



A SUMMARY OF GOVERNMENT BILL 1998/99:115

On their terms

A youth policy for democracy, justice
and a belief in the future

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Background

Youth

Today's young people are growing up in a rapidly changing society. Old forms of authority are having to make room for new ones, and the changes appear to be taking place at an increasingly rapid pace. This development gives rise to both hope and concern.

Never before has an entire generation grown up amidst such ethnic and cultural diversity as there is today. Many young people have themselves moved to Sweden from another country or have parents with a foreign background. Many young people, especially in the big cities, also live in a milieu in which different cultures meet daily. These meetings lead to new perspectives and knowledge, which society must use to its advantage.

The young generation is more international than any generation that preceded it. A great number of them have travelled to many parts of the world. Through participation in exchange programmes, traineeships and development assistance work abroad, young people have also acquired experience that is very valuable in the labour market and to society. Society as a whole can benefit from this development.

Likewise when it comes to modern information technology, young people have a significant advantage over previous generations. For many, what begins as play and recreation grows into work and a means of earning a living. In this way young people's great interest in information technology and their acquisition of

skills in this area contribute to the development of society. Young people's knowledge of information technology has also upset the traditional balance of power between generations, not least in the schools – the student has become the teacher's teacher.

The situation for young people may thus seem to be full of opportunity. But there is also another – and more sombre – side of reality.

A growing feeling of powerlessness is spreading among young people. This is very disquieting. Young people want to participate and have an influence, make decisions and take responsibility. Many studies show this to be true. But they often feel that they are not admitted where power exists. Another obstacle may be that forms of work in politics do not provide scope for the dynamic way of working that young people want.

Among the younger generation, gender equality also needs to improve. Traditional gender patterns still affect choices of education and occupation, even if some progress has been made in the 1990s. And as far as leisure time activities are concerned, boys receive more resources



than girls do, according to reports from the leisure-time area and others.

The young people who have grown up in the 1990s have also been hit by a level of unemployment unique to the post-war period. For a long time the unemployment rate among young people has been twice that of adults. Even though the situation has now changed, it has left clear marks on the younger generation. Today there is a small group of young people who have been without work for a very long time. At the same time the number of those at risk of being very marginalised is continuing to increase. The Government regards this development with great concern.

Disparities in living conditions among young people with different social backgrounds are also increasing. The housing market is perhaps the most obvious example, but class differences in work, education and health are also increasing. It has become more and more important to be born to the right parents. Combating these increased class divisions is one of the most important tasks as the new millennium approaches.

What does the term 'young people' mean?

Today there are about one million young people living in Sweden. The social, cultural and ethnic differences among various groups of young people are significant. As with older people, the circumstances under which young people live, especially economic conditions, can vary considerably. Therefore it is difficult to make generalisations about young people's living conditions and the ways in which they

think and act. Social and cultural background is often more important than the generation to which one belongs.

Youth can be described as a phase in life, a stage between childhood and adulthood. This definition is generally used when one studies how people develop an identity and what takes place on the road to adulthood.

But youth can also be defined as a social category focusing on young people as a social group. In addition to age, young people have certain social and cultural traits in common. One example of this is the labour market situation for young people.

Both of these approaches find expression in Sweden's youth policy.

The point at which one leaves youth and takes the leap into adulthood is extremely individual. Factors such as a place to live of one's own, a job, children and family play a big part in when one begins to consider oneself an adult. In a study conducted by the National Board for Youth Affairs – *Ny tid – Nya tankar? (New Times – New Ideas?)* (1998), most young people responded that becoming an adult occurs upon assuming responsibility for one's own decisions. Individual responsibility was thus perceived as even more important than coming of age and moving away from home.

There is no clear dividing line between childhood and adulthood. Whereas children are largely dependent on the adult world for protection, young people are often looking for freedom from dependence on their parents and support for their own development.

