

Outline of the ArbetSam approach

Introduction

The ArbetSam project (2011-13) aimed to upskill frontline adult social care staff in the Stockholm region of Sweden. Funded by the European Social Fund, the project worked with 75 adult social care workplaces to embed an innovative system of sustainable workplace learning. In addition to delivering vocational qualifications to over 650 employees, the project also addressed employees' Swedish language needs – in the Stockholm region migrant workers make up more than half of the adult social care workforce and many have limited Swedish. Overall, ArbetSam benefitted some 3000 care workers.

ArbetSam's innovative approach was developed through a decade-long series of projects in the Stockholm region, prompted by the workforce challenges associated with rising demand for increasingly complex care (due to population aging). These challenges exist in other European countries, where migrant workers have also become an important part of the care workforce, and, from 2013 to 2015, the ArbetSam approach was the subject of a Transfer of Innovation project, funded through the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme. That project, TDAR (Transfer and Development of ArbetSam Results), brought the approach to four other European countries¹.

ArbetSam: Key concepts, methods, products

Key concepts

1. Vocational learning aims to improve workplace performance. For this to happen, workers must apply vocational learning in their practice.
2. The more closely vocational learning is linked to workplace practice, the more likely workers are to apply vocational learning.
3. Linking vocational learning closely to workplace practice makes the learning more accessible and relevant to workers, particularly front-line workers with limited educational attainment.
4. Work is a collective, organised activity. Vocational learning can only improve workplace performance if it is incorporated into collective practice and supported by workplace decision-makers (i.e. those responsible for managing work organisation and work activity).
5. Close co-operation between learning provider and workplace personnel is necessary in order to link vocational learning to workplace practice. Workplace managers and other staff need to be involved in the planning and implementation of any formal learning programme.
6. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that learning is transferred from the classroom to work activity. These mechanisms should ensure organisational and peer support to help the individual workers participating in the formal learning programme to apply their learning at work.
7. Formal classroom learning is only one form of vocational learning. Workplace systems (i.e. work organisation, people management processes) also 'teach' workers how to do their jobs. In addition, workers learn from the daily interactions they have with colleagues and 'customers' during work activity.

¹ TDAR project partners included Stiftelsen Stockholms läns Äldrecentrum (Stockholm Gerontology Research Center), Stockholms Stad (Sweden); interculture.de e.V. (Germany); Oxfordshire Skills Escalator Centre CIC Ltd (UK); Nazaret Zentroa (Spain); and UC Leuven/Limburg (Belgium).

8. These other forms of vocational learning offer ways to extend and support formal classroom learning and its transfer into workplace practice – provided that all three learning systems (i.e. formal classroom learning, non-formal workplace-systems-learning and the informal learning of daily interactions) are aligned to inform and reinforce each other.
9. Because work is a collective, organised activity, communication is central to performance. Language is central to communication and therefore to performance, individual and collective. Language is central to learning, including all three vocational learning systems. It is also central to personal identity.
10. Within the context of work and vocational learning, language competence is best treated as a vocational competence to be developed individually in workers (natives and migrants alike) and collectively in organisations. Employers have a role to play in supporting language development in the workplace while vocational learning providers support it in formal learning programmes. More generally, responsibility for developing migrant workers' Swedish language proficiency should be shared between the individual worker, their employer, their colleagues and the state.
11. Reflection is at the heart of vocational learning and at the heart of organisational performance. Reflection helps individual workers to relate theoretical learning to their daily practice. It helps teams and organisations develop a shared understanding of their practice through collective examination of daily practice. Reflection is a skill and needs to be supported. Formal learning programmes should use reflection to help learners connect theory and practice. Employers should use reflection to help work teams improve their practice.
12. The need for vocational learning is career-long for individuals and life-long for organisations. Vocational learning needs to be collective, inclusive and sustainable. Much of it must and can only happen in the workplace; all of it must be linked as closely as possible to workplace practice. This has implications for both employers and learning providers. Employers need the expertise and resources of learning providers. Learning providers need the input and support of employers. Vocational learning is partnership work.

