

SWEDEN

Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in Sweden

ECEC in Sweden is part of a unified education system covering the ages 1–19 years. Since 1996, the Ministry of Education and Research (*Utbildningsdepartementet*) has had overall responsibility for early childhood services. The National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*) and the National School Inspectorate (*Skolinspektionen*) are responsible for providing support and monitoring quality.

The Swedish education system for children aged 1–6 years includes preschools¹ for children aged 1–5 years (*förskola*), preschool classes (*förskoleklass*) for children aged 6 years and school-age educare² settings (*fritidshem*) for children from 6 years of age before and after school hours to supplement the education in the preschool class and the compulsory school (SFS 2010:800 § 1). Different curricular frameworks exist for the preschool, and the preschool class and school-age educare setting. There are municipal (*kommunala*) and independent (*fristående*) preschools. Most registered children (78.6%) attend municipal preschools (Skolverket 2023a).

The preschool class is in a transition phase. In 2018, the preschool class became compulsory. In 2020, the Government commissioned an inquiry on a 10-year compulsory school where the preschool class would be included as year 1 (SOU 2021). Although no decision has been made by Parliament and there is no explicit policy on this up till now, the preschool class is likely to become officially integrated into the primary school system in the future.

ECEC also includes facilities termed Pedagogical Care (*Annan pedagogisk verksamhet*) such as home-based ECEC provision and open preschools (SFS 2010:800, chapter 25).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Two main groups of qualified staff work in preschools: *Förskollärare* (lit. Preschool Teachers) with a university degree and *Barnskötare* (Childcare Workers) with a specialist upper secondary vocational education. Currently, well over 35% of ECEC staff lack a specialist qualification in ECEC or are unqualified. Only about 60% of the workforce have a specialist qualification out of which 40.7% are certified Preschool Teachers and 17% qualified Childcare Workers (see *Table 2* in *Chapter 3*).

Preschools have long opening hours. There is some variation, but most preschools are usually open from 6/6:30 in the morning to 18:30/19:00 in the afternoon. Staff work in teams (*Arbetslag*) on a rotating scheme. The full complement of staff is usually on site between 10:00 and 14:00 hours. According to the Education Act, preschools must have qualified Preschool Teachers in the work team, but it does not stipulate how many per group of children or per department. Childcare Workers are not explicitly mentioned in the Education Act. It is however stated that in addition to Preschool Teachers, staff with relevant training and/or experience may also work in the preschool as long as they can support children’s development and learning and work towards reaching the goals in the curriculum (SFS 2010:800).

¹ ‘Preschool’ is the official translation of *förskola* in government and other administrative documents.

In order to apply for a permanent position Preschool Teachers must be certified. Certification requirements do not apply to Childcare Workers. With the persistent lack of qualified Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers, municipalities employ staff with various qualifications, even unqualified staff. These may be given a position as *Outbildad barnskötare* (Unqualified Childcare Worker) or – for those with a university degree other than a teaching degree – as *Lärare med annan inriktning* (Teacher with an alternative specialisation). It is the responsibility of the individual municipality to decide about the various positions, hence there may be considerable variation across the country.

In recent years, because of the lack of qualified staff, municipalities have introduced a new position to support the regular staff. There is variation between municipalities across the country also in this respect. Some municipalities have defined qualification requirements for the support staff. In the municipality of Gothenburg *Förskoleassistenter* (Preschool Assistants) have been employed. The Preschool Assistants are part of the work team and have a complementary role to assist and help with the practical care work in line with the curriculum for the preschool (Skolverket 2019).

The qualification requirements for this group are:

- 9-year compulsory schooling or equivalent
- Personal competence suitable for work in the preschool such as being attentive to children’s needs and able to establish good relations with both children, their guardians, and colleagues
- Ability to communicate orally and in writing in the Swedish language.

To apply for a permanent position Preschool Assistants must complete course modules equivalent to about 40% of the vocational programme for Childcare Workers with the ambition that they will eventually complete the entire 3-year programme and become fully qualified Childcare Workers. Staff without this qualification can only be temporarily employed (Rebas and Enbågen 2022).

In addition to these staff categories, staff with other qualifications such as *Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem* (Primary Teacher specialising in school-age educare) and *Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i förskoleklass och grundskolans årskurs 1–3* (Primary Teachers specialising in Preschool Class and Primary School Grades 1-3), may also belong to the workforce. They work in school-age educare settings, in primary schools and in some cases also in preschools.

Table 1 shows the ECEC staff in centre-based settings in Sweden and categorises the core pedagogues (i.e., staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Sweden: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Preschool Teacher/ ECEC Teacher	Förskola Early childhood	Core practitioner with group responsibility	1–6 years	3½ years university education

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<p><i>Förskollärare</i></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>	<p>centre/preschool 1–5 years³</p> <p><i>Förskoleklass</i> Preschool class in schools 6 years</p> <p><i>Öppen förskola</i> Open preschool 1–5 years</p> <p><i>Fritidshem</i> School-age educare setting 6–12 years</p>			<p><i>Award:</i> Bachelor's degree</p> <p>ECTS credits: 210 EQF level 6 ISCED 2011: 6</p>
<p>Childcare Worker <i>Barnskötare</i></p>	<p><i>Förskola</i> Early childhood centre/preschool 1–5 years</p> <p><i>Öppen förskola</i> Open preschool 1–5 years</p>	Qualified co-worker	Broad-based pedagogical and social care approach 1-10 years and beyond	<p>3 years upper secondary vocational education specialising in pedagogical work</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a⁴ EQF level 3/4 ISCED 2011: 3</p>
<p>Primary Teacher – specialising in School-age Educare <i>formerly</i> Leisure-Time Pedagogue <i>Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem</i></p>	<p><i>Fritidshem</i> School-age educare setting 6–12 years</p> <p><i>Grundskolan</i> Primary school 7–12 years</p>	<p>Core practitioner with group responsibility in school-age educare settings</p> <p><i>In schools:</i> Specialist teacher for practical / aesthetic subjects</p>	6–12 years	<p>3 years at higher education institution specialising in school-age educare and practical/aesthetic subjects</p> <p><i>Award:</i> Bachelor's degree</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180 EQF level 6 ISCED 2011: 6</p>

³ **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in pre-primary settings. In Sweden, the relevant formats are **1–5** and **6–7** years.

⁴ n/a = not applicable

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Up until June 30, 2019, the title for staff with leadership responsibility in the preschool was *Förskolechef* (Preschool Head). As of July 1, 2019, this was replaced by the title *Rektor* (Principal), the same as for compulsory school. This was an important change and marked a step forward to equate the work in preschools with the work in primary schools. Only those with the required education and experience can be employed as Principals. A Deputy Principal may be appointed. A Preschool Principal is usually responsible for several preschools, especially in the larger municipalities, and a majority do not work directly with children. The mean number of preschools per Principal is 2.6 in municipal preschools compared to 1.2 in independent ones. In municipal preschools, about 6% of the Principals combine this position with working with children. The corresponding figure for independent Preschool Principals is 73% (Skolverket 2023b).

