

Mentoring for Newly Qualified Teachers in Sweden: Reforms and Challenges

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Abstract: This article focuses on the mentoring of newly qualified teachers (NQT) in Sweden and gives a brief historical overview of how mentoring has appeared on the educational agenda in Sweden and how its focus has changed over time. The research questions that guide this study are: (a) what major key events and reforms can be identified in relation to implementing mentoring of NQTs in Sweden, and how have these efforts turned out; (b) what is the state at present; (c) how is the issue of education and training dealt with; and (d) what key players and initiatives for the future can be identified? The methodological approach is a systematic review of policy documents and research on mentoring in Sweden from 1970–2019, as well as analyses of key actors web pages. Two important reforms are identified: (1) the national agreement (ÖLA, 2000) in 1995 between the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SALAR), the National Union of Teachers in Sweden (Lärarnas Riksförbund) and the Swedish Teachers' Union (Läraryrket), giving NQTs the *right* to be supported by a mentor and to participate in an induction programme; and (2) the parliamentary decision in 2011 to introduce a reform package which included teacher registration with a probationary year, evaluations of NQTs and a mentoring system. The probationary year and principals' evaluations of NQTs were discontinued in 2014. A side effect of this was that mentoring became downplayed, which led to new initiatives to get mentoring back on the educational agenda. A professional programme with four levels of proficiency has been identified as a key reform that, if implemented, could put mentoring and the professional development of NQTs back on the educational agenda.

The current situation in Sweden is that some legislation and regulations related to the mentoring of NQTs are in place, although recent data shows that induction and mentoring are not as widespread as might be expected. Major stakeholders such as the two teacher unions, the Swedish National Agency for Education and

the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR) are identified as providers of web-based materials supporting NQTs.

Keywords: induction, mentoring, probationary year, Sweden, teacher registration reform

Introduction

The Swedish Education Act (2014), Chapter 2, § 22a, states that:

A local authority that has employed a teacher or preschool teacher with the relevant teaching qualifications shall ensure that at the start of their employment the teacher or preschool teacher will undergo a period of induction that in the main corresponds to the teacher's or preschool teacher's competence, unless the teacher or preschool teacher has not already undergone such an induction period. (Translated from Swedish)

The above paragraph constitutes the legal basis for the mentoring of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and preschool teachers in Sweden. However, putting this Act in place has been challenging (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2013), and the extent to which it has been realised could also be questioned. The guiding research questions for this study are: (a) what major key events and reforms can be identified in relation to implementing mentoring of NQTs in Sweden, and how have these efforts turned out; (b) what is the state at present; (c) how is the issue of education and training dealt with; and (d) what key players and initiatives for the future can be identified? A systematic review of relevant policy documents and research on mentoring, teaching induction and teacher registration in Sweden from 1970–2019 has been carried out. In this, key actors have been identified and the web pages of these organisations have been analysed.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the teacher education programmes that are available in Sweden, showing how mentoring has appeared on the educational agenda and describing how the focus has changed over time. In the main, the chapter focuses on the status and provision of mentoring in recent years and indicates what might happen in the future.

Teacher education programmes in Sweden

In Sweden some 240,000 teachers work in preschools, leisure-time centres, primary schools and upper secondary schools. Around 8,000 new teachers graduate each year from the teacher education programmes (TEPs) offered by universities in Sweden. In the academic year of 2017/18, a total of 8,360 teachers graduated from TEPs. These included 2,660 preschool teachers, 910 F-3 teachers (that is: preschool class and years 1–3), 570 teachers of years 4–6, 550 leisure-time teachers, 660 subject teachers in years 7–9, 1,430 subject teachers for the upper secondary school and 550 vocational teachers (Universitetskanslerämbetet, 2019). One thousand and sixty graduated from supplementary teacher education programmes, that is: a programme for people already working ‘as teachers’ but who have no formal teaching qualifications, who may, after validation of job experience and university courses, attend individually-designed courses to attain a formal teacher qualification. There is currently a shortage of teaching graduates and registered teachers in Sweden, and it is estimated that by 2035 this number will have increased to 79,000.