Methods

1. Partnership working, between employers, care providers, Swedish language learning providers
2. Formal learning, based on validation (accreditation of prior learning), individual learning plans, portfolio building
3. Integrated teaching of care skills and language skills
4. Three-way discussion, between learner, line manager, teacher at least twice during the programme (beginning and end) to ensure manager is involved in learner's programme and progress
5. Reflective practice discussions: group discussions focused on care work scheduled in work time for care workers
6. Members of care staff trained to act as reflective practice discussion leaders
7. Work-related language assessment, where both participant and Swedish language teacher each assess participant's Swedish language skills informally, using CEFR adapted to care workplace
8. Support for language development embedded in the workplace through voluntary care staff role of language advocate, whereby a member of staff acts to support migrant worker colleagues informally and also to champion language development more broadly in the workplace

Products

1. Handbook for workplaces: *Better language skills, better care – SpråkSam is leading the way* (2011)
2. Handbook for teachers: *ArbetSam – the learning workplace, teacher's guide* (2013)
3. CEFR adapted for elderly care context: *Adaptation of the Council of Europe's linguistic reference levels for work in elder care and care for people with disabilities* (2012)
4. Curricula for language advocates and reflective discussion leaders
5. Guide for managers
6. Promotional materials, including website and films

These products, along with additional materials developed through the TDAR project are available here <http://www.aldrecentrum.se/utbildning1/TDAR/>

The diagrams below describe the Swedish context for ArbetSam and the ArbetSam approach.

