



FEATURE

Career pathways in teaching in Sweden

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Career pathways in teaching in Sweden

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Abstract

In Sweden, as in many other countries, there is a pressing challenge regarding the impending shortage of teachers, which is exacerbated by upcoming retirements. The reduced attractiveness of the teaching profession is often attributed to a lack of career opportunities. Despite efforts to make teaching more appealing, there is a growing teacher deficit, and a significant number of unqualified teachers are working in schools. In recent decades, the landscape surrounding teacher supply has undergone significant changes. This has raised questions about the increasingly diverse routes into teaching and the implications for professional learning and workforce development. Therefore, this study aims to closely examine current career paths that emerge from teacher education in Sweden.

To achieve this, a multiple case study approach is adopted, which includes document and literature analysis. The research examines and compares four different cases of career pathways related to the teaching profession. It explores the efficacy of these pathways in addressing the issue of teacher shortages and increasing the profession's attractiveness. The results of this comparative analysis show that teacher education and the teaching profession can serve as gateways to various related career paths. However, the majority of these paths also lead away from the school classroom.

Keywords: teaching careers, Sweden, teacher professionalism, careers in education, teacher education

Introduction

Like many countries, Sweden is facing a shortage of teachers, which will be exacerbated in the near future by waves of retirements (Skolverket, 2023). This has led to a growing political and public awareness of the need to prioritise the future supply of qualified teachers. In recent years, several initiatives have aimed to make teaching a more appealing career choice.

One of the most prominent and controversial reforms has been the introduction of a career step for experienced teachers, including increased responsibilities and higher salaries, the so-called *förstelärare*, literally “first teachers”, but will be referred to as “senior teachers” in this paper. This reform

was introduced, among other things, to counteract existing prejudices that teaching was a dead end in a low-status profession with few opportunities for career development. A large-scale survey of Swedish citizens in 2002 (reported in Svensson and Eriksson, 2009) found that the status and prestige of teachers were low compared to other professions and lowest compared to professions requiring higher education.

Cultural peculiarities and the pressure of the acute shortage of teachers has led to a significant number of unqualified teachers (“obehöriga lärare”) working in Swedish schools. The presence in schools of teachers who have not completed formal initial teacher education can also be explained by the fact that formal education has not been as important for a successful working life in Sweden as in other countries (cf. Sadurskis, 2018). Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a raft of initiatives aimed at legitimising teachers who have come into schools via this route. The proportion of certified teachers in a school’s staff has now become a quality indicator (Skolinspektionen, 2023). Certain privileges are reserved for certified teachers, e.g. only they can get tenure or grade students (Skolverket, 2024). The introduction of teacher legitimation was intended both to improve the quality of schools and to contribute to the professionalisation of teachers. The government has set up various university programmes to enable unqualified teachers, as well as qualified teachers from other countries, to obtain a teaching certificate that is valid Sweden.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to examine and compare different career paths for teachers in Sweden and how these different paths relate to initial teacher education and/or practical teaching experience, identifying different career “directions”. The results of these comparisons can contribute to the understanding of teaching as a profession in contemporary Sweden.

Background

Teaching has both a theoretical and a practical side that must work hand in hand to produce successful results. One of the first to point this out was Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), one of the continental founding fathers of education and pedagogy as a field of research. In one of his early lectures, Herbart (1802/1981) demonstrates the importance of a theoretical, scientifically based orientation of the teaching profession, and thus of teacher education. At the same time, he recognises the indispensability of the practical application of theory and the personal acquisition of teaching experience. Formalised teacher education programmes include both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretical studies can mean both subject studies, general education and pedagogy. School placements and in-service training of various kinds constitute the practical part. The ratio between theory and practice varies between teacher education programmes and from country to country (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Given the dichotomous nature of the teaching profession, it is not self-evident that teachers should have a formal academic education. The question of whether teaching qualifies as a full profession at all has been debated at length (e.g. Brante, 2008; Hoyle, 1975; Sockett, 1993). There is not scope here to reflect on these discussions in all their complexity. However, it is worth noting that one reason why the status of teaching as a profession has been questioned is because of the different ways in which it is

