Chapter 2. Strengthening collaboration and consolidation of vocational education and training provision in Sweden

Swedish vocational education and training (VET) is relatively decentralised and market driven with public and private providers competing for students. Chapter 2 shows that in this context, schools and school owners have weak incentives to collaborate in planning the provision of VET. In international comparison, Swedish upper-secondary schools offering VET programmes cater to few VET students. The chapter argues that to better match VET provision to labour market needs and to make the system more effective, Sweden may introduce measures that foster collaboration across schools and encourage concentration of provision in fewer institutions. The proposed measures should span the youth and adult sector and apply to all schools with VET provision, including public and independent schools.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Introduction: Background

In Sweden, tension has emerged in recent years between different policy objectives bearing on vocational education and training (VET) schools and their owners. VET schools are granted a substantial amount of autonomy, while remaining accountable for their results. A market in upper-secondary education (including VET) has allowed many for-profit VET schools to emerge. An over-arching issue is the relatively small size of VET schools in Sweden, relative to international counterparts. This introduction describes these developments, while the following sections discuss how they have imposed conflicting pressures on the VET school network, and how they can be addressed.

Governance in VET

Successful VET systems include a range of models. Olivier (2010[1]) argues that a well-managed VET system is efficient, responds well to student and employer needs, is easy to access and navigate and is open to change and reform. The governance of vocational education and training is demanding, not least because it needs to involve employers and usually also unions, as well as VET providers. Governance needs to take into account how VET policy responsibilities are distributed across national, regional, local or school level, and how other bodies and stakeholders that influence VET policy interact and cooperate (Oliver, 2010[1]).

Local autonomy and accountability in OECD school systems

Many countries have increased school autonomy, balanced by accountability

Since the early 1980s, many school systems, such as those in Australia, Canada, Finland, Hong Kong (China), Israel, Singapore, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, have granted localities and individual schools greater autonomy in relation to decisions about curricula and resource allocation (OECD, 2016[2]). These reforms were driven by the idea that individual schools, and their leaders, are better-placed than more remote central authorities to identify local requirements and learning needs, and therefore determine how they might best be met. It is also accepted that local autonomy needs to be balanced by effective accountability systems that challenge local actors to demonstrate that they are meeting locally defined needs (OECD, 2016[2]). Accountability measures seek to ensure that all students, independently of where they live and which school they attend, receive education meeting quality standards.

The same balance between autonomy and accountability applies to VET schools

These arguments for a balance between autonomy and accountability also apply to VET systems, but they are also modified by the need for VET programmes to prepare for occupations, as well to offer general education. The level of local autonomy and national supervision can vary largely across countries, ranging from models with great institutional autonomy such as in the United States, to systems with a high level of national or regional guidance and control. Sometimes, a national (or regional) level body maintains responsibility for those aspects of VET that have an impact on the labour market (e.g. occupational qualifications).

Autonomy and accountability in Swedish VET provision

In Sweden, the owners of VET schools decide on many aspects of VET

The Swedish education system, including that related to VET, is relatively decentralised. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 shows that at lower secondary level, Swedish schools have one of the highest levels of autonomy among OECD countries (OECD, 2017[3]) These findings are an indicator of how things work at upper-secondary level as similar rules in terms of school autonomy apply to upper-secondary education. Municipalities, as the owners of most VET schools, have full employer responsibility for all school staff, allocation of resources between different parts of the school system, school organisation and adult education, developing, following up and evaluating their own activities, and continuous professional development for staff (Ministry of Education, 2015[4]).

The Swedish government steers and oversees VET policy

Despite decentralisation, all schools (owned by independent and public authorities) are run according to the prescriptions of the Education Act. Goals for upper-secondary VET are set nationally, while localities decide how these objectives and goals should be reached. Within a nationally defined curriculum, schools choose which courses to offer to meet local and regional needs (Equavet, 2018[5]). Measures of quality are also defined nationally and all upper-secondary schools are evaluated by the Swedish School Inspectorate. Other national requirements define funding rules and requirements for teachers.

Markets in education

Market models are intended to increase choice and drive quality improvements

In market approaches, a range of education providers, including both public and private entities, and schools compete for students. The market is intended to enlarge the choice of educational options available to parents and students and encourage more efficient provision. In some systems, schools compete for public funding through their capacity to attract students. Direct public funding of independently managed institutions, based on student enrolments or student credit-hours, is one model for this. Public funding can cover all tuition costs with no fees for students, as in Sweden, or can cover only part of the cost with students paying the reminder. In many countries, some or all privately run schools receive no subsidies from the government and rely entirely on tuition fees paid by students.

