

Summary

Education is one of the most important factors for young people's future opportunities. Young people who have dropped out of, or never started, upper secondary education often find themselves in a very vulnerable position. Young people who lack upper secondary education risk unemployment and a range of other destructive factors in both the short and the long term. Assisting young people under the age of 20 who are outside upper secondary education is therefore highly important for both individuals and society. Each year, about 30 000 young people drop out of upper secondary education and some 2 000 never start. A young person may drop out of upper secondary education for various reasons, for example, to start working, travel abroad or start some other form of education. However, follow-up shows that in any given year, some 17 000 young people aged 16–19 are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

The terms of reference from the Government instruct the Inquiry to undertake a review of the municipal responsibility to be informed about young people under the age of 20 who are not undergoing and have not completed upper secondary education. The Inquiry is also required to take a position on whether the division of responsibilities between central and local (municipal) government regarding measures for young people who are not in employment, education or training needs to be clarified. If necessary, the Inquiry is to propose legislative amendments and, if deemed appropriate, present other proposals on means of improving the assistance provided to the target group of young people who are not in employment, education or training.

NEETs' needs

In many cases, young people who are not in employment, education or training are in a complicated situation. They often have a background of social problems and educational failure. Such backgrounds in many cases lead to poor self-esteem and difficulty in dealing with simple everyday activities. A large proportion of these people were born abroad, and this group includes recent arrivals in Sweden. Mental disabilities are common. The target group therefore has special needs for flexible, individually adapted and in some cases long-term measures.

The measures needed by these young people have certain shared features, such as a need for organised daily activities with an educational or work-like content. The adults around them should be sensitive and listen to their needs, while maintaining high expectations and clearly defined requirements. The target group is not one that finds it easy to navigate among the large variety of activities and complicated regulations. Being socially connected with other young people in the same situation has been underlined as an important factor. For some young people, activities physically separated from school have also been emphasised. Years of setbacks and failure take time to work through. In many cases, the measures provided must be allowed to take time. It is a matter of building up self-confidence and self-esteem. A short or incomplete period of schooling in another country also poses special demands on the measures to be taken.

Municipal responsibility needs to be clarified

Municipalities are currently required to keep themselves informed about young people who are not in upper secondary school and are under the age of 20, so as to be able to offer them appropriate individual measures. This is known as the 'municipal responsibility to be informed'. However, municipalities differ widely in how they choose to organise and implement their responsibility for young people beyond compulsory school age. Experience shows that there are considerable differences in how municipalities keep themselves informed about young people's occupations and the measures they are offered. Far too many young people are without an occupation and too much time is allowed to pass before they are

reached and offered support. Central government has been unclear about its level of ambition. Clearer legislation is required to ensure that young people receive the support and assistance they need to return to education or some other occupation.

Central government needs better tools

Young people also have priority in central government labour market policy. The objective is to help young people to quickly obtain work or return to mainstream education. The young people need organised full-day activities. The measures taken by central government for the very youngest group are considered inadequate. For example, this group (young people aged 16–17) lacks access to a broad range of labour market policy measures. Furthermore, financial benefits for participating in labour market policy measures are not available to them, which makes it difficult to motivate them. In addition, central government labour market policy measures for the target group as a whole are too focused on individual jobseeking and matching. It is also problematic that far too long a time generally passes before some form of work experience or other labour market policy programme becomes available to young people who lack upper secondary education and who in general are in great need of support in order to move forward in work or education.

Lack of knowledge about methods and effects

There is a lack of evaluations providing knowledge about the impact of measures targeting young people covered by the municipal responsibility for young people under the age of 20 who are beyond compulsory school age. Although the measures are evaluated, the methods used do not make it possible to compare the effects. This knowledge gap also applies to central government labour market policy measures addressed to this target group. The lack of impact studies is a general phenomenon in the labour market policy area. More evidence-based knowledge is needed both about the methods that best help young people to return to education, and about the assistance they need most to improve their prospects of obtaining work in the future. Measures to support

young people who drop out of or never start upper secondary education should be carried out anyway, despite the lack of systematic knowledge. The available knowledge about young people's marginalisation and exclusion should guide any decision to offer advanced measures to young people who are not in employment, education or training.