In Sweden, preschool teacher education programmes consist of 210 ECTS credits. Three different academic degrees are available for teachers in the nine-year compulsory school system: one for the preschool class and years 1–3 (consisting of 240 ECTS credits), another for years 4–6 (consisting of 240 ECTS credits) and a third for school-based leisure-time centres (consisting of 180 ECTS credits). Two other kinds of degrees focus on subject teachers and are directed at work in years 7–9 in the compulsory school (consisting of 240 ECTS credits) and in the upper secondary school (consisting of 300 ECTS credits). All the teacher education programmes include studies in specific subject matter, didactics, pedagogy and a minimum of 30 ECTS credits in teaching practice in schools. The main way of becoming a teacher is through a teacher education programme.

There is also a shorter route into teaching, which is to first take a subject degree and then follow a short 90 ECTS credit programme, (the supplementary teacher education programme), although the number of students taking this route amounts to about a couple of hundred each year. In this teacher education programme structure every student teacher has to have a teaching practice placement before they are able to enter the

teaching profession as NQTs, where they are then regarded as inexperienced yet qualified teachers.

Mentoring in Sweden – some historical notes

In 1978, when it was investigated how a new teacher education could be organised and implemented, it was suggested that NQTs should work as teachers for at least two years and then return to a teacher training institution for an additional six months of in-service training (30 ECTS credits) (SOU 1978:86). If this proposal had been implemented, it would have been a way of supporting new teachers early on in their careers, by offering opportunities for reflection, learning and recovery from teaching. In the same investigation, seven and a half pages of the Commission's 495 page report dealt with the induction of NQTs and provided good examples of support and induction, both in Great Britain and in Sweden. The report noted that:

Many teachers experience during their first job such difficulties and such inadequacy that they leave the profession. Already today, there are strong reasons to give the newly qualified teachers better support in their work ... the period immediately after the professional debut must be considered as crucial for the new teacher's continuing attitude to their profession, especially for their willingness to change their own and the school's approach. (SOU 1978:86, p. 248, 250)

The report suggested 'acclimatisation measures', with induction programmes, reduced service and contact teachers (equivalent to mentors) who could provide guidance. However, this proposal was not approved and, thus, not implemented.

Formalised mentoring for NQTs was not a priority during the 1980s, although it is likely that new teachers were informally supported by more-experienced colleagues – a phenomenon that has, to some extent, always existed between teachers.

Sweden experienced many educational reforms at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. The government's responsibility for schools was decentralised to the local education authorities in the municipalities (today there are 290 municipalities in Sweden). The detailed regulations

for the education system were reduced, and a goal-oriented governance system was introduced. A new curriculum was implemented in 1994, which involved setting achievement goals for students and enabling teachers to select suitable educational content and methods. The education sector was also opened up for private alternatives and profit organisations, and profiling and competitions between schools were encouraged. Thus, in a relatively short period of time, the Swedish education system has changed from being highly centralised to one of the most decentralised and market-oriented in the western world (Lundahl, 2016).

In the early 1990s, the rhetoric emanating from politicians and the teacher unions was that it was time to rely on teachers' professionalism to develop the education system and its results. In this context, the National Union of Teachers in Sweden (Lärarnas Riksförbund) made an important decision in May 1992 to work towards the implementation of teacher registration, that is: a certification that only teachers who graduated from teacher education institutions could get, giving exclusive rights to teach (cf. Frelin & Fransson, 2019). As this union mainly organises teachers who are subject specialists in upper secondary schools and at the senior level of the nine-year compulsory school, the union saw benefits for their members in being positioned as registered teachers. However, it was to take almost 20 years before the decision to introduce teacher registration became a reality. It was during this time that mentoring for NQTs became an issue on the educational agenda.

The 1995 national agreement between teacher unions and local authorities

The restructuring of the education system in the late 1980s and early 1990s as described above enabled the teacher unions to take more responsibility for the development of the education system and position themselves as professional and responsible parties. Thus, in 1995, a national agreement (ÖLA, 2000) was reached, between the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SALAR), the National Union of Teachers in Sweden and the Swedish Teachers' Union, emphasising school development. One component in this agreement was that it gave new teachers the *right* to

be supported by a mentor and to participate in an induction programme during a probationary year.

