



*A commitment
to learning*

THE SWEDISH COUNCIL FOR THE RENEWAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT

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A Commitment to Learning–Evaluation Report

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Svensk sammanfattning

Föreliggande utvärdering initierades av den tidigare huvudsekreteraren för Rådet för Högskoleutbildning, Hans Jalling. Han föreslog också att Richard Johnstone, professor och vicerektor vid University of Sidney, skulle utföra utvärderingen. Den omfattar Rådets verksamhet sedan 1995. Avsikten med utvärderingen var att studera den påverkan på kvaliteten i lärande och undervisning vid svenska högskolor och universitet som Rådets verksamhet haft.

Arbetet har utförts i tre steg. Det började med en insamling av relevant information och en enkät sänd till 91 projektledare (varav 44 svarade). För att komplettera enkäten fick rektorer vid berörda lärosäten kommentera Rådets roll och aktiviteter. Till sist samtalade Johnstone med berörda parter under en tre veckor lång rundresa i Sverige.

Johnstone uttrycker sig mycket positivt om Rådets verksamhet. Rådets aktiviteter har verksamt bidragit till att höja kvaliteten i svensk högskoleutbildning. Detta gäller särskilt om man beaktar relationen mellan insatta medel (dvs. Rådets anslag) och den totala kostnaden för grundutbildning i Sverige.

Utvärderingen utmynnar i ett antal råd för Rådets framtida verksamhet:

- Uppmuntran till samarbete vid utarbetande av projektansökningar
- Starkare styrning av ansökningarna till vissa kategorier eller teman
- En kategori av större anslag till större organisatoriska enheter än enskilda lärare
- Förstärkning av samarbetet med pedagogiska konsulter vid universitet och högskolor
- En sökbar databas med alla projektrapporter
- En serie workshops eller konferenser för att visa upp lyckade projekt
- Styrgrupper för projekt eller kategorier av projekt för att stödja projektledare
- Mer direkta metoder (som Sommarinstitutet) för att höja undervisningens status
- Strategier för att utvärdera studenternas lärande
- Omarbete Levande Pedagogers Sällskap

- Ett nationellt program för att uppmärksamma utmärkta undervisningsinsatser
- Återge Rådet dess ställning som självständig organisation
- Arbeta för att öka anslaget till Rådet

Johnstone anser att om dessa rekommendationer följs så kommer Rådet att ytterligare öka sina möjligheter att, i samarbete med universitet och högskolor, positivt påverka lärande och undervisning.

Summary of recommended strategies for consideration by the Council

It is recommended that the Council give consideration to:

- Encouraging and rewarding collaboration in the development of project applications and the definition of intended outcomes
- Adopting a more directive role and inviting applications under certain categories or themes, developed in consultation with universities
- Establishing a category of major grants designed to benefit one or more universities or larger organisational units
- Forging stronger and more productive links with pedagogical consultants in universities
- Introducing a searchable on-line database containing summaries of all reports of completed projects and all progress reports on continuing projects
- Developing a more systematic program of workshops and conferences designed to showcase successful projects
- Creating “steering groups” to oversee the implementation of a project or category of projects in order to monitor progress, and to provide advice and feedback, including advice on project management, to project leaders to assist them in achieving the desired outcomes
- Adopting more direct methods of enhancing the status of teaching, such as the experimental project recently supported by the Council, the Summer Institute
- Restructuring the Society of Living Pedagogues and considering the introduction of a national annual program of recognition for excellence in teaching
- Reasserting the independence of the Council as a free-standing body
- Making a robust case for increasing the overall level of funding to the Council

Background

The Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education was established in 1990 by the Swedish government on the recommendation of the Swedish Higher Education Commission of 1989. It was established as a freestanding body with the task of enhancing undergraduate teaching and learning across the higher education system in Sweden. Its role was to provide financial support for developmental work in teaching and learning and, by means of strategies and projects for the renewal of higher education, to highlight the importance and revitalise the status of undergraduate teaching.