Many countries have partial markets in VET provision

Provision of VET by private providers differs by country. In Switzerland the formal upper-secondary VET system is largely run by the public sector, while the post-secondary VET and VET for adults are dominated by private institutions (OECD, 2016[6]; Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education, 2014[7]). In the Netherlands, VET programmes offered by private providers that are accredited by the ministry are fully funded with public money (Eurydice, 2018[8]). In Norway, the overwhelming majority of upper-secondary VET students are enrolled in public institutions. In 2017/18, only 8% of all upper-secondary students were in privately run institutions (vibli.no, 2018[9]). Privately run schools in Norway receive public money but can charge some tuition fees.

In Finland, 60% of vocational institutions are maintained by local authorities, joint municipal authorities and the State. Upper-secondary VET institutions maintained by private organisations account for 40% of the market and enrol around 20% of students (Koukku and Paronen, 2016[10]), mainly in specialised and adult vocational programmes. When these sectors are excluded, the privately run institutions account only for 25% of the upper-secondary VET institutions (Stenstrom and Virolainen, 2014[11]). Funding criteria are uniform irrespective of ownership. The Finnish education ministry grants authorisations to VET providers, defining the fields of education in which they are allowed to provide education and training and their total student numbers. Within this framework VET providers choose specified fields of vocational education in which they offer study programmes and qualifications (Koukku and Paronen, 2016[10]).

The introduction of markets in VET can be challenging

Some countries, such as England and Australia are heavily reliant on private providers in VET (Field, 2018[12]). Evidence from these countries urges some caution with a market approach. In Australia, there is a long-established market in the provision of post-secondary VET, with public and private providers competing for public money. Recent reforms, particularly in some states, have further encouraged the growth of the private sector. These reforms aim at increasing the number of VET participants, improve access to post-secondary education, and boost student choice. However, the reforms also created a system that is complex and difficult to understand for students, and where quality varies greatly across providers (OECD, 2017[13]; Hurst, 2015[14]).

Markets in education in Sweden

Private and public providers compete in upper-secondary education in Sweden

The market in the Swedish upper-secondary school system, including VET, involves the following elements: 1) accredited independent education providers can freely compete for students; 2) students have a far-reaching right to choose between the different education providers' offerings; 3) students' choices determine the allocation of financial resources between schools; and 4) there are no tuition fees (Skolverket, 2012[15]).

Independent schools are run by private entities but are publicly funded

Independent upper-secondary schools are funded through a voucher system which funds schools according to the number of students enrolled. The amount of funding per student and criteria according to which the funding is allocated are roughly the same for municipal and independent schools. Permission to start an independent school is issued by the School Inspectorate and is given on the condition that the school follows the nationally provided syllabus and teaches the same democratic values as schools run by the municipalities (Skolinspektionen, 2015[16]). The majority of upper-secondary students in independent schools attend schools run by for-profit companies (Skolverket, 2014[17]).

The independent sector has remained relatively stable over time

In 2013/14, 27 % of upper-secondary VET students were enrolled in independent schools, rising to 29% in 2017/18. In 2013, around one in three upper-secondary schools were independently run (Skolverket, 2014[18]; Skolverket, 2012[19]).

The gap in resources for education has widened across municipalities

Upper-secondary providers include both the municipalities that run most public sector schools, and the private companies that own and run most independent schools (Skolverket, 2014[17]). Municipalities are obliged to provide compulsory and upper-secondary education to all young people and low educated adults, placing them in a very different situation from independent providers. Evaluations show that larger municipalities tend to attract more students than small ones (i.e. after taking account of the fact that they have larger catchment populations) (Skolverket, 2012[15]). Since there are economies of scale in provision, the unit cost of education in municipalities losing out in the competition tends to rise (presumably because of the fixed cost of half empty buildings, staff that need to be paid, etc.). The end result is that differences in unit expenditure (expenditure per student year) has increased across municipalities (Skolverket, 2012[15]).

The challenge: Small average size of VET schools with weak co-operation between them

How the size of VET schools is defined

The term "VET schools" designates schools offering VET programmes recognising that most of the upper-secondary schools in Sweden offer both VET and higher education preparatory programmes. The size of the VET school, as discussed in this report, refers to the number of students enrolled in the VET programmes by institution.

