

Summary

The state's dimensioning of teacher training
– are the correct number of teachers being
trained? (RiR 2014:18)



DATE: 01-09-2014

The State's dimensioning of teacher training – are the correct number of teachers being trained?

The Swedish National Audit Office (NAO) has reviewed whether the system for dimensioning of teacher training functions efficiently. The review has been conducted within the framework of the Swedish NAO's review strategy of the State's initiatives for schooling.

Background of the review

Teacher training is one of the country's largest and most important vocational trainings and teachers are vital for creating schools of a high quality. Now there is shortage of certain types of teachers. The shortage risks deteriorating based on the low interest of students for studying subjects and specialisms within teacher training in areas with a large demand in the labour market. The shortage is not new and the problem of training a sufficient number of teachers within certain subjects and for certain classes has existed for a long time.

The State has an overall responsibility for the quality and equivalence of schools. By means of the Education Act, the Swedish Riksdag (Parliament), has decided which qualifications teachers must have in order to secure permanent employment in schools. By regulating teacher training, the State has undertaken a responsibility to provide the correct number of teachers with the correct skills.

It is important that the system for dimensioning of teacher training functions efficiently, that is, that the higher education institutions neither train too many nor too few teachers within different teaching specialisms. However, other initiatives by the school principal and the State are also important for there to be competent teachers in Swedish schools. Despite the fact that the number of applicants for teacher training has increased in recent years, few students apply for teacher training with specialisms in shortage subjects. The higher education institutions have to face this and they can affect the situation, albeit to a limited extent.

The Swedish NAO has examined whether the state system for providing the correct number of teachers with sufficient formal skills functions in an efficient manner. The work of the higher education institutions on determining the number of admission places and the Government's management of the system is a part of the system for dimensioning.



DATE: 01-09-2014

The review has been conducted by using a case study of five higher education institutions and a selection of municipal school principals close to them, a survey to higher education institutions with teacher training, a survey to municipal and individual school principals, document studies, as well as interviews with officials at the Government Offices of Sweden and at central agencies.

Results of the review

The Government's management is restrained

One of the starting points of the Swedish NAO's review is that the Government should have good monitoring of the work on dimensioning, and based on this take necessary measures in its management. The management system which the Government has designed for dimensioning teacher training means that the Government has adopted a more distanced role in which the active management is not as extensive as, for example, before the latest change in teacher training was conducted in 2011. The Government wants the higher education institutions to be independent in the dimensioning issue. According to the Swedish NAO, there are good reasons to choose a restrained approach to manage higher education. The autonomy of higher education institutions should provide academic freedom and good quality in higher education. Through appropriation directions, the higher education institutions have been assigned to ensure that the number of places corresponds to the interest of students and the demand of the labour market.

At the same time teacher training represents teaching which is critical for society as competent teachers comprise a fundamental prerequisite for quality of teaching in Swedish schools. However, the demand of students and the labour market does not fully match each other when it comes to teacher training. Students do not act in a manner required by the management system, that is, select training with a large demand in the labour market. Despite being aware of a shortage of teachers in large areas, the Government has maintained its restrained management. The measures initiated by the Government are relevant, but the Government can manage in a more efficient manner.

Collaboration and competition – two conflicting values

A starting point of the review for the Swedish NAO has been that the higher education institutions should collaborate with other higher education institutions to attain an efficient allocation of places in programmes across the country. Most of the higher education institutions collaborate with others in some form. However, it primarily involves exchange of experiences and network building. The review of the Swedish NAO shows that about a third of the higher education institutions provide teacher training in collaboration with another higher education institution. This indicates that there is scope for more in-depth collaboration between higher education institutions.



DATE: 01-09-2014

The Swedish NAO assesses that the higher education institutions can increase concentration of teacher training to fewer higher education institutions to a larger extent. A majority of higher education institutions see a concentration of teacher training as something positive for the finances of higher education institutions and quality of teaching. However, interviews of the Swedish NAO reveal that higher education institutions are not inclined to forgo a subject specialism to other higher education institutions. If a subject specialism is forgone it may, for example, create problems for other teaching specialisms at the higher education institution as well. A broad teacher training may be beneficial in the competition with other higher education institutions. Higher education institutions attach value to being available for teaching students as they assess that it facilitates recruitment of students. The resource allocation system encourages that higher education institutions provide training in areas where there are a large number of applicants. It makes it difficult for higher education institutions to agree among themselves on concentrating certain specialisms within teacher training to fewer higher education institutions.

