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Centres of Excellent Quality
in Higher Education 2007



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Centres of Excellent Quality in Higher Education 2007

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Summary

In January 2007, for the first time, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education invited universities and university colleges to apply for recognition as Centres of Excellent Quality in Higher Education. This award is part of the new national quality assurance system.

In total, 26 applications were submitted by 12 institutions. Following a preliminary assessment, nine applications went on to a second round involving more in-depth assessments and site visits. These were carried out by an international review panel aided by the initial findings of a group of field experts. At the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (the National Agency), the project was coordinated by two members of staff from the Department of Evaluation.

In conformity with the review panel's proposal, the National Agency has decided to award the following five centres, listed in alphabetical order, recognition as Centres of Excellent Quality in Higher Education 2007:

- Linköping University, *Control Systems at the Department of Electrical Engineering*
- Linköping University, *the Medical Programme*
- Malmö University, *the Dental Education*
- The Royal Institute of Technology, *the Vehicle Engineering Programme*
- Umeå University, *the Department of Historical Studies*

These centres have shown, in a clear and convincing manner, that they possess excellence and that they maintain a very high level of quality.

The identification of these centres of excellent quality has been guided by the National Agency's quality aspects, and demands have been high. The review panel has developed the quality aspects further, which will facilitate both applications and assessments in the future.

It is the National Agency's intention to continue working on what characterises centres of excellent quality, and additionally to contribute to the spreading of examples of good practice.

The National Agency's Reflections

Interest in the award was greater than expected, with a total of 26 applications submitted from 12 different higher education institutions. Applications were made for programmes or other forms of higher education in a wide variety of areas. Many of the applications were well-written and appeared to have strong support within the applicant's institution, but there was considerable variation. To different degrees, applications were structured around the guideline quality aspects presented by the National Agency in the invitation. Some applications included programme syllabuses, course syllabuses and reading lists. All but one of the applications were written in English; the exception was in Swedish.

Judging from the variations in scope and content of the applications, the instructions need to be made clearer. It is important that the application clearly states which programme or other organisational unit it concerns. In order for the international review panel to be able to peruse the applications, they need to adhere to a certain structure and contain information about relevant quality aspects. Applicants should furthermore be able to quote clear examples of success. A surprisingly large number of applications showed inadequacies in the ability to describe and analyse the applicant's strengths and weaknesses.

In order to encourage full institution support for all applications, the National Agency proposes that the number of applications from each institution be limited. Each application should furthermore be accompanied by a statement of justification from the management of the higher education institution.

Field experts' findings were very positive

An international group of 26 field experts from 15 different areas of education participated in the preliminary assessment of the applications. Some of them had previously collaborated with the National Agency on national subject and programme evaluations. Others were hired on recommendation from previous reviewers or trade organisations. Interest in participating was considerable, and most of those approached was positive to take part.

The field experts assessed and commented on the applications based on the eight quality aspects presented by the National Agency. In addition, they considered such things as they regarded relevant for the educational field in question. They were further asked to comment on any shortcomings in the applications.

On the whole, the field experts made very positive judgements. When information was lacking in the applications this was commented on to some extent, but not systematically. In those cases where field experts also had some previous knowledge of the programmes, this was reported in the comments.

It is the review panel's view that the instructions to the field experts need to be made clearer and the quality aspects made more concrete. This would give the comments from the field experts the same structure and limit them in scope. The National Agency shares this view.

Nine applications were nominated for a second round

While the field experts were assessing applications in their respective subject areas, members were being recruited to an international review panel with particular experience of higher education and centres of excellence. One person on the panel spoke Swedish. The reviewers then made a global analysis of the applications and the field experts' comments. In this process, the panel chose to disregard assessments made by the field experts on the basis of information that was not included in the application, or which had not been requested by the National Agency.

The review panel met for the first time at the beginning of September 2007 to discuss the quality aspects and which criteria should apply for centres of excellent quality in higher education. An important premise for their work has been to identify proof that success has been achieved and is judged to be sustainable. A discussion about the criteria is included in the review panel's missive, and the aspects are described in Appendix 1.

The result of the panel's global analysis was that nine applications were judged to contain relevant information and to indicate success in various respects. Those applications that did not qualify for a second round either lacked sufficient information or did not demonstrate sufficient excellence. It should be mentioned here as well that the review panel's analysis of the applications would have been facilitated by a more rigid structure.

Planning ahead is important for the smooth working of an international review panel, to allow for meetings to be scheduled that everyone can attend. However, the National Agency would like to underline its view that the panel completed its task with great merit despite the time pressures involved, and that it furthermore contributed important comments ahead of the next round of applications.

Site visits important for overall impressions

The nine centres whose applications qualified for closer assessment received site visits by the review panel. On these site visits the panel interviewed students, teachers and management in separate groups. The management group also generally included the institution's vice-chancellor. Meetings with the three groups lasted for about 50 minutes each.

Site visits were focused on giving an overall impression of the centres, and this approach worked well. On three occasions it was possible to conduct two site visits in one day, which reduced the panel's total number of travelling days.

