

Further Development of Higher Education – The Bologna Process in a Swedish Perspective

FACTSHEET

The ministry of Education and
Science in Sweden

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In April 2002, a working group was appointed at the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science with the task of reviewing certain issues related to degrees awarded by higher education institutions (henceforth referred to as the Degree Review). The review was called for mainly as a consequence of developments within the Bologna Process for higher education and of national developments during the past ten years.

The review has primarily concerned the degree structure – and more specifically, the level and status of the *magisterexamen* (master degree) – formulation of the scope and objectives of different degrees and the translation of degree names. Another task was to address the issue of adapting the Swedish credit point and grading scale systems to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). During this process there have been a number of consultations with relevant stakeholders.

The points of departure for the Degree Review have been to

- promote national and international mobility for students, during and after completing their studies,
- increase the clarity and transparency of the Swedish structure for higher education,
- strengthen confidence in the quality of Swedish higher education,
- increase possibilities for lifelong learning, and
- safeguard freedom and flexibility for both students and higher education institutions.

An interim report was presented in March 2003 and the final report (*Högre utbildning i utveckling – Bolognaprocessen i svensk belysning*, Ds 2004:2) in February 2004. This is being circulated for comments to all the relevant stakeholders until 9 June 2004. The Government will subsequently take a stand on the proposals put forward by the review group. If accepted by the Government and the Parliament, the proposals would primarily entail changes in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100) and the Degree Ordinance (an appendix to the Higher Education Ordinance). The review group estimates that new legislation and regulations ensuing from the proposals could come into effect on 1 July 2007.

The present Swedish degree structure

Swedish higher education is formally divided into two parts: *grundläggande högskoleutbildning* and *forskarutbildning*. *Grundläggande högskoleutbildning* roughly corresponds to the concepts of undergraduate and graduate studies and *forskarutbildning* corresponds to postgraduate or doctoral studies.

The Swedish degree system is divided into general degrees and professional degrees.

The general degrees are:

within *grundläggande högskoleutbildning*

- *högskoleexamen*, at least two years of full-time study (120 ECTS credit points),
- *kandidatexamen* (the equivalent of a bachelor degree), at least three years of full-time study (180 ECTS points),
- *magisterexamen* (the equivalent of a master degree), at least four years of full-time study (240 ECTS credit points),

The Bologna Process

The Bologna Process is an inter-governmental process within higher education that started in 1999 with the signing of the Bologna Declaration by 29 European countries. The three overarching objectives of the process are to promote:

- mobility,
- employability and
- the attractiveness/competitiveness of European higher education.

The main aim is to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010. Aims and objectives are further developed within 10 action lines, such as the adoption of easily readable and comparable degrees, adoption of a system with three main cycles and the establishment of a system of credits.

Forty European countries are currently taking part in the Bologna Process together with representatives of student organisations, higher education institutions and European organisations such as the EU Commission and the Council of Europe.

For more information, see:
www.bologna-bergen2005.no

within *forskarutbildning*

- *licentiatexamen*, normally two years of full-time study, and
- *doktorsexamen* (the equivalent of a PhD degree), normally four years of full-time study.

In addition, there are more than fifty professional degrees (in medicine, teaching, engineering etc.) organised according to a somewhat different structure and varying in duration.

Within *grundläggande högskoleutbildning* there are no intermediate qualifications. All degrees are regarded as final qualifications, even if further studies are possible. This means, for example, that a *kandidatexamen* is not required before starting studies leading to a *magisterexamen* and there are study programmes leading directly to a *magisterexamen*. To be eligible for admission to doctoral studies, the student must have completed a programme of at least three years of full-time study within *grundläggande högskoleutbildning* or have otherwise acquired the equivalent knowledge in this country or abroad.

The use of a credit point system is mandatory throughout the Swedish higher education system. The student's workload is expressed in points where one week of full-time study equals one credit point (one year = forty credit points) and a degree is based upon an accumulation of credits. A grading scale is specified in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100). Unless the institution of higher education prescribes otherwise, one of the terms fail, pass and pass with distinction shall be employed as a grade.

Higher education is organised according to a modular credit system allowing students to build up their degrees or other qualifications by selecting self-contained courses. The appropriate degree is awarded after accumulation of the required number of credits in relevant combinations and after the student has passed the required exams for each module. A specific degree does not normally require a single, final exam. The *kandidatexamen* and *magisterexamen* require advanced studies in the main subject.

Short summary of proposals from the Degree Review

Three main cycles¹

The Degree Review group proposes that degrees within higher education be formally divided into three cycles or levels: the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels. Institutions of higher education should thus organise and label their programmes and courses according to these three levels.