achieved. Historically, in Sweden, but also other countries like Germany, France or the USA, the teacher education in higher education settings was reserved for levels corresponding to today's (upper) secondary school, while primary and elementary school teachers were educated in colleges and seminars (Richardsson, 2004; Rury and Tamura, 2019). In parts of Europe, apprentice-like "on the job" training of teachers was also a reality in the early days of mass schooling (Bosse, 2012). Today's teachers can be prepared for the job in different ways. Initial teacher education in a range of higher and further education settings, in-service training and "learning by doing" can coexist in the same national context (cf. Macbeath, 2012). The diverse routes into teaching also partly explain the dual nature of what is meant by teaching as a profession. There is a distinction to be made between the professionalisation of teaching, for example by making it academic, and the individual professionalism of a teacher that is actually evident in his or her practice (Hoyle, 1980; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005).

This collection of dichotomies is taken forward into the analysis of the selected career paths. Before doing so, it is necessary to give a brief description of the Swedish school system and teacher education in order to provide the necessary context. This is followed by a brief explanation of the research design and methods, before moving on to the core of this paper, the presentation of the cases.

The Swedish context

In Sweden, to obtain a teaching certificate for any type or level of school, from pre-school to upper secondary, including after-school teachers, must complete an education at university level. The Swedish comprehensive primary school ("grundskolan") is divided into three stages by the curriculum (Skolverket, 2022), (1) from the pre-school class ("förskoleklass") to year 3, (2) from year 4 to year 6 and (3) from year 7 to year 9. This is followed by three years of non-comprehensive upper secondary education ("gymnasium"). Teachers qualified for grades F-6 are usually generalists, i.e. class teachers responsible for most subjects. Teachers in grades 7-9 and upper secondary school are usually educated as subject teachers. The initial teacher education programme for grades 7-9 primarily provides competence in two subjects. Not all subjects can be studied at every university that offers teacher education. For further reading on Swedish teacher education from an international perspective, see Ostinelli (2009).

Swedish schools have traditionally been characterised by multi-professionalism (Berg, 2003). In addition to teachers, the staff includes headteachers - who most often have a teaching background - counsellors, special education teachers, librarians, catering staff and caretakers. In addition, teachers qualified for different types of school may work side by side, especially in the lower primary years. After-school care, and therefore after-school care teachers, are now an integrated part of the school organisation. Qualified preschool teachers are as qualified to teach preschool classes as primary teachers. In preschools, preschool teachers work side by side with nursery school teachers, who are educated at secondary rather than tertiary level.

Throughout history, municipalities have been a strong and powerful pillar of the Swedish nation. In the early 1990s, they were given more responsibility and decision-making power over schools. At the same time, the establishment of profit-oriented free schools was legalised. These two decentralisation

movements have contributed to an increase in the autonomy of each school and increased competition between schools. This has meant increased power for headteachers, not least in relation to human resources. It is the responsibility of the individual headteacher to solve staffing crises. One solution is to hire teachers or trainee teachers without a completed education, or anyone else who seems suitable for the job on the day.

Swedish research on teacher careers in recent decades has been associated with the names of Lindqvist and Nordänger. Together with other researchers, they have been able to follow a cohort of student teachers from essentially their first day of teacher education to late mid-career. A recurring theme in their research has been teacher attrition in this cohort and the reasons for it (e.g. Lindqvist et al., 2014). While attrition may appear to be the end of a teaching career path, Carlsson, Lindqvist and Nordänger (2019) have shown that many of the teachers in their cohort who left teaching actually continued working in other parts of the education system.

