

RENEWING SWEDISH TEACHER EDUCATION INSPIRED BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES: EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE AND POLICY

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This paper discusses Swedish teacher education reform in a transatlantic perspective. It provides an example of teacher education renewal at the level of higher education institutions based on research and international experiences. Also, the paper contributes to policy and academic leadership because it demonstrates that it cannot be taken for granted that higher education institutions' experiences inform teacher education policy.

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Introduction

Teacher education plays a crucial role in the development of successful educational systems around the world. During recent years, policy makers have shown an increased interest in teacher education reform. Teacher education is seen as a significant tool for educational change because reforms in teacher education structure and curriculum supposedly affect the professional behaviors, values, and knowledge of future teachers. However, the focus of educational policy on teacher education raises important questions about the motives for reform. Are reforms informed by research evidence and experiences of teacher educators and higher education institutions, or are reforms guided by ideological and political forces? Addressing these issues, a recent cross-country exploratory study by Tatto and Menter (2019) examined twelve countries from North America, Asia and Europe, and showed variation between countries in the extent to which research evidence informed teacher education reform:

There are still situations where the professionals – teachers, teacher educators and educational administrators – are trusted to lead processes of review and reform – with or without the research community. But there are also situations where these groups are not trusted and where politicians feel they must be seen by their electorates to be acting decisively, arguably in pursuit of the common good, frequently supporting their case by invoking global forces that demand change. (p. 281)

This paper discusses teacher education reform and renewal in Sweden framed by the overarching themes of the CALIE (Collaboration, Academic Leadership and Innovation in Higher Education) project.¹ The CALIE project includes four Swedish universities – Lund University, Stockholm University, University of Gothenburg and Uppsala University – and explores, among other things, renewal of higher education in a transatlantic perspective. Lessons, experiences, and future challenges are discussed in collaboration with Stanford University; the University of California, Berkeley; and the University of Washington.

This paper makes two major contributions. First, it provides an example of teacher education renewal at the level of higher education institutions inspired by research and international experiences. In a recent contribution to the CALIE project, Williamson and Moore (2021) presented research evidence, which they labeled “principles of strong teacher education programs,” on what constitutes high quality teacher education programs (cf. Darling-Hammond, 2006). They also demonstrated how these principles have inspired the renewal of the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP). Stanford University, as noted by Williamson and Moore (2021) and discussed in more detail by Lotan et al. (forthcoming), shares its professional experiences on teacher education reform during iSTEP, an annual professional development conference attended by an international community of teacher educators. Since

¹ <https://calieproject.com>

2012, several Swedish higher education institutions have participated in iSTEP. In this paper, the University of Gothenburg, which is one of the participating institutions, will be used as the primary example to demonstrate that the principles of strong teacher education can be applied successfully in the Swedish context.

Second, the paper provides an important contribution to policy and to academic leadership. It argues that Swedish teacher education policy reflects an international trend challenging the norm of university-based teacher education. No longer can it be taken for granted that higher education institutions' experiences inform teacher education policy. The proposed 2021 teacher education reform in Sweden is used as an example to demonstrate that teacher education reform might be seen as a political project driven by ideological forces.

The paper is structured as follows: In chapter 2, mainly based on Williamson and Moore (2021), I discuss the principles of strong teacher education programs. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Swedish teacher education system. Chapter 4 addresses teacher education renewal based on international experiences at the university level. Chapter 5 discusses Swedish teacher education policy, specifically examining the proposed 2021 teacher education reform as a political project which restricts the ability of higher education institutions to shape and determine their programs. Chapter 6 concludes and discusses implications for academic leadership in the higher education sector.

I refer to reports, evaluations, policy documents, and secondary literature. In addition, I draw on my own experiences as a former dean of teacher education at the University of Gothenburg and as the chair for the Swedish Network of Teacher Education Leaders, which has provided me with valuable insights into the policy process. This paper's main aim is to provide concrete examples to stimulate further discussions on the importance of university-based teacher education.

Teacher education reform: Learning from international experiences

The Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP) is organized and run, on a daily basis, in accordance with research evidence on high quality teacher education programs. As detailed by Hammerness and Darling-Hammond (2002) and Hammerness (2006), program reconstruction took place in the early 2000s. At that time, scholarly interest focused on factors and processes to explain variation in the experiences and thoroughness of preparation of student teachers for their professional work as teachers. Research demonstrated that successful programs were characterized by coherence, meaning that programs provided students with integrated learning experiences. Somewhat simplified, coherent programs refer to programs where university and clinical coursework are closely linked and where teacher educators—including university faculty as well as teachers and supervisors at the schools where students do their clinical work—share a common vision of good teaching and learning (Klette & Hammerness, 2016). Thus, as pointed out by Hammerness (2006), coherence encompasses both structural

and conceptual components. Courses and student placements at schools must be organized and aligned, and centered on a shared idea of teaching and learning. University courses and clinical courses should be connected and intertwined.

