Being a trainee at a government agency

INTRODUCTION
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The public sector includes many qualified professions. Approximately 250,000 central government employees work daily with higher education, crime fighting, international work, collecting taxes, making payments from social security systems, mediating employment, planning infrastructure, cultural matters and much more. Examples of professional roles include researchers, police, investigators, museum employees, fighter pilots, dance teachers, tax experts and IT technicians, to mention but a few. Sweden currently has approximately 340 government agencies.

The five largest employers are the Police Authority, the Swedish Armed Forces, Försäkringskassan (Swedish Social Insurance Agency), Arbetsförmedlingen (Sweden's Public Employment Agency) and the Swedish Tax Agency.

Working for the central government means contributing to social welfare for everyone living in Sweden and for building Sweden's relationships with the rest of the world. Working for the central government also means carrying out the work and applying the laws and regulations that the Swedish government and parliament have decided on.
Sweden is a parliamentary democracy. This means that all public power proceeds from the people. Being employed by the state means being part of the democratic process.

You are helping realise the will of the Swedish people and the Swedish state.

The Swedish people select representatives to the Riksdag (the Swedish parliament) in elections every four years.

The Riksdag appoints a prime minister who is tasked with forming a Government. The Riksdag is the supreme decision-making body in Sweden. Its tasks include deciding on laws and on the national budget.

The Government governs Sweden by implementing the Riksdag’s decisions and proposing new laws and amendments to existing laws. It is assisted by the Government Offices,
with ministries for different areas, as well as the various government agencies. The Government is free to decide how the agencies should work. But the Government may never control how the agencies apply laws. In many other countries, a minister may directly influence how the government agencies work. In Sweden, this is now allowed. Sweden has what is referred to as a prohibition against ministerial government

Each year, the Government decides on appropriation directions for the agencies. The appropriation directions specify how the agencies shall work and how much money they have at their disposal.

The Government decides who is made head of a government agency. The head of a government agency is called the Director-General.
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**THIS IS HOW THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS WORKS**

**THE PEOPLE**

The people of Sweden elect the members of the Riksdag

**ELECTIONS HELD EVERY FOUR YEARS**

The Riksdag makes decisions on laws and about government spending.

**THE RIKSDAG**

**THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS MINISTRIES**

The Government governs Sweden and gives both money and assignments to the government agencies.

**GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

**RESULTS**

The government agencies are to ensure that the decisions made by the Riksdag and the Government are carried out.
Private and public sectors – what is the difference?

In Sweden, work is often divided into public and private sectors. Public sector work includes work financed by taxes and carried out by government bodies. This includes all state operations, but also work in municipalities and county councils.

**Public sector**
The public sector involves tax-funded operations which are run by public actors. The public sector has two parts: government activities and activities conducted by municipalities and county councils.

**Government activities**
Operations (administrative agencies, public enterprises etc.) with a commission from the Government and Riksdag to work with specific activities to develop and support society as a whole.

**Activities conducted by municipalities and county councils**
Hit Operations (schools, public traffic, health services etc.) working for a part of society with geographical delimitations. There are several such activities, which together takes care of society as a whole.

**Government operations**
This is often a matter of government agencies being given specific tasks by the Government and Riksdag in order to develop and support society. The operations are mainly financed by taxes. Government operations include administrative agencies such as Arbetsförmedlingen and public enterprises such as Luftfartsverket. This does not, however, include stateowned companies such as Vattenfall. They are considered to be part of the private sector.

The state employs around 286,000 people. This is equal to 6 per cent of all persons employed in the labour market.

**Municipal and county council operations**
Här handlar det om sådan verksamhet som bedrivs av kommuner och landsting, till exempel skola, hälso- och sjukvård och lokaltrafik.

Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities and each municipality has its own elected body, a municipal council, which decides on municipal matters. The operations are financed by municipal taxes, fees and government funds.

Sweden is divided into 20 county council and each county council has its own elected body, a county council assembly, which decides on county council matters. The operations are financed by county council taxes, patient fees and government funds.

**Municipalities and county councils** employ around 1,098,100 persons, which is 23 per cent of all employees on the labour market.

**Private sector**
Companies or organisations that are often run for profit. There are competing actors producing similar goods/services.

**Private operations**
These often involve companies or organisations that are run for profit, for example by competing with others who produce similar goods and services. Private operations involve (in addition to households) privately owned companies. These are often organisations seeking to make a profit. There are also non-profit organisations within private operations. These are sometimes referred to collectively as non-governmental organisations.

The private sector, which is the largest sector, has around 3,403,500 employees, which is equal to 71 per cent of everyone employed on the labour market.
Common fundamental values

Fundamental values are the values that form the basis for an organisation’s work. There is a set of fundamental, democratic values that apply to all government employees, regardless of professional role.

Democracy
All public power proceeds from the people. We ensure that the people’s will, via the Riksdag, is realised.

Legality
Public power is exercised in accordance with the law. We must obey the laws and rules that apply to our work.

Objectivity
We must treat everyone equally before the law, and be objective and impartial. We must ensure that similar cases are handled the same way and that decisions are not based on subjective opinions.
We cannot accept bribes.

Freedom of opinion
Swedish democracy is based on freedom of opinion. Openness and freedom of expression are important. We have a right to talk about what happens at the agency, apart from information that is confidential.

Respect for everyone’s equal worth, freedom and dignity
The public power shall be exercised with respect for everyone’s equal worth and for the individual’s freedom and dignity. We must always respect the fact that people are equal and not discriminate against anyone due to factors such as their gender, ethnicity or functional capacity.