The Principal is responsible for the internal organisation, for the budget and for allocating resources according to children’s conditions and needs. With a special focus on pedagogical work, the Principal is responsible for coordinating and developing education in the preschool. A member of staff at a preschool with sufficient knowledge and expertise may be appointed to support the Principal, make decisions, and take responsibility for certain management tasks.

Qualification requirements for Principals include a compulsory university education comprising 30 ECTS at advanced level over 3 years. The costs for education are shared between the state and the municipalities. The education is mandatory for those Preschool Principals who took up the post after July 1, 2019. They are required to start their training within two years of taking up their duties. The education must be completed at the latest within five years of taking up the position of Principal. Those who were active as Preschool Heads on July 1, 2019 are not covered by the obligation (SFS 2010:800; Skolverket 2021a). This also applies when changing employers. Job specifications for these posts may vary between municipalities. However, the criteria usually focus on both *personal leadership skills*, e.g. communication, cooperation and social competencies, and *formal leadership skills* such as familiarity with legal aspects, exercising authority, etc.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Since municipalities are responsible for the organisation and running of all education settings, including early childhood education, there may be variation between preschools and municipalities across the country. Some municipalities in rural areas may only have a limited number of settings with implications for special posts of responsibility.

Special assignments may be allocated within the preschools, such as responsibility for digitalisation, gender equity, language and literacy, multilingualism and other areas that need development to align with the curriculum goals (Skolverket 2019). These special responsibilities are often, but not exclusively, linked to Government initiatives and usually require training within the specific knowledge domain. All salaries are individually negotiated so there may be a variation between members of the staff regarding salaries. However, rather than increased salaries, staff with these responsibilities are assigned hours to carry out their work, leading to a reduction of hours working directly with children.

There are also positions as *Förstelärare* (First Teachers). *First Teacher* and *Senior Teacher* (*Lektor*) positions were introduced by the Government following the reform (2011) of teacher education programmes (Utbildningsdepartementet 2012). The intention was to make use of the expertise of certified teachers considered to be highly qualified who had demonstrated excellence in their work over at least four years in the workplace. This initiative did not involve Preschool Teachers. However, some municipalities have introduced ‘First Teacher’ positions also for Preschool Teachers. The task of the First Teacher is to be designed according to local needs and based on the development areas identified in the systematic quality work. The First Teacher may be appointed to support the principal and take responsibility for certain management tasks (Skolverket 2021b). The position often entails a salary increase.

In settings where students are placed during practicum, *VFU-lärare* (On-site Supervisors) are responsible for the supervision of students. Certified Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers specialising in school-age educare can take a special course for supervisors at universities comprising 7.5 ECTS credits. This qualifies them to work as on-site supervisors in preschools and school-age educare settings (see also *Chapter 5*).

Furthermore, there are mentor positions (*mentor*) for newly qualified and certified Preschool Teachers. During their first year of employment, newly qualified Preschool Teachers have a personal mentor whose role is to provide support for their professional development (SKOLFS 2014:44) (see also *Chapter 7*).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The accountable local preschool authority may establish different preschool positions with a coordinating and/or supervisory responsibility. The titles for these positions vary across the country, e.g. Pedagogical Leader, Development Educator, Development Leader, Process Leader and *Pedagogista* (in Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools). The various preschool authorities determine their competence requirements, areas of responsibility and tasks. In some municipalities they work centrally, in others they are placed under the Principal.

A Pedagogical Leader (*Pedagogisk utvecklingsledare*) is responsible for different aspects of the work in the preschool such as quality assurance, professional development, etc. Pedagogical Leaders usually have special training of shorter or longer duration within specific knowledge domains and often work across several preschools. They have a counselling, coaching and support role focusing on the work team to further develop the competence of teachers and the overall quality of the preschool. They may also organise on-site or regional continuing professional development activities. ‘Pedagogistas’ have taken university courses in so-called Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogy. After completion, they may be responsible for implementing this pedagogical approach in several preschools.

At the national level, the National School Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring quality. At the municipal level, the overall preschool administration is responsible for quality assurance. At the preschool level, the Principal is responsible for systematic quality work and for ensuring that the education aligns with the intentions of the curriculum (Skolverket 2019).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Children in need of extra support are integrated into regular preschools. Children who, for physical, mental, or other reasons, need special support in their development shall be given the support that their special needs require. It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that the child is given such support. The child's guardian must be given an opportunity to participate in the design of the special support measures. However, unlike in compulsory schools, for preschools there are no provisions for action programmes. The documentation of support measures in preschool is decided at the local level (SFS 2010:800, chapter 8, §9).

Preschools have access to so-called resource teams to guide and support teachers in their everyday work such as Speech Therapists, Psychologists etc. These specialists are not based at the preschools and do not usually work directly with children in the preschool. Children can be referred to different specialists who have individual consultations with guardians and children regarding, for example, delayed speech development. There are also some preschools for children with specific disabilities such as hearing impairment and autism who need additional educational or practical support. In these preschools, Special Education Teachers (*Specialpedagoger*) often work together with the regular Preschool Teacher and Childcare Worker. The Children's Health Centre (*Barnvårdscentralen, BVC*) has overall responsibility and provides support to parents regarding children's medical health, well-being, growth, and development. In several municipalities, staff from BVC meet Preschool Teachers and Principals once or twice annually to discuss, support and advise on general issues regarding children's development.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Table 2 shows the proportion of various staff categories in all preschools, both municipal and independent, according to their structural composition.

Table 2

Sweden: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in municipal and independent centre-based settings 2022

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in <i>municipal preschools</i>	42.9% Preschool Teacher
	1.6% Compulsory School Teachers
	0.4% Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare*
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in <i>independent preschools</i>	30.5% Preschool Teachers
	2.0% Compulsory School Teachers
	0.5% Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary) in <i>municipal preschools</i>	17% Childcare Workers
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary) in <i>independent preschools</i>	15.3% Childcare Workers

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in <i>municipal preschool classes</i>	46.2% Preschool teachers
	27.6% Compulsory School Teachers
	5.0 % Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in <i>independent preschool classes</i>	33.3% Preschool Teachers
	28.1% Compulsory School Teachers
	2.9% Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare
Staff with some pedagogical education** in <i>municipal preschools</i>	18.1%
Staff with some pedagogical education in <i>independent preschools</i>	19.8%
Staff with no relevant or no formal IPE in <i>municipal preschools</i>	20.1%
Staff with no relevant or no formal IPE in <i>independent preschools</i>	21.9%
Specialist support staff (e.g. support for children with disabilities integrated into regular preschools)	5% approx.
Male staff	4.2% of all staff in preschools (approx. 4% in municipal preschools and 6% in independent preschools. 41.9% of all male staff have a preschool teacher degree)
	8.4% of all staff in preschool classes
	32.1% of all staff in school-age educare settings
	6.0% of all ECEC principals
Foreign-born (<i>utomlands födda</i>) staff members	Preschools: No systematically compiled national data Preschool class: 13.6% in the school year 2022/2023

Sources: Skolverket 2023a, b, c

***Note:** Although the official term for students who graduate from the current teacher education programme is *Primary Teacher specialising in School-age Educare*, the former term (Leisure-Time Pedagogue – *fritidspedagog*) is still in current use, for example in statistics from the National Agency. A considerable proportion of the staff working in school-age educare settings may have the former qualification as Leisure-time Pedagogue.

