

IT support for parental insurance¹⁶

There is an imbalance between the use of IT support at the local social insurance offices and the possibilities which the existing technical equipment permit. The considerable investments in modern working place equipment which have been made during the last few years have not yet provided the anticipated effects. One of the reasons for this is that the central EDP systems which were developed during the 1970's, constitute obstacles to the use of modern IT. This is one of the most important conclusions of the National Audit Office's (RRV's) audit of IT support for parental insurance.

The RRV has made an audit of the quality of IT support for parental insurance. Does the administration of IT support meet the requirements of appropriateness and quality? Does the computer support meet requirements in respect of usefulness? These are the main issues we have addressed in the audit. We have also taken up other general IT issues in the social insurance administration, for example IT strategy and the administrative model.

The National Social Insurance Board (RFV) and the local social insurance offices administer the social insurance system. The basic strategic requirement for the organisation of the work has been the provision of IT-based information. IT affects all activities in the social insurance system. IT issues are therefore of great importance in the organisation.

It is the task of the RFV to supply the social insurance administration with requisite computer support. The local social insurance offices have high demands in respect of efficient computer support. The administrators at the local offices need efficient com-

¹⁶ IT-stödet för föräldraförsäkringen (RRV 1996:66)

puter support for their assessment and investigative work, as well as for their contacts with the general public.

The administration of computer support is organised in accordance with the RFV's system administration model. For each system there is a system "owner" at the RFV who has the total responsibility for both the administration and development of the system. Furthermore there is a systems administrator who coordinates the administration work.

The availability of computer support has improved since most administrators have access to their own working station. However work is still being done according to old routines which have not been changed to any great extent. IT has still not been used to its full capacity to develop and change activities. Where this ambition is concerned, the old central EDP systems constitute an obstacle. Several social insurance offices are therefore starting to invest in developing their own programs with the aim of making activities more efficient.

The possibilities of making operations efficient with the aid of IT have not been exploited to the full despite the fact that the requisite technical conditions exist. The IT approach which should be used to make operations more efficient is the subject of different opinions at the RFV and the local social insurance offices, as well as between the offices. The method of dealing with IT issues in the social insurance administration is a considerable source of irritation at the local social insurance offices.

Parental insurance is a form of support which is possible to plan. An extensive system of rules form the basis of the parental insurance and makes it possible to use the system flexibly. It involves providing parents with a great deal of information on how the rules for the parental insurance work. The local offices regard their service to parents as an important part of their work with parental insurance.

Computer support for the parental insurance system was developed during the 1970's when this type of insurance came

into being. During the 1970's and 1980's the computer support was not changed to any great extent. But during the last few years the conditions in respect of parental insurance have been changed on several occasions, necessitating extensive changes in the computer support.

The computer support is spread over the entire country and its use is obligatory in the administration of the parental insurance system. The computer support works in the same way at all local offices. There are general regulations which govern the use of the support.

The computer support has been developed and adapted to changes in laws and rules but, on the other hand, there has been less adaptation to the conditions at the local offices where the computer support shall be used. One noticeable problem is that the local social insurance offices consider that they do not have a decisive influence over the development and administration of computer support they use in their daily work.

At the local social insurance offices the staff is aware of the fact that general computer support is necessary if the parental insurance system is to function in the same way throughout the entire country. There is also agreement in the criticism of the functions of computer support and in the requirements to adapt the functions better to the working needs at the local offices.

An overwhelming proportion of the administrators at the local offices feel that the computer support is of use in the administration of cases and in contacts with parents. The computer support contributes to maintaining good order in the work and is therefore of great importance for the parental insurance system. The administrators also agree that computer support needs to be better adapted to operations at the local offices so the work can be simplified and made more efficient. Furthermore new functions have been requested in the computer support to reduce the amount of manual work.

Despite the modern computer equipment at the local offices, computer support for the parental insurance system is totally dependent on the central EDP systems. Shortcomings in these systems have had the consequence that a large number of duties at the local offices must be performed manually. This constitutes a workload for the local organisation, in particular where following up and evaluating activities are concerned.

The present computer support does not offer any possibilities for the local processing of data which the local offices have registered in the central databases. It is not possible to create local registers by the feedback of data from central databases. Thus the possibilities of using the modern IT equipment which exists at the local offices are limited.

This emphasises the great gap between the potential of IT and reality at the local offices. It also means that the staff do not take full advantage of the considerable investments which were made when acquiring the advanced IT equipment.

Other observations are that:

- there are no clear goals for the administration of IT support for the parental insurance system.
- most insurance offices do not have a member of staff who is responsible for the administration of computer support for the parental insurance system.
- the changes, which have been made over the years, have in many ways affected computer support. There is a danger that the general overview of the system will be lost with the consequence that maintenance of the system will be made difficult and it will be increasingly complicated and time-consuming to make changes.
- the system for payment of parental benefit, PUMA, functioned deficiently for a long period of time. There is reason to ask

whether shortcomings in PUMA can have led to errors in payments.

- the system administration organisation does not emphasise, in a clear and functional way, the relationship between purchaser and supplier.
- the responsibility for the users' skills development is not clearly defined in the administration model.
- organised co-ordination between the insurance offices is required, as well as better skills to enable the offices to make better specifications of their requirements where changes in computer support are concerned.
- the administrators at the local offices feel that the interface in the computer support for parental insurance is not user-friendly and make the criticism that there is no standard layout.
- the work of the administrators is made difficult, or even impossible, since there are breakdowns in operations from time to time and periodical reductions in accessibility.
- at the local offices the staff are not satisfied with the information they receive on changes in IT support etc. The administrators feel that they often receive information too late.

The proposals for action to be taken which the RRV presents are intended to solve existing problems and to improve the quality of the system administration.

New forms of co-operation need to be developed to make efficient co-operation possible between central and regional level, i.e. between RFV and the local social insurance offices. In the opinion of the RRV this does not merely apply to computer support for parental insurance but also for other forms of insurance.

For the efficient development and administration of computer support the existing administrative organisation is inadequate. The

distance in the organisation between the central administration and the users at the local offices is too great. There is no link between the two at regional level.

The RRV proposes that:

- the RFV, in co-operation with the local social insurance offices, creates an administrative level at the insurance offices between the central administration at RFV and the local offices so that the administration of IT support can function better.

Furthermore the RRV proposes that the RFV, together with the local social insurance offices:

- improves systems administration by clarifying the goals and introducing quality assurance procedures for administrative work.
- follows up the results of the administrative work by making surveys of users and system forecasts.
- studies the reasons for breakdowns in operations and rectifies them.
- improves the usefulness of computer support, for example by developing requested functions, improving accessibility, and by better adapting computer support to the practical work at the local offices.
- makes computer support more user-friendly, for example by improving the user interface and reducing the number of windows.