

Evaluation of the New Teacher Education Programme in Sweden

Laila Niklasson, Stockholm Institute of Education, Sweden

Introduction

In the academic year 2001 a new Teacher Education Programme started in Sweden. In the prerequisites for the new Teacher Education Programme it was already decided that an evaluation should be carried out soon after the reform. The evaluation showed that there was a problem with the freedom to choose for the teacher student and the demand for visible (in the curriculum) and perceived (by the teacher student and teachers) progression. An open question was who, except the teacher student, has information about the "study biography" of the student?

In this article I will problemize how the conflicting perspectives, choice and progression, have been handled on a society level, organisational level and individual level. In the conclusion I argue that the problem can be understood at several levels. There is an individual problem in balancing as the student is the only one who has the overview at certain points in the programme. There is an organisational problem with guaranteeing quality and goal achievement and there is a national problem making the programmes comparable and steering the education. As an extension I argue that it is not only a national problem but also a problem that can be perceived from a European perspective as similar tendencies are shown in creating choice and progression in higher level studies.

First I will shortly present how a reform of the Teacher Education Programme in Sweden was motivated.

Motivating a reform

In late 1990ies a committee was appointed to give suggestions for reforming the Swedish Teacher Education Programme as there had been some problems with the earlier programme. One problem had been balancing general and specific preparation for profession; another problem had been

making the programme equivalent over the country and at the same time creating profiles between universities and within the programme. Connection to research, the programme's place in higher education and co-operation with municipalities had also been discussed (Högskoleverket, 2005). The suggestion from the committee was that the Teacher Education Programme should be regulated by the state to secure an equally valuable education but the universities and university colleges should be free to create the education aiming at reaching evaluable goals that the state regulated (SOU 1999, 63).

The report constituted the base for a Government bill in 1999 (prop 1999/2000:135). This bill affected the organisation in the 25 universities and university colleges all over Sweden (Högskoleverket 2004) when they should start the new programme in 2001. All the organizers were free to vary the content and the design; as a consequence all Teacher Education Programmes also have local targets which affect the organisation.

The new Teacher Education Programme

The new teaching degree shows the graduate's specialization and status of qualification. Even though there is one degree, still the different Teacher Education programmes will indicate different profiles according to where they are going to work: pre-school, in compulsory school, upper secondary school and which subject/s like math or foreign languages.

The general field is one of the three parts in the programme; the other ones are areas of emphasis and specialization:

General field	Areas of emphasis	Specialization
---------------	-------------------	----------------

Figure 1. Parts of the Teacher Education Programme

Regardless of what age and which subject students shall teach in, the teacher student shall study the general field. Therefore as much as 1,5 years will be common to all students. The general field should comprise areas of knowledge central to the teaching profession and interdisciplinary subject studies. Central knowledge is defined as teaching, special needs education and child and youth development. The second and third parts, areas of emphasis and specialization are designed in a way that gives the students opportunities to choose a profile in their studies. This flexible design enhances the students' possibilities of choice and here they can partly create their individual Teacher Education.

In the reform, free choice was a central perspective. At university or university college level there is freedom to organise and design the programme in accordance with law and ordinance to reach the goals. There are numerous possibilities to make choices at organisational level, but in this paper I will focus on dividing up some choices at a student level instead. The choices for the students are, for example:

1. Choice between different universities or university colleges, because they have different profiles
2. Choice between open entrance where all choices for profiles are still open and a focussed entrance where the student has defined the profile he or she aims at right from the start
3. Choice when to study the three different parts of the curriculum, which part to start with, follow and so on
4. Choice of the area of emphasis and the specialisation
5. Choice what courses to study within the three parts
6. To a certain degree choice when to make the degree project (the student has to accomplished a certain amount of courses)
7. To a certain degree choice of the content of the degree project (affect the need for supervisors from different subjects)
8. Choice of a profile which the employers have or have not yet created a post for

This freedom of choice on an institutional and individual level was problemized in the national evaluation that was carried out.

Evaluation of the Teacher Education Programme

During 2004 and 2005 the universities and university colleges with Teacher Education Programme carried out a self-evaluation and external evaluators (from Sweden and other Nordic countries, representatives of the labour market and teacher students) created a group that visited the universities and university colleges. The National Agency for Higher Education summed up and finally evaluated (Högskoleverket 2005).