Swedish schools might concentrate the provision of VET programmes if they obtain economies of scale

Swedish schools enrol fewer VET students on average in comparison to other countries, sometimes ten times fewer than, for example, some Finnish schools. Given economies of scale, the small size of schools increases the cost of VET provision in some programmes and increases the risk that students will follow a programme that is not adequately linked to their career interest. As a first step towards consolidation of the school network, collaboration across VET providers and VET schools could be improved, recognising that competition among VET providers and VET schools for students tends, inevitably, to discourage collaboration. Sweden might therefore improve both efficiency and the match between VET provision and labour market needs by, in the short term, promoting collaboration among VET providers and VET schools, and, in the longer term by rationalising the network of VET schools to increase the average size of VET schools.

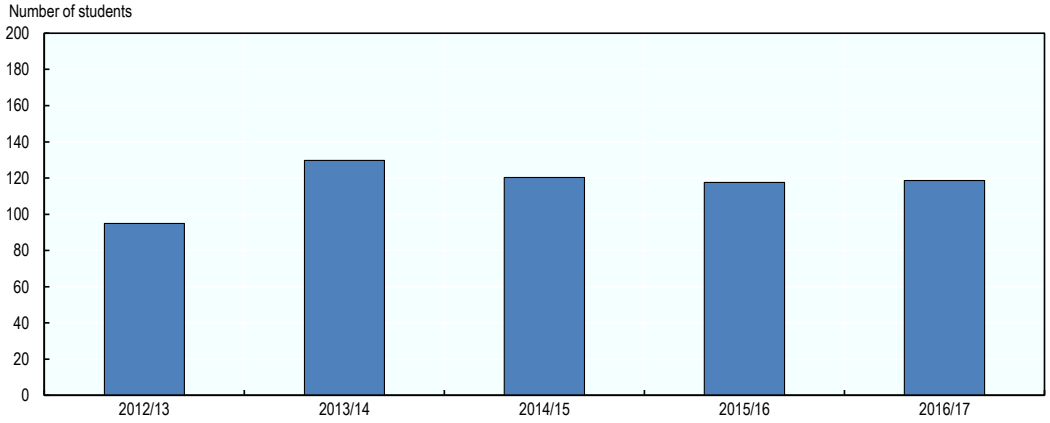
Other countries maintain much larger VET schools than Sweden

By the standards of other European countries, Swedish VET schools are very small, with average enrolments per school at around 100 pupils (Figure 2.1). This compares, for example, to a system like that in the Netherlands where many VET upper secondary schools enrol several thousand pupils. Differences of this order of magnitude are associated with a totally different capacity to address highly specialised technical areas with dedicated staff, and to purchase the very expensive equipment associated with these specialities. In Sweden, in 2017 there were 1 313 upper-secondary schools, of which 794 provided vocational programmes (Skolverket, 2017[20]). In the Netherlands, with nearly twice Sweden's population, there are 43 regional multisectoral VET colleges (*regionale opleidingscentra*), 12 specialist trade colleges specific for a branch of industry

(*vakscholen*:), 11 agricultural training centres (*agrarische opleidingscentra*) and one school for people with disabilities in hearing, language and communication (Smulders, Cox and Westerhuis, 2016[21]). Like Sweden, in France and Finland the majority of young VET students are enrolled in school-based programmes. In Finland, 96 vocational institutions enrol on average more than thousand students (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018[22]). In recent years the government has further encouraged schools to consolidate. The French VET system, on the contrary, is characterised by a large number of institutions. In 2016, a VET school (*Lycée Professionel*) enrolled 300 students on average (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2017[23]). But a study by the Court of Auditors judged the system as inefficient. It recommended an increase the size of institutions and a review of the funding mechanisms that currently favour small schools (Cour des Comptes, 2015[24]).

Figure 2.1. How big are VET schools in Sweden?

Average number of VET students by school



Source: Adapted from Skolverket (2017[20]), *Accounting for Government Assignments*; Ministry of Education (2018[25]), *Review of VET in Sweden. Background Report*.

StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933927476

There is no definition of the perfect size for a VET provider or a VET school

Sometimes, consolidation may increase efficiency – similar or higher quality services are offered at a lower price. The efficiency gains from economies of scale may be set against some clear losses, such as longer travel times for school students. Across many countries, school mergers are often desirable, but rarely popular. As a first step towards consolidation, stronger co-operation between providers and schools may be encouraged.