As the Swedish way of governance had become highly decentralised due to reforms, the task of implementing this agreement and developing local initiatives was handed over to the country's 290 municipalities. This often involved renegotiation with teachers' unions at the local level in order to find suitable forms and conditions for the induction programme and for mentors and mentees. In some municipalities, carefully-prepared induction systems emerged, while other municipalities devised more *ad hoc* solutions. In some municipalities very little, if anything, happened. In the later rounds of negotiations, the national agreement was not renewed and, since 31 March 2005, no national agreement has been in place, although some local agreements do still exist at municipal level. In the autumn of 2004, 59 % of all NQTs employed *on a probationary* basis were allocated a mentor by the school in which they worked, and 63 % thought that they received the help they needed as new teachers (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2005). Note that employment on a probationary basis gave the right to a mentor, but obviously that was not working out as intended.

Teacher registration, probationary year and teacher induction (2006–2017)

The decision taken by the National Union of Teachers in Sweden (Lärarnas Riksförbund) in May 1992 to work towards the implementation of teacher registration resulted in early 2006 in an official government inquiry initiated by the Social Democratic Government (SOU 2008:52). As the inquiry was initiated at the beginning of the 2006 General Election campaign, it can be understood as a way of moving the issue of teacher registration away from the political agenda (Gustafsson & Fransson, 2012, p. 25). The Government was under pressure from an opposition with a highly offensive political manifesto in the area of education. However, despite the political initiative to initiate the inquiry, the Social Democrats lost power and a centre-right coalition government was formed.

The official government inquiry, entitled 'Registration and stricter qualifying rules' (SOU 2008:52), was held in May 2008. On 2 March 2011,

the government bill based on this inquiry was adopted by the Swedish Parliament (Proposition 2010/11:20), and the implementation of three closely-linked reforms was initiated. *First*, teacher registration linked to the subjects and grades that teachers were trained for was implemented. *Second*, a probationary year with evaluations was added for new teachers before teacher registration could be granted. During the probationary year it was compulsory for school principals to evaluate NQTs in relation to the teaching standards that had been developed by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), and it was left to the principals to decide whether or not to recommend registration. *Third*, during the probationary year an NQT was also expected to have a mentor assigned to them to support their professional development but not one who was expected to be involved in their evaluations.

However, the implementation of these reforms was not smooth. Teacher registration became especially problematic when the NQTs who were already working had to be registered in accordance with the grades and subjects of their teacher education. It took a long time to review all the documentation and decide whether teacher registration should be granted and, in many cases, matching subjects and grades with a specific teacher education proved challenging (Frostenson, 2014). It also turned out that many older and experienced teachers were teaching year levels and subjects that they had not been trained for, which led to them not being granted registration for their present teaching position. Needless to say, this led to a number of adjustments to the legislation. One of the most recent policy adjustments was that from 1 July 2019, which now means that leisure-time teachers need a specific teacher registration to be able to teach and be responsible for a school's leisure-time activities.

The evaluations carried out by the principals were also questioned, and research showed variation in the quality of the evaluations (Fransson, Frelin, & Grannäs, 2017; Gerrevall, 2017). Evaluation was also a complicated practice, and there were fears that if NQTs were not offered probationary placements and evaluated for teacher registration it would make a teaching career less attractive (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2013). Thus, in July 2014, the probationary year and principals' evaluations of NQTs were discontinued and teacher registration was earned by graduating from teacher education.

When these parts of the reform package were discontinued in July 2014, a side effect was that mentoring also became downplayed. This could be understood as the issue of mentoring being buried under other ‘more important’ issues that were vying for attention. This led to the Swedish Teachers’ Union, the National Union of Teachers in Sweden and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) making a joint effort during 2016–2017 to revive the issue of induction and mentoring, albeit with limited effect. However, it did result in some workshops and web-based materials, including a film about research highlighting the importance of mentoring and ways of organising and carrying it out. Further, in August 2017, a letter was sent to the government calling for mentor education and an information campaign about the induction period.