Planning of site visits was crucial. The practical side was handled by the project group, which contacted and provided instructions to contact persons at the institutions. All site visits were carried out in the same way and allotted the same amount of time.

It is preferable that each group is made up of no more than six people for each interview, and that the panel remains in the same room to meet with each group in succession, allowing about ten minutes between each meeting. In addition to these breaks, the panel needs time to deliberate behind closed doors before and after the meeting. It is important to clarify that it is the panel that asks the questions and that no presentations are to be made by the institution's representatives.

Content planning for the site visits, i.e. what issues were to be highlighted, was done individually by each panel member as well as in a meeting preceding each site visit.

The result – five centres stood out

The nine centres that were visited were all judged to possess excellence in different respects. Those that have now been awarded were able to satisfy all assessors, in the application as well as during site visits, that they possess overall excellence.

Several educational fields were represented in the applications which qualified for closer assessment, with a certain bias towards natural sciences and technology. Of the five awarded, two are in the field of technology, two are in medicine/odontology, and one is in the humanities.

One indication that the selection criteria and their application work relatively well is that among the nine applications selected for closer assessment, two were in the area of history and one in an interdisciplinary subject, entrepreneurship.

Guideline aspects were a challenge

When announcing the award, the National Agency chose to present only eight guideline quality aspects. There were three reasons for this. First, the aim was to avoid the exclusion of less traditional or more innovative centres by formulating detailed criteria. Second, it was taken for granted that outstanding centres of education are well aware of which aspects and criteria are important in demonstrating success. Third, the idea was that the award should not be normative at the micro level.

As has already been stated above, the guideline aspects proved to be a challenge not only for several of the centres that applied for the award, but also for those who assessed the applications. Those centres which have now been recognised as centres of excellent quality in higher education have, in addition to the quality aspects, also managed to transmit some distinguishing qualities which the review panel regard as being common to all of them.

The review process can be developed further

This first round of applications has been very instructive, and the experience will provide a good basis for the handling of future applications. Based on the quality aspects, the international review panel has narrowed down the defining characteristics of a centre of educational excellence. In collaboration with the National Agency, the panel has further identified several ways in which the review process can be developed.

- Clarify the instructions for applying.
- Limit the number of applications from each higher education institution.
- Clarify the instructions to the field experts.

As part of the continuing work in this area, the National Agency will also develop forms for spreading examples of good practice from centres of educational excellence. The National Agency further welcomes comments and suggestions for improvements from those institutions that have taken part in the process.

**THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
PANEL'S REPORT**

Missive

Centres of Excellent Quality in Higher Education 2007

In total, 26 units submitted applications to the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education with the purpose of being recognised as centres of excellent quality in higher education. To the International Review Panel was conferred the task of assessing these applications.

The following experts were appointed by the Agency:

Marianne Stenius, Chair of the Panel, Professor and Rector of the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, Finland.

Barbara Kehm, Professor of Higher Education Research at Kassel University and Managing Director of the International Centre for Higher Education Research.

Guy Neave, Dr. Honorary Professor of Comparative Higher Education Policy Studies, Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, Twente University, The Netherlands and Principal Researcher at the Centro de Investigação de Políticas do Ensino Superior, Portugal.

Paul Ramsden, Professor and Chief Executive of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), United Kingdom.

The Panel would wish to recommend to the University Chancellor that the following five units be honoured as Centres of Excellent Quality in Higher Education 2007:

- Control Systems at the Department of Electrical Engineering, Linköping University
- The Medical Programme, Linköping University
- The Dental Education, Malmö University
- The Vehicle Engineering Programme, The Royal Institute of Technology
- The Undergraduate Education at the Department of Historical Studies, Umeå University

Short statements, which comment on the applications, are set out below. First, however, the Panel would like to dwell briefly on the review process and on the notion of “excellence”.

Assessment was built around the following steps. All applications, as well as analyses of them by field experts, were presented to the International Review Panel. Nine applications were retained as possible candidates and site-visits were arranged. Evaluation was based on the university’s application. These showed great variety in both scope and content. Some did not meet the standards and were not considered for a second review. Others, often due to an absence of full information, were not possible to assess. In the main, site-visits served to weigh up the evidence presented in the applications, rather than as a way of exploring omissions.

As the applications show - and it was demonstrated throughout the site-visits - devotion and commitment to teaching and learning within Sweden's institutions of higher education are strong indeed. The Panel remains suitably impressed by the large number of teaching units that command both a high international standard and a high academic output. In the course of the review process several meetings were held by the Panel to discuss the applications and how the criteria proposed for the appraisal should be operationalised. Excellence takes on different forms. Some units lean to the more traditional, others embrace the innovative. The Panel focused on those units that had reached a certain degree of maturity. The evidence they presented suggested that a level of excellence had been achieved and could, moreover, be sustained. The units proposed for recognition, share certain common features.