Research design and question

Studying and attempting to understand abstract phenomena such as career pathways is challenging. Since there are - potentially - as many career paths as there are qualified teachers, the main challenge is to find a methodologically sound way to reach a level of analytical generalisation. For the current study, the multiple case study analysis research design described by Stake (2006) has been identified as fruitful inspiration. Stake's approach begins with a critique of how to define the core of a case that makes it relevant to the research in question, in this case an exploration of pathways in teaching in Sweden. Rather than speak of phenomena, criteria or categories, Stake uses the term *quintain*, originally meaning the rotating target in medieval lance games, to define the particular form of research object and question in the context of case studies. "Multicase research begins with the quintain. To understand it better, we study some of its individual cases – its sites of manifestation. But it is the quintain that we are trying to understand" (Stake, 2006, p.6). The quintain of this study is teacher education as a professional pathway in Sweden, and its manifestations are five selected formalised career pathways (cases). These cases are constructed around a research question or "issue" (Stake, 2006, p.7) with the current quintain in mind. The question for this study is: How do the selected career pathways relate to initial teacher education and teaching as practice?

The cases were constructed using the same set of methods, always guided by the central research question. First, a systematic review was conducted of laws, policies and other regulatory documents, as well as existing research literature on the respective career pathways. The research situation on the different pathways is very diverse. Senior teachers, school leadership and the academic route are well researched, but there is no outstanding research on the others. There seems to be a complete lack of research on the continuing professional development route. This route appears mainly as a collection of national and local rules and regulations. These cases have therefore been built based the descriptions of the programmes as they are offered at Malmö university (Malmö university, 2024a, 2024b).

Four career pathways are scrutinised in this study. They were chosen, because: they are formalised, which means that they are regulated by law and/or policy and have to include further education or experiences based training beyond initial teacher education. The four career pathways are named here as:

1. The continuing professional development route for unqualified and foreign teachers.
2. The senior teacher route
3. The headteacher route
4. The academic route.

Other career pathways that deserve scrutiny in the future are, for example, trade unionists school developers and inspectors, education policy and civil servants..

The cases are presented following the same order. They are first described on the basis of their bureaucratic frameworks and representation in research. Second, the case descriptions are analytically synthesised using the metaphor of the career direction and asking whether new or divergent directions the described cases imply in relation to initial teacher education and teaching as practice. Does the pathway in question imply a continuation at the same level of power and influence, i.e. a *horizontal* movement? Does the path imply an increase in power and influence over (aspects of) the teaching profession, i.e. a *vertical* path? Or does the route mean an entirely new path, a career *parallel* to the teaching profession?

The continuing professional development route for unqualified and foreign teachers

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a significant number of teachers working in Swedish schools who do not have formal teacher education. According to a report by the National Board of Education (Skolverket, 2021), most of these teachers (63%) have no formal education or pedagogical training. They have literally learnt to be a teacher by doing. Forty-three per cent of them have no education beyond secondary school.

In order to deal with this situation, a supplementary teacher education programme called *Further Education of Teachers, FET* ("Vidareutbildning av Lärare, VAL") was made available. FET is a national initiative that is implemented by eight higher education institutions. Admission to FET requires teaching experience in pre-school, after-school club, primary school, upper secondary school or equivalent adult education. Applicants to the FET must have extensive teaching experience and credits from previous studies. FET students must be practising teachers at least half-time during their studies and in the subjects, forms and levels appropriate to their degree.

The extent of the FET studies varies greatly from individual to individual and depends on previous study credits and professional teaching experience. An overall assessment, known as a "validation", of the individual applicant's academic record and length of service as an unqualified teacher is carried out at the time of application. This validation forms the basis of each FET student's individual study plan. For those with long professional experience, there are special options for validating larger parts of teacher

education, resulting in a shorter FET. Upon completion of the programme, the student receives a diploma and can then apply for a teacher certificate.

Similar to the FET programme, a supplementary education for teachers with a foreign background has been established. Through the *Foreign Teachers' Further Education, FTFE* ("Utländska lärares vidareutbildning, ULV") programme, anyone who has completed a foreign teacher or preschool teacher education programme or a foreign academic programme in a Swedish school subject can obtain a certificate to teach in a Swedish school.

As with the FET, an individual study plan is drawn up for each student. The number of credits a student needs to complete depends on their previous education, teaching experience and the requirements of the subject or school form. The minimum requirement is a completed and recognised foreign post-secondary teaching degree or post-secondary subject education and at least two years of work experience as a teacher in an officially recognised school in the country of origin. FTFE students must be able to demonstrate knowledge of the Swedish language in order to be admitted.

