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7. SWEDISH CAREER GUIDANCE

History, Development and Dilemmas

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to give a descriptive and analytical overview of Swedish career guidance, its development, present situation, dilemmas and challenges. I start by giving a picture of what characterises Swedish career guidance, more specifically its' aims and organisation. Thereafter I will present a short description of the history and development of career guidance. The next section will focus on how career guidance has been evaluated and perceived by various and different interest groups and what goals it has achieved. Finally, I will reflect on Swedish career guidance and discuss its future.

THE CONTEXT FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN SWEDEN

In Sweden there is a longstanding consensus in politics concerning the positive effects of career guidance. This means that, despite economic cuts, career guidance has received a relatively steady allocation of funds over time. Various stakeholders, mainly politicians and representatives of trade and industry, have however on occasion criticised career guidance for not taking sufficient account of developments in the labour market and considering how skills can be matched to labour market opportunities (Stenberg, 2016; Svenskt näringsliv, 2016). In recent years there has been growing criticism of career guidance for failing to successfully match individuals to areas of skills shortage (OECD, 2016).

In order to better understand the Swedish career guidance system, one should also consider that Sweden has an official administration tradition that differs from many countries, even our Nordic neighbours (Statskontoret, 2000:20A). In Sweden, the departments or ministries are relatively small and are to a certain extent populated by civil servants appointed by the political parties that form the government. Under the ministries there are so called central government offices or departments consisting of non-political officials, whose task is inter alia to interpret and implement various policy decisions. This means that, for example, under the Ministry of Education there is a large organization called the Swedish National Agency for Education (in Swedish, Skolverket), which provide instructions, interpretation and commentary

on policy documents. Furthermore, they produce materials to help teachers and organise conferences.

Career guidance is seen as part of the welfare state, which means that state and local authorities finance the main part of the activities in education including career guidance and career education. Non-governmental activities, mainly aimed at adults, take place partly through trade unions (see Thomsen, Mariager-Anderson, & Rasmussen, Chapter 22, this volume) and, to a lesser extent, are delivered by private actors. Within the public employment service there are also some forms of guidance.

During the late 1980s, there was a radical change in the system of Swedish education. The new policy emphasised deregulation and decentralisation from central authorities to local authorities. The result was that a number of decisions regarding education were placed in the hands of the local authorities and the curriculum was more goal oriented than in the past. Today, in 2019, local authorities have a very strong and independent position as an employer of all school staff and also have responsibility for implementing the curriculum. However, the state still has a range of different control and evaluation instruments. The most important of these are the Swedish National Agency for Education and the School Inspectorate, which examine education in communities and schools and if necessary, require the local authorities to make changes (Trumberg, 2011).

Another change in the school system in the last decade is the strong emphasis on the concept of freedom of choice particularly in relation to educational choices. It means that for many young students the range of alternative possibilities have increased especially in the transition to upper secondary school. In the big cities there could be more than 1000 alternatives to choose from. Part of the concept of freedom of choice is linked to the emergence of independent, mainly private schools, and the right of students to apply for any upper secondary school without any geographical limitation (Trumberg, 2011). Parallel to this development the marketing of schools has increased significantly (Lundahl, 2014). Another change is an increased number of students applying for upper secondary school. In 2017 98% of students from secondary school applied to upper secondary school. As a result of these changes there is an increasing need for students to acquire, interpret and understand information about education programmes (SOU, 2019:4).

THE AIMS OF CAREER GUIDANCE IN SWEDEN

In Sweden, career guidance in the educational sector can be defined either broadly or narrowly (Lindh, 1997; Skolinspektionen, 2013; Skolverket, 2013). This division is now generally accepted by both career practitioners and teachers. In a newly published official report from the government these two concepts are replaced with the terms individual guidance and general guidance. The meaning of the concepts are however the same as before (SOU, 2019:4).

Career guidance in a broad sense (general guidance) refers to all of the activities aimed at students preparing and planning for their future. These activities include

career education, contact with working life, teacher-student interviews, information-giving, internet-based material, fairs concerning upper secondary schools, labour market days and workplace visits.

Career guidance in a narrow (individual) sense refers to the activities that career specialists are primarily responsible for. These are mainly different types of interviews carried out individually or in groups. Group guidance has been included in the narrow guidance because it had traditionally been done by career counsellors.