****Note:** According to the National Agency for Education ‘*some pedagogical education*’ equals unfinished courses with no degree or final award from any of the specialisations listed above.

Table 3

Sweden: Proportions of the ECEC workforce qualifications according to provider in %, 2022

	Qualified Preschool Teachers	Qualified Primary Teachers* (Leisure Time Pedagogues)	Qualified Teachers	Upper secondary specialist vocational education (Child Care Workers)	Some pedagogical education	No formal pre-service education for working with children
Municipal preschools	42.9	0.4	1.6	17	18.1	20.1
Independent preschools	30.5%	0.5	2.0	15.3	19.8	21.9

Sources: Skolverket 2023a, b, c

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The three main groups of staff in ECEC follow different qualifying routes. Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers with a specialisation in School-age Educare are educated at university level; Childcare Workers have an upper secondary vocational education specialising in pedagogical work. *Tables 4–7* set out the details of these different routes.

According to legislative probations in 2011, all teachers must be certified or licensed (*legitimerade*) with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) from the National Agency for Education to work in preschools and schools. Since December 2013, only Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers who have QTS are accepted for permanent posts (SFS 2011:326).

Table 4

Sweden: Preschool Teacher

<p>Job title in Swedish: <i>Förskollärare</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>
<p><i>Since 2011</i></p> <p>Entry requirements*: 12 years of schooling (9 years compulsory schooling, 3 years upper secondary level) + matriculation</p> <p>Professional studies: 3½ years (7 semesters) at a higher education institution/university for the education of teachers. Students specialise in early childhood education (0 to 6 years)</p> <p>Award: Bachelor of Arts in Preschool Education (<i>Förskollärarexamen, grundnivå</i>)</p> <p><i>Since 2013:</i> Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) necessary for permanent employment</p> <p>ECTS credits: 210</p> <p>EQF level: 6</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main ECEC workplaces: Early childhood centre/preschool (<i>förskola</i>), full-day provision for 1 to 5 year-olds; preschool class in schools (<i>förskoleklass</i>) mainly for 6 year-olds, open 3 hours daily. Also: open preschool (<i>öppen förskola</i>) for parents, family day carers and children aged 1 year and older; school-age educare settings (<i>fritidshem</i>) for children aged 6–12 years as a complement to the preschool class, open before and after school hours and during holidays.</p>

***Note:** There are two kinds of admission criteria for all university study programmes, *basic admission criteria* (mainly grades from upper secondary education) and *special admission criteria*. Both are related to the programme chosen. There are also three main selection groups for admission into university: (1) based on grades (a minimum third of available places), (2) based on results on the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test, *Högskoleprovet* (a third of available places) and 3) selection decided by universities or university colleges themselves (maximum third of the places) (UHR 2022).

Table 5

Sweden: Childcare Worker

<p>Job title in Swedish: <i>Barnskötare</i></p>
<p><i>Since 2011</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate.</p> <p>Professional studies: 3 years upper secondary level of comprehensive school in the childcare and leisure-time education programme – specialisation in <i>pedagogical work</i> (including 15 weeks in practical placement).</p> <p>Awards: Matriculation Certificate – <i>Pedagogical Work</i> awarded by the school authorities.</p>

Job title in Swedish: <i>Barnskötare</i>
<p>Students who have passed the exam and have taken courses in Swedish and English are qualified to apply for university education.</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Early childhood centre/preschool (<i>förskola</i>), full-day provision for 1 to 5 year-olds, as auxiliary worker; open preschool (<i>öppen förskola</i>) for parents, family day carers and children aged 1 year and older, as auxiliary worker.</p>

Note: Some Childcare Workers who have been in the workforce for many years and who completed their professional training before 1992, when a two-year upper secondary programme specialising in childcare only was introduced, may have shorter-length qualifications. *Barnskötare* (Childcare Worker) is not a **protected/certified title**. Hence, in addition to the three-year vocational programme there are still courses of varied duration, some of only ten weeks' duration.

Table 6

Sweden: Primary Teacher – Extended School

Job title in Swedish: <i>Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem</i> Profile: Primary Teacher specialising in school-age educare and practical/aesthetic subjects
<p><i>Since 2011</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: 12 years schooling (9 years compulsory schooling, 3 years upper secondary level) + matriculation</p> <p>Professional studies: 3 years (6 semesters) at a higher education institution for the education/training of teachers/university department of child and youth studies, specialisation in leisure-time pedagogy and practical/ aesthetic subjects with children 6 to 12 years.</p> <p>Award: Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education – Extended School. (<i>Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem, 180 högskolepoäng, grundnivå</i>).</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main workplaces: School-age Educare settings (<i>fritidshem</i>), 6–12 years – most centres are integrated within school premises; primary school (<i>grundskola</i>), 7–12 years, practical/aesthetic subjects. Some may also work in preschool classes although their current education does not qualify for work in the preschool class (see <i>chapter 3 Table 2</i>).</p>

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Teacher education since 2011

Since 2011, teacher education programmes are related to distinctive age specialisations. Currently, teachers who specialise in early childhood education in preschools and teachers who specialise in school-age educare and in practical/aesthetic subjects follow two different programmes:

1. Preschool teacher education for work in preschools (children aged 1–5 years), comprising seven semesters (210 ECTS credits).
2. Primary teacher education. This programme has four distinct specialisations. The programme for work in school-age educare settings and for teaching practical/aesthetic subjects in the first years of compulsory school for children aged 6–12 years) is one of the specialisations. This programme comprises six semesters (180 ECTS credits).

The overarching aims and competences required for a degree in both programmes are regulated in the Higher Education Act/*Högskolelagen* (SFS 1992:1434) and the Higher Education Ordinance/*Högskoleförordningen* (SFS 1993:100; SFS 2021:1335). Graduates must demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for independent work as Preschool Teachers/Primary and Leisure-time Teachers in preschools, school-age educare settings and schools. The overarching aims are then further specified under the headings: *knowledge and understanding; competence and skills; judgement and approach*.

Four principles characterise the current approach to teacher education: a) a scientific and critical approach, b) a historical perspective, c) an international perspective, and d) IT as an educational resource. Based on these principles, three domains of knowledge make up the content of the IPE of both Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers working in school-age educare settings and primary schools:

- Educational sciences
- Subject knowledge including subject didactics
- Work placement – practicum.

In addition, students must produce a professionally relevant degree project of 15 ECTS credits.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslerämbetet [UKÄ]*) has overall responsibility for monitoring the quality of higher education, and for reviewing HEI's resource utilisation and compliance with laws and regulations.

In Sweden, universities have a high degree of autonomy. As long as they abide by the overarching aims and guidelines such as the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100) individual higher education institutions (HEI) can choose to focus on certain domains of knowledge. It is the local Faculty Board of Studies for initial teacher education programmes at respective universities that are responsible for translating the overall aims and guidelines in the Government Bill and Higher Education Act and Qualifications Ordinance to local curricula and syllabi. Therefore, it is not possible to give detailed information about curricular areas and pedagogic-didactic approaches for the education of teachers across all HEI institutions in Sweden. The following information reflects the programmes offered by the University of Gothenburg.

