



RIKSREVISIONEN

Summary:

Government initiatives for graduates
with a non-Swedish education

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Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office has examined government initiatives within the field of education for making use of the competence of university graduates with a non-Swedish education.

Background to the audit

It takes a long time for many people born outside Sweden but resident in the country, including graduates, to establish themselves on the labour market. Statistics also show that foreign-born graduates are affected by unemployment or are overqualified for their posts to a much greater degree than those born in Sweden. At the same time, the generational shift taking place on the labour market will lead to a need for skilled labour.

The Swedish National Audit Office has examined the government's governance and follow-up on initiatives within the field of education for making use of university graduates with a non-Swedish education, as well as the work of the responsible authorities. This has included the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education's assessment of completed foreign higher education and the National Board of Health and Welfare's scrutiny and issuing of licences to practice for doctors and nurses with a non-Swedish education. This audit also looked at supplementary higher education courses for graduates with a non-Swedish education and the coordinating responsibility of county administrative boards for language classes as part of their introduction process for new arrivals. The audit covers initiatives mainly carried out during the years 2008-2010. It has been based on the general audit question: *Are the government initiatives within the field of education appropriate and effective for the purpose of enabling graduates with a non-Swedish education to establish themselves on the Swedish labour market in accordance with their level of education?*

The results of the audit

The Swedish National Audit Office's overall conclusion is that the current system, which involves a number of different authorities, could be made more appropriate and effective. This would mean that valuable academic expertise could be introduced into the Swedish labour market faster and to a greater extent. Furthermore, it is clear that there are also indications of efficiency problems related to initiatives not covered by the audit, for example, the teaching of Swedish.

The route to establishment on the Swedish labour market is not sufficiently known. The audit shows that there is a need for earlier and clearer information on the initiatives in place for graduates with a non-Swedish education. For example, awareness of supplementary higher education courses is generally poor among the target group. There is also a need for the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and the National Board of Health and Welfare to continue to review the information for both job applicants and the authorities that come into contact with foreign graduates at an early stage in order to reduce the time it takes to produce evaluations, qualified teacher status certificates and licences to practice.

A complex system of government initiatives. Graduates with a non-Swedish education who want to establish themselves in Sweden are faced with a complex system of government initiatives and government bodies in various sectors. This system relies heavily on the government's coordinating responsibility. The Swedish parliament, the riksdag, has passed government bill 2008/09:175 and thus agreed with the government's proposal for a more effective system for assessing health care and nursing education from third countries. These changes have led to confusion regarding the division of responsibility between the National Board of Health and Welfare and the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, something that the authorities have not, however, specifically raised with the government. This has meant that the government has not had occasion to follow up on whether development work is progressing as expected. The result is that the intended streamlining of the system has not been fully implemented.

Long wait to establish a presence on labour market. The audit shows that the time it takes for graduates to get their non-Swedish education assessed as the basis for an evaluation, qualified teacher status certificate or licence to practice is affected by a number of factors. For example, the time it takes for the National Board of Health and Welfare to deal with such matters is largely the result of the time it takes for third-country graduates to complete the authority's supplementary programme. The National Board of Health and Welfare has changed its practice in terms of the requirement for residence and work permits for job applicants educated in a third country, which has subsequently led to an increase in applications from, for instance, doctors resident in third countries.

Shorter total times lead to socio-economic benefits. Calculations indicate that even small reductions in the amount of time applicants are unemployed can lead to significant socio-economic benefits. If the 700 or so foreign graduates that the calculations are based on were able to establish themselves on the labour market in their preferred professions one month earlier, then the socio-economic benefit, i.e. the value of the boost in production, would be in the magnitude of SEK 40 million.

The government has not guaranteed that the funds granted will match the demand for supplementary higher education courses. During the period 2008-2010, the government only used SEK 110 million of the SEK 235 million set aside for organising supplementary higher education courses. At the same time, this audit shows that half of the higher education institutions affected believe that the remuneration does not cover the costs of running the supplementary courses. However, the Swedish National Audit Office has no basis for assessing whether the higher education institutions receive enough money to cover their costs for the supplementary higher education courses.

Initiatives promoting better knowledge of Swedish are required. There are many indications in the audit that there is a shortage of Swedish courses. For example, lack of knowledge of Swedish is the largest obstacle preventing students from completing supplementary higher education courses with a pass result within the set timeframe. One way to facilitate language learning is target group-adapted Swedish courses. Here, the county administrative boards have a coordinating role within the framework of their integration work, a task that has been clarified by the establishment reform. However, only 9 of 21 county administrative boards have implemented such initiatives.

The Swedish National Audit Office's recommendations

The Swedish National Audit Office's recommendations to the government:

The Swedish National Audit Office believes that the government should take a greater responsibility for coordinating and streamlining initiatives to make it easier for foreign graduates to establish themselves on the Swedish labour market.

- The government should guarantee cross-department coordination and follow-up on existing initiatives.
- The government should clarify the requirements for residence and work permits set by the authorities assessing foreign educational qualifications.
- The government should follow up on and ensure there are supplementary higher education courses suitable to meet the demands of both students and the labour market.
- The government should clarify and follow up on the county administrative boards' responsibility for coordinating target group-adapted Swedish courses in the municipalities of the relevant counties.

The Swedish National Audit Office's recommendations to the authorities:

The Swedish National Audit Office believes that the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, the National Board of Health and Welfare and the higher education institutions organising supplementary higher education courses should implement a number of measures to speed up the system's processing times.

- The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, the National Board of Health and Welfare and the higher education institutions organising supplementary higher education courses, in consultation with other appropriate authorities, should improve information for graduates with a non-Swedish education. The aim should be for the information to be coordinated and clear and for it to reach graduates with a non-Swedish education at an early stage.
- The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and the National Board of Health and Welfare should review their internal processes in order to reduce processing times.
- The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education should clarify the aim of the agency's evaluations and, in consultation with representatives of the labour market, adapt them to the needs of the labour market and applicants.

Fact box

Graduates with a non-Swedish education are offered a number of government initiatives to help them establish themselves on the labour market. *The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education* is responsible for assessing higher education courses leading to professions that are unregulated in Sweden and for issuing evaluations. If you are in a regulated profession (for which a licence to practice or the equivalent is required), you need to approach the authority responsible for that profession. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education is the authority responsible for the teaching profession and issues qualified teacher status certificates. *The National Board of Health and Welfare* assesses completed foreign higher education courses within the 21 regulated health care and nursing professions (for example doctors and nurses) and issues licences to practice.

In addition, there are specific supplementary higher education courses that supplement the education of foreign graduates in order to help them establish themselves on the labour market. The government has given eight higher education institutions the special task of organising such courses. These are aimed predominantly at foreign teachers and doctors, nurses and dentists with a third-country qualification.

The county administrative boards are responsible for coordinating the reception of new arrivals, which now includes municipal courses in Swedish for immigrants and professional Swedish.