

Competing on the basis of quality

– tuition fees for foreign students

FACT SHEET

Ministry of Education and Research

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In the Government Bill ‘Competing on the basis of quality – tuition fees for foreign students’ (Govt. Bill 2009/10:65) the Government proposes that higher education be free of charge for Swedish citizens and citizens of an EU/EEA state or Switzerland. Moreover, the Government considers that citizens from other countries – ‘third country students’ – should pay a fee for their higher education as of the autumn term 2011. The Government wants Swedish higher education institutions to compete on the basis of quality, not on the basis of a free education.

Free of charge for citizens of Sweden and EU/EEA states

Sweden has a long tradition of free higher education paid for by the taxpayer. Education gives people the opportunity to shape their own lives and to influence their situation, and is thus very valuable in itself. But higher education is also of strategic importance for our common future. Sweden’s ability to maintain and develop welfare depends to a large extent on our country’s ability to manage knowledge. A well-educated population is crucial for a country wanting to assert itself in the face of ever tougher global competition.

The Government therefore proposes that the Higher Education Act be supplemented with a provision stating that higher education is to be free for Swedish citizens and citizens of an EU/EEA state or Switzerland. These are countries whose citizens Sweden has undertaken to treat in the same way as Swedish citizens.

Sweden in the global education market

The number of students applying to study across national borders has risen dramatically throughout the world over the past ten years. The number of students coming to study in Sweden has trebled since 1999, and these students currently make up just over eight per cent of the student population in Sweden. Interest has grown particularly in countries outside Europe. Prior to the autumn term of 2009, Sweden received 120 000 applications from students from countries outside the EU/EEA.

Today, there is a fully developed global education market, in which Sweden and Swedish higher education institutions are actors. Swedish higher education institutions are already competing with those abroad. The Government considers that our higher education institutions should, in future, compete on the same terms as foreign higher education institutions in the countries with which Sweden wants to be compared. Sweden is currently one of very few countries to offer free education to all foreign students. In the EU, it is the norm for non-EU students – ‘third country students’ – to pay fees.

Swedish higher education institutions must compete on the basis of high quality and good study environments, not on the basis of a free education. As Swedish higher education institutions are characterised in many areas by high quality and good study environments, there is a good chance that these institutions will successfully compete in the global education market.

The introduction of tuition fees for third country students will also give higher education institutions the possibility of working more strategically on recruiting these students.

Fees for students outside the EU/EEA to be introduced from 2011

Foreign students are an asset to Swedish higher education. They help to strengthen the international environment and diversity at Swedish higher education institutions. The number of third country students at Swedish higher education institutions has risen rapidly. The costs involved in taking on these students have therefore also risen. Although third country students bring a lot of positive aspects to Swedish higher education, this is not reason enough to offer free education paid for by the taxpayer without restrictions to all foreign students. Swedish tax revenues should primarily cover the educational needs of Swedish citizens.

The Government therefore considers that citizens from countries outside the EU, the EEA and Switzerland – third country students – should pay a fee for their higher education as of the autumn term of 2011. Everyone who has begun their education before then should be able to complete their education at a normal pace of study without having to pay tuition fees.

Tuition fees are to be introduced for education at undergraduate and advanced level. Doctoral level studies will remain free of charge, also for third country students.

Not all third country students should be liable to pay fees. People considered to have strong links to Sweden,

who have a permanent residence permit or a residence permit in Sweden for reasons other than studies should be treated in the same way as Swedish citizens, and should thus be able to complete their higher education without paying tuition fees.

The design of tuition fees

It is intended that higher education institutions themselves determine the size of fees, based on the principle of full cost coverage. The size of tuition fees will therefore depend on the design of educational programmes.

All or some of the tuition fee should be paid in advance in order for a student liable to pay fees to be able to begin his or her education. The revenue from tuition fees should be at the disposal of higher education institutions. As tuition fees are introduced, it is intended that the central government appropriations for undergraduate education will be gradually reduced. The funds saved will be used for other essential investments in higher education, such as increased quality in education.

Grants and information to third country students

Swedish higher education institutions should continue to have good opportunities to recruit highly qualified students from all over the world. The aim is for qualified students to choose a Swedish higher education. Many countries offer grants to qualified third country students, and the Government considers that grants should also be offered at Swedish higher education institutions. Grants are an important strategic tool for higher education institutions when competing in a global education market. Higher education institutions

should also continue to build up their own long-term grant funds for these students. As a complement to already existing programmes, the Government considers that two new grant programmes should be introduced to make Swedish higher education institutions even more attractive.

One grant programme (SEK 30 million) will be distributed through The Swedish Institute and will target at highly qualified students from certain developing countries, and will thus cover both living costs and tuition fees.

The second grant programme (SEK 60 million) will target highly qualified third country students from all over the world and should not cover living costs, only tuition fees. Grants will be distributed to highly qualified students by the higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are responsible for providing information about their educational programmes, both in Sweden and internationally. When tuition fees are introduced, it is important that Sweden and Swedish education are marketed as a whole. The Swedish Institute is currently responsible for communicating the image of Sweden and Swedish higher education abroad. Prior to the introduction of tuition fees, the Government will increase resources to the Swedish Institute to provide clearer information about Sweden as an education nation.

When tuition fees are introduced, there is a risk that the number of third country students will decrease. Active work on marketing, recruitment and reception of third country students will help to counter this reduction and also provide new strategic opportunities for Swedish higher education institutions and for Sweden as an education nation.



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