Figure 1. The Swedish context: challenges addressed by ArbetSam

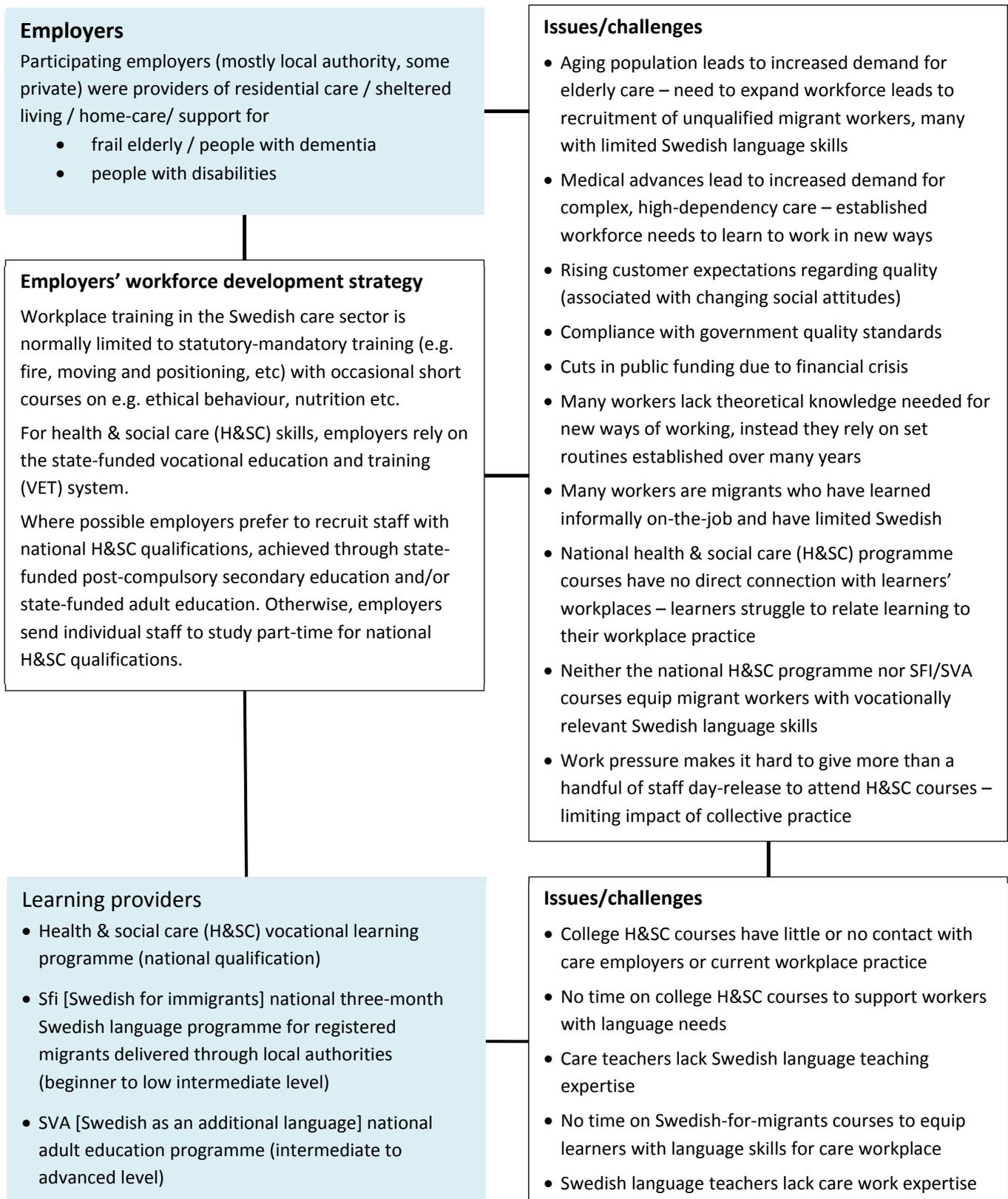
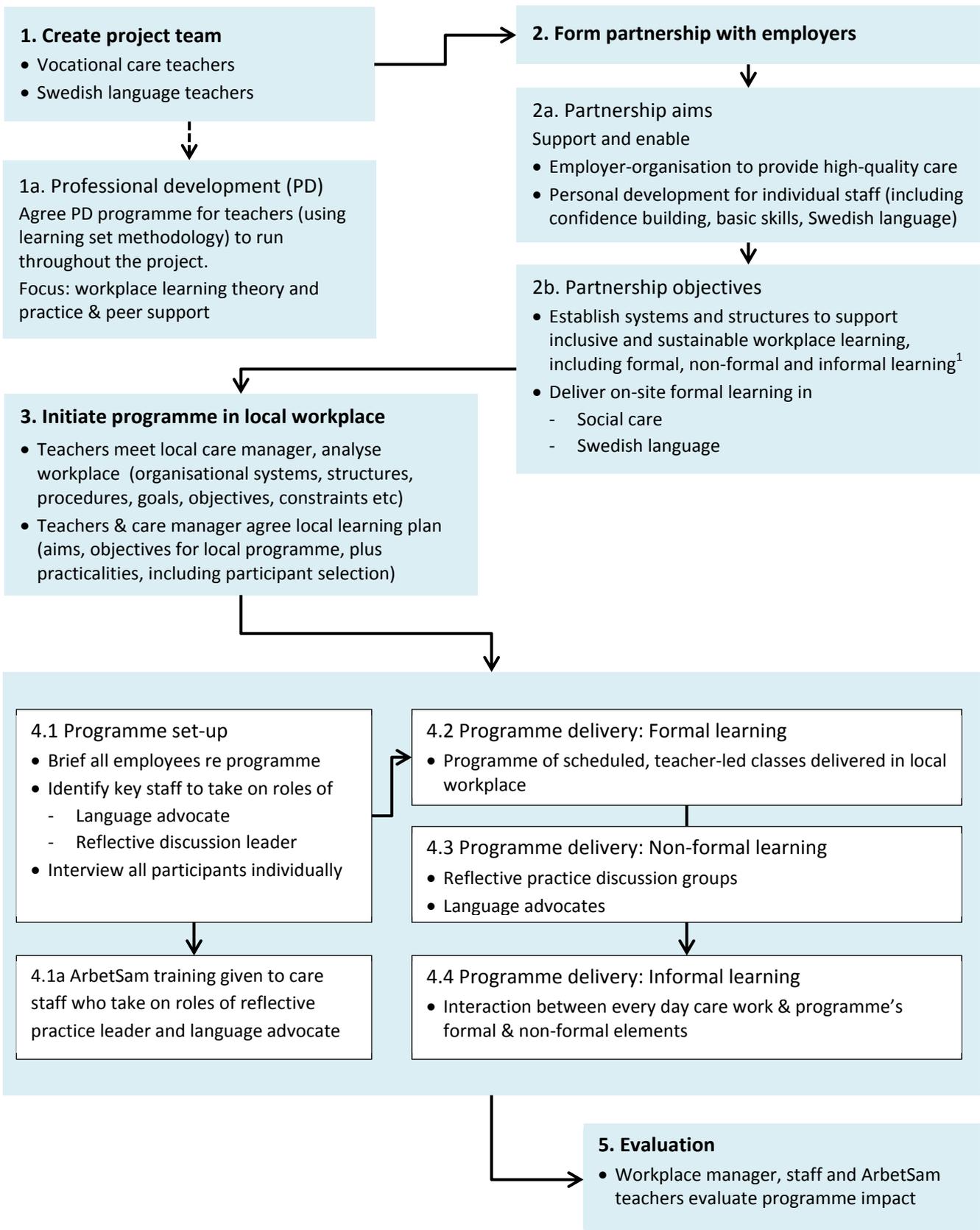


Figure 2. Overview of the ArbetSam approach



¹Informal learning: Situations / events in daily life, daily interactions at work with care recipients, relatives and /or colleagues

Non-formal learning: Reflective discussion groups, workplace meetings, workshops, supervision

Formal learning: Structured learning programmes

Figure 3. ArbetSam approach in detail (cf fig. 2, 4. Deliver programme in local workplace)