Sweden's policy on children is based

on the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines children as everyone up to the age of 18. Therefore this Convention is also an important basis for youth policy.

Something that all young people have in common is that, step by step, they will succeed to the society that the older generations leave behind. How young people and society succeed in this process depends on the opportunities to have an impact and exert an influence that society gives young people today.

Young People's Belief in the Future

A study by the National Board for Youth Affairs, *Ny Tid – Nya tankar?*, shows that most Swedish young people are satisfied with their life. Among young people between 16 and 29 years old, 75 per cent thought that their quality of life was good.

But between 10 and 15 per cent of Sweden's young people are dissatisfied with their situation and are depressed about the future. They are worried about becoming unemployed and are more pessimistic than others about labour market developments – both in their own community and in the country as a whole.

There are many poorly educated young people with a limited social

network in this group. They have little confidence in the social welfare system. Three out of four young people with a pessimistic view of the future also believe that they have very little freedom in determining their own future.

Young people's plans for the future revolve primarily around a place to live of their own, permanent employment, family and self-fulfilment. In this respect young people seem to be quite conventional. Young people born abroad are more likely than others to think that it is more important to have attained a good social status by the time they are 35 years old. For young people born in Sweden, it is more important to have a great deal of leisure time.

As regards gainful employment in the future, young people value pleasant fellow-workers most of all. Young people consider such factors as high wages or work that can help make the world more humane to be much less important.

Young people have high ambitions for their education. Sixty per cent of the young people between the ages of 16 and

29 are planning to take a university degree. Many also want to move abroad. Sixteen per cent are seriously thinking of living abroad more or less permanently.



Objectives for a National Youth Policy

In this Bill the Government states three objectives for national youth policy:

1. Young people will have good conditions for living an independent life.
2. Young people will have genuine opportunities for influence and participation.
3. Young people's commitment, creative abilities and critical thinking will be utilised as a resource.

An Independent Life

Today many young people have difficulty becoming established in various parts of society. Lengthy periods of education and difficulties finding work and their own housing make young people feel that the time it takes to become an adult has been prolonged.

Having a job as well as a place to live and a financial position of one's own gives one independence in relation to parents, other adults, and society. In many respects this is what becoming an adult means. Therefore the policy will make it easier for young people to become independent.

Opportunities for Influence and Participation

Young people will have genuine influence, both in the development of society at large and the decisions that concern their own lives and activities. This objective means not only that every young person will be able to exert an influence on their own daily life, but also that young people jointly will be able to have an impact nationally and internationally.

If young people are unable to have a sense of participation, part of the basis of a democratic society is threatened. From a

democratic viewpoint, such a situation is unacceptable and detrimental to social development.

Society must be able to meet young people's wish for new, more direct forms of influence and participation. This wish places demands first on the political system, but also on the authorities and other institutions in society that handle issues affecting young people.

The gender differences that exist in general with respect to opportunities for influence are also found among the young. Therefore gender equality has to be given special attention in youth policy.

Young People Are a Resource

In contrast to their size as a group, young people today have few representatives on various decision-making bodies. The skewed age distribution on the boards of many public authorities and government committees not only is a problem vis-à-vis democracy, but also means that the decisions that these boards make also risk being adversely affected.

Society has to become better at making use of young people's competence in various areas. Knowledge gained from experience and formal qualifications are insufficient for solving problems in a modern and changing society. As a complement to experience and qualifications, young people's creativity, new knowledge and values should be made greater use of here. In an increasingly internationalised world, the need for young people's knowledge – for example, information technology, media and languages – is also increasing.

A Youth Policy for Democracy, Justice and a Belief in the Future

A Commission on Youth and Democracy

The National Council for Swedish Youth Organisations (Landsrådet för Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationer) (LSU) has proposed the establishment of a new commission, the Commission on Youth and Democracy (Demokratikommissionen) – for, with and by young people. The aim of the Commission will be to survey young people's opportunities to have an effect on their own environment and in a larger political context.

