

The Third Report

on the National Reviews of Swedish Higher Education

by The International Advisory Board

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The Third Report on the National Reviews of Swedish Higher Education

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Contents

Introduction	5
Development of the Swedish model	7
Students and employer's involvement	9
Audits and thematic studies	11
Implementing the Bologna reforms	13
Future challenges	15
The need to review the organisation of academic work	15
Internationalisation, Bologna and their implications for evaluation – some reflections on the Swedish position	25
Bologna as an additional factor of complexity	26
Summary of recommendation	31
References	33
Annex 1	35
Suggested themes for discussion at the third meeting of the Advisory Committee to the National Agency for Higher Education	35
Annex 2	37
Notes from a meeting with the International Advisory Board of the National Agency for Higher Education in Cambridge, Mass. May 26–28, 2003	37

Introduction

The International Advisory Board to the National Agency for Higher Education Mary Henkel, Ernie House, Bente Kristensen (acting chair), Guy Neave and Martin Trow (Chair), absent, met for the third time at the Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. May 26–28, 2003 with the University Chancellor and members of her staff. Unfortunately Martin Trow, Chair of the Board, was unable to participate because of illness. Bente Kristensen was asked to act as chair. The meeting proceeded according to the suggested themes (Annex 1) and the forwarded material.

Notes from the meeting produced by Karin Agélii and Staffan Wahlén, based also on the notes produced by Guy Neave, are attached as Annex 2. The Advisory Board approves the notes including the summary of conclusions and decisions.

The Advisory Board would like to comment further on the following subjects:

- Development of the Swedish Model
- Students involvement
- Thematic studies
- Implementing of the Bologna Declaration
- Future challenges for Swedish higher education and for the Agency

In the final chapter 6 the Board sums up further recommendations.

Development of the Swedish model

In the second year of national evaluations within the framework of the new quality review system the Agency has conducted both

- follow-up procedures of the previous audits of quality assurance procedures at institutional levels
- evaluations of subjects and programmes and
- accreditation of subjects and programmes.

The follow-up procedures of the audits have now been completed. In connection with the subject and programme evaluations a total of 130 assessors have, together with the Agency's own staff, conducted 264 appraisals of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in 16 subjects. Both for the audits and the evaluations, a very large number of people have been involved: faculty, students, subject experts and representatives from the labour market, both from Sweden and from abroad. According to the Agency a certain tendency, evaluation - 'fatigue', at the institutional and departmental level can be noticed. Therefore, the Agency has decided that no further audits of the current kind will take place until the current cycle of evaluations of subject and programmes concludes in 2006.

The Advisory board supports this decision.

Although the workload of the Agency has been rather heavy in 2002, the Advisory Board noticed that the Agency, in a very impressive and skilful way, carried out the reviews as evaluative, informative, consultative and accreditative.

The Agency seems to pay careful attention to the tension between control and development. The peer review teams are instructed to look for strengths, just as much as for weaknesses, and to provide examples of good practice. An example presented to the Board was an extract of the report on evaluation of the discipline History at Swedish universities and university colleges. In each report is a similar full section on the general quality of the subject throughout Sweden, which according to the Agency is often read with great interest by those concerned. In the History report, the review team emphasises six important aspects for quality enhancement in History: 1) the academic environment 2) undergraduate programmes 3) doctoral programmes 4) gender equality, gender and ethnicity 5) co-operation and internationalisation and 6) the market. Furthermore, the peer review team disseminates observations and recommendations on each subject and finally they addresses its recommendations at the relevant level: Government and Parliament, higher education institutions, faculties and departments. This report is indeed very developmental and very holistic and *the Board recommends the Agency to use this extract as a model for other peer review teams.*

The Board was interested to learn that the Agency had worked on its consultative role. According to the Agency, the relationships between the Agency and the higher education institutions have improved considerably with regard to the planning and implementation of the reviews. Self-studies are no longer returned to the institutions for re-writing and it has become increasingly common for the Agency to ask for supplementary information and thus to carry on a continuous dialogue with the departments.

The Agency is empowered to withdraw from specific departments/programmes the right to award degrees in those departments/programmes that it deems unable to teach to the required standard, i.e. the accreditive role of the Agency. In connection with the evaluation and the report on bachelor level engineering programmes no less than 25 “yellow cards” (out of 225 different programmes) were raised, most of them based on the fact that the programmes in question do not contain a sufficient amount of certain ingredients specified in the Higher Education Ordinance. One of the reasons for this is that the institutions have developed programmes aimed at students with a secondary school background other than the traditional one for engineering. This is a problem not only for Swedish higher education institutions. The emergence of new interdisciplinary areas, often with a thematic organisation and with the building up of the interdisciplinary research foundation is a phenomenon that not only the institutions, but also the evaluation agencies, the evaluators and the Ministries of Higher Education have to deal with. These new interdisciplinary areas often attract very intelligent and very motivated students, students who after graduation are very attractive on the labour market. In earlier reports, the Board saw the development of interdisciplinary study programmes as a necessity for the evolution of the Knowledge Society. *The Board recommends the Agency, in connection with the subject and programme evaluations, to take the lead in stimulating this development.*

Students and employer's involvement

The involvement of both students and employers on the peer review teams is a characteristic of the evaluation system of Swedish higher education institutions that is unusual in other European countries. It can be either a strength or a weakness, depending on, how the team interacts. There is no doubt that the academics take the lead on the peer review teams. *With a diverse composition of the team, the role of the chair becomes more difficult and therefore, the Agency's instruction and preparation of the team are very important.*

The Board finds that the students involved in the subject and programme evaluations must be activated and made more visible and therefore the Board looks forward to discussing with the Agency next year the result of the different activities (see Annex 2) for strengthening the involvement of the students.

In some way, the same could be said for the involvement of the employers. The strengthening of the employers' involvement was not discussed in Boston but the Board would like to draw the Agency's attention to the following issues related to the Bologna Declaration and where the expertise of the employers could be most helpful:

- Definition of the term "employability" in the context of study programmes at Bachelor level;
- How to accumulate workload-based credits as units within a given programme;
- How to design curricula that take into account qualification descriptors, level descriptors, skills and learning outcomes;
- The role of Higher Education inserting itself into a perspective of lifelong learning
- The alumni policy of universities and university colleges.

These questions are all more or less related to the so-called 'third task' of Swedish universities and university colleges – their interaction with industry, the business community and society at large.

Audits and thematic studies

The Board supports the Agency's decision, in the light of the collective experience of quality audits and after consultation with the Ministry of Education, that the higher education institutions should not be required to submit further reports on their quality assurance procedures until the first round of evaluations of subjects and programmes has been completed at the end of 2006.

However, in order to maintain momentum, *the Board recommends the Agency to invite the most progressive institutions (4 – 6 institutions) within quality improvement and quality assurance to an annual meeting to discuss how their internal quality culture is developing. The results of this meeting could be made public, e.g. on the Agency's website, as examples of good practices that could serve as inspiration for other universities and university colleges.*

The Board also supports the idea of further thematic evaluations. The list of themes contains: Student influence, gender equality, social and ethnic diversity, life-long learning and staff development.

