

VÄRMDÖ DISTANS



Gymnasieutbildning på distans - värdu är!

Värmdö Distans: Upper secondary e-learning

Upper secondary e-learning at *Värmdö Distans*:

In order to provide for upper secondary education for Swedish youngsters living abroad with their parents, **the Swedish National Agency for Education** (<http://www.skolverket.se/english/index.shtml>) decided to entrust Värmdö distance education with this task in 1999.

Värmdö Distans is part of **Värmdö gymnasium** (<http://www.gy.varmdo.se/>), an upper secondary school just outside Stockholm, Sweden. E-learning at *Värmdö Distans* is in most respects like studying at Värmdö Gymnasium: The courses, books, and the teachers are the same. The main difference is that all communication is through e-mail, rather than direct class room contact, since student and teacher are many miles apart.

Currently we have some **160 students**, 60 taking single courses, and 37 taking full study programmes. The rest are domestic students, who for social or physical reasons are unable to go to their local school.

What can you study at *Värmdö Distans*?

The students can take **individual courses** or **full study programmes** (the Natural Science programme or the Social Science programme). The students can take the full three-year programme, or part of it. If they want to continue their studies when they return to Sweden, it is quite possible.

What the students need:

In order to study at Värmdö distans, the students need a **computer** as well as access to the **Internet**, since the course plans are found on a web site there.

The students also need an **e-mail** system, and this is provided by sending software on a CD. All communication with the teachers and fellow students goes through e-mail, voice mail, virtual classrooms and chat.

Lastly, the students are sent **books and material** for practical subjects through ordinary mail.

What is e-learning like at *Värmdö distans*?

Students **apply** in the spring and are sent instructions, software and course material through ordinary mail.

The courses start late August and finish in the beginning of June.

The **course plans** are found in a user friendly format on the Internet. The course plans instruct the student what to do, how to do it, and when to submit assessments to their teachers. The students are expected to study these course plans carefully, in order to pursue their studies. It does take a great deal of self-discipline to be ones own teacher!

The students have frequent **e-mail contact** with each teacher, however, and can expect an answer within 24 hours. In many respects this one- to-one communication is more than an ordinary class room situation can offer.

The students submit written and spoken **assessments** for the teacher to grade and give feedback on. The students get regular information from the teacher about their progress, and

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at the end of the course grades are given according to the same standards as everywhere in Swedish upper secondary schools.

In case of **difficulties**, the students can get help from their teacher, their mentor, a study counsellor, the school welfare officer or the director of studies.

Staff:

There are 23 teachers involved in distance teaching as well as in-house teaching and two full time distance teachers. Furthermore there is administrative staff, technical support, school welfare officer, and an director of studies

The teachers' work entails introduction, tutoring, communication, documentation, feedback, assessment and grading.

Fees:

Students who study full programmes can apply for a **government grant**, which covers about 60 percent of the fees. The **rest is paid by the parents**, or the companies by which the parents are employed

Student taking single courses pay the whole fee themselves. There is, however, a similar grant for courses in Swedish, History, Social Science.

The pros and cons of e-learning:

Some students find it difficult **to work on their own**: carrying the full burden of responsibility for their studies, keeping deadlines, understanding the written instructions and missing classmates. For some, face-to-face teaching is more appropriate.

On the other hand, they would **not be able to get their upper secondary education at all** if it were not for e-learning. And once they get used to the e-learning study technique, they get ample **practise** for their writing and reading skills, as well as working on their own. They also find they can study much more **efficiently**; not having to travel to school, not changing class rooms many times a day, not being disturbed by other students, not having to compete with others for the attention of the teacher. Many students regard it as a great advantage to **work whenever and wherever they like**, not having to be in a specific class room at a specific time.

Furthermore, each full time student has a person at hand to support them during their studies, as well as the student welfare staff at Värmdö distans. Lastly, classmates all over the world are **available at arm's length**, since they can reach anyone through e-mail, chat and voice mail.

More about Swedish school system: Upper Secondary School:

<http://www.skolverket.se/english/system/upper.shtml>

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