The two programmes are different in length, with 210 ECTS credits for Preschool Teachers and 180 ECTS credits for Primary Teachers specialising in school-age educare. The work placement also takes place in settings that are professionally relevant for the two groups, that is, preschools and school-age educare settings and schools. In addition, the subject studies are oriented toward the future profession. Education for sustainable development is central to the University of Gothenburg and a distinctive feature throughout the programmes.

Box 2

Sweden: Course modules – Preschool Teacher programme, University of Gothenburg

Preschool Teachers have a university degree of 3½ years' duration with the possibility to extend this to 4 years. The overarching principles and domains of knowledge that make up the content are translated into different themes/course modules (Göteborgs Universitet 2023).

1. Educational sciences (60 ECTS credits)

Seven integrated and overlapping themes make up this domain of knowledge:

- The history, governing, conditions and founding values – including democracy and human rights of preschool and school
- Curriculum theory and didactics
- Theory of science, research methodology
- An interdisciplinary perspective on development and learning including cognitive science and special education

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social relations, conflict resolution and leadership – Follow-up and analysis of learning and development for Preschool Teachers – Evaluation and developmental work. <p>2. Subject studies: Preschool pedagogy (120 ECTS credits) including subject-related didactics within the domain of early childhood education (105 ECTS credits) and a degree project/dissertation (15 ECTS credits) Six themes make up this domain of knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Children’s play, communication, language and literacy – Children’s mathematical learning – Play, learning, and care – Co-operation with guardians, the preschool class, the school-age educare setting and the school – Aesthetic learning processes – Nature, environment, and technique/technology. <p>All modules in semesters 1–5 and the two first modules in semester 6 are at initial level and comprise 7.5 ECTS credits each. The degree project comprises 15 ECTS credits.</p> <p>In the final semester (7), there are two distinct course modules at advanced level comprising 15 ECTS credits each. One is compulsory (<i>Sustainable Development and Global Perspectives</i>) and one is optional, focusing on one of the themes above.</p> <p>3. Work placement – practicum, 20 weeks (30 ECTS credits) The practicum, supervised work placement, is organised as four distinctive course modules comprising a total of 30 ECTS credits.</p>

Table 7

Sweden: Semester schedules – Preschool Teacher programme, University of Gothenburg

Semester 1	Learning, development and pedagogy 1 Play, learning and care 1 Practicum 1 Children’s language and communication 1
Semester 2	Children’s language and communication 2 Mathematics in early childhood education 1 Social relations, conflict management and leadership 1 Steering, Organisation and Value Systems 1
Semester 3	Practicum 2 Collaboration Learning, development and pedagogy 2 The teaching profession and theory and methods of science 1
Semester 4	Children’s language and communication 3 Arts, aesthetics and learning Steering documents, assessment and evaluation 2 Practicum 3
Semester 5	Play, learning and care 2 Science, environments and technologies Mathematics in early childhood education 2 Social relations and special educational perspectives 2
Semester 6	The teaching profession and scientific work Practicum 4 Degree project
Semester 7	Education for sustainable development and global perspectives Optional module

Sweden: Programme for Primary Teacher – specialising in school-age educare Course modules, University of Gothenburg

The same domains of knowledge apply to the programme for students qualifying for work in school-age educare settings and schools (Göteborgs Universitet 2022).

1. **Educational sciences** (60 ECTS credits)
 - Learning, development and didactics
 - Curriculum theory, organisation, follow up and assessment of learning and development
 - Leadership, special education, social relations, and conflict management
 - Theory of science, research methodology, evaluation, and developmental work.

2. **Subject studies** (90 ECTS credits)

including subject-related didactics within leisure-time education (75 ECTS credits) and a degree project dissertation (15 ECTS credits)

The subject studies include five themes:

 - Leisure, play and relations in school-age educare settings
 - Children's upbringing and leisure time in the local environment
 - Children's digital media cultures
 - Outdoor Education
 - Language and creative processes for teachers in leisure-time centres.

In addition to the above students are expected to specialise in one or more of the following subjects a) arts, b) home economics, c) sports and health and d) music.

3. **Work placement – practicum**, 20 weeks (30 ECTS credits)

The practicum, supervised work placement, is organised as four distinctive course modules comprising a total of 30 ECTS credits.

Upper secondary vocational programme for Childcare Workers, 3 years

Childcare Workers are required to follow a three-year upper secondary vocational programme specialising in pedagogical and social work. The overarching aim of the IPE is to prepare students for working primarily alongside Preschool Teachers in early childhood settings. The education comprises both compulsory and optional courses focusing on children's development, needs and rights as well as on various educational activities and the professional role. The programme includes 15 weeks of work placement/practicum and prepares students for work in the preschool or for work as student assistants in schools. In addition to assessing the theoretical courses, the student's abilities to perform common tasks in the professional field are assessed. This programme is also offered as an **apprenticeship**. It provides the same knowledge and the same vocational qualification as the regular programme, but approximately 50% of the education takes place in one or more workplaces (Skolverket 2023d).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

A large group of staff members in the preschools lacks any formal or pre-service education for working with children. The Education Act stipulates that the work in the preschool should be carried out by certified Preschool Teachers (SFS 2010:800 chapter 2, §13). According to the curriculum Preschool Teachers are responsible for education and teaching in the preschool. They have management and leadership responsibility in relation to the work team to ensure that the work is carried out in accordance with the overarching goals in the curriculum (Skolverket 2019). Such a high number of uneducated staff causes concern when it comes to overall quality in the preschool. To attract students to the profession, HEIs offer a variety of alternative qualification routes to become Preschool Teachers.

Since 2007, experienced Preschool and Primary Teachers with an incomplete degree from a Swedish university or a degree from a foreign university but lacking a formal teaching qualification, are offered an alternative route (SFS 2008:1101). The supplementary programme usually comprises 120 ECTS credits (30 ECTS credits of which are practicum) depending on the educational background the programme may need to be complemented with an additional 30 ECTS in Swedish or English. Through individual validations of previous course modules taken, the length of study can be shortened (Göteborgs Universitet 2020).

Experienced Childcare Workers/equivalent with five years of full-time or eight years of part-time work experience in preschools can qualify as Preschool Teachers by taking supplementary education full-time or part-time at higher education institutions. At the University of Gothenburg, the programme comprises 150 ECTS credits over 2.5 years for full-time students. For part-time students, the programme takes 5 years to complete.

There is a large degree of flexibility for the individual student regarding the pace of study. The mode of delivery is online study. The content is largely the same as in the regular programme. In this programme, students are credited with 15 ECTS credits of practicum. Furthermore, Educational Science is reduced by 19.5 ECTS credits and Subject Studies by 10.5 ECTS credits (Göteborgs Universitet 2023) (see also *Chapter 2* – Preschool Assistants).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Workplace-based learning comprises an important part of all teacher education in Sweden. It is in the workplace that students can acquire essential professional skills and competences that university-based courses alone cannot provide (Karlsson Lohmander 2015). The relation between the two parts of teacher education was highlighted in the two most recent teacher education reforms (SOU 1999:63; SOU 2008:109). Following a discussion between the Government, representatives from the teachers' union and municipalities, the Government decided that a five-year trial period with selected practicum schools and preschools would be implemented (SFS 2014:2). From 2014–2019, the University of Gothenburg (together with 14 other universities across Sweden) participated in the so-called Practicum Preschool Project (*Övningsförskoleprojektet*). This proved to be successful (Berlin 2018; Fröborg, Wimmerstedt, Steele, and Svensson 2020) and the system with selected practicum preschools and schools has now been introduced in all teacher education programmes (SFS 2021:1335).