Williamson and Moore (2021, p. 170) provide an up-to-date account of these principles in action, emphasizing that their goal is to show the principles in action as “an ongoing development process”. They draw on the framework for coherence developed by STEP program directors Rachel Lotan and Ira Lit. The framework highlights the interconnectedness of the core principles, including the importance of integrating theory and practice, amplifying “the joint work of the university and the field,” and addressing issues of teaching for equity and justice in programs. Further, the framework is shared and discussed with an international community of teacher educators at the annual iSTEP-conference mentioned in the introduction. Lotan, Lit and LeTendre (forthcoming) explore the work of the network and provide case studies from participating countries such as Sweden, Hungary, Brazil and Chile. They emphasize the importance of learning from international experiences while, at the same time, the core principles must be adapted to educational contexts, both national and local. The network is run in accordance with the idea that “principles travel and context matters,” i.e., that core principles might inform and inspire renewal processes in different settings while being adapted to the local context.

The Swedish teacher education system

Recent initiatives of teacher education renewal in Sweden, inspired by the iSTEP professional development arrangement at Stanford University, are explored in Chapter 4. As an introduction, Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the structure of the Swedish teacher education system.

Teacher education as an integrated part of higher education

Since the late 1970s, university-based teacher education has been the norm in Sweden. The higher education sector reform of 1977 transferred the responsibility for teacher education from teacher seminars to the higher education sector (Furuhagen et al., 2019). In 2021, teacher education was provided by 27 universities and university colleges. Due to its integration in the higher education system, teacher education is subject to national legislation. For example, teacher education program curriculum is decided by the government while the parliament passes laws that regulate program structure. The curriculum identifies learning outcomes for individual programs. Each teacher education program has approximately 25 learning objectives. Program structure refers to the length of individual programs (number of credits) and the specific category of teachers targeted by individual programs. The present teacher education system comprises, for example, separate programs and degrees for a) preschool teachers, b) class teachers (grade levels 1-3 and 4-6), and c) subject teachers (grade levels 7-9 and 10-12). In accordance with the Bologna system, the program for class teachers yields a

bachelor's degree, while the subject teacher program yields a bachelor's or a master's degree. In addition, the program structure decided by the parliament regulates that all programs include three content areas: subject courses, core professional courses and clinical work, as well as the number of credits per content area.

National program curricula and fixed program structures are not unique to teacher education. In general, higher education in Sweden is subject to "fixed program structures and resource systems" (Eftekhari & Rindeljäll, 2021). However, teacher education is distinguished by the detailedness of its regulation. As noted by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF), the teacher education curriculum includes a significantly higher number of learning objectives than comparable programs to educate welfare professions, such as nurses, lawyers and physicians, and the learning objectives of teacher education are much more detailed (SUHF, 2021a, p. 29). Recently, SUHF concluded that the detailed regulation "appears to be excessively extensive" (SUHF, 2021a, p. 31)

Frequent reforms

The Swedish teacher education system is characterized by frequent policy initiatives and reforms (Åstrand, 2017; Furuhausen et al., 2019; Hallsén, 2013). The 1977 reform created the university-based teacher education structure. Since then, teacher education has been reformed about every tenth year: 1988, 2001, 2011 and 2021. In the following, I will briefly comment on the reforms of 1988, 2001 and 2011. The reform of 2021 will be discussed in more depth in the concluding section.

Teacher education reforms in 1988, 2001 and 2011 targeted both teacher education program structure and curriculum. As demonstrated by Furuhausen et al. (2019), reforms have been guided by different views of the "ideal teacher," which mirror various political conceptions and ideologies concerning the "good school." Hallsén (2013) concluded that the system for teacher education has been reformed in tandem with structural reforms of the Swedish educational system. For example, the reform of 2001 adapted teacher education structure to the decentralization and marketization reforms of the early 1990s. A series of reforms strengthened the local level by transferring responsibility for hiring and paying teachers and school leaders, as well as for organizing and financing public education, from the state level to the local level, i.e., to the municipalities and to independent school providers. At the same time, national regulations concerning the requirements for employment as a teacher were liberalized. Thus, the 2001 reform was based on the idea of a general teacher who could teach most grade levels in the comprehensive school (Furuhausen et al., 2019). Most student teachers studied together in one program that led to a common degree, although different categories of student teachers followed various paths during their time of study. One motive for the reform was to match teacher education with the greater freedom of the municipalities in their new role as employers.