A compulsory placement test must be taken at the time of application. The results form part of the admission criteria and determine whether or not the student is required to attend an introductory course. Pre-admission tests for university studies are a rarity in Sweden.

The programme includes both courses similar to regular Swedish teacher education and courses with an intercultural focus. There are courses explaining the Swedish school system and courses called "Being a teacher in Sweden" ("Att vara lärare i Sverige"). The FTFE programme is therefore complementary in terms of subject content, teaching skills *and* integration into a particular value system.

In contrast to FET, the FTFE programme is more explicitly a controlled labour market programme. It aims to integrate foreigners into Swedish society while at the same time alleviating the shortage of qualified teachers. However, the programme is selective in the sense that it is only open to those who have the background and education to meet the current needs of the Swedish education system and labour market.

The change in the pathway for unqualified and foreign teachers is not easy to describe. It can be difficult for an external observer to distinguish between a qualified and an unqualified teacher, even more so in the case of fully qualified foreign-educated teachers, whose education, however, is not recognised. From the point of view of the school organisation, however, it makes a difference because they can count another fully certified teacher on their staff. In a school system that is undergoing increasing juridification (Bergh and Arneback, 2019), this is a value in itself. They are finally completely "on track".

The senior teacher route

In 2013, the Swedish government introduced the senior teacher positions as one of several initiatives aimed at increasing teachers' career opportunities while maintaining proximity to their work in the classroom. The stated, overarching goal of these initiatives was to improve student learning (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2012).

Senior teachers are appointed by the body responsible for the school, i.e. the municipality or the free school, following an open, competitive application process. According to the law (SFS 2020:473, 2020), in order to become a senior teacher, a teacher must be certified as having at least four years of proven teaching experience; demonstrate the ability to improve students' learning outcomes; and a documented commitment to developing their teaching practice. In addition, the teacher must be primarily engaged in teaching duties when appointed as a senior teacher.

According to an early report from the National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2014), the first generation of senior teachers were mainly women, in the middle of their careers, working at a municipal primary and/or lower secondary school and teaching Swedish. The majority of the first generation of male senior teachers worked in upper secondary schools, teaching mathematics.

The immediate consequence of being appointed as a senior teacher is a government-funded salary supplement. For teachers working in schools with particularly difficult conditions in terms of the socio-economic background of the pupils, the supplement is even higher. As it is the body responsible for the school, usually represented by the headteacher, that defines the work tasks, the assignment of senior teachers can vary greatly between municipalities, schools and from teacher to teacher (Skolverket, 2015). There are municipalities that appoint senior teachers as a permanent, lifelong position and others where it is a temporary position, but has since changed them to temporary positions; there are also examples of the opposite (Hjalmarson and Löfdahl Hultman, 2016). Since the senior teacher initiative came from the state government, it is mainly the uncertainty about the funding of the salary supplement that has made municipalities more cautious about tenure. A change of government could mean a change in cash flow from the state level.

Initially, it was not entirely clear what the initial teacher assignment actually entailed. Most municipalities did not have a clear definition of the rights and responsibilities of the senior teacher (Skolverket, 2015). In many cases, "the reform [was] used as a means of compensating teachers for work already done and did not necessarily contribute to further improvement of teachers' practice or work" (Hardy and Rönnerman, 2019, p. 816).

The reform was met with scepticism and concerns that the new hierarchical level would lead to friction and envy among colleagues and led to some teachers' initial reluctance to apply for the posts, but with improved understanding and clearer definitions of the role of the senior teacher, these issues seem to have diminished (Hardy and Rönnerman, 2019; Hjalmarson and Löfdahl Hultman, 2016).

For example, it is common for senior teachers to become the right hand of the headteacher and to participate in meetings and steering committees at different levels of the local school and municipality organisation, where teachers usually do not have access (Hjalmarson and Löfdahl Hultman, 2016). The senior teacher position has become a "new form [or level] of educational leadership" (Alvunger, 2015), a position further removed from the teaching profession, which also means that benefits and a changed status are easier to accept. As not all senior teacher positions are tenured, there is the possibility of teachers returning to regular teaching. What the consequences of such a return from "being in charge" might be for the individual and for colleagues is a question that needs to be left unanswered here.