Many countries have concentrated their VET provision and promoted collaboration

While Denmark, Estonia and Finland show some similarities with Sweden in their VET systems, provision in the three countries is much more institutionally concentrated than in Sweden. This reflects a trend in all three countries towards institutional consolidation, with a series of mergers leading to a considerable reduction in the number of institutions (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Consolidation of VET provision in Denmark, Finland and Estonia

Denmark

In recent years, the trend has been towards institutional consolidation, with a series of mergers leading to a considerable reduction in the number of VET institutions. Remaining institutions are larger and can offer students a greater choice of programmes. Currently in Denmark there are around 90 technical colleges offering upper-secondary education. Upper-secondary VET programmes are divided in two parts: a basic programme that is predominantly college based, and a main programme during which students alternate work placement with college education. The basic programme aims to equip students with general skills (e.g. in mathematics, Danish, English) and broad vocational skills. In addition to upper-secondary VET programmes these institutions also offer higher technical and commercial examinations, programmes combining upper-secondary academic and VET education and adult vocational courses. They can provide short-cycle higher education programmes and courses for enterprises in collaboration with higher education institutions (Andersen and Kruse, 2016[26]).

Finland

Finland has encouraged mergers of VET institutions, so during the period 2005-2017 the number of vocational institutions decreased from 182 to 96, while enrolment only dropped by 2%, so that institution size increased dramatically. In 2005, there were 60 institutions with less than 300 students, falling to 28 in 2013. A similar trend was observed in adult education, where the number of providers nearly halved between 2005-2017 (Koukku and Paronen, 2016[10]; Stenstrom and Virolainen, 2014[11]; Official Statistics of Finland, 2018[22]). In parallel, the Finnish government has strongly encouraged institutions and other stakeholders to co-operate and network.

Estonia

To increase the quality and efficiency of VET in Estonia, many small providers were merged into regional VET centres offering a wide range of qualifications. Adjustments will continue in line with demographic trends (Cedefop, 2017[27]).

Source: Andersen, O. and K. Kruse (2016[26]), "Vocational education and training in Europe – Denmark.", *Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe Reports;*, www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/denmark-vet-europe-country-report-2016; Cedefop (2017[27]), *Vocational Education and Training in Estonia: Short Description*, www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4155; Koukku, A. and P. Paronen (2016[10]), "Vocational education and training in Europe: Finland", *Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe Reports*, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_FI.pdf; Official Statistics of Finland (2018[22]), *Providers of Education and Educational Institutions 2017*, http://www.stat.fi/til/kjarj/2017/kjarj_2017_2018-02-13_tie_001_en.html; Stenstrom, M. and M. Virolainen (2014[11]), *The Current State and Challenges of Vocational Education and Training in Finland* http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A66853.

Insufficient collaboration has been recognised as a challenge

When VET schools are small, as in Sweden, the need for collaboration increases, so that equipment, facilities and specialist expertise can all be shared. Such collaboration means that the potential inefficiencies arising from small schools are mitigated. Such collaboration, on occasion, may also be a very effective precursor to merger, sometimes allowing existing buildings and sites of delivery to be retained. There are some good

Swedish examples of effective collaboration across providers in the area of VET (e.g. in the Göteborg region). However, in other parts of the country co-ordination is less common (Skolverket, 2017[28]; OECD, 2016[29]).

Despite incentives for co-operation in adult education, large differences in the level of co-operation at the regional level remain

To promote a wider range of adult VET courses, since 2016 the government has rewarded collaboration in planning the provision of adult VET across municipalities with grants. The co-operation should involve at least three municipalities and cover a range of bodies providing services for adults, such as municipalities and Public Employment Services (Ministry of Education, 2018[25]). A study evaluating the initiative one year after its introduction shows that matching provision of education to regional demand for labour is challenging (Skolverket, 2017[28]). Local employers felt that they were often unable to communicate their needs at the regional level, and that municipalities were concentrating too much of their attention on training in the health sector, where municipalities are the major employer. (Two-thirds of the adult VET participants are enrolled in health and social care courses). The study also reports wide variations in the level of co-operation at the regional level (Skolverket, 2017[28]).

New structures have been created but their impact remains limited

Regional Competence Platforms (*Regionalt utvecklingsansvariga*) are bodies run by regions that are expected to evaluate the regional demand for skills and the corresponding educational offer, and to foster regional co-operation. But the scope and outcomes of the Platforms vary across regions, and their impact on planning provision of VET seems to be limited (OECD, 2016[29]).

