



RIR 2018:34

The unauthorised dissemination of national tests

– what are the Swedish National Agency for
Education and the Swedish Schools
Inspection doing?

Background and purpose of the audit

In both compulsory and voluntary school forms, national tests are used to support the assessment and grading of pupils' knowledge. Pursuant to the Education Act, since 2018 it has been required that the results of the tests be taken into account in the grading process. Despite the provisions to protect the content of the tests, test information has become known in advance and has been disseminated to pupils on a number of occasions. The unauthorised dissemination risks damaging the legitimacy of the tests, as well as confidence in the grading.

The Swedish National Agency for Education is responsible for developing the national tests and distributing them to the schools. The Swedish National Agency for Education also determines regulations governing the handling and implementation of the tests by the schools. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate is responsible for supervising and quality auditing of the schools' handling and implementation of the tests. Supervision involves monitoring whether the activities fulfil the requirements of laws and other regulations. Quality auditing examines the quality of the activities, based on objectives and guidelines.

In response to the recurrent unauthorised dissemination of national tests, the Swedish National Audit Office has examined the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's efforts to prevent unauthorised proliferation during the period of 2015 to August 2018. The purpose of the audit is to assess the Swedish National Agency for Education's work process for the management and prevention of risks of unauthorised dissemination, as well as the agency's procedures for the dissemination of tests. As regards the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, the audit has assessed whether that authority's supervision and quality auditing of the handling of national tests are in accordance with its mandate. The audit therefore answers the following audit questions:

1. Does the Swedish National Agency for Education have an appropriate process for managing the risks of unauthorised dissemination of national tests?
2. Are the Swedish National Agency for Education's procedures in the event of the unauthorised dissemination of national tests effective?
3. Does the Swedish Schools Inspectorate exercise supervision and quality auditing of the handling of national tests in accordance with its mandate?
4. Is the collaboration of the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate on the unauthorised dissemination of national tests effective?

The results of the audit

In 2018, the Swedish National Agency for Education addressed several shortcomings in its risk management process

It was not until 2018 that the Swedish National Agency for Education developed a largely effective process for managing the risks of unauthorised dissemination of national tests, thus addressing several previous shortcomings in its risk management process. In 2018, the agency developed measures for the 2018/2019 academic year that are based on a more systematic and comprehensive risk analysis, clearer risk assessment and greater synergy than during the earlier part of the audit period. However, the Swedish National Audit Office finds that the follow-up and assessment of implemented measures can be further improved.

The risk of unauthorised proliferation was not reported in the Swedish National Agency for Education's comprehensive internal management and control process until 2017, when the unauthorised dissemination increased in scope. At the time, the agency did not conduct a systematic risk analysis – for example, no assessments were carried out of the agency's risks based on probability and potential consequences. The Swedish National Audit Office finds that this may have made it difficult for agency leadership to identify the Swedish National Agency for Education's significant risks and prioritise their work.

One of the Swedish National Agency for Education's primary tools for combatting dissemination are the regulations governing the handling and implementation of the tests by the schools. It is the opinion of the Swedish National Audit Office that the Swedish National Agency for Education has fallen short both in its investigation of the nature of appropriate governing regulations for the schools, and in monitoring how the regulations function and are used in schools and by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate. However, in the course of 2018, the Swedish National Agency for Education has worked more actively to revise the regulations governing the handling of the tests, and in doing so it sought input from several external actors, including the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.

Procedures essentially function, but certain guidelines are lacking

In general, the Swedish National Agency for Education has procedures that allow the agency to act effectively to reduce damage in the event that national tests are disseminated. Preparedness for the tests has also increased over time. On the other hand, the procedures do not indicate the principles on the basis of which information about unauthorised dissemination and deficient test handling should be submitted to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, nor when any such offences should be reported to the Swedish Police Authority. The Swedish National Agency for Education currently hands such cases over to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate and the

Swedish Police Authority. However, according to the Swedish National Audit office, the absence of internal guidelines for which cases should be handed over may entail a risk that cases are not dealt with equally.

Substitute tests support grading but complicate follow-ups

The Swedish National Audit Office approves of the fact that the Swedish National Agency for Education has developed substitute tests in the subjects and annual courses in which the agency has identified an increased risk that the ordinary tests may be disseminated. The Swedish National Audit Office shares the opinion of the Swedish National Agency for Education that the substitute tests can support teachers in the grading process. However, substitute tests do not provide the same opportunity as ordinary tests to follow up on test results and evaluate the extent to which the tests support equivalent assessment and grading. Nor is it clear why the collection of results of ordinary and substitute tests differs between various school forms and subjects.

Supervision and quality auditing are carried out in accordance with the mandate

The Swedish National Audit Office finds that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate exercises supervision and quality auditing of the handling of national tests in accordance with its mandate. Supervision has been exercised in individual cases, and since the autumn of 2018 the handling of national tests is included as part of the regular supervision of primary and secondary schools.

Moreover, in 2017 the Swedish Schools Inspectorate conducted an unannounced audit of 60 primary schools' handling of national tests, and similar audits have been planned for the end of the autumn semester of 2018. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate has used its quality auditing tool for the unannounced audits, because according to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, the regulations for the handling of the tests are not regulate enough to allow that authority to exercise supervision on the basis of this form of auditing. In 2018, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate notified the Swedish National Agency for Education that the possibility of supervising on the basis of the regulations is limited.

Furthermore, the Swedish National Audit Office considers that it may be in accordance with the mandate of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate that handling of tests in adult education programs has not yet been subject to supervision or quality auditing, even though there are problems with dissemination in such programs. At the same time, the dissemination of national tests in adult education programs may hamper the possibility of affording these test results special consideration.

Late start for constructive collaboration

The audit indicates that in 2018 the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate established collaboration that will help to develop these authorities' measures to prevent the unauthorised dissemination of national tests. In 2017, the Swedish National Agency for Education began reporting deficiencies in the handling of national tests to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate. On the other hand, it was not until May 2018 that the authorities had established specific cooperation meetings about their efforts to combat unauthorised dissemination. According to the Swedish National Audit Office, these cooperation meetings should have been carried out earlier in the light of the increasing unauthorised dissemination of tests.

Recommendations

The Swedish National Audit Office provides the following recommendations to the Swedish National Agency for Education:

- Ensure that implemented measures to reduce the risk of unauthorised dissemination are followed up and assessed. Measures concerning the handling of national tests by schools should be evaluated in cooperation with the schools and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.
- Clarify the grounds and principles on which information regarding deficiencies in the handling of national tests should be handed over to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate or reported to the Swedish Police Authority.
- Review which results of the substitute tests that should be collected, analysed and made available.

The Swedish National Audit Office provides the following recommendations to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate:

- Further investigate the need to supervise and quality audit the handling and implementation of national tests in municipal adult education programs and the ways in which this can be done.