Since the main form of ECEC provision is preschool education and the largest group of core professionals are Preschool Teachers, the following will focus on workplace-based learning (practicum) for this group. However, the overall structure and organisation apply to the education of Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare in schools and in school-age educare settings as well.

With a clear focus on the age group 1–5 years, students spend approximately 20 weeks (corresponding to 30 ECTS credits) in the workplace. During the practicum, students are organised into small groups and placed in the same preschool in a particular area during all workplace-based course modules. To ensure that students gain experience and knowledge of a variety of preschool contexts, they have field studies in preschools in other areas.

Principals of preschools (*rektorer*) and Placement Coordinators (*VFU-samordnare*) nominate the most appropriate preschools in the field and the most qualified Preschool Teachers to act as On-site Supervisors (*VFU-handledare*) to safeguard high-quality workplace-based learning.

The focus of the work placement modules is on *investigating*, *implementing* and *synthesising*, indicating gradually increasing complexity – from novice in the first module to competent professional in the fourth and last module. Work placements take place in four different course modules comprising 7.5 ECTS credits each in semesters 1, 3, 4 and 6. 100% attendance at the workplace is required, which corresponds to the normal working hours of a full-time employee. Exceptions are made for time scheduled for participation in lectures, seminars, and exams.

Module 1, semester 1: Observations focusing on the overall organisation and everyday practice, and on children’s learning and own professional development. Investigating how the steering documents, including curricular frameworks and theoretical perspectives, are implemented.

Module 2, semester 3: Central to this module is the didactic planning, implementation, and documentation of theme-oriented work with children integrating mathematics, language and communication.

Module 3, semester 4: This module aims to develop knowledge and understanding of pedagogical leadership and its importance for social relationships and conflict management. The focus is on systematic approaches towards promoting children’s development and learning, including aesthetic learning processes. Students are encouraged to gradually ‘replace’ the Preschool Teacher and take independent responsibility for planning and implementing different activities such as arts, drama, dance, and music with children and to collaborate with the work team and parents/guardians.

Module 4, semester 6: This module focuses on the importance of pedagogical leadership and the professional role to manage the complexity of preschool education from a societal and sustainable development perspective in relation to children’s differing needs and sometimes unequal preconditions. Central to this module are children’s perspectives and own pedagogical-didactical perspectives related to the curriculum.

For each practicum period, students are expected to keep a reflective journal (logbook) and participate in introductory lectures, praxis seminars and exams. They also have to submit individual written assignments. Students who fail a workplace-based learning course module have the right to a second placement.

Both the university and the preschools participate in the planning of the workplace-based learning periods. On-site supervisors (*VFU-lärare*), university-based teachers/workplace-based course module teachers (*VFU-kurslärare*) and students form teams throughout the four modules. The team reflects on possible amendments and developments of the various modules in terms of safeguarding high quality. The university-based teachers visit students during the practicum in semesters 2 and 6. Together with the on-site supervisor they assess the performance of the students and discuss with them areas for development and need for support during the weekly meetings. Furthermore, the university-based teacher will also consult and discuss the performance of each student with the on-site supervisor before reporting the grades. The on-site supervisors do not receive specific remuneration. However, taking on the responsibility of on-site supervision is an important criterion when negotiating salaries at annual appraisal meetings. The time allocated for supervision depends on the needs of the individual student. Some students may need more support to reach the goals in the course module syllabus while others are more independent. A common recommendation is one hour per week.

To become On-site Supervisors, prospective candidates must be qualified and certified Preschool Teachers and have a minimum of two years’ work experience. They are obliged to complete a qualifying course at the university “Tutoring in Teacher Education” (*Professionshandledning för VFU-handledare*) comprising 7.5 ECTS credits.



6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Municipalities have the main responsibility for the organisation and management of preschools. There is currently no national coherent and transparent system which includes formal, informal, and centre-based forms of CPD. Consequently, CPD activities may vary between municipalities across the country. However, the establishment of a national merit-/qualification system for Principals, School Teachers, and Preschool Teachers (*Nationellt professionsprogram för rektorer, lärare och förskollärare*) to strengthen and develop their competence, enable career advancement and make the teaching profession more attractive will be introduced in 2025 (Regeringskansliet 2023a).

Principals have overall responsibility for quality issues in the preschool, including CPD. They are responsible for ensuring members of staff are well qualified for the work. They decide the kind of CPD activities needed for the preschool, for different categories of staff and for individual members of the work team. There is no regulation regarding the number of days per year granted for CPD. Preschools are usually closed two days per semester for planning the work in the setting and for CPD. The individual Preschool Teacher's/Childcare Worker's need for competence development is discussed at the annual appraisal meetings and formulated in the competence development plan (*Kompetensutvecklingsplan*).

Concerning the content focus of CPD activities, at the national level the government may outline and target domains of knowledge for CPD and allocate money to municipalities to organise this. One example was the 'Boost for Preschool' programme (*Förskolelyftet*) in 2009 and 2011 where preschool staff were offered advanced courses of varying lengths, with shorter courses for Childcare Workers than for Preschool Teachers and Preschool Principals. This was linked to the revision of the curriculum in 2010 where subject knowledge was included for the first time. The focus was on children's development in language, mathematics, natural sciences, and technology. Another example was the 'Boost for Reading' (*Läslyftet*) initiative from 2017–2021 where the National Agency was commissioned by the Government to organise CPD activities focusing on the didactics of language, reading, and writing for Preschool Teachers and 'provide preschool teachers with scientifically informed and proven working methods for developing children's linguistic and communicative abilities' (Skolverket 2021d, 3). There is still a strong focus on language and literacy. Since autumn 2022, the Swedish National Agency for Education has offered various language-promoting and competence-enhancing initiatives for staff in preschools such as Vocational Swedish for preschool staff (see also *Chapter 8*) (Skolverket 2023e).

Apart from the above-mentioned government initiatives, the most common forms of CPD are study days for all members of staff where the focus is on current issues often linked to the curriculum. These include topics such as leadership, teaching in preschool, language and literacy, multilingualism, pedagogical documentation, science and technology, sustainable development in the preschool, the professional role, etc. In some municipalities, there is a strong focus on 'Reggio Emilia pedagogy' and this has been a recurring focus for CPD in many preschools. Childcare Workers may be offered supplementary training which will deepen and expand their professional competences and skills. Likewise, unqualified workers such as Preschool Assistants may receive education to make them more professionally competent (see *Chapter 2.1*).

As part of the national school development programme, the National Agency for Education provides funding for courses for preschool staff organised in the municipality and linked directly

to local needs. Courses comprising 7.5 ECTS credits are delivered online by higher education institutions appointed by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2023f).

