

## **The welcome speech of Anders Söderholm, Director General of the UKÄ, 6 mars 2020**

A warm welcome to today's conference on educational development in higher education. We have organised this conference together with the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF), which I am delighted to mention from the very start. UKÄ has arranged the morning programme and SUHF will be taking care of the afternoon programme. This is why I'm starting the day and Birgitta Bergvall Kåreborn at SUHF, will be wrapping the day up.

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We will be using Mentimeter to help with interaction, and I thought I'd begin by asking how many of you took part in our last conference on educational development in higher education in September? When type in the Menti code visible on the screen, you will see a Yes/No question which I would like you to answer now.

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The conference is a conclusion to the government assignment given to the Swedish Higher Education Authority at the end of 2018 and for which the formal final report was submitted at the end of this past year. The assignment included conducting a follow-up of educational development, providing an overview of the situation nationally, and contributing knowledge on the educational development taking place at higher education institutions. The Swedish Higher Education Authority was to also conduct advanced studies on educational development in higher education.

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This assignment has in some ways broken new ground.

First of all, the government's intention was not to collect data for a coming reform or to evaluate the effects of a previously implemented reform.

Otherwise, these two objectives are common for assignments given to the Swedish Higher Education Authority by the government. This time, though,

the government wanted to highlight the importance of educational development, support the work that is ongoing and, I think I can say, raise the issue's profile as a way of encouraging additional efforts within the field.

Second of all, we have planned and implemented the assignment in somewhat of a new way. We have used some new methods and also strived to achieve effects from the project in a way we normally do not do. We began, however, by defining desired impacts from the project. Compared to the project objectives, which are directly linked to the implementation, we wanted the project to eventually impact how educational development in higher education progressed, that the field would gain more attention, and that expertise and research would be strengthened. We also wanted the project to become a platform for developing new forms of communication and interaction between the Authority and interested parties for this type of government assignment.

The methods that we have used are, as I noted, in part new and in part proven. We have asked questions, met with different types of experts, visited higher education institutions and collected material on matters we normally work with. But we have also actively participated in conferences, we have organised conferences together with other representatives of the sector, we have developed virtual forms of meetings, like this one, and we have produced different types of video material in new ways for us. This has been very rewarding and we will take these experiences forward to other assignments and other areas of responsibility that we have within UKÄ.

Finally, we have submitted the final report in a way that is unlike anything we have done before. Since a significant part of the assignment's impacts have been achieved along the way through externally focused activities, we wanted this also to be visible in the final report to the government. The final report was produced in a format for the web in what can best be compared to a website. Anyone interested can delve into the various themes and, in this way, take advantage of the rich material generated by the assignment.

There are also texts of more structured and traditional character that can be downloaded and read, but there is also documentation in the form of

presentation material and videos from various events we participated in. You can access the final report through our website [uka.se](http://uka.se).

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Even if the government assignment on educational development in higher education has largely revolved around activities conducted during the assignment period, there is also material valuable for the future. We have documented knowledge and experiences that we believe are important for future efforts.

I will not go through the complete material as we will be discussing the assignment's results later in the programme. But there is a lot of material of interest about the system for acquiring academic qualifications, challenges with creating systematic educational development, and what internationalisation of educational programmes means for educational development, among others. The expectations and demands, if I may use that word, of the students and the student organisations are also important fundamental insights to consider in future efforts.

It is unsurprising to learn that a lot of work is taking place in this field. There are many active and enthusiastic teachers and students throughout the country who work with educational development in higher education on a daily basis. They test methods, learn about new opportunities derived from technology, design learning aids, and use different modern approaches to conduct their programmes. Research and the exchange of experience among researchers are also expanding our knowledge bank.

Naturally there are challenges in carving out space for these development efforts, in finding the time quite simply, and in incorporating all the new ideas into actual teaching and learning. Having large groups of students and teaching staff who are already busy with their regular teaching load can naturally make conducted educational development difficult. Opportunities for teaching staff to focus on educational development, it can be assumed, vary throughout the higher education system and perhaps not always the subject of strategic considerations at institutions.

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This is why we should stop and consider the need for a comprehensive view, focus and systematic approach to development work. Many higher education institutions are working hard to organise educational development but a systematic approach is still a challenge.

One reason for this is naturally that educational development in higher education is closely linked with many other development issues at the institutions. Developing new distribution channels and new forms of distance, part-time and off campus education requires new educational forms while teaching aids, course syllabuses and student recruitment need to change.

The need for lifelong learning is another area. Lifelong learning also means higher education institutions have students with other experiences and varying study motivation, which in turn require new tools for educational development. New student groups need to be served by improved methods.

The need to manage questions on sustainability and sustainable development, democracy, climate, immigration and demographic shifts, to name just a few areas, require more of interdisciplinary educational environments, which in turn increases the need for educational development.

The digitalisation of society creates new professions and new competency areas for established professions, which increases demands on educational development to manage these. At the same time that the educational environment is being digitalised and offers new opportunities, new digital tools also place new demands on educational development. The new generation of students entering higher education have a different approach to digital solutions and likely also another expectation that educational environments are to have a high degree of digital sophistication.

