

SUMMARY

1 Introduction

This study focuses on the connection between educational programmes and work in the public sector. The public sector includes that part of the economy in which the services being provided are aimed at the well-being of citizens. These services are education, health care, social services, cultural services, and sport and recreation, as well governmental administration services. The significance of the public sector in terms of the total number of people employed is considerable. In spite of the dramatic growth enjoyed by the private sector in the last ten years, a quarter of all jobs is still located in the public sector.

The number of job opportunities in the public sector can be compared to the number of graduates from study programmes with content focused on public-sector jobs and from which the majority of graduates fill a position in the public sector. The number of people trained to fill public sector jobs has increased considerably in recent decades. Even in the early 1980s when it became clear that the growth of the public sector itself was limited, a surplus of people trained to fill public sector jobs was being predicted. This situation raised the question about the degree to which the development of the public sector and the supply of people trained for these jobs were on equal footing. Have surpluses of people trained for jobs in the public sector developed, and are these people finding it increasingly difficult to locate jobs? Are they increasingly winding up in other sectors than those for which their training was intended? How has the level of positions filled by people trained to take public sector jobs developed?

The objective of this study is to describe the quantitative and qualitative connections between educational programmes and work in the public sector, with an important focus being a comparison of the public with the private sector. The study addresses:

- the kinds of jobs filled by those trained for jobs in the public sector and to what extent they work;
- characteristics of positions and employees in the public sector;
- surpluses and shortages of those trained for public sector jobs;
- the connection between the level of education acquired and the level of work obtained;
- the incomes of those trained for the public sector;
- perceptions of the quality of work in the public sector;
- the degree of interest in public-sector study programmes and the reasons why people select these programmes.

The results and conclusions are summarized in the following sections.

2 Jobs and employees in the public sector

Chapter 2 provides a description of the jobs and employees in the public sector. Traditionally, the public sector includes many high-level jobs. Almost half of these positions require higher professional or university education, and the level of the positions in the public sector continues to rise. On average, the level of jobs in the private sector is much lower. Not more than two out of ten jobs in the private sector requires a higher professional or university education. Although the educational level of employees in the private sector is also lower than for those in the public sector, it is rising rapidly. Because the rate at which this is happening is faster than the rise of job levels in the private sector, the relationship between job level and educational level in the private sector is becoming unbalanced.

In addition to certain educational characteristics common to the public sector (a high level, specific study programmes), the high percentage of women is also typical and in conjunction with this fact, the many part-timers. Furthermore, the number of women and the number of part-timers in the public sector is rising. The increased number of working women has scarcely led to a more proportional distribution of men and women over the private and public sector, however: 60% of the jobs in the public sector are now filled by female workers as compared to only 33% in the private sector. The percentage of part-timers in the public sector has risen to 45%. Unlike the private sector, the public sector work force is also ageing. One in three employees in the public sector was older than forty-five in 1997, whereas ten years previously, this number was not even one in four. The results of this trend are rising salary expenses and eventually large numbers of retirees accompanied by a pending shortage of personnel in a sector such as education.

3 The kinds of jobs filled by those trained for jobs in the public sector: a quantitative connection

Chapter 3 discusses the kinds of jobs filled by graduates of study programmes focused on the public sector. Do these graduates of public-sector study programmes perform paid work? In which sectors do they turn up? And to what degree are there surpluses or shortages of these graduates?

People with more advanced educational levels have always been highly focused on acquiring jobs in the public sector. Nevertheless, this tendency is decreasing: while in the early 1980s, about two out of three people with higher levels of education had a job in the public sector, this is now just somewhat more than half. These days, the public sector no longer enjoys the position of being the prime job destination for the more highly educated.

Furthermore, the various study programmes at the secondary and upper levels of education had traditionally been clearly differentiated into programmes aimed at the private sector and programmes aimed at the public sector. This traditional differentiation has lost some of its importance: the graduates of study programmes

in the fields of language and culture, in the fields of mathematics and natural sciences, and in socio-cultural programmes are more often found in the private sector. Particularly younger employees with such educational backgrounds commonly have jobs in the private sector. Since graduates of certain traditionally public-sector study programmes are increasingly shifting to private-market jobs, the impending surpluses have been contained.