Originally, the expressed idea behind the senior teachers was that they should be active and involved in teaching, and thus represent a horizontal progression in career development. However, the earmarking of senior teacher positions for specific tasks and the increase in leadership responsibilities that comes with promotion means that senior teachers are no longer “ahead”, as the term “förstelärare [first teacher]” suggests, but increasingly “above” their teacher colleagues. This means that there are also traces of a vertical path. It is too early to say whether the close relationship between headteachers and senior teachers will lead to a new, formal level of leadership, and whether this is still a continuing pathway in relation to teaching and initial teacher education, or a new parallel one.

The headteacher route

Before the Second World War, a headteacher in Sweden was a teacher among other teachers as “primus inter pares”, “first among equals”, or “principals”. Gradually, the role of the headteacher took on the character of a profession in its own right, and from the late 1950s the headteacher was known as a “rektor”. Various courses were organised to equip school leaders with the tools to deal with all the situations that arose, including courses in school administration, psychology, education and pedagogy. (Perselli, 2021) However, there was no national consensus on this and various local initiatives were taken throughout the country. (Ekholm, 2015; SOU 2015:22; Stålhammar, 1984)

In the 1960s, a government bill (Proposition 1966:74, p.42, authors’ translation) stated that “the education of school leaders should be directed towards improving the conditions for head teachers to fulfil the task of educational-organisational leadership”. The bill goes on to say that it is about municipal administration and management, that these are things that a headteacher can be expected to have knowledge of and insight into. The then Minister of Education proposed that the National Agency for Education should organise a national education for headteachers.

This education programme was reformed several times over the years and gradually, in the mid-1990s, it was taken over by higher education institutions. Universities are now encouraged to apply to provide headteacher education for a limited number of years, after which they are reviewed for renewal. The education, which is compulsory, lasts three years and runs in parallel with the work as a headteacher and can be compared to the Headship Qualifications programme in Scotland (TGfE Scotland, 2021), for example. It is a 30-credit education programme and consists of courses in School law and the exercise of authority, 2. Governance, organisation and quality, and School leadership (SFS 2019:562).

The Swedish National Agency for Education’s target document states: “The Rektorsprogrammet [Qualification for headship] is a professionally oriented education that is based on a scientific foundation and proven experience” (Skolverket, 2020, p.4, authors’ translation). In the same document, the education of headteachers is described as both positional and vocational. It can be said that the journey from being primarily among peers has come to an end, and that school leadership, being a headteacher, now clearly constitutes and is perceived as a profession in its own right (Ahlström et al., 2021).

When a teacher is appointed as a headteacher, there are automatically admitted to a three-year education course, which both reshapes and broadens their professional identity. The duties of a headteacher differ significantly from those of a teacher in almost all areas. The management and

organisational tasks of the headteacher's role are different from those of a teacher. However, like teachers, headteachers have an educational mission that includes pupils, but unlike teachers, headteachers have an educational mission that includes teachers and other staff in the school or pre-school. It is a big step to go from being a teacher or a preschool teacher to being a headteacher (Skott and Törnsén, 2018).

Thus, the headteacher route is the most obvious vertical change of direction, as it means becoming a leader over former colleagues. They act as employers and are responsible for the legal aspects of the organisation they lead. In particular, the legal responsibilities that play a major role in the education of headteachers and the fact that they have taken on other characteristics of a profession in their own right mean that the headteacher route is also a parallel route to the teaching profession. As most headteachers today have their roots in teacher education, the experience of continuing professional development, albeit at different hierarchical levels, is to be expected.