For inspiration, *the Board would like to draw the Agency's attention to the EUA institutional evaluation programme with a special focus.*

The EUA, The European University Association, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe with 662 higher education institutions and national rectors' conferences in 45 countries. The EUA Institutional Review programme, launched in 1993 was in 2002 evaluated by a distinguished panel. Chairman of the panel was Professor Jan S. Nilsson, Executive Member of the Board of the K & A Wallenberg Foundation (1992-2002) and former Rector of the University of Gothenburg (1986-1992). Our Board member, Mary Henkel, has been secretary of the panel. One of the recommendations from the panel was that the EUA should offer the option of more focused and topical institutional reviews. In the future, the primary focus of the EUA institutional evaluation programme will still be the institution as a whole, but with a new option: the institutions have been offered the possibility of choosing a "special focus" area which will constitute one-fifth of the evaluation exercise and be considered within the overall institutional perspective. The following can be chosen as additional focus areas:

- Research management
- Student support services
- Internationalisation policies
- Implementing Bologna
- Working with stakeholders
- Governance and leadership
- ICT
- Articulation between the centre and faculties
- Looking at specific faculties

Implementing the Bologna reforms

In the discussions between the Board and the Agency, the implementation of the Bologna reforms has not been very prominent in Swedish higher education institutions. The Report, “Trends 2003 Progress toward the European Higher Education Area”, by Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch, published for the conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin, 18-19 September 2003, based among other things on a survey among the higher education institutions in the participating European countries it said:

“Awareness of the Bologna Process has increased considerably during the last two years. Nevertheless, the results of the Trends 2003 survey and many other sources suggest that, despite this growing awareness among the different HE groups, the reforms have yet to reach the majority of the HE grass-roots representatives who are supposed to implement them and give them concrete meaning. Deliberations on the implementation of Bologna reforms currently involve heads of institutions more than the academics themselves. Hence, interpreting Bologna in the light of its goals and the whole context of its objectives at departmental level, i.e. rethinking current teaching structures, units, methods, evaluation and the permeability between disciplines and institutions, is a task that still lies ahead for a majority of academics at European universities. Administrative staff and students seem so far to be even less included in deliberations on the implementation of Bologna reforms. Generally, awareness is more developed at universities than at other higher education institutions. In Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, Ireland and most strongly the UK, deliberations on institutional Bologna reforms are even less widespread than in the other Bologna signatory countries. This does not mean, of course, that no reforms are being undertaken, but that if there are reforms they are not explicitly associated with the Bologna Process. In the case of Sweden, for instance, reforms along the lines of the Bologna Process are not carried out in the name of Bologna.”

The quality of higher education has proved to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area, i.e. the aim of the Bologna Process. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. Through the European network ENQA the Agency is involved in this work and with the ENQA Survey 2003: “Quality procedures in European Higher Education” it has become possible to determine which evaluation models are used in various countries and to analyse basic similarities and dissimilarities.

According to the Board, there seems to be a need in Sweden both at national and institutional level to revitalize the Bologna Process. The Board recommends the Agency to participate in this debate since the implementation of the reforms has an impact on the subject and programme evaluations.

See further pp. 26–30.

Future challenges

The Board wants to concentrate on the following two themes:

- The need to review the organisation of academic work
- Internationalisation, Bologna and their implications for Evaluation – some reflections on the Swedish position

The need to review the organisation of academic work

Introduction

One of the challenges facing European universities is the new conditions for knowledge production. As pointed out by Michael Gibbons et al. (1994) the conditions for knowledge production are changing radically, with huge implications for the established universities. For example, they identify the following general trends:

- Knowledge is increasingly generated in an application-oriented context, not based on a discipline-oriented perception of problems
- Knowledge is increasingly cross-disciplinary
- Knowledge production takes place increasingly in professionally heterogeneous groups and in transient networks across institutional and organisational boundaries, not anchored primarily in the university sector.

For universities, this development will blur the distinction between basic and application oriented research, they will need to consider themselves far more as part of branched-out networks working with many types of institutions and companies, and their traditional, discipline-oriented organisation will have to be reassessed.

The need to review the organisation of academic work

The general theme here is that as universities assume a larger role in society and the boundaries between them and other social institutions become more open, it is more difficult to hold on to universal concepts of what academic work entails.

With the pressures of the contemporary academic environment and their implications for long held assumptions about what constitutes academic work, the nexus of values and activities involved and the structures in which they are embedded are under challenge. Those identified here include:

- a) the research – teaching nexus long held to encapsulate academic work. It can be argued that this formulation is over-simple, now that the career trajectories and combination of activities open to academics have multiplied choices.

- b) some of the choices open to academics threaten not only the research – teaching nexus but also the role of the basic unit in the academic life of the individual. They may relocate individuals' centre of gravity outside the department or even the institution.
- c) the tension there has always been between the requirement for the individual to be both distinctive and embedded in the discipline and the higher education institution: to be individualist and a member of a collective. It is now significantly heightened.

Observations

The following observations might be made:

1. Swedish law and the national subject reviews conducted by the Agency reinforce the 'research-teaching nexus' (Neumann 1990; Clark 1995) as a central value of higher education and a key defining feature of the university and of academic work. The reports we have read (departmental self evaluations and panel reports) clearly indicate the importance attached to this value in the academic community.¹ They also demonstrate the role of research in the curriculum of undergraduate as well as graduate programmes (e.g. introduction to research methodology and requirements to produce a piece of research).
2. There are now counter influences to the essentialism informing this concept of higher education and to the structures and relationships in which it is embedded (departments as the basic units that 'meld' the disciplines and the higher education institution (Clark 1983, p.32); self-regulating communities of academics and students). International bodies, such as the OECD and the EU, as well as many nation states, including Sweden, articulate the need for higher education institutions to lay more emphasis on external relationships and needs and on their roles as engines of international and national economic growth and competitiveness (not to mention their own financial survival and prosperity). Current literature on higher education increasingly talks about the multiple purposes and the multi-modality of universities (Clark 1998; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1997; Enders and Fulton 2002). Universities are required to enter into more open and pro-active relationships with other sectors of society, in particular the private sector. The '*contrat social*' between universities, governments and societies is being revised (Enders and Fulton *ibid.*). There is pressure for greater differentiation of higher education institutions in some contexts.

1. Most of the reports we have read have been in the humanities. Would those in other subjects have been any different in this respect?

3. These developments have led to change in assumptions about the nature of academic work in some contexts. An increasing proportion of academics in universities are on 'research only' or 'teaching only' contracts. Academics are encouraged to make connections outside their basic units and their institutions, some with other academics but many with businesses, as well as with local and regional governments and communities. The objectives are various. They include strategic research, collaborative research, applied research, innovation networks, technology transfer, education and training programmes, promotion of economic regeneration or development.
4. There are consequences for institutional structures, academic relationships and academic identities. They have prompted higher education institutions to develop internal structures that are more complex, more flexible and more open to external interests. Incentives have increased for the establishment of units that can be focal points of attraction for external research funding, research collaborations and technology transfer. Research centres or institutes have proliferated in universities, sometimes as specialised off shoots of departments, sometimes cross-cutting the discipline-based departmental organisation to bring together researchers from a number of disciplines in an emergent or growing research domain. The department as the point at which discipline and institution come together comes under challenge in these circumstances.
5. The network is another example of a structural form with increasing visibility and importance for policy makers, researchers and higher education institutions. Academics, at least the most active and successful, have always developed their own networks, largely within the invisible colleges of the discipline. The differences now lie in the variety of network membership and in the drives by various policy and institutional actors to formalise research networks and to give them increasing administrative or financial significance.
6. Academics are under pressure, therefore, to multiply external relationships. Some are encouraged to become 'academic capitalists', for example to form their own companies. Such developments challenge the idea of a universal formulation of the nature of academic work, centred on the research-teaching nexus. There may now be more choices of role for academics, some of which do not involve such a nexus: researcher-entrepreneur; research manager; academic manager; educational entrepreneur. Some may mean that relationships with industry or government or other academic institutions, including overseas, become more powerful than those with the department or basic unit.