The Government now wishes to provide financial support to young people's organisations to make this work possible.

The Commission on Youth and Democracy will supplement the work of the Commission on Democracy in Sweden (Demokratiutredningen), whose task is to clarify the new conditions facing the Swedish democracy on the eve of the twenty-first century. The task of the Commission on Youth and Democracy will be the examination of young people's opportunities to exert influence at school, in their neighbourhood, in municipal, county and national politics, in European politics and in a global perspective.

The Government is of the opinion that it is important for young people with different experiences and living conditions to participate in the work of the Commission on Youth and Democracy. Achieving this diversity requires an equitable gender distribution and participation by young people of different ethnic and cultural back-

grounds and young people with disabilities.

Democracy in the School

The school plays an important role in young people's lives. Young people form many of their expectations for the future within the walls of the school. One of the school's most important tasks is to emphasise the democratic values on which Swedish society is founded, both in theory and practice.

However, different studies and observations show that students today think that they have too little say. This dissatisfaction also appears to increase with age. Therefore it is important for young people to be given greater influence at school as they become older. This increasing influence can also prepare them for adult life. In light of these circumstances, the Government has paid special attention to the question of the basic values on which the school rests and has allocated funds for a special project to examine these values.

The school should encourage young people's involvement in democratic issues in various ways. During 1999 the Government will make special efforts to implement measures in the following five areas:

Spreading local education committees with student majorities to more upper secondary schools.

At present a four-year pilot project with local education committees having a student majority is under way. As part of

these projects, which include upper secondary schools and municipal adult education, the municipalities have relinquished some responsibility and decision-making powers to local education committees. Representatives of students and school employees are included on these committees.

At the end of 1998, 21 schools were participating in the pilot project, which the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) is evaluating. After the evaluation, the Government will decide how to continue the work to strengthen students' influence at school.

Encouraging student council work and other voluntary activities at school.

Student councils, student unions and other local forms for influence at school perform an important function as concerns young people's opportunities for exerting an influence. These bodies can also be valuable assets for the schools. However young people's interest currently is sometimes met by negative attitudes, especially by adults. It also appears that young people participating in student council or student union work have this work recorded as hours that they were absent, which is disquieting. Instead young people should be encouraged and receive appreciation when they become involved in these activities.

Participation in other voluntary, democratic associations such as sports associations and aid organisations will likewise be promoted.

Safeguarding students' rights – a student ombudsman.

Since 1996 the School Students' Union in Sweden (Elevorganisationen) has had a special student ombudsman (elevombudsman) with the task of safeguarding stu-

dents' rights. An evaluation shows that there is great need for such support. Therefore the Government also intends to continue to make this activity financially possible in the years to come.

Allowing the political parties to enter the schools and be active there.

The study, *Ny tid – Nya tankar?*, showed that a large number of young people are interested in political parties, but for some reason they have a wait-and-see attitude. Many young people say that those at school would like to have more information directly from the political parties.

Today it is the municipalities' responsibility to decide which political parties will be allowed admission to the schools. As a result students in some places are not able to have contact with all the organisations that are important for democracy in Sweden. In the future it is important for all schools to be open to socially and politically active organisations as well as the political parties, particularly the youth organisations. School elections should also be encouraged as one way of increasing young people's interest in politics. It appears that some schools do not report the results of school elections. However the Government is of the opinion that election results should always be reported. If this is not done, there is a risk that students' trust in both the school and in election institutions will suffer. Therefore the Government will also draw attention to these matters in upcoming discussions with the Association of Local Authorities (Kommunförbundet) and the National Agency for Education.

Strengthening students' influence in higher education.

A working group has proposed a number

of measures for increasing students' influence in higher education. The proposals concern both students' opportunities for exerting an influence over their own education and their influence over higher education in general. The Government intends to return to the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) on the matter at a later date.