In 1995 the Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education was located within the National Agency for Higher Education and in 1999 the title of the Council was varied to the Council for the Renewal of Higher Education in order to reflect the expansion of the Council's role to include postgraduate education.

The re-named Council was particularly charged with organising and overseeing:

- The disbursement of funds for the quality development and pedagogical renewal of both undergraduate and postgraduate education
- The gathering and dissemination of knowledge about planned, continuing and completed developmental activities in both Sweden and abroad
- The evaluation of those development activities to which the National Agency has awarded funding.

Underpinning these responsibilities was a continuing expectation that one of the Council's core roles was to enhance the status of teaching within Swedish universities.

It is now ten years since the original Council was established. This is a significant period of time in the life of a national body such as the Council. The conclusion of those first ten years, and the recent retirement of the foundation Secretary, Dr. Hans Jalling, provides a natural point at which to pause for a moment and reflect on past experience and achievements, and to consider in the light of that experience what new directions or changes of emphasis the Council may wish to implement for the future.

It was in that context that I was initially asked by the Chairman of the

Council, Professor Lars Haikola, and by the Secretary, Dr. Jalling, to undertake an evaluative review of the Council's activities. The incoming Secretary, Professor Ingemar Ingemarsson, subsequently asked me formally to undertake this task, and specifically to "focus on the role of the Council over the past three to five years, and to evaluate its impact on the quality of teaching and learning in Sweden. This will involve a consideration of the overall impact of funded projects, as well as of the effectiveness of the administrative and organisational structures put in place by the Council."

In responding to this request, I have chosen to concentrate on the past five years, with a particular emphasis on the past three years. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the more recent activities of the Council, and their evaluation, are inevitably going to be of more interest and significance to the Council in guiding future policy directions. Secondly, university personnel change over time, and the corporate memory of institutions is likely to be fresher and more immediate in relation to the past five years than to the five years before that. Thirdly, there has been rapid change in the external climate—both nationally and internationally—in which universities are obliged to operate, and it is likely to be more useful to concentrate on the more recent of these changes as they affect the Council. Finally, the Council has commissioned a number of reports in the past that have covered some if not all aspects of the earlier years.

I have for example benefited from the various reports undertaken into specific aspects of the Council's activities, both by external reviewers and by members of the Council staff, and particularly from the overview of the Council completed by Dr. Tony Becher in 1992 and entitled *The Learning Council*, and from the report entitled *An Attempt to Raise the Statues of Undergraduate Teaching. Five years with the Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education*, completed in 1995 by Mårten Carlsson and Hans Jalling. Other reports focusing on specific areas of Council activity, such as the *Evaluation of Short-term CALL Projects 1997/1998* by Peter Liddell, *Organizing Innovation: An evaluation Report on the Work of the Swedish Case Method Centre* by Ivar Bleiklie, and *Gender-inclusive Higher Education in Mathematics, Physics and Technology: Five Swedish Development Projects* by Inger Wistedt have also helped to provide essential background.

I have benefited too from discussions with the chairman and secretary of the Committee for Pedagogical Renewal of Higher Education, Dr. Anders Fransson and Mr. Staffan Wahlén. The Committee's report, entitled *New Conditions for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in Sweden*, was published in February 2001. I am delighted to acknowledge the

cooperative and friendly spirit in which those discussions took place. The Committee's report is much greater in scope than mine. It does, however, take in some questions relating to the present and possible future role of the Council, and makes recommendations in that regard with which I am in broad agreement. My report is more confined in nature, and focuses on only one aspect of the areas covered in the report into *New Conditions for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in Sweden*, but in doing so it will, I hope, serve to complement it, and to strengthen the basis for discussion of the future role and priorities of the Council.

There have been three main stages in preparing this evaluative report. The first stage involved preparatory reading of relevant materials and publications in English, both in hard copy and in electronic form. In the second stage, a set of questions was sent to all 91 leaders of projects awarded since 1995. Responses were received from 44 project leaders.