- They are true learning communities - students, faculty and management share a common culture for learning.
- Their approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement is systematic.
- Mechanisms identifying and diagnosing problems are well established. There are examples, both tangible and real, to show how such mechanisms and procedures lead on to continuous improvement.
- At all levels, the student voice is taken seriously.
- Between quality assurance operating on a university-wide level and its counterpart within the teaching unit, there is focus, clear alignment and concordance.
- The factors of their success have been defined and analyzed.
- They stand and serve as development templates for other departments or institutions, in Sweden or elsewhere.
- Clear vision and strategy to advance internal and external change are present and evident.
- There is consistency in the presentations made by students, teachers, administration and management.
- Teachers work in teams and systems for training new colleagues in the basic pedagogic techniques, their rationale and ethos of the unit, are established and active.
- Excellence in teaching is recognised by the leadership.
- The interplay between teaching and research generates new impulses both ways.

In varying degrees, these operational features are present in many of the applications. Yet, these five units stand out because they – in very different ways – have provided firm evidence of meeting these criteria.

The way selection was made poses important issues. No one is compelled to apply. Other programmes, departments or units, which may rightfully claim a similar level of excellence, have opted not to take part this year. Some appli-

cants submitted information insufficient to allow a thorough assessment to move further.

For all applications, the statements are set out below. They are summaries of the main points rather than detailed explanations of why a particular application should – or should not – be recognised as a Centre of Excellent Quality in Higher Education 2007.

On behalf of the International Review Panel,

Marianne Stenius
Chair of the Panel

Institutions Reviewed

Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship of Technology, Chalmers University

Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship offers a master level education for managers of high technology based firms.

The programme is promising and impressive. The educational principles are convincingly designed in accordance with the contents and the objectives of the programme. The teaching aims at excellence. The programme supports the students very well in developing their own projects which then can be turned into a start-up or a business. The programme also gives constant and substantial backing to students in their goal to become leaders and entrepreneurs, providing individual coaching when needed. Without a doubt, the programme is highly dynamic and also very much student driven. There are close and productive student-faculty relationships; students are engaged in the curriculum and feel part of a learning community. The faculty involved in this programme has in most aspects relevant knowledge, experience and capacity. Clearly, the programme demonstrates educational success. Its impact extends beyond Chalmers, and its examples have been emulated nationally as well as internationally.

The programme though unique is very small and costly. Its organisation does not show a coherent quality assurance system as much as an *ad hoc* structure dealing informally with quality issues. The programme has its own sophisticated quality assurance system in which faculty discusses problems and, very positively, regards students as partners in this discussion. There is evidence that this quality assurance system has led to improvements. However, the risk for quality assurance being too entrepreneurial seems to be high. Integrating this organisation into the quality assurance/enhancement system of Chalmers University is a challenge.

The faculty runs their own companies alongside of their involvement in the programme and it therefore has a strong foundation in practice. There seems to be a tension between academics and the entrepreneurial focus of the programme and an imbalance between the scientific level and the entrepreneurial spirit. This is the single largest future challenge and critical for such a small operation. In addition, the programme lacks teachers in some areas such as accounting and finance. The programme seems overly dependent on part-time faculty and there is not enough pedagogical capacity to assure sustainability. There is an uncertainty related to the sustainability of the programme in general. The impression remains that the programme's success is highly dependent on the current constellation of staff. Factors behind the success of the programme are not explicitly explained.

The application from Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship, site-visit included, has not been convincing in the evidence provided that the school is a centre of sustained excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

Control Systems at the Department of Electrical Engineering, Linköping University

Control Systems as a field of education and research belongs to the Department of Electrical Engineering, Linköping University. The field provides a mandatory course in Automatic Control to all MSc programmes and most of the BSc programmes in engineering. In addition, a wide range of elective courses at advanced level are offered.

Organisation, quality assurance and infrastructure are convincing. There is a sophisticated quality assurance system in place. An important dimension in this system is the involvement of several teachers in each course. Thus, the high level of quality is less dependent on single individuals. The quality assurance system is well developed: It is aligned to university processes, pedagogical discussion to resolve on how best to teach specific topics is customary, and students are involved in quality processes. There is also a strong connection between faculty and senior management on quality enhancement.

The faculty stands out as an example of the mutual reinforcement that comes of excellent teaching and excellent research. Altogether the staff members give the impression of having a clear and shared vision of what is important in engineering education. Much effort is devoted to keeping students motivated and providing a good learning experience. This includes a broad spectrum of pedagogical approaches – problem based learning, lab work and projects. Clearly, the teaching is research based and challenging for the students. The curriculum is best seen as a species of ‘focused training’, closely aligned and in continuous contact with leading industries, national and international, which provide the main basis for practice based training in the form of a five month team based project. Control Systems branches out from what appears to be a classical discipline-centred curriculum usually associated with engineering. This stands in marked contrast to the essential approach developed within the Control Systems programme which is both student-centred and grounded in problem based learning.

The Department is placed at the cutting edge in the field of Control Systems. It keeps up a close and sustained dialogue between staff and students. There is engagement of both in linking theory to practice as well as the continual and sustained quest to improve and to ‘fine tune’ both courses and content.

Project course work lies at the centre of the student experience and it is a close reflection of the conditions in which its graduates will work. Project work is group based and handles problems commissioned by outside enterprises. The five month project is not confined, however, simply to technical problem solv-

ing. It is also explicitly given over to developing the social, communications and negotiation capacities of its members.