This shift to the private sector, however, is not always a reaction to impending surpluses. The graduates from teacher training programmes for secondary education are increasingly taking jobs in fields other than education: among younger graduates from these study programmes, the demonstrated interest in a job in education has dropped to far below 50%. At the same time, secondary education is being faced with a shortage of teachers. Besides a shortage of teachers, there is also an impending shortage of nurses. This means that in terms of the entire public sector, a surplus of people trained for public-sector jobs does not exist. Only for certain study programmes focused on the public sector (language and culture, socio-cultural study programmes) is the chance of unemployment higher than average.

Judging by the various prognoses, employment prospects for the vast majority of public-sector study programmes are good. Like the private sector, the number of job vacancies in the public sector is expanding, and for public-sector jobs with specific training requirements such as nursing and education, there will soon be problems involved in attracting enough personnel.

On the other hand, it should be noted that some of the graduates from teaching and nursing programmes are neither working nor seeking work. Of those who are actually working, some work only a few days a week. Mobilizing people from these groups is a possible solution for reducing shortages.

Women, far more often than men, are educating themselves for jobs in the public sector, even after taking into consideration the study programme chosen. The fact that twice as many women are unemployed is not the result of their preference for public-sector study programmes, even though the employment opportunities for certain public-sector study programmes are less favourable. Higher unemployment among women occurs among graduates of all study programme sectors and has more to do with such factors as career interruptions and then re-entry, the setting of certain requirements by some of the women seeking work, and the preferences of certain employers.

4 Job compensations enjoyed by graduates of public-sector study programmes: a qualitative connection

The fifth and sixth chapters focus on the issue of a qualitative connection. Chapter 5 discusses the job compensations enjoyed by graduates of public-sector study programmes in terms of job and income levels. In comparing the job levels of employees, we see that having followed a public-sector study programme is commonly rewarded by being hired to fill high-level jobs. As long as graduates of public-sector study programmes are hired for a job in the public sector, they are often working at a job level appropriate to their educational level. If they switch to the private sector, not only will they experience a drop in job level but they will have job levels lower than employees having graduated from a private-sector study programme. This applies especially to graduates from study programmes in education and health care.

Although compensation for a public-sector study programme is favourable in terms of job level, precisely the opposite is true in terms of income. This adverse difference is greatest (estimated to be around 10%) at the upper secondary vocational education and higher professional education levels and is partially due to the sector in which people are working; the more highly educated working in the public sector are by and large less well paid than in the private sector.

The figures presented in Chapter 6 show that there are substantial differences in income between the job areas within the public sector. The highest incomes are paid to public administrators; here, both lower and middle-level positions are better paid than in the private sector, while incomes earned by those in higher-level jobs lag scarcely if at all behind incomes earned in the private sector. The other extreme is demonstrated by health care and welfare work, especially jobs in nursing homes and homes for the elderly. For jobs at the higher professional education level, hourly wages in these job areas are about 20% less than those in the private sector. Compensation for employees in education remains somewhat below that being earned by employees in public administration but is better than for employees engaged in health care and welfare work. In general, the differences in incomes in the public sector are smaller than in the private sector.

Due to the favourable connection between study programmes and jobs, the degree to which the more highly educated receive fewer compensations in the public sector is limited. Higher-level jobs are less well paid in the public sector than in the private sector, but the opportunity for a job at a high level there is greater. A better access to higher-level jobs compensates for the lower incomes in the public sector. The public sector also offers a certain amount of protection to women and part-time workers; the degree to which their jobs are at a lower level and are less well-paid in comparison to men and full-timers is not as great as in the private sector.

Judging by the salaries acquired through collective bargaining, the monthly salaries earned in the public sector have been below the salaries earned in the private sector

since 1990. Even so, the reduction in the number of hours worked in the public sector plays a role in this. The *hourly* wages paid to public-sector employees as determined by collective bargaining have lagged very little behind in comparison to wages paid to private-sector employees. An exchange of wages for free time has taken place more frequently in the public sector than in the private sector.

Information about the perception of the quality of the work (also covered in Chapter 6) emphasizes the previously drawn conclusions about the connection between study programme and jobs and about compensation. Employees in the public sector are more positive about the connection between their job and their study programme than employees in the private sector. At the same time, people in the public sector are more often unsatisfied about labour conditions (with the exception of the employees in public administration).