The recommendations from the external evaluation group are directed towards the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), the National Agency for Higher Education, universities and university colleges as all the actors are affecting the future possibilities to achieve the aims in the Teacher Education Programme. First the external evaluation group confirms that the new programme is a challenge for the different actors. The programme should integrate several earlier different teachers' degrees, integrate theory and practice to a higher degree than before, at the same time have scientific research and experience from teaching as a starting point, and prepare the students for the profession and also for doctoral studies (Högskoleverket 2005, 163). The external

evaluation group points out that the staff at the universities and university colleges have been loyal to the reform, but that the challenges, and sometimes the paradoxes are hard to handle. The students have at first sight an extensive, almost market like situation, that later on turns into a perception of being left alone. Some students have not perceived the choice and the responsibility as a challenge, but as a lack of demand and follow up. It is underlined that students have different perceptions of the programme, both compared between universities and university colleges and within groups. The external evaluation group draws attention to the fact that the student's perception seems to be affected by the frames for the programme, the teacher's competence and the student's own experiences and motivation. Some of the recommendations can be perceived as especially linked to choice and progression.

The universities and university colleges are suggested to create possibilities for staff in different departments and staff in the placements to secure that central knowledge areas and progression is achieved, create following up routines to secure that the requirements in the degree ordinance is fulfilled, secure that the degree document describes in what way the degree ordinance is fulfilled. They are also suggested to develop the education plans so that the intentions and interplay between the different parts of the curriculum become more visible for the different agents, develop forms so that the student's understanding of the context of the education and professionalism is gradually deepened and that both staff and students agree with how the education for professionalism is carried out as a whole. The transition from programme structure to course structure is in accordance with a choice model, and demands that support to the students via study counselling has to increase; the response to carried out work and documentation of progressions also has to be emphasized (Högskoleverket 2005, 163-174).

After considering the suggestions from the external evaluator group the National Agency for Higher Education also gives suggestions. Firstly, the universities and university colleges are suggested to clarify the design of the programme. Secondly, the universities and university colleges are suggested to create prerequisites for rational choices within the Teacher Education Programme by offering sufficient and adequate study counselling (Högskoleverket 2005, 7).

Although the external evaluation group was considering choice and progress, The National Agency has chosen not to highlight these concepts. In accordance with the external evaluators group I want to put forward the question of handling choice and progression. First of all I will discuss the question on a national level.

Choice vs. progression-national level

Choice as reform intention, progression as quality aspect

One of the essential ideas of the Teacher Education Programme Reform that was carried out in 2001 was that the students should be able, to a certain extent, to construct their own Teacher Education Programme, or at least their own profile. The possibility to choose for both university and university colleges and the students is regarded as a reform question, and the demand for progression is regarded as a quality question by the external evaluators (Högskoleverket 2005, 62). The difference is essential as the external evaluators argue that quality is connected to standards and goals, whereas reform is connected to following up (ibid., 71). The consequence can be that different actors are getting assignments to evaluate choice and progression and the relation between the two is less discussed.

Reform intention-choice

The intention of the Teacher Education Programme was to increase possibilities to choose, both at an organisational and an individual level. What the university and university colleges can offer can be limited by the competence of the staff that each university and university college has.

The possibility to choose has increased, but choosing does not mean to get what is chosen. Some profiles and courses are popular. It is only possible to get access if the student chooses them directly when they apply to the programme. Some courses give a pre access so that if you have studied a certain course it is easier to get access to another course, which reduces the opportunities to choose for latecomers. Other courses give the opposite effect. If a course is too similar to another one it can be hard to get access to it. Those who can plan their programme entirely from the start have an advantage.

There is also a question of why the students choose certain courses. Does the student choose out of interest or because of the possibility to get employment later on? The external evaluation group suggested that the experience the student has from her or his own school or during the placement affects the choice (Högskoleverket, 2005, 122). Not only the choice of the entire design is important. The choice of degree thesis positions the student in a scientific area which in turn affects who should supervise (ibid., 163). The choice also indirectly affects the future possibilities to get employment as the degree thesis can be presented as a supplement to the student's cv.

Programme level -general field

The general field is a new part in a Teacher Education Programme in Sweden. The consequence is that it is not possible to compare with earlier years to decide how to define progression. It can also be problematic to compare with other countries as most countries do not have a Teacher Education Programme with integrated subject, didactic and professionalism during three and a half to five years (Högskoleverket 2005, 92). As the other parts in the programme (area emphasis and specialisation) are eligible; they are harder to fit into a progression, the general field has to carry the main part of the progression. To be able to create that progression, the general field part often is designed as one part, almost separated from the other parts (Högskoleverket 2005, 93-94). This part can not always get help from for example pedagogic. One reason is that the general field should include 50 percent cross-disciplinary courses. Further on one cross-disciplinary course can not guarantee a scientific relation as there are many subjects involved (ibid., 137). If the general field is not in a hierarchy compared with specialisation and the courses in the different parts are not in a hierarchy then it can be hard to argue that there is a progression.

