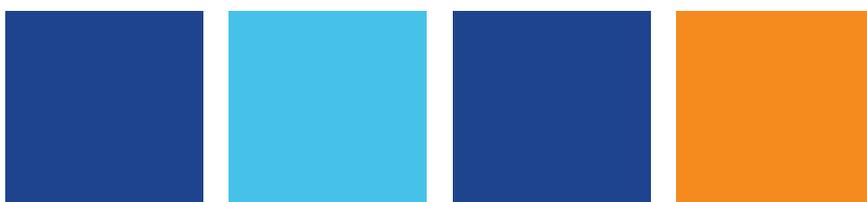

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY
IN APPRENTICESHIPS: FOCUS
ON LONG-TERM MOBILITY
SWEDEN



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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

There are 12 national IVET programmes in upper secondary education in Sweden. An apprenticeship pathway has been operating since 2011 ⁽¹⁾ as a pathway to a vocational diploma. In this article, we will focus on IVET-apprentices that enter upper secondary education before they turn 20 years of age ⁽²⁾ since that is the only formally defined group of apprentices in the legislation. The Education Act ⁽³⁾ states that more than half of the time of the education needs to be work-based for apprentices. An apprentice also needs a tripartite contract regulating the division of responsibilities between the education provider, the workplace and the learner. It is possible to organise municipal adult education with more than half of the time the form of apprentices, but there is not a regulated pathway in the legislation and consequently no clear definition of adult IVET-apprentices. Providers of higher vocational education also are required to provide work-based learning, but the apprentice term is reserved for learners in upper secondary education for the youth. Neither are the continuing education or training schemes included that regulate time needed to be fully trained in some sectors. These schemes are regulated by collective agreements and although in Swedish the term 'company apprentices' (*företagslärling*) is used, the schemes are not regulated by the state.

In contrast to the VET-systems in which the responsibility for the vocational learning is located in the workplace or with a chamber, Swedish apprenticeships are organised by an education provider which is wholly responsible for ensuring that students receive a full qualification as defined by a completed upper secondary education. The education provider is also responsible for organising the work-based learning. Companies do not select students for in-company training in the school based pathway, nor apprentices, and the education provider must therefore scale the provision in relation to the expected number of possible in-company training positions and thus the terms of the companies. Companies taking on

⁽¹⁾ A pilot was operating between 2008 and 2011.

⁽²⁾ Work-based learning can also be included in adult IVET education, but the extent to which it should be included is not regulated in the legislation. There are, however, state grants available for adult apprentice-based education if 70% of the time is work based in IVET. The same courses and learning outcomes are used in IVET education for adults as for young people, but adult education is more flexible and built solely on courses rather than programmes.

⁽³⁾ The Education Act (2010:800).

students for in-company training or apprentices receive state grants through the school for each student and a subsidy if they have qualified workplace trainers.

Since its inception in 2011, the proportion of apprentices has grown from 1 340 and 3,2% of the age cohort to 12 400 and 12% ⁽⁴⁾ of all IVET students in 2018/19. Almost one quarter of apprentices are in the building and construction programme (*bygg- och anläggningsprogrammet*).

The reform in 2011 introduced more vocational content into the VET programmes, and the qualification standards are defined by the diploma goals for a completed upper secondary VET programme. Although one objective of the reform was to make upper secondary students ready for employment after graduation, many sectors, such as the building and construction sector, require that additional learning takes place after graduation ⁽⁵⁾.

Only a few long-term mobilities have been granted funding ⁽⁶⁾: in 2018, funding for 48 individuals was approved; and in 2019, approval has so far been granted for 30. These mobilities received 15.6% of the Swedish Erasmus budget for 2018, and 7% of the budget for 2019. Most long-term mobilities involve graduates from upper secondary VET and take place during the summer recess.

(4) https://siris.skolverket.se/siris/sitevision_doc.getFile?p_id=548309 [accessed 02.07.2019]

(5) These forms of learning are often called 'company apprentices' in Sweden (*företagslärling*) but they cannot be considered as "apprenticeship" for the purpose of this article, so they will not be analysed. They are regulated through collective agreements between the social partners, and vary depending on sector. In most cases, the graduated student is employed, and the collective agreement specifies the salary and the time needed to complete the education as a 'company apprentice' in order to become fully trained and receive a full salary. In some cases, the 'company apprenticeship' leads to a certificate, but the education tends to be defined by time spent rather than learning outcomes. In the case of construction, a 'company apprentice' should, according to the collective agreement, work and learn for another 1 900 hours after completing upper secondary education.