The movement towards an integrated program structure was introduced by the 1988 reform. In that reform, several different programs were integrated to form one cohesive program for class teachers learning to teach in the comprehensive school, although the program had sub-programs. The reform of 2011 stands in sharp contrast, as it introduced separate programs and degrees for preschool, class teachers and subject teachers, described briefly in the previous section.

Teacher education renewal at Swedish higher education institutions

The forthcoming work of Lotan, Lit and LeTendre provides an in-depth exploration of the international network of teacher education leaders centered around the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP). Exploring lessons from Sweden, Åstrand (forthcoming) documents learning among Swedish teacher educators and shows that the four participating universities—University of Gothenburg, Karlstad University, Uppsala University and Umeå University—had different strategies for their participation in iSTEP. The first strategy focused on developing new programs, while the second strategy centered on professional development and the redesign of existing programs.

Below, the collaborative efforts of the University of Gothenburg and the City of Gothenburg to develop and implement a new teacher education program based on the core principles illustrate the first strategy, while Karlstad University's experiences illustrate the second.

University of Gothenburg

As a consequence of the 2011 teacher education reform, subject teacher programs can be of two types: a) a cohesive program with 4 to 5 years of study, including subject courses, or b) a supplementary program with one-and-a-half years of study for students with a bachelor's degree or with a certain number of credits in prior subject studies. The example from the University of Gothenburg concerns the supplementary program.

Collaborative efforts to develop and implement a new one-year program

In close collaboration with the City of Gothenburg, the university developed a new teacher education program based on principles of strong teacher education.² As described by Williamson and Moore (2021), Stanford University arranges an annual iSTEP-conference, which is a professional development event for teacher educators offering an exploration of the principles of strong teacher education at work. Conference participants meet Stanford professors, who elaborate on the implications of research findings for teacher education program design. Furthermore, participants attend university classes and meet students and faculty to share their experiences. Visits to schools and classrooms where teacher candidates do their clinical work are also part of the weeklong conference. Teams of teacher educators

² This section is based on Jarl, Mitiche and Gustafsson (forthcoming), which documents the initiative during the period 2013-2018.

from the University of Gothenburg and the City of Gothenburg have participated in iSTEP since 2013.³

Teacher educators who participated in iSTEP were involved in the collaborative project to develop a new teacher education program at the university. The collaborative effort by the university and the city was part of an initiative supported by the vice-chancellor of the university and the municipality's chief executive. Overall, the collaboration initiative aimed to increase the attractiveness of teacher education to students in subject areas such as mathematics, science and technology. Specifically, the aim was to develop and implement a one-year post-graduate program for students with prior studies in these subject areas. The ordinary supplementary program yields 90 credits and three semesters of study (30 credits/semester). In the one-year program, 90 credits are to be studied during two semesters. Also, studies during the summer are included. An initial action plan was formulated during iSTEP in 2013. The action plan highlighted the importance of developing close collaboration with schools and exploring ways to bridge the divide between theory and practice in teacher education. The initiative was led by a steering committee with representatives from the university and the municipality and run by a three-part project management team representing the municipality, the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Science. The program was developed during 2013-2015 and implemented between 2015, when the first cohort of students entered the program, and 2017. In 2018, the program was made permanent.

[Adapting the core principles to the local context](#)

Williamson and Moore (2021, p. 186) concluded that teacher education programs were most effective “when they are organized around core principles or values that research finds to be key.” Furthermore, they acknowledge that principles of strong teacher education “can travel across contexts,” although principles also are contextual and must be “tied to the specific needs, resources, and relationships of particular settings” (ibid., p. 170). For example, a key characteristic of STEP is that university courses and clinical work run concurrently. Students do their clinical placements in the morning and attend university courses in the afternoon (Williamson & Moore, 2021). This idea has been applied in the one-year program at the University of Gothenburg. Although the specific form for alternating between clinical work and university work on a daily basis have varied between student cohorts, the idea of concurrent courses distinguishes the one-year program from other teacher education programs both at the university and nationally (Hagborg, 2018; Klette et. al., 2016).

