

**Working Paper SW2**

**‘WE ARE DOING WELL ON QAE’. THE CASE OF SWEDEN**

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**Abstract**

The paper presents preliminary results on the modern history and development of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) policy and activities at national level in a Swedish context. The contemporary web of Swedish QAE activities and their planned effects are analysed in relation to European (European Union) and other international organisations’ efforts to influence national policy concerning education. Questions dealt with are: What in European and international ideas on QAE is considered to be of interest for Swedish national policy, and what are the reasons for this? To what degree do Swedish national policy brokers disseminate international QAE policy into the Swedish school system? Are there any obstacles for European policy to permeate national QAE policy and practise in Sweden? The paper reports preliminary results from textual analysis of national policy documents and interviews with a selection of so-called national policy brokers, (ie civil servants at the ministry of education and national agencies and researchers involved in international and national activities and for a promoting QAE). So far we find Sweden to be historically early equipped with means to control quality in schooling, eg inspection in the mid-1800s. In the end of the 1990s, there is a marked increase in national policy efforts in amendments/changes in the Education Act as well as new regulations, increasing the number of QAE activities directed at Swedish schooling. Preliminary conclusions suggest that the recent development of QAE in Sweden is related to a shift in governing policies and practices, and that Swedish national brokers harbour an image of doing quite well on QAE policy and practice compared to other European countries.

## Introduction

Quality assurance/assessment and evaluation policy and activities (QAE) are rapidly developing throughout the globe, and education at all levels is one of the most targeted areas for this expansion. Several international organisations have invested work to promote this trend. As an example the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has for a long time, and lately more intensely, engaged in education policy by carrying out international tests like PISA, and thematic reviews in which several countries take part (Schuller, 2006). Another example is the European Union's work with indicators for assessing progress in education (see for example European Commission, 2001).

In the international project Fabricating Quality in European Education the aim is to

*“a) Develop understanding of QAE as a form of governance of education, through empirical investigation and theoretical work that draws on current social science approaches to the relationship between evidence, data and governing;*

*b) Develop new methodological and theoretical approaches to comparative education in Europe, which combine perspectives on emergent global policy development with critical approaches to meaning-making through comparison and with attention to the mediating effects of national and local practices.”* (Ozga, Proposal to ECRP, 2005, p. 2)

This paper reports preliminary results from two sub-studies of the Swedish part of the international project. These studies are:

- a. a study of national policy documents concerning QAE in schooling (mandatory education comprising grades 1-9), and
- b. an interview study conducted with a selection of so-called national brokers (ie civil servants at the ministry of education and national agencies and researchers involved in international and national activities and for promoting QAE).

The paper starts with a historical review of QAE in Sweden and a description of the expansion of QAE policies and activities at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the contemporary context. This historical and up-to-date picture is based on textual analysis of national policy documents. The paper continues with a presentation of Sweden's international engagement regarding QAE policies and activities at national level, as recorded in the interviews with national policy brokers. Finally, an analysis of the relation between international organisations' efforts to influence national policy concerning QAE in schooling in Sweden is performed. The analysis draws on previous work in the international project, particularly work carried out by the UK team.

Descriptions of methods and materials are found in Appendix A.

## History of QAE in Sweden

As in many modern societies, QAE, or evaluative activities, are closely interrelated to (national) governing. Sweden is no exception, which the following account will show. To fully appreciate the Swedish context it is important to know that state control of inhabitants and

citizens has prevailed for centuries. The state church was responsible for national registration from the 1600s until 1991 by keeping parish registers. The registration included recordings of such things as births, matrimonies, deaths, and transfer to another parishes. From the late 1600s books over parish catechetical meetings started to be kept by the vicars, became a common practice at the end of the 1700s, and terminated or was changed into a less interrogative practice at the end of the 1800s. In these books all people in each household were registered regularly. Their occupations, ability to read and know the catechism, their moral conduct, and whether or not they were inoculated of smallpox are among the things noted (Johansson, 1977; Wikipedia, a). Official national statistics on living conditions of Swedish inhabitants have been collected with some regularity ever since.

### Early inspection<sup>1</sup>

In 1841, the Swedish parliament decided to establish a general comprehensive primary school (folk-school; in Swedish: 'folkskolan'). By that decision, the state took on the responsibility to make the then very diversified types of primary schools more alike, and into a united primary school system. This new primary school system was also intended to be obligatory for all children.

In order to control that folk-schools actually were installed locally, and to control the existence of basic equipment and that instruction were delivered according to central requirements, a national inspection system was established in 1861 (Persson, 1991; Richardsson, 1977/1980, p. 36). Accordingly, state school inspectors travelled around to ensure that public folk schools existed, that a minimum of facilities and materials were provided, and that the content stipulated by the state in national plans was adequately taught (Johansson, 1991). Richardsson (1977/1980) argues that this inspection was a strong governing instrument since state subsidies were only delivered to the (ecclesiastic) municipalities if these minimum requirements were fulfilled. However, the main financing of these schools was the responsibility for the school districts during a long period (Persson, 1991). In these local school boards, the priest was the chairperson and was influential in the selection of teachers. More general supervision and leadership was at this time a responsibility for the bishop and the chapter (ibid.)

Mandatory schooling was extended from six years (1878) to seven in the 1930s, and the state successively strengthened its political influence through making private and semi private schools public throughout the first half of the 1900s. The inspections also expanded. A national board for folk schools was established in 1914 and in 1919 the National Board of Education (in Swedish: Skolöverstyrelsen) was founded (Wikipedia, b, c). During the same period the local school boards were moved from the ecclesiastic municipalities to the civil (?) municipalities, and influence from the state church diminished (Richardsson, 1997/1980).

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<sup>1</sup> This part of the paper draws on earlier texts by me found in Hanberger et al. 2005 and in Segerholm, 2005.

## Governing and QAE after the Second World War

County school boards with county school inspectors were established in the 1950s (Richardsson, 19977/1980, p. 44). The same decade compulsory schooling was prolonged to eight years. County school inspectors visited schools and were responsible for school development, coordination and for the planning of public schooling in the counties. They should make sure national plans and guidelines were followed (Persson, 1991). The National Board of Education supervised at a national level.

In the beginning of this period, a long and intense political debate about a new radical school reform (in Swedish: 'enhetsskola') was taking place. After more than ten years of local tryouts and political struggle, mandatory schooling for all children was extended to a nine years compulsory, unified school system (in Swedish: 'grundskola') with a new national plan for content and time spent on each subject – the National curriculum of 1962 (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1962)). In this tryout period wide-ranging evaluations were carried out in order to form a thorough basis for parliamentary decisions. However, the concept evaluation was not used at this time. Evaluative activities were part of the national commissions (at that time called Royal commissions) assigned to investigate and propose directions for new educational reforms. This kind of national policy-making was characterised by extensive 'local experiments' in which different methods were tried and evaluated. The national commissions then summarised the results of the tryouts and crafted a proposal for a national educational reform. Aaron Wildavsky (1979) called this strategy 'the rational reform paradigm'.

By this time the state governed public schooling by issuing national curricula and ordinances at a high level of detail. State grants to the municipalities were divided into special categories and allocated for particular efforts. Salaries to the teachers were also paid by state grants, since the teachers were employed by the state and not by the municipalities.

Examples of decisions that were made at the national level concerned:

- The content in each school subject in each grade as laid down in national curricula
- The amount of time allotted for each school subject (all stipulated in the extensive national curricula of 1962 and 1969 (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1962, 1969), together with a strong emphasis on democratic goals like every ones equal value)
- National tests in the higher grades in certain school subjects (Swedish, English and Mathematics) to calibrate the national grading system, which at that time was norm based (grades should be of equal value independent of location)
- The political and administrative organizational features of both municipalities and school organization (all municipalities were organized alike)
- A national group approved texts books.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This list is probably not exhaustive but gives an idea of the level of centralisation in national governing at the time.

