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NETWORK OF ADVANCED TRAINING PROVIDERS IN SWEDEN

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Swedish vocational education and training (VET) starts after compulsory education and includes programs at upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels. Upper secondary VET programs are 3-year programs leading to an upper secondary vocational diploma at EQF level 4. Each program can be followed through two pathways: school-based and apprenticeship. Higher 1- or 2-year VET programs are offered at post-secondary and tertiary levels, leading to a diploma (EQF 5) or advanced diploma (EQF 6) in higher vocational education (Cedefop, 2022).

Over the past few years, Sweden made a commitment to an ambitious reform program to enhance involvement of social partners in vocational education and training, to increase provision of work-based learning within VET programs and to promote apprenticeship. The Swedish VET system has many strong points. Sweden has a strong evaluation culture ensuring that policy is based on solid evidence; upper-secondary VET is provided in a flexible way, allowing individuals to build on their previous experience and knowledge, and Higher Vocational Education and Training launched in 2002

has filled a gap in the market for professional post-secondary qualifications and has been expanding (Kuczera & Jeon, 2019).

In the European Skills Agenda, actor cooperation and public and private investments are important factors to support lifelong, accessible up-skilling and re-skilling for all. Partnership is a foundation of VET not only in Sweden. In European Union ministries, state authorities at the sub-national level, VET providers, employer and employee organizations, chambers of commerce and individual enterprises have intensified their cooperation due to the reforms that have promoted learning outcome-driven approaches in VET (ETF, 2020).

Public private partnerships (PPPs) are mechanisms that enable the coordination of actions and the definition of responsibilities between private and public stakeholders. Common elements are skills development, co-financing and the engagement of private or economic cooperators in the various stages of common activity, which includes implementation. PPPs have been implemented in countries at different levels, ranging from a national coordinated policy to the more regional and local level.

A great example of PPPs in Swedish VET is Teknikcollege. It is a network of competence centers where companies collaborate with municipalities and education providers, in order to secure the quality in technology oriented courses at different levels. Courses at Teknikcollege are quality assured on the basis of eight criteria. The companies of a region play a key role in shaping the structure of the courses, as well as designing their actual content.

For students, Teknikcollege offers attractive vocational education and training which can lead directly to a job on the completion of studies, or provide a good basis for further studies (e.g. various engineering courses). For companies, Teknikcollege help secure the needs of skilled workers within industrial companies. For society, the collaboration with other municipalities and different education and training providers, guarantees effective use of resources as far as municipalities are concerned.

The initiative of Teknikcollege was taken by companies and social partners within the Swedish engineering industry in 2003. Since then, the scope of the profiles offered by the institution has expanded and Teknikcollege now belongs to the entire industrial sector and is governed by the Council of Swedish Industry (ETF, 2020).

At present, there are Teknikcolleges in 25 regions of the country is now in the final stage of certification. As a result, Teknikcollege operates on the basis

of regional cooperation but actually has national coverage. At the same time, it is multi-sectoral and offers qualifications in the following sectors: food, textile and chemical industries, energy and utilities, manufacturing (a wide range of products), metal production and processing, mining, construction, IT and media technology, and more.

The objectives of Teknikcollege are defined as follows (ETF, 2020):

- improve quality and efficiency in vocational and educational training;
- improve the skills and competences of students;
- improve the image of education for industry;
- create education adjusted to the labor market;
- without introducing an apprenticeship system.

The financing of Teknikcollege is multi-source. Public funds come from municipal and regional budgets on the basis of a genuine belief and strong conviction that high-quality education is a driver of regional and national development. The VET colleges also make a financial contribution, while the investments made by private partners differ in amount and form, e.g. direct financing, provision of premises for training, materials or tools, human resources, expertise, etc. The motivation of employers is also clear: they want to secure a new generation of qualified employees in the face of an ageing Swedish society and a high retirement rate. The risks are balanced and shared more or less equally.

Keywords: vocational education and training (VET), public private partnerships (PPPs), Teknikcollege, Sweden.

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