Project leaders were asked the following questions in writing:

1. Please describe briefly the nature of the project (in no more than one paragraph) and identify the principal disciplinary area(s) on which it focuses.
2. Have the original objectives of the project been met (or in the case of continuing projects, are these objectives likely to be met)? If not, why not?
3. What methods have you used (or do you intend to use) to evaluate the project outcomes? Are you able to describe and/or quantify the impact on student learning?
4. Would you describe your project as being essentially concerned with the applications of technology, or not?
5. How important was Council funding in initiating/completing the project, and what other opportunities might have existed for similar support, either from within or outside your institution?
6. Did you encounter any significant problems or obstacles in implementing and managing your project, and if so, what were they, and how were you able to address them?
7. Did your project involve you in collaboration with other areas of your university, or with other universities or external bodies? What were the advantages and/or disadvantages of this collaboration?
8. What has been the impact of your involvement in the project on your own teaching and on the teaching of your immediate colleagues?

9. Have the outcomes of your project been taken up elsewhere, either in your own university or in other universities? If not, why not?
10. What do you see as the future of the project now that Council funding has ceased, or, in the case of continuing projects, when Council funding does cease.
11. What support in undertaking the project has been provided by your university and/or department? Could that support have been more effectively directed and/or managed?
12. How have you disseminated the results of your project, and to whom? Has this process been effective, in your judgement?
13. Do you consider your project to have returned value for investment, both of funds and time?
14. Are there any other benefits and/or disadvantages of your involvement in the project on which you would like to comment?
15. Do you have any comments on future directions for the support of projects in teaching and learning, based on your own experience?

In addition, Vice-Chancellors or their nominees were invited to comment on behalf of their institutions on the role and activities of the Council. Responses were received from twelve institutions, taking into account some or all of the following issues:

- The impact of Council-funded grants, and Council-supported activities, within the institution, including the role these activities may have played in enhancing the profile of teaching and learning within the University
- The impact of the Council on the development of institutional policy and practice, including strategic planning for the improvement of teaching and learning
- The role of the Council in encouraging and facilitating effective collaboration, both within and amongst universities, and in identifying priority areas for attention
- The issues associated with effective dissemination of the outcomes of funded projects
- The effectiveness of the Council in meeting its objectives
- Priorities for the future

The third stage involved me spending three weeks in Sweden, in January and February of 2001, during which time I visited and spoke to staff and

students at ten institutions, as well as meeting representatives from the creative arts institutions in Stockholm.

The institutions visited were
Stockholm University
Royal Institute of Music
Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design
University College of Dance
Stockholm University College of Opera
University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre
Stockholm University College of Acting
Royal University College of Fine Arts
Karolinska Institutet
Göteborg University
Linköping University
Växjö University
Malmö University College
Lund University
Umeå University
Luleå University of Technology
Uppsala University

I also met the Chairman, Secretary, immediate past-Secretary and members of the Board and staff of the Council, the University Chancellor and members of the National Agency for Higher Education, and as already indicated the chairman and secretary of the Committee for Pedagogical Renewal of Higher Education.

In finalising this report, I have not attempted to make specific operational recommendations. Rather I have tried to identify areas that would benefit from further consideration by the Council, to summarise the options that I believe are available, and to recommend broad courses of action. I have tried, in other words, to avoid making recommendations that are too specific and localised. While there are many benefits to an outside perspective, there will always be details and nuances that an outside reviewer misses and which may make a specific course of action, however desirable in an ideal world, unworkable in the real one. I am also aware of the speed with which circumstances change, so that a specific recommendation that I might make now may not seem so practicable or relevant in six months or a year's time.

Context

From the international perspective, there has been in the last ten years an extraordinary growth of interest, both from universities and from the wider public, in the quality of teaching and learning in universities. It is extraordinary when one considers that teaching and learning has been the main, indeed the justifying, activity for universities ever since they have existed, yet it is only in very recent times that we have begun to look seriously at the teaching function—at what might be wrong with it and how we might improve it.