Apart from the municipalities, there were hardly any other providers of mandatory education. According to the Education Ordinance and to the Ordinance for the National Administration for Education from this period, (SFS 1971:235; SFS 1988:815) the National Board of Education should undertake national evaluations of primary and secondary education and be responsible for the construction of national tests. However, the national board did not seriously take on this evaluation task until the end of the 1980s, when a proposal for a program for guidelines and implementation of national evaluations was presented (Franke-Wikberg, 1989; SFS 1988:815). Still, not much came out of this proposal since the National Board of Education was closed down in 1990 (see below). More regular evaluation was a task for the county school boards (SFS 1988:815). They also continued the inspection mentioned above. The purpose with these inspections was to support schools in their work, and to make schools aware when national requirements were not followed.

A general reflection when reading the education ordinance from this period is that the level of detail is high, particularly when it comes to requirements of teacher competence and education when hiring teachers for different positions. The same can be said about this period concerning state subsidies (Nihlfors, 2003). There were certain grants for certain things, specified in different categories like subsidies for school buildings, for teachers' in-service training, for teachers salaries according to a national scale, for teaching materials, etc. National governing was carried out 'in beforehand' so to speak, carefully crafted by tryouts before reforms, and detailed in specifying content, time and material and personal resources as preconditions for teaching and learning. In this kind of governing, the concept 'quality' did not exist since it was believed that setting fair and equal conditions for all municipalities, schools and children would lead to education that produced politically, socially and economically more equal citizens. Englund (2005) argues that this central control of schooling is connected to the principle of equivalence and how it was perceived at that time. (Each child's right to get good education and skills in citizenship independent of social class, geographical location, gender, ethnicity – equal access and an emphasis on equality of results.)

A movement of decentralisation began at the end of the 1970 and was made visible in the National curriculum of 1980 (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980). The detailed national timetables in the national curricula of 1962 and 1969 were changed into a time table based on amount of time spent in each school subject during grade 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9. It was also decided that municipalities should develop local school plans. A new education act was decided in late 1985 to be valid from first of July 1986 (SFS 1985:1100, still valid with several amendments). The responsibility for municipalities to provide a local school plan in which measures to reach the national educational goals were to be inscribed, was added in a particular paragraph (ch. 1, 8§). This can be interpreted as a wish by the government to stronger emphasise local political responsibility for public education than had previously been achieved with the National Curriculum of 1980 (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980). Yearly national tests were administrated as before.

All in all, the post World War II period in Swedish education, can be described as a triumph for the idea of central governing by: 'the rational reform paradigm'; central control and governing by means of detailed regulations concerning allocation of state subsidies, educational content and time spent on different school subjects; a grading system calibrated by national tests; and regional inspections mainly aimed to be supportive to the local schools and principals. In the end of this period, this governing doctrine was disintegrated, and changes to install a more decentralised education system can be detected. Governing problems like: difficulties in the implementation of reform intentions (see Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984); inequalities in outcomes (group differences in test scores and grades related to socio-economic backgrounds, etc.); economic recession; lack of political legitimacy, and a decreased belief in the possibility to govern an expanded welfare state have been suggested as some possible explanations for this decentralisation process (Rothstein, 1984).

### Governing and QAE at the end and beginning of the 20th century - a shift

In 1991 Sweden applied for membership in the European Union and became a member in 1995. This last decade of the 1900s also marked a shift in public education in Sweden and in national governing. One major change that affected the public school system as a whole was a new act regulating the relation between the state and the municipalities, making local decision- and policy-making, and accountability more important (SFS 1991:900). The national government opened up the possibility for the municipalities to organise in different fashions. An amendment to the Education Act in accordance with this new Municipal Act was therefore made, stipulating that one or more political boards should be accountable for education provided by the municipality. Also, the specified, detailed (ear-marked) state subsidies to public education were abandoned in favour of a resource allocation system based on lump sums to the municipalities, thereby moving the political responsibility for prioritising between different policy areas from the central state to municipal decision- and policy making. Municipal audit was simultaneously strengthened (Regeringens proposition 1998/99:66) and amendments in the Education Act required the municipalities to continuously evaluate and follow-up the local school plan (SFS 1990:1477).

At this time the national administration was dramatically altered. As mentioned above, the National Board of Education and the County school boards were closed down. A new national authority, the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE), replaced both these instances in 1991. In the Ordinance for SNAE (SFS 1991:1121) the direction for this new national authority was laid down. Relevant to this paper is that SNAE was '*...1. to follow-up and evaluate the school-system /.../, 2. to develop, control and support quality assurance work within the school system /.../, 3. to summarize and publish the results of this work concerning follow-up, evaluation, quality assurance and supervision /...../ 12. to be responsible for public statistics /.../ (3§).*' National evaluations mainly based on tests in several school subjects were performed in 1989 (grades 2 and 5), 1992 (grade 9), 1995

(grade 9) (NUG, <http://www.ped.gu.se/nughtml/nug/nug2.htm>). National follow-up on municipal expenditure, pupil/teacher ratios etc., were collected from the municipalities.

Yet another change of consequence was a law opening the possibilities for independent schools to basically operate on state grants (SFS 1991:1079). Later, an amendment to the Education Act ruled that these schools should be subsidised by state grants to the municipality in which they are situated (SFS 1992:710).

This was also a time for ideological debates about the direction of public schooling and national governing (as is noted above with the new act for municipalities). A new national curriculum was designed (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994, again heralded by intense political debates<sup>3</sup>). Several major changes were made including a radical move to decentralise decisions regarding educational content and pace of instruction and learning to the individual schools and teachers. Issues concerning evaluation are clearly spelled out in this national curriculum (still in operation). It is said that "...the school head is responsible for drawing up a local work plan as well as following up and evaluating the results of the school..." (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994, p. 17). Teachers also have a duty to evaluate and follow up on pupils' and their own work. A new grading system, criterion referenced and aligned to the goals and objectives in the national subject syllabuses, was decided and put into operation in 1993/94 (Andersson, 2002, p. 153).

To further emphasise a new governing doctrine, and to accentuate the political responsibility put on municipalities to direct, manage, carry out, evaluate and guarantee some measure of quality in education, a law regarding local quality account (in Swedish 'kvalitetsredovisning') was passed in 1997. According to this, all municipalities have to produce a yearly account of the quality of public education provide by them, and every school has to collect and deliver such information to the central education administration in the municipality (SFS 1997:702, still valid). According to so called general recommendations (guidelines) crafted by SNAE, the purpose with these accounts were to form a basis for school improvement and for political decisions, to inform parents in order for them to influence school practice and to chose the school they want for their children (Skolverket, 1999a). The assessment of quality should be based on the extent of fulfilment of the national goals prescribed by the national curriculum. However, there was no particular requirement of how these quality accounts were to be designed, but the guidelines proposed a general layout including information on and analysis of preconditions for education, the process of carrying out education, and results of education (ibid.)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As I recall it, the debates were among other things concerned with how to express the basic/constitutional values that public education in Sweden should be anchored in.

<sup>4</sup> This way of conceptualising evaluation is based on the so-called frame-factor theory developed by Urban Dahllöf (see for example Dahllöf, 1967), and further elaborated by Ulf P. Lundgren (eg 1972). The latter, in cooperation with Sigbrit Franke (-Wikberg), put forward an evaluation approach rooted in this perception of how to understand educational processes (Franke-Wikberg and Lundgren, 1980). Franke (Franke-Wikberg, 1990) developed this approach to a model for local evaluation aimed at local development. The model (at that time called the Umeå-model) consists of three parts: self-evaluation, peer-review, and a report from the reviewers. Based on the results of this procedure, an action plan for improvement is laid out. Incidentally, this

It is clear that the central government used QAE, carried out by SNAE, as a governing strategy. In the appropriation directions to SNAE it is said that: "The agency /.../ should support and influence the development of both the principle of governing by objectives and results, and the results of schooling by means of information, debate and comments." (Statsliggaren, 1998, p. 8) These particular appropriation directions to SNAE also communicate an intensification of QAE in other ways. The national agency was asked to: increase its work on national quality audits, now performed by so called inspectors; to make the national follow-up system more efficient; to develop methods and criteria for quality audits of schools; and to develop indicators capturing quality development. Further, these activities should be designed to promote the principle of governing by objectives and results, the principle of equivalence/equity, and to direct attention to resource allocation regarding pupils with special needs. A time frame for this intensified supervision was set so that all municipalities should be reviewed within seven years (Statsliggaren, 1998)

The stress on municipalities to take on and more actively follow and report on the quality of education was further increased when an amendment to the ordinance regulating the work of SNAE was made (SFS 1999:168). A quality audit board (in Swedish: 'kvalitetsgranskningsnämnd') was then installed at SNAE. The quality audit board was to examine and assess quality and results in the school system, particularly in relation to the national goals decided in the national curriculum (ibid., 9§). The work of the board started in 1999, and from the yearly appropriation directions from the central government to SNAE, it is quite obvious that the government had a firm will to strengthen QAE activities in the municipalities (Statsliggaren, 1999). The time frame for a review of all municipals was cut to six years. As earlier, the government asked for an assessment of goal fulfilment. A new task was to compare differences between municipalities as regards goal fulfilment, the relation between results and resources, and teacher competence. Another addition was the assignment to map how cooperation between schools within the EU influence Swedish school development. Results should as previous be reported by gender, and quality assurance work in the municipalities should also be reported (Ibid. p. 11). In 1999 SNAE presented their work on quality indicators (Skolverket, 1999b) in which they identified 155 (!) indicators for compulsory school (Nytell, 2006, p. 103).