As a mature and well established Department, Control Systems maintains tried, tested and active links with similar departments, both in Europe and North America. It is recognized as exemplary in both teaching and research within Sweden and abroad. The dialogue and effective take up of advice from external constituencies and industry is intense and acted upon.

The strength of Control Systems has grown up around a disciplinary driven concept of the engineer. But engineering, just as other fields in the Natural, Medical and Biological Sciences, is currently both subject to and the instrument of a highly dynamic fragmentation as subject areas and domains break out of their original setting to form new 'proto-disciplinary' combinations. The challenge is ever present to determine precisely which key skills are and types of knowledge the future will need and, no less central, what would be the optimal way for their transmission, acquisition and application.

The application from Control Systems at the Department of Electrical Engineering, including site-visit, has provided convincing evidence that the Department is a centre of quality, excellent in both teaching and learning.

The Medical Programme, Linköping University

The Medical Programme in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Linköping University started in 1986. Central for the programme profile are the inter-professional integration and the pedagogical model problem based learning.

That the Medical Programme is supported by a robust academic base was confirmed. Continuous quality assurance mechanisms are established and supported by student representation at all levels. It is also clear that the educational principles are closely in accordance with the contents and the objectives of the programme. In Sweden, the programme has pioneered the systematic application of problem based learning to the study of Medicine. Since the transition towards a student-centred curriculum began more than two decades ago, this model has had time to mature. No less interesting is the fact that the vision which inspired this pioneering engagement abides and is still perceived as viable and relevant. The essential validity of the reform has been further reinforced by the decision of the Faculty of Health Sciences to reassert the fundamental strategy in 2001 to prevent what was seen as a form of 'curricular drift' away from basic science.

The programme shows educational success and is well able to explain the factors behind its successful results. Alignment at all levels seems to be an important focus against which corrective measures are determined. Students are learning on the basis of problem based learning and early clinical practice supported by a good system of tutors and mentors. Cooperation with regional health council is both positive and close. There is a genuine partnership with students with respect to quality management and the use of evidence-based

educational practise. The programme, and in particular the innovatory known as “The Hospital Ward” has had an impact on similar programmes elsewhere in Europe and in Australia.

All levels, both staff and students are acutely aware of the challenge posed by increasing student numbers; clinics are becoming more crowded and more effort has to be invested in seeking further to find and train clinical mentors.

The application from The Medical Programme in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Linköping University, which included a site-visit, have been convincing in the evidence provided that the programme is a sustained centre of excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

The Dental Education, Malmö University

The School of Dentistry at Malmö University dates back to 1949. Its official title, the Centre for Oral Health Science, denotes an integrative approach to both dental education and research. The teaching approach of the school is problem based learning.

The organisation is impressive. A well-functioning quality assurance system is in place, backed by a very solid infrastructure. The system is grounded in the concept of collective cooperation and the sharing of knowledge. For example courses are not the possession of individual teachers but part of the collective responsibility of the teaching community. In some courses, external examiners accredit the students.

Teachers have permanent commitment to researching learning theory as it applies to Odontology over and above the usual commitment to academic research. Most certainly, the programme is supported by a robust academic foundation.

Its educational principles are clearly designed in accordance with the contents and the objectives of the programme which stands as the first in Sweden systematically to base education in Odontology on the principles and methods of problem based learning. This has radically restructured curriculum, quality assessment, the nature of the relationship between staff and students and last, but not least, the basic vision that underlines Odontology.

The report by teaching staff is convincing in the coherence and clarity which emerge from a conception both lucid and shared about what learning is. Theirs is a continual engagement to advance this concept further. They are well aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They work progressively to eradicate such weaknesses. In partnership with students, they see themselves as a team and provide support in every possible way. In the area of patient care, students are treated as colleagues by teaching staff. Since problem based learning depends on student self-learning, the librarian is included on the team.

Relationships are close between teachers and students and amongst the students themselves. A “skills laboratory”, has been set up to allow the experience

of older students to be handed on to their younger fellows. The presence of a collective identity, a high degree of trust in students and team work rather than competition, all permeate this programme.

Internationalisation to a certain degree can be observed. Some teachers have worked abroad. There are some foreign students. Furthermore, the community the programme serves in the Malmö region is itself highly international. This too is important and noteworthy.

Leadership confirmed that the faculty sets an example for other parts of the university. In particular, each application for recognition of distinctive achievement and each evaluation this involves serve as occasions to reflect and improve. Research is applied and in keeping with other Departments in the field. The transfer of theoretical knowledge into actual health care is the constant goal.

The school serves as model of excellence in teaching for other dental schools nationally and internationally.

The application from The School of Dentistry at Malmö University, including site-visit, has provided evidence of a convincing nature that the school is a centre of sustained excellence in the quality of its teaching and learning.

The Vehicle Engineering Programme at the Royal Institute of Technology

The School of Engineering Sciences is responsible for the Vehicle Engineering programme which is a five years programme leading to a Master of Science in engineering.