7. Those for whom the research-teaching nexus remains at the core of their identity, may nevertheless find the tensions within it that were always there exacerbated. Academics have always been under some pressure both to be distinctive, to construct an individual identity, and to remain embedded in the collective, discipline and department. Research identities have, if anything, become more important, while collective responsibilities have not only expanded but also become more fully articulated and more visible. Developments such as the importance of evaluation, access and equality agendas and the challenge of teaching more varied student populations have led to new definitions of academic tasks and skills. They constitute a new form of professionalisation of academic work, the impetus for which has come largely from outside the academic profession itself.

Merit and Worth

One might make a distinction between the “merit” and “worth” of a higher education programme. The “merit” of a programme refers to how good the programme is according to the intrinsic criteria of the discipline of which it is a part. For example, a graduate programme in chemistry might be a good programme based on its research training of graduates, the quality of the content in its courses, and the quality of the teaching and advising it provides to undergraduates. Any chemistry department would recognize these as being meritorious attributes.

“Worth” can be conceived differently. A programme could be useful to the larger society or to groups in the larger society in various ways. For example, a graduate programme in business might be valuable to the economy by training people to staff important positions in corporations. Or a medical programme might produce research that leads to health benefits across the entire population of society. Or a political science department might provide advice to the government on how to organize governmental agencies. Social worth applies to social benefits outside the university. Of course, merit and worth may overlap considerably; they are not mutually exclusive. But neither are they exactly the same thing.

Currently, most discussions about evaluation in universities focus on evaluative criteria intrinsic to the academic disciplines, the merit. However, if one regards universities as socially privileged institutions that receive substantial support from the larger society, it is reasonable to expect that some benefits should accrue to the society for supporting these institutions. Societal benefits are not always obvious, and not enough discussion is devoted to the relationship between higher education institutions and the larger society, except when educational institutions want more resources. One future direction might be to focus more on programme benefits to the larger society and to make these a larger part of future evaluations.

Of course, one would hope that educational programmes would be both meritorious and socially worthwhile, that is, that they would excel in meeting intrinsic disciplinary criteria and also make significant contributions to the larger society. Unfortunately, that is not always the case, and one could extend higher education evaluation in the direction of making departments more self-conscious about their usefulness to society. Of course, this could be a sensitive topic since many academics see their work as intrinsically valuable to society, whatever that work is, and one way to phrase the discussion might be to cast it as deciding what kind of activities to support, given that resources are too limited to support any and all academic endeavors. Choices must be made.

More and more demands are being placed on university faculty, not least including more time spent on evaluation activities. Yet the resources available to universities have not been increasing at a corresponding rate. Nor is it likely to be the case that resources devoted to higher education will increase dramatically. The slow expansion of the Western economies precludes the possibility.

If resources remain the same or even dwindle, many higher education institutions will find themselves dealing with the shortage of resources by such tactics as hiring part-time faculty. Hiring part-time workers is usually seen as a solution to a temporary budgetary problem, but this may be a misreading of the economic situation of universities. As more part-time faculty members are added, academic life moves away from the ideal of a community of academic discourse and begins to resemble other industries that have experienced similar trends.

The appeal of part-time workers is obvious. They are hired to teach on a course-by-course basis, and often they do not receive fringe benefits. Hence, they are much cheaper. Part-time faculty free up the regular faculty to teach the courses they prefer, to have more time for research, and to manage committee work and new demands such as evaluation. Part-time faculty often are spouses who do not have employment elsewhere or those employed in other jobs who extend their workdays by teaching higher education courses, such as lawyers teaching evening courses. Integrating active workers into professional training has its own benefits.

However, there are serious costs to part-time work. Part-time faculty members are rarely full-fledged members of the academic community. They do not conduct research, nor do they participate in faculty discussions and decisions. The more courses they teach, the more the curriculum slips from the purview and control of the regular faculty. Part-timers do not have much intellectual engagement with other faculty or with research, even if they have excellent contacts with professional practice. They do not develop academic careers. The academic work remains on the periphery for them, however much they enjoy it.

Over a period of time this is not a healthy situation for the higher education institution. In fact, continuing to add faculty in this way at the margins will result in transforming the nature of the institution itself. How big a problem is it? It is probably not a large problem for Swedish higher education institutions. But it is a problem elsewhere. For example, in the community college system of Colorado, more than half of all instructors are part-time employees. This cannot be a good thing for the integrity of an academic institution.

Rather than have higher education institutions drift into unplanned restructuring like this, or of other kinds, it would be better to face the prospect of organizing academic work in different ways by finding more productive avenues of institutional development. Addressing a long-term problem like this is something a higher education agency can do that individual institutions cannot do very well. Of course, reorganizing academic work is potentially an explosive issue among faculty members. They might well see it as a way of increasing central authority over the institution. Perhaps discussion papers and low-key conferences might be the ways to consider the issue of adjusting academic work during a period of declining resources. In the long term this is a hugely significant problem for higher education institutions since it has the potential of reshaping them altogether.

Research management

In accordance with the need to review the organisation of academic work in institution wide research management has emerged lately. This has occurred in response to several closely inter-related factors in the external environment: changing funding regimes, new societal demands on universities and university systems, changes in the practice of innovation and research, requiring close ties between universities, industry, commerce, government and community. The current trends and specifics of research management have been discussed in two consecutive OECD meetings in Paris, 2000 and Tokyo 2001 with broad input from various countries.

While all universities strongly maintain a core function of teaching, although the teaching and learning process has changed dramatically with a much more diversified student body and the shift in focus from teaching to learning, the same does not hold for research. The levels of research engagement vary widely, even within individual national systems. The motivation for individual, academic researchers may also change, from intellectual challenge to recognition by the peer group or recognition by academic institutions (promotion), to the pride being part of an innovative/original product process. (Vardar et al. 2003).

'Research management' has long been part of those administrative tasks that accompany 'Big Science', arguably from the standpoint of scholars in science policy, its extension to other fields is both natural and, if sometimes controversial, is an inevitable part of 'rationalizing' the work of academia (Neave 2002).

Universities already have a formal hierarchy of managers. However, by tradition, lower level managers close to the individual researchers are often managers by name rather by fact. Probably, it is not unfair to characterise present research management at many universities as a democratic form of laissez-faire management. It is often invisible, random and unprofessional.

