

# Background Information: Higher Education System in Sweden



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# Higher Education System in Sweden

## I. General Characteristics

<b>Population</b>	
Total population (I.I.2013) (million) <sup>1</sup>	9.56
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) <sup>2</sup>	23.6
<b>Population Structure (2013)</b> (share of total population %) <sup>3</sup>	
0-14 years	16.9
15-24 years	12.9
25-49 years	32.8
50-64 years	18.3
65 years and older	19.1
<b>GDP</b>	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 <sup>4</sup>	127
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) <sup>5</sup>	1.3
<b>Education (2012) (All levels)</b> <sup>6</sup>	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	2,480,778
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	453,328
<b>Tertiary Education</b>	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) <sup>7</sup>	36.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) <sup>7</sup>	48.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) <sup>8</sup>	1.6

## 2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

In Sweden, higher education is delivered mainly by two types of institutions – universities (*Universitet*) and university colleges (*Högskolor*). The majority of universities and university colleges in Sweden are public sector institutions. As public sector institutions they are accountable to the Ministry of Education and Research with the exception of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (*Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet*) which is accountable to the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation. The public sector institutions are regulated by

<sup>1</sup>European Commission. (2013). Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.

<sup>2</sup>Eurostat. (2013). *Population density*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00003&plugin=0>

<sup>3</sup>Eurostat (2013). *People by age group*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00010&language=en>

<sup>4</sup>Eurostat. (2013). *GDP per capita in PPS*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0114>

<sup>5</sup>Eurostat (2013). *Real GDP growth rate*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0115>

<sup>6</sup>Eurostat (2014). Students by ISCED level, age and sex. Retrieved from [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ\\_en1rt1&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_en1rt1&lang=en)

<sup>7</sup>OECD. (2014). Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators, pp. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>OECD. (2014). Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators, pp. 232. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

government legislations and statutes (e.g., administrative and labour market legislations, and the provisions of the Instrument of Government). Additionally, as agencies of higher education they are also subjected to laws and statutes that are specific to the area of higher education. There are 14 public sector universities and 20 public sector university colleges in Sweden<sup>9</sup>. Besides public sector institutions, a number of independent and self-governing universities and university colleges also provide higher education in Sweden.

All higher education is offered by public-sector higher education institutes (HEIs) or by independent education providers granted degree-awarding powers by the Government. Universities offer degrees in the first (Bachelor), second (Master), and third cycle (Licentiate and Doctoral degree) qualifications. University colleges offer degrees in first (higher education Diploma and Bachelor's degree) and second (Master's degree) cycle programmes. University colleges can apply to the Swedish National Agency for an entitlement to award 120 credit Master degrees in one or more than one area of study. Sometimes university colleges also have an entitlement to award degrees in the third cycle qualification in one or more specified fields. University colleges that are entitled to award degrees in the third cycle qualification have an automatic entitlement to award a 120 credit Master degree in the fields specified.

### 3. Study Structure

As a result of the Bologna Process, a three-cycle structure was introduced in Sweden in 2007<sup>7</sup>. Higher education attainment and student's performance are measured in 'higher education credits', compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

First cycle qualifications (Diploma, Bachelor, Professional)

- The first cycle qualifications in Sweden include a Higher Education Diploma, Bachelor degree, and professional qualifications. All first cycle qualifications include an independent project.
- First cycle Higher Education Diploma (general and in the field of fine, applied, and performing arts) is granted upon completing 120 ECTS.
- A Bachelor degree (general and in the field of fine, applied, and performing arts) is awarded after the completion of 180 credits.
- There are 32 different first cycle professional qualifications in Sweden. The ECTS credits required to obtain a professional qualification varies by study programme. For instance, a professional degree in nursing and engineering requires 180 ECTS credits whereas a professional degree in the field of dental hygiene requires 120 ECTS credits.

Second cycle qualifications (Master, professional qualifications)

- All qualifications in the second cycle include an independent project.
- A one year Master degree (general and in the field of fine, applied, and performing arts) requires 60 ECTS credits whereas a two year Master degree (general and in the field of fine, applied, and performing arts) requires 120 ECTS credits.

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<sup>9</sup> Universitetskanslersämbetet. (2013). *Higher Education in Sweden: 2013 Status Report*. Stockholm: Swedish Higher Education Authority.

- There are 22 different second-cycle professional degrees, for example Master of Architecture (300 HE credits), Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery (90 HE credits), and Master of Science in Medicine (330 HE credits).
- Some of the professional qualifications awarded in the second cycle, for example Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery, require a previous qualification. Other programmes that lead to the award of a professional qualification in the second cycle are undivided, i.e. are not split between the cycles, for example Masters of Science in Medicine.

#### Third cycle qualifications (Licentiate and Doctorate)

- A Licentiate degree (general and in the field of fine, applied, and performing arts) requires completing 120 ECTS credits.
- A Doctorate degree (general and in the field of fine, applied, and performing arts) requires 240 ECTS credits.
- A Licentiate degree must include a thesis of a minimum of 60 higher education credits.
- A degree of Doctor must include a Doctoral thesis equivalent to a minimum of 120 higher education credits.