(6) Since there is no centralised data on how WBL (both apprenticeship and school-based pathways) is organised, the only data available on the funding of mobilities is through programmes like Erasmus+.

CHAPTER 2.

Exogenous factors influencing mobility of apprentices at upper secondary level

2.1. Economic sectors and actors

Sweden has a long and successful industrial tradition and is an export-dependent country that competes in a global market. A characteristic feature of Swedish working life is that many professions are skills-intensive, requiring constant upskilling and life-long learning. A highly skilled workforce is a necessary prerequisite in order for Swedish industries to be competitive in a global market.

Although most people in the private sector are self-employed or work in small companies, there are several large global companies ⁽⁷⁾ that were founded in Sweden and have a large share of their production in the country. Some of these companies also run their own schools as a means of ensuring skills supply. One example is the bearing manufacturer SKF ⁽⁸⁾, which runs its own VET school ⁽⁹⁾ and has the ambition that all its students graduate; that all its students who want to work in Sweden or abroad gain the knowledge and competence to do so, and that all its students who desire such can study at higher levels in Sweden or abroad. The school was awarded 'The Erasmus+ actor of the year' in 2018 ⁽¹⁰⁾, an award aimed at highlighting best practice cases of education providers that actively work to integrate mobilities and WBL. Due to its global nature, SKF has the network to organise work-based learning abroad, but does not offer long term mobility periods. Similar arrangements are offered by Volvogymnasiet ⁽¹¹⁾, owned by Volvo,

(7) 99.4% of all companies in Sweden have fewer than 50 employees. Although only 0.1% of all companies have more than 250 employees, these companies employ more than one million people. The other 0.5 in companies with 50 and 250 employees. <https://www.ekonomifakta.se/fakta/foretagande/naringslivet/naringslivets-struktur/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

(8) <https://www.skf.com/group/splash/index.html?pubPath=/group>. [accessed 02.07.2019]

(9) <http://www.skftekniskagymnasium.se/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

(10) <https://www.utbyten.se/nyheter/arets-erasmusaktor-2018/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

(11) <https://volvogymnasiet.se/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

and Göteborgsregionens Tekniska Gymnasium (GTC) ⁽¹²⁾, which is co-owned by the city of Gothenburg and Volvo.

2.2. Dynamics of skills demand and supply at the medium occupation level

The Swedish population is ageing, and many employers face skills shortages. A high immigration rate constitutes a valuable addition to the labour market, but, as the workforce has become increasingly well-educated, competition for work has become fierce. Employers almost always require an upper secondary qualification, even in professions where education requirements have traditionally been low. A completed upper secondary diploma is a necessity for employment in most cases. The number of students in several areas of IVET education is expected to be too low to meet the estimated demand from employers. There are already skills shortages in some areas, and, in the long run, there is a risk that skills shortages will be aggravated. All in all, the shortage is expected to be greatest from the upper secondary Health and social care programme (or corresponding adult education), where the current educational volume is not expected to sufficiently meet the large increase in demand for care for the elderly. In upper secondary school there were in 2017/18 slightly less than 1,000 apprentices in the Health and social care programme, or 10% of the learners in the programme ⁽¹³⁾, but none are reported to have participated in long-term mobilities. Figure 1 below provides an estimate of the shortage of skilled workers by 2035.