Efficiency and service
Efficiency and good use of resources shall be combined with service and accessibility. We are to provide information, guidance and advice to the public. We are to carry out our duties in an efficient way.
### Working at a government agency

Government employees work in a variety of fields. The image on page 11 shows the different fields, with two examples of government agencies in each field.

The government agencies are divided into seven different operational fields.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Field</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Agencies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>74,700</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Lund University, National Agency for Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social defence and administration of justice</strong></td>
<td>52,300</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Police Authority, Economic Crime Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social security etc.</strong></td>
<td>41,600</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Försäkringskassan, Pensions Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General public administration</strong></td>
<td>28,200</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Tax Agency, Agency for Public Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Armed forces and emergency preparedness</strong></td>
<td>28,100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Coast Guard, Civil Contingencies Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade and commerce matters</strong></td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Work Environment Authority, Transport Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recreation, culture and religion</strong></td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>National Heritage Board, Moderna Museet</td>
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Recreation, culture and religion
Our job is to preserve, utilise and develop the cultural heritage. We collect, preserve and display art.

Social defence and administration of justice
Our job is to reduce crime and to promote security in our society.

Education
Our job is to educate and do research at universities and university colleges and to promote an equal education for all, as well as a high level of quality in both education and research.

General public administration
Our job is to ensure that the right taxes are paid and that everyone living in Sweden are registered in the population register. Our job is to develop and streamline the operations of the government agencies.

Social security etc.
Our job is to pay out different forms of remuneration to parents, people with functional impairments, people with illnesses and pensioners.

Trade and commerce
We set requirements to ensure that all workplaces have a good working environment. We strive to make sure that everyone gets where they are going in a smooth, environmentally friendly and safe manner.

Armed forces and emergency preparedness
We are responsible for environmental rescue and monitoring the nation’s coastline. We help in the event of disasters and crises both in Sweden and around the globe.
What does it mean to work at a government agency?

Work duties
As an employee of the state you are the extended arm of the Government. When working at a government agency, it is important to be aware that the citizens of Sweden (via the Riksdag and Government) are the ones who commission your work, and that your operations are financed by public funds. The work that is done at a government agency obviously varies depending on the agency. The work duties can also vary greatly within a single agency.

Exercise of public authority – making decisions in the agency’s name
When an employee of the state does something as part of their work, for example deciding on a certain measure, they must always consider the rules that apply in that situation. Sometimes it can be a matter of exercising public authority. These are the types of decisions where a government agency is authorised to exercise authority over the citizen. Examples include decisions about permits, fees, compensation or obligations of some kind. In these situations, the government employee must follow the applicable legislation (laws, regulations or provisions).

Management by rule – how the work is carried out
There are certain requirements that apply to all government employees, for example about how cases shall be processed – as simply, quickly and cost-efficiently as possible. Where decisions need to be communicated, this should be done in a clear and easy to understand way. There are also rules regarding service, for example meaning that you are obliged to answer questions from the public. A government employee should also be objective in their handling of matters. For example, they should not handle cases relating to someone they know or are closely related to.

Openness and secrecy
Openness is important in public administration, for example in order to prevent corruption. The general idea is therefore that information and documents at a government agency are public and shall be provided to members of the public on request. However, for certain information and documents there are rules that mean that a government employee is sworn to secrecy and cannot disclose them. This can, for example, pertain to sensitive information about someone’s health. If a government employee is sworn to secrecy, this applies both in the workplace, between colleagues who do not have the same work duties, and outside of the workplace.

The workplace
Working for the state is like any workplace when it comes to being comfortable with your work environment and work duties. Good work environment is a highly valued among government agencies.

Design of the workplace
The physical design of the workplace is important and your employer often tries to adapt the environment to the specific needs entailed by the work. If you work in an office, there may be adjustable desks that can be raised or lowered, and if you have a more physical line of work there are usually work clothes and tools to ensure that the work is safe and does not cause undue strain on the body.

Agreements
There are agreements that apply to the state as a whole, but also local agreements in each workplace that determine how much you are to work, how salaries are set, how and when you can take time off etc. The agreements form a foundation and framework for how the workplace is designed so that everyone is able to do a good job, with the possibility of balancing work and leisure time. The agreements are reached between the employer and the labour unions.

Dialogue with managers
Through dialogue with your manager, you will regularly discuss how you perceive your work situation. Some frameworks can, as previously mentioned, already be set in agreements and rules in the workplace. But by talking and telling your manager how you feel about your work duties, cooperation and goals, you can influence how your work should be done.
Being a trainee at a government agency

As a trainee you are not employed, but through work duties, the workplace and colleagues you will learn more about what it is like to work for a government agency. Some elements of the work differ from how it is to be an actual employee at the agency.
Working hours
In many cases you may have been given your trainee position by Arbetsförmedlingen and, depending on their model, you may not be a full-time trainee but instead do other things in addition to the traineeship, such as learning Swedish or taking classes via Arbetsförmedlingen.

As a trainee you are not, unlike an employee, paid by the agency. However, Arbetsförmedlingen or Försäkringskassan will give you special compensation for your time as a trainee.

Work duties
As a trainee you are not an employee, which means that your work duties may differ. You will try different aspects of the work, but you will for example not be allowed to handle cases where you make decisions on behalf of the agency.

The agency that offers the trainee position is responsible for your work environment. In this respect, things are the same as for the agency’s employees. Regardless of how your traineeship is set up, it is important that you, just like the employees, go ahead and influence your work situation, take an active interest in your work and ask questions when you want to know more.

Supervisor
From the very first day, you will have a supervisor who will help you in the workplace and tell you about working for the government. You can always contact this person if you have questions or want to know more about something.

More information
You can read more about what it is like to work for the government at our website,

www.arbetsgivarverket.se/jobbastatligt