All of these are questions that require activity and development and where educational development helps manage the pressures for change from digitalisation, lifelong learning, distance education and other factors. Educational development is often dealt with in relation to other issues, and I

am sure that each higher education institution has its own way of dealing with these.

But sometimes, I think that it can be wise to take a more coordinated approach to educational development in relation to the other questions. This is a way of creating a systematic approach and of emphasising the basic educational situation that teachers and students work within.

I am certain that each higher education institution considers this, and we also know that there is lots of work ongoing at the the university-level. But at the national level, it is less obvious that the current situation is sufficient and that there is not a broader awareness of educational development in higher education.

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Based on this, we have formulated some assessments and proposals aimed at the national level and which we argue would be appropriate to base continued work on.

The suggestions touch on the need for a national strategy for educational development in higher education and a national strategy for digitalisation of higher education and research. They also look at promoting and supporting development through grants for development projects and for research. These suggestions are aimed at some specific addressees but in practice it does not matter who does the work, so long as it is done.

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It is important to note that the Swedish Higher Education Authority has not been tasked with continuing to highlight or follow up the field of educational development even if we will be able to include educational development in different types of assessments and analyses. I'd argue that, aside from this, we have done what we can and we cannot and should not take long-term responsibility for organisational development within the higher education sector. This is not within what we can or should work with at UKÄ.

As I've already noted, however, educational development in higher education is incorporated into many other questions and, as such, risks sliding between the cracks. There are a number of questions like this. Widening participation, digitalisation, forms for student influence, sustainable development, collaboration, validation of prior learning and internationalisation are similar in that there is the risk that many higher education institutions do a bit here and there or do nothing at all. That that these issues fall through the cracks. I'm not saying this is the case but there is a substantial risk of it happening.

That's why an important purpose with today's conference is to symbolically pass the baton of responsibility for continuing development and in doing so, strive for a shared view of how to divide the various roles as we move forward. The proposals that I quickly mentioned above serve as background for two of the topics we have for today's discussions.

The two topics discussions deal with, firstly, the advantages and disadvantages with national strategies and, secondly, how collaboration between different stakeholders can be formed and implemented. For both of these topics, the sector in its broadest sense has to answer both the strategy and the collaboration question.

Students need to be given a clear voice through the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) and through the local student organisations at the universities and university colleges. Students are co-creators for the quality of the programmes and have a large, documented interest in these issues and significant knowledge to share with the coming processes on strategies and collaboration.

There are also other stakeholders that need to be included in this work. SULF is one, of course, but also networks like Swednet, Include, ITHU, Sverd and others that bring together teachers and researchers interested in educational development in higher education. Other representatives for teachers and researchers are also important participants in discussions. The list is so long that I can't even begin to mention them all.

So what needs to be done, how it is to be done and who is to do it? My hope is that the two discussions will be able to address these questions.

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We also have a third parallel theme. It deals with digital meeting forms, such as this virtual conference which we are holding right now. We know there are participants here today who are primarily here to learn more about digital forms of holding meetings and how and in what way they can use the opportunities at hand.

This is why we have organised a special discussion on this topic. Digital meeting forms can also be a part of educational development so the topic is definitely relevant for teaching and learning in higher education. But they are also a way to enable travelless meetings and thereby reduce environmental impact, offer greater access to meetings and improve the quality of interaction between us.

All of these aspects can be topics for discussion and exchange of experience in the third session.

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Time for a Mentimeter question. I wonder which of the three themes you plan on participating in. So please go in to the mentimeter page and mark whether you plan to participate in the discussion on national strategies, collaboration or digital meeting forms.

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This afternoon has been organised by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF). Their work groups for educational development in higher education and for digitalisation are important for continued efforts, and they will be coordinating the discussion during the afternoon.

Likewise, the day will shift from discussion of our assignment and our proposals to coming work and what the next step is. I hope the afternoon offers many impressions, contributions and suggestions that the working groups, in particular, can benefit from in their continued work.

SUHF will round off the day with a summary of what we have done to this point.

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Even though we are just starting the day, I'd like to finish by thanking the people who have contributed to putting today's programme together. Andrea Amft is UKÄ's project manager for the government assignment on educational development in higher education and has also worked hard to ensure all the activities have taken place, not least this conference. Stina Moritz, together with Andrea, has done lots of the work. Birgitta Hemmingsson, Mid Sweden University, and Markus Schneider, Karlstad University, have been important in holding the conference. They are both active in ITHU.

Klara Bolander Laksov, professor of educational development in higher education at the University of Stockholm and a member of SUHF's working group for educational development in higher education, has also contributed significantly to formulating the programme. I would also like to thank SUHF's and the participants in SUHF's working groups, ITHU for its support and the rest of our colleagues from UKÄ who have helped. You have all contributed to making today a success.

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I would also like to remind everyone that everyone participating is important for achieving the purpose of today's conference: To create the conditions that will allow continued strong educational development at the country's higher education institutions. You are all important, you can all actively participate in discussions, you can collaborate and create together. Make it happen.

And with that, it is time to conclude my opening remarks and bring on Andrea Amft, who is in charge of the next item in our programme. Over to you Andrea.