More Young People In Various Public Bodies

Young people currently are poorly represented in various national and local public bodies. This problem is serious, both from the standpoint of democracy and out of consideration for the quality of the decisions being taken.

There is a risk that the shortage of young people on the boards of authorities and government committees, for example, will confirm and reinforce young people's feeling of exclusion from the political system. In the long term this feeling of exclusion could result in people dissociating themselves from Sweden's democratic system, founded on parliamentary government and representative democracy.

In addition a skewed age distribution in public bodies means that their competence is too limited, with the outcome that their recommendations and decisions may be adversely affected.

Young people's knowledge and experience in several areas are unique to their generation. This is true of information technology, for example, but it also applies to culture and the environment.

On the boards of certain authorities the shortage of youthful competence is particularly evident. In autumn 1999 the Government means to identify a number

of boards of authorities that obviously lack these skills and especially need to broaden the age distribution. The Government will also strive for a better age distribution when it is appointing new committees.

However some government committees have had a strong youth representation. One example is the Commission on Youth Policies (Ungdomspolitiska kommittén). But the Government is of the opinion that a broad age distribution is important even when the aim is to clarify young people's issues. Therefore more adults and older persons must be included on these committees and commissions.

From now on the Government will also report annually to the Riksdag on the age composition of government committees and the boards of central authorities. The Government will also instruct the National Board for Youth Affairs to survey the age distribution in various municipal decision-making bodies.

Information Empowers – The Youth Channel

People need knowledge and information in order to be able to exert influence. But in today's information society, it is equally important to be able to sift through the flood of information and acquire an overview.

In autumn 1999 a special web site will be launched on the Internet – The Youth Channel (Ungdomskanalen). It will offer civic information specifically for young people. The idea is that the Youth Channel will function as a natural starting-point for anyone wishing to acquire knowledge of various social and youth issues.

The Youth Channel will thus be a

database, but it will also provide guidance and encourage additional searches using other sources of information. In addition the channel will provide opportunities for communication between young people and decision makers and in this way it will increase young people's influence.

Non-Discriminatory Age Limits

Today many restaurants and places of entertainment have higher age limits for men than for women. The risk exists that young men will be barred from public entertainments and thrown onto the streets instead. This exclusion may create frustration and aggression, which can contribute to increased crime.

Discriminatory age limits for men and women are also unfortunate from a gender equality perspective. Therefore the Government will take the initiative in talks with the entertainment and restaurant business on eventually doing away with the discriminatory age limits.

A Better Understanding of Girls With Different Ethnic and Cultural Backgrounds

For several years the National Board for Youth Affairs has worked to strengthen the situation of girls in society. As part of a special project, the conditions for girls with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds were studied. From that study it emerged that some of these girls are badly affected by the culture clashes that in unfortunate cases may sometimes ensue when different cultures meet.

There is a lack of accurate information on girls with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore the National Board

for Youth Affairs, in co-operation with the National Integration Office and the other authorities concerned, will be instructed to review existing knowledge and find methods for strengthening their position.

The National Integration Office (Integrationsverket) will study the situation of severely disadvantaged girls as part of this task.

Networks in Support of New Activities Throughout the Country

In recent years youth centres of various kinds have sprung up around the country. These youth centres and meeting-places often have a broad range of pursuits that can accommodate both cultural activities and training under one roof. Established popular movements and educational associations head some of these new youth centres. Others are recently formed and completely independent organisations.

The proliferation of local youth centres is something of a growing popular movement. One common feature is that the activity takes place on young people's terms and makes use of their resources. Here in fact there has also been success in reaching socially vulnerable young people and providing them with the possibility of more informal learning.

The Government now intends to provide financial support for a network connecting various youth centres in order to increase the exchange of experiences and act as a stimulus to establish similar new centres in more communities and residential areas.