The organisation, its quality assurance system and infrastructure give a very good impression. Its educational principles are designed in accordance with the contents and the objectives of the programme. The application describes the systematic way in which the curriculum is developed and improved and staff being trained. Explicit integration of didactic concepts, e.g. the understanding of the flow of learning has been explicitly used to solve problems in knowledge transfer.

There is a high level of coherence between courses and their contribution to each of the objectives.

Its very significant research and development, long upheld and prominent in the field of Vehicle Engineering, guarantee that the educational programme is underpinned by a robust academic foundation and that teachers have relevant knowledge, experience and talent. Academic staff are committed to the programme's continuous improvement. They are easily accessible to students.

The project work – an important part of the programme – is impressive. So is the good inter-communication between students of different levels. How the programme nurtures cooperation with students from arts and design for vehicle construction inspires admiration.

Among teachers reciprocal support and encouragement as well as the drive to achieve excellence in teaching all make for a good *esprit de corps*. In addition, the alumni network is both substantial and active.

Yet, if teaching aims at excellence, no provision appears to be made officially to recognize it. Furthermore for a programme that pioneered the field of Vehicle Engineering, its international commitment does not appear to engage students, though staff are naturally active in the classic form of representation, namely the presentation of the programme's work at international conferences. Even so, the major challenge to the long term excellence this department has achieved lies in the foreseeable future when staff renewal may well demand further reflection as to how it is to sustain a well-deserved international standing.

The application from The School of Engineering Sciences, The Vehicle Engineering programme at The Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, including site-visit, has been convincing in providing evidence that the school is a centre of sustained excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

The Department of History, Stockholm University

The Department of History at Stockholm University consists of three divisions: History, the Study Programme in the Humanities and the Centre for the Studies of Children's Culture. The Department offers undergraduate-, graduate and doctoral courses.

The organisation, its quality assurance system and infrastructure function very well. Its educational programmes are supported by a robust academic foundation. The Department enjoys a well-functioning and open atmosphere. Students can pursue their own topics and perspectives and, because it is a large Department, many options are open to them.

Teachers are accessible and tutorship good. At every level, students are involved in quality management teachers give the impression of seeking continually for ways to improve current provision. Teachers seem to benefit from a collegial atmosphere and a good working climate, both of which allow them to develop an informal basis for discussing pedagogical concerns. Departmental structures appear to be stable. Student bodies are active. Clearly, teaching is research based and emphasizes critical thinking. Teachers command impressive knowledge, experience and capacity.

Evidently, the Department of History at Stockholm University gives a very good impression on many aspects, even excellent in parts. But in others the impression is less substantial.

The Department consists of three heterogeneous strands, two of which are clearly vocationally oriented. Basically, the mix of academic and vocational training seems to work but the (academic) history strand clearly dominates.

The international dimension is not to the fore and innovative modes of teaching and learning seem to be more experimental as opposed well devel-

oped and firmly embedded. The absence of a clearly articulated strategy and vision for the future is to be regretted.

Evidence as to how teaching encourages excellence or whether students attain exceptional results could be more comprehensive. Systematic follow-up of alumni to find out what they are doing a few years after graduation has yet to be explored.

Nor are the factors that might explain success, explained. Academic staff appeared to labour over defining the Department's strategy on the one hand and to clearly account for and identify the factors held to make for success, on the other.

The application from The Department of History at Stockholm University, site-visit included, has not been convincing in the evidence provided that the school is a centre of sustained excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

Undergraduate Education, Department of Historical studies, Umeå University

The Department of Historical studies comprises of two subjects offering both undergraduate and doctoral courses, History and History of Science and Ideas. The application concerns the undergraduate courses at the Department.

The organisation is impressive. It has an established well functioning quality assurance system and a very good support system. There is a high degree of staff stability and newly recruited teaching staff is actively integrated into the culture of the Department. Leadership communicates strategic thinking which seems open to bottom-up proposals.

Teachers have relevant knowledge, experience and capacity; they are at hand on a daily basis. The dedication and commitment, personal inspiration and a ready and always open access of staff to the students is confirmed.

The educational program is supported by a robust academic foundation. Teaching and research are in close complementarity. Furthermore it is evident that teaching and teaching skills are given very high priority. Teaching staff are highly alert and sensitive to pedagogical issues. They tailor their support to the needs of different groups of students. Team work among teachers plays an important part.

Educational principles are laid down in accordance with the programme's contents and objectives. Communication between staff, administration and students, the perception of students as part of a shared learning community, engaged in acquiring the skills both of the historian, the professional researcher and teacher, are noteworthy indeed.

Close ties between teaching and research have served to provide students with an unusual and socially sensitive definition of their own individual and by extension, professional identity. The historian as a teacher is held in crea-

tive tension with the (future) school teacher as researcher. Teaching aims at excellence, the standards and efforts are high.

This characteristic is also present and accounts for a high level of focused contact and cooperation with external stakeholders in the region.