Mentoring – the current situation

The current situation in Sweden is that some legislation and regulations pertain to the mentoring of NQTs. As noted at the very beginning of the chapter, the Swedish Education Act, Chapter 2. § 22a, states that the employer ‘shall ensure that at the start of their employment the teacher or preschool teacher will undergo a period of induction’. This is further elaborated on by legislation adopted on 26 June 2014, ‘... regarding the induction period for teachers and preschool teachers’ (SKOLFS 2014:44):

The principal shall design the induction period so that the teacher is given the opportunity to carry out as many of the profession’s tasks as possible. Different methods for the planning and implementing of the teaching, development conversations, assessment and documentation and, where applicable, individual development plans and grading should be included. Furthermore, the induction period will deal with questions about the treatment of students, teachers’ leadership and teachers’ interactions with students, colleagues, parents and guardians. (SKOLFS 2014:44, § 7, translated from Swedish)

Although these regulations are now in place, it is important to understand how they play out in practice. For instance, the TALIS survey from 2018 (OECD, 2019) shows that in Sweden 30 % of the lower secondary

school teachers participating in the study reported that they took part in some kind of formal or informal induction when they began work at their current school, compared to an average of 42 % of the teachers in the other countries participating in the same survey.

When it comes to mentoring in Sweden, 17 % of the teachers with up to five years of teaching experience were reported to have been assigned a mentor, compared to an average of 22 % among the other participating countries (OECD, 2019, Table I.5.10). Notably, in Argentina, Chile, Italy, Finland, Lithuania, Slovenia and Spain, only 5–10 % of the NQTs reported having a mentor, while more than 50 % reported having a mentor in Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Shanghai and Singapore. Compared with TALIS 2013 Sweden is among the four countries that have slightly increased the numbers of NQTs being mentored.

Further, in May 2019 the Swedish Teachers' Union conducted a survey covering 99 % of the municipalities ($n = 287$), which showed that only 5 % of the municipalities 'always' offered an induction period to NQTs while 20 % 'never' did. Thirteen percent offered this 'often', 31 % 'seldom' and 31 % offered it 'sometimes' (Läraryrbundet, 2019).

In September and October 2019, another survey was sent to 3,228 of the NQTs belonging to the Swedish Teachers' Union and who had graduated in spring 2019. Eight hundred and ninety NQTs responded, yielding a response rate of 31 %. This survey showed that 41 % of the NQTs were in an induction period and had a mentor, while 59 % were not. However, an analysis of the different categories of teachers shows that these figures mainly refer to teachers of years F–3 and 4–9 in the nine-year compulsory school and at upper secondary school, and involve induction activities and mentoring. For preschool teachers and leisure-time teachers the percentages were 32 % and 23 % respectively (Figure 5).

Among the 59 % who were not involved in an induction period and did not have a mentor ($n = 496$), 24 % claimed that they had been offered a mentor and 76 % said that they had not. In the latter group ($n = 369$), 74 % stated that they would like to have had a mentor.

Among the teachers with an induction period and a mentor ($n = 338$), 13 % claimed that they had reduced duties in class in order to have time to meet with their mentors.