In this regard, Sweden is internationally recognised as being at the forefront, particularly when it comes to national initiatives to support the development of best practice in teaching and learning. Similar initiatives in other countries, including the UK and Australia, have been profoundly influenced in this regard by the Swedish experience. The comparable national body in Australia for example was established in direct response to the establishment of the Swedish Council.

One of the great strengths of the Council is the way in which it has adopted from the very beginning a determinedly internationalist perspective, ensuring that it has remained abreast of developments abroad, and has through an increasingly comprehensive network of contacts been able to benchmark its own practices against those in other countries. More difficult to quantify, but fundamental to any assessment of the impact of the Council, is the indirect role it has played in enhancing the reputation abroad of Swedish higher education. The very existence of the Council, and its commitment to internationalisation, has led over the period of its operation to a huge growth in the number of individual contacts between Swedish academics and their counterparts in other countries, and to an enhanced recognition of the quality of both teaching and research in Sweden.

From the beginning, the Council has benefited from the commitment and enthusiasm of its chairmen and Council members, who have devoted considerable time and energy to the setting and oversight of policy, and to active participation in the assessment of grant applications. The Council itself has been ably supported by a small and efficient Secretariat, which has played a vital role not only in the day to day administration of the Council

but in ensuring that a vital network of personal contacts with the wider higher education system has been steadily nurtured and augmented.

In recognising the commitment of all the various members of both the Council itself and the Secretariat, it is appropriate to single out one individual for particular mention. Dr. Hans Jalling, as foundation Secretary of the Council from 1990 to 2000, has played a pivotal role in building the Council to its current position, both nationally and internationally. His energy and vision have been instrumental in helping, through the Council, to place the quality of teaching and learning at the forefront of the higher education agenda.

In identifying relevant international experience, the most comparable approaches may be found in the UK, USA, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia. While strategies vary considerably, it is fair to say that broadly similar issues have been encountered. The difficulties associated with effective dissemination of good practice are universal and continue to prove one of the major obstacles to ensuring the broader awareness and adoption of successful innovation in teaching. Similarly, the evidence of the positive impact of teaching innovation, as funded by bodies like the Council, and of the capacity of the innovation to have similarly positive impacts when adopted elsewhere, has not typically been robust. This has led to a belief in the critics of bodies such as the Council that innovation is being advocated for its own sake rather than because it can be unequivocally demonstrated that the new ways are better. The result, in the words of one respondent to this review, can be “innovation overload”. This particular criticism is often associated with scepticism over the value of the contribution the new technologies are making to effective teaching and learning.

These criticisms must be confronted because they go to the heart of the strategies adopted by the Council and by comparable bodies in other countries. While the details of implementation vary, the broad strategy in Sweden and elsewhere has been to encourage and facilitate innovation in teaching by a system of nationally competitive grants. By rewarding excellence, or perhaps more accurately, by rewarding the potential for excellence, the assumption has been that both the culture and practice of teaching in all universities will benefit. It is that assumption that needs to be addressed in any evaluative report.

The grants program can fairly be seen as the core of the Council’s work over the years. However, it has also engaged in a wide range of other activities designed to further the aims of the Council. It has undertaken disciplinary reviews, identifying examples of good practice in relation to

individual disciplines. The Council has supported a national repository of case studies to be used in teaching. It has also had carriage of a number of governmental priorities over the years. These include the MINT-program, which is dedicated to the integration of environmental aspects across the curriculum in higher education, and which has recently announced a major initiative entitled Greenspiration 3. Other similar initiatives include the encouragement of more female students to study engineering and sciences, the use of IT in teacher education, and more recently the new program for postgraduate supervisor training. Notwithstanding the individual success of these programs, there is also a sense in retrospect in which they remain somewhat separate initiatives. Their links with one another and with the strategic priorities of the Council are not always fully articulated or clear. This may as much as anything be a question of presentation, suggesting that in the future more attention could be given to placing the various activities of the Council within an overarching framework.