To gain admittance to programmes at graduate level leading to a master degree, the student must have the requirements needed for a bachelor degree (180 ECTS

points) or a professional degree comprising at least 180 ECTS points or a corresponding foreign degree or have otherwise acquired the equivalent knowledge. To gain admittance to doctoral studies, the student must have completed at least four years of full-time study (240 ECTS credit points), of which 60 ECTS points must be at graduate level, or equivalent studies abroad. If studies at graduate level cover more than 60 ECTS credit points, any credit points exceeding 60 ECTS may be given credit for at doctoral level.

Programmes leading to a professional degree comprising 240 ECTS or more will include both first cycle and second cycle studies within the same programme. Such programmes will not be formally divided into two separate cycles.

According to the proposed structure, first cycle studies should give access to second cycle programmes and second cycle studies should give access to doctoral studies, thus creating a clear division of levels within Swedish higher education in accordance with the intentions of the Bologna Process.

General and professional degrees

One of the assignments of the Degree Review was to investigate the need for guiding principles indicating the criteria for a professional degree as opposed to a general academic degree. The review group concludes that for purposes of clarity there is indeed a need for such principles. According to the review group, the guiding principle should be that where the educational requirements for access to a particular profession are regulated in Swedish legislation, European Community directives or in a majority of the countries within the European Economic Area (EEA), the educational programme preparing a student for this profession should lead to a professional degree. An application of these principles would mean that several of the professional degrees currently existing would be replaced by an appropriate general academic degree.

The Degree Review group proposes that a new master degree called *masterexamen* should be introduced. The new master degree can be awarded after 60 or 120 ECTS credit points at graduate level. It is also proposed that the new master degree should replace the present *magisterexamen* and in order to be awarded a *masterexamen*, the student is required to have an undergraduate level degree covering at least 180 ECTS credit points.

Another suggestion put forward by the group is that the question of awarding joint degrees in cooperation with other higher education institutions nationally or abroad be further investigated. Proposals should be presented on how to render the award of such a degree possible.

¹ The concepts of "cycle" and "level" are used synonymously.

Qualifications framework

The group also proposes that currently used descriptors should be developed into generic qualification descriptors, indicating the level of knowledge, understanding and competence to be attained by the student before being awarded a *kandidatexamen*, *masterexamen* and *doktors-examen* and that these should be formulated in the Degree Ordinance. These three degrees are the outcome of each of the proposed degree levels which means that the qualification descriptors would at the same time function as level descriptors for the three cycles.

At present, general academic degrees in the Degree Ordinance are described in terms of workload, level, profile and other specific qualifications required for a degree. Professional degrees contain an additional description in terms of learning outcomes and skills. According to the proposal, descriptors for professional degrees should be revised in order to be compatible with, and comparable to qualification descriptors for general academic degrees. Studies leading to a professional degree requiring less than four years of full-time study should belong to the undergraduate level and studies leading to a professional degree requiring more than four years of full-time study should be at graduate level.

It is proposed that students carry out a degree project (thesis) before being awarded any higher education degree.

System of credit points and grading scale

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) contains both a credit point system and a grading scale. The system allows 60 credit points to be awarded after one year of full-time study. The review group suggests that the ECTS credit point system be used for all three proposed levels. This would mean a change from the present Swedish credit point system to a system where one and a half credit points correspond to one week of full-time studies.

The seven-step ECTS grading scale should be introduced as the new main grading alternative in the Higher Education Ordinance. This means that unless an institution of higher education otherwise prescribes, one of the letter notations A-E (A being the highest grade) should be used for a pass and Fx or F (Fx being the highest) for a fail. As is the case with the present grading scale specified in the Higher Education Ordinance, the grading assessment using the ECTS scale should be goal-related.

Translation and information on Swedish higher education

The National Agency for Higher Education should provide directions on how to translate the names of degrees and diplomas into English in order to guarantee uniform standards for English translations. The translation of concepts used by higher education institutions that are appended to the degree name to describe the orientation and profile of the degree should be reported to the National Agency. The Agency should construct a database containing these translated concepts that is available to the public.

It is also proposed that the National Agency for Higher Education should be responsible for information to other countries to promote adequate recognition of Swedish higher education abroad.

Since 1 January 2003 a Diploma Supplement, describing the degree programme and its place in the educational system, is issued automatically, free of charge and in English, appended to all degree certificates within *grundläggande högskoleutbildning*. The review group suggests that a Diploma Supplement should also be issued for degree certificates at doctoral level.

In addition the National Agency for Higher Education should be assigned the task of producing and continuously updating an electronic Swedish-English glossary of terms used in higher education.



REGERINGSKANSLIET

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