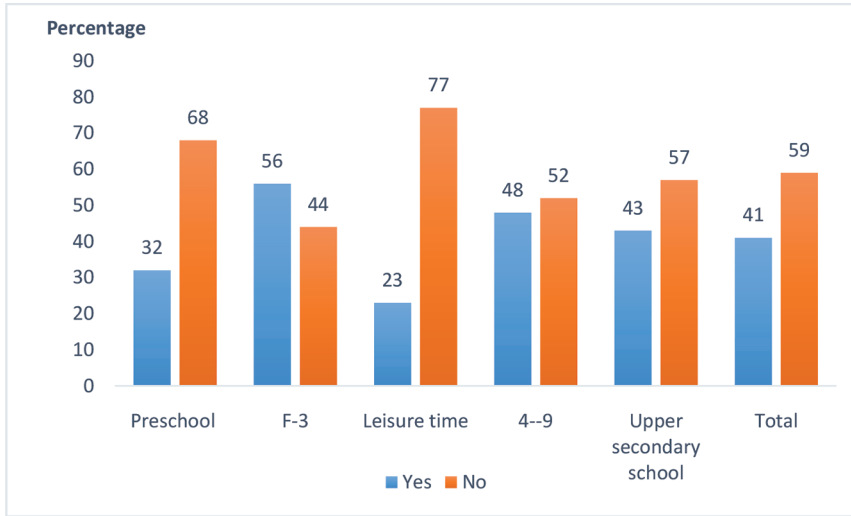


Figure 5. Percentage of NQTs in an induction period with mentors. (n = 988). (Läraryrbundet, 2019).

This shows that more effort is needed to organise induction systems and offer NQTs induction activities and mentoring.

In the following, the extent to which NQTs are involved in mentoring activities and mentoring will be discussed. Here the focus is on the principals and a government inquiry proposing a ‘professional programme and education for mentors’.

Principals as important key actors – who are also busy and moving around

Research has shown that principals are important for the well-being, professional development and resilience of NQTs (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2013; Peters & Pearce, 2012). For instance, Peters and Pearce (2012) found that relationships between NQTs and principals were important for the resilience and well-being of the former. Similarly, Tiplic, Lejonberg and Elstad (2016) showed that trusting relationships between principals and NQTs reduced teachers’ turnover intentions. In a study of Californian principals, Wood (2005) identified five important roles that principals played in the induction of NQTs: ‘(a) culture builder, (b) instructional leader, (c) coordinator/facilitator

of mentors, (d) novice teacher recruiter and (e) a novice teacher advocate/retainer' (p. 39). Thus, principals play an important role for NQTs in a number of ways – from a direct one-to-one relation to how they influence and develop a school's culture.

Against this backdrop, it is disadvantageous for NQTs when principals only stay in a position for a short period and then move on to other schools. For instance, the 2013 TALIS study showed that Swedish principals were less experienced than their counterparts in other Nordic countries – both as principals and regarding time in service at their present school – and changed schools to a greater extent (Skolverket, 2015a). Denmark has the highest proportion of experienced principals. Additionally, in Sweden 51 % of the principals have worked for less than three years at their present school, compared with approximately 30 % in Iceland and Finland, and 20 % in Denmark.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, 2019) has recently acknowledged that this situation negatively influences the ability to organise induction programmes or mentoring for NQTs, which principals are largely responsible for organising and involved in. The processes, routines and initiatives that are involved in organising these kinds of activities are slowed down, downsized or even neglected, as are activities like cooperative assessments of national tests and the structured work of supporting pupils with special needs.

Thus, the principals' working conditions and organisational structures within the education system negatively affect the possibility of organising systematic and structured induction and mentoring for NQTs in Sweden. This shows the complexity of the educational ecosystem and how circumstances are interrelated. It also shows that support for NQTs is not just a matter of moving induction and mentoring higher up the educational agenda, but also means making sure that NQTs, mentors, principals and the entire education system are catered for in the best possible way.

The shortcomings in supporting NQTs and in giving them a good start and successful professional development in their first year of teaching may be symptomatic of greater challenges in the Swedish educational system.

Waiting for the 'professional programme' - a 2018 reform proposal put on hold

The issue of NQTs' professional development and the provision of mentors has also been highlighted in a recent official government inquiry aimed at strengthening the teaching profession and teaching in order to 'strengthen the pupils' learning and development of knowledge and values' (SOU 2018:17, p. 96). The inquiry's focus is colourfully illustrated and manifested in the title: *With teaching skills in focus – A framework for the professional development of teachers and principals*.

The main proposal in the inquiry is the implementation of a professional programme (Professionsprogram) offering systematic opportunities for professional development. Linked to this programme is the implementation of a professional framework with four levels of proficiency: registered teachers, experienced teachers, merited teachers and especially merited teachers. Corresponding levels are proposed for pre-school teachers. For principals two levels are suggested – principal and merited principal. The first level – registered teacher – addresses the professional development of NQTs and their participation in induction programmes and mentoring activities with a view to becoming registered teachers. Mentors for NQTs are expected to be experienced teachers who have undergone mentor education.