Academic route: Teacher educators and educational researchers

Initial teacher education in Sweden is organised through university programmes that align with the levels and subjects in the school system. These programmes are staffed by personnel from various departments and disciplines, with institutions of education and pedagogy playing a leading role. Teaching staff can be classified into two groups: those with a doctorate, who are considered 'academic' staff, and 'non-academic' staff. Junior lecturers, also known as "universitetsadjunkt", are primarily employed for teaching tasks, while senior lecturers and professors are expected to carry out research and related tasks. The original purpose of employing junior lecturers was to bring individuals with extensive experience as school teachers back into higher education. This is true for all professional programmes in higher education, including teacher or nursing education (Eliasson, 2021). The term "adjunkt" implies that these professionals were originally intended to be attached to teacher education for a limited period of time, with a constant rotation of staff to keep university education up to date with the ever-changing demands and conditions of working life. This statement no longer accurately reflects the reality of Swedish teacher education. Currently, most junior lecturers in teacher education have tenure and hold a Master's degree in teacher education or a related field. Although having initial teacher education is a requirement for becoming a junior lecturer, teaching experience in schools is not as essential.

The transition from having a major teaching remit to academic staff is a doctorate. A doctorate in education or a related field is a prerequisite for starting an academic career as a senior lecturer, with the possibility of progressing to reader and professor. Doctoral studies in Sweden are organised as fixed-term employment. The time spent as a doctoral student is usually five years, divided into individual work on the dissertation, a compulsory number of university courses at advanced/doctoral level and a certain percentage of teaching duties. The amount of teaching obligations corresponds to the amount of teaching experience required to be employable as a senior lecturer. With this in mind, doctoral studies in education and related fields appear primarily as a means of educating academic university teachers and researchers.

Although PhD positions seem to be aimed at supplying the university labour market of tomorrow, the individual reasons for pursuing a PhD are diverse and depend on personal visions and aspirations as well as on the requirements and traditions of different disciplines. The decision to start a doctorate can be motivated by personal development and growth (“Bildung”), curiosity about a particular question or problem in the world, external labour market requirements or personal career considerations (Hägström, 2008). For a physician’s career, it may be important to be able to put an actual “MD” after one’s name, rather than just being called a “doctor”.

As pointed out in the introduction, such formal titles have been of little importance in the world of schooling and education outside universities in Sweden, so the academic route has been an opening for individual career aspirations. All of the above motives for deciding to become a doctoral student are possible for people entering the academic fields related to teacher education. However, doctoral students in education stand out in that personal career considerations rank quite high as a motivating factor. On the one hand, there are junior lecturers who aspire to further their careers in higher education as teachers and researchers. On the other hand, there are those who apply directly for a PhD position from outside higher education. It is not uncommon for teacher education and/or teaching experience to be merited in addition to graduate studies in the field of the doctorate (cf. Angervall and Gustafsson, 2013). Choosing a career as a doctoral student often means severe economic losses, especially if it is done mid-career from a position as a head teacher, senior teacher or junior lecturer (Eriksson, 2013).

Possession of a formal teaching qualification can provide a direct route to becoming a teacher educator in the form of a junior lecturer, although it is more common and desirable for junior lecturers to be recruited from among experienced, practising teachers. While a teacher education and/or teaching experience is crucial for becoming a Junior Lecturer educating teachers, it is not as crucial for positions as a PhD student. Here, academic and graduate merits are more important. Teacher education staff in Sweden thus consists of teachers who are divided not only by the academic hierarchy, i.e. whether they have a doctorate or not, but also by whether they have a teaching background or not.

The strong representation of teachers in university teacher education contributes to the self-regulation and thus autonomy of the teaching profession. Teacher educators influence future generations of teachers both at the classroom level and at the institutional and programmatic level (cf. Deng, 2011). They play a major role in the development and design of the curricular documents that guide their work. This means that the here described academic route is a vertical pathway in relation to initial teacher education, as it means a gain of influence over the teaching profession. In relation to teaching as practice, it is more of a parallel or horizontal, continuous one. Teaching in higher education differs from teaching children and young adults in schools; it is more focused on supervision, facilitation and the exercise of public authority among adults, but it is still teaching. The expanded responsibilities of senior lecturers, including research obligations, represent a further shift away from teaching.