The Department's work has its impact both on the rest of the University and outside. It is recognized by University leadership that key practices involved in teaching, student relationships and research have been tried, tested and have succeeded in this department. Their extension to other faculties forms part of current leadership strategy for the university as a whole. The Department's role as example thus fulfils the criterion of excellence *qua* recognition by peers and leadership, largely influenced, one feels, by the sustained and continuing efforts of its staff organically and incrementally to adapt to the changing nature and needs, of its constituents internal and external.

Whilst some indication of research actively pursued, it is small scale and tends to be targeted on pedagogical issues. Internationalisation does not stand out as an important part of the Department's work.

The application from The Department of Historical studies at Umeå University, including site-visit, has been convincing in providing evidence that the school is a centre of sustained excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

Biology Education Centre, Uppsala University

The Biology Education Centre is the central administrative organisation for all undergraduate and master level education within biology, biotechnology and bioinformatics at Uppsala University.

The organisation, its quality assurance system and infrastructure function well. The Biology Education Centre is an administrative body of a highly innovative nature. Two strategic aims are served by this body: To maintain long standing excellence in international and national research, in the general standing and international attractiveness of the University and the Faculty of Sciences and Technology in particular, second strategic to extend standing acquired in the research domain to undergraduate study.

The quality assurance scheme is multi level, comprehensive and draws upon outside interests. External community links and close ties with industry are key to the quality assurance system, to ensure similar levels of excellence are achieved across different undergraduate programmes. Ideas or best practice proven in one programme are taken over by another. This internal self examination is key to the Centre's capacity to meet new demands rapidly and effectively. The "In Blanco" system of keeping open time slots for unplanned yet relevant demands generated by students or by new developments in the field itself, ensures both a sustained and operational 'student centredness' plus the possibility to test particular facets of a course or programme into the main curriculum.

Excellence in communication, the DiAna programme, adds significantly to 'professional socialization'. That this programme has improved student self-esteem, is currently regarded by university leadership as applicable across the university, points to its recognised standing.

The educational principles accord with the programme's contents and objectives. The programme includes a number of innovative approaches which help students to react fast to changing developments in the subject. In addition, the Centre is rather international and students are also familiarised at a very early stage in the programme with field work. Undergraduate education is research based and teaching staff are engaged in research. Teaching clearly aims at excellence.

How students attain exceptional results, is not clear. Neither application nor site-visit furnished convincing evidence about educational success. The Centre and its leadership are characterised by many informal and ad hoc structures. Still, crucial aspects – organisation and quality assurance mechanisms – remained unclear. Finally, the application's vision was couched largely in the conditional. This grammatical structure leaves the impression that the Centre's vision deals with plans yet to come than being firmly grounded in established practice.

The application from The Biology Education Centre at Uppsala University, including site-visit, has not provided convincing evidence that the school is a centre of sustained excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

The Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University

The Department of Business Studies at Uppsala University was founded in 1958. It offers studies in business, economics and entrepreneurship in programmes as well as single subject courses at undergraduate-, graduate- and doctoral level.

Strong emphasis on research and a strategic vision about the direction the Department will develop are evident. The Department places weight on programmes with a strong grounding in research and which, at the same time, opens the door for the individual to choose between a range of specialised options. A good quality management system is in place. The administrative and management structure seems strong. Students are involved in the development of the programme. They find their learning environment modern, flexible and as providing a good level of preparation for working life. Teaching staff emphasise the programme's interdisciplinarity and that teaching is research-led. They appreciate the flat hierarchy that is a characteristic of the Department. They are alert to issues that quality engages.

Though staff numbers do not appear up to strength, nevertheless, teachers command appropriate knowledge and experience. Yet, some doubt may be expressed as to whether the Department's educational principles are effectively

designed in accordance with the programme's contents and the objectives. Despite the emphasis on research and on preparing students for problem-solving and practical issues, the programme does not include internships though alternative arrangements for cooperation with industry are available. There is also no clear strategy for sending students abroad although internationalisation clearly is an important part of the vision of the programme.

That teaching aims at achieving excellence does not convince, not least because training in the managerial skills appears relatively weak. No convincing evidence of students attaining exceptional results was given. Though many scenarios for the Department's future figured in the application, the site-visit brought to the surface certain dissonances between plans and reality.

The application from The Department of Business Studies at Uppsala University, including site-visit, has not provided convincing evidence that they are a centre of sustained excellence and quality in teaching and learning.

Applications Analyzed

The Speech and Language Pathology Programme, Göteborg University

The Speech and Language Pathology Programme is part of the Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology.

The programme shows impressive sensitivity to student needs and to changes in the demands of the profession. Quality assurance systems seem well developed. There is well structured interaction with other disciplines and departments in teaching and research as well as contacts with practitioners in the region. There are sustained and dynamic links to international programmes.

The number of teaching staff is rather small. The programme also lacks a full professor in speech and language pathology. In the application, much weight is given to current purpose and future intent, but it is short of grounded evidence of excellence.

The application from The Speech and Language Pathology Programme does not provide sufficient information for a second and more thorough review.

The Educational Environment for Special Needs Education, Göteborg University

The Educational Environment for Special Needs Education is concerned with basic education as well as teacher training at different levels. There are also activities such as seminars and courses targeting groups outside the university.

