

## Swedes bring personal touch to academies

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### Scandinavian company to open chain of state-funded schools in England

Scandinavian education has long been regarded with envy by UK teachers and politicians.

Now a Swedish private school company with a radical approach to teaching has been given the go-ahead to start opening a chain of state-funded academies in England.

Kunskapsskolan, the biggest independent school provider in Sweden, has been named as preferred sponsor for two academies in Richmond, Surrey. It has plans for around 30 by 2018.

The company operates a system of genuinely personalised learning in 30 Swedish secondaries, giving pupils a say in setting their own targets.

Kunskapsskolan, which translates as 'knowledge school', intends to import the entire approach – "the DNA" of its system – to state schools in England.

It has the backing of the Department for Children, Schools and Families, which suggested the company as a potential sponsor to Richmond Council for academies to replace Hampton Community College and Whitton School, which could open by 2009. It has been in touch with Lord Adonis, the Government's academy cheerleader, since before he became a schools minister in 2005.

Anders Hultin, managing director of Kunskapsskolan, told *The TES* he thought his company could start raising standards in its English schools within two to three years and, as in Sweden, they would eventually beat national averages.

The Swedes hope to expand quickly through academy sponsorship and local authority competitions for new school providers. They are looking at Cambridge, where five new secondaries are planned, and Thames Gateway development areas like Ashford, Kent.

As a former political adviser at the Swedish education ministry, Mr Hultin helped implement the country's school funding voucher system in 1992 and co-founded Kunskapsskolan to take advantage of it in 1999.

The policy allows the company to make profits so long as it is providing the required level of education. But none of the main political parties will allow academy sponsors to do this in England.

Mr Hultin said the company's main motive for setting up in the UK was not profit, but to boost its chances of expanding into other countries by showing it can teach internationally recognised qualifications, such as A-levels, in English.

But he said: "If the politicians open up this opportunity (to make profits) then we wouldn't say no because we don't see a problem with this."

Kunskapsskolan also envisages opening "one or two" low-fee independent schools in England alongside its academies.

Again it says the aim is not profit but to create schools completely free of state control.

The local authority will be the co-sponsor for the two Richmond academies. The deal has yet to be finalised but Malcolm Eady, the council's cabinet member for education, said after hearing the company's pitch, he "knew this was where education should be going".

The company intends to use academy start-up costs to train existing school staff to use its model, with exchange visits to Sweden planned for teachers and pupils.

One question is whether Kunskapsskolan will have to pay the sponsorship contribution of around £2million per academy. It hopes to qualify as an education-based sponsor alongside schools and universities, which are excused the fee.