## 4. Admission Requirements<sup>10 11 12</sup>

The requirements for admission to higher education are jointly governed according to the regulations of the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance, and the Swedish Council for Higher Education. Specific prior knowledge is required for admission to higher education. Higher education entry requirements can be both general and specific. The general entry requirements apply to all the courses and programmes in higher education. For many courses and programmes there are also specific requirements for eligibility. In order to meet the general entry requirements for first cycle programmes, students must have successfully completed their upper secondary education and been rewarded an upper secondary diploma or equivalent. This is also applicable for adult education.

The higher education institutes themselves determine the eligibility criteria for admission to the second level programmes. This mainly includes a first degree of 180 or equivalent higher education credits, or an equivalent qualification. Requirements for admission to professional programmes (covering both first and second cycle) are the same as the entry requirements for the first cycle programmes.

Eligibility requirements for the third level studies include a degree at the second level, at least four years of studies with at least one year at the second level, a corresponding foreign education, or equivalent knowledge. The selection criteria for entry to first cycle programmes are generally based on the school graduation grades and eventual credit increments (extra credit for studies in English, math, and modern languages), or results from the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test.

<sup>10</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Bachelor*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Bachelor>

<sup>11</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Second\\_Cycle\\_Programmes](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Second_Cycle_Programmes)

<sup>12</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Third\\_Cycle\\_%28PhD%29\\_Programmes](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Third_Cycle_%28PhD%29_Programmes)

## 5. Enrolment Levels

Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (ISCED 5A, 5B and 6, ISCED 97) in Sweden between 2003 and 2012. Tertiary Type 5A enrolments decreased between 2003 and 2008, increased between 2008 and 2011, followed by a slight decrease between 2011 and 2012. The number of students in Tertiary Type 5B has steadily increased between 2003 and 2012.

## 6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees<sup>13</sup>

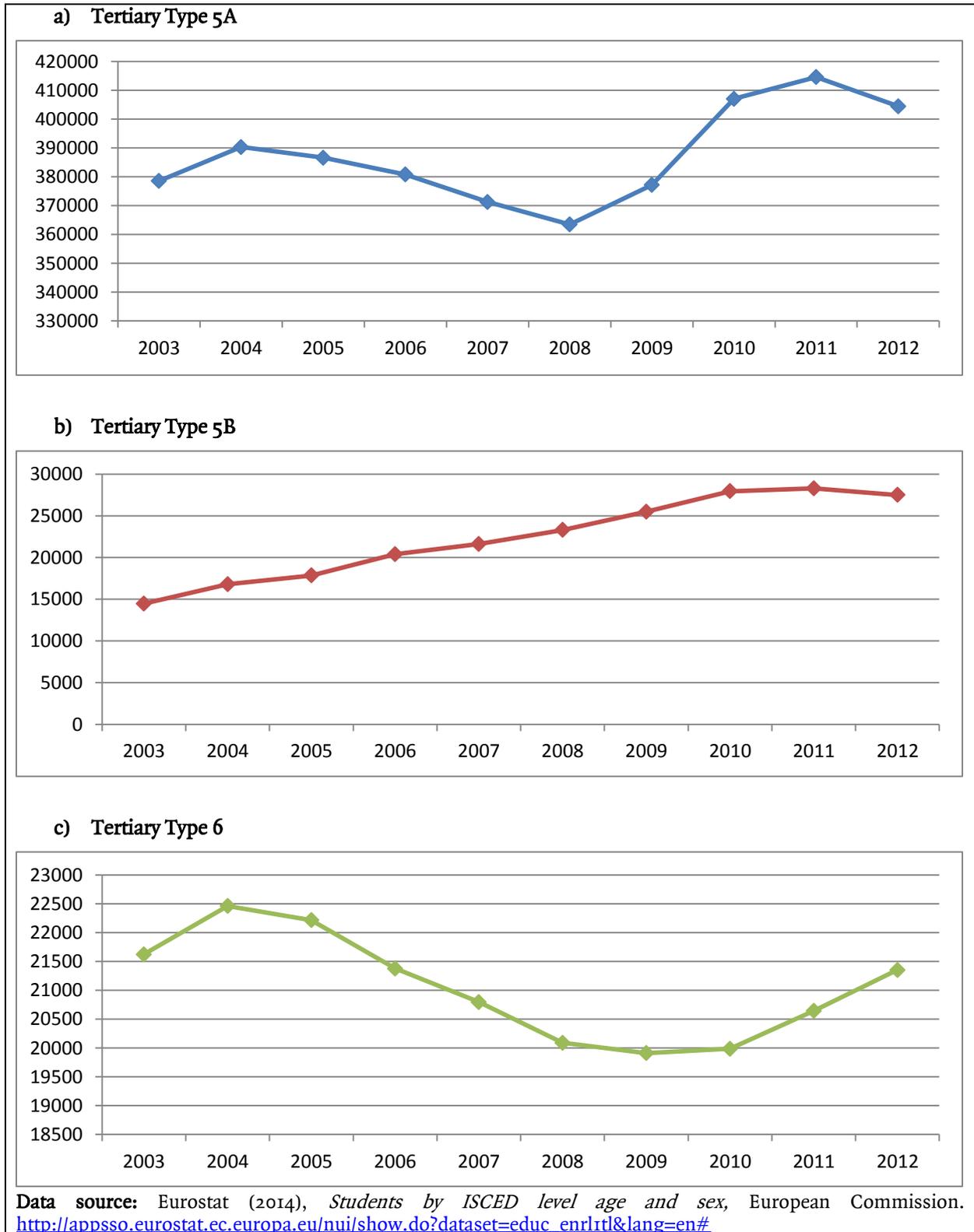
Higher education is free of charge for Swedish citizens and citizens of European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) states or citizens of Switzerland. As of autumn term 2011, citizens of other countries have to pay an application fee and tuition fees for the first and second cycle higher education courses and programmes. This was a result of the enactment of a provision in the Higher Education Act in June 2010. Scholarships are available for international students. Funding is awarded on a competitive basis by the Swedish Institute and individual universities<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Universitetskanslersämbetet. (2013). *Higher Education in Sweden: 2013 Status Report*. Stockholm: Swedish Higher Education Authority.