Quality aspect - progression

One way of tracing a progression is to look at the course plans. The course plans can be perceived as summarizing the degree goals (Högskoleverket 2005, 147). When the student has accomplished the courses over a certain time it can be defined as a progression. The staffs at different departments at the universities and university colleges do not always have the same opinion about professionalism, how professionalism is achieved and what to demand of the students. Even if there was an agreement about the professionalism there will be a problem following up the individual student since (as the external evaluation group phrase it) the responsibility is collectivised. The student moves between universities, institutions, subjects, courses and teachers. Also in the placement there is often a team of teachers that are working with the student/s. No one, except the student, has an overview of the education (ibid., 148). The responsibility for the professional progression of the

students is unclear in the new Teacher Education Programme. From a student perspective it is hard to perceive their development and progression. The students perceive that they do not get enough response from the teachers. The three parts general field, area emphasis and specialisation are perceived by the students as separate areas and not always integrated. The integration is left to the students to accomplish (Högskoleverket 2005, 144). From an organisational perspective it is hard to guarantee an individual progression in the programme (ibid., 31).

Responsibility

The new Teaching Education Programme allows students a great deal of freedom in planning their own studies and they are themselves responsible for their own development, which in a way moves responsibility from an organisational level to an individual level. It is not only the responsibility for the choice that is left to the students. It can be perceived that the responsibility to get a coherent programme is left to the student. Even the progression is to a certain extent left to the student via creating portfolios. The professionalism becomes an individual project without support from the education programme (Högskoleverket 2005, 123). The education has changed from a structured programme to course education (ibid., 131).

In the government bill that introduced the new programme the special board for the Teacher Education Programme at each university or university college has a responsibility for the entire Teacher Education Programme. Within an overarching structure the universities and the university colleges as well as the students shall have a freedom to design the structure and content and still the programme should be formed as a whole and include progression (Högskoleverket 2005, 143).

The board, in turn, has directives that are formulated in the degree. There are nevertheless some problems with the document as it only shows overarching choices that can be made by the student and to a lesser degree what the student has to fulfil with regard to the degree requirements (Högskoleverket 2005, 91).

Problems and solutions

From a student perspective the first choice regards the programme; the second choice is followed by several within the programme. From a university and university college perspective a lot of courses have to be offered, staff has to be ready and in the end some courses will not be chosen. This freedom of choice also gives the universities and university colleges a freedom to offer courses. From a national state perspective the consequence is that the state, that finances the education, has less possibility to direct the education.

The different courses, parallel tracks with theory and placements, and choice when to study the three parts (general field, area of emphasis and specialisation) and also when to write the degree thesis is contrasted by the fact that there is no possibility to choose in which territorial area, municipality, to do the practice, even though there is a choice in subject combination and level at school. It can happen that most of time the placement is carried out in lower secondary when the student shall teach at upper secondary.

Summarizing the following problems can be identified:

1. Choice leads to difficulties for the student to predict what course they will have a place in and to plan their study
2. Choice leads to difficulties for the university to predict the future and plan (steer) their resources
3. The possibility for students and universities to select which course to follow or to offer makes it hard for the financier, the state, to steer the education programme

4. Choice leads to difficulties for the university to follow the students' progress
5. As a result it is hard to plan and guarantee students' progression
6. This results in problems with getting a progression in the profiles that should have both a depth in knowledge and in didactics (choice effects because a student can choose several short courses)
7. Freedom of choice can be measured, but progression is hard to measure
8. Low transparency in progression of students can easily result in critique against the level of demand,

The universities and university colleges have of course noticed these problems. The solution has been to reduce for example the amount of courses in different parts of the programme. Instead of suggesting a reduction in courses the National Agency suggests is that there should be an extended career counselling so the students can make rational choices. In an indirect way a suggestion from the National Agency can create a reduction of the amount of courses. The National Agency gives directives that there should be certain specified knowledge areas that will be compulsory. When these compulsory knowledge areas are transformed into courses, because of lack of space and time, there will be a "natural" decrease in the possibilities to choose from. To reduce the amount of choice does not necessarily create better quality concerning progression. Instead progression and measuring the progression has to be discussed. As a possible solution to the choice vs. progression the National Agency suggests that the role of the board for Teacher Education at each college or college university should be emphasized. The board should follow up how choice and progression is balanced (Högskoleverket 2005, 127).