The following are examples of courses offered to Preschool Teachers during 2023:

- Teaching in preschool
- Challenging and supporting children’s development
- Science and technology
- Documenting quality
- Multilingualism.

For Principals, the following course is offered:

- To lead and organise the systematic quality work – the principal's responsibility for preschool quality.

CPD activities during working hours are organised and funded (total or partial costs) by the individual preschool, the municipality or the government and are compulsory for those members of staff who are invited/nominated to participate. The cost for any CPD that is not approved by the Preschool Principal must be covered by the individual and must take place outside working hours.

There is a multitude of CPD formats and activities available. These include seminars, conferences, lectures, and courses (on-site or online) addressing various domains of knowledge. In recent years the variety of providers has increased substantially. In addition to the National Agency for Education, universities, municipalities, regional development centres, and the Teachers’ Union, there are many independent private providers who offer CPD activities, often at very high costs. Municipalities/preschools are free to choose the topic and provider that suits them.

Regularly occurring problems regarding access opportunities to CPD have to do with the overall economy; the funding usually set aside for CPD for each practitioner is very small. At the same time, costs for attending various forms of CPD may be very high, which makes it difficult to participate. Another problem is the shortage of staff. Even if there is funding available it still might not be possible for practitioners to attend because of the lack of substitute staff to replace them.

Concerning formal recognition of CPD in terms of promotion and career advancement, participation in CPD activities can qualify the individual Preschool Teacher for specific tasks or posts of responsibility within the setting. As mentioned (see *Chapters 2 and 5*), there are qualifying university courses at regional levels for On-site Supervisors who are responsible for the supervision of student teachers during practicum and at the national level for mentors responsible for newly employed Preschool Teachers during their introductory year.

In addition to the assignments and positions mentioned in *Chapter 2* (First teacher, Pedagogical Leader, On-site Supervisor, Mentor), participation in CPD can also qualify for principal positions in the preschool. Furthermore, with the aim to include valuable expertise from experienced Preschool Teachers and School Teachers in teacher education, to strengthen the cooperation between work settings and the university, practising Preschool Teachers can be appointed as Adjunct Teachers (*Adjungerad Universitetsadjunkt*) at the university. They are usually employed on a part-time basis while working concurrently in preschools and schools. Long-term competence requirements for employment as an Adjunct Teacher responsible for workplace-based course modules in the university study programme usually include the following:

- Certified Preschool Teacher including on-site mentoring experience
- A course on ‘Tutoring in Teacher Education’ (7.5 ECTS credits)



- A course on ‘Teaching and Learning in Higher Education’ (7.5 ECTS credits).

Particular importance is attached to pedagogical skills such as experience in supervising students during practicum and participation in the development of work-place based learning modules in the regular programme.

There are also other study routes such as Master, Licentiate and Doctoral degree programmes. Participation is usually not supported by state or employer funding although there have been some exceptions in the form of so-called National Research Schools which was part of the ‘Boost for Teachers’ initiative (*Lärarlyftet*) where students studied part-time while working concurrently. Participation was funded through Government grants to municipalities and universities. After completion, students were awarded a *Licentiate* degree (Riksdagen 2016).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Preschool Teachers do not usually receive the same salary as Compulsory School Teachers. One of the justifications given for this difference is that the length of initial professional education differs. However, salaries are individually negotiated and, given the shortage of qualified Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers, there can be considerable variation between different parts of the same city and between municipalities across the country depending on, for example, work experience, level of qualification and lack of qualified Preschool Teachers. An average introductory salary for a newly qualified Preschool Teacher is approximately SEK 31,500 (€2,743.19)⁵ per month; more experienced Preschool Teachers receive approximately SEK 36,000 (€3,135.08) per month, with a variation of SEK 31,800–45,200 (€2,769.32–3,936.26). The average salary across the country is approximately SEK 34,900 (€3,039.28).

Some municipalities may offer higher salaries to attract Preschool Teachers to vacant positions. Staff may also receive higher salaries for posts of responsibility such as Pedagogical Leader or First Teacher. While mentors for newly qualified Preschool Teachers usually receive a salary increase, Preschool Teachers who take on the responsibility for the supervision of students do not automatically receive this. It is considered an important criterion when discussing salaries at the annual appraisal.

Salaries for Childcare Workers are also individually negotiated and may vary across the country. The salary per month for Childcare Workers varies from approximately SEK 26,000 to 30,100 (€2,264.22–2,621.27) with an average salary of SEK 26,649 per month (€2,320.74). It is possible to live on this salary, although much depends on the living costs and family composition (e.g. single parents and number of children) and the area of residence. Through the publicly funded Swedish Social Insurance (*Socialförsäkringen*) all families receive allowances for each child until the child’s sixteenth birthday. There are also housing allowances to support families with children who need help paying rent or monthly fees for their housing (Försäkringskassan 2023).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Full-time employment for Preschool Teachers in Sweden means 40 hours of paid work per week. Part-time employment can involve different percentages up to full time, e.g. 50% or 75% of full-

⁵ Conversion rate November 2023

time employment. Staff with young children under the age of 12 years are entitled to work part-time. Working six hours a day for five days is a common solution for many.

In terms of permanent or temporary employment, a total of 119,386 employees work in the preschool which corresponds to 100,753 full-time permanent posts. The remainder is employed on a temporary basis (Skolverket 2023d).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Newly qualified staff are entitled to an introductory period when they first start working after graduation. The introductory period usually lasts a whole academic year during which new employees can further develop and become more secure in their professional role. The introductory period should begin immediately after the new employee starts working. The Principal is responsible for nominating licensed Mentors with sufficient work experience and must ensure that the Mentor gets the appropriate preconditions for the work. To qualify for the mentoring responsibility experienced and professional Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers must attend a specially designed national online mentoring course comprising 7.5 ECTS credits at advanced level. The Mentor is responsible for supporting the new employee during the introductory period. In addition to providing professional, personal and social support in the workplace, and stimulating professional development, the aim of the introductory period is also to develop an understanding of schools and preschools as workplaces and of their role in society (SKOLFS 2014:44).

7.4 Non-contact time

Non-contact time is not regulated but the Teachers' Union recommends four hours per week for Preschool Teachers. There is no recommendation for non-contact time for Childcare Workers or other members of staff. It is up to the local preschool authorities to decide about and regulate in local agreements non-contact time for this staff category. All staff members attend workplace meetings. Furthermore, Mentors have time set aside for regular meetings with new employees.

7.5 Current staffing issues

As previously mentioned, there is currently a huge lack of qualified Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers in the preschool (see *Chapter 2*); recruitment and retention of qualified preschool staff are in crisis.

One reason is the number of teachers approaching or taking retirement, resulting in an estimated future shortage of Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers. According to the Teacher Prognosis 2021 (Skolverket 2021c), the total need for qualified Preschool Teachers is estimated to be 37,000 full-time positions (approximately 2,500 annually) up to 2035. The corresponding figure for Teachers in School-age Educare settings is 5,800 (approximately 400 annually) (Skolverket 2021c).