The two perspectives on science and the conflict between the classic academic and societal perspectives on science are illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 1:

	The classic, academic perspective on science	The societal perspective on science
The purpose of Science	To accumulate certified knowledge as an end in itself	To produce knowledge for practical application
Quality evaluated by	Intra-scientific criteria (reliability, consistency, originality, objectivity)	Intra- and extra-scientific criteria (relevance, utility, economic impact)
The individual researcher's research should	Be independent and autonomous	Be managed in accordance with societal and organisational objectives
The prime source of control is	Peers in the prestige hierarchy	The (professional) management of the employing organisation
Best possible development of the institution of science takes place through	Self-organisation	Design by institutional and political management
Images of the nature of research and researchers	<p>Research is unpredictable and therefore unmanageable; the serendipity model; a researcher can be described as a kind of artist</p> <p><i>The individualist perspective:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher is a "self-employed" person who motivates him (her)self • The researcher must be autonomous and free to set his or her own agenda for research: free thinking is the basis for creativity and originality • Research is a personal calling for the few; it is a highly elitist and unique activity • Researchers are individualists and loners 	<p>Research is purposive and intentional. Management is possible as most researchers do standard research and work with set methods ("puzzle solving");</p> <p><i>The high-skilled employee perspective:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher is an employee who sometimes needs to be motivated • The researcher must integrate his research agenda with the desires of stakeholders: free and institutional thinking • Research is a professional calling; it is a craft which can be taught • Researchers are individualists and team players
Typical exponents	Merton, Hagstrom, Barber, Popper, Bush	Fuller, Gibbons et al. Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff

These two perspectives are to a large extent each other's antitheses (although they may and do exist alongside each other. When left unmediated, as it has been the case in many industrialized countries in the last decade, the two perspectives will lead to conflict and a sub-optimal use of resources.

Therefore, active research management is becoming increasingly important for organising the frameworks for research in a more efficient way. Academic research management can no longer be satisfactorily performed as a discrete, laissez-faire activity. The most important tasks for contemporary academic research managers are:

1. to secure an optimal utilisation of resources (human, financial and technical)
2. balancing individual autonomy and organisational control
3. balancing the two perspectives on science (figure 1)
4. reduce complexity

To ensure a proper balance between control and autonomy self guiding systems which set conditions for individual adaptive processes and in which researchers voluntarily work in accordance with collective goals/organisational needs have been introduced. The tasks of modern research management are best catered to when the management activity is distributed between several levels. This points in the direction of figure 2, what has been called the three-order concept of management (Ernø-Kjølhede et al. 2001):

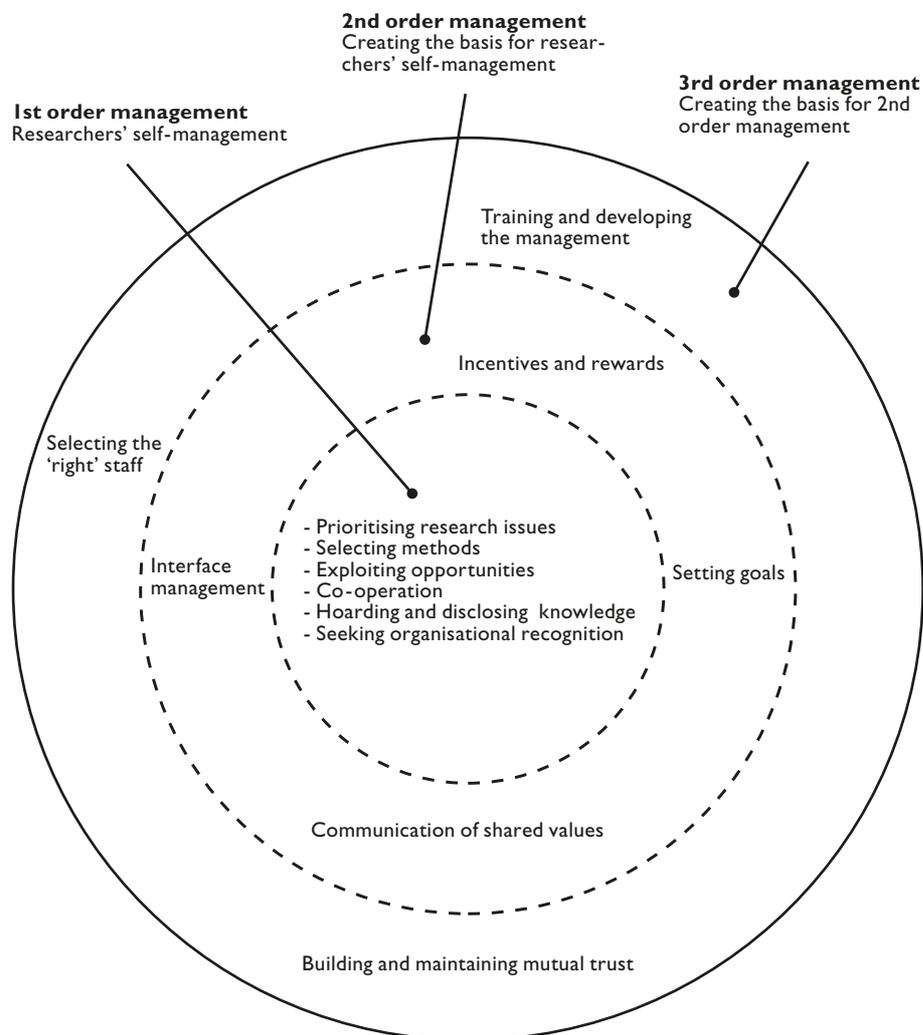


Figure 2:

Managerial influence should according to this figure be exerted to the second and thirds levels. Management at these levels does not obstruct but rather facilitates researcher's self-management and professional development. Along

these lines it may also sometimes be the task of managers to try to shelter researchers from short-term political or corporate whims. In this way, modern research management becomes – despite what many believe – a protection of the individual researcher’s autonomy and self-determination.

Relevant is to ask: which specific qualifications and what knowledge should the future academic research manager possess to ensure that researchers continuously develop and utilize their knowledge both for the fulfillment of individual career goals and in the most beneficial way for the employing organisation? This question is discussed in many European countries and we suppose also in Sweden. Swedish universities’ provision of services and interaction with society (the so called ”tredje uppgiften”/the third task) was part of the former audits. The Agency already knows a lot about how the universities fulfill their obligations within this area of their core activities. However, perhaps the Agency knows less about how the universities solve the conflict between the classic academic and societal perspective on science, the clash between two different rationales concerning the purpose of science. *The Board would therefore recommend the Agency to include the subject: “tredje uppgiften”/the third task in the planned thematic reviews using this opportunity to discuss and clarify many of the questions raised here which are relevant and urgent to academics at Swedish universities.*

Internationalisation, Bologna and their implications for evaluation – some reflections on the Swedish position

It is a matter of record that Sweden stands amongst one of pioneering systems in the area of internationalisation – internationalisation being understood primarily in terms of developing linguistic competence amongst its younger generation on the one hand and also in creating a sense of international awareness and collective responsibility amongst its citizens on the other, both of which transcend national borders and national culture. Though one is working from personal memory rather than from documented sources, the impression remains that internationalisation, construed in this manner, was a notable feature in Swedish higher education during the early eighties and subject to not inconsiderable enquiry and development. (Opper, 1979)

Sweden's commitment to underwriting international 'out-reach' lay principally in two areas. It lay in the moral principle of solidarity with the developing world in the form of setting aside a certain proportion of the national income for overseas aid and assistance programmes. It also embraced a more pragmatic aspect which derived in the main from Sweden's reliance on an export driven economy and thus explicitly on the priority to ensure that the nature of the skills, their level and distribution in the working population at large were maintained, if not renewed in keeping with changes in what today would be regarded as the 'international market place'. Put succinctly, this strategy may be seen as Sweden's initiative and stance to what may, with a certain interpretative latitude, be taken to be an early manifestation of that phenomenon nowadays associated with the pervasive process of economic globalisation.