In order to support municipalities in their work to develop required QAE activities, the government decided 2000 that so called development dialogues were to be carried out by SNAE (Nytell, 2006, p. 108). Another addition in 2000 was the focus on accessibility of information. SNAE should work to improve in that respect (Statsliggaren, 2000). Comparisons between municipalities, between municipal schools and independent schools were asked for, as were longitudinal comparisons of results. To achieve that and for purposes of accessibility, SNAE was assigned the task to develop an online statistical

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model is now the model used for most QAE in higher education, and Sigbrit Franke was director general for the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education between 1999-spring 2007. Ulf P. Lundgren was director general for SNAE during the 1990s.



system already in 1999 and the system was in operation in 2001 (Nytell, 2006, p. 108; see further below). SNAE should also continue to work on national quality indicators and the quality audit board should report on how its assessments were communicated to the municipalities (ibid.).

Without terminating any of the QAE activities in operation, some additions to the totality of QAE were also added in the 2001 yearly appropriation directions to SNAE (Statsliggaren, 2001). One such supplement was the quest to improve the national follow up system in order to promote quality and credibility. Like the years before, special attention should be paid to issues concerning pupils with special needs, gender differences and comparisons between municipalities, between municipal schools and independent schools, and longitudinal comparisons directed at the relation between results and allocated resources (ibid.). The same year and after a tryout, SNAE published their work with national quality indicators as informational materials (Skolverket, 2001). The purpose with the indicators were intended as support for local self-evaluations at school level (ibid., p. 2).

To summarise, the stress on municipalities and individual schools to evaluate, assess and assure educational quality was increased incrementally during this period. Stressed in the sense that the relation between preset objectives in the national curriculum and syllabuses for school subjects were compared to educational results mainly measured by national tests and grades (aggregated individual outcome measures, supposedly measuring also the quality of the entire Swedish compulsory school system and implicitly the quality of teacher instruction). An increase in QAE activities performed by SNAE and directed towards the municipalities sustained this process. However, no particular model or design for the municipal QAE work, or for QAE work at schools was mandated. But a belief in the power of self-evaluations for development purposes can be detected. By the end of this period the shift in governing doctrine is apparent. Governing by objectives and results was the new doctrine, and several efforts were made to implement it at all levels in the formal governing system, not only in the central national administration, but also in municipalities and schools. Another observation is that national governing in the beginning of the 1990s was relying on local politicians and professionals to take responsibility, and also giving these groups power to interpret national objectives and directions concerning QAE. At the turn of the millennium this local space for manoeuvre was successively narrowed by an increased amount of QAE activities. The national policy documents still did not direct municipalities and schools (teachers) in any detail. The requirement was to carry out all obligatory QAE activities, but not in any particular fashion. The principle of equality, pupils with special needs, and comparisons of results (between schools, municipalities, longitudinally and in relation to costs) were however mandated.

The rationale behind this governing principle is the emphasis on the relation between preset objectives and obtained results, ie comparisons between objectives and results/outcomes. Attention to (or perhaps obsession with) measuring educational results/outcomes becomes inevitable with this rational, which is exactly what the above description has shown.

Governing is conducted more 'from behind', because evaluative activities direct attention and energy to what is measured. In Sweden QAE is consciously used as one governing instrument among others (juridical, economic and ideological [Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000]). Thereby policy-making seems to shift from engagement with political/ideological visions to discussions of how to best measure results and assess whether they are good enough in relation to the objectives or if improvement is needed. (I have not yet encountered any information or person who is ready to say that improvement is not necessary, particularly when Sweden is to be one of the most competitive nations in the world.)

## **Contemporary QAE policy and practice**

The most dramatic change either ending the preceding period, or forming the basis for the contemporary context, was the decision in 2002 to make national inspections the major QAE activity both in terms of scope and resources, and a new ordinance concerning SNAE's work was crafted (SFS 2002:1160). This decision had been preceded by proposals for an independent national inspection authority (or independent national quality institute) by the liberal parties for several years.<sup>5</sup> SNAE was now to inspect every school and every municipality within a period of six years (SFS 2002:1160). By that decision the national quality audit board was closed down, since the inspections are to examine both juridical aspects and the quality of provided education. A decision by the government also ruled that SNAE's main task should be to control and evaluate the public education system. The development part of the authority's original commission was now to be performed by a new national agency: the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement (in Swedish: Myndigheten för skolutveckling) (Nytell, 2006, p. 114.). SNAE's three main activities are now national inspection, evaluation and follow-up.

More specified instructions to SNAE were given through the yearly appropriation directions, now stating for the first time that international comparisons should be carried out (Statsliggaren, 2002). Efforts to find explanations for differences between schools and municipalities concerning resources and results and their relation to gender and social background of the pupils were emphasised. In addition attempts to support municipalities by feed back from national quality audits were brought forward. A reference to the EU was also made about the validation of a language portfolio for secondary education, however, a bit in the margin (ibid.). As in most formal policy documents produced after the Second World War, the principle of equality was stressed, but now accompanied by the overarching concepts 'quality' and 'goal fulfilment/attainment'.

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<sup>5</sup> I like to stress that I am aware of the different meanings of the concept 'liberal parties' in an English context and a Swedish context. The political parties that I am here referring to were: Moderata samlingspartiet, Folkpartiet and Centerpartiet. The materials used for this claim are: Betänkande 1999/2000:UbU 1; Betänkande 2000/2001:UbU 1; Betänkande 2001/2002:UbU 1; Betänkande 2002/2003:UbU 1; Betänkande 2003/2004:UbU 1.

In the following yearly appropriation directions to SNAE (Statsliggaren, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 so far) national inspection, follow-up and evaluation should be directed at comparisons between municipalities, educational providers, schools and other nations. Accessibility, quality and credibility are other concepts that colour these instructions. There is also an interest from the government to get information about the relation between resources spent and educational outcomes (grades, test scores in national tests and national evaluations) and the reasons why this ratio differs depending on municipality, school, gender, socio-economic background and ethnicity.

### **Accessibility and online statistics (follow-up)**

The stress on accessibility is increased during this period. In the appropriation directions for 2006 and 2007, SNAE should make results accessible for different stakeholders and also investigate how this information is used. The online information system, SIRIS was launched in 2001, the idea being to promote public access in that "...transparency facilitates the discussion on the school and it's quality." (Skolverket, n. d.) The database is comprehensive and makes comparisons between municipalities and schools possible. Comparisons of "...grade results of schools and municipalities with attention to certain background factors, such as gender and parents' educational level." (ibid.) can be made using SALSA, a statistic tool in SIRIS. A large proportion of official statistics in education can be found in SIRIS. (Eg results from national tests, numbers of pupils and teachers, pupil-teacher ration, costs.) Annual reports from the municipalities (quality accounts) can also be accessed here.