This government inquiry was delivered in March 2018 and, since then, has been on the government's table for decision and further action. At the time of writing this article (January 2020), the educational sector in Sweden is still waiting to see what the outcome of this proposal will be.

The inquiry highlights the issue of education for mentors of NQTs. An education of 7.5 ECTS credits is proposed. The suggestion is that mentors need to 'develop a professional approach in the role as mentor and develop their knowledge about for instance professional ethics, adult education and conversational methodology' (p. 260). In the inquiry, the issue of mentor education is assessed as being of 'immediate interest', and it is proposed to be implemented already 'in 2019'. However, as yet, nothing has been decided or implemented.

Although this proposal has not yet become a reality, it is interesting to analyse the extent to which mentor education is provided in Sweden today at universities. This is covered in the next section.

Education and training for mentors – state of the actual

The education and training of mentors is closely related to the mentoring of NQTs. Becoming a mentor implies a transition from experienced teacher to mentor and the need to master both teaching and mentor practices (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015a). Orland-Barak (2001) claims that learning to be a mentor involves similar developmental stages to those experienced by NQTs in their first years of teaching. Here, mentors' professional development can be of two kinds: informal learning based on experiences during the mentoring process, or more formalised in terms of mentor education courses. In research, mentors' professional competence has been found to be highly practice-oriented (Clarke, Killeavy, & Moloney, 2013; Ulvik & Langørgen, 2012; Ulvik & Sunde, 2013).

When it comes to formalised mentor education, it has been claimed that the education of mentors is important. For instance, the *New Teacher Project* in California, USA, claimed that mentor education was the key to the success of a sustainable induction programme (Moir, 2009).

But how is mentor education regarded and acknowledged in Sweden? The Government Bill (Proposition 2010/11:20) proposing the reform package of teacher registration, probationary year and induction system touched on the issue of mentor education in the following way:

It is certainly also an advantage if the mentor has some form of supervisor or mentor qualification. Several consultative bodies point out that this should be compulsory, although the value of this is questioned by the Government. Södertörn University suggested that the educational institutions that organise teacher training should also offer mentor education. The Government regards this as a valuable point of view, but leaves it to the higher education institutions themselves to decide whether to introduce and organise such education. (Proposition 2010/11:20, p. 38, translated from Swedish)

When the Bill was adopted by Parliament on 2 March 2011, the reform process was accelerated to the extent that already in autumn of 2011 NQTs were required to have a formal probationary year and a mentor. By the spring of 2014, only five out of 18 surveyed universities offering teacher education provided some kind of education for mentors of NQTs (7.5 ECTS credits and five weeks of study) (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015b). When the probationary year and principals' evaluations of NQTs were discontinued in July 2014, a side effect was that mentoring became downplayed – as was mentor education. Another survey carried out in the autumn of 2019 showed that three of the 15 surveyed universities offered some kind of mentor education, although these courses did not have a specific focus on education for mentors of NQTs.

In the autumn of 2019, these three courses were officially announced in the university applications system (www.studera.nu). However, two of these courses focused on mentoring (and coaching) *in a general sense* and addressed different kinds of professional occupations. An example of the course description reads as below:

We highlight and problematise the meaning of being a mentor in all professions and activities where mentoring is a relevant part of the professional socialisation and a development of the organisation. (University of Borås, translated from Swedish)

At this university the required qualification for the course is a teaching certificate or degree for preschool teachers, teachers or leisure-time teachers *and* three years of professional occupational experience.

The course offered by the University of Gothenburg focused on the 'assessment of learning' in educational contexts, school-based supervisors for student teachers and also, to some extent, on mentors for NQTs. Thus, these types of mentor education are in line with Norwegian courses for mentors aimed at both student teachers and mentors for NQTs (Ulvik & Sunde, 2013).

Depending on the specific skills that are required, having joint and combined education for 'mentors' for student teachers and NQTs could be a sensible move. However, in some circumstances it may be better to have separate training courses. The reasons for having combined or

separate courses may be practical, ideological or depend on the contextual circumstances (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015a).