Bologna

It is against this broad backdrop that the more recent developments, focused around the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 and the on going process of consultation at European level between the representatives of the University interest, national authorities responsible for higher education and the European Commission – the so called 'Bologna Process' - should be placed, as too should the Lisbon Convention. Seen from what may be considered to be a Swedish perspective these two enactments are at one and the same time, more restricted in focus. They also pose challenges more complex and more immediate. They are complex not just in the common objectives that Bologna assigns to higher education at a European level – effectively the objectives of:

- Mobility of students, researchers and staff
- The Transparency of qualifications

- The Employability of Citizens
- The Competitiveness of institutions of Higher Education
- The Attractiveness of European Cultures.

They are also immediate in the sense that the 'Architecture' – that is the structure of qualifications and the levels of achievement they underwrite – are scheduled to be in place and complete by the year 2010. In addition, there are two other dimensions that, in all likelihood, will have major consequence for Sweden's systems of higher education and of evaluation. These may be construed as the additional factors of complexity and immediacy.

Bologna as an additional factor of complexity

From the standpoint of the external observer, Sweden's external policy environment – at least that part of it which has direct bearing on higher education policy – has at a very minimum been shaped by two abiding commitments. The first of these has already been commented upon – namely, the dual commitment to providing education and training to the developing economies and an active human resources policy at national level to ensure the Nation's international competitiveness. The second is that equally abiding commitment to working together with Sweden's Nordic partners. In effect, the Bologna Process like Mohammed's coffin, floats between these two other spheres of 'extra-national' engagement.

Of these three spheres within which activities of an 'extra national' nature take place in Sweden, clearly the Bologna Process has high significance for the potential impact it will have upon such basic structures as study duration, measures of student performance encapsulated in the ECTS credit unit system, though at the moment Sweden is not part of the latter. (Reichert & Tauch, 2003, Figure 11, p. 68) They also place an interpretation very different and operational in a more restricted form from the transparency in output and qualifications which emerge from Sweden's system of higher education. Output and qualifications ratios are, of course, not the only criteria of a how a system or the particular units within it, perform, though they are often held in the popular mind to be suitable surrogates. For that same reason, the notion of transparency as it appears to be emerging from within the Bologna Process entails an earlier interpretation and one that may well be at odds with precisely that central characteristic within the very particular 'style' of evaluatory discourse that has so markedly emerged under the aegis of the National Agency for Higher Education, namely the resolute dismissal of league tables and ranking systems.

Basic Questions

The basic question arising from the Bologna Process is then two fold: first, how far the system of evaluation specifically devised to be flexible, sensitive and 'fit for Swedish circumstances and purpose' may have to compromise with other models focused more on relating outcome to finance; second, how far participation in a broader system of cross frontier exchange which entails competition between institutions does not increase the risk of 'routinisation' and thus precipitating a 'compliance culture' both of which the National Agency has been particularly careful to hold at bay. In this regard, the evaluation programme has been especially alert in avoiding the replacement of what might be presented as 'legal homogeneity', once a marked feature of Swedish higher education up to the reform of 1992, with a homogeneity of outcomes. The explicit emphasis that the programme has set upon diversity in provision and process, both at the institutional level and below, has been the subject of favourable comment in previous Board reports as an essential part of the 'Swedish model of Evaluation'. That it is held to be exceptional serves merely to underline the very real possibility that other evaluatory modes are less concerned with an explicit commitment to diversity.

Europe: policies of convergence or regression to the mean?

If this is so, then one of the major issues that arise from involvement in the Bologna Process is very precisely how far Sweden can avoid 'regressing towards the European mean'. Stated slightly differently, the strategic issue that appears to confront the National Agency is how far the Evaluation Programme's 'fitness of purpose' to Swedish circumstances is compatible with commitment to constructing a European Higher Education Area. Another way of stating the same thing may be rendered thus: "As Sweden becomes more deeply involved in this venture, which dimensions of its evaluatory model may it reasonably expect to retain? Which should it fight for? Which is it prepared, if necessary to concede?"

There is, however, an additional feature to the Bologna Process that underlines still further the strategic importance it has for the Swedish model of evaluation. That feature is the dynamic implicit in the term 'process'. The agenda of the Bologna Process is evolutionary. Over the past four years, it has moved on from those elements such as mobility which have long been at the heart of trans frontier traffic and collaboration. It now has as its central focus those dimensions that are central to defining the public perception – transparency – as well as the public's notion of worth, efficiency and performance of their higher education, a perception that, if shaped by evaluation internal to the nation, may nevertheless not necessarily be wholly compatible or even confirmed when judged from sources, agencies and bodies beyond the nation. These are delicate issues indeed. They are contained in quality on the one hand and accreditation on the other. The recent emphasis placed upon accreditation at the Berlin Summit of September 2003 show this dynamic very clearly.

Issues of Resonance:

Certainly, there are dimensions in the Bologna Process that resonate with issues inside Sweden and which are being taken up within the Evaluation Programme. The recommendation to Parliament that graduate schools be established is one, though it has to be said that elsewhere – Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany being very concrete examples – the establishment of such bodies both antedated the Bologna Declaration and for that reason were largely independent of it. That graduate schools are associated with responding to the Bologna Process illustrates one basic feature of that process itself – it is perceived as a way to accelerate the pace of reform. Bologna possesses then a justificatory centrality. In that sense, the Bologna Process may serve to bring certain issues forward. Employability is one, provision for lifelong learning, its practice and its take-up, another.

Thematic evaluation and the Bologna Process

Issues such as these – as indeed, internationalisation itself – assume a new weight as the Agency begins to explore other approaches to quality audit. The take up of such issues as part of the National Agency's future agenda would seem particularly important and appropriate. The notion of evaluation through cross cutting themes such as employability has merit in itself. It also has merit in that it requires institutions and departments to examine explicitly how they discharge their responsibilities to employers, quite apart from how institutions and departments are informed by employers of *their* expectations and requirements. Yet, if thematic evaluation focusing on employability is of central importance to our understanding how departments, faculties and institutions build – or fail to build – dialogue with external society and interests, such undertakings are no less important as an element in the negotiations between universities and national authorities working together within the Bologna Process. They are important on at least two counts. First, because such thematic evaluations open the way to providing a particular meaning to Bologna by ensuring that what has begun as a top down exercise in system reconfiguration and macro management beyond the nation state, becomes grounded in institutional practice and in academic culture. Second, because whatever the insights that may result, they ought also to feed directly into the debate that must follow within the Bologna Round about the basis of international and cross national comparisons with respect to operationalising the concept of 'employability'.