The general recommendations regarding career guidance describe it as a process where the students gradually develop their self-awareness and their knowledge of the surrounding society, particularly their knowledge of education, professions and the labour market. (General Recommendations, Skolverket, 2013). The concept of 'career management skills' (Sultana, 2012) has become an increasingly well used concept to describe the skills and knowledge that an individual should have in order to make 'well-informed choices'.

The curriculum specifies that the school should inform and counsel the students prior to them making decisions about their future education and vocational orientation. It also suggests that schools should pay special attention to opportunities for students with disabilities and support teachers' educational and vocational guidance efforts. (Lgr11, p. 17).

The National Agency for Education provides a more detailed description of how the work of career guidance can be conducted in their general recommendations. The aim is to satisfy the students' needs for educational and vocational guidance and this can, according to the recommendations, take place through three different interventions; career interviews, teaching and information giving. The former is the counsellor's sole responsibility, while teaching and information giving are shared responsibilities for both counsellors and teachers.

CAREER GUIDANCE IN THE COMPULSORY SCHOOL

A review of the development of career guidance, irrespective of the country described, often ends up in a tension between the needs of the individual and society's demands and opportunities (Watts, 1980). This has been the case in Sweden with different emphasis depending on the values and approaches of different time periods. From the 1900s until the 1950s, the goals emphasised the needs of society, but gradually the needs of the individual have increased in importance. The attitude towards career guidance in the first half of the 20th century is summarised by a governmental school investigation from 1940 which subordinates the needs of the individual to society.

More important than the individual's right to the desired education is society's need that workforces in various fields are filled in an appropriate way. (Lovén, 2015b, p. 135)

It was not until the introduction of the nine-year compulsory school in the early 1960s that a clearer individual need was raised in curricula and other policy

documents (Lovén, 2015b). Today, as mentioned, the concept freedom of choice has a strong position in politics as well as in the eyes of the public. Unlike many other countries, in Sweden, upper secondary school is a combined school form that covers both vocational and academic education.

The first guidance specialists within the Swedish school system were called vocational choice teachers and were social sciences teachers with a short further education in educational and vocational guidance. They worked within the 9-year-old compulsory school especially in grade 6–9. In the early 1970s a new system of so called SYO-consultants (SYO = study and vocational orientation), later called educational and vocational counsellors, was introduced in the education sector. Gradually the system of vocational choice teachers was abolished. The SYO consultants had and still have a three-year academic education, on a bachelor level. They worked in the 9-year compulsory schools primarily with students in grade 6 to 9, in upper secondary schools and in adult education.

Today it is this organisation that applies to the above-mentioned school levels. Since the beginning of the 1960s career guidance in a broad sense has been emphasised in every curriculum concerning the compulsory school. The message has been and still is that questions about education, working life and students' choice of future should be included in the schools' teaching and in all school subjects often called career teaching (NICE, 2016). Also work experience, so called 'pryo' (practical vocational orientation) was mandatory according to the curriculum. In the curriculum from 1994 and 2011 the requirement for working life experience disappeared, but several schools kept this activity. Recently the Swedish Parliament once again has decided on mandatory practical work experience. This must include at least two weeks in year eight or nine.

Compensatory Guidance

In the objectives formulated in the 1970s, there was also a strong emphasis on the so-called compensatory mode of work, aimed primarily at those students who, for various reasons, did not succeed in the school system. The idea was that career guidance would compensate for those shortcomings, but it did not clarify how this should happen. Lundahl and Nilsson (2009) summarise these ambitions.

They [the career counsellors] were expected to compensate for social, gender-related and geographical obstacles to the career choice process, and to provide a counterweight to influences (from media, friends and other factors) that could limit or bias young people's educational and vocational choices. They were also required to develop contacts with industry and other organisations related to working life. Against this background it was hardly surprising that several evaluations in the 1980s gave discouraging results and concluded that study and vocational guidance had not lived up to expectations. (Lundahl & Nilsson, 2009, p. 29)

The authors above also described the difficulties of living up to these high goals. In the beginning of the 1980s other researchers also pointed out the problem with these excessive goals and expectations (e.g. Franke-Wikberg & Jonsson, 1981). In the subsequent curricula from 1990 onwards, the number of regulations and rules greatly decreased, partly as a result of the transfer of responsibility to the local authorities as mentioned earlier. Today the Swedish objectives still emphasise the importance of broadening the perspectives but in only one short sentence: Everyone working in school should ‘contribute to the student’s choice of study and career choice not being restricted by gender or social or cultural background’ (Lgr11, part 2.6, author’s translation).