<sup>14</sup> University Admissions. (n.d.). *Scholarships for studies in Sweden*. Retrieved from <https://www.universityadmissions.se/en/All-you-need-to-know/Studying-in-Sweden/Fees-and-scholarships/Scholarships/>

Figure 1: Trends in enrolment levels



## 7. Financial Support for Students<sup>15 16</sup>

Students who have been accepted by a university, a university college, or other post-secondary education and who fulfil basic criteria are eligible for financial aid for studies. Financial aid for studies consists of a combination of study grants and study loans. Students (Swedish citizen or EU citizen deemed equivalent to Swedish citizen according to EU legislation) may also be entitled to student aid for studies outside Sweden. Students with children may be eligible to receive an extra child allowance. Students aged 25 or above may also be eligible to receive a supplementary loan. The supplementary loan is targeted at individuals who previously had an earned income and is intended to facilitate work-study transitions. Students with extra costs while studying, for example for musical instruments, may also be eligible to an additional loan. The amounts for the additional loan vary according to the extra costs. The upper age limit for study support is 56 years. The National Board of Student Aid (*Centrala studiestödsnämnden, CSN*) is responsible for the allocation of financial support and its repayment.

In general, students are offered financial support for a maximum of 12 semesters or six academic years. Repayment of the study loan starts at the earliest in January six months after a student received financial aid for studies. The loan amount has to be repaid within 25 years or before the borrower's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Repayment of the loan is based on an annuity system. There is a provision to reduce the payment amount one year depending on borrower's income. If the repayment is reduced one year, a bigger amount will have to be paid the following years to ensure complete repayment within 25 years.

## 8. Note on the Swedish data provided for EUROSTUDENT V

In Sweden, a significant number of students enrol in freestanding courses with the possible aim of taking a degree but not yet having decided what degree they are aiming for – nor if they are aiming for a Bachelor or a Master, or what is going to be their main field of study.

In Sweden, applicants to higher education can apply to a programme or to a course. Courses are the building blocks of a programme. Though, a large number of courses in the Swedish higher education system are not within programmes. These courses are called “freestanding courses” and are elective for applicants/students who do not want to follow a programme but want to freely choose the content of their education. These students can also study for a degree but they have to apply each semester for a new course. When a student has the required amount of credits in certain fields, the student can apply for a certificate in a general qualification.

For a professional qualification students must enrol in a programme. If a student, before applying to a programme, has completed freestanding courses within the field often the student can be given credit for the course within the programme.

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<sup>15</sup> Centrala Studiestödsnämnden. (2014). För dig som får extra kostnader. Retrieved from <http://www.csn.se/hogskola/hur-mycket-kan-du-fa/extra-kostnader>

Centrala Studiestödsnämnden. (2014). What is student aid?. Retrieved from <http://www.csn.se/en/2.1034/2.1036/2.1037/2.1038/1.9267>

<sup>16</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Higher education funding*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Higher\\_Education\\_Funding](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Higher_Education_Funding)

In EUROSTUDENT V, the Swedish questionnaire allowed the students to answer that they had not yet decided to study for a Bachelor or a Master degree. These students were randomly assigned to the categories Bachelor and Master with the same proportions as the population.

This report is based on the following sources:

Centrala Studiestödsnämnden. (2014). För dig som får extra kostnader. Retrieved from

<http://www.csn.se/hogskola/hur-mycket-kan-du-fa/extra-kostnader>

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[http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Governance\\_Autonomy\\_Funding/June\\_2012\\_report\\_FINAL.sflb.ashx](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Governance_Autonomy_Funding/June_2012_report_FINAL.sflb.ashx)

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Stockholm: Swedish Higher Education Authority

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