The Swedish Education Act states that all students in schools should receive guidance before making choices concerning their future. Career guidance is provided through teaching, information provision and guidance counselling. It is the responsibility of all school staff and most guidance counsellors within the school system hold a Bachelor of Arts in Study and Career Guidance.

Since 2013, the National Agency for Education has had a government brief to strengthen and support career guidance in schools. The agency’s activities mainly focus on career guidance in general, how to support teachers in integrating knowledge about working life and occupations into their subjects and how to encourage the motivation of pupils.

Background
Policy (The Education Act), steering documents, the curriculum and general guidelines are produced at national level. The local level is responsible for achieving national stipulated goals and organising and allocating resources. Provision, and how to achieve common goals such as equity, can vary. There are differences between cities, within cities and across schools. The role of the agency at national level is to support the local level.

The agency has published general guidelines for career education and guidance to promote the uniform application of legislation within the school system and to make it easier for education providers to plan and organise their guidance activities. We provide recommendations about how statutes can be applied and the guidelines illustrate how responsibility for guidance is divided into three parts: information, personal guidance and teaching. The guidelines also provide a Career Management Skills (CMS) perspective, where knowledge and skills in this field are supported and developed.

It is common practice that only guidance counsellors deliver guidance in schools. But the mandate stipulated in national steering documents is broader, i.e. a whole school approach. However, teachers are not always aware of how they can deliver guidance within their teaching even though they are responsible for integrating the content into their subjects. The guidance counsellors have a greater role in the provision of support and are responsible for guidance counselling, individually or in a group.

Pupils’ knowledge about working life and occupations in Sweden is narrow and needs to be developed. It is necessary that they make well-informed choices about further studies but it is not easy to make informed choices without experience and knowledge.

Sweden has a long tradition of guidance and Mikaela Zelmerloow of Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education, explains in this article how the system works today.
There are high dropout rates in upper secondary school and too few students go on to vocational education. The government, therefore, decided to develop a three-year programme to strengthen guidance in school, specifically concentrating on occupations and working life. It is mainly designed for compulsory school, but is also suitable for upper secondary school and adult education. The government has since decided to extend the programme and will fund it until the end of 2018.

Training package
To support the provision of guidance, the agency offers in-service training for teachers, guidance counsellors and school leaders, a “training package”. The purpose is to integrate educational and vocational guidance into all subjects across the whole school, mostly compulsory school. We offer this training all over the country and approximately 1,500 teachers, guidance counsellors and school leaders have participated so far. The agency conducts the training in close cooperation with the Public Employment Service and the country’s regions and universities.

The training package is designed to
• develop examples of teaching participants how to use knowledge about working life in their classes based on the core content of the subject curriculum.
• support pupils in making informed choices for further studies and future work, and to develop their ability to manage recurring choices.
• demonstrate the benefits of integrating educational and vocational guidance in education and how to work systematically and long term.
• improve knowledge of the labour market.
• develop contacts with the surrounding community.
• gather teaching material and offer a database where other teachers can find inspiration for their own activities.

The programme involves participation in two training days, with a few months between the days. During that period participants will have two or three supervision sessions. Different universities supervise groups between training days.

Embedding career exploration into subjects
The material that teachers create varies according to subject discipline. In science, for instance, if a student asks ‘what use could I have with physics’, the teacher often suggests that the student could be a physics teacher. But the goal is to inspire the teacher to think of broader possibilities. So, when young pupils learn to read and write they are encouraged to choose a story and begin to find out what professions are involved in producing such work and how they can train to become such a professional - publisher, author, editor, artist (cartoonist). By doing this, the pupils’ desire to read has hopefully increased as well. Five or six different subjects can be involved, all based on the core elements in the subjects.

Another example is of a class who produced a web-based inventory of their interests and published their results/occupations on the wall in the teachers’ room. The teachers who taught that specific class studied the inventory and tried to work out which of their subjects had links to the professions on the wall. The exercise helped teachers to think about how to link the content of their subject to various professions. Interestingly, the Art teacher found his subject in all professions on the wall.

Pupils need to be equipped to deal with ongoing transitions – it is likely they will change direction often during their working lives. So the next task for Sweden is to explore how Career Management Skills can be developed to support pupils in dealing with these transitions.

Related links
Education in Sweden
https://sweden.se/society/education-in-sweden

Overview of Swedish Education System
http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak-och-lattlast/in-english/the-swedish-education-system

Upper secondary school – Sweden

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1 Each year there are more than 30 000 young people who do not complete their upper secondary school education with leaving certificate, diploma or proof of study within three years after they started secondary school. This corresponds to approximately eight per cent of all students in secondary schools. Some of them finish in four years and a few in five years.