Informal Education – A Merit

Many of the skills that young people acquire through informal training and experience currently have no value as job qualifications as they cannot be attested to by means of certification. This is true of knowledge acquired through a labour market measure, in various projects sponsored by a youth centre or in an international exchange programme. Many young people also acquire a form of education for themselves by using information technology, especially the Internet.

A way for the better evaluation of young people's informally acquired skills is needed now – both to get a fairer picture of young people's proficiency and to improve their opportunities in the labour market. Therefore the National Board for Youth Affairs will be instructed to propose methods for evaluating such qualifications. The recommendations presented in the report, *Validering av utländsk yrkeskompetens (Validation of Foreign Vocational Qualifications)* concerning the appraisal of foreign training might also be useful as far as young people's qualifications are concerned.

Young People as Entrepreneurs – Creating a Job for Oneself

Young people are curious and have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. It is important for society to encourage young people's initiatives and have confidence in their ability. While older generations were often able to enter an existing labour market with ease, in the future an increasing number of people will have to create jobs for themselves.

Young people not only have a good

knowledge of such fields as information technology, but also are sensitive to new trends and values. In addition their way of life is quite different from that of many adults in multicultural Sweden.. It is also important to pay special attention to the experience and initiative of women and girls and make good use of it. All these factors make for good conditions for thinking of ideas that can create enterprises and jobs.

Internet has made it possible today for even small companies to sell their goods and services to the whole world. Young people operate many of the businesses on the Internet and, more often than not, they have their office at home.

In the future the adventure industry will probably employ more and more people. Here the music industry occupies a unique position. Today many young people are already working in this successful export business, which is growing steadily.

Against this background the National Board for Youth Affairs will now be instructed to analyse the development of the adventure industry – particularly music, literature and drama – and put forward proposals for measures to encourage young people's initiative in this area. The work should be done in consultation with the Swedish National Board for Industrial and Technical Development (Närings- and teknikutvecklingsverket) (NUTEK) and the Swedish Trade Council (Sveriges exportråd).

Increased Support for Local Youth Activities

Child and youth organisations will receive an additional contribution of about SEK

50 million a year by way of the video lottery terminals that AB Svenska Spel (a state-owned gaming and lottery company) has permission to operate. The amount is preliminary, but will correspond to 20 per cent of the profits from the video lottery, which have been estimated at SEK 250 million.

The money will first be used to strengthen local child and youth associations' ordinary and more long-term activities. But new organisations that do not conform to the regulations – for example, for government grants – will also be allowed some scope.

Renewal of the Associations

Developments in the 1980s and 1990s show that fewer young people are choosing to join a traditional association. But a look at young people's organisations indicates that the number of members in recent years has generally been stable at about 600,000.

Young people are involved and are organising, but they are looking for new, flexible and more open forms of organisation. Instead of choosing a long-standing involvement in a popular movement, they quite often meet about a concrete issue or a project.

Supporting organising by young people is one of the principal aims of Sweden's youth policy. By working together towards a goal, young people learn how they can exert an influence and bring about change. These organisations also give young people the chance to fashion a leisure time on their own terms.

A programme is currently under way to develop the work and forms of organi-

sation for young people's organisations. The Government is of the opinion that this programme should continue for an additional two years. In this connection the political youth associations should be given the opportunity to play a role in the schools, even when it is not an election year.

Better Service to Enthusiasts and Project Initiators

Young people and youth organisations can seek state support for various projects from a number of sources. For example the National Institute of Public Health (Folkhälsoinstitutet) can provide financial support for preventing ill-health among young people, while the Swedish Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket) supports projects that can strengthen young consumers' power. In addition funds can be sought from the National Board for Youth Affairs, the National Council for Cultural Affairs (Statens Kulturråd), the National Integration Office and the Swedish Inheritance Fund (Allmänna Arvsfonden), among others.

However who supports what and why is unclear to many young people. Therefore in 1999 an information brochure clarifying the situation will be published.