In a previous review, the Swedish NAO has stated that the problems of inadequate collaboration and a uniform provision of training are difficult to solve within the framework of the current management models in which higher education institutions should compete with each other.

Obtain knowledge and allocate places in programmes

Another starting point of the review is that the higher education institutions should try to attain an allocation of places in programmes within each higher education institution which correspond to the demand of different types of teachers which exist.

Higher education institutions have been commissioned to dimension the number of places based on the demand of students and the labour market. The review of the Swedish NAO shows that the existing teaching resources of higher education institutions are highly significant for the decision of higher education institutions on the number of places at the different specialisms of teacher training. This means that to a certain extent higher education institutions adapt their provision of teaching based on the teaching staff they have available. It is important to safeguard the quality of teacher training. However, at the same time it results in a sluggishness in the system which results in higher education institutions continuing to offer teaching where the demand of the labour market is less while they may find it difficult to increase the number of places in programmes where there is a large demand. An important reason for higher education institutions attaching great importance to teaching resources is that they want to offer good quality in teaching, something which the Swedish NAO naturally considers as being very important. However, the Swedish NAO is of the opinion that teaching resources, in accordance with the intended model for deciding on the number of places in programmes, should not be as fully prominent in the decision on number of places, which they currently appear to be. According to the Swedish NAO, the higher education institutions should work strategically to a greater extent with recruitment of



DATE: 01-09-2014

teaching staff in order to offer teaching demanded by students and the labour market – with continued focus on high quality in the teaching.

In its assessment of degree-awarding powers, the Swedish Higher Education Authority does not take into account the student base of higher education institutions. In accordance with the assessment of the Swedish NAO, the Higher Education Act provides the opportunity for such consideration. Then the examination of power could have a dimensioning effect and stimulate collaboration between higher education institutions. How this should take place in practice should be examined further.

The review reveals that the problems which certain higher education institutions have experienced in terms of increasing the number of places for pre-school teacher training have partially entailed a shortage of correct teaching personnel who can teach within the area. This indicates that the Government, when it wants higher education institutions to significantly increase the number of places for certain training programmes, also needs to support the higher education institutions in the work on developing teaching resources for the specialisms in the long-term in areas with a shortage of teaching staff and where the teaching needs to be expanded.

The review shows that alongside teaching resources, the number of applicant students is the most important factor when higher education institutions decide on which specialism for teacher training should be offered and how many places are offered for each specialism. It is also the decisive factor when higher education institutions choose not to offer a certain teaching programme. An important reason for this is how resources are allocated to higher education. It contributes to a risk of shortage of certain teachers and surplus of others. The interest of students in teacher training is affected by societal factors which higher education institutions can affect to a low extent, but which they still must face in the dimensioning.

The review also shows that the higher education institutions only to a minor extent reduce the number of places in teaching programmes with a low demand for new teachers. However, the higher education institutions often prioritise providing supplementary educational programmes (KPU) within shortage subjects. At the same time KPUs for people with a subject background there with a shortage are relatively common.

The higher education institutions are able to reallocate resources and places between training within the higher education institution. Reallocating funds necessitates that there are funds for reallocation. Resources for reallocation come from the number of students a higher education institution has. It would risk resulting in higher education institutions admitting more students than the labour market requires within areas with a high application pressure. One way for higher education institutions to have the opportunity to offer teaching in shortage subjects, in cases where more qualified students than expected can be admitted, is to hold a number of places in programmes centrally at the higher education institution. These places can then, if necessary, be allocated to subject specialisms with a shortage of teachers. This allows admission of these



DATE: 01-09-2014

students even if the planned admission numbers for different teaching specialisms were originally fewer. The review shows that discussions for this are being held at the higher education institutions. However the extent to which the reallocation is conducted in reality seems to vary.