The conditions for follow-up and evaluation need to be improved. Better local follow-up is needed, in which measures are systematically documented and which can be used for both local and national analyses. Such a development will pave the way for future research and knowledge development.

The Inquiry's proposals

Clarification of responsibility for young people beyond compulsory school age but under the age of 20 – from a responsibility to be informed to a responsibility to act

Clarification of municipal responsibility for young people beyond compulsory school age but under the age of 20

Municipalities are currently required to keep themselves informed about young people beyond compulsory school age but under the age of 20 who are not undergoing and have not completed upper secondary education. The purpose is to be able to offer these young people measures that will strengthen their prospects of returning to education or moving on into work. This responsibility is not clearly regulated at present. The Inquiry therefore proposes several clarifications.

The municipal 'responsibility to be informed' will be renamed 'responsibility to act'. This will clarify the municipality's responsibility to be active in reaching out to young people and taking measures to assist them. In addition, the Inquiry proposes that the home municipality be required to work in an organised way. Since organised procedures depend on documentation, a requirement for written documentation will be introduced. Further, it will be made clear that municipalities have a continuous, year-round responsibility to reach out to and keep themselves informed about young people beyond compulsory school age but below the age of 20 who are not undergoing and have not completed upper secondary education. It is also made clear that the home muni-

unicipality is to ensure that the young person is offered appropriate individual measures. The primary purpose of such measures is to encourage the young person to resume education. If the young person cannot be induced to resume education, the municipality must ensure that the young person makes contact with the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen).

The Inquiry also proposes that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Statens Skolinspektion) be instructed to conduct a special review of how the municipalities are taking their responsibility one year after the changes have been brought in.

Better information about pupils at risk of dropping out of school

For the home municipality to be able to meet its responsibility to act, it is important that the municipality is able to take necessary measures quickly. When a young person drops out of upper secondary school, the time that passes before the young person is contacted by the municipality with an offer under the responsibility to act must be as short as possible. A high level of absence from school is an indicator of a higher risk that a person will later drop out of school. The home municipality needs better opportunities to identify at an early stage which individuals it may need to take responsibility for. The Inquiry therefore proposes that when a pupil at an upper secondary school managed by a body other than the home municipality has a significant level of absence without valid reason, the managing body will be required to inform the home municipality promptly of this fact. This proposal will put the home municipality in a better position to quickly contact the young person and assist them in completing their education or offer other appropriate measures.

Study and vocational guidance services to pay attention to pupils in the risk zone

Study and vocational guidance has a key role in informing and guiding pupils ahead of study and vocational choices. Pupils who do not begin or complete upper secondary education risk having greater difficulty entering the labour market, which also limits their possibilities of making other types of active choices in life. Study

and vocational guidance therefore has a particularly important role with regard to pupils in the risk zone for dropping out of school. To emphasise the responsibility of study and vocational guidance services for these pupils, the Inquiry proposes an additional clause in the provisions on study and vocational guidance in the curricula for compulsory school, compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities, special needs school and upper secondary school. The Inquiry proposes that study and vocational guidance services be given a special responsibility to pay attention to the situation of pupils who risk dropping out of school.

Clarifying the purpose of a tailored course of studies

The primary purpose of a tailored course of studies is to offer a solution that creates enabling conditions for pupils who would otherwise have great difficulty in learning from their education and preventing such pupils from completely stopping attending school. The Inquiry considers there is a need to clarify the purpose of a tailored course of studies. It must be clear that the purpose of a tailored course of studies is for the pupil to complete compulsory school education and go on to education at upper secondary school level.

More central government labour market policy measures from age 16

Organised full-day activities needed

Young people under the age of 20 who are not undergoing and have not completed upper secondary education do not receive the organised full-day activities they need from the Swedish Public Employment Service. Young people's activity level in labour market policy programmes should increase. Therefore, a deeper analysis of the activities of the Swedish Public Employment Service is needed with a view to taking measures to ensure that it succeeds in its task in accordance with the intentions of the regulations.