In their metasynthesis of mentor education for NQTs, Aspfors and Fransson (2015a) found that three dimensions could guide the development of mentor education: (a) *the theoretical-analytical dimension*, (b) *the relational dimension*, and (c) *the contextual dimension*. The theoretical-analytical dimension stresses the layers of content and professional knowledge and analytical skills that a mentor education needs to address, while the relational dimension emphasises the importance of relationships when becoming a mentor. The contextual dimension addresses the importance of acknowledging local, regional, national and international contexts when implementing, developing and researching mentor education. The importance of acknowledging local circumstances as well as changes at the policy level is below exemplified by the experiences of researchers at a Swedish university.

At the University of Gävle, researchers and teacher educators have been involved in mentor education for NQTs since 1998. From 1998 to approximately 2010, the researchers' and the university's approach was to *not* offer university-based mentor education, but instead help different municipalities to develop their own mentor education. In this way, municipalities not only developed the kinds of competencies that mentors needed, but also the 'ownership' of mentoring and mentor education (Morberg & Gustafsson, 2007). This approach was used in collaboration with a network of nine municipalities and involved different kinds of local education with a variety of ambitions and scope.

However, when the reform package of teacher registration, probationary year and induction system was implemented in 2011, researchers at the university changed track because they found that mentors also risked becoming involved in the evaluation of NQTs, even though this was formally a task for the principals (Fransson, 2010). This meant that mentors would have to navigate a more complicated landscape of evaluations and professional development and possibly conflicting tasks, roles, interests and ethics, even though it was the principal's evaluation that was crucial for teacher registration. From 2013 to 2015, the university delivered some specially designed courses for mentors that took this complex landscape

into account (Fransson, 2016). These courses were not offered after 2015 due to a reprioritisation of resources at the university, not due to the discontinuation of probation years in 2014.

Different actors supporting NQTs

The formal responsibility for involving NQTs in professional development and induction activities and offering mentoring lies with the principal. In some municipalities resources are provided for these kinds of activities and also for bringing NQTs from different schools together.

The need to support NQTs has been recognised by other actors too. Web-based information is offered by the Swedish Teachers' Union (Läraryrskörbundet, 2018) and the National Union of Teachers in Sweden (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2019). The Swedish National Agency for Education also offers support material (Skolverket, 2015b; 2020). Here, the two teacher unions are powerful stakeholders in highlighting the *right* to induction and mentoring for NQTs. Some membership magazines for teachers also publish articles about NQTs' experiences and mentoring activities.

Another example of initiatives to support NQTs is the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR), which is a media company 'in the service of the public' owned by the foundation for Radio Sweden (SR), Swedish Television (SVT) and the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR). The Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company provides TV and radio programmes as well as web-based materials for the educational sector directed at pupils, teachers and the public. UR has the freedom to choose which issues, themes and materials to produce, and has also chosen to provide material for NQTs in order to 'support NQTs during their first years' and to give 'advice and support in this professional role' (Utbildningsradion, 2019). The material consists of web-based films on leadership, planning, classroom management, stress, relations, evaluation and grades, juridical and relational issues, and how to organise classrooms for teaching and learning. According to officials, UR has tried to 'reflect new teachers' explicit wishes about what they need at the beginning of their professional life' and stresses that it is 'experienced teachers who give tips and advice on requested themes'.

Summary and future perspective

This article has provided a brief overview of some of the important milestones in the development of more sustainable structures for mentoring in Sweden. Legislation is in place in the form of the Swedish Education Act and the Swedish National Agency for Education's regulations. However, at present the issue of mentoring does not appear at the top of the educational agenda in Sweden. There is also a need for up-to-date data about the extent to which NQTs have access to mentors and what the quality of mentorship is like. The proposed professional programme with four levels of proficiency may result in a renewed focus on mentoring and mentor education. For this to be placed at a national level will require political decisions and local efforts. The current shortage of teachers may also give added impetus to retaining NQTs in schools and to organise mentoring. In short, there is still a lot to do.

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