### **Quality indicators**

In 2004 SNAE got a renewed assignment from the government concerning quality indicators that were reported later in the same year (Skolverket, 2004a). The report says that the indicators aim at supporting local quality work in schools and municipalities (ibid. p. 1). The indicators are to make possible comparisons between schools and municipalities as well as support national follow-up, evaluation and inspection. The indicators are among other things based on international indicators reported by Sweden in the cooperative OECD-work on indicators, EU's common goals for education, and data forwarded to Unesco, OECD and Eurostat. The suggested indicators for compulsory education are divided into three dimensions of education: preconditions, process/work in school, and attainment/goal fulfilment. Data on teachers and staff, material resources and costs per pupil are indicators in the first category. Pupil influence and responsibility, information on study results, and quality assurance of assessment and grading are 'work in school' indicators. Finally, attainment indicators are pupil results in relation to the national objectives for school subjects, and pupil results in relation to the national objectives for constitutive values (in Swedish: värdegrundsmål/normer och värden) (ibid., p. 19-20).

## Inspection

When describing the national inspections it is realised that they were less structured than is now the case. In the abovementioned appropriation directions to SNAE from 2003 and onwards, the list of content to incorporate in the inspections is successively specified and prolonged. How the inspections are to be carried out as well as what is to be inspected is more plainly described in SNAE's information folder published in 2005 (Skolverket, 2005). It is stressed that the aim of the inspection is to promote quality and local improvement, that they form a basis for national and municipal decision making, and that the inspection is based on both information obtained about and from the school/municipality in question (eg statistics, local quality accounts, school plans to prevent bullying and harassment, gender equality, etc.) and from site visits. During the visits (often 2 days) the inspectors interview head-teachers/principals, teachers, pupils, staff, parents, central politicians and administrators to collect information. Visits in classrooms are made and informal conversations with teachers and pupils are conducted. The assessments follow a manual where rubrics based on the components preconditions, work process, and attainment are used (examples of rubrics are: adjustment to individual pupils and individual support; evaluation of learning, assessment and grading) (ibid., p. 16). They also assess quality assurance systems at school and municipal level. The inspectors produce a public report that is published electronically at SNAE. If conditions are not satisfactory a new inspection is carried out. In their summary report of the national inspections between 2003-2006, SNAE concludes that a new inspection model is needed due to the new government's policy<sup>6</sup> (Skolverket, 2007). The briefly sketched new model rely more on documents, and self-evaluations may be a part of it. The model divides inspection into three activities: basic inspection, deepened inspection and thematic inspection. With this new model inspection criteria for the assessment are to be clearer so that "...the assessments become sharper and more evident than today." (ibid., p. 35). In the government bill on expenditure, the intention of the new government is that inspections of all units are to be carried out at a minimum every third year (Regeringskansliet, a).

## National evaluations

The latest national evaluation was carried out 2003 (Skolverket, 2004b). It was a comprehensive exercise including: tests/tasks to assess the level of performance and attainment in all school subjects; surveys to pupils about their experiences of different school subjects, teacher instruction, grading and school life in general; surveys to teachers in all school subjects asking much the same things; surveys to parents about their opinion of school subjects, instruction, etc.; surveys to principals to collect school specific information.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In the election 2006, the liberal parties formed a coalition and won the election over the social democrates. The parliamentary majority is based on this coalition and these parties now form the government (Moderata samlingspartiet, Folkpartiet, Centerpartiet and Kristdemokratiska partiet).

<sup>7</sup> The description of this national evaluation is partly based on my own partaking in the event as a commissioned researcher carrying out the evaluation of the school subject art.

The amount of data collected was enormous and is not yet analysed to its full potential. Shortly after this evaluation was carried out, the government asked SNAE to redesign the national evaluation system. After commissioning professor Jan-Eric Gustavsson to design a system for continuous evaluation partly based on experiences of other nations evaluation systems, SNAE suggested something called a continuous sample-based system (Skolverket, 2006c). In their report, SNAE expresses the opinion that the international assessments like PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS very well may serve the purpose to evaluate certain areas of knowledge attainment in the Swedish school system (ibid., p. 10). A less comprehensive system is therefore preferred and is suggested to replace the national evaluations.

### Local quality accounts

The pressure on municipalities to produce and deliver yearly quality accounts has constantly been upheld throughout the decade this rule has applied (see also Håkansson, 2006, p. 162-166). In their yearly report 2006, assessing the general situation for public education in Sweden, SNAE describes quality accounts as lacking analysis, important data on attainment and descriptions of how quality work (assurance and assessment) is carried out (Skolverket, 2006a). The government has instructed SNAE to follow up on the municipalities in this respect, as has been shown in the descriptions above. Furthermore, SNAE was to develop new general recommendations (guidelines) for how these quality accounts are to be performed. The new guidelines were published in August 2006 (Skolverket, 2006b). By additions in the law regulating the requirements on the municipalities' work with quality accounts, one addition says that pupils' and parents are to be involved, and another addition in the obligation to evaluate plans for equal treatment and prevention of harassment of pupils (SFS 1997:702, 3a§ and 4§). The recommended structure/areas to include are preconditions, work processes, results and assessment of attainment. The presented purpose with quality accounts is to form a basis for local and school improvement, political decision making, and as a basis for dialogues between different administrative levels. The yearly quality accounts should be produced and accepted by the school board at the latest May 1. This makes it possible for the municipality to effectively use the information and assessment in other accounts and in the municipal audit. The municipal central administration is encouraged to make comparisons between itself and national statistics and other municipalities. It is however not an obligation.

Regarding quality accounts at school level, head-teachers/principals are made aware of the benefit in comparisons between schools in order to learn from good examples. Individual pupil information should be separated according to gender, pupils with special needs, disabled pupils, and pupils with another native language than Swedish. Health and lifestyle among pupils should also be considered in the assessment of attainment (SFS 1997:702, p. 19). Preconditions to be included are for example teacher-pupil ratio, teacher competence, and organisation and leadership structure. Work process data should include recordings of

individual pupils' progress, their individual study plans (see further below), procedures for assessment and grading. Finally, data on attainment should be collected to make possible assessment of how well the national goals in the national curriculum and subject syllabuses are fulfilled. Again, in Sweden these national goals not only specify criteria for what to perform in different school subjects, but also include objectives concerning democratic abilities like tolerance, being responsible, gender equity, environmental awareness, engagement and expressing personal views (pupil influence). An analysis of reasons for the schools'/municipalities' situation should also be made and included. The quality account is a self-evaluation approach but should include opinions from pupils and parents.

## **National testing**

Annual national tests are constructed by SNAE in Swedish, English and Mathematics and Swedish as a foreign language for grades 5 and 9. These are compulsory for all pupils and function as a test of the individual pupil's subject knowledge and ability, and serve as an instrument to calibrate grades in school subjects so that the grades are of equal value independent of location. To support teachers in their assessments of pupils SNAE has also developed tests in other school subjects. When taking office in autumn 2006, the new government announced an increase of national testing which is mirrored in the appropriation directions for 2007 to SNAE (Statsliggaren, 2007). It says that national tests in Swedish and Mathematics should be created for grade 3.

## **Individual development conversations**

For more than a decade it has been obligatory for teachers to carry out conversations with parents and pupils regarding individual pupils' capacity, study results and need for improvement. The content in these conversations are to be based on an assessment of how the pupil has developed in relation to the national goals/objectives specified in the national curriculum and syllabuses for school subjects. This practise is now formalised and strengthened by the requirement on teachers to construct an individual study plan in which efforts needed for the pupil to fulfil the national goals/objectives specified in the national curriculum and syllabuses for school subjects are offered in the development conversation (SFS 1994:1194, 7ch. 2§). The individual study plans should be based on an evaluation of the educational results performed by the pupil.

## **Summary**

What then can be said about the contemporary policy and practice concerning national governing and QAE activities in public compulsory education? As has been shown, the process of strengthening central governing has continued and can now be described as 'a quality regime' (Nytell, 2006). Others have labelled similar tendencies as 'the audit society' (Power, 1997), and 'the evaluative state' (Neave, 1998). This centralisation process is also obvious when looking at the development of the separate kinds of QAE activities described

above. From being presented as a local development tool, or as a support system for local and school improvement, follow-up statistics, indicators and local quality accounts have increasingly been presented to serve as a basis for national policy-making and governing. In the yearly appropriation directions to SNAE, their work is directed to align the different QAE activities to sustain each other. This is done to such an extent that each and every pupil's performance is now meant to be part of the governing system through the incorporation of individual study plans and development conversations into local quality accounts at schools. The school accounts are then to be used in the municipal quality account. National tests meant to calibrate the grading system, and also used as outcome measures, further underline the intertwined character of what is now the design of the contemporary national Swedish QAE system.