Now there is a network for project funding agencies for matters concerning young people. The National Board for Youth Affairs will now be instructed further to develop co-operation in the network to make it easier for young people seeking financial support.

Youth Policy in the Municipalities

Cultural Activities Programmes for Young People

Today's young people are very interested in culture in its various forms. Culture makes possible personal development and a greater understanding of one's own identity. It opens doors to new thoughts and experiences.

Young people now are growing up amidst an ethnic and cultural diversity at the same time that society is more open than ever before to a global culture. The cultural heritage of the future will be created from the youth culture of the present.

Young people's cultural activities in particular should be supported. It is important to increase the local scope for young people's culture. Therefore the Government wishes to provide a stimulus to the development of young people's cultural activities – principally in music, theatre and dance.

The so-called adventure industry will also be an important business in the future and an expanding source of jobs for young people. Even when the cultural activity is a leisure time pursuit, it may give birth to creativity and hence in the long run to new enterprises.

In order for there to be greater scope for young people's creativity at the local level, measures are needed both centrally and locally. Therefore the Government means to earmark funds for a three-year programme for this purpose.

Local Development of Young People's Leisure Time Activities

Young people's leisure time interests are constantly changing and today appear to be completely different than they were 10 years ago. The large increase in the number of young people who will become teenagers in the early 2000s necessitates the development of municipal leisure time activities. Good examples of how future meeting places and leisure activities for young people may look are now needed.

The Government therefore wishes to initiate a special programme for local projects that can contribute to this renewal. The aim is to provide financial support for activities in which municipalities and associations work jointly. As well the professional role of recreation leaders and youth workers may need to be elaborated in order to meet new requirements. The Government particularly wishes to stress the importance of taking the gender equality perspective into consideration in this work.

The work to renew leisure time and cultural policy ought especially to make use of young people's own initiatives. Support should be distributed by the National Board for Youth Affairs, which should look to co-operate with the Association of Local Authorities and others in this work.

International Co-operation on Youth Issues



Sweden's Strategy for Youth Issues in the EU

In co-operation within the EU on youth issues, Sweden should concentrate its efforts in four areas: youth unemployment, young people's influence and participation in the EU, youth exchanges and young people who currently are not making use of the benefits offered by the EU.

Today in the EU work on youth issues is actively under way. The EU Commission wishes to give youth policy a stronger profile. It is planning to conduct a study of the situation of young people in Europe in 1999. Afterwards a white book on guidelines for a youth policy programme will be published.

The Government is of the opinion that in international co-operation Sweden needs to work for the co-ordination of countries' youth programmes. Countries can achieve much more with joint programmes than they can when they work independently.

Youth unemployment in the EU is

high. In many cases it is double that of adult unemployment.

Young people who become unemployed also run a particularly large risk of exclusion, not only from the labour market, but also from society as a whole. The reason is that young people often lack the alternative means of support that adults may have from various social insurance plans.

It is obvious that it requires transnational co-ordination to counteract youth unemployment. Youth issues also need to be more clearly linked to labour market policy and the EU should take the youth perspective into consideration whenever labour market issues are discussed.

International youth exchanges in the EU are very important, both in creating understanding among people and in functioning as an informal training in the languages and cultures of other countries. Participating in an exchange programme can also provide young people with greater knowledge of international work. This knowledge can, in turn, give young people a better chance of influencing international issues.

Youth exchanges could be used to facilitate the expansion of the union. Therefore the Government is of the opinion that young people from the candidate countries in Eastern Europe should have more opportunities to participate in exchange programmes.

Influence and participation are the core of Sweden's youth policy. If young people

do not have a sense of participation in society, democracy will be undermined. EU membership means that Sweden has the opportunity of pursuing the issue of young people's participation at the international level. In the design of the EU programmes for young people, Sweden will give priority to those measures that build on young people's own initiative and active involvement.

