

Appendix C

A National Knowledge Centre for the Work Environment – Objectives and Activities (English translation of chapter 1)

The following text gives a summary of the viewpoints and suggestions of the Scientific Advisory Committee for the Work Environment Policy (Arbetsmiljöpoltiska kunskapsrådet) regarding a coordinating agent for the dissemination of work environment knowledge¹ or, in the words of the Advisory Committee, a *National Knowledge Centre for the Work Environment*. The Advisory Committee has developed these suggestions with due consideration to the opinions of a multitude of stakeholders in work environment practice and research as interviewed by the Advisory Committee in late spring 2011, and with consideration to policy documents² behind the Government's 2010 action plan³ for the work environment policy.

Needs and opportunities for a National Knowledge Centre for the Work Environment

In earlier reports the Advisory Committee has shown that a good work environment and wise routines for managing the work environment are decisive factors for profitability, efficiency, and competitive power in both business and public organisations⁴, and for increasing the feasibility for groups with demonstrated diffi-

¹ cf. Skr. 2009/10:248.

² In particular Ds. 2008:16.

³ Skr. 2009/10:248.

⁴ *God arbetsmiljö – en framgångsfaktor?* SOU 2009:47 (in Swedish with summaries in English).

culties in attaining or retaining a job to be part of working life⁵. A wise and effective work environment management requires that up-to-date knowledge from researchers and practitioners is appropriately disseminated, and that those receiving the information recognize the importance of work environment issues.

The Advisory Committee has concluded that the current level of dissemination of knowledge is dissatisfactory, a view supported by a majority of the interviewed stakeholders who represent worker representatives and employers, practitioners and researchers. Several stakeholders did, indeed, demonstrate knowledge dissemination, but did so from their own standpoint to meet specific commissions rather than in response to a recognized national need. In many cases, these endeavours lacked long-term stability in commitment, economy and focus. A solid dissemination of knowledge at a national level requires a long-term perspective regarding access to information on the work environment as well as an understanding of the long-term development of the work environment. The Advisory Committee is therefore of the opinion that there is both a need and a responsibility at the national level to develop, manage, update and support a strong centralized knowledge base concerning work environment conditions and effective development strategies for the work environment, and to do so with a stable, long-term commitment. The Advisory Committee also emphasizes the fact that Sweden needs an official representation in certain international bodies and networks in the work environment sector.

The Advisory Committee believes there are currently favourable conditions for realizing these national needs. The Swedish government has stressed that the work environment is a national concern through its action plan for the work environment policy, and the worker representatives and employers prioritize work environment issues. Also, the high standard of Swedish work environment research continues to be reputed internationally, although the Advisory Committee underscores their anxiety for its future, as expressed in reports by other authorities⁶. Thus, the Advisory Committee concludes that there is a strong base for creating – in some organisational form – an eminent and effective national centre for the dissemination and preservation of work environment

⁵ *Inkluderande arbetsliv*. SOU 2009:93 (in Swedish with summaries in English).

⁶ *Svensk arbetslivsforskning – en resurs för välfärd, hälsa och tillväxt*. In Swedish; Swedish Council for Working Life and Social research, 2009.

knowledge, in co-operation and agreement with present stakeholders.

Superior aims, goals and marks of the Knowledge Centre

The National Knowledge Centre shall, from a long-term and national perspective, work to make present knowledge about the work environment accessible and useful for relevant stakeholders in working life, education and politics.

The long-term goal of the Knowledge Centre's activities shall be to ensure that work environment management in Swedish enterprises and organisations is based on solid and up-to-date knowledge on the effects of the work environment on health, profitability and prosperity.

The activities of the Knowledge Centre shall be characterized by credibility, effectiveness and foresight.

Activities of the Knowledge Centre

- *Watch the work environment*
The Knowledge Centre shall, with a long-term perspective, follow developments of the work environment, and focus its activities on issues considered important by practitioners dealing with the work environment.
- *Follow knowledge developments*
The Knowledge Centre shall keep track of and disseminate recent results from work environment research, in particular within the issues identified as the most important.
- *Make knowledge accessible*
The Knowledge Centre shall facilitate contacts between work environment practitioners and researchers, and act to make relevant results from research accessible and useful for work environment practitioners.
- *Review knowledge*
The Knowledge Centre shall be responsible for reviews of work environment knowledge in areas considered important from a national perspective, and where no other stakeholder acts. This can include methodological as well as thematic issues.

- *Be a national representative*

The Knowledge Centre shall represent Sweden in certain international work environment bodies and networks, and act as a national reviewer on international matters within its area.

In the long run, additional activities may be appropriate for the Knowledge Centre, including: initiatives towards the development of infrastructure to facilitate long-term follow-up on issues concerning the work environment, for example, national registers, and recurrent work environment surveys; and initiatives towards engagement in work environment education and debate. However, the Advisory Committee believes that the core activities outlined above represent a reasonable initial portfolio.

Target groups of the Knowledge Centre

The target groups for the Knowledge Centre are those with either an active role in the formation of the work environment, or those who contribute to creating and disseminating work environment knowledge. This would include, but is not limited to: political decision makers on issues that directly or indirectly have a bearing on the work environment; work environment practitioners in enterprises and public organisations; teachers in education programmes related to the work environment; researchers interested in reaching practitioners in working life; and people who develop and mediate work environment products.

Organisation and location of the Knowledge Centre

The Advisory Committee considers it necessary to decide about the aims and activities of a National Knowledge Centre before discussions on issues such as resources, organisation, and location are relevant at anything more than a hypothetical level.