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Introduction to an English-language version of ArbetSam materials

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This material (the teacher's guide, the managers' guide, the adapted CEFR and the training programmes for reflective discussion leaders and language advocates) has been developed over the course of the past 10-15 years through a series of learning projects focused on adult social care in the Stockholm region of Sweden. It necessarily starts from and reflects the laws, regulations, traditions, attitudes and circumstances prevailing in adult social care and education in Sweden. To help make this context clear, the following offers a brief outline of how elderly care, adult education and language learning for migrants works in Sweden.

Adult social care and adult education in Sweden

Sweden is divided into 290 local authorities, each with tax-setting powers. These local authorities are responsible for providing adult social care, while central government enacts laws, regulates and inspects and contributes some supplementary funding.

Elderly care

In Sweden, adult social care is 'collectively funded by taxpayers' and 'available according to need, rather than ability to pay' (Government Act 1997/98: 113 s 1). In 1998, the Swedish parliament confirmed that elderly care would continue to be publicly funded to ensure it did not become stratified by social class. Presently, almost all elderly care is publicly funded.

To access care services, the elderly person, with the help of relatives or a local government officer, makes an application to the local authority. Applications are assessed by local government officials, care assessors, who decide what services the elderly are entitled to. The local authority's decision can be appealed if the applicant is not satisfied. Care services are provided either by directly employed local authority care staff or by private or voluntary-sector care providers, commissioned by the local authority.

Workforce planning and development in adult social care

The adult social care sector in Sweden employs a workforce of some 200,000 people. This workforce includes a range of professional roles such as nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, but the majority of employees work in support roles as care workers or auxiliary nurses (i.e. healthcare assistants).

Professional roles require staff to hold appropriate qualifications and undertake continuing professional development. These skills are developed and maintained through higher education programmes delivered in universities.

For support staff, there is an upper secondary school national health and social care programme delivered through post-compulsory school and college-based education. Social care employers are encouraged, but not required, to recruit staff with qualifications gained through this programme. Although the government's quality assurance system requires employers to ensure that support staff have whatever competence their role requires, compliance by employers is not monitored.

Demographic change and workforce projections

Demand for care workers varies across Sweden. Many of ArbetSam's participants were recruited between ten and 15 years ago, at a time of severe staffing shortages in the Stockholm area. Similar pressures are expected now over the next two decades, as the proportion of Swedish people aged 80 and over increases significantly, due partly to the large number of people born in the 1940s and partly to the rise in life expectancy. Between 2020 and 2030, there will be 45% more people aged 80 older. Over the period 2010 to 2050, it is anticipated that the elderly care workforce will need to expand by up to 75%.

In addition to increased recruitment pressure for employers, care staff themselves will require different and higher skills than currently. In Sweden today the care professions are dominated by women born in the 1940s and 1950s. Today and tomorrow's women have different career expectations regarding salary, job impact and self-development. In addition, they are much more likely to move between employers and even occupations during the course of their working life. The sector will need to become a much more competitive employer, offering more attractive workplaces with more engaging tasks, progression opportunities, better wages and full-time work. It will also need to recruit more men.

At the same time, the numbers of young people entering the workforce are declining. According to some estimates, the number of high school students will fall by over 100 000, a fall of almost a quarter, within the next ten years. This, combined with rising career aspirations, is likely to mean substantially fewer enrolments by young people on the national health and social care programme. There will be a corresponding need to attract adult recruits, including significant numbers of migrant workers, into the sector. In these circumstances, adult vocational education and Swedish language training will be even more essential to ensure quality and dignity in elderly care.

Learning and development in the adult social care workplace

Employers who want to upskill support staff may send them to local authority-funded adult education for national health and social care programme courses. Likewise, individual workers may take these courses for career development.

Courses on the national health and social care programme are delivered by occupationally competent teachers employed by the learning provider. Courses are classroom-based and teachers typically have no contact with learners' workplaces.

Workplace training for support staff is typically limited to statutory and mandatory training: fire training, health and safety, moving and positioning and such like. This training is delivered either by a member of staff or an external learning provider.

Care employers tend not to employ in-house training managers.

Adult education in Sweden

There is a well-established culture of self-organised adult learning in Sweden, dating back to the 19th century, based on voluntary study associations and study circles (many established by organisations such as churches, the temperance movement, political parties and so on). This voluntary-sector provision has a particular focus on social inclusion and learning for adults with limited formal

education. Such voluntary sector, community-based adult education is designated as 'non-formal adult education'. Well over a million people participate annually in non-formal adult education.

Local authority adult education

In the late 1960s, a local authority-based, publicly-funded system of adult education was introduced. This publicly-funded system is referred to as 'formal adult education'. About 200,000 participate in it annually.

This 'formal', local authority-funded provision aims to enable adults to study for national qualifications at the post-compulsory upper secondary school level, including vocational qualifications in areas such as health and social care. (National, upper secondary qualifications represent the main route into non-graduate level work for young people in Sweden.)

It has also provided a vehicle for the state to deliver labour market training to combat unemployment, assist in retraining and adaptation of the Swedish workforce to economic changes, to support full employment.

Local authority provision is free for those entitled to it, but, due to major cuts implemented since 2008 following a reduction of 25% in central government subsidy, there is now some shortage of places. By law, those with the lowest educational level have priority.

As with elderly care, while local authorities are legally required to ensure the provision of this type of adult education, they have the option of providing it directly themselves or commissioning it from outside providers (who may be voluntary sector organisations or private companies).

SFI: Swedish for immigrants

Swedish for immigrants or SFI (*Svenskundervisning för invandrare* in Swedish) is national Swedish language learning programme offered free to any migrant (excluding Norwegians and Danes), registered with the local authority, aged 16 and over who lack basic knowledge of Swedish¹. SFI takes learners from complete beginner to CEFR level B1 (Independent Speaker: Threshold or pre-intermediate). Learners are entitled to SFI classes for as long as they meet SFI criteria (for some learners this equates to a number of months, for others several years).

SFI was instituted in 1965 in response to a significant influx of migrant workers with the equipping the migrants with enough basic Swedish to cope in Swedish society. Existing study associations were funded to deliver the programme until 1986, when responsibility for provision was transferred to local authorities (moving it, in effect, from the 'non-formal' system to the 'formal'). SFI now constitutes a discrete strand of local authority provision, subject to national quality standards², and, again, may be directly provided by the local authority or commissioned from external providers.

Studying in SFI is voluntary for the individual and migrants are under no legal obligation to participate. However, local authorities may require newly arrived migrants to participate in order to receive financial assistance. It is relatively common for learners to leave the programme early if they

¹ Education Act, chapter 22, section 13 (re who is entitled to participate) Skollag (2010:800). 2010-06-23

² Förordning (1997:702) om kvalitetsredovisning inom skolväsendet m.m. (national regulation of quality assessment in the school system)

find employment. This is one reason why participants in SpråkSam and ArbetSam may not have completed the SFI programme.

Translating a project

ArbetSam involved seven local authorities and five private care providers. The teachers who worked on the project came from formal local authority adult education, but their work has been funded through the European Social Fund. ArbetSam was consciously designed to contribute to the further development of adult education and to ensure that the project results were as transferrable as possible.

We have translated the material developed during ArbetSam to make our learning available to others. Of course, for this translated material to be useful elsewhere it must be adapted to whatever conditions prevail locally. We would emphasize that the adapted European language scale (CEFR) applies only to the requirements in Sweden. But we hope that the processes we have described and the approach we have taken can provide a welcome stimulus for development in other countries.