

Summary

This report surveys strategic recruiting efforts of young people and recent graduates to the municipal sector. Competition for qualified labor is intense; an increasing number of employers are making use of new means to attract the attention of young job applicants. We approach this topic from two different but tightly connected viewpoints. Recruiting consists in general of a basic set of connections between employers and potential job applicants. The degree of success experienced by municipalities when attempting to attract young people and recent graduates to fill their positions reflects not only their ability to convey a message but the degree to which the working conditions offered match applicants' desires and expectations. With this as a starting point, we have designed the report to include analysis of both demand and supply. We have examined young people through focus group interviews of university college students in nursing, engineering and day care teaching studies. We have supplemented the focus group interviews with response meter results at three university colleges. Furthermore, we have examined employers through qualitative interviews with administrative leaders and unit group leaders in four municipalities. The sectors we have examined include health care, day care, and technical services. Moreover, we have conducted telephone interviews with those responsible for recruiting in the counties and in inter-municipal sector firms. In addition, we have conducted interviews in focus groups made up of university college students in nursing, engineering and day care.

The aim of this report is to answer the following questions:

1. Which demands and expectations do students/future job applicants have regarding employers?
2. How do municipalities, counties and inter-municipal firms work with the recruitment of young workers?
3. How can the municipal sector work towards the goal of meeting the expectations of young job applicants and succeed in recruiting them?

(i) The demands and expectations of young people and recent graduates

Students' opinions about municipalities as employers are formed before they apply for jobs. Impressions of municipalities are formed through their own and others' experiences during internships, summer jobs or part-time work during one's school career, during bachelor or master projects, during visits to municipal work places, during conversations with municipal leaders or co-workers during career days, or during guest lectures by municipal leaders. Established preconceptions of municipal jobs as characterized as routine and lacking in challenges are often far removed from the daily reality of municipal work places. Nonetheless, the manner in which these work places are experienced internally is of little relevance for recruiting purposes if not communicated to the outside world. We found that employees in the organization are perceived as the most reliable sources of information. Personal meetings with leaders or colleagues during the trainee period, with tutors for bachelor dissertations or representatives from career days, affected students' intentions to apply for an available job upon completion of studies.

Young people are critical of recruiting messages on social media. Their lack of work experience prompts students to make use of the experiences and opinions of others when creating impressions of potential employers. At the same time, this study reveals that students are skeptical of information received through social media. The credibility of the message can potentially be increased through the encouragement of employees to operate as witnesses on Twitter and Facebook. The municipalities we have looked at employ social media only to a small degree in their recruiting and image building efforts. Nonetheless, negative experiences related through informal networks can give rise to negative impressions of specific workplaces or of municipal employers in general. Several nursing students were during their clinical practice directly warned against applying for municipal jobs by colleagues. The importance placed by

students on informal information channels emphasizes the need for guidance and follow-up for example during clinical practice. In this manner, first impressions of municipalities are created.

Young people and recent graduates look for employment in challenging professional environments. The young people and recent graduates in our survey placed an emphasis on challenging job responsibilities, possibilities for career growth, and solid professional environments when considering potential employers. Engineering students expected helpful follow-up and usable learning conditions in the municipal sector. They feared, however, professional stagnation in the long run. Nurses did not envision a lack of challenges, but thought municipal work places were characterized by smaller specialist environments and fewer nurses at work. For day care center employees, the density of teachers carried considerable weight during evaluation of their job possibilities. They looked at teacher density as a sign that their competence would be respected, and, consequently, that there would be ample opportunities for development and learning at the work place.

Information about interesting jobs and career opportunities. Students express a lack of knowledge regarding the possibilities that exist in the municipal sector regarding the contents of jobs, possibilities for professional development, career possibilities and the work environment. In other words, they lack knowledge about challenges they might encounter, and about what distinguishes a municipal job from other employers. Private sector companies are, according to students, better at promoting ongoing or planned projects that students can be a part of. Students want a bigger ‘story’ about why a job in the municipality is important.

Young people and graduates want fixed position and competitive work conditions. On the one hand, we find that factors such as interesting work, development opportunities and strong specialist environment is very important for students. It is therefore important that local authorities are profiling positively along these dimensions. On the other hand, working conditions such as wages, working hours, flexibility and further education are also important. A good branding strategy should clearly communicate strong points related to working conditions. The case study municipalities want to attract young people and recent graduates. However, there are at the same time relatively many part time positions and much use of temporary employment, particularly in the care sector. This suggests that recruitment strategies have not been closely connected with development of employment conditions. Many municipalities have a tight economic situation. If municipalities can be better at combining recruitment strategies with competitive terms, and also can communicate this externally in a good way, this will overall be an important contribution to strengthening their reputation as attractive employers. Better and clearer job advertisements is a concrete measure towards this end.

(ii) Recruiting young people: problems and possibilities

Employer policies and strategic recruiting. The municipal sector is changing rapidly as evidenced by new responsibilities and demands for new competence. Sources in municipalities, counties and inter-municipal firms view the recruitment of young people as important because they bring new perspectives and updated competence into organizations. Unit managers emphasized at the same time that a balance between recent graduates and seasoned employees is important for building an organization with a good diversity. We find that municipalities that emphasize young people and recent graduates in their competence planning to a larger degree include young people in their recruiting practices than municipalities that do not. An overriding strategic focus is important for working effectively with recruiting young people, but those efforts must also be followed up at a variety of levels and in cooperation across municipalities.