Overall the goal formulations in policy documents were shortened and now more briefly written;

... that the school should strive for each student to acquire sufficient knowledge and experience to make well-informed choices of continuing education and vocational training. (Lpo94, p. 10, author’s translation)

Responsibility for this endeavour would rest on all those who worked in school. (The National Agency for Education, 2009). This recurring theme of everyone’s responsibility for matters relating to the link between school and working life has, been part of all curricula and other documents since the beginning of the 1960s.

ADULT CAREER GUIDANCE – LESS DEVELOPED AND RESEARCHED

Adult career guidance in Sweden is characterised by a different perspective from career guidance with young people. Adults who seek guidance usually have a more complex life situation. Guidance may have to address people’s family situation, economics and lack of clarity about their futures. This requires adults to be supported to reflect on multiple levels. The term *lifelong guidance* is often used to describe how the individual’s choice can affect the whole life situation. In some cases, adult career guidance deals with the specific turning points which the individual faces. This may include dismissal from work, some kind of injury related to work or any kind of obstacles that limits the individual’s scope of action (Hallqvist, 2015). However, the turning point can be extended due to a difficult labour market or the individual’s need to complete education or acquire other skills. Such guidance may then extend over a longer period of time and be focused on creating a trustworthy and cooperative relationship with the client.

Adult guidance in Sweden is often linked to adult education of different kinds. The local authorities, which mainly finances the activities, employs both private and locally governed educational institutions. Even in the employment offices, different forms of education are sometimes linked to rehabilitation and/or transition activities.

Adult guidance has been researched to a lesser extent than guidance in the secondary and upper secondary schools. One explanation may be that the state has

invested more resources in youth education, especially in the field of educational and vocational guidance.

Swedish employment offices have had a strong position in terms of adult guidance. However, guidance within the employment offices has been considerably weaker since the 1980s. Before that vocational counsellors had a respectable position and their own in-service training (see e.g. Vestin, 1991). Most often, career guidance has been discussed in connection with transition and rehabilitation for jobseekers, but has been labelled with different occupational titles rather than career guidance. Throughout the years these different occupational titles have been named employment officers, advisors, administrators and coaches.

In 2018 the employment office published a new national strategy for career guidance (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2018). The overarching goal is that individuals should get good conditions to deal with career related questions. The same year a political compromise between several political parties made an agreement that the employment offices should be partly privatised next year. How this will be achieved and what implications it will be clearer in the autumn of 2019.

Even in universities and colleges, career guidance as a profession has had a less strong position until the 1990s. Often, the counsellors were subject specialists who chose to work with career guidance. Eventually, however, the number of counsellors with an education in career guidance has increased strongly, and today there are several universities which have developed career centres which have a broad and multifaceted career service.

THE PROFESSION

As part of their professional development career counsellors, especially in the educational sector, have since the 1970s strived for clarifying their professional working field and tried to describe their working responsibilities in a more structured way. Some of these were listed in a more detailed way in early documents from school authorities (see, for example, *Aktuellt från Skolöverstyrelsen* 72/73:55). The discussion of the professionalisation of counsellors was earlier and still is concerned with the question how career counsellors differ from other similar professional groups. In other words; what can career counsellors do that other groups cannot? During the 1980s, the counsellors increasingly focused on the narrow guidance (Fransson, 2001; Lovén, 2000), partly due to the difficulty of implementing career guidance in the broader understanding. During this time, interests in models and methods of personal guidance increased, both through the publication of method books, and through a comprehensive and extended career guidance education, a three year bachelor education. Today the need for a certification of career counsellors is high on the agenda both in the counsellors' trade unions and their interest groups.

EVALUATIONS OF SWEDISH CAREER GUIDANCE

In the following section I will present some of the evaluations concerning career guidance. Many of them, independent of time, have similar results especially concerning broad career guidance.