Within the Department for Education, the unit for Special Needs Education has developed a competent and flexible organisation structure. With the exception of the MA-programme, a high percentage of students complete their studies successfully. However, there is no information about what students do after graduation.

In spite of a long history, the unit has an unbalanced composition of the staff concerning age and academic level. These issues are being addressed with measures such as competence development, research groups and mentor systems.

The application from The Educational Environment for Special Needs Education does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Graduate School of Language Technology, Göteborg University

The Graduate school of Language Technology is a national graduate school for which Göteborg University is the coordinating host. At the time of application, 42 students from ten different Swedish institutions of Higher Education were enrolled.

The overall impression retained is that the application is hard to discern and fails to address certain important criterion which makes judgments difficult. The teacher qualifications are not mentioned in the application. There is little stated about learning outcomes and impact, and the description of the quality assurance system is unclear.

The Graduate school of Language Technology does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Project Management Programme, Karlstad University

The Project Management Programme at Karlstad University is organized as a unit within the Faculty of Economic Sciences, Communication and IT. The programme started in 2002 and offers specialization for students from different educational programmes.

The application provides evidence that the pedagogic model is the subject of much reflection. The programme itself is based on a clear profile. However, the programme is relatively small and is considered too young to have achieved excellence at this early stage. Research is still somewhat underdeveloped among staff and furthermore, an analysis of success factors is missing. The application provides no great detail on management and administration.

The application from The Project Management Programme does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Centre for Advanced Medical Simulation, Karolinska Institutet

The Centre is highly focused and based on the transmission of cutting edge techniques and skills to increase patient safety. Staff is numerous and highly qualified. Training is well organized around highly structured sessions and students give positive evaluations.

There is an extensive inter institutional network at national level and there are well developed and active linkages with leading international establishments. However, the institute is a rather young organisation and is still in the process of developing its educational programmes. The application is bereft of information on several points. For example, the quality assurance system is only briefly mentioned, as is the examination system. Furthermore there is not an explicit description of the factors that have been important for success.

The Centre for Advanced Medical Simulation does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Clinical Education in the Nursing Programme, Kristianstad University

The Clinical Education Unit within the Nursing Programme at Kristianstad University aims to be a strong academic clinical practise environment. As such, research methodology has been integrated into clinical practise.

The introduction of research methodologies in the curriculum appears to be successful and highly appreciated by students. However, the application does not contain sufficient information to make an evaluation of either the method or the context in which it is employed in.

The Clinical Education in the Nursing Programme does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Commercial and Business Law Programmes, Linköping University

The Commercial and Business Law programme with French/German communication and legal culture has been offered at Linköping University since 1994. Later, a similar programme which focuses only on law and economics has been added.

This is a relatively strong and ambitious application. There are well thought out pedagogical methods supporting the students' learning process. The aims of the programmes are very convincing and the idea of integrating law, economics and language is interesting. The close links between education and legal practice and even working life by so called sponsor company activities is impressive. The application shows that there are excellent aims and good spirit behind the programmes. However, the documentation about the implementation of these aims is in some respects rather thin. Moreover, the application also lacks information on the research base of the programme as well as information about the teaching staff.

The application from the Commercial and Business Law programme does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review

The Strategic Management Programme, Lund University

The Strategic Management Programme consists of courses at undergraduate and Master level within the School of Economics and Management at Lund University.

The application shows that the programme is taught according to standards. It does not reveal any particular strengths and the application itself is not very convincing. It does not provide enough information on quality assurance, success factors, research of the teachers involved and administration and management of the programme. No tangible indication is given what makes that programme special.

The application from the Strategic Management Programme does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics (IIIEE), Lund University

Founded in 1994 by the Swedish Parliament, the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics at Lund University now offers two international and interdisciplinary Master programmes.

The application convinces that the institute is a valuable addition to the academic curriculum. It is not clear that the new theoretical ground is broken, but the applied nature of the programme requires quite sophisticated organizational systems. It seems like the programme has successfully managed this. Quality assurance mechanisms are in place. There is a strong alumni network and staff are involved in (applied) research. However, the application does not bear out the Institute's claim to excellence.

The application from the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Creative Writing Programme, Lund University

The Creative Writing Programme at Lund University started in 2002 and is a relatively young programme. The programme has two major divisions, one consists of courses focusing on writing exercises, and the other allows the student to concentrate on a major writing project of their own.

The programme is small and seems vulnerable as one person is coordinator, administrator as well as Chair of a Teaching Committee. The application shows that the teachers involved in the programme are well known writers. However it does not specify how much they are engaged in the programme and how much tutoring the students receive.

The application from The Creative Writing Programme is very general and does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The School of Computer Science and Communication, The Royal Institute of Technology

The School of Computer Science and Communication at the Royal Institute of Technology runs undergraduate and graduate education as well as research in scientific computing, computer science, media technology and many other areas.

The application shows that this environment has much strength in such aspects as staff development, which appears to be effective, and there is evidence of recognition of teaching, effective leadership and good outcomes.