'Complementarity' and local alliances

Other reasons put themselves forward in favour of taking up the impact of internationalisation as a subject for thematic evaluation across departments and institutions. The first returns us to the introduction of this analysis, namely the different levels and dimensions of 'internationalisation' which have engaged the Swedish higher education system. It is self evident that at one level, cross

frontier complementarity has long been a feature in Scandinavia and that the Agency's evaluation programme has almost as a reflex, built this dimension solidly into its procedures of review, visitation and evaluation. Indeed, there is a good case to be argued that the Nordic region has long served without either fuss or publicity as the crucible for developing those practices now heralded with song and dance as specific examples of higher education responding to either the knowledge economy or to the challenge of Europe's Higher Education Area. Networking is one, student and staff mobility another. Interestingly, this very particular form of trans-frontier co-operation between the Nordic countries appears to have its attraction elsewhere in mainland Europe. The recent signing this year of an agreement between the Netherlands and Flanders to work together on accreditation may be seen as a more restricted application of 'complementarity', though equally significant, it too involves countries sharing a common language root.

Inner evaluation, external demonstration

The Dutch-Flemish agreement, taken in conjunction with the long established 'cultural entente' between the Nordic systems of higher education opens up very interesting vistas indeed. It suggests that shared modes of evaluation or perceived compatibilities in dimensions now the forefront of the Bologna Process – in this case, accreditation – very certainly influence where they do not determine, alliances and coalitions for advancing – or defending – a particular agenda. Put succinctly, the internal priorities and procedures of a nation's system of evaluation are not limited in their consequences to the 'home market'. One might even go farther and suggest that depending on the priorities, processes and purposes of evaluation undertaken internal to the nation, so the range of alliances it can secure in the European higher education arena will largely be defined. That said, the force of whatever item or interest one defends is not wholly divorced from the degree of grounded work, insight and knowledge the nation has acquired about its higher education system. And whilst it is not always the case that 'good practice' in one national setting is always perceived as 'good practice' elsewhere, both the credibility and the force on which a particular agenda rests benefits from demonstrated and demonstrable effect and consequence.

Such a perspective casts the issue of institutional audit, the embedding of 'quality culture' or the culture of evaluation into the institutional framework in a very different light. More responsibility for the individual institution for defining the particular type of evaluation it undertakes the better to permit the National Agency to move towards an audit model may be justified on grounds other than simply to minimise the ravages of 'evaluation fatigue'. Such a strategy may equally well be justified on the grounds that the on going agenda of the Bologna Process places special weight upon having a clear, accurate and up-to date picture focused on the national level as a prior condition to presenting or defending the national interest at the European level. Strengthen-

ing the adaptability and responsibility of higher education within the nation and to the nation – part of the original mandate and purpose of the National Agency – is in no way lessened by the impetus the Bologna Process appears to assume. On the contrary, the building of strength on the home front, like the Bologna Process itself, is an integral part of being able to demonstrate – and uphold – those self-same qualities abroad. For the National Agency then to shift its energy towards thematic problem-related evaluations with a national, rather than an institutional, focus, would appear, logically at least, to be fully in keeping with the challenges the Bologna Process poses.

Summary of recommendation

(should be seen as a supplement to the conclusions and decisions according to Annex 2)

The Board recommends the Agency

1. to use the full section of the History report on the general quality of the subject across Sweden as a model for other peer review teams for strengthening the developmental role of the subject and programme evaluations
2. to take the lead in stimulating and encouraging the development of interdisciplinary study programmes as a necessity for the evolution of the Knowledge Society
3. to pay more attention to the instruction and preparation of the peer review teams regarding the various roles of the team members, especially the chair, safeguarding that all members of the team are involved equally (academics, students and employers)
4. to invite the most progressive institutions (4–6 institutions) within quality improvement and quality assurance to an annual meeting to discuss how their internal quality culture is developing in order to disseminate examples of ‘good practices’.
5. to consider the extension of the list of themes for further thematic evaluations, inspired by the focus areas of the EUA institutional evaluation programme
6. to participate and stimulate the debate in Sweden about the implementation of the Bologna reforms with the aim to strengthen the quality of the subject and programme evaluations
7. to include (high on the agenda) the subject “tredje uppgiften”/the third task in the planned thematic reviews to raise debate within Swedish universities for the need to review the organisation of academic work according to the future challenges facing European universities.

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Annex I

Suggested themes for discussion at the third meeting of the Advisory Committee to the National Agency for Higher Education

Material

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Developments in 2002 | How did things turn out?
The Second Year (attached) |
| | Report on developments in the light of the Committee's second report. (Will be sent out around May 10) |
| 2. The general view of a discipline | Part of the report on History (attached) |
| 3. Self-studies | Self-study in Informatics (distributed earlier) |
| | Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Stockholm University (sent) |
| | Egyptology, Uppsala University (attached) |
| 4. Self-studies in relation to National Agency report. Special problems of "small" subjects | Final report on Classical Archaeology.
Archaeology and Egyptology (distributed earlier) |
| 5. Current controversial issues. What do we mean by results (outcomes)? How do we take them into account? | Alternative model (attached) |
| 6. What happens after 2006? | |

Annex 2

National Agency for Higher Education
Karin Agélii
Staffan Wahlén

Notes from a meeting with the International Advisory Board of the National Agency for Higher Education in Cambridge, Mass. May 26–28, 2003

Participants: Bente Kristensen (Acting chair), Mary Henkel, Ernie House, Guy Neave; Sigbrit Franke, Karin Agélii, Ragnhild Nitzler, Lars Petersson, Staffan Wahlén.

Summary of conclusions and decisions

- The Advisory Board supports the decision on a moratorium of quality audits, but suggests that the dialogue on quality processes between the Agency and the institutions should be maintained.
- The Board supports the idea of further thematic studies. Suggestions for themes included Life-Long Learning and Staff Development in the light of declining resources and aging staff.
- Panels should be informed of the ethical implications of their work.
- Panels should be provided with written information (in English) of the Swedish higher education system.
- The Board stressed the importance of the inclusion in the reviews of the aspects of both merit (academic value) and worth (the broader social values).
- The Board emphasized the need to express more clearly the students' voice in the evaluation process. Students may be encouraged to produce their own self-evaluations.
- The Board supports the inclusion of the faculty level in the interviews during the site-visits. The faculty representatives should present their views and plans on the subjects or programmes under review.
- The Board stressed the importance of seeing outcomes not only in the perspective of student achievements. Consequently, the ideas presented in the study *Simpler and More Useful?* are invalid.
- The reports should show more clearly what are the Agency's views and what are the panels' views. The different summaries are confusing to the readers.
- It is important to follow international developments. The Evaluation department should be better represented at international conferences and in international organisations.

- The post-2006 developments will be further discussed next year. The Agency is to draw up different scenarios as a basis for such a discussion.
- At the next meeting the Agency will also present a report on all its activities and how they relate to one another.
- Before the next meeting the Board will receive press releases and texts from the studera.nu sites.
- The Board will produce a brief report of the Cambridge meeting with recommendations.
- It was decided that next year's meeting will be held in Stockholm in late May or early June.