Feedback and comments

The Council has devoted the greater part of its attention (and, particularly in recent years, roughly half its annual budget) to the funding of teaching projects led by academics. The following table summarises the disbursement of funds to projects over the past five years, within the context of the total budget annual allocation to the Council.

| BUDGET AND DISBURSEMENT (1,000 SEK) | 1995/1996 ^a | 1997 ^b | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Total budget allocation to the Council by fiscal year | 59,500 | 39,500 | 30,400 | 25,000 | 20,000 |
| Total amount spent on both new and ongoing projects by fiscal year, including 13,64% overhead | 22,862 | 13,015 | 12,769 | 12,044 | 10,215 |
| Total amount allocated by the Council to one, two, and three year projects by decision year, excluding 13,64% overhead | 1995: 12,666 1996: 11,132 | 12,142 | 8,500 | 10,200 | 11,338 |

^a The fiscal year 1995/96 included 18 months, from July 1, 1995 to December 31, 1996. All other fiscal years were only 12 months long, from January 1 to December 31.

^b The Council's ordinary budget was supplemented by 15,000,000 SEK for a one-time concentration on IT in teaching and learning. Of that amount, the Council awarded 14,048,000 SEK, excluding 13.64% overhead, to 13 projects.

Source: Council for the Renewal of Higher Education

It is also through the competitive funding of projects that the Council has achieved its greatest public profile. It is natural, therefore, that the system of grants for projects in teaching innovation is the area of the Council's work that received the most comments from respondents, both verbally and in writing.

These grants are intensely competitive, and are subject to a rigorous and time-consuming process of evaluation. The success rate, only ten per cent at the time of the Becher report, has hovered around that mark for the life of the Council, declining to closer to eight per cent in the 2000 round of grants. This process inevitably means that a large number of people are unsuccessful, which can in turn lead to what one departmental head called the need to "manage disappointment" at the institutional level. Even allowing for repeat applications over the years and the possibility that a repeat applicant may in due course be successful, there will still be many

good and committed teachers whose applications will not attract Council funding. In this context, the options for support at the “local” level (departmental, faculty, or university wide) will play an important part in the “management of disappointment”.

| VOLUME | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 ^a | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|--|------|------|------|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Number of proposals received by year of submission | 191 | 177 | 181 | 202 | 168 | 176 | 186 |
| Number of projects granted funding by fiscal year. Selection made from among proposals received the preceding year | | 17 | 18 | 17 | 17 | 11 | 15 |

^a As noted above there were an additional 13 IT projects this year.

Source: *Council for the Renewal of Higher Education*

Notwithstanding any problems that may be created by the low success rate, the fact that the process is so competitive has been important in establishing the credibility of the Council, and the worth or value of success. The most striking aspect of the written and verbal comments made by project leaders is the depth and sincerity of their gratitude for the existence of the Council, and the opportunity it provides to fund teaching innovation. Almost without exception, project leaders (many of whom had made multiple applications over the years, not all of them successful) believed that Council funding was crucial to the implementation of the project, and that without it the project either would not have begun or would at the least have taken much longer to realise. “The support from the Council was instrumental in making our project possible,” said one teacher. “We would not have been able to go ahead without it.” Similar comments were made by many of the respondents.

Project leaders were equally enthusiastic—again almost without exception—about the impact on themselves, and the personal importance to them of success in achieving a grant. The word “validate” recurs repeatedly in the responses, from different people in different universities, as they describe the way in which the award of project funding “justified” (another word that recurs again and again) their enthusiasm for and interest in teaching, both for themselves as individuals and in many but by no means all cases to their colleagues. In terms of its personal impact on “one’s interest in teaching and pedagogical issues generally,” said a teacher of languages, “a project like this...can’t be over-estimated. I hadn’t thought much about pedagogy before this opportunity came along. While I have always tried to be a good teacher, focussing on an aspect like this has been of the utmost inspiration to me.”