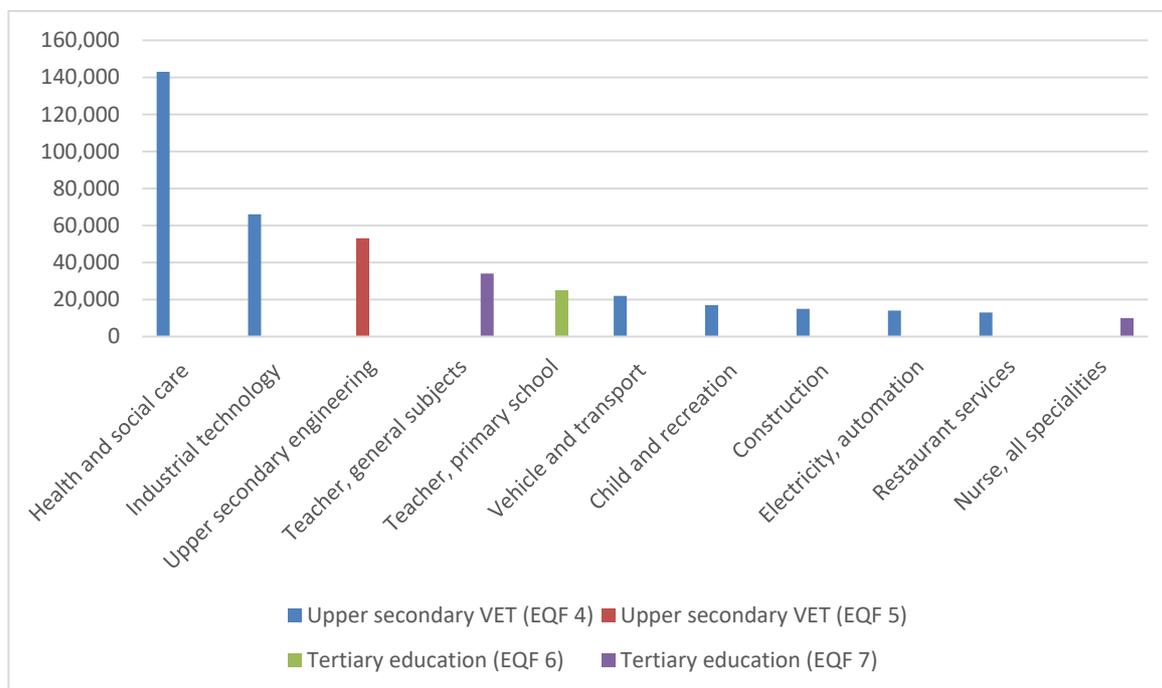
2.3. Attitude of employers towards training

VET in Sweden is fully funded by the public sector and free of charge, although providers may be public or independent. Private independent education providers receive their funding through a voucher system. As such, it can be argued that the private sector partakes in funding through the taxation system and expects skills to be delivered by the educational system.

⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.gtg.se/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽¹³⁾ 983 apprentices out of 9 735 learners.

Figure 1. **Groups and corresponding education programmes in which the shortages of skilled workers are expected to be the largest by 2035 (shown in numbers)**



Source: Trender och prognoser 2017⁽¹⁴⁾, SCB (Statistics Sweden).

Based on the findings of Cedefop flash thematic country review on apprenticeship in Sweden ⁽¹⁵⁾, it is possible to argue that there is an asymmetrical relationship between education providers and employers, that schools are dependent of the willingness of companies to provide placements, and that the provision of education does not fully respond to the skills needs. The review shows that employers cannot decide to take on an apprentice based on evidence of costs and benefits in comparison with school-based VET, which is in fact not available. Some companies, the study argues, perceive apprenticeships as costly in terms of time and human resources, while others appreciate it as a low-cost way to hire a young workforce. In an analysis of the Swedish VET system, the OECD ⁽¹⁶⁾ came

⁽¹⁴⁾ https://www.scb.se/contentassets/60312e5030114512b5b58a94a4ae25e2/uf0515_2017i35_br_am85br1701.pdf [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽¹⁵⁾ Cedefop (2018). Flash thematic country review on apprenticeships in Sweden. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4169_en_0.pdf [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽¹⁶⁾ Kuczera, M and s. Jeon (2019) Vocational Education and training in Sweden, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training; OECD Publishing, Paris. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/vocational-education-and-training-in-sweden_g2g9fac5-en [accessed 02.07.2019]

to a similar conclusion to Cedefop's: that employers have fewer responsibilities, but also less influence on designing the education and curriculum. The recommendation from the OECD, therefore, is to hand over more responsibility for apprenticeship education to employers' organisations so that it is shared between education providers and social partners. It would be important that trade unions are involved as well in designing education since most vocations are not regulated but defined by collective agreements.

That being the case, the analysis appears to point to an ambiguity in employers' attitudes towards training (i.e. a tension between decision making and availability to provide funding) and an obstacle in offering apprenticeship placements to students. Some among the interviewed employer representatives in the Cedefop study indicated a need for greater financial incentives to ensure that companies can recoup their investment in apprentices training. Since Swedish employers are not formally prevented from hiring anyone they see fit, there is little incentives for filling competency gaps by taking on apprentices from other countries.