Introduction

It was noted that the documents² sent out for the meeting had been selected for reasons of expediency as well as relevance. The main purpose of the selection was to provide the Advisory Board with information on experiences and problems encountered by the Agency and issues relating to the reviews in Sweden debated during 2002 and 2003. A summary of the issues highlighted in the reviews is presented in the publication *How did things turn out? The National Agency's Quality Appraisals 2002*. That volume contains information addressed to central authorities (the government, the Agency itself), the central level of higher education institutions and the departments. It has recently been presented to the Swedish Ministry of Education and distributed to the presidents and quality coordinators at all the higher education institutions.

Sigbrit Franke emphasised that a particularly important issue for discussion during the meeting was the decision by the Agency to introduce a moratorium of the quality audits during the remainder of the six-year cycle of programme and subject evaluations. A preliminary sharing of ideas on what steps to take for the period after 2006 would also be helpful.

The discussions that took place during our three days together are summarised under thematic headings.

2. Comments on development activities suggested by the Second report of the Advisory Committee.

- How did things turn out? The National Agency's Quality Appraisals 2002.
- Simpler and more useful? An alternative model. A summary of a proposal by Karl-Axel Nilsson, Lund University.
- History at Swedish Universities and Colleges. Extracts from the History Evaluation Report.
- Evaluation of Classical Archaeology and ancient History and Egyptology.
- Self-study: The department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Stockholm University
- Egyptology, Uppsala University. Self-evaluation.
- Self Evaluation 2003. Part 1,2 and 3.

Quality Audits

The two cycles of quality audit have resulted in awareness in the higher education institutions of the importance of systematic quality procedures. However, this awareness is to be found mostly at the central management level of the institutions and only in about one-third has it reached out to the departmental level. It is difficult to determine how far the Agency has been successful as a change agent. Judging from the self-evaluation of Informatics at Jönköping, that particular college has reached a “higher order status” in its quality philosophy.

There was agreement that the most important lesson of the audits is the cultivation of quality cultures. The Agency must be open to different quality systems and models.

The Board felt it was a good idea not to repeat the audits during the rest of the six-year cycle of programme and subject assessments. But the dialogue between the Agency and the institutions and among the institutions must continue. The Agency should support benchmarking activities on quality enhancement and quality management.

Thematic studies

During the moratorium for quality audits, the Agency plans to conduct thematic reviews. Already, there is a follow-up study of the year 2000 review of the activities of the institutions with regard to student influence, gender equality and social and ethnic diversity.

Plans are being prepared for an evaluation of the strategies and activities of the institutions with regard to internationalisation. The theme is a wide one, which does not only incorporate student and staff mobility, but also, for example, the international perspective in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, research and the use of textbooks in languages other than Swedish.

In this context it may be advisable to keep an eye on international trade in higher education (which is not a problem in Sweden yet), and the trend for educational establishments to offer degree studies in countries other than their own.

The Board’s suggestions for further review themes included life-long learning and staff development. The relevance of the latter is connected to the fact that university teaching staff today have a heavy workload. This, in turn, is related to the growing number of tasks devolving on the staff, as well as to the increasing student-staff ratio. Also the average age is high, and there is need, therefore, to train new staff, who will take over. Declining resources lead to universities in e.g. the United States and the Netherlands (and Sweden?) increasingly hiring part-time staff, who are less involved in the departments’ research and, in many cases, do not conduct research of their own, nor take part in development activities.

A review of staff development could also include a study on how academics in different disciplines use their time for reflection in order to promote development and innovation.

Programme and subject reviews

Preparation of the departments to be reviewed

A plan of the reviews to be conducted in the six-year cycle 2001–2006 is presented on the Agency's website. Each year a letter is sent to all rectors and quality coordinators at institutions affected the following year. The institutions are asked to name contact persons for the specific reviews, and sometimes there is a discussion on the appropriateness of the inclusion of certain subjects and programmes. In the autumn the contact persons for each review are invited to information meetings to discuss the process of self-evaluation and site-visit and to agree on any special focus. The contact persons are encouraged to comment on the self-evaluation manual, which may then be adapted to suit the needs of a specific subject or programme.

Preparation of the review panels

The review panels are selected mainly from a list of suitable candidates proposed by the institutions. This is sometimes a cumbersome process. It is recommendable to take references in order to put together representative and well functioning groups.

Training is provided for the members of the panels, and guidelines have been prepared for this purpose. In many cases the Agency's project manager and the chairperson of the panel get together before the first meeting of the panel. Special meetings have also been arranged for the student members. One lesson learnt is that it is necessary to introduce the Swedish system of higher education as well as the evaluation model to international (and sometimes also Swedish) panel members. This applies also to Nordic assessors. A Danish assessor has given Bente Kristensen the following suggestions for improvement of the preparation of the panels:

- The Agency should describe more clearly the ethical principles involved.
- The information on the Swedish system of higher education should be given to the assessors in written form and preferably in English.
- The basic data presented in the self-evaluation reports is not consistent enough to be used for comparison. Either this aspect should be ignored or formulae should be found for comparable information.
- The frames of reference for the reviews need to be defined more clearly.

The self-evaluation process

The lack of analysis and self-reflection of some of the self-evaluation reports is still a problem. This is something that will have to be even more clearly emphasized in the contacts with the units under review.

The basic manual is revised each year, and the questions have now become more open-ended and give the units better opportunities to develop themes relevant to them. Less statistical information is required. Furthermore, the introductory meeting with the units provides an opportunity to propose changes in the manual to suit the particular subject/programme.

The Board stressed the importance of analysis and self-reflection in the self-evaluation reports. The Agency has not returned deficient reports but has consistently asked for supplementary information, if needed, either before or during the site-visit.

The Board felt that the three self-evaluation reports they had seen were different in that one of them gave the impression of the unit being able to master its own situation, whereas the other two looked on themselves as victimized. This may reflect a difference between humanities subjects and other areas.

The manuals state that the self-evaluation reports should be no longer than 40 pages (20 pages for undergraduate studies and 20 pages for postgraduate studies). The Board considers this to be too long.

Final Reports

The National Agency is responsible for the initiation and implementation of the reviews and their consequences. The report, however, is the work of the panel of assessors. The Agency's views (reflections) as expressed in one section of the final report is based both on the judgements of the assessors and on its own frames of reference. It is essential that this is clearly indicated.

The Board discussed the importance of assessing both merit ("academic value") and worth (the broader social value) in the process. The reports the Board has seen have focused mainly on the former. It is also desirable that in its reflections the Agency should demonstrate that higher education has several different functions and that results of a programme can involve many different aspects.

Follow-ups

There are two kinds of follow-up activities: One of them takes place three – six months after the publication of the report and has the form of a meeting of representatives of all the participating units, members of the panel of assessors and Agency staff. It is appreciated by the institutions and is felt to be rewarding as a forum to discuss both the procedures and the results.

The other takes place about three years after the publication. The first two will be arranged in 2004, and will probably require only written communication. A strategy will have to be formulated as to the implementation of these activities.

The students' voice in the reviews

The Board finds that the student perspective is weakly represented in the self-evaluation reports and the reports from the reviews. Both the students on the

panels and those interviewed during the site-visits must be activated and made more visible. One way of involving students in the self-evaluations is to ask them to do their own self-evaluation parallel to that of the rest of the department. The two groups could then comment on each other's report.