All QAE activities are separately designed to sustain the doctrine governing by objectives and results. The grading system, national tests, local quality accounts, indicators, follow-up statistics, etc. are all planned to be used to assess goal fulfilment/attainment. The objectives laid down in the national curriculum and syllabuses for school subjects form the basis for this assessment. Interestingly enough, an adamant will is still expressed concerning the importance to guard democratic values and beware of inequalities related to gender, physical disability, socio-economic background and ethnicity.

Most QAE exercises share astonishingly similarities to what Franke and Lundgren developed in the end of the 1970s (Franke-Wikberg and Lundgren, 1980). However, the shared characteristics of the approach for the QAE activities (they are based on information of the components: preconditions, work processes, results and assessment of attainment) are now formalised into a more or less mandated list of what to include, which was not the original intention. Instead, the original evaluation approach was intended to contextualise educational processes and results by relating them to preconditions such as the societal function of education, hegemonic political ideologies, time, materials, other resources and goals/objectives in order to be able to explain and more fairly assess the outcomes of schooling. Self-evaluation is another feature of the contemporary QAE activities now to take place. Again, this was part of what Franke (Franke-Wikberg, 1990) proposed almost two decades ago as a preferred local development strategy. All levels in the public education system are to evaluate themselves some way or another, and seemingly the ways proposed by the state become more and more alike. A slightly opposite direction is also evident in the process of how QAE are to be carried out. The local quality accounts are for instance to include parents and pupils in the process. It is also apparent from guidelines and other requirements that it is important to incorporate the views of pupils and parents when assessing quality. Opening up for the involvement of these groups and their opinions may lead to a less coherent way to assess quality. On the other hand, it may also be seen as a (unconscious) strategy to disarm opposition and/or educate parents and pupils the 'right' way to perceive educational quality. Through involvement in dialogues, conversations and

quality administration at all levels, a streamlined view of quality in education may very well be achieved.

QAE in Sweden as laid down in laws and regulations can be characterised as web containing aligned evaluative activities at all levels.

QAE include:

- Individual data on test results and grades, reported by gender, ethnicity physical disability and socio-economic background, is collected and form yearly follow-up statistics, plus individual study plans;
- School data reported as ratio teachers/pupils, expenditure/pupil, cost effectiveness, catchments, etc., and quality accounts assessing quality by self-evaluation and as a relation between preconditions, work process and goal fulfilment. Indicators point out what to collect and include;
- Municipal data based as reported by schools and from follow-up statistics, and a local quality account;
- National data including all above plus inspection reports and results from national evaluations, test scores from international tests (se further below).

QAE are to be characterised by:

- Comparability/commensurability - making comparisons possible between schools, municipalities and nations;
- Accessibility - making it possible for different stake holders/groups and individuals to get hold of data and information;
- Development of methods – ensuring constant improvement of quality and credibility in measurement and data analysis;
- Accountability at all levels – making everyone and all levels accountable, even pupils who are accountable to their parents and teachers in formalised procedures.

This fairly coherent web of QAE activities (at least as intended in the regulations described above) has evolved during several decades, but it is not until the beginning of the new millennium that all parts are so evidently aligned to the governing doctrine.

## **Sweden and international QAE efforts**

The following section describes the relation between Sweden and international organisations as regards QAE. It basically relies on statements from the interviews with national policy brokers. The statements have been summarised to capture the essence of a Swedish position and policy on international QAE efforts and how they are treated at the national level in Sweden. It is important to remember that attention was directed to compulsory education



in this study. This means that issues of paramount interest in the EU and OECD like 'life-long learning', 'vocational training', and 'mobility' have been toned down since they are not primarily talked to in relation to that educational level in Sweden. These concepts nevertheless appear in the interviews and should be kept in mind as a background to what is presented below.

### The significance of international QAE work in the Swedish (national) context

Do EU and other international organisations policies on QAE matter for Sweden? All interviewed persons find QAE activities to be of increased importance, both nationally, in the EU and globally. The most significant organisations for Sweden are the OECD, the EU and the Official co-operation in the Nordic region (Nordiska ministerrådet). UNESCO is also an organisation of weight, but more as recipient of ideas, influences and foreign aid from Sweden.

According to the interviewed persons, Sweden has taken part in OECD projects for several decades. The earliest date in the interview material is from middle of the 1970s. Projects and groups that are mentioned are: The International School Improvement Project (ISIP), Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE), PISA both test groups and steering group, OECD governing board, International Comparisons in Education (INES) steering group, a spin-off network from ISIP; the International Council for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI). These are the organisations and groups that the Swedish brokers hold highest in esteem for their professional and analytical capacity. PISA was also mentioned by all, for its high impact on national policy, not only in Sweden but in other countries as well, because of the attention media give it. IEA's tests TIMMS, PIRLS and Civics are also important for Sweden and a more informal international evaluation network called EVA.

As a late member of the EU, Sweden was not particularly sensitive to EU's education policy efforts in the beginning of the membership, said several of these persons. This has changed, and the EU is becoming a more and more prominent part of the Swedish education policy sphere. The early Swedish engagement mostly concerned exchange programmes like Socrates and Leonardo. Sweden has taken part in the Lisbon process and lately been more engaged in the process to develop a "coherent framework of indicators". These quality indicators are described as very well anchored in the Swedish government and parliament (fall 2006). It was said that the indicators fairly well match the goals for Swedish education, and that Sweden has already achieved what was agreed on in the earlier process of common educational goals for Europe. Another example of Swedish engagement is the work with indicators for lifelong learning.

Sweden is now part of EU projects directed at the development of indicators in particular areas, eg foreign languages. Other projects that Sweden partakes in are the European

Qualification Framework (the aim being to organise vocational education in Europe into eight levels), and the European Charter Mobility Programme.

Most of the informants at the ministry of education brought forward 'the open method of coordination' as an influential method in the work with QAE in European policy on education. This is the European Union's way to govern education policy according to them, and they also seem to think that it is a good strategy. The method is based on voluntary participation and dialogue. The interviewees describe this kind of governing in terms of transparency, comparison, self-assessment and pressure. By open comparison of common quality indicators (EU), test scores (OECD; PISA, IEA; TIMMS, PIRLS) and statistics (eg EUROSTAT), Sweden notices its position in relation to countries that are culturally akin. Such countries become interesting to look closer to when new QAE activities are planned in Sweden, it was said.

According to most of the interviewed persons, the general aim of the European Union's QAE activities is to promote high quality education in Europe in order to produce and sustain a highly knowledgeable, competent and flexible workforce, so that Europe (and Sweden itself) becomes the most competitive region on the world market. One person however, points to a different direction and emphasises accountability as the major driving force behind QAE activities. It is also worth noticing that Sweden, in the eyes of these persons, does not import, borrow or copy ideas or models from anywhere, since the common opinion in the ministry and at the SNAE appears to be that Sweden is already very good at QAE. Actually, some of the interviewees seemed to be a bit annoyed about this lack of interest. On the other hand (as is described below) certain countries are of interest and may inspire Swedish policy-making to a certain degree.

There is a clear limit to what Sweden will agree to participate in. As an example from the interviewees, Sweden does not look keenly on the European Commission's efforts to get support for a common and coordinated education policy throughout the member states. Sweden defends the principle of national sovereignty in the case of education. Education is a national responsibility and the EU should not interfere with that.

There is a mixed view among civil servants, both at the ministry and at SNAE, regarding what is considered as quality in compulsory education and thereby measured in the international QAE efforts, and how it is measured. Many pointed to more generic and non-curriculum-based competences like literacy and mathematical and problem solving abilities as the most important ones to foster (and measure) which is not the case in all international QAE activities. Others bring forward issues of equality, critical thinking and independency as individual traits of consequence in education. Quality in education defined like that is not easy to test or measure they say at the same time. Whether or not the QAE activities the interviews attribute most significance to really measure what is considered to be most important to promote, eg PISA, all informants are aware of the risk of unintended impact stemming from the QAE activities themselves. Several of the interviewees pointed to the

limitations of international tests like PISA, IEA Civics and international statistics with regard to the possibilities to get explanations as to why some countries come out better than others. But again, the power of comparison and international dialogue was repeatedly underlined as quality in itself.