2.4. Lack of international qualifications

There are no IVET programmes that lead to international qualifications in the Swedish upper secondary school. Most qualifications and professions are defined thorough collective agreements between social partners at the national level. There are fewer than 40 regulated professions in Sweden, most of which are in post-secondary medical fields. In addition, some professions are defined by international and EU standards and they require upper secondary VET qualifications: for example, professions in the marine field, such as mariners, or in aviation, such as aircraft mechanics. The professional dancers' programme may be included in this category, since the rationale behind the programme is to supply the Royal Swedish Ballet and international companies with professional dancers. The first long-term mobilities of students from Sweden were dancers from the independent organiser Balettakademien ⁽¹⁷⁾, who participated in the programme during the summer of 2018.

⁽¹⁷⁾ <https://www.folkuniversitetet.se/Skolor/Balettakademien-dansskolor/Balettakademien-Stockholm/in-english/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

2.5. Other relevant factors

All Swedish students study English from the earliest years of compulsory school. A third language is offered ⁽¹⁸⁾ in primary school. German, French and Spanish are available for the most part, but schools are free to offer other language courses, and pupils may study their mother tongue or sign language as a third language. It is also possible for them to study Swedish and/or English. The rationale for providing Swedish and English, which are already compulsory subjects, is to give recent immigrants or students who need more time and support a chance to catch up. There are, however, indications that more and more pupils study Swedish and English during the time allocated for a third language, instead of studying a third language ⁽¹⁹⁾, mainly because of a declining interest in investing the energy needed for learning a new language and maximising grades in order to enter the most popular upper secondary schools. In upper secondary education, students in VET programmes have fewer mandatory courses in English than do students in general education, and no mandatory courses in a third language. Data from the European opinion survey on VET ⁽²⁰⁾ also shows that, while Swedish students in general education claim to have developed skills in a foreign language in upper secondary education, there is also a wide skills gap between students who pursue a general education and those who study in a vocational programme ⁽²¹⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Sveriges Riksdag (2014). Lag om gymnasial lärlingsanställning. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2014421-om-gymnasial-larlingsanstallning_sfs-2014-421 [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽¹⁹⁾ Of all pupils who completed the ninth year of compulsory school in 2016/17, 24.4% studied Swedish, English or a combination of the two languages during the time allocated for a third language. <https://www.skolverket.se/getFile?file=3966> [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽²⁰⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/opinion-survey-on-vet> [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽²¹⁾ General education (GE) students in Sweden estimate that their foreign language skills are better than the EU-average for GE students; while VET-students are on par with EU-VET-students. The gap is obvious in the spider graph of the Country Chapter on Riga MTDs 2015-2017.

CHAPTER 3.

The link between design of the apprenticeship scheme and mobility of apprentices

3.1. Apprenticeship type

Work-based learning is mandatory in upper secondary VET, and the activities performed during work-based learning should be aligned with the content of the steering documents ⁽²²⁾, so that the work-based learning supports the student in achieving the knowledge requirements stated for the different courses. The education provider and a trainer who supervises learning at the workplace need to communicate beforehand to ensure that the activities during WBL (including apprenticeship) support the training that is stated in the steering documents and will thus cover the learning outcomes expected. In the school-based pathway, WBL covers a minimum of 15 weeks, or roughly 15% of the time. In contrast, for apprentices, more than half of the education occurs at a workplace ⁽²³⁾ which may enable long term mobility. Since WBL is central to apprentices, a tripartite contract has to be agreed between the student, the education provider, and the company providing the work based learning, in order to clarify the responsibilities of each party and to ensure that the individual student and apprentice will achieve all learning outcomes that are specified in the courses that make up the relative IVET programme. Such a contract may be a disabler for long term mobility – in particular since the education organiser is responsible for the education which includes the learning in a workplace and may not accredit an employer to organise and assess the learning.

⁽²²⁾ The curriculum, diploma goals, subject syllabuses and the core content of the courses.

⁽²³⁾ The term used in the Education Act (2010: 800, Chapter 16, par. 11) is "*i huvudsak*", which could be translated as "more often than not." It is operationalised as more than half of the time from the start of the scheme.

In most cases, education providers apply for funding ⁽²⁴⁾ for the mobilities of their students ⁽²⁵⁾.

3.2. Apprenticeship governance

The Education Act ⁽²⁶⁾ gives the framework for providing the apprenticeship scheme. The provision of education is decentralised, and the provider is responsible for supplying both school-based and apprenticeship within the legislative framework.

