

Teacher Education Policies in Sweden

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Background

As of 1977, all teachers in Sweden undergo training at a university or university college. Teacher education programmes vary in length from three to five years depending on the teacher's academic qualifications. Universities and university colleges that offer teacher education are found all over the country, and one in ten students in higher education is a student teacher.

Teacher education has been the focus of interest in Sweden for a long time. There is great political interest in teacher education because of the vital role it plays in the implementation of education policies in schools.

In the last ten years, teacher education programmes have been evaluated a number of times from a variety of perspectives. In 1997, the Riksdag (Swedish parliament) appointed a commission of inquiry to examine how teacher education might be adapted to our changing society. Last spring it presented its final report containing proposals for a new system of teacher education.

The proposals are currently being considered by officials at the Ministry of Education and Science, and a bill on teacher education is to be submitted to the Riksdag this May. Thus, this report refers to the current system but also comments on some of the proposals put forward by the parliamentary commission mentioned above.

The following comments follow the structure given by the Presidency through its rapporteur, Professor Friedrich Buchberger:

- *Structure of systems and programmes for initial teacher education*

For a description of the structure of the system and the basic teacher education programmes for different levels within the school system, please see Eurydice, where all the relevant facts are presented so as to allow comparison between Member States.

- *Steering and governance of initial teacher education*

Higher education operates within the framework of a system of goals and management by results which central government and several local governments apply. In this system an authority is entrusted with a task and receives the resources needed to carry it out. The number of graduates each institute of higher education should produce is specified for a particular period.

Ultimately teacher education is governed by the Education Act which states that "schools shall employ teachers with the relevant qualifications for the teaching they are to perform." As far as higher education is concerned, the teacher education programmes referred to in the Education Act are specified in several degree descriptions with goals for the contents of teacher education programmes. The course description also states the length of each programme. Furthermore, central government specifies how many teachers of different kinds, for example upper secondary school maths and science teachers, should be trained during a specified period (often three years). For the continued allocation of funds it is required that the institute of higher education achieves the goals regarding the number of teachers who graduate.

The goals that are to be achieved by the student teachers in order to qualify for a degree focusing on certain age groups and subjects are common to all institutes of higher education. University or

university colleges must provide education that leads to the fulfilment of the goals stipulated for the degree course. The institute of higher education is responsible for the quality of its teaching programmes. A close check is kept on institutes of higher education to ensure that they fulfil the goals set by central government regarding the quality of graduate teachers.

The National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for monitoring the quality of education at universities and university colleges. Should the Agency find that training provided at a university or college fails to meet the goals for teacher qualifications, it may withdraw the university's/college's right to hold examinations. The programme of education is then discontinued. The National Agency for Higher Education has announced that it will keep a close check on teacher education programmes with regard to the development of quality.

- *Steering and governance of induction*

Within the framework of their 1995 central agreement, the social partners in Sweden have agreed on an induction year following graduation from college/university before newly qualified teachers may obtain a permanent post. Not all municipalities have introduced this one-year induction scheme. Only a minute number of teachers fail to obtain a permanent post after the induction year.

- *Steering and governance of in-service education for teachers' continuous professional development*

Under the Education Act, an employer is responsible for teachers' in-service training. Under the Compulsory School Ordinance and the Upper Secondary School Ordinance, the employer is under an obligation to provide five in-service training days per year for teachers. These are used for in-service training in different areas that will help the teacher to fulfil the goals of the school in accordance with curricula and other relevant management documents. The in-service training referred to can be procured by the employer from a university college/university or other course provider.

- *Steering and governance of further education of teachers*

Every teacher is responsible for his or her continuing professional development and further training. It is incumbent upon Swedish universities and university colleges to provide a range of programmes that meet the need for in-service training and further training in the community at large. For several years now, a large number of courses designed to enhance the skills of teachers have been available on a part-time basis or in the form of distance learning courses (flexible training). This has enabled teachers to remain at work while training for new assignments. All higher education is available free of charge, which means that teachers invest their time rather than their money in further training. Occasionally – although not very often – an employer might offer a teacher the opportunity to undergo further training.

- *Continuous professional development in the relationship to career opportunities*

In Sweden a teacher is employed at a school to provide tuition under the guidance of the head teacher. The municipal authorities are responsible for schools in Sweden, which means that there are no national systems for automatic promotion. Teachers in Sweden receive individually agreed salaries.

