



Health and Social Care Inspectorate – hampered supervision

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited the supervisory role of the Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO). The supervisory activities undertaken, must be conducted strategically, effectively and consistently throughout the country. The Swedish NAO's conclusion is that IVO has not fully fulfilled its role as a supervisory authority in these three aspects. For its part, the Government has not provided IVO with stable and long-term conditions for fulfilling its mandate.

Audit findings

IVO was established on 1 June 2013. The Government was clear on the purpose and tasks of the supervisory authority. IVO was to address several problems that existed when the National Board of Health and Welfare was responsible for supervision. However, the Government has neither been consistent nor long term in its financial management of IVO. The level of appropriations has varied over time and consisted of temporary funds allocated one year at a time. This has made it difficult for IVO to recruit and retain supervisory staff, for example. At the same time, the Inspectorate has worked to develop supervision.

IVO has around 375 inspectors to supervise around 50 000 health and social care activities, and in addition 225 000 registered professionals. An important part of the Inspectorate's mandate is to conduct risk-based self-initiated supervision. However, until now, this has been carried out on a small scale and predominantly in response to circumstances that have arisen, thus, it is too heavily based on reports received. The work to develop the risk-based self-initiated supervision at central level, has been ongoing for two years. To date, IVO has not implemented a wide range of risk-based supervision to highlight issues that are important for groups of people, or risks that exist at the systemic level, in healthcare and social care.

To transfer resources to the risk-based self-initiated supervision, IVO has needed to make available resources and improve the efficiency of its activities. To this end, regulatory changes have been implemented. Among other things, the requirement for the number of inspections in residential centres for children and young people has been halved, and complaint handling has been moved to patients' advisory committees and healthcare providers. The self-initiated supervision has increased slightly in recent years, but complaints against health services still claim the most resources.

IVO's supervision is to include both support and control. IVO develops continuously its supervision to be supportive and to promote learning. The number of supervisory decisions requiring action has decreased over the years. The stricter sanctions have been used to a limited

and relatively unchanged extent. At the same time, the IVO inspectors have different views on the impact their sanctions have on the activities inspected in terms of remedying shortcomings.

IVO has decided not to use any overall assessment support for the inspectors. The lack of easily accessible assessment support makes it difficult for the Inspectorate to develop more consistent supervisory decisions. To assess the consistency of supervisory decisions, IVO started to follow up the decisions in 2015. In this regard, it is noted that there are differences in the basis on which decisions have been taken.

There are well-founded criticisms of the functioning of the IVO IT system. It is difficult to find supervisory information, and data quality is inadequate. The inspectors have views on what can be improved but have so far not participated to any great extent in the ongoing development work. The lack of well adapted support systems makes it more difficult for the Inspectorate to carry out effective supervisory activities, and important areas of concern as well as risk elements may have been missed. At central level, IVO has underestimated the scope and the degree of difficulty related to the digitalisation of the work.

Supervisory activities are not followed up systematically. The follow-ups conducted by IVO only measure confidence in the Inspectorate and are not comparable over time. This makes it difficult for the Inspectorate to account for development resulting from supervisory activities and inspections. However, it is important to point out that there is a positive image, among both inspectors and organisations inspected, in terms of feedback from supervisory findings, and the inspectors consider that their work is beneficial.

Recommendations

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the Government:

- Provide a stable financial framework to enable IVO to plan for a sustainable and long-term supply of skills to fulfil its supervisory role.
- Follow IVO's efforts to develop more consistent decisions.
- Follow IVO's digitalisation work for the supervisory activities.
- Ensure that IVO's reporting of its supervisory findings can be followed over time.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to IVO:

- Develop governance and management to ensure that the supervisory activities are provided with the necessary conditions to fulfil the mandate.
- Develop national and regional supervisory risk assessments so that supervision can be directed to the areas and activities where it is most useful.
- Design and make available assessment support for inspectors, to make decisions more consistent.
- Manage the risks associated with the ongoing digitalisation process and the introduction of a new IT environment
- Follow up the supervision findings systematically so that they can be followed over time.