A small number of project leaders felt that their success led to resentment amongst immediate colleagues, and an even greater departmental resistance to change than had existed previously. But in the vast majority of cases, people felt that the impact on their colleagues had been positive, to the extent that the fruits of the project were in many cases adopted more widely as part of departmental policy. A different picture emerges however when one looks beyond the department, to the faculty (or similarly large organisational unit) and the wider university. Most respondents expressed considerable reservations about the impact of their project on the wider university, or even in many (but by no means all) cases whether anybody in the University outside their department even knew about it.

This may not have been literally true; for example in most universities the names of the successful grant holders were publicised in some way, typically by university newsletter and on the web-site. However it does point to a perception amongst project leaders that notwithstanding their success, and notwithstanding the competitiveness of the grants and the rigour of the review process, it was not seen as genuinely significant, in comparison for example with a research grant. There was also a sense of frustration that the outcomes of the project, and its pedagogical implications, could well be of benefit to the wider university and that that was not being sufficiently recognised.

In some cases there was evidence that this lack of institutional awareness was systemic. It is difficult to be precise, and circumstances vary from institution to institution, but broadly speaking it is fair to say that individuals who were successful in attracting teaching grants from the Council were unlikely to gain a “higher profile” within the institution as a result. Several senior staff members felt that the Council made insufficient effort to advise the university of people who had been successful, and in particular to draw these successes to the attention of the Vice-Chancellor and the senior administration.

These comments relate directly to one of the major aims of the Council, namely that of conferring on teaching an equivalent status to that of research. Not one respondent felt that this point was anywhere near being reached, though one person’s comment, that “things are changing, but slowly” probably best sums up the general view. There are two significant underlying issues here that relate directly to the methods and priorities adopted by the Council. The first concerns the emphasis on individual grants, and the second concerns the attempt to achieve parity with research.

Emphasis on individual grants

It is possible to infer both from comments and from the actual practice of the Council that in order to maximise the chances of real cultural change, the Council has sought to establish a direct link with “front-line” teachers, and in doing so to target the enthusiastic and committed practitioners and to “validate” them. In this process, which has—on all the evidence—been very effective, there has been a tendency in practice to bypass the established structures of the University (as represented by the central administration and to a lesser extent by the pedagogical consultants). While only a handful of senior administrators and pedagogical consultants expressed actual hostility to the Council, there was a sense of distance expressed by almost all of them, as if to say that the aims of the Council were no doubt worthy, but that its day-to-day activities were not particularly relevant to theirs.

It was instructive for example that at one University, in the course of a lively and stimulating conversation amongst project leaders – all of whom acknowledged that their individual success had been recognised by their University – it emerged that none of them had ever met the others. This is not a question of failure on the part of either the individuals or the University ever to organise such a meeting. It is however indicative of an attitude to the grants shared by all members of the University, whether practising teachers or academic administrators; namely that while individual success may be recognised and even celebrated, there is not a strong sense of the projects as representing part of the intellectual capital of the whole university or indeed the system, which may in turn be built on for the benefit of the wider professional community and of course, the students.

Only one respondent advocated the abolition of the Council. But University administrators, particularly those familiar with the details of Council activities, typically expressed strong views that the time had come for the Council to play a greater part in setting directions in developments in teaching and learning, ideally in consultation with universities. “The Council’s practice,” reads one institution’s written submission, “of only supporting initiatives by individuals means that the projects funded often have little connection to institutional priorities or to results of quality assessments. The focus has been on individual development, rather than on institutional or program development.” From the point of view of academic administrators and senior staff there needed to be a greater sense of the Council’s priorities, a greater effort to build strategic links with institutions, and more emphasis on projects of strategic value to the whole sector. As respondents described them these projects could well be collaborative,

and could involve a commitment to matching funding from participating institutions.