Broad Guidance: Everybody's Responsibility – Nobody's Responsibility.

As early as the late 1970s, the first evaluations showed that the goals for career guidance had little impact in school practice and that they were largely unknown to school leaders and teachers (Åsemar, 1985).

During the 1980s and 1990s several studies were published, (Borhagen & Lovén, 1989; Henrysson, 1994; Skolverket, 1997) which showed that the idea of everyone taking responsibility for career guidance in schools did not result in a substantial impact on daily teaching.

During the 21st century other investigations and research projects (National Agency for Education, 2005; Lundahl & Nilsson, 2010; SOU, 2002:120) were conducted and came to similar conclusions to the earlier studies. Skolinspektionen (2013) also concluded that in spite of the guidelines in curriculum many schools did not work proactively to counteract the limitations in student's educational and vocational choice based on gender, social and cultural background. The same study also underlined that the approach of viewing career guidance as a responsibility for everybody in school was given a low priority and usually resulted in nobody taking responsibility.

Due to lack of control and lack of responsibility from the principals and local authorities, the individual counsellor was left alone trying to realise the curriculum's intentions. (Skolinspektionen, 2013, p. 30, author's translation)

Furthermore, it was pointed out that guidance as a process where students gradually gain knowledge of themselves and the outside world did not occur to the extent intended in the formal target documents. Instead most Swedish career guidance was conducted at transition points in young peoples and adults career development (Dresch & Lovén, 2010; Skolinspektionen 2013; UbU, 2017/18:RFR24). More specifically guidance was given between various educational levels, between education and the labour market, and between various positions in working life.

What has happened to guidance, primarily in the broad sense, in primary and secondary schools is that the activities are prioritised neither by the local school authorities nor the responsible persons in the local school, usually the principals (Skolinspektionen, 2013). Evaluations and different types of quality assurance have rarely been carried out at a local level, and therefore representatives of the local authorities have had no insight as to how career guidance in a broad sense is actually carried out in the local schools.

33 out of 34 principals do not make sure there are systems and procedures for planning, monitoring and evaluating the goals for study and career guidance. (Skolinspektionen, 2013, p. 29, author's translation)

The report summarises this in the following:

The result of the shortcomings in career guidance causes the students in their choice of upper secondary school to rely on their own networks. This, in turn, means an increased risk that social patterns will be reproduced in students' choice of both education and their life choices. (Skolinspektionen, 2013, p. 8)

The Department of Education published an overview of career guidance in schools in 2018 (UbU, 2017/18:RFR24). The report underlined the results from earlier studies, noting that there was often nobody responsible for schools' career guidance provision and that it was poorly governed.

A recently published report (Olofsson, Lovén, & Delier, 2017) based on case studies in three local communities, discusses the requirements which should be fulfilled in order to improve career guidance provision in schools. The report identifies important stakeholders and actors as follows:

1. Decision-makers, including political representatives, managers and school leaders.
2. Executives, comprising of school leaders, study and career counsellors and teachers and educators.
3. Resources, covering local and regional working life and employment offices.
4. Recipients, consisting of students and parents.

According to the report an important success factor is that all of these levels are involved and that the first three levels (decision-makers, executives and resources) feel responsible for the various actions needed to deliver career guidance. They conclude that in the case studies usually one or two levels are involved but never all of them.

The shortcomings of career guidance in Swedish schools and its' consequences for the labour market have also been noted by the OECD in two studies (OECD, 2016, 2018). Among other things, the OECD emphasises the importance of developing career guidance in comprehensive school, so that students' choice of upper secondary education is based more on labour market demand than is the case today.

Although more than 50 years have passed through different curricula, it can be concluded that the same issues and shortcomings of broad guidance have been pointed out in a large number of reports and investigations.

Narrow Guidance

The majority of studies have over the years shown that students generally appreciate 'narrow' career guidance (Borhagen & Lovén, 1991; Lindh, 1997; Lovén, 2000;

Lundahl 2010; National Agency of Education, 1997). Where shortcomings have been identified they generally relate to unclear communication and to difficulties in broaden the student's perspectives (Lovén, 2000; Lundahl, 2010). The students also express that they have not been given sufficient information about education and the labour market (Lundahl, Lovén, Holm, Lindblad, & Rolfsman, 2020; Skolverket, 2014).