This article has mainly presented a national problem with one educational planning problem. If educational programmes for other professions have similar perspectives with change from teaching perspective to learning perspective, from rules to goals and increased choices among courses for designing a professional profile, then these problems are likely to occur even within those programmes.

Choice vs. progression – European level

There are different opinions whether the Teacher Education Programme in Sweden is similar to other Teacher Education Programmes in Europe. In the motivation of the Teacher Education Reform some authors argued that Teacher Education in different European countries varies substantially. Although there are similarities, the differences seem to be most outstanding. In comparison with other European countries the Swedish Teacher Education is in the group of countries where studies of subject and pedagogic practice is integrated, where the educational system integrates different kinds of teachers into one degree and to as high a degree as possible have a common field of knowledge and national steering. What is different from most other countries seems to be the inclusion of training for research (Regeringskansliet 2003).

Other authors argue that the Swedish Teacher Education Programme differs in the way that the programme integrates teachers at different levels within one profile and that the programme is integrated in the common comprehensive higher education system. One similarity is reforming the programme, which has happened in Denmark (1998) and in Norway (2003). On a Scandinavian systems level the programmes have similarities in goal orientation, focusing

on reflection during the education, a didactic turn concerning subject and emphasize on the placements (Högskoleverket, 2005, 45-46).

The National Agency pointed out that the Teacher Education Programme is included in the Bologna process as it is a graduate programme at university or university college level. The Bologna declaration from 1999 (The Bologna Declaration, 1999/2005) underlines that an European area of higher education (EHEA) should be created. The reason is for example to create possibilities for students to move between countries already during their education. The consequence is that any national discussion about freedom of choice and measurement of progression is also framed within a European context. Although signed by European ministers of education the Bologna declaration is not a law, but the meeting in Bologna has been followed by meetings every second year where the process of creating a European area of higher education is followed and documented in what I call the Bologna process documents (Prague Communiqué 2001; Berlin Communiqué 2003; Bergen Communiqué 2005). In the documents for example the freedom of choice in terms of mobility is creating a need for recognition of both ongoing and accomplished studies. In the requirements for quality there is also a demand for progression of one kind or another, either passing at a subject level in a progression or showing individual progression in some way.

Conclusion

When increasing free choice at the same time as progression in a curriculum as a dimension of quality, a problematic situation can occur. If the teacher student has several courses to choose between then the student is the only one who has an overview over the past and the future. This can be perceived as influence over the design but can also create an individual problem as the student can find it hard to have an overview over the individual progression. At an institutional level there can be a problem with guaranteeing quality and goal achievement. On the national level there can be a problem making the different national programmes comparable and steering the education. As the Swedish Teacher Education Programme is not only a national programme, it is also a part in a European Educational system the problems can also be regarded as European problems. Especially as similar problems can occur within other programmes and in general in under-graduate programs in the European Education system when free choice and progression should be combined.

References

- Högskoleverket [National Agency for Higher Education], 20040804, Stockholm (www.hsv.se)
- Högskoleverket [National Agency for Higher Education] (2005), *Utvärdering av den nya lärarutbildningen vid svenska universitet och högskolor [Evaluation of the new Teacher Education Programme at Swedish universities and university colleges]* (Rapport nr 2005:17R. Del 1).
- Lärarhögskolan (2003b), *Utbildningsplan för programmet för lärarexamen*, Stockholm.
- Lärarhögskolan, (2003c), *Programkatalog läsår 2004/05*, Stockholm.

Prop. 1999/2000:135 [Government Bill], *En förnyad lärarutbildning [A renewed Teacher Education Programme]*, Stockholm, Utbildningsdepartementet.

Regeringskansliet [Government Offices of Sweden], 20040804, Stockholm (www.regeringen.se).

Regeringskansliet [Government Offices of Sweden] (2000), *A new system of teacher education* (Government Bill 1999/2000:135, Fact sheet), Stockholm.

Regeringskansliet [Government Offices of Sweden] (2003), *Lärarutbildning i Europa* (Fact sheet), Stockholm.

SFS 1992:1434. *Högskolelag [Law concerning Higher Education]*.

SFS 1993:100, *Högskoleförordning [Ordinance concerning Higher Education]*.

SOU 1999:63 (Committee Report), *Att lära och leda – En lärarutbildning för samverkan och utveckling*, Stockholm, Utbildningsdepartementet, Lärarutbildningskommittén, U97

The Bergen Communiqué (2005), 20050929 (www.regeringen.se).

The Berlin Communiqué (2003/2005), 20050929 (www.regeringen.se).

The Bologna Declaration (1999/2005), 20050929 (www.regeringen.se)

The Prague Communiqué (2001/2005), 20050929 (www.regeringen.se).