Over the past decades, many recruitment strategies have been introduced. Since 2016 the Government has been allocating funding to municipalities to raise teacher salaries, the so-called 'Teacher Salary Boost' (*Lönlyftet*) for specially qualified Schoolteachers and Preschool Teachers. The aim of this initiative is to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and thereby improve outcomes in schools (SKOLFS 2016:61). In addition, various new career posts have been introduced (see *Chapters 2 and 5*) and a new national merit-/qualification system for Principals, Teachers, and Preschool Teachers has been suggested (see *Chapter 6*).

The National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2021c) proposes several measures to counteract the shortage of qualified teachers. In this respect teacher education is crucial. The number of places in preschool teacher education programmes has increased in recent years and efforts are being made to encourage students (including male students) to apply and ensure they complete their education.

To safeguard teacher education of high quality the Government has also invested in Research Schools/doctoral programmes for Teacher Educators to strengthen research links where, after completion, students are awarded a *Licentiate* or, alternatively, a *Doctoral Degree*. One example is the Research School ‘*Educating for Play-Responsive Teaching in Early Childhood Education for Social and Cultural Sustainability (PRECEC SCS)*’ (2019–2024) which is organised by a consortium of universities and funded by the Swedish Research Council. Students study part time (80%) while working concurrently in preschool teacher education programmes (20%). In this case, students are awarded a Doctoral Degree.

While there has been an increase in CPD opportunities, according to the National Agency it is crucial to continue investing in qualifying CPD, further education and flexible study routes for unqualified staff to safeguard access to equal preschool education of high quality across the country. The need for CPD is estimated to be the case for approximately 2,400 Preschool Teachers and 5,700 Primary Teachers/Leisure-time Pedagogues. To retain preschool staff, Principals must also systematically work towards ensuring a good working environment (Skolverket 2021c). This is particularly important since stress and health issues seem to be increasing (Persson and Tallberg Broman 2019) and are a matter of concern to the Teachers’ Union, Preschool Principals, and preschool administrations all over the country.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

For decades, education has been and still is high on the political agenda and a recurring topic in both political and public debate. Several reforms and initiatives have been suggested and implemented to further develop education in general, including preschool and teacher education. In addition to the initiatives and reforms already presented such as increased CPD opportunities, the introduction of a national merit-/qualification system for Principals, Schoolteachers and Preschool Teachers, and the ‘Teacher Salary Boost’ (see *chapter 6*), there are also other initiatives.

Some of these initiatives include:

- Strategies to *develop teacher and preschool teacher education* (Regeringen 2023)
- Investment in continuing education to *improve the knowledge of the Swedish language among staff in preschools* (Skolverket 2023e)
- Strategies to increase attendance in the preschool *among foreign-born young children for improved language development in Swedish*
- Investment in continuing education for Preschool Teachers and pedagogical staff in preschool to *strengthen their digital competence* in the preschool field.

Recently, the use of digital tools in preschool has been debated. The Government has commissioned the National Agency for Education to review the curriculum for the preschool (Skolverket 2019) regarding digitalisation with the intention that the use of digital tools be

informed by research and provide documented added pedagogical value. The review is to be reported in June 2024 (Regeringskansliet 2023b).

According to the report from the Government Inquiry on *Förskola för alla barn – för bättre språkutveckling i svenska* (Preschool for all children – for better language development in Swedish) (SOU 2020:67), about 4% of all children in the age group 3–5 years were not enrolled in preschool, with children from weak socio-economic backgrounds being overrepresented. As a consequence, the Education Act was amended to include an obligation for municipalities of residence to contact the guardians of children through outreach activities and inform about the purpose of preschool and the child's right to preschool education (even without any request for a preschool place from the child's guardian) if: (1) the child was born abroad and has been resident in Sweden for a maximum of five years, or (2) the child's guardians who are resident in Sweden were born abroad and have resided in Sweden for a maximum of five years (SFS 2022:833).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There is a large and growing body of research on preschool with a mixture of both small-scale and large-scale projects. Many research studies/projects conduct praxeological research with a focus on different aspects of the listed domains of knowledge in the preschool curriculum (Skolverket 2019) or other aspects of everyday practices in the preschool. In these projects, the role of teachers is often addressed. Some projects focus on issues of professionalism in a direct way. The research projects below are examples of important areas relating to staffing issues in the preschool.

Dilemmas in the assignments of Preschool Teachers (2017–2019) (*Dilemman i förskollärares uppdrag*)

Sources: The main publication from this project is by Persson and Tallberg Broman (2019). Key findings from the project have also been reported in various book chapters, e.g. Tallberg Broman 2020 (see *References* for full details).

Background and aim: In 2017, the Malmö City Preschool Administration, Department of Quality and Supervision, providing funding and commissioned researchers at Malmö University to conduct a professions-oriented study about dilemmas in the mission of Preschool Teachers assignments and highlight different staff members' perceptions and experiences of contributing causes to high sick leave and increased mental health issues. The aim of the study was a) to create in-depth knowledge about dilemmas in Preschool Teachers', b) to compile statistics and exemplify research concerning conditions for Preschool Teachers' assignments and work situation and c) to present and discuss possible measures and actions to deal with the problem.

Methods: The study included both documentary research and interview studies. The documentary research included annual reports from Malmö City as well as reports and situation assessments from the Preschool Administration in Malmö. It also included 30 preschool reports and 30 quality reports and quality plans from preschools in seven preschool areas where sick leave was particularly high in 2017, as well as national and local statistical reports. The interview study comprised 13 interviews with 46 staff members from Malmö Preschool Administration, Preschool Principals, and Preschool Teachers from areas with high and low sick leave.

Selected findings and implications: Findings indicate that several factors related to staffing and the work environment contribute to the current increasing sick leave and health issues, e.g. the lack of qualified Preschool Teachers, high staff turnover and a shortage of staff for children in need of special support. Another important factor is the changing role, the extended responsibility, and the legitimacy for Preschool Teachers to take on a leadership role in relation to colleagues in the preschool. Some of the suggested support measures and actions that need to be taken into account to improve the situation include: increased autonomy and control for Preschool Teachers, support for their leadership responsibility, reduction of the workload and sufficient staffing.

Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC) (2019–2022)

Sources: The main publication from the project is Pramling et al. (2019) which is available through Open Access (see *References* for full details). Another key publication is Pramling (2022).

Background and aim: The background of this project funded by the Swedish Institute for Educational Research is the recent increased emphasis on teaching and education in the Swedish preschool curriculum and how this pedagogical practice can be understood in the context of ECEC with its holistic goals and play as central for children’s learning and development. The aim of this research project was to contribute an empirically grounded theorisation of teaching that does not exclude but instead is inclusive of play.

Methods: A combined research and development project was conducted, an example of praxeological research where researchers and preschool personnel collaborate in generating new knowledge of relevance to research (theory) and to preschools (pedagogical principles). Preschool Teachers documented joint activities with children. These films were then discussed at seminars at the university in terms of what could be learned from these activities and how they played out and could be developed. The films were subsequently analysed by the researchers to theorise the observations. This work eventually led to the theorisation of Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC), encompassing teaching as responsive to play.