Several of the studies have examined the students' satisfaction with career guidance, while significantly fewer studies have examined the long-term effects of guidance. In the School Inspectorate's study (2013) there are some critical points that concern the work of the counsellors. It is pointed out that many students (37% in the questionnaire) did not feel prepared for the guidance that they had received. In addition, only 28% say they have a clear picture of the different upper secondary school programs that are available. The students also demanded more and earlier guidance and more information about the labour market.

Need for a Comprehensive ICT-System

Several reports have also pointed out that students' self-knowledge is not adequately investigated (Lundahl, 2010; Skolverket, 1995). Instead greater emphasis has been placed on the transmission of information, though without sufficient ICT support (Dresch & Lovén, 2010). Both the EU Lifelong Learning Memorandum (2000) and the OECD (2004) highlighted the importance of developing knowledge about how ICT can be used to make guidance more accessible in both time and space. Traditionally, however, the guidance programs have focused on interviews that take place in the "traditional room" (face to face) and have not highlighted the possibilities that exist in the use of web-based choice support and/or in the use of social media within guidance (see also Jochumsen, Chapter 19, this volume; Kettunen, 2017; Kettunen, Lindberg, Nygaard, & Kardal, Chapter 11, this volume). Sweden has not yet invested in a coherent ICT system, and thus the field has been free to different commercial actors (SOU, 2019:4).

CONCLUSIONS

The above description of Swedish career guidance shows that it had and has a strong focus on secondary and upper secondary school and is mainly focused on a student-centred approach in the form of student interviews and of presenting information in classrooms or through other channels (UbU, 2017/18:RFR24). This 'narrow' approach has been appreciated by the students, while the 'broad' guidance approach, with its focus on career education and the idea that career guidance should be everyone's responsibility has been criticised in evaluations.

Weaknesses in the system can be seen as a result of lofty goals set out in the curriculum without any thoughtful follow-up. Another factor is the lack of

knowledge amongst those who should be responsible for leading and delivering the broad guidance.

Additionally, the motivation to fulfil these goals among teachers and school leaders are low as well as uncertainties about how, when and who shall be responsible for teaching these issues. Most of teachers have not received any training or education in careers during their teacher education (SOU, 2019:4, pp. 235–236). In most schools there are no plans for how career education should be carried out, so the entire area of guidance in a broader sense rests upon the shoulders of the individual career counsellor (Lovén, 2015a; Skolinspektionen, 2013; UbU, 2017/18RFR24). The counsellors and their trade unions have also underlined that the resources are so small that the career counsellors cannot perform their duties effectively. Furthermore, some of them have to divide their services between two or three schools (Lärarnas riksförbund, 2017).

In other words, the interest and dedication has been low from the people responsible, (both principals and local school authorities) which as a consequence has resulted in isolated career counsellors who lack the mandate to implement the approach set out in the curriculum. Despite several reports and investigations no action has been taken at national level to address the shortcomings that could lead to a higher goal achievement.

This problem was among other things the basis for the national guidance study (SOU, 2019:4). The directives from the government were clear¹:

- analyse how the teaching and competence of teachers can be developed within career guidance and the field of working life knowledge
- analyse how the role of the career counselor can be strengthened and more integrated in school (SOU, 2019:4, author's translation).

I started this chapter with a statement that there is a consensus among policymakers that career guidance is an important part in young students' transitions to working life. This may sound strange and contradictory in light of the results in research. One explanation for this is that for many politicians it's good enough that there is some sort of career guidance in schools. The details of its delivery are of minor interest especially when they are not mandatory. In recent years, however, criticism of guidance has increased (see, for example, figures representing various parties in Almedalen 2016 and 2017²) have expressed concerns that students take little account of the needs of the labour market and that the number of students applying for vocational studies has decreased while there is a great demand for skilled workers in many areas.

So, What Can We Do?

It's easy to be pessimistic when you read this article. In many ways Swedish career guidance is far away from the goals and guidelines decided by parliament, especially

the goal that career education should be a responsibility for all teachers. Here it is important to realise that the guidelines are not mandatory and that local authorities make their own understanding and interpretation. In some cases they do not even know the guidelines. The important thing for local policymakers is that career guidance meets the guidelines that exist and is delivered in an effective way.