Room for better coordination of actors and use of policy instruments. A challenge for strategic recruitment is that municipalities are complex organizations with many units. We find that it is challenging for the central HR unit to follow up the various units as closely as informants on the different levels would have wanted. This may lead to recruitment strategies that are not well implemented and followed through. Unit managers play a key role in the implementation of the recruitment process, but this is just one of many tasks. Many municipal organizations are characterized by scarce resources, and much pressure. There is a need for an overall recruitment strategy that is followed up through close cooperation between central staff lead by HR staff and line managers. Several unit managers feel that they have limited possibilities to work long-term with proactive recruitment of young, and that they need more active support from the central HR, as well as competency building. It is important to ensure a holistic and smart use of instruments such as recruitment positions, wages, full-time positions, flexible arrangements and further education measures.

Look at recruiting, image building and reputation in context. Municipalities are experienced with goal-oriented communication directed towards young people in the form of internet campaigns among other forms. These have produced results, but at the same time, interviewees made it clear that these efforts should be made to sharpen communication goals. Several underscored that there exists a huge room for improvement in use of social media. An important find in the survey with clear relevance for municipalities' reputation is the use of employees as ambassadors. Narratives about good work places where people enjoy themselves spread fast in social networks whereas narratives centered on bad work places can spread even faster. Interviewees in the municipalities stress that reputation is a key component in recruiting and that one can see large differences in the number of applications to different areas in the same sector in the same municipality. Good workplaces are characterized by employees who like their jobs. Leaders on different levels have an overreaching responsibility to make this possible. This can be achieved through the establishment of more permanent positions, by increasing salaries, raising the importance of continuing education, creating possibilities for personal development and learning through challenging work responsibilities, the facilitation of well-developed professional environments etc. In addition, these efforts can and should be supplemented by good follow-up of young people and recent graduates who have had contact with the municipality in the form of municipal summer jobs, apprenticeships and part-time jobs. Stories about good and bad work places spread fast in student networks.

Need for analysis of recruiting practices. In order to formulate well-functioning recruiting strategies municipalities must understand what works and what does not work. The municipalities we examined did not seem to place any importance on evaluation of their recruiting strategies and consequently did not gather, to any significant degree, statistics on their recruiting efforts. Municipal efforts could be strengthened by the systematic collection and analysis of data. This demands however routines and increased competence. One county achieved good results through the use of direct promotions on the net and advertising. These recruiting methods offer access to useful statistical tools.

(iii) Employer strategies along different axes

Leaders as 'magnets'. This study and earlier research have shown that managers can act as 'magnets' that can attract employees. This means that the municipal employer policy should emphasize recruiting and developing leaders who can develop good academic and work environments, and thereby strengthen recruitment and create lower turnover. In order to do this, leaders need sufficient resources in terms of authority, time, tools and support. We know that many do not have this. At a time when small units are merged into larger, partly to create larger

specialist environments and partly to be more cost efficient, the tasks and responsibilities can quickly become too many, making the leader less present for the employees on a daily basis. This applies especially in the care sector. It is a longterm task to maintain good working environments, and this should be among the most important goals formulated in employers and service policy.

Good measures and systematic recruitment efforts. Communicating a bigger story about working in the municipality will also strengthen recruitment. The communication can highlight professional development, the importance of the tasks on a societal level and the good working environment, to name a few factors. It can be mediated through various channels, including social media and campaigns online. Our findings from both the municipalities and students underline the importance of municipalities working systematically to create good relationships with colleges. Measures includes internships to college students, students writing bachelor's or master's thesis in cooperation with a municipal workplace, using municipal unit managers as guest lecturers at high schools and colleges, holding company presentations and arrange student visits to municipal jobs. The municipalities will probably give students a better impression if they use unit employees as presenters at schools. One of the municipalities in the study have positive experiences with a 'recruitment team' consisting of young employees who present in schools and employer fairs. Students prefer to get information from people they can identify with, and this can strengthen their impression that municipalities can be a place for them to work. It is also important to have cooperation with high school concerning apprenticeships, that apprentices are taken good care of when working in the municipality. Another finding is that employees play an important role as ambassadors for the municipality. Information about the working environment and opportunities spread quickly in social networks. In a strategic recruitment perspective, it is important to become more aware of this ambassador role. Our findings also underlines the importance of managers' responsibility to create good and attractive work environment where people want to work, thrive and remain.

Collaboration with school systems. During the course of this project, no municipal leaders or students discussed the importance of leaders or employees taking part in school classes, neither as a form of image building, or as a form of anchoring dialogue with colleges or as a form of learning and development activities for municipal employees. On the other hand, interviewees emphasize the notion that tighter collaboration can lead to a focus on municipal problems and challenges as topics for bachelor theses, which in turn would familiarize students with municipalities. Is it possible that work with these theses can stimulate the development of municipal services? Internships are much discussed. These help to familiarize students with specific parts of the municipality and assist in the students' evaluation of the municipality as a potential work place. Several respondents related episodes that drove them more away from the municipality than attracted them. In addition, interviewees reported on poorly organized internships with a lack of methodical guidance.

About time for a junior politics. Senior politics is an established concept. It is incorporated in law and collective agreements, as well as in the employment strategies of the majority of municipalities. While working with the learning and development programs 'Sammen om en bedre kommune' ('Together for a better municipality') and 'Ufrivillig arbeid' ('Involuntary part time') we observed a need for a junior politics. This observation is based on the meeting of projections of the need for labor with an employment policy that does not take care of apprentices in the larger sectors but instead focuses on middle-age women who wish to work part-time. In lieu of permanent full-time positions, many recent graduates in health care are offered part-time positions of under twenty per cent. The result of this policy is that people move away from the municipality. It would appear that many municipal apprenticeships are not

included in any competence or recruiting strategies but rather as individuals municipalities have taken upon themselves as a societal responsibility.