There is a risk that the benefits of EU membership will only be shared by groups already in a strong position. Therefore information on European co-operation must be directed to all young people and give everyone an opportunity for influence. Sweden should actively encourage those young people who ordinarily do not take advantage of EU benefits to participate in its youth programmes.

Young People as a Resource in International Co-operation

In the Government Offices (Regeringskansliet) there is currently a special working group on youth issues at the European level. The Government now means to invite more youth organisations to participate in this working group. In addition international youth issues should be given more attention, and the Government wants to strengthen the position of the working group.

The expanded working group will be instructed to put forward proposals on how to strengthen young people's influence and involvement. In addition it will be instructed to initiate a project in co-operation with the National Board for Youth Affairs, the Swedish EU Programme Office (Svenska EU-program-

kontoret) and SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Office. The aim will be to make use of the experiences acquired from the European exchange programmes for young people.

In recent years regional co-operation on youth issues has been growing among Baltic Sea countries. In 1998 a conference of youth ministers was held in Visby. Sweden is currently taking part in the follow-up work from the conference.

Given this situation the Government is of the opinion that the working group should also work on Baltic Sea issues and Nordic co-operation.



Annexes

National Support for Local Young People's Activities

Financial support for various types of youth activities and projects is available from several sources. An information brochure explaining who supports what and why – centrally, regionally and locally – can now be ordered from the National Board for Youth Affairs.

The following is a summary of the more important central government project funding agencies:

The Swedish Inheritance Fund

Commission (Arvfondsdelegationen) distributes money from the Swedish Inheritance Fund. These funds are used to support non-profit work to benefit children, young people and people with disabilities.

The National Institute of Public Health is a central government authority working to promote health. Its aim is to prevent disease and other forms of ill health among the population. The National Institute of Public Health can provide support for the development of local policy and for public health action plans and networks.

The National Board for Youth Affairs distributes state grants and project funding to young people's organisations and also works to revitalise youth activities in municipalities and county councils. It provides ideas on how to develop a local youth activity and tips on other interest-

ing projects all over the country. The National Board for Youth Affairs is also responsible for the EU's exchange programmes, Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service.



The National Council for Cultural Affairs supports culture for children and young people. It can finance activities such as theatre, dance, music, literature, cultural magazines, museums and exhibitions. In addition the Council works to strengthen and develop culture in the schools in particular.

The Swedish Consumer Agency is a central government authority with the task of safeguarding consumers' interests. Money is distributed in the form of project financing. In addition the Swedish Consumer Agency can contribute facts on consumer issues, function as a sounding board and supply ideas.

The National Integration Office is working for a Sweden where everyone has the same rights and opportunities, irrespective of ethnic and cultural affiliation. Helping to reduce xenophobia, providing better

chances for people to have a sense of participation and to be able to earn their own living and striving for increased respect and tolerance are some of the goals of the National Integration Office. It was founded in 1998.

Foundation Culture of the Future

(Stiftelsen Framtidens kultur) wants to contribute to the development of cultural life. It supports long-term and innovative cultural projects. Cultural programmes that can serve as an inspiration for others are being given particularly high priority. The Foundation also wants to develop contacts between cultural life and the schools.



Young People's Parliaments and Meetings With Special Themes Prior to the Government Bill on Youth Policy

– A Summary

Prior to the Government Bill on Youth Policy, four young people's parliaments were held in spring 1999 – in Gällivare, Skellefteå, Jönköping and Stockholm. The idea behind the young people's parliaments was to give young people the chance to discuss and present their ideas on various issues that affect them.

The meetings focused on influence, democracy, integration and belief in the future. Young people's views on these issues as well as how they perceive their own opportunities were discussed.

In addition, information technology issues, the municipal development guarantee and issues of leisure time and culture have been discussed at three meetings with special themes for young people.

The following is a summary of young people's opinions:

IT

Information Technology should not be allowed to become a class issue. All young people must have access to IT, both girls and boys, irrespective of social or ethnic background. IT can be a way in which young people participate more and have a greater influence in society. But IT also is of great importance to people's social and professional development.