### **The interrelation and direction of policy influence**

A common feature to almost all QAE activities that occupy these national brokers (PISA, TIMMS, IEA Civics, etc) is that they are based on the measurement of individual pupils, directly linking common indicators and criteria for Europe or the world to the individuals. The test scores are then aggregated so that a measure is produced for larger units like a school, a municipality or a country. Statements on the success or non-success of different nations are then made on the basis of these aggregated data. The informants in this study directed attention to an increased interest from media to report on how Sweden is doing compared to other countries (eg in PISA). Attention and good coverage in national media was said to be highly influential in setting the national political agenda in education.

It also seems like Swedish brokers operate at different levels within the EU and in the OECD. They work in particular identified projects, in the European Commission, in steering groups and general assembly, and in more informal networks. Most of the interviewees were all involved in a number of these groups, networks and formal decision making bodies at the same time. There is obviously also a blend of national politicians, civil servants and scholar/experts in some groups, while other groups (decision-making ones) are strictly for the representatives of either the political or the administrative part of the Swedish state.

When the interviewees describe more every-day policy-making in Sweden, several sources of data and information are used, for example internal Swedish QAE data is put forward as important (see the section above). There are efforts to better coordinate national policy on QAE and the engagement vis-à-vis different international and global organisations, said the interviewees.

### **Ideas and spaces of policy learning**

Inspiration for the contemporary Swedish QAE activities are traced by some of the interviewees to names like Urban Dahllöf (professor emeritus in education and in Sweden well known for his efforts to explain educational outcomes by introducing the concept 'frame-factors', like time and group size), Miles, Michael Fullan and Richard Schmuck from the United States and Canada, and David Hargreaves and David Hopkins from England. The person who put forward these names, said that interest for these scholars was because of their interest in trying to explain the outcomes of education by inquiring about preconditions for education and learning and by studying the actual process. For schools and education systems to improve, such knowledge was thought to be crucial. Other nationally influential persons mentioned are Ulf P. Lundgren and Sigbrit Franke, who in the end of the 1970s developed what was called 'theory-directed evaluation' (see references in footnote 4). Their

evaluation approach was developed in opposition to approaches focused on outcome measures using aggregated test scores at individual level to evaluate entire education systems. Mats Ekholm and Rolf Lander are two other professors in education brought forward by some of the interviewed persons as examples of from where influence can be detected. Many of the interviewees however refer to their actual practice and work with QAE in different groups and networks as the most important source for knowledge and learning about QAE.

In the eyes of the interviewees, Sweden is regarded as a driving force in the EU and the OECD work with QAE in education. The long history of official statistics in Sweden (since the 1700s when it comes to the reading ability of the population), and Sweden's long tradition of national systems to control public education, are examples given by the interviewees to explain Sweden's strong international position in the policy and practice of QAE.

The importance of the Official co-operation of the Nordic region (Nordiska ministerrådet) is also mentioned by several of the interviewed persons. When Sweden tries to persuade/put pressure on other nations to listen to propositions or to take another policy route, the Nordic allies are valuable and the Nordic alliance makes a powerful actor.

From the interviews it becomes quite clear that the Swedish national policy brokers consider Sweden to do very well on QAE compared to most other countries. Groups of official national education people from other countries frequently visit the Swedish Ministry of Education and SNAE to learn more about the Swedish education system as a whole and about its QAE system too. Germany and Asian countries were repeatedly mentioned. The lifelong learning indicators were declared an area in which Sweden has influenced European work with indicators substantially. Even though Sweden is doing well on QAE, the interviewees believe that other countries ways of organising particular QAE, is of interest for Sweden. Examples given were England and the Netherlands when it comes to inspection, Scotland concerning national tests, Ontario and New Zealand more generally, and Finland due to its PISA success. PISA was also mentioned as a reason for Germany to visit Sweden, their PISA results being shockingly low while Sweden had PISA results that were fairly high and with low variation in range.

## **Relationship to national policy directions**

OECD reports and international statistics are used in the preparation of proposals, new ideas, government bills, but also in preparation for the EU commission meetings, EU project meetings. SNAE does a lot of preparation work leaning on international reports of different kinds (OECD and EU mostly) when laying a ground for Swedish policy on international and national QAE activities. But since Sweden has an intricate web of QAE activities directed at compulsory education, there is also a vast array of national statistics, national test scores, inspection reports, national evaluations, etc., to draw on.

One striking result from the data collected in the interviews is that the direction of QAE policy described by the informants is almost restricted to the national level. The major part of the communication is between the ministry of Education and SNAE. Even though communication with municipalities, teacher's unions, universities, etc. are mentioned as partners in dialogues and as recipients of national policy efforts on quality improvement work, this is apparently a weak spot. My impression is that it is almost as if the impact of QAE activities within Sweden is not an issue. The persons from the ministry that I interviewed, were relying on SNAE to disseminate QAE policy, but did not know the results of that.

## Sentiments of QAE

There is a strong belief that QAE is here to stay, at least for 5-10 years. The opinions among the brokers are clearly very diverted, ranging from extremely positive towards QAE and a wish for more of it, to a view that they have become perverted and are suicidal when it comes to educational values and education practice (teach-to-the-test, etc.) Accountability is by one person understood to be the driving force for future QAE, but another informant discusses QAE in terms of the problems associated with governing by objectives/goals and results. This strategy has its shortcomings, but says this person, what strategy can replace it?

## Summary

The policy brokers' notions about the significance of international organisations' work with quality issues in education are imbued by ambiguity. On the one hand work and memberships in OECD and EU groups and networks are said to be of importance, where OECD seems to be the most influential international organisation in Swedish policy brokering. But considering the high level of engagement in EU activities it is probably fairer to say that both organisations are significant and influential. EU's importance is something that is also noticeable when visiting the website of the Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Education. A special link called EU work directs the visitor to documents about how Sweden takes part in European joint efforts within education (Regeringskansliet, b). On the other hand the interviewees underlined Sweden's independency concerning education policy and expressed particularly negative views about the efforts to construct a common education policy for all member states. Education is believed to be a national concern and national sovereignty should not be tampered with. They also judge Sweden to be very well equipped with a comprehensive system for evaluation and quality assessment. At the same time it has to be noticed that Sweden readily engage in initiatives taken by the OECD and the EU to construct and disseminate international tests, quality indicators and benchmarks. They hold the expertise of OECD in high esteem, and also find PISA, TIMSS and other OECD initiatives to be of importance for national policy-making, albeit in conjunction with national data from the Swedish QAE system, which they find to be well developed.

The relative significance attached to EU and OECD can perhaps be understood by the late membership of Sweden in the European Union. The EU is a later actor for these people, but is also a late international actor when it comes to education and QAE policy and work. Accordingly, Swedish brokers have engaged for a longer time in the OECD context and also, found a bit of a market for their expertise there. The willingness to participate in both EU's and OECD's ventures of measuring education quality can perhaps also be understood by referring to the old Swedish tradition of public statistics and measurement of people. This is a common national habit in Sweden. But there is scepticism about how well the tests, indicators and benchmarks really captures values of importance in education.

The open method of cooperation is of interest since it is an idea that is very similar to what is already practised in public education in Sweden. National statistics, national and local inspection reports, national evaluations and tests, municipal statistics etc. are made public and open for everyone (a far reaching public access is also a longstanding tradition laid down in the constitution). The method is of no surprise to the national brokers. Even though they look favourably upon it and find it decent since it leaves some space for autonomy to the individual nations, it is not something they think that Sweden has imported. Rather the opposite; their conception is that Sweden has already proved itself successful when it comes to QAE, and does not really need to import, copy or borrow from outside. It is more the other way around, ie Sweden is by several interviewees viewed as a driving force, because of its competence and well-developed QAE system.