The inclusion of partner schools for student teachers' clinical placement in the new program is another example of the iSTEP philosophy that contextualized key principles of strong teacher education can inspire program renewal globally. Teacher education at Stanford (STEP) “relies on partner schools to strengthen teaching and learning across the setting of the schools and the university” (Williamson & Moore, 2021, p. 176). STEP partner schools refer to a “group of schools that are partners in our collective work of preparing teachers and teaching students”

³ 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

(ibid, p. 177). They represent a clinical model that is mutually beneficial for the schools and the university: teams of supervisors representing the university and cooperating teachers representing the schools form a network that supports teacher candidates during their studies. Partner schools offer professional development for supervisors and cooperating teachers and there are examples of collaboration resulting in concrete school improvement activities at the school level.

Inspired by the partner schools of STEP, the University of Gothenburg and the City of Gothenburg strategically selected 'university schools' for student teachers' clinical work in the one-year program. University schools are characterized by highly qualified supervisors and an exploratory approach to teaching and learning, and they enable teachers to play an active role in improvement activities at the school and in relation to teacher programs. A letter of intent was formalized between the university and the schools, regulating the roles and the rights and responsibilities of the two parties in relation to the one-year program. Common meeting areas have been established to enable teachers, principals and faculty to engage in a continuous dialogue on program and course development. This joint dialogue and the high proportion of student teacher clinical placements distinguish university schools from schools where student teachers do clinical work in the ordinary teacher education programs of the university.

Initial governmental support

The teacher education renewal activities at the University of Gothenburg were initially supported by the Swedish government. As briefly mentioned above, an action plan for the collaborative initiative was formulated during the first iSTEP visit in 2013. The action plan was later transformed into an application for funding from the Swedish government, namely the Ministry of Education. The application sketched a four-year initiative (2014-2017) with the overall aim, as described above, to increase the attractiveness of teacher education to students with prior studies in mathematics, science and technology and to develop and implement a new teacher education program in close collaboration. The application addressed the lack of certified teachers, which was an issue of utmost concern at the national level at the time, as well as the need for higher education institutions to renew teacher education based on research and proven experiences. The application was granted funding for the period of 2014-2017 for around 4 million SEK per year.

Additional funding was provided on finalization of the project. The funding allowed the university to expand the one-year program to include students in other areas lacking certified teachers, such as modern languages and craft. It could be argued that such government support suggests that national policy is informed by lessons and experiences. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, that does not seem to be the case.

Karlstad University

The overarching aim for the attendance of Karlstad University at iSTEP was, according to Åstrand (forthcoming), to drive change through professional development among leaders of

teacher education programs. Thus, the university aimed for teacher educators to gain insights and experiences which in the long run could contribute to the renewal of existing programs.

Initiated by the former dean, teams of teacher educators from Karlstad University, representing various teacher education programs, have participated in iSTEP since 2012.⁴ iSTEP participation has stimulated dialogue and sharing of experiences among colleagues. In addition, experiences and lessons from iSTEP proved to be fruitful in the university's recent efforts to adopt a strategic plan for teaching and research and, in addition, for the different faculties. In 2018, initiating the process, the Board of Teacher Education convened a meeting. At the meeting, a working group was formed with the mandate to discuss the core principles of strong teacher education programs and how these could be adopted to the local context. According to the dean, the teams' iSTEP action plans were an important source of inspiration, as was the feedback provided by the directors of STEP. The work was broadly anchored within the university as well as with schools where student teachers do clinical work. In 2020, the vision was formally accepted by the Board of Teacher Education (Karlstad University, 2020). The vision was aligned with strategic goals as well as with a concrete plan for implementation.

The core principle proven to be most valuable was the "joint work of the university and the field." According to the dean, exploring this principle in the local context strengthened the collaborative work of the university and the school providers and the schools. Applying this principle has contributed to a deeper feeling of responsibility for, and belonging to, teacher education among school providers and teachers and principals at the schools. The dean emphasized that theory and practice must be interconnected in program curriculum and in teacher education research, describing it as it is "in the air in all discussions, it permeates everything we do." Further, the vision, and the inclusiveness of the process formulating the vision, increased the visibility and status of teacher education at the university. That the process, as briefly noted above, was related to the strategic work of the university was another factor that contributed to teacher education being more visible within the university.

However, the process was not without frictions and difficulties. For example, the value of iSTEP participation was initially questioned. The hesitation was related to the contrasting organizational circumstances of teacher education at Karlstad University and Stanford University, for instance the number of students, schools and teacher educators. Providing good examples and a genuine interest in program development has helped overcome the initial worries, and so has the ongoing support of the university's vice-chancellor.