Young people aged 16–17 to have access to more early measures on the part of the Swedish Public Employment Service

Young people not in upper secondary school need a great deal of help to strengthen their position in the labour market. At present, the very youngest (those aged 16–17) only have access to enhanced employment service support, the job guarantee for young people and the temporary initiative for folk high school courses aimed at encouraging study. From the age of 18, young people have access to more labour market policy programmes, which means there are greater opportunities to support this older category through early measures from the Swedish Public Employment Service. The youngest category needs better access to early and swift measures from the Swedish Public Employment Service. The Inquiry therefore proposes that the Swedish Public Employment Service broaden its services by offering 16–17-year-olds access to more early labour market policy programmes.

Introducing state development allowance for 16–17-year-olds participating in labour market policy programmes

The Inquiry proposes that young people aged 16–17 be entitled to development allowance when they take part in a labour market policy programme to which they have been assigned by the Swedish Public Employment Service. The lack of financial compensation has proved to be a difficulty in attempts to encourage the very youngest category to be active and take part in measures. Active participation must be rewarded. Under the current regulations, it is only possible to receive development allowance for participation in labour market policy measures from the age of 18. In view of this, the Inquiry proposes that young people aged 16–17 should be entitled to development allowance, just as older young people are. The level of the development allowance should be the same as young people aged 18 or over receive until and including the first six months of the year in which they turn 20, which is SEK 48 per day.

Allowing agreements on labour market policy measures between the Swedish Public Employment Service and municipalities

The Inquiry proposes that the Swedish Public Employment Service be allowed to enter into an agreement with a municipality on the provision of measures in cases where the Service has been unable to find another appropriate actor. Since 2008, for two priority groups – newly arrived immigrants and young people with disabilities – the Swedish Public Employment Service has had the option of cooperating with municipalities outside the job and development guarantee and the job guarantee for young people. The Inquiry proposes that young people covered by the municipal responsibility to act prescribed by the Education Act should be another such target group.

Improved national and local follow-up

Introducing a requirement for local registers

At present there is a lack of information about both the scope and the substance of work under the municipal responsibility for young people beyond compulsory school age but under the age of 20 (the responsibility to be informed). The Inquiry also notes that there is a lack of information about both the substance and the impact of municipal measures for these young people. The Inquiry therefore proposes that home municipalities be obliged to establish registers of the young people covered by the responsibility to act prescribed by the Education Act. A continuous responsibility to be informed covering more than one individual presupposes that the information is collected systematically in a set structure. A register is therefore necessary to give municipalities a continuous overview of the young people concerned and the measures in which they are participating. It will also reveal how the municipalities are complying with the intentions of the law. A register requirement will also clarify the obligation of the municipalities to work in an organised way.

National statistics for monitoring and analysis

The Inquiry also notes that there is a lack of national-level information about both the substance and the impact of municipal measures for young people. National monitoring of young people not in upper secondary school must improve. A first step towards increased information is to systematically collect data on the target group and the measures offered to young people. The Inquiry proposes that the Swedish National Agency for Education be instructed to collect annual data on young people not in upper secondary school from home municipalities. The national data collection and statistics should be based on data from the local registers. The instructions to the Agency should also include the task of publishing regular reports on the national statistics in the area.

Financial consequences of the proposals

The Inquiry's proposals will lead to increased costs for both central and local government. The proposals may entail increased costs to central government of between SEK 24 million and SEK 48 million per year. The increased costs will mainly be for labour market policy activities due to an anticipated increased volume of early programme activities and development allowance for 16–17-year-olds. For the local government (municipal) sector, the proposals may entail increased costs of between SEK 2 million and SEK 7 million per year. The financial consequences for the municipal sector mainly derive from the proposals for mandatory written documentation. The costs described apply for when the changes have taken full effect in activities and services. The Inquiry proposes that the increased costs be financed by appropriations.

Entry into force and transitional provisions

It is proposed that the Inquiry's proposed legislative amendments enter into force on 1 July 2014. Transitional provisions are not deemed necessary.