Sweden's engagement in the work with indicators must also be noticed as an important answer to the question; what international ideas about quality education are of interest for Sweden? Even though most of the interviewees expressed an attitude of national self-confidence, and seemed slightly unwilling to ascribe much significance to external policy and ideas, a comparison over time concerning work with indicators tells a slightly different story. As has been shown in the description of how QAE developed in Sweden, work with indicators became important in the late 1990s. Indicator work in CERI (OECD) started at the end of the 1980s and the first publication using thirty-six indicators was 'Education at a Glance' in 1992. National brokers in Sweden were part of CERI at that time but work on indicators did obviously not then attract Swedish national policy-makers in power. The indicator work in OECD has continued and is said to measure "the relative qualities of education systems" (CERI, 1996a, p. 9 as quoted in Lingard and Grek, 2007, p. 8)<sup>8</sup>. EU's efforts to construct a European educational area intensified at the end of the 1990's and quality assurance and evaluation and work on education indicators became dominant discourses (Lawn and Grek, 2006, pp. 3-5)<sup>9</sup>. Even though interest had been shown earlier to numerical measurement of educational performance, it was not until 1999 that indicators were thoroughly observed by the European education ministers (Lawn and Grek, 2006, p. 5). This comparison between work on indicators in the OECD, the EU and Sweden leads to the

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<sup>8</sup> Permission to refer to and quote this text granted from the authors September 5, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Permission to refer to this text granted from the authors September 5, 2007.

not so imaginative conclusion that Sweden's entry and engagement in the EU is important in that EU policy on QAE and indicator work becomes unavoidable for Sweden to deal with, and in fact has influenced national policy. Also, the totality of indicator work internationally at the turn of the millennium must not be disregarded as a powerful ideological context that is hard to ignore. But from the interviews it seems equally apparent that Swedish brokers and the Swedish education and QAE system influence other nations through the OECD and EU.

Inspiration through networks of researchers/experts, civil servants in groups in international organisations, brings ideas in and out, their origins hard to detect. Within Sweden members of these networks/groups communicate with each other and ideas can be adjusted, reconstructed and moulded into national policies. Since the same individuals are part of several groups in different organisations and networks, ideas are communicated crosswise making the OECD, EU and Swedish policy efforts intertwined.

Certain nations were mentioned as historically important inspirers, and some of them, the U.S.A., Canada and the U.K., are still of interest according to the national brokers. The Nordic countries are also of vital importance, but more as allies in political persuasions. Evidently Finland also is looked upon to find explanations as to why they are doing so remarkably well on PISA, the idea being that Sweden may find ways to improve in that respect. Apparently, there seems to be a feeling of cultural (perhaps historically religion based???) kinship to the Anglo-Saxon countries. Perhaps something that is worth looking more closely into when it comes to understanding receptivity, animosity and the flow of education policy trends in general and QAE policy trends in particular.

If activities and engagement in QAE is high at the national level, the policy impact of both international and national QAE initiatives in municipalities and schools may be questioned. Interviewees at the ministry relied on SNAE to disseminate policy and implement QAE reforms. The civil servants who were interviewed at SNAE seemed however unsure of how they succeed in this endeavour. The number of SNAE publications is enormous and impossible to overview, but safe to say is that most QAE results are published and accessible for municipalities, schools, and individuals through the Internet. How well the QAE message is conveyed and accepted is another issue. The question; has QAE improved (the quality of) compulsory (or any public) education? seems to be of little interest to the national brokers in their daily life. This condition is possibly linked to the question of what QAE is all about. Some brokers said it is about producing a competent and flexible work force and about the possibility to make comparisons, one talked about accountability, but few spontaneously mentioned to get the pupils to learn better, develop better subject knowledge and generic competences, or develop to responsible persons. These things were however brought forward when good quality education was talked about.

## Conclusions/summary

This paper is based on policy documents that present formal decisions (laws, etc.). In that sense the description of national policy on governing and QAE lack most of the ideological background debates that forego decisions made either by the parliament or by the government in power. More elaborated discussions about factors important to motivate new decisions are usually found in documents like state commissions, government bills and papers from ministries. Such documents have not been part of this study so far. In that respect, there is a lack of material for a thorough description of quality assessment and evaluation policy in Sweden, and the analysis probably suffer from that. Also, the number of national brokers that have been interviewed is limited and brokers in other perhaps important organisations in Sweden have not yet been heard. Independent of those drawbacks, the picture of what is done at the national level and how policies of QAE moves between the national policy sphere and the international policy sphere (EU and OECD in the case of Sweden) is fairly clear.

### National governing and QAE

National governing of education in Sweden has shifted during the last two decades (eg Lindblad and Popkewitz, 2000). Education in Sweden was a highly centralised system directed from the state level by detailed prescriptions of educational content and methods, time, requirements of certain professional education, use of resources, and with a control system based on national tests and regional inspections aimed to support of little power. Governing from the front or steering forward may be descriptors that capture this governing doctrine. Khakee (1998) portray it as a system based on planning and models for planning. A shift to a more decentralised system picked up speed in the beginning of the 1990s with a new national curriculum in which goals are prescribed but not methods, new allocation system, new teacher education etc., stressing professional autonomy, the importance of local autonomy and individual choice. National tests, and national evaluations approximately every third year constituted the control system. It was in the end of the 1980s and in the beginning of the 1990s that political general rhetoric stressed the failure of the welfare state and the need to assure quality. Successively attention has moved from educational goals to educational results and to pupil performance. 'Governing from behind' is meant to describe this way to steer education. National governing is now wholeheartedly developed according to the governing by objectives and results doctrine. The national QAE system has been developed accordingly, for several decades and is now composed by a web of evaluative activities, by one informant described as 'a palette of interrelated activities'. Conscious attempts are made by national policy-makers to design evaluative activities so that they sustain this governing doctrine and thereby become active governing instruments (Segerholm, 2001).



## Being receptive of not to QAE flows?

The Swedish national brokers stress 'the method of open coordination' as a means to govern, ie to 'do' European education policy, and also global education policy. The method is not foreign to Swedish policy makers and national civil servants working in the ministry and SNAE. It has been in operation in Sweden for some decades in governing education (eg as implementation strategy for new reforms) and is based on voluntary participation, dialogue and information. Other concepts used in Sweden to describe this method are transparency, comparison and commensurable measures. National statistics, national and local inspection reports, national evaluations, municipal statistics etc. are Swedish operational examples of those concepts. The outcome measures created by these methods are communicated by the state and by the municipalities themselves, making comparisons easy to do. Easily understood and commensurable information is paramount to governing. Information is needed for transparency and transparency is needed to find good examples (best practice) as a basis for improvement, adjustment and competition. Competition is essential in this rationale, locally, nationally and globally. Pettersson and Wallin (1995) use the concept 'informative steering' to capture some of the essence of this governing method. It is also easy to detect parallels to Foucault's (1993) notion of how power is exercised.

As has been seen from the presentation above, Swedish national QAE activities are well in line with what is promoted internationally. Reasons for Sweden's receptivity to the hegemonic ideas on QAE seems to lie in its historical tradition of measuring people, of measuring educational performance, of national control of public education, and its ambition to stay on the top in international competition on the market. What is being promoted internationally is not that foreign to Swedish national policy-makers. National policy brokers have also for several decades been active parts in 'doing' international/global quality assessment and evaluation like international tests and indicators.

These 'doings' take place in networks. From the interviews with the Swedish brokers it seems that the persons engaged in these groups have a long time engagement and that the these groups work with long term issues, giving the networks a continuity and stability that goes beyond national, personal and more restricted educational interests. In that sense, these actors form a policy elite that sometimes represent nations, but sometimes also act as experts with their own agendas influencing global and European education policy without being formally accountable. These groups workings form policy spaces that are less 'controllable' for both formal policy makers and citizens. They constitute a 'magistracy of influence' Lawn and Lingard, 2002, p. 292) and are perhaps as such 'untouchable'.

Interesting dissonances concerning educational values that may challenge or counteract the international and transnational flows of QAE policy directed to converge education were nonetheless detected in the materials. There is still a stress on the principle of equivalence/equity in national policy making even though it is now more a question of a minimum standard than a question of equality of results. Too big differences between

different groups concerning educational performance results are not taken lightly. There is also an ambition to increase pupils' and parents' influence over schoolwork, which, if it is taken seriously by these groups and by the schools and municipalities, can work in an opposite direction from 'governing from behind'. It may also be a deceptive way to 'teach' these groups what quality in education is all about. Inviting people to dialogue and to influence education practice (eg by being involved in peer review or external assessor groups in inspection, evaluation etc.) and still control the agenda is a powerful way to get sympathy for certain ideas without getting too much opposition.

