

U.S. Department of Education  
Staff Analysis  
of the Annual Report Submitted by

**Sweden**

Prepared July 2004

Background

In 1996, the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation (NCFMEA or the Committee) determined that Sweden's standards for the evaluation of its medical schools were not comparable to those used in the United States. Three years later in September 1999, NCFMEA decided to vacate its prior determination of noncomparability and defer making a new decision on comparability until its March 2000 meeting pending the receipt of additional information about Sweden's standards and processes for evaluating and reevaluating medical schools and its policy for reaccreditation visits. At the March 2000 meeting, while Sweden provided more information, the Committee decided to defer making a decision again and ask for information on questions raised at the meeting.

At the September 2000 meeting, after reviewing the additional information from Sweden, NCFMEA determined that the accreditation or approval standards used by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE or the Agency) were comparable to those used to evaluate programs leading to the M.D. degree in the United States. However, NCFMEA requested that the Agency submit reports on specific aspects of its accrediting activities to the Committee. The Agency submitted reports for 2001 and 2002 that were accepted by the NCFMEA. At its September 2002 meeting, the NCFMEA asked the country to submit a report on its accreditation activities by July 2004. That report is the subject of this analysis.

Summary of Findings

Based on its review of the report submitted by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Department staff concludes that the Agency has provided useful information about the evaluation of postsecondary schools but did not provide details regarding its monitoring and oversight of medical education. While the Agency did include information about its ongoing interaction with the International Advisory Board and meetings with presidents of medical schools, it

did not provide detailed information about the discussions of those activities and their impact on the evaluation of medical schools.

## Staff Analysis

### Overview of Accreditation Activities

The National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE or the Agency) submitted its mid-term report on the Agency's evaluations of the quality of 700 higher education programs in 2001-2003. In 2001 the Agency had been given the task of evaluating all undergraduate and postgraduate programs during a six-year period. The purposes of its evaluations are three-fold: to contribute to the development of quality in higher education; to monitor whether a program complies with the objectives and provisions of the Swedish Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance; and to provide information to students in choosing programs and the public on the use of resources.

In conducting its evaluations, the Agency used panels of more than 300 assessors (including 121 international assessors). Panels of assessors are appointed by the Agency based upon recommendations and consultations with the programs to be evaluated. The criteria established by NAHE for the composition of the panels of assessors ensures that the panels include subject experts and undergraduate and postgraduate students, along with labor market representatives and employers, as appropriate.

In 2003, evaluations were completed for 10 undergraduate and postgraduate programs in a variety of areas (including cultural studies, social anthropology, and earth sciences). The Agency noted in its report that the quality of the programs assessed was good. Although in 15 cases the entitlement to award degrees was questioned and one application to award a master's degree was rejected, no institutions lost their authority to award degrees. The agency is in the process of performing evaluations for 2004 and planning for 2005 is underway.

Medical programs were not reviewed during this three-year period, but the same evaluative process, using panels of assessors that include subject experts, will be applied to medical education by 2006. The Agency did, however, conduct a meeting for all university presidents of medical schools on quality assurance and accreditation issues in January 2003. The Agency reports that it continues to discuss standards and quality issues at regular meetings every year. However, the Agency did not provide detailed information about the discussions that occurred at those meetings.

Medical schools are required to submit comprehensive annual reports that cover administrative, economic and educational matters of importance for the Agency's review and analysis. There were no issues identified last year that required action, and the Agency did not provide any specific information about how these reports are used in assessing medical schools.

The Agency also reviews internal quality assurance mechanisms at institutions on a regular basis, and it has confirmed that the schools continue to comply with its standards. The Agency's Legal Department monitors activities of all higher education institutions, including medical schools. There have been no complaints of any kind and no actions against medical schools.

More generally, Sweden has a comprehensive national system of quality assurance for higher education. Along with many other European countries, it participates in the "Bologna process," which is an initiative to ensure that European higher education becomes more competitive internationally that includes cooperation on quality assurance. As a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA), NAHE will participate in the development of mutually acceptable criteria and methods for quality assurance, a task assigned to ENQA in 2003. In 2005, member countries are expected to have developed an evaluation system that includes the evaluation of programs and higher education institutions using specific measurement tools, a system of accreditation and certification, and participation of international assessors and cooperation between countries. These requirements have already been satisfied by Sweden for many years, as described in NAHE's mid-term report on quality evaluations.

NAHE created in 2002 an International Advisory Board, a special five-member body of experts to study the Swedish system of quality review and to monitor NAHE's implementation of its quality evaluations. The Board meets regularly with members of other countries, including the United States, to discuss experiences from the review process. The last meeting of the Advisory Board occurred in May 2004, and the next scheduled meeting will be in spring 2005. The Agency has not provided a summary of its Board meetings. The Advisory Board has, however, prepared several reports on the implementation of the Swedish review model that addresses institutions' (departments') self studies and quality evaluations, and the Agency did provide access to the Board's interim report. The Board did provide to NAHE recommendations on how processes can be improved or sustained, along with continued support for NAHE's approach to reviewing programs in Sweden's higher education system.

### Summary of Changes in Laws and Standards

- *Laws and Regulations*

There have been no changes or significant developments in the laws or regulations since January 1, 2001, when a new law authorized the Agency to conduct accreditation and quality reviews of all academic programs and subjects every six years.

- *Standards, Processes and Procedures*

The Agency reports that there have been no changes to the standards or the general procedures for accreditation and quality reviews.

### Schedule for upcoming accreditation activities

The Agency will not conduct reviews of medical schools during the next year. However, medical education programs in all six universities will undergo a national quality review by 2006. Upcoming activities include: the International Advisory Board meeting, spring of 2005; meeting with presidents of medical schools, 2005; and a meeting of ministers of member countries of the European Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, 2005.