One respondent, a project leader, described the Council's general approach of focusing on individual teachers as "subversive" – by which he meant stirring things up from below – while another, a senior administrator, felt that the success of an individual project leader was good for the individual but only by chance good for the University and the wider system. These comments can be seen as two sides of the same coin, and they raise a concern that in continuing to validate the individual teacher (and, by implication, only certain teachers), and to maintain what may in effect be a distance from the formal structures of the University, the Council could find itself in the future exposed to the charge that it is contributing to a breach between those who are committed to improving teaching in day-to-day practice, and those who are committed to improving teaching at a strategic, institutional level. This is particularly so as universities become increasingly aware of the need to adopt overarching strategic policies in this area, and to take advantage of the expertise in teaching and learning that exists across their institutions.

Notwithstanding these comments, it is important to recognise that, in the context of the times, the strategy of the Council up till now, to focus on individual teachers, has been the right one. It needs to be remembered how different the climate was ten or even five years ago, when the task of improving the status of teaching seemed, in countries such as Sweden that were prepared to identify and tackle it, a very daunting one. Research and success in research was the major currency of prestige, and teaching was regarded as a necessary but essentially private activity, not subject to the judgement of others in the same way as was research. The Council and its founders recognised from the beginning how entrenched this perception was, and the extent to which the very structures and processes of universities had grown to reflect it. In focusing its attention not on the structures and processes, but on the individual enthusiasts, it was rapidly able to build up a constituency of supporters and advocates.

The time may have come however to review that strategy, to recognise that the university culture has changed—partly as a result of the efforts of bodies like the Council and even though its critics might say the change has not been rapid or widespread enough—and for the Council to take the lead in developing partnerships with individual universities and groups of universities based on mutually agreed priorities.

Parity with research

In the original justification for the establishment of the Council in 1990, the rigorous methods of assessing research applications, and their link to the commonly agreed status of research, were very much in the foreground. It was felt in Sweden as in other countries that research, while different in crucial ways from teaching, nevertheless provided a model which any scheme to enhance the status of teaching could usefully imitate. There is now a widespread tendency in higher education generally to *underestimate* the progress that has been made in raising or highlighting the status of teaching over the last decade. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the parity gap between teaching and research remains a significant one.

Interestingly, this issue, of whether the means of supporting teaching innovation should be more like the means of supporting research or less like them, is an area on which there was no consensus or majority view amongst those whose opinion was sought. Some people felt that the Council, in its grant assessment procedures, had gone too far in imitating research grant application and assessment procedures, others that it had not gone far enough. A small but significant minority argued that the Council should become, in effect, a research funding council focusing on educational or pedagogical research, with outcomes measured essentially in terms of refereed publication. A larger number felt that in relying on practices for the assessment of applications that were broadly comparable to those of research bodies, the Council had in effect missed many worthy and worthwhile projects simply because the proponents were inexperienced researchers who could not or would not, in the words of one respondent, “play the research game”.

Any judgement on the fairness or validity of these comments depends on what is regarded as a successful outcome from a project, whether it is in teaching or research. In other words, it is possible to argue that to the extent that the granting processes of the Council have been modelled on similar processes in research, they have tended to focus on the outcomes expected of traditional, or pure research; that is, publication and other approved forms of dissemination such as conferences, and evaluation by peers. It has in my view, however, become increasingly apparent that the real comparison, if it is to be useful at all, is with applied research, where success is judged to a large extent on whether the outcomes are taken up more widely by the relevant industry and through that take-up have a positive impact on quality of processes. In the case of the Council, the relevant industry is, of course, higher education, and the relative processes are those that lead to an enhancement of student learning.

The status of teaching

To enhance the status of teaching has been one of the central underlying objectives of the Council over the past ten years. Most respondents acknowledged that the importance of teaching had been increasingly highlighted, and to that extent at least its status had increased accordingly. Most were also willing to attribute at least some of this increase to the work of the Council. Many teachers continued to feel, however, that notwithstanding the public declarations of the importance of teaching, including the recent national requirement for pedagogical skills to be given due weight in all academic appointments, the fact remained that in