



VET in Sweden

Swedish vocational education and training (VET) starts after compulsory education and includes programmes at upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels.

To enrol in upper secondary VET programmes, learners need a sufficient number of passing grades in a lower secondary programme. Four bridging programmes offer an alternative pathway to gain access rights for upper secondary programmes. They do not lead to any VET qualification but learning outcomes might be recognised if they continue an upper secondary VET programme or ease their access to the labour market as semi-skilled workers. Depending on student goal and performance, they usually last from one to three years.

Upper secondary VET programmes are three-year programmes leading to an upper secondary vocational diploma at EQF level 4. Each programme can be followed through two pathways: school-based and apprenticeship. Both pathways incorporate mandatory training at the workplace; in school-based programmes the overall share of work-based learning is at least 15%; in apprenticeship the minimum is 50%. Overall, there are 12 such VET programmes focusing on different occupational fields. Graduates having sufficient passing grades in particular modules (such as Swedish, English and mathematics) can access higher vocational education.

Higher one- or two-year VET programmes are offered at post-secondary and tertiary levels, leading to a diploma (EQF 5) or advanced diploma (EQF 6) in higher vocational education. Programmes combine school-based learning with training at the workplace; the programme leading to the advanced diploma needs to contain a minimum of 25% of workplace training.

Adult education is provided in many forms and has a long tradition. In 2019, participation in lifelong learning was above 34%, making it the highest in the European Union (Eurostat). Individual modularised pathways for adults, set up according to specific required needs, are the most common way to gain a qualification in a new field or study the courses required to access higher vocational or higher general education. A range of non-formal courses and programmes is offered, financed through fees or by companies and organisations, with public grants also provided.

Since 2016, non-formal qualifications and certificates can be referenced to the Swedish national qualifications framework (SeQF).

Governance

The Swedish government has overall responsibility for the education system and sets the policy framework at all education levels. Goals and learning outcomes are defined centrally but with decentralised implementation. The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for most education fields, including upper secondary schools, adult education, and higher VET. Steering documents regulating upper secondary school and municipal adult education are drawn up by the government and by the Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*). There is a national programme council for each vocational programme; these advise and support *Skolverket* regarding adaptation, development and modernisation of vocational education.

The Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH) is in charge of higher VET, approving and financing training providers who then cooperate with the world of work to develop and deliver programmes. Training providers can be run by municipalities, counties, State or private stakeholders.

Distinctive features of VET

Modularised structure of upper secondary education

Modularised programmes allow learners in upper secondary education to transfer one or more courses to another programme, for example when changing study route. Municipal adult education provides the same courses as secondary school, with a few exceptions, allowing learners to build on their earlier studies and, for example, gain higher education access.

National governance, decentralised provision, municipal funding

Upper secondary education is governed by the State, financed by municipalities through a voucher system (funded through taxes) and provided for locally. It is a decentralised system with private and public education providers competing on a school market for students. The voucher is paid by the municipality to the education provider the student chooses to go to.

Validation in adult education

Validation is possible in municipal adult education courses at upper secondary and higher vocational level. Education, knowledge, skills and competences acquired through training, job experience or otherwise may be validated and recognised for part of a programme. Education providers are responsible for the process.