Another issue that may hinder Sweden to wholly buy into QAE policy designed by the EU is a reluctance to be too much involved in development of a European Education Policy Space. National autonomy in education policy is stressed and there is apparently a more coordinated policy in how to act and react in relation to international and global policy efforts today compared to 10-15 years ago. This may of course be due to the long period of social democratic governments, and might change now with the new government. The new government has signalled more tests, more efforts to measure academic achievements and more state control of compulsory schooling in general.

The interviews also reveal a collective view of Sweden as a very advanced and skilled QAE-nation. The quality of national statistics is considered to be high, the tradition of national systems for quality assurance and assessment have been in operation for a long time compared to many other nations. As has been shown in the first part of this paper, Sweden has by laws and regulations installed an intricate web of QAE activities that also attracts policy-makers from other nations. There are constant changes and additions to the QAE web, and as is the late practice in Swedish education policy; the constant questioning of the efficiency, quality and good of Swedish schooling sustains a pace of reforms that has never been experienced before (Lundgren, 2004).

## Europeanization and globalisation

Europeanization of Sweden seems to operate through the QAE activities and instruments developed in the networks and policy communities, but to what degree is yet to be analysed. Sweden is self-content and appears a bit stubborn and reluctant to whole-heartedly engage in this measurement era on the terms suggested by the EU. Gender issues, issues of equality, equity and democracy are still promoted by several Swedish national brokers, and occur frequently in national policy documents.

Swedish brokers put a lot of weight on PISA and how it connects global non-subject-based educational values to national policy making. PISA is widely talked about among national politicians, national civil servants, local politicians, teachers' unions, etc. Media attention today is high and the publication of PISA results is followed by intense public debates. These debates focus on the quality of Swedish compulsory education as a system and fail to see the shortcomings of such tests when it comes to their explanatory power. But what is

measured in PISA becomes important in Sweden in that it triggers competition through comparisons. It also activates quick policy action, getting certain issues on the policy agenda fast. Traditional Swedish educational values promoted for several decades, at least in the national rhetoric, like equality, equity, democracy, tolerance, independent and critical thinking, risk being pushed back in favour of easy tested competences/subject knowledge. Also, all reports on educational outcomes based on pupil tests most probably adds to the increased speed of Swedish educational policy making, perhaps in itself increasing the difficulties in governing contemporary public enterprises like education. As mentioned above, the number of educational reforms decided (and perhaps implemented?) has never been so high as during the last 15 years (Lundgren, 2004), pointing to efforts made by the state to show determination in a time when the inability of the state to govern successfully is reduced (Rothstein, 1984). This dilemma is shared by most modern western democracies and is part of globalisation in that respect.

### **A Swedish model?**

Although quality assessment and evaluation policy in education in Sweden is in line with what is promoted within the EU and OECD, perhaps the comprehensive web or system, and the alignment of all its parts to the doctrine of governing by objectives and results, is what is uniquely Swedish? And perhaps educational values like the principle of equivalence/equity, democracy, gender equality, and the like are more distinctly cherished in Sweden as important outcome measures of consequence? If this is something also visible in local education practice is yet to be studied.

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## Appendix A

### Methods

#### The document study

From previous studies of national policy documents I decided to base this document study on decisions made on quality assessment and evaluation in compulsory education in Sweden. To find such documents I searched in the following electronic databases:

- Regeringskansliets rättsdatabaser (Government Offices legal database, in Swedish). Search from 1990-2007.

<http://62.95.69.15>

- Sveriges riksdag (Swedish riksdag (parliament), statements from the parliamentary committee for education, in Swedish). Search from 1990-2007.

<http://www.riksdagen.se/webbnav/index.aspx?nid=3320>

- Sveriges riksdag (Swedish riksdag (parliament), written communications from the Riksdag, in Swedish). Search from 1990-2007.

<http://www.riksdagen.se/webbnav/index.aspx?nid=20019>

- Statsliggaren (The Swedish National Financial Management Authority, Collection of central appropriation directions, in Swedish). Search of all fulltext appropriation directions to Swedish National Agency of Education 1998-2007.

<http://www.esv.se/4.1f4cdd2fe95b4121a8000190.html>

- Skolverket (the Swedish National Agency for Education, publications, in Swedish)  
<http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/193/url/0068007400740070003a002f002f0077007700770034002e0073006b006f006c007600650072006b00650074002e00730065003a0038003000380030002f00770074007000750062002f00770073002f0073006b006f006c0062006f006b002f0077007000750062006500780074002f0074007200790063006b00730061006b002f0053006500610072006300680046006f0072006d/target/SearchForm>

The search words used were:

Kvalitetsgranskning, kvalitetsredovisning, kvalitetssäkring, inspektion, skolinspektion and utbildningsinspektion. These Swedish words are similar to: quality examination, quality account/quality audit, quality assurance, inspection, school inspection, and education inspection. They were chosen because they are part of the terminology used in Sweden for quality assurance and evaluation. A personal note about the Swedish terms in use is that quality assurance was used in the end of the 1990s, but has almost disappeared and a more common term today is quality account/audit. Since in the Swedish part of the project quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) has been defined to mean evaluative activities, all above

search words were important to try in the search. The search on central appropriation directions came about since I know that it is in those instructions to the national authorities that more detailed information of how policy is to be implemented or carried out is found. Most hits were made on the words 'kvalitetsgranskning' (quality examination), 'kvalitetsredovisning' (quality account) and 'utbildningsinspektion' (education inspection).

However, the appropriation directions were not searched but read in Whole. Most consisted of about 20 pages.

I also read recent dissertations and reports about quality, education reforms, education policy and found references to formal documents (laws and ordinances) that did not come forward in my search in legal and other policy documents.

An estimate of the total amount of pages that was read and used is 2000. All in all 48 texts form the basis for description and analysis (laws, ordinances, appropriation directions, public reports, government bills and dissertations on the subject).

The documents (all listed in the reference list) were read thoroughly with the searchlight on passages directly and indirectly dealing with QAE. In several cases I tried to retrace decisions made backwards, but with little success since new regulations/amendments most often are just put into existing laws/ordinances by revisions. In the electronic databases the most recent version is what is available. I also read and structured the documents chronologically in order to build a more coherent description of the development of QAE in Sweden.

## **The interview study**

The aim of this particular sub-study was to study policy brokering of global and European quality assurance and evaluation policy and activities in Sweden. The interviews were conducted throughout the academic year 2006-2007, and by a telephone connected to a tape recorder. So far, the collected interview material consists of taped interviews from eight interviewees. They may be characterised as conversations around a particular subject and directed by an interview manual. Notes were also taken during the interviews.

The taped material has been listened to all over and all notes have been re read during this listening to add important things that were missed the first time. After that the notes have been re read again and organised to map out the most important features concerning the topic derived from the material. This is also the reason why no quotes from the interviews are used in this text. A process like this probably leads to a more coherent picture of Swedish national policy brokering as told by the informants, but risks losing important dissonances and/or ambiguities in the material.

## The informants and their professional contexts

The informants were selected from three groups defined to be of importance in national policy brokering of QAE in education by a combined technique of snowballing and strategic sampling. The three groups are:

- civil servants working (or previously working) at the ministry of Education, the assumption being that they know the contemporary history of global and European Union QAE-efforts from a Swedish national political perspective.
- civil servants working at the Swedish National Agency of Education (SNAE). They should be the most knowledgeable when it comes to the national administration and implementation strategies of QAE as well as when it comes to what kind of global and European Union QAE material that is used in the national policy-making and decision-making processes.
- researchers involved in different global and European Union QAE-projects.

It was soon discovered that these categories are blurred and overlapping. This can perhaps be explained by the small number of interviewees, and by the sampling technique. However, since our knowledge was very limited regarding the national policy brokers, we had to rely on other peoples' connections and insights. Drawing on my experience from other interview studies involving national policy makers, I know that civil servants go between the ministries and the national agencies (perhaps more often from the ministry to SNAE than the reversed way?), and researchers are ever so often directly involved in policy making processes either as experts or because they also work in the national agencies or in the ministries.

Most of the interviewees are men (two women), high-ranking officers in their respective organisation, and have several have a doctor's degree. Most of them have been working in this policy domain for several years, which gave the interviews an interesting historical dimension.