⁴ This section is based on an interview with the present dean of teacher education at Karlstad University, Jessica Eriksson, 2021-04-01.

Swedish teacher education policy: “The point 56-example”

The following section explores the role of evidence and politics in Swedish teacher education reform, based on the 2021 reform currently being prepared.

The 2021 teacher education reform

Visiting the Swedish Network for Teacher Education Leaders in February 2015, the Minister for Higher Education and Research of the 2014-2018 government stated the governments’ priority not to reform teacher education. With reference to frequent reforms of the past, the minister emphasized the government’s reform ambition, namely to improve teacher education within the 2011 program structure. The agenda of the 2018-2022 government is the opposite. Because the 2018 parliamentary election did not identify a stable majority in the parliament, an agreement of collaboration was reached between the Social Democratic and the Green party government and the Liberal party and the Center party. The agreement, which comprises ideological ambitions and objectives of four parties, identifies 72 policy initiatives which are to be prioritized during the government’s term of office. Point 56 calls for a teacher education reform. The Minister for Higher Education and Research of the 2018-2022 government engaged in a dialogue on point 56 when participating at the annual Swedish Network for Teacher Education Leaders’ conference in June 2019. The minister welcomed further suggestions and recommendations from the sector. During summer and early fall of 2019, the teacher education leaders’ network agreed on a statement with concrete recommendations on how to fulfil the ambitions of point 56 (Läraryrkeskonventet, 2019). In November 2019, representatives of the network, together with representatives of SUHF, were invited to the Ministry of Education to submit the statement to the minister.

In my experience, the political agreement on point 56 has, to this point, restricted the ability of the higher education sector to inform the policy process (cf. Ehn & Sundström, 2020). As the following example will show, the initial openness towards sector experiences was soon overshadowed by what seem to be political considerations. Point 56 in the government’s agreement with the collaborating parties includes several sub-themes of reform. Here, I will focus on the sub-theme most closely aligned with the renewal processes that have taken place at the university level based on international iSTEP experiences. Specifically, the sub-theme includes the goals of strengthening the link between theory and practice in teacher education and reforming the structure and curriculum of the supplementary program for subject teachers.

Initiating the policy process

Three experienced teacher educators were hired by the government to investigate the political aims of point 56. The investigators worked in close dialogue with different educational

stakeholders.⁵ Among other things, they took inspiration from the one-year program developed and implemented at the University of Gothenburg. Their report to the government concluded that the one-year program had “general applicability.” Thus, it could be recommended to other universities and university colleges. Most importantly, investigators reported the student teachers’ positive experiences of studying more than full-time. Full-time studies in the Swedish higher education two-semester system equal 30 credits per semester.⁶ The supplementary program for subject teachers includes 90 credits, i.e., three semesters of study. To earn 90 credits, students of the one-year program are expected to study during the summer and they are also expected to study more than full-time during fall and spring semesters. Further, investigators argued that the one-year program strongly integrates theory and practice: university course work and clinical work are run concurrently, which creates a “unique closeness between lectures and theoretical studies on the one hand, and practical work in the classroom on the other hand.”

The investigators reported to the government in March 2020. Next, an internal working group was appointed at the Ministry of Education which reported directly to the government and the collaborating parties. When the government’s proposal was finally presented, in February 2021, it held no trace of the one-year program. Instead, a pilot to introduce a new supplementary program for subject teachers was suggested. In comparison with the ordinary supplementary program for subject teachers, it includes two fundamental curriculum changes. First, the number of credits is decreased by about one-third. The ordinary supplementary program for subject teachers equals 90 credits, divided into two areas of study: 30 credits of clinical work and 60 credits of core professional courses. The new supplementary program includes 60 credits: 20 credits of clinical work, 20 credits of core professional courses and 20 credits of subject courses. Second, the proposal changed the entry requirements. To be accepted to the ordinary supplementary program, student teachers must have completed prior studies in relevant subjects. However, prior studies in broad categories of subjects are sufficient to be accepted to the new supplementary program. Thus, as mentioned above, the new program will include 20 credits of subject courses to compensate for the shortage of prior subject studies that follows from the changed entry requirements.