A National Commission of Inquiry has been set up to examine the issues of co-ordination and consolidation of VET provision

The National Commission of Inquiry on dimensioning of upper-secondary education for youth and adults is exploring how provision might be steered and co-ordinated at a regional level and how this level could be reinforced.

Policy options

- As a first step, collaboration between VET schools should be encouraged. Collaboration may cover diverse options, including sharing facilities and teachers, helping with the work-based learning component of programmes, offering specialist training to students from other schools lacking relevant teaching expertise, collective engagement with the social partners and other matters. Collaboration efforts may build on some existing initiatives, such as branch schools.
- To improve the match between the provision of VET and labour market needs, social partners should be part of this process and be able to convey their needs. Currently the provision is heavily driven by students' preferences and schools competing for students, and less so by labour market needs.
- As a second step, in programmes where economies of scale can be reached VET schools should be merged to create larger institutions, drawing on the positive

experience of many other countries that have consolidated their VET school systems. In practice it would mean that VET programmes would be offered in fewer schools and the schools with VET provision would enrol a larger number of VET students. Consolidation would not prevent schools from offering VET and Higher Education Preparatory Programmes.

- Funding incentives may be necessary to encourage and reward collaboration, and sometimes mergers, when the effect is to improve the quality of provision.
- These policy options, as well as options discussed in other chapters of this report, should apply to all VET schools, including schools run by private and public providers. Including independently run schools into this process may be a challenge. But excluding them would result in different arrangements for different providers, which would contribute to unfair competition and would discourage collaboration. This would be highly undesirable. The proposed policy options should apply to VET for youth and adults, so as different provisions complement each other. Such co-ordination of provision would allow to offer a more diverse range of courses and programmes and better address individual and local labour market needs. This is consistent with the mandate of the National Commission of Inquiry on dimensioning of upper-secondary education that focuses both on upper-secondary system for youth and adult education.

Policy arguments and implementation

This section discusses the benefits to Sweden of consolidation in VET provision. It argues that co-operation across VET providers and schools would help address some negative consequences associated with a large number of small VET schools. It also suggests how Sweden may successfully consolidate its VET system drawing on existing initiatives.

Sweden would benefit from consolidation of VET provision

VET school consolidation, through a decrease in the number of schools and increase in their average enrolment, may have some benefits, but the consolidation would need to be handled carefully to avoid undesirable effects.

Benefit 1: Larger schools can lower the cost of provision

Provision of some types of VET programme is very expensive, given the cost of equipment and the need for small groups for practical demonstrations, so the cost of good quality provision is particularly high for small schools, where class sizes are small, or where unexpected fluctuations in student numbers mean that some teachers and workshops cannot be easily redeployed. For this reason, VET providers (municipalities or private providers), and especially those with many schools attracting few students, may curtail the offer of expensive VET programmes and privilege programmes that are cheaper to offer, because they are more classroom-based or because they do not require expensive equipment. Industry representatives in Sweden have already expressed concern that some VET programmes are under-provided in some regions (Skolverket, 2015[30]).

Economies of scale are more salient in VET than in general education

By concentrating provision, the cost of providing VET programmes could be lowered and/or quality improved, as the fixed cost associated with running a VET programme is,

within reason, independent of the number of students. For example, if there are three schools in the area offering a similar VET programme, all three schools have to equip workshops and hire VET teachers to run the programme, sometimes in very small classes. Sharing the teachers and workshops either through collaboration between schools, or through actual school mergers, would therefore yield efficiencies. While there may also be economies of scale in general education, the need for equipment and a high level of specialisation mean that these economies of scale are more salient in the context of VET.

Benefit 2: It can better match labour market needs

Providers and schools competing for students favour programmes that are popular with young people. While there might be an overlap between student preferences and labour market needs, evidence shows that the current situation leads to a mismatch in provision and demand for skills. A recent OECD study evaluating skills mismatches in Sweden argues that the current system favours short-sighted and uncoordinated approaches to education and training at the local level resulting in skills imbalances (OECD, 2016[29]). Chapter 3 suggests that the introduction of the mandatory work placement, in principle reflecting employers' needs, could improve the match but currently only some schools evaluate the availability of relevant work places when planning the provision (Skolverket, 2016[31]).