Opportunities to engage in educational research or research in their particular subject field is often regarded as a career move for teachers. A teacher with a Ph.D. and in-depth subject knowledge is in a good position to apply for more qualified jobs.

- *The role of higher education institutions in teacher education*

The universities and university colleges have the exclusive prerogative to issue teaching certificates. The scope and contents of this prerogative are defined by central government. In Sweden cooperation between political bodies, the social partners and other stakeholders takes place in so-called regional centres attached to universities and university colleges. The main task of these centres is to develop both basic and further training for teachers in a long-term perspective. Some regional centres also carry out development activities and research in connection with teacher education programmes and educational activities.

- *Policies for recruiting and /or retaining competent and committed teaching force, e.g. in deficit areas*

A basic prerequisite for recruitment to the teaching profession and teachers education is individual salaries for teachers. This system was agreed upon in 1995 and has since been affirmed in a new agreement signed only recently. However, there is still a shortage of teachers in mathematics, certain scientific subjects and some modern languages.

A preparatory one-year foundation course in science and mathematics before embarking on teacher education has proved to be a successful way to recruit students as science teachers.

This method has also been tested for the recruitment of students with an immigrant background, who are underrepresented in Swedish teacher education courses (and at institutions of higher education generally). The method has also proved successful in this context.

The various institutes of higher education have also devised their own methods for boosting the number of teachers in particular subject fields. Often by providing courses in a relevant field and giving students engaged in basic training the opportunity to choose these. Institutes of higher education also offer these courses to professionally active teachers as part of their career development.

- *Particular strengths of the system of teacher education in my country*

The strength of teacher education lies in the fact that it is part of the higher education system with links to research. This situation has evolved gradually since 1977 when teacher education was integrated into the higher education system. Pre-school teachers, recreation instructors, remedial teachers along with compulsory school and upper secondary school teachers are all university or university college trained. Further measures are required with regard to research and postgraduate studies on learning and conditions for learning. Extensive development work in these areas is currently under way within the higher education system. The Government is shortly due to put forward proposals on how this development might be supported and promoted in the future.

- *Main problems of and challenges for teacher education perceived by different actors*

An important issue in this context is whether institutions of higher education are able to provide teacher education that enables student teachers and qualified teachers to implement the targets set up by the central authorities. This is currently the subject of discussion between institutes of higher education and the recipients, that is schools and municipal authorities. These matters are being considered at the regional development centres attached to university colleges and universities and it is here that solutions can be found.

We have already mentioned the difficulties involved in recruiting teachers for certain subjects.

Another discussion concerns what constitutes a suitable balance between subject knowledge and depth vis-à-vis teaching skills. This topic is at the forefront of the new proposals for teacher education. The proposals clarify the specific teaching skills required and devote greater attention to this issue than previously.

An important issue relating to teaching and teacher education is the feminisation of the profession. Current efforts to reverse this trend must be intensified quite considerably.

- *Incorporation of a European dimension into teacher education*

The mobility of student teachers is encouraged through, for example, the Socrates programmes such as Erasmus, and in the case of professionally active teachers through the Leonardo, Comenius and Lingua programmes. Sweden participates in these programmes to roughly the same extent as the other member states.

To make it simpler to receive qualified teachers from other parts of the European Union an amendment was made to the Swedish School Act in the autumn of 1999. This amendment means that Swedish language requirements can be adapted to the specific needs of the tuition situation in which teachers coming to Sweden are likely to find themselves.

The National Agency for Higher Education has been assigned the task of finding equivalents to the teaching qualifications that teachers in other countries, including those from EU member states, present when applying for jobs in Sweden.

It is also important that Swedish universities and university colleges work actively in the EU: various programmes focusing on teacher education. Networks such as intensified cooperative projects within the framework of, for example, the Socrates programme would seem to represent valuable contributions in this context.

- *Strategic targets for teacher education and teacher education policies at national level*

The Commission's proposal of a new teacher formation means an educational structure that allows for great flexibility with regard to the balance between subject fields and subjects common to all teachers. This flexibility also makes it possible for teachers to resume teacher education as and when the need arises as part of a process of life-long learning. This flexibility also aims to meet the need for teachers who are able to adapt to variations in the size of annual cohorts all the way through the school system.

It is important that teacher education is constructed in such a way as to prepare students for postgraduate studies and research on learning/conditions for learning or on a specific subject. The structure of teacher education and its link to research should make full use of the potential of higher education to achieve the aim of teacher education and thereby be adapted to suit the entire education system.