Higher education sector reactions

The reactions from the higher education sector were overwhelmingly critical: the shortened supplementary program was unanimously rejected by actors in the higher education sector. For example, SUHF concluded that the reduction of clinical and core professional content in the curriculum “means a fundamental deterioration of quality that ends with students being insufficiently prepared for the teaching profession” (SUHF, 2021b). The Swedish Network of Teacher Education Leaders argued similarly: the new supplementary program would leave students unprepared for the profession which, in turn, risks “significant negative effects of

⁵ This section is based on an interview with one of the investigators, Anders J. Persson. Because the investigators report to the government, this is considered to be ‘working material’ and has not been made public.

⁶ Each semester includes 20 weeks of study.

students' achievement in schools" (Läraryrskonventet, 2021; see also Jarl et al., 2021). Also, the network argued that the proposal failed to take sector experiences into account. In the network statement submitted to the Ministry of Education in November 2019, 27 universities and university colleges rejected the proposal of point 56 to shorten the supplementary program.

Discussion

The question arises of how the ministry could propose changes directly opposite to the experiences of the higher education sectors. The "point 56-example" discussed above cannot be used to draw general conclusions about teacher educational policy in Sweden. Still, it illustrates some international tendencies identified in the work of Menter and Tatto (2019). I recommend that the academic leadership of higher education institutions in Sweden pay close attention to those tendencies in order to preserve, and to strengthen, teacher education as a qualified academic program and thus, in the long run, to increase the professional status of teachers.

First, the policy process illustrates the tendency to question whether higher education institutions have the capacity to meet the societal need for highly skilled teachers. The experiences of a number of countries included in Tatto and Menter's (2019) study show that the norm of university-based teacher education is being challenged. The researchers find evidence of "a countervailing tendency" (Tatto and Menter, 2019, p. 272), which they argue questions the role of academia:

This is most apparent in England, where an apprenticeship model of teacher 'training' has been promoted and universities have experienced some sense of marginalization in these matters. In Australia too we have seen the emergence of Teach for Australia, an employment-based route, and the United States, programs such as 'urban residencies' have followed a similar pattern (as well as Teach for America).

One Swedish example of this tendency is the entrance of Teach for Sweden (TfS) in teacher education in 2013. TfS recruits high-achieving university graduates in different disciplines to teach in socioeconomically disadvantaged secondary schools in metropolitan areas. National regulations require TfS to cooperate with higher education institutions (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2017a). Even though TfS is not as 'alternative' as similar programs in other countries, the TfS-program is based on ideas about the limited capacity of higher education institutions. Furthermore, teacher education programs in which students may combine studies and teaching while being formally employed as teachers are presently being established throughout the country. While these programs may be viewed as an attempt to strengthen the role of practice in teacher preparation (Åstrand, forthcoming), one still must be aware that these alternatives include a critical view of the capacity of academia to prepare teachers for the schools of tomorrow.

Second, the “point 56-example” illustrates what might be seen as a lack of trust for research evidence and sector experiences in the policy process. Relevant teacher education research was identified in the countries included in the study of Tatto and Menter (2019). These were mostly local research initiatives and programs which affected practice, for instance, renewal processes at the level of individual institutions and programs. However, extreme variation was found in the extent to which research evidence influenced policy. Tatto and Menter (2019, p. 273) concluded that “teacher education is significantly under-researched as a whole” and that it is “still remarkably difficult to identify sustained programs of teacher education research that are large scale and/or longitudinal”. During the last decades, several Swedish policy initiatives have involved teachers in the knowledge production of the profession. Examples include Ph.D. programs for teachers, and, most recently, Ph.D. programs for teacher educators (SOU 2018:19). However, as a whole, research on teacher education is lacking and funding is scarce. Further efforts to strengthen teacher education research could strengthen the likelihood of evidence-based teacher education reforms in the future.

Third, I believe the 2021 reform to be related to the international trend of the rise of “published standards that define what it is a teacher should know and be able to do” (Tatto & Menter, 2019, p. 275). The more defined and specific the standards are, the less agency is available to “teacher educators in shaping and determine their program” (ibid., p. 276). The 2021 government teacher education reform proposal includes additional national regulations; for instance, a new steering document is to be established. While this is not the place to go into detail, my point is that the proposed new steering document illustrates the ambition of the government to regulate teacher education. It fuels the concerns previously expressed by the leadership of universities and university colleges that the high number of required learning outcomes challenges the autonomy of higher education institutions (SUHF, 2021a). The leadership fear that the negative consequences include too much content squeezed into the program and the risk that students will be provided an education “without progression and academic depth” (SUHF, 2021a, p. 32). My argument is that it lessens the opportunity to renew teacher education in accordance with research evidence and experiences.

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