Benefit 3: Larger VET schools can help to address teacher shortages

Economies of scale also apply to teaching staff, particularly in the occupational fields which are less common. Concentration of VET programmes in larger institutions may therefore alleviate VET teachers' shortages that are expected to worsen in the future. It is estimated that the demand for qualified VET teachers will exceed the supply by over 30% by 2035 (Skolverket and ReferNet Sweden, 2016[32]).

Benefit 4: Larger VET schools may facilitate the involvement of social partners at the local level

In Sweden, every VET school is expected to establish collaboration with the social partners through Local Programme Councils. Social partners' involvement is also sought by other sectors such as higher VET, adult VET and VET for people with disabilities, further increasing the expectations on social partners. Such a large number of interlocutors makes it nearly impossible to establish meaningful collaboration with each institution, and individual schools may therefore only realise very patchy collaboration. Larger schools would mean that social partners' involvement could be focused more meaningfully on collaborative endeavours.

Benefit 5: A more consolidated system may improve attractiveness of VET

Larger VET schools could become regional VET hubs, with high quality equipment and strong support of social partners. The Finnish example is instructive: extensive consolidation in the VET school network has been associated with increased enrolment in VET.

Co-operation across various stakeholders minimises the side-effects of larger schools

It has been suggested that consolidation can damage teacher morale and make for a more impersonal school environment (Ares Abalde, 2014[33]). With these risks in mind, following school mergers teachers may need to be supported to improve co-operation and to take advantage of the better professional development opportunities that emerge in larger schools. Sometimes larger schools mean longer travel times for students, and long travel times are associated with motivation and drop out problems (Ares Abalde, 2014[33]), though this may be less of a factor in upper-secondary schools with older students. Inevitably, consolidation tends to have the biggest impact on travel times in rural and sparsely populated areas, such as in northern Sweden. Conversely, consolidation may also mean that students in more rural areas attend a large well-equipped school, of a type previously only found in urban areas. Co-operation across various stakeholders, including stronger collaboration across providers, would help to minimise these potential side effects.

In Sweden, consolidating VET schools would create implementation challenges

In Sweden, even decreasing the number of VET institutions by half would result in an average school size of around 250 students, less than in most other countries. As the school network is gradually consolidated, additional support measures would be necessary. For example, Finland encourages institutions to network and collaborate to minimise the negative consequences of the consolidation (Eurydice, 2018[34]). The section below discusses how consolidation might best be managed. Consolidation of VET provision in the adult sector, while challenging, should be easier to implement than in VET for youth. In adult education, municipalities keep the sole responsibility for provision of VET courses.[1] By comparison, in VET for youth the provider landscape is more complex as the provision is defined by municipalities and private providers. Municipalities are also not obliged to take into account students' choice when defining the provision of courses for adults. As argued below, student choice that drives the mix of provision in VET for youth and its associated funding discourage schools from collaboration. School specialisation and systematic use of standards would support consolidation.

Schools specialisation would be linked to consolidation

Specialisation of schools, focusing provision on just one field of study, such as health care, has many advantages and would be a natural part of the consolidation process. This could draw on experience with the recently introduced branch schools (*branschskola*) pilot scheme. Many young students are reluctant to change schools. The branch school pilot is meant to provide more insight on this topic. One option is for students to start their upper-secondary VET programme in their local school with an emphasis on more general education and training, and then move to a more specialised VET school in their second or third year. This would reduce the potential problems associated with younger students moving far from home and spending long hours on commuting, or having to live away from home.

Box 2.2. Branch schools in Sweden

In 2018, a pilot exercise was launched, designating ten schools as branch schools, offering specialised VET programmes in sectors and areas where provision is inadequate to meet labour market demand, either because there are not enough students applying for these programmes, or the cost of provision is too high for regular VET schools. VET schools can apply for state grants to send their students for at least six weeks to a branch school participating in the pilot (Skolverket, 2018[35]), obtaining the part of their education and training that cannot be provided in the local school. An advantage of this approach is that students can receive most of their education and training in local schools and attend the more remote institution only for more specialised education and training. If successful this initiative could be scaled up, with smaller and more costly specialisations concentrated in a small number of institutions.

Source: Skolverket (2018[35]), *Statsbidrag för försöksverksamhet med branschskola 2018 - Skolverket*, www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statsbidrag/statsbidrag-for-forsoksverksamhet-med-branschskola-2018.