According to the Higher Education Ordinance, students should evaluate all courses. Such evaluations take place in the vast majority of cases, but the involvement of teaching staff and students varies. This has been verified in the reviews, but results of such evaluations have not often been asked for. The Legal Department of the Agency is currently carrying out a project on the students' situation – their rights and obligations – from a legal perspective. A similar study on the use of student evaluations is envisaged. Our reviews will have to include questions not only on whether such evaluations are used, but also on the feedback and any consequences.

The Agency conducts other studies on the situation of undergraduate students. One example is the national questionnaire "Through Student Eyes" published in 2002. A similar study of postgraduate students is currently under way.

Outcomes

There was general agreement that the model described in Karl-Axel Nilsson's paper is unsatisfactory. It is an industrial model that accelerates routinisation. It does not sufficiently take into account the opinions of the whole range of stakeholders whose judgements we need.

In fact, it is the responsibility of the institutions themselves to look at these issues, perhaps in consultation with employers or the community in relevant cases. The question of outcomes is complex and, according to the Agency, characterized by the quality of both preconditions, process and results in the sense of student achievement. The role of the Agency is then rather to find out how institutions have negotiated the issues involved.

It seems that the self-evaluations deal with outcomes only to a limited extent. This is an additional argument for the panels to ask questions about different facets of results at site-visits. The Board feels that such a discussion of result/outcome is an important one and that it is part of the social dimension of higher education ("The third task"). It was suggested that the quality of the evaluation system depends to a large extent on who is on the panels. The assessors must be and be seen as competent professionals, who can also formulate their own frames of reference and ask the relevant questions.

The Danish experience of user surveys conducted by commercial companies is not wholly satisfactory. It is expensive and does not yield sufficiently reliable information. It is best used with programmes that are clearly related to professional life (medicine, engineering etc.).

It is important that the outcomes discussion is not tied in with the common notion of results simply as student achievement. The recommendation of the

Board is that the Agency should not be too defensive in this respect (or any other respect, for that matter).

Outcomes in terms of degrees are used in Denmark as a criterion of success, and also as a basis for funding. In Sweden many students fulfil the requirements for degrees but never go to the administrative bother of actually signing the documents needed to receive the diploma. Thus, like in France and Germany the statistics do not show the correct picture, and the number of completed degrees awarded is comparatively low, especially in the non-professional programmes.

Small subjects – big problems?

The Agency's reviews are mostly based on "merit" in the sense referred to above. The social "worth" determined in relationship to usefulness, function and the needs of society and the professions are less clearly addressed in the reports. It is seen as the responsibility of the institutions to judge whether a discipline such as Egyptology with low social worth should be retained. So far, neither the Agency nor the panels have made any pronouncements on the soundness of retaining disciplines which are not economically viable. Cooperation and concentration are advice normally given to the institutions. This advice has been followed in e.g. Classical languages, where several necessary organisational changes have been made as a result of the review and the "yellow cards".

Such solutions require the participation of the faculty level. Thus, it is important that the dean and other leading faculty members are interviewed to present their view of the subjects and the possible strategies for improving the situation. This has now become standard procedure at the site-visits.

The question of small subjects is difficult. The Agency should continue to apply pressure both on the institutional managements, the faculties and the government in order to reach sensible solutions. The Agency should volunteer to take responsibility for investigations and reviews and advise the government.

Interdisciplinary programmes/disciplines

Engineering programmes, environmental studies and social work programmes were interdisciplinary areas/programmes reviewed last year. The difficulty of these reviews was mainly the recruitment of broadly based panels open to interdisciplinary approaches.

Environmental studies is a young subject. The main problem of the panel was to define the area and its development in Sweden, and it was difficult for the assessors to find sufficiently concrete criteria on which to base unequivocal judgements of the quality of the programmes. The review of engineering (which is defined as national professional programmes listed in the Higher Education Ordinance), however, did result in "yellow cards". In order to attract

students, a number of programmes had been given flashy names and included social science elements at the expense of mathematics and technology. Several of them were deemed to contain such a small amount of mathematics and technology that they did not live up to the Higher Education Ordinance (as interpreted by the panel). This is a good illustration of the problem: How far can we deregulate in a market-driven system?

It is important that the Agency follows the development in and among the various subjects – that there is an “epistemic map”. There may be valid reasons for institutions to alter the contents and form of programmes and develop new subjects in response to societal demands. But the regulations of the higher education ordinance must apply. What the Agency can do in relevant cases is to recommend that the government should review the ordinance.

The review of social work was the first evaluation in which the Agency co-operated with a research council (in this case the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research). The report provided an interesting analysis of the state of the art of undergraduate studies, postgraduate studies and research.

General observations

Members of Parliament and the government have been pleased with the achievements of the Agency, and the results of the reports are used as arguments by all political parties.

It is encouraging that the Agency has not yet encountered any serious setbacks or discovered major shortcomings in Swedish Higher Education. It is important, however, that we do not become too professional or “routinized”. We should continue to coordinate our resources to investigate, inform on and influence higher education.

The workload of the departments is becoming increasingly heavy, and the Agency’s reviews constitute an additional (but necessary) task. Therefore, the Agency recommends that institutions allocate special resources to departments under review. Generally, the reviews now seem to become increasingly accepted and established elements of the work of universities and university colleges and that they contribute to the legitimacy of institutions and departments.

What distinguishes the Agency’s model from those of many other countries is its high degree of flexibility. The Committee maintained that the Swedish model is important to other countries, above all in Europe. It is therefore vital that the members of the Evaluation department participate in international conferences organised by international networks and organisations in the field.

The audits have been characterized by a top-down perspective in contrast to the bottom-up perspective of the subject and programme reviews. The Agency should endeavour to develop a model combining the two.

The Future

The next few years

The six-year period of programme and subject reviews will come to an end in three and a half years. There will still be follow-up activities for another few years. What follows are some ideas on modifications that could be introduced during the next few years:

Focus on problem areas or on weak units and let others go their way.

Look at themes across the board. One of the themes could be the regional role of universities (cf. Finland and France). This could also include the universities' contacts with the larger society ("The third task").

Give more weight to the output phase. Bring in groups of progressive units and use them to introduce and disseminate best practice and inspiration in a follow-up of audits. This does not necessarily need to be systematic, but could involve perhaps two or three institutions, which may serve as examples.

Look at the organisation of universities in the context of the growing workload and the fact that universities are organized largely in the same way as fifty years ago. How can universities do more things with the same or less resources?

After 2006

By 2006 the Agency should have taken stock of the institutions' 'quality culture' and determined how to proceed. It was agreed that we cannot repeat the same process; we will have to change in one way or another, maybe in the direction of a less systematic approach, demonstrating more clearly the responsibility of the institutions. That would point to some kind of audit model. After all, the institutions and departments will be far better equipped as a result of having learnt from the current incisive reviews. We might move more in the direction of thematic problem-based evaluations on a national level. The important thing is that we have some kind of monitoring of quality and quality processes and probably that we retain some sort of sanctions.

It is desirable that the Agency provides the Board with different scenarios for post-2006 evaluation activities well in advance of next year's deliberations.