Findings and implications: The findings are primarily theoretical, in the form of Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC). This theorisation, in very brief terms, conceptualises teaching as activities jointly co-constructed by staff and children where there is responsivity to play. It provides a number of concepts that serve as analytical principles for understanding co-constructive activities in ECEC (and beyond). The project also contributed to pedagogical principles – such as being responsive to play, and to different modes of participating, co-constituting narratives (imaginary scenarios, in and from which children can play and learn also what goes beyond play) and shifting between and relating fantasy and reality through meta-communication. Additionally, there were contributions given in the form of establishing a network for ECEC personnel and researchers, exchanging experience, and generating and disseminating new knowledge.

A Sustainable Preschool – A development and research project (2021-2024) (*En hållbar förskola- ett utvecklings- och forskningsprojekt*)

Sources: Two main publications from the project are Engdahl et al. (2021) and Ärlemalm-Hagsér et al. (2023) available through Open Access (see *References* for details).

Background and aim: The background of this combined development and research project is the revision of the national preschool curriculum (Skolverket 2019), where the concept of sustainability is central, both in the fundamental values and tasks sections, and in specific goals.

The aim of the development part of the project is to develop Preschool Teachers' competence and skills on how to work with sustainability with young children. The aim of the research project is to study how teachers, and their leaders, develop their education and teaching towards sustainability. Another aim is to follow how the participants, over 100 Preschool Leaders and 200 Preschool Teachers, implement a 'Whole School Approach' into their management and organisational strategies.

Methods: The following methods were used: 1) An initial survey on how the participating preschools handled and understood Education for Sustainable Development (ESD); 2) All teachers evaluated their work with ESD using the OMEP ESD Rating Scale; 3) Systematic conversations with children; 4) Group discussions about the ongoing work with sustainability; 5) Interviews with leaders and preschool teachers about promoting a sustainable leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE). A final survey will be conducted to study the development of knowledge and the processes of development and changes in the preschools and in the organisations.

The data has mainly been generated and uploaded by the participants themselves, mostly as text documents. Furthermore, the researchers are conducting interviews with process leaders, Preschool Teachers, and Principals, aiming at developing theoretical and pedagogical strategies that offer opportunities for enhancing Education for Sustainability (EfS) in ECE.

Findings and implications so far: Findings indicate that teachers are interested in EfS. Initially, common content areas were linked to Nature and to waste sorting, reuse, and recycling. Less common content was linked to the economic dimension of sustainability, consumption patterns, budgeting, and money. Thus, the teachers identified a need for professional competence to initiate relevant EfS content and activities. Furthermore, participants recognised that children's participation for a sustainable present and into the future is a decisive element if change is to occur.

The project was initiated by the Swedish institute Ifous (2021) and funded by the collaborating partners; Ifous, the nine participating municipalities/providers, Mälardalen University and University of Gothenburg.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Recruitment and retention of qualified ECEC staff is a significant challenge for the Early Childhood Education workforce in Sweden and has been for several years. Currently, there is a substantial shortage of certified Preschool Teachers, with an estimated need for 37,000 full-time positions up to 2035 due to upcoming retirement among practising Preschool Teachers (Skolverket 2021c). There is also a growing shortage of qualified Childcare Workers. Given the crucial role staff qualifications play in children's development and learning (see, for example, Sylva et al. 2011), it is problematic that the number of staff lacking relevant professional or formal education of any kind currently working in preschools is very high. Moreover, *Barnskötare* (Childcare Worker) is **not a protected/certified title**. In addition to the three-year vocational programme there are courses of varied duration, such as ten-week courses offered by private providers. Therefore, even if employed Childcare Workers may have undergone some training, the **acquired qualifications and skills may vary substantially**, with implications for the overall quality of the education provided.

Linked to the challenge of staff qualification and shortage of staff is the issue of **group size in preschools and the staff to child ratio**. A recommended benchmark for children aged 1–3 years is 6–12 children. For 4 to 5 year-olds the benchmark is 9–15 children. According to the Teachers' Union, approximately 49% of preschools have larger group sizes than the recommendation for groups of 1 to 3 year-olds. In the age group 4–5 years, the corresponding figure is 47%. Both the union for Preschool Teachers and the union for Childcare Workers demand that group size be regulated by law (Sveriges lärare 2022, Kommunal 2023).

A lack of qualified staff and large groups of children implies a **worsening of working conditions**, of the conditions needed (e.g. non-contact time) to take on the overall responsibility for pedagogical work aligned with the curriculum, including planning, documentation and cooperation with parents (Williams, Sheridan, and Pramling Samuelsson 2016). Individual children's achievements are not assessed in the preschool. However, according to the curriculum, preschool staff should 'continuously and systematically follow, document and analyse each child's development and learning...' (Skolverket 2019, 19), which is challenging. It requires qualified, competent staff and time, neither of which are always available (Skolverket 2023). Furthermore, preschools have long opening hours (6:00/6:30 – 18:30/19:00), with staff working in teams on a rotating scheme. The full complement of staff is usually on-site between 10:00 and 14:00 hours. Because of the lack of regular staff as well as substitute staff children might not receive the attention, support and trust needed for their development, wellbeing and learning. The youngest children are especially vulnerable in this respect (Skolinspektionen 2016).

Over time, with the goal of increasing the quality of education in the preschool, the roles and responsibilities of staff members have been differentiated. The curriculum demands enhanced responsibility for Preschool Teachers (Skolverket 2019). In addition to being responsible for children's education, they now have a **leadership responsibility** in relation to their colleagues without a clear formal mandate for it (Eriksson 2014). In many cases, it can be a single Preschool Teacher who must supervise and support a work team with very varied qualifications, including staff members with no relevant education at all. This has implications for preschool education and the workforce in that it is very time-consuming and may cause stress and other health issues (Persson and Tallberg Broman 2019). Preschool Teachers need support for their leadership and management responsibility. Leading other adults, especially their colleagues, is different from the leadership role they otherwise have for the children. The preconditions for high-quality preschool education are insufficient and health issues and sick leave are increasing.

As in many other countries, the number of foreign-born families in Sweden has increased in recent years. Yet another challenge is how to support these children and families in the most appropriate way. Preschool Teachers need more knowledge about family backgrounds, language and cultural traditions. They need to develop skills and competences regarding how to **work with multilingual groups of children and their families** (Harju-Luukkainen and Kultti 2017). Furthermore, it is important to offer **CPD focusing on linguistic and cultural diversity and inclusion** and to support both children's and staff members' development in the Swedish language (Skolverket 2023e; SOU 2020:67). With the strong focus on language and literacy (Skolverket 2019) it may be a challenge **to support children's language development in both Swedish and their home language** especially if staff with the appropriate educational and linguistic qualifications and competencies are lacking. Practitioners also need basic skills to support children in developing **digital competency**, including the role of media in society, to ensure the use of digital tools is informed by research and provides added pedagogical value (Regeringskansliet 2023b).

The Government has initiated several reforms already reported, such as the Teacher Salary Boost (SKOLFS 2016:61), increased CPD opportunities and career advancement strategies.

Furthermore, strategies to increase attendance in the preschool among foreign-born young children for improved development in the Swedish language have also been initiated.

Taken together these initiatives and reforms are hoped to make the teaching profession more attractive, counteract the recruitment and retention problem, ensure a qualified workforce in preschools and school-age educare settings and equal and accessible high-quality preschool education across the country.

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