Co-ordination across VET for youths and adults would allow to better match individual and local labour market needs

The government has already introduced financial incentives promoting collaboration across municipalities in planning the provision of VET for adults. The next step would be to encourage and build co-ordination of provision not only within specific parts of the system but also across its different elements, including VET for adults and youth. Co-ordination across youth and adult VET is one of the issues examined by the National Commission of Inquiry on the dimensioning of upper-secondary system. Co-ordination of VET provision across different parts of the system would enable the provision of a diverse range of courses and programmes and better respond to the skill needs of individuals and demand for skills from the local labour market.

Lack of co-operation contributes to fragmentation

A number of recent reports have argued for a more collaborative approach to VET provision in Sweden, whereby the number of training places in any specific VET programme and their geographic location would be determined by VET stakeholders collectively in the light both of labour market needs and student demand. The National Commission notes that the lack of co-ordination and joint planning among providers may have resulted in inefficient use of resources, shortages of VET programmes in some areas, and skills mismatch (Regeringskansliet, 2018[36]). An OECD study of skills mismatches argues that strengthening co-operation in educational planning at the local level would help to consolidate provision and maximise the benefits from investment in education (OECD, 2016[29]).

Existing initiatives go in the right direction but are not sufficient

Some features of the current system such as the way in which unconstrained student choice drives the mix of provision, and how school competition for students and associated funding tends to discourage collaboration between schools, would need to be addressed. Existing initiatives, such as those which aim at enhancing collaboration, are not sufficient to offset the effect. Co-operation should therefore be encouraged more vigorously, for example by linking it to school evaluation and funding criteria. Involvement of social partners in regional planning should be mandatory and their perspective should be taken into account in defining VET programmes on offer.

Note

[1] However, municipalities may procure education from private providers and students are free to choose among different institutions.

References

Andersen, O. and K. Kruse (2016), "Vocational education and training in Europe – Denmark.", *Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe Reports*, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/denmark-vet-europe-country-report-2016. [26]

Ares Abalde, M. (2014), "School size policies: A literature review", *OECD Education Working Paper*, No. 106, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxt472ddkjl-en. [33]

Cedefop (2017), *Vocational Education and Training in Estonia: Short Description*, Luxembourg: Publications Office, Luxembourg, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4155. [27]

Cour des Comptes (2015), *Le Coût du Lycée: Rapport Public Thématique.*, https://www.ccomptes.fr/sites/default/files/EzPublish/20150929-rapport-thematique-cout-lycee.pdf. [24]

Equavet (2018), "Using a school's programme council to identify the needs of the local labour market", https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/Case-Studies/Sweden-Using-a-school%E2%80%99s-programme-council-to-ide/Sweden-2 (accessed on 17 July 2018). [5]

Eurydice (2018), "Finland. Organisation of vocational and technical upper secondary education", https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-vocational-and-technical-upper-secondary-education_en (accessed on 2 August 2018). [34]

Eurydice (2018), "Organisation of vocational upper secondary education (MBO)", https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-vocational-secondary-education-mbo-0_en (accessed on 27 August 2018). [8]

Field, S. (2018), *The Missing Middle: Higher Technical Education in England*, Gatsby Charitable Foundation, London, http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/the-missing-middle-higher-technical-education-in-england.pdf. [12]

Hurst, D. (2015), "Crackdown on alleged unscrupulous vocational education providers", *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/oct/14/crackdown-alleged-unscrupulous-vocational-education-providers (accessed on 13 July 2018). [14]

Koukku, A. and P. Paronen (2016), "Vocational education and training in Europe: Finland", *Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe Reports*, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_FI.pdf. [10]

Ministère de l'éducation nationale (2017), *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche*, http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/2017/82/7/depp-rers-2017-etablissements-maj-dec-2017_861827.pdf. [23]

Ministry of Education (2018), *Review of VET in Sweden. Background Report*. [25]

Ministry of Education (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools (School Resources Review). Country Background Report: Sweden*, http://www.oecd.org/education/school/CBR_OECD_SRR_SE-FINAL.pdf. [4]

OECD (2017), *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281110-en. [13]

OECD (2017), *PISA 2015 Assessment and Analytical Framework: Science, Reading, Mathematics, Financial Literacy and Collaborative Problem Solving*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281820-en. [3]

OECD (2016), *Getting Skills Right: Sweden*, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264265479-en. [29]

OECD (2016), *Low-Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How To Help Them Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264250246-en. [6]

OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en. [2]

Official Statistics of Finland (2018), *Providers of Education and Educational Institutions 2017*, Statistics Finland, Helsinki, http://www.stat.fi/til/kjarj/2017/kjarj_2017_2018-02-13_tie_001_en.html (accessed on 22 June 2018). [22]