Talks on dimensioning between higher education institutions and school principals can be developed further

A starting point for the review of the Swedish NAO is that higher education institutions should have a system for obtaining knowledge about the demand of students and the labour market regionally and nationally. In terms of teacher training, there is a clearly defined qualified group of stakeholders which the higher education institutions can and should have contact with in order to find out about the demand of the labour market: the school principals.

Higher education institutions collaborate with school principals, primarily in regional contexts. Almost half of the municipal school principals are represented in a body within a higher education institution where decisions are taken on teacher training. The individual school principals participate to a significantly lower extent than the municipal school principals in different forums where higher education institutions and school principals meet to discuss the teacher training. Very few individual school principals are represented in bodies within higher education institutions where teacher training is discussed. At the same time, in the academic year 2013/14 approximately 13 per cent of compulsory school pupils and approximately 25 per cent of upper secondary school students attended a school managed by an individual principal.

Discussions on the number of places at the different specialisms of teacher training do not have the highest priority when higher education institutions and school principals meet. They primarily discuss school development and placements within teacher training. Interviews with municipal school principals indicate that there is a certain level of resignation due to the low interest of students in primarily certain specialisms in teacher training.

The higher education institutions obtain information which is available on the demand of the labour market and thereby have certain knowledge of where the demand in the labour market exists. In accordance with the Swedish NAO's survey, a majority of the municipal school principals have informed higher education institutions on their demand for teachers. The share among individual school principals is significantly lower. The fact that approximately 50 per cent of school principals do not have any current personnel or skills provision plan can potentially obstruct the opportunity of higher education institutions to take into account the demand of school principals in their dimensioning. The Swedish NAO assesses that more developed supporting material from school principals could strengthen the discussion on dimensioning.

Inadequate quality of submitted data and preferences on greater accessibility for national registers



DATE: 01-09-2014

The data which the municipal school principals report to the Swedish National Agency for Education's register on teaching staff (register of teachers) has sometimes had quality deficiencies according to the municipalities. This creates uncertainty in the supporting material for forecasts on the demand for teachers and indicates that it may be necessary to make efforts to safeguard the quality of data in connection with its collection.

The representatives from municipal local educational authorities which the Swedish NAO has interviewed wish to have access to information from the Swedish National Agency for Education's register on teacher registration. Such information would facilitate the municipalities to obtain good supporting material for the demand of teachers with different teaching specialisms. According to the Swedish NAO, the statistics on locally working teachers from the register for teacher registration would facilitate the school principals to convey their long-term demand of teachers for the higher education institutions. High quality supporting material which describes the demand of the labour market is also decisive for this aspect to be taken into account for examination of degree-awarding powers.

Recommendations of the Swedish NAO

To sum up, the review shows that the Government needs to influence the dimensioning of higher education institutions more actively than it is currently doing. The availability of competent teachers is essential for society. Without such teachers there is also a risk that quality improvement measures by the State in the form of, for example, mathematics and reading promotion will not have the intended effect on teaching. It justifies a departure from the principle on restrained management of autonomous higher education institutions which largely apply for the university sector. More active management could function as an efficient supplement for the measures which the Government has taken to increase the status of the teaching profession and in this way increase the attractiveness in teaching, for example, career paths for teachers.

The Swedish NAO recommends the Government to:

- Adjust the resource allocation system so that within teacher training it becomes possible to strengthen the prerequisites of higher education institutions to provide teaching programmes within shortage subjects even when the number of students is small.
- Stimulate and further facilitate higher education institutions to collaborate concerning teacher training in order to, in this manner, attain greater specialisation between the higher education institutions.
- Continue the work on developing statistics concerning working teachers and to a greater extent make available information for school principals, which increases the opportunity of school principals to provide higher education institutions good supporting material for dimensioning.



DATE: 01-09-2014

- Investigate whether the examination of degree-awarding powers should also include the dimensioning aspect.

The review shows that the higher education institutions should strengthen certain aspects of their work for their dimensioning decisions to result in the correct number of teachers with the correct teaching specialisms being trained.

The Swedish NAO recommends higher education institutions to:

- Work more systematically and strategically with student recruitment for teacher training where there is a shortage in the labour market.
- In a more systematic manner have contact with all types of school principals in order to obtain information on the future demand of teachers from them.
- Work more actively to ensure that the teaching personnel matches the demand of the labour market for teachers.