3.3. Duration of apprenticeship and company placement

The Education Act states that vocational upper secondary programmes may be offered in the form of apprenticeship and that the pathway may start during the first, the second, or the third year of education, since a student can transfer from a school-based to an apprenticeship scheme and back. The Act further states that minimum 50% of education in the apprenticeship scheme should be carried out at the workplace.

3.4. Organisation of alternance

Schools are responsible for providing education and awarding the final qualification, and organise also the work-based learning component independently. Consequently, the provision of WBL is decentralised, and no data is collected about its provision.

Decentralisation of apprenticeship management by the schools could be a disabler of LTMA, if dialogue among the schools and the labour market actors is not well-functioning (for example, for companies abroad). Especially considering

⁽²⁴⁾ Besides EU funding (Erasmus), there are other programmes covered by Swedish state funding.

⁽²⁵⁾ Here, we refer to GE and IVET students but not only. Organisations and branches of industry can form consortia that also are eligible to apply for such funding. There is therefore nothing preventing different companies from sending abroad 'company apprentices' who have recently graduated and no longer have student status on long term mobilities.

⁽²⁶⁾ The Education Act (2010:800), Chapter 16, par. 11.

that most schools are quite small and do not have the administrative resources for organising mobilities or for applying for grants.

It is common knowledge that WBL in apprenticeship might be provided several days per week, every second week, or for longer periods alternated to school-based learning. In most cases, students study foundation subjects, e.g., Swedish, English and mathematics, in school, while VET subjects are studied during the in-company training. On one hand, this organisation could be an enabler of LTMA, since there is a clear distinction of learning outcomes and schools prepare the students homogeneously. On the other hand, schools are responsible for assessing learning, give students grades for it and therefore ensuring that all parts of the curriculum are met after a work-placement. This would be a major disabler if in-company training took place abroad.

3.5. Type of contract and status of apprentices

Work-based learning is integrated into the curriculum as part of the core content of the courses. Each school organiser ⁽²⁷⁾ must plan and document the intended and achieved learning outcomes of each placement in relation to the core content. Apprenticeship education is built up from the same subjects and courses as school-based education, with the difference that more time is spent in a work placement. Therefore, there are more stringent requirements for documenting the intended and achieved learning from work placements. Upper secondary apprenticeship education thus requires tripartite individual contracts (learning agreements) between the student (or, if under the age of 18, the student's guardian) the employer and the school. The contracts stipulate which parts of the curriculum will be carried out through work-based learning. The clear allocation of learning outcomes in the contract could be considered an enabler of LTMA, at least in principle. In practice, however, if the student is not nearby the school, this becomes difficult for the teacher.

It is the teacher who assesses the WBL and who gives the student a grade for the course. The VET teacher must therefore work in close collaboration with the trainer at the workplace for each work placement. This might become challenging when the workplace is abroad.

⁽²⁷⁾ The organiser is the formal body that organises the education. In municipal schools, it is the political school board. For independent schools, it is the board or the owner. The board usually delegates the operationalisation to the headmaster, who in turn, most of the times, ultimately delegates the task to the VET teacher.

3.6. Remuneration

Students who are in an apprentice path of VET can be employed with a regular employment contract in what is called an upper secondary apprentice position (*Gymnasial Lärlingsanställning, GLA*) and receive remuneration. In the autumn of 2018, only 231 students were employed while in apprenticeship education ⁽²⁸⁾. The small scale of the scheme might be related to scarce visibility of its benefits.

Because it is unlikely that a company pays remuneration to a learner if she or he is abroad, the presence of GLA might be considered as a disabler for LTMA.

The employment will be terminated if the student ends their upper secondary education without adhering to the termination rules of the Employment Protection Act. As of July 2014, a legislative ⁽²⁹⁾ change allows students attending apprenticeship education in upper secondary school to be exempt from the measures of the Employment Protection Act ⁽³⁰⁾ while they are in education.

Study allowance ⁽³¹⁾ (*studiehjälp*) in the form of student grants, supplementary allowances and boarding supplements can be paid to students under the age of 20 who are studying in upper secondary school. Under certain circumstances, these grants can also be awarded for studies abroad.