Oliver, D. (2010), "Complexity in vocational education and training governance", *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 5/3, pp. 261-273, http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2010.5.3.261. [1]

Regeringskansliet (2018), *Planering och dimensionering av gymnasial utbildning*, https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/kommittedirektiv/2018/03/dir.-201817. [36]

Skolinspektionen (2015), "The Swedish Schools Inspectorate in brief", http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/getattachment/51a6c9d1-d59a-415a-bbdb-79f50fe2d1be (accessed on 17 July 2018). [16]

Skolverket (2018), *Statsbidrag för försöksverksamhet med branschskola 2018 - Skolverket*, https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statsbidrag/statsbidrag-for-forsoksverksamhet-med-branschskola-2018 (accessed on 25 July 2018). [35]

Skolverket (2017), *Accounting for Government Assignments*, Skolverket. [20]

Skolverket (2017), "Regionalt yrkesvux. UPPFÖLJNING 2017, Rapport Dokumentdatum: 2018-05-30 Dnr: 2017:294", https://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publikationer/sok?_xurl_=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FBlob%2Fpdf3957.pdf%3Fk%3D3957 (accessed on 12 June 2018). [28]

Skolverket (2016), *Det arbetsplatsförlagda lärandet på gymnasieskolans yrkesprogram*, https://www.skolverket.se/sitevision/proxy/om-oss/publikationer-och-nyhetsbrev/sok-publikationer/svid12_5dfee44715d35a5cdfa2899/55935574/wtpub/ws/skolbok/wpubext/trycksak/Blob/pdf3643.pdf?k=3643 (accessed on 17 July 2018). [31]

Skolverket (2015), *An Assessment of the Situation in the Swedish School System 2015*, Skolverket, Stockholm, https://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak/in-english/publication/2.5845?_xurl_=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FBlob%2Fpdf3551.pdf%3Fk%3D3551 (accessed on 4 June 2018). [30]

Skolverket (2014), *Gymnasieskolan - Elevstatistik 2013/14*, https://siris.skolverket.se/reports/rwservlet?cmdkey=common&geo=1&report=gy_elever&p_ar=2013&p_lankod=&p_kommunkod=&p_skolkod=&p_hmantyp=05&p_hmankod=&p_sub=&p_inriktning=0&p_visahmt=1&p_flik=G&p_programkod= (accessed on 10 September 2018). [18]

Skolverket (2014), *Private Actors in Preschools and Schools A Mapping of Independent Education Providers and Owners in Sweden. Report 410*, Swedish National Agency for Education, Stockholm, https://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=3356 (accessed on 12 June 2018). [17]

Skolverket (2012), *Gymnasieskolan - Elevstatistik 2011/12*, https://siris.skolverket.se/reports/rwservlet?cmdkey=common&geo=1&report=gy_elever&p_ar=2011&p_lankod=&p_kommunkod=&p_skolkod=&p_hmantyp=05&p_hmankod=&p_sub=&p_inriktning=0&p_visahmt=1&p_flik=G&p_programkod= (accessed on 6 September 2018). [19]

Skolverket (2012), "Mapping the School Market Synthesis of the Swedish National Agency for Education's school market projects SKOLVERKETS AKTUELLA ANALYSER 2012", https://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publikationer/visa-enskild-publikation?_xurl_=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FBlob%2Fpdf2946.pdf%3Fk%3D2946 (accessed on 4 June 2018). [15]

Skolverket and ReferNet Sweden (2016), "Vocational education and training in Europe - Sweden", *Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe Reports*, https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_SE.pdf. [32]

Smulders, H., A. Cox and A. Westerhuis (2016), "Vocational education and training in Europe: Netherlands", *Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe Reports*, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_NL.pdf. [21]

Stenstrom, M. and M. Virolainen (2014), *The Current State and Challenges of Vocational Education and Training in Finland*, Nord-VET, Roskilde University, Roskilde, http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A66853. [11]

Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education (2014), *Swiss Education Report 2014*, http://skbf-csre.ch/fileadmin/files/pdf/bildungsmonitoring/Swiss_Education_Report_2014.pdf. [7]

vibli.no (2018), *Friskoler – frittstående skoler med rett til statstilskudd | Videregående opplæring - vilbli.no*, https://www.vilbli.no/nb/nb/no/friskoler-frittstande-skoler-med-rett-til-statstilskudd/a/025484 (accessed on 27 August 2018). [9]