As noted above career guidance in several respects is appreciated by the individuals using it, e.g. students get the information they ask for and most of them appreciate their interviews with career counsellors. There are also some good examples of career education (Lovén, 2015a) even if many of these are dependent on a few extremely committed persons (Lundahl et al., in press).

Some Proposals to Go Forward ...

The shortcomings described above, are important, and one of the reasons for the former mentioned study (SOU, 2019:4). The now completed study contains a number of new proposals and regulations. Among these are a clearer goal formulation and more emphasis on the teachers' role in career education. Another proposal is that every local authority should have a yearly plan for how to implement and work with career guidance. More radical and challenging is the proposal, mentioned above, that a new subject called Future Choice should be a part of the secondary school (see Røise, Chapter 18, this volume, for a parallel example in Norway). This subject is intended to be handled by the career counsellors with assistance from different teachers. Many reports (see above) have underlined the local head teachers' responsibility as an important key to move forward towards higher goal fulfilment. This also includes both the local politicians and administrators. On top of that many teachers' lack commitment, often caused by insufficient insight and knowledge in the field of career guidance.

Based on the Nordic experiences (see Boelskifte Skovhus, 2017), it can be concluded that the conditions for a successful career guidance in a broad sense can increase if a subject like Future Choice is introduced. However, this will require both a coherent structure and training for the teachers who will carry out the teaching of the subject.

Counsellors can play an important part by not focusing exclusively on narrow guidance and instead working more with guidance in a broad sense. It can be noted though, that working with guidance in the broad sense can be a challenging task as some counsellors have an unclear role in the curriculum. This means that they occasionally have to ask the ordinary teacher for teaching time in the classroom (SOU, 2019:4). Also, some counsellors may not be comfortable with teaching in classroom, while others consider it quite natural to enter the class rooms.

Career counsellors are therefore a key factor in the necessary changes that have to be done in order to reach a stronger goal fulfilment. To succeed with this task the counsellors need support from both head teachers and local authorities including the politicians and representatives from local businesses and working life.

The opposite may be a continuation of the situation today. Still there will be good initiatives by career counsellors and enthusiastic teachers but in the long run they will lose tempo and power. It's sad but that is what we have had the last decades (see Lundahl et al., in press). One consequence could be that counsellors choose a survival strategy where they focus narrowly on individual career guidance and the combination of career education and career guidance activities would be status quo or even decline.

What Can We Learn?

Is Sweden unique or is this description of career guidance a pattern in many countries? Based on research it seems as if many countries are struggling with similar problems. Sweet (2004) concludes with reference to research in 37 countries that:

There is a large gap between the ways that career guidance is organised and delivered on the one hand and some important public-policy goals on the other. Narrowing this gap will require countries to make extensive changes to service delivery and also to training and qualification arrangements. (Sweet, 2004, p. 101)

Summarising the Swedish example can be made in six short points and hopefully the Swedish example can give some ideas to learn from:

1. Goals are not enough especially when they are written as guidelines. The goals have to be connected with a clear and structured strategy.
2. Head teachers have to be interested and motivated to develop a comprehensive program of career guidance.
3. There is a need for dedicated trained teachers who want to work with career teaching.
4. Politicians must have a will to support the development of career guidance in schools.
5. Representatives from working life must be willing and motivated to support career guidance.

Career counsellors with a professional training must be aware and able to deal with many different demands in career guidance.

The Road Is Open ...

So, the answer to the future of Swedish career guidance lies in many hands. On a national level in the hands of parliament and different stakeholders such as employment organisations and trade unions and on a local level in the hands of head teachers, local politicians and career counsellors. They can each contribute to a change but best of all would be a shared effort where they all move in the same direction towards better career guidance in Sweden.

NOTES

- ¹ I have chosen the two most relevant directives.
- ² Almedalen at the island of Gotland is a Swedish meeting place for stakeholders like politicians, civil servants, representatives from employers, trade unions, think tanks etc. During a week there are workshops, political speeches, debates and all covered by media from TV, radio and newspapers.

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