3.7. Provisions on occupational health, safety and social insurance

An apprentice and a student in a school-based programme have the same student status, follow the same curriculum, receive the same diploma based on the same courses, have the same study allowances and study aids, and are fully insured. For activities in a school workshop, the headmaster is responsible for safety and the performance of risk assessments for each activity. During work-based learning, the responsibility is shared between the school and the employer. The headmaster needs to ensure that the company follows safety regulations and performs risk

⁽²⁸⁾ Information provided by the Apprenticeship Centre at the National Agency for Education.

⁽²⁹⁾ Sveriges Riksdag (2014). Lag om gymnasial lärlingsanställning. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2014421-om-gymnasial-larlingsanstallning_sfs-2014-421 [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽³⁰⁾ *Lagen om Anställningsskydd, LAS* https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-198280-om-anstallningsskydd_sfs-1982-80 [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽³¹⁾ <https://www.csn.se/languages/english.html> [accessed 02.07.2019]

assessments before any activities are carried out. This might become a disabler in case of work-based learning in a company abroad.

3.8. Curriculum / training standards specification

The curriculum structure for upper secondary education starts with a general curriculum and diploma goals for each individual programme that state the goals and specific objectives of the education. Courses ⁽³²⁾ serve as modules of the subjects and state the core content that should help students to reach the relative learning outcomes.

3.9. Use of validation in apprenticeships

Upper secondary students have the possibility of taking an extensive test to show that they have achieved the learning outcomes and knowledge requirements that are specified in the core content of each course. The process is most commonly used for students who have not reached a passing grade in a course, but it is also applicable as a validation tool. The process is the same for apprentices and students in a school-based education programme.

In principle, the transparency characterising the assessment process might be an enabler for LTMA. However, it is difficult to argue that employers abroad consider the validation tool as an acceptable one for their assessment purposes. It can rather be used at the school, once the apprentice has returned from abroad.

⁽³²⁾ Some of the VET-subjects of the curriculum are translated to English, e.g. Building and Construction (<https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.4fc05a3f164131a7418104b/1535372296394/Building-and-construction-in-swedish-school.pdf>), Electricity Theory (<https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.4fc05a3f164131a74181053/1535372296947/Electricity-theory-swedish-school.pdf>), Catering (<https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.4fc05a3f164131a7418104d/1535372296590/Catering-and-industry-knowledge-swedish-school.pdf>) and Health and Social Care (<https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.4fc05a3f164131a7418105b/1535372297731/Health-and-social-care-swedish-school.pdf>). [accessed 02.07.2019]

CHAPTER 4.

Conclusions

In Sweden, the design of the apprenticeship scheme itself, characterised by flexibility, might be relatively easily adapted to LTMA. The apprenticeship scheme is governed through the same structure as school-based IVET, built on modular courses that can partially or entirely be learnt in a workplace. Education is free of charge, learners are fully insured and receive study allowances. There are funds available for work-based learning abroad, not only in the Erasmus+ programme, but also outside of Europe ⁽³³⁾. Study and career guidance are well developed and generally accessible to students. All in all, there is a systemic, flexible structure in place for long and short-term mobilities in the Swedish apprenticeship scheme. At the same time, within the framework of the national vocational upper secondary programmes, there is scope for flexibility and local adaptation that appears to be underutilised.

On the other hand, the centralisation of responsibility for upper secondary VET, including apprenticeship, in schools might play as a disabler to LTMA. For example, when schools have to assess work-based learning and this takes place in a company abroad. However, this centralised arrangement serves as a guarantee of equity and equal access to IVET. Other disabling factors are the asymmetrical relationship between schools and employers and more in general the lack of national, regional or local cooperation. These factors prevent IVET education (including apprenticeship) from unlocking its full potential, and therefore also the development of LTMA. Another disabler is the administrative burden. There is a need for a network of international partners and an administrative structure to be in place for funding applications and for organising, administrating and assessing work-based learning during mobility. VET schools are relatively small in Sweden ⁽³⁴⁾, which hampers the administration of mobilities.

In conclusion, there appears to be a need to optimise and utilise the full potential of the apprenticeship scheme in combination with the establishment of economies of scale, through cooperation or through some form of regional coordination, in order for an education provider to be able to utilise the full potential of mobilities in general and long-term mobilities in particular.

⁽³³⁾ <https://www.utbyten.se/program/atlas-praktik/> [accessed 02.07.2019]

⁽³⁴⁾ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/vocational-education-and-training-in-sweden_g2g9fac5-en#page41 [accessed 02.07.2019]