However, the structure of the application is not very clear. The undergraduate education is described in much detail but reflections are mostly on PhD or specific components. The description of the quality assurance system is rather weak and needs a more wholehearted and more elaborated development.

The application from School of Computer Science and Communication does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Department of Energy Technology, The Royal Institute of Technology

The Department of Energy Technology was established in 1993, uniting several related research groups. Today the Department is responsible for a number of programmes, specializations and courses within the field of energy technology and engineering.

The application shows that this Department serves many departments and programmes and is quite international. However, the description of the organisation is too brief, success factors are not mentioned explicitly and there is no indication that students attain exceptional results. The preparatory programme seems innovative and highlighted but is not described. The application is also rather weak in its description of programme goals or outcomes.

The application from The Department of Energy Technology does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

The Department of Scandinavian Languages, Stockholm University

The Department of Scandinavian Languages presented its application in respect of its undergraduate courses in Swedish, Swedish as a Second Language, Swedish as a Second Language for the Deaf, Scandinavian Languages (Historical Profile), and Dutch.

The application is made in a clear and convincing way. There is no doubt that the organisation is well designed and functions well. The qualifications of the staff give a convincing impression as do the teaching activities as well.

They are broad in research areas and courses and they have strong specialization on Swedish as a second Language for the Deaf.

The quality assurance system is flexible and gives a reassuring impression and so does a well designed examination system. The Department has good contacts with working life and schools.

The application is informative and well structured. However, what is described does not make the Department appear exceptional in a way that others may look on it as a good example and a model for development.

The Department of Social Work, Stockholm University

The Department of Social Work at Stockholm University offers three programmes; Bachelor of Science in social work, Master of science in social work and doctoral and Ph.D. studies, and also independent courses on a variety of topics.

The application does concentrate on the impressive work of development and improvements that the Department has carried out since the programme evaluation 2003, and in some respect also a former evaluation 2000, carried out by The National Agency for Higher education.

A lot has been done since the last evaluation and the development of quality awareness is very obvious. The overall quality has increased as a consequence of this awareness and all the work of improvements that followed, convinces. The research base has clearly been more closely integrated in the undergraduate curriculum. Investing in improving teaching skills among the teachers are another positive result. It is also convincing that a great deal of effort has been put into making the Department an attractive and interesting place to work at and be a part of.

However, the application does not provide enough relevant and convincing information for the review of excellence and quality. What is described does not make the Department appear exceptional in a way that others may look on it as a good example and a model for development.

Umeå School of Business, Umeå University

Umeå School of Business (USB) was founded in 1989. The school offers four Bachelor programmes, seven Master's programmes, doctoral programmes, and a large number of courses.

The application is well written and provides much information that is relevant. The range in the provision of different programmes and specialisations is rather broad. The organisation is well designed and functions well. The qualifications and the capacity of the staff are convincing. The internalisation is obvious in student exchange, staffing policy and the curriculum. A quality assurance system is in place and seems to work well on all levels.

However, the approach is rather mainstream and less outstanding in the sense of excellence. What is described does not make the School appear exceptional in a way that others may look on it as a good example and a model for development.

Umeå Institute of Design, Umeå University

The Umeå Institute of Design is an institute within the Faculty of Science and Technology at Umeå University. The education of industrial designers is based on artistic rather than scientific foundation.

This application shows a high degree of self confidence and describes how goals have been achieved. It is a small environment, allowing informal student voice in quality assessment. There is some evidence of external impact and good outcomes. The institute has many strengths and a very good reputation nationally as well as internationally.

However, a more structured, and in depth self analysis of what led to the institutes success is missing. It is difficult to get a picture of how deliberate enhancement has brought it to the stage where it is now. There is little evidence of a formal quality assurance process linked to that of the university. Further, there is no evidence of recognition and reward for its teaching. It would be useful with more information about external review process and student feedback.

The application from Umeå Institute of Design is impressive in many ways but does not provide sufficient information about excellent quality on some crucial aspects.

The Clinical Training Centre, Uppsala University

The Clinical Training Centre was established in 2001, primarily to provide systematic skills training for health professionals. The majority of the users are students from the Nursing and Medical programmes.

The Centre has contributed significantly to improvement of clinical training of students from different health professions education programmes at the University, the Hospital and the County.

However, the application from The Clinical Training Centre is too unspecific and does not provide sufficient information to proceed with a second and more thorough review.

Appendix I

Quality aspects

The organisations that apply for this distinction must be very well organised and eminent in their fulfilment of both national and local objectives in their programmes. The following aspects and criteria are provided as guidelines.

- There must be an organisational structure, a quality assurance system and infrastructure that function exceptionally well,
- the organisation must be run by a competent management/administration and committed teachers with the relevant knowledge, experience and capacities,
- the organisation must be firmly underpinned by an explicit and robust academic and/or artistic foundation and/or tried and tested experience,
- the teaching and forms of examination used in the organisation must be designed in accordance with the contents and objectives of its programme,
- student learning is to be fostered in an eminent manner,
- the centre's students should attain exceptional results.

In a centre of educational excellence it should also be possible to describe

- the factors of educational success and
- why these lead to exceptional results.