Some young people currently are not receiving the help that they need to learn

how to use the Internet, and perhaps are not interested in it. Therefore it is important that computers are accessible in places that young people frequent, for example, in the schools, recreation centres and libraries. In that way young people's curiosity can be aroused so that more of them begin to make use of the possibilities that the new technology offers.

Girls are currently not treated fairly when it comes to information technology. They do not have the same access to information technology that boys do. In schools and recreation centres, which have a limited number of computers, boys often do not leave room for girls. Teachers and recreation leaders must pay more attention to this situation. In addition computer games are often not designed to interest girls.

Young people want to have computers used more in the course of instruction, not more instruction about computers. For example, the Internet should be used more widely in project work. It is also important to improve teachers' competence in information technology.

The Schools

Education must give young people the chance to make genuine choices about their future. Students will have the opportunity to have an influence on how the lesson plans are designed, and the instruction will

take place in close co-operation between students and teachers. Both teachers and students should also evaluate work in the schools.

The schools at present do not encourage young people to take an interest in politics. Young people would like to see more scope for taking an active interest in politics during school hours.

Each student should have a mentor in order to increase motivation to do school work. Together the student and the mentor will have the opportunity to design a personal development plan.

Young people also want to see more co-operation among the schools, the business community and society in general. Methods used by the business community could be useful in school instruction – for example, presentation techniques, project training and management by objectives.

Meeting-Places

There are too few community meeting-places for young people. The municipalities should take the initiative and make meeting-places available. This must be done on young people's terms. It would also be good if the municipalities conducted studies of leisure time habits to find out the types of leisure activities that young people in the neighbourhood want to have.

Housing

It is difficult to get a place of one's own. One often needs to have contacts in the housing market. Measures must be taken to do away with the black market in housing. Efforts must be made with respect to the segregation in housing. Everyone should have the right to reside where they wish.

Local housing authorities play an important role in this regard. No one should be able to refuse to rent any residence with the law as a pretext.

Youth Unemployment

The unemployed's financial situation is largely dependent on their access to unemployment compensation. As young people in most cases lack work experience, they find themselves ineligible for unemployment insurance. The only means of support available to the majority of young people who are unemployed is social assistance.

It is difficult for young people with a foreign name and an immigrant background and for disabled persons to find jobs. A change in attitudes as well as stricter legislation in the area needs to be effected.

The Municipal Development Guarantee

Today's youth will not get a gold clock for long and faithful service. A certificate is to be issued by the employer upon completion of the development guarantee. Personnel at the employment offices need to give more individual support and it is important for the participant to have the same counsellor for the duration of the programme. The unemployed's right to a say in setting the agenda must be taken seriously.

Influence and Democracy

Adults cannot expect young people to take responsibility if at the same time young people do not feel that their views are being taken seriously.

Young people should have as much influence as other groups in politics. Against

this background it is important for young people's organisations to co-operate more on common issues and try to affect policy-making.

The traditional way of exerting influence, through the political parties, is not working in society today. It is difficult for many young people to support one single party on all issues. In that case it is better to become involved in individual issues such as environmental and youth issues.

At the same time the political parties should show more interest in young people's situation and include a youth perspective on all social issues. There must also be more young people in various decision-making bodies. For example, through youth councils, political decisions can get more support among young people.

International Co-operation

Many young people's organisations would like to work together with young people from other parts of the world, but often cannot get beyond the planning stage. More often than not, it is difficult to fill out the application forms to participate in programmes such as international youth exchanges and therefore applications for assistance need to be simplified.

Belief in the Future

Young people are demanding much from the labour market of the future. One big

task in the future is to provide jobs for young people without upper secondary or university education. In that connection new models for co-operation between the school and working life need to be created. Young people want to have the opportunity to travel and acquire knowledge and chances to form international contacts in the course of their work.



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