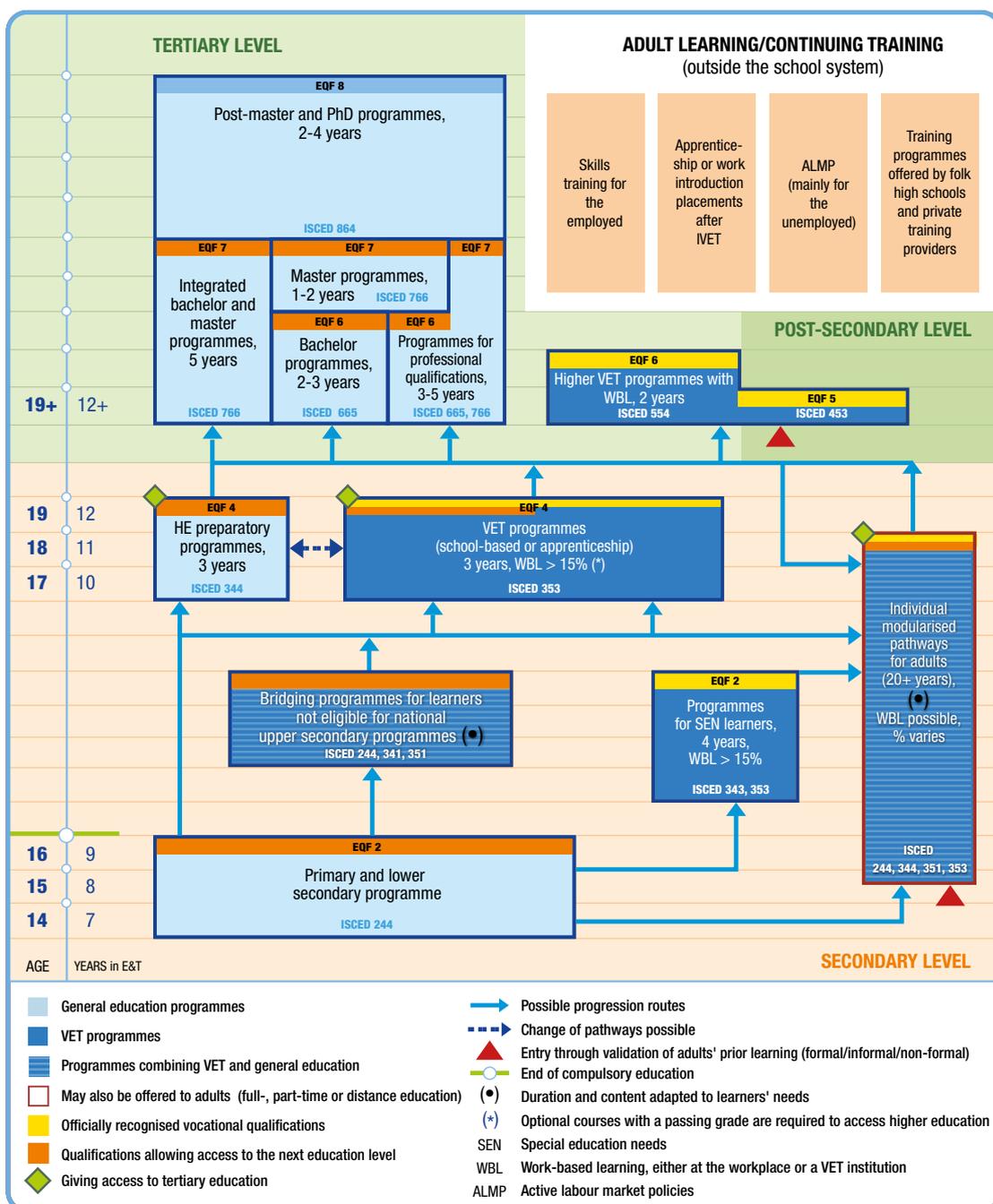
Strong social partner involvement

To guarantee a close link of education with the world of work, social partners are represented in various councils and involved at many other levels. For example, they are represented in the national programme councils for each of the upper secondary vocational programmes and members of the Labour Market Council, an advisory body linked to the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

Challenges and policy responses

Small school units in need of regional cooperation

Swedish VET schools are small. Decentralised provision, public funding and student choice have increased competition among them, leading to inflated costs and risks of skill mismatch. Proposals have been made to assign an authority for planning and dimensioning of upper secondary education provision to the regions, to secure the skills supply, demanded on the regional and national labour market, streamline the use of resources and improve access to a comprehensive and wide range of high-quality education.



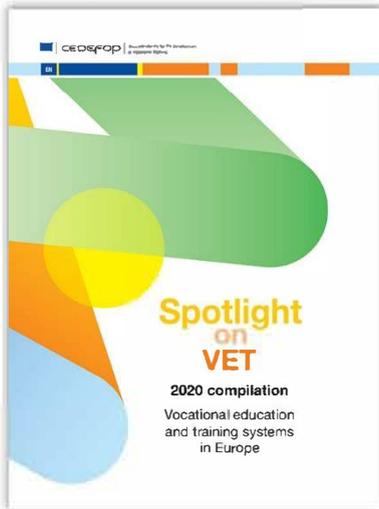
NB: ISCED-P 2011.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Sweden, 2020.

Transition from education to the labour market

The government has focused on strengthening the link between education and the world of work, within upper secondary and tertiary VET. Municipal adult education has accordingly shifted from prioritising admission to VET for those that have the lowest education levels to other target groups. This includes adults with a diploma from an upper secondary higher education preparatory programme or someone with a tertiary degree from another country. More opportunities for VET are also given to adults with intellectual disabilities.

Fast introduction of newly arrived immigrants

Many newly arrived immigrants have received training and professional experience in occupations facing labour shortage. In consequence, many new VET pathways were introduced allowing for partial qualifications. To reduce the time from arrival to first job entry, the government has started consultations with social partners, the Swedish public employment service and other relevant government agencies on measures for creating 'fast tracks' into the labour market. The initiatives may include, Swedish language training specific to the vocational field, quicker validation of skills and competences, assessment of foreign qualifications, and supplementary training.



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