The satisfaction with the content of their work (another aspect of the quality of work) is greater in the public sector than in the private sector, while people working in the public sector are less often faced with poor physical conditions (dirt, noise, unpleasant odours, physical stress) than those in the private sector. The physical stress experienced by those in the nursing professions, however, is an exception to this rule.

In reference to *work pressure* (measured in general terms: working at a fast pace and being pressed for time), the public sector does not score so badly. Nevertheless, employees in the field of education indicate more often than the highly educated in other fields that problems associated with work pressure are frequently too much for them; evidently, problems other than rapid pace and time pressure apply to them.

5 Becoming educated to fill jobs in the public sector

Chapter 4 provides a summary of how people become interested in public-sector study programmes and the reasons why they choose these study programmes. Since the early 1990s, a restoration of interest in public-sector study programmes has become evident following a period marked especially by the popularity of business study programmes. Interest in teaching programmes for secondary education, however, remains low.

Public-sector study programmes are much more popular among girls than among boys. This difference in interest has changed very little despite the growing participation of girls in higher education. The result is that they are now in the majority in educational fields to which they have traditionally been attracted. The environment in which students grow up is another factor in what educational choice they will make. The most conspicuous factor here is the parents' working environments. Pupils with parents working in the public sector often show a preference themselves for a study programme aimed at a job in this sector. This means that there is a transfer of affinity for study programmes and economic sectors from parents to children.

Pupils with a preference for public-sector study programmes more often put the intrinsic value of the study programme and work first while placing less value on the extrinsic rewards of work (high salary, career opportunities). In this respect, they are the opposite of pupils interested in a business study programme and a job in the service sector. Pupils considering a career in education value the possibility of coordinating their work with their family life (working part-time, being able to combine work and childcare).

6 Discussion

The final chapter concludes the study by elaborating on a number of findings. To begin with, it is noted that the increased supply of graduates from public-sector study programmes has been largely absorbed into the labour market despite sombre past predictions and despite the continuous influx of these graduates. Furthermore, it appears that the absorption of large numbers of these graduates has not occurred on a large scale at the expense of the connection between study programmes and jobs. Only when graduates of public-sector study programmes switch to the private sector are they faced with a less favourable connection between educational and job levels. According to prognoses, the prospects for these graduates are not bad either, and the expected scarcity of personnel will have a positive effect on the connection between study programmes and jobs.

The drawback to these favourable employment prospects, however, is that shortages of personnel will soon occur in education and health care (teachers and nurses). Given the close relationship between study programme and profession, the possibilities for substitution are few. Ways to reduce such shortages include stimulating participation in these study programmes, mobilizing qualified people who are not working or working elsewhere, expanding the appointments of part-timers, and counteracting the number of people leaving these positions. Each of these strategies is associated with advantages and disadvantages.

The threat of shortages in certain areas of the public sector is intensifying the demand for increasing the sector's appeal. Strong points in favour of the public sector are a relatively good connection between study programme and job level (both according to 'objective' criteria as well as employee perception) and a relatively high level of satisfaction among employees with the content of their work. Against these selling points are the lower wages earned in significant areas of the sector. These lower wages are also associated with a lower degree of satisfaction in terms of compensation.

To increase the appeal of the public sector, it is important that work in the sector generally satisfy the points that young people with an interest in the public sector value. Issues that in themselves can be indicated as disadvantages to jobs in the public sector such as wages and career perspectives are less important to these young people.

A final issue illuminated by this study's findings involves the attempts to get women and girls to move into less one-sided choices for study and profession. The data illustrated in this study show that the continuous preference of women for public-sector study programmes and jobs in the public sector is understandable. Girls, much more than boys, value the possibility of later being able to combine work and childcare. A part-time job is thus seen by many of them as essential. The public sector offers ample opportunity to meet this requirement while in sectors such as the government, education and health care, facilities for day care are much more plentiful than elsewhere. The opportunity for women to work need not systematically suffer from their preference for public-sector study programmes. By choosing in favour of a job in the public sector, women can limit the degree to which their incomes and job levels are lower as compared to men. All in all, this makes the public sector an attractive employer for many women. It is therefore unlikely that women and girls can be influenced to make less traditional choices as long as there are such advantages associated with the professions they have traditionally chosen.