



Summary

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Higher vocational education – ambitions, governance and follow-up

Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited whether higher vocational education lives up to the Riksdag's intentions that higher vocational education programmes that meet the needs of working life are implemented, that they are of high quality and that central government support to them is effectively distributed. The overall conclusion is that higher vocational education largely lives up to the Riksdag's intentions, but that there are parts that can be developed.

Education programmes that meet the needs of working life are implemented

The participation of working life is central in assessing which programmes should be conducted in higher vocational education. It is required that higher vocational education programmes be designed and conducted in close collaboration with working life in order for them to receive central government grants. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education's quality assessment is designed in a way that supports quality development and assesses the effectiveness of cooperation between working life and education. Those who started higher vocational education in the period from 2010 to 2016 have a higher income and employment after completion of their programme. They also develop better than similar individuals who have not attended higher vocational education. However, this should be interpreted cautiously as it has not been possible to estimate the effects of a higher vocational education. Based on the overall observations made

during the audit, the Swedish NAO assesses that programmes in demand in the labour market are implemented.

Processing of applications to arrange programmes could be streamlined

The processing associated with applications to include a programme in higher vocational education and receive central government grants could be made more efficient and transparent. It is important for the processing of cases to be efficient, legally secure and independent. The decisions of the Agency must also be transparent so that it is possible to follow up what forms the basis of a decision. At present that can be difficult.

The Agency for Higher Vocational Education should develop its work regarding threats to independence and conflicts of interest.

The Agency for Higher Vocational Education awards central government grants, exercises supervision, collaborates with working life and advises education providers. There are thus several different areas where conflicts of interest may arise. It is therefore important to be clear how to deal with conflicts of interest and threats to independence. The Agency has an organisational division of its supervisory and grant-awarding operations in which the activities appear to be appropriately separated from each other. However, there is no clearly developed systematic work to counter threats to independence, nor a policy for more routine handling of potential conflicts of interest. Such work is important to ensure that there is no threat to independence or risk of conflict of interest in the Agency's operations.

The Government should investigate the conditions required for a common application system

The Agency for Higher Vocational Education works with several different strategies to ensure that the education appropriation is used effectively. For example, by working to prevent cancellation of programmes and taking measures to find replacements for students that drop out of the programme. Decisions on admission to higher vocational education are at present taken by each individual programme management group. The fact that the admission decision is made in close collaboration with working life is probably an important part of higher vocational education. The applications are administered by each individual provider. One consequence of the lack of a common system for applications is, for example, that a person can accept several places. This may be a contributory reason for empty places when programmes start. The Agency for Higher

Vocational Education has itself investigated this and raised the issue with the Government. The Agency proposes that the Government set up an inquiry tasked with investigating the conditions necessary for long-term development of a common system for handling applications for programmes in both higher vocational education and higher education, and as an alternative also investigate a common system for applications to higher vocational education. The Swedish NAO considers that some form of common system for application to higher vocational education should be investigated to determine whether this could be a step towards a more efficient use of resources.

Recommendations

Higher vocational education is undergoing major expansion. In light of the above conclusions, it is particularly important to have efficient and legally secure systems that can handle an increased load.

To the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education:

- Develop the processing in connection with applications to include a programme in higher vocational education and receive central government grants so that it becomes more efficient and ensures that decisions contain an explanatory statement of reasons.
- Ensure that there is no threat to independence or risk of conflict of interest in the Agency's operations.

To the Government:

- Investigate the conditions required for a common system for higher vocational education applications.