Discussion and conclusion

Summarising the four cases, it is clear that formal, university-based teacher education, i.e. initial teacher education and various forms of professional development, plays a crucial role in teachers’ career

opportunities. Formal and completed teacher education is a prerequisite for permanent employment as a teacher, which in turn is a prerequisite for promotion to senior teacher. To become a headteacher or an academic researcher in education, a completed teacher education is a useful asset and a competitive advantage. The FET and FTFE programmes are evidence of the political importance attached to the formal certification of teachers. Theoretical education is clearly preferred to practical experience. It also seems that teaching is still seen as a national profession. The Swedish particularities seem to be so complex that they cannot be learned on the job. Instead, foreign-educated and experienced teachers have to undergo further theoretical education in order to be prepared for Swedish schools.

The initial teacher route originally emphasised the practical side of teaching and was intended to be a career path close to the classroom. In order to become a senior teacher, one must not only be a certified teacher, but also a qualified educator with good pedagogical qualifications. The introduction of senior teachers was a response to demands from teachers' unions to expand career opportunities for teachers close to the classroom, and can therefore be described as part of professionalisation efforts with a focus on teacher practice (cf. Bergh and Englund, 2016). However, the senior teacher position has evolved since its introduction. Applying for and becoming a senior teacher now often means that the teacher in question must be prepared to take on a wider range of responsibilities, beyond the realm of the classroom and teaching practice. Instead, senior teachers take on pedagogical and educational leadership roles, relieving the burden on headteachers. It is not a career move based solely on previous teaching performance.

The routes in this study rely heavily on individual initiative and effort, often combined with personal sacrifice. For example, doing a PhD often means both a major financial sacrifice and the risks of essentially starting a new career or before being promoted to a senior or headteacher position, lots of unpaid hours must be invested. This leads to another common denominator for the cases studied, with the exception of the FET/FTFE routes. They may be rooted in teacher education (and practice), but in reality they at the same time resemble steps towards new careers and moves into other professions. Headteachers have already taken this step and declared themselves to be a profession, a development facilitated by the introduction of a qualification for headship and forming their own union, as have university teachers and researchers. The work of senior lecturers is very different from that of teachers. The increase in leadership and management responsibilities for senior teachers also means, in part, a new career. Indeed, the Swedish title of “föreläsare [first teacher]” resembles the idea of a “principal”. It is too early to say whether this is indicative of the emergence of a new profession or not.

For those teachers who do not want to risk moving too far away from their work in the classroom, the supposed core of the teaching profession, there is still no way to gain any kind of formal recognition. A substantial pay rise is virtually only possible by changing employers, which is another form of career change, not attractive to everyone. In addition, the constant turnover of staff is very costly for the schools concerned and jeopardises quality. This has become an increasing challenge in the Swedish school system and a constant concern for headteachers. The extent to which the (lack of) career opportunities for teachers is linked to other frictions in the Swedish school system is illustrated once again by the

senior teacher reform, which was originally a government-funded reform, but the implementation of which was made the responsibility of municipalities and free schools. However, not all municipalities and free schools would be able and willing to take on the financial commitments that senior teacher posts entail, should state funding cease. There is a real risk that state funding will be reduced or withdrawn after a change of government. Different actors in the Swedish school cannot be sure of each other's long-term reliability, which further complicates a structure of equal career opportunities across the country.

Nevertheless, the case study of teachers' possible career paths in relation to different modes of teacher education in Sweden has shown that the degree of self-regulation of the teaching profession must be described as extensive. Assumptions about teachers as semi-professionals must therefore be treated with caution. Qualified – and often experienced – teachers make up a large proportion of teacher educators in Sweden, which means that they have considerable control over the future of the profession. Educationalists are often called upon as experts for policy reform and evaluation. The trend towards headteachers without a teaching background, which prevailed for a while in the 1990s, has also been broken. The creation of the senior teacher position has brought practising teachers into leadership contexts where they were not previously represented, thus broadening the decision-making power of the profession. While the number of professional titles may be increasing, and with it the notion of a multi-professional school system, the common background in teaching and teacher education of the people who hold these titles speaks a different language, as substantial parts of the teaching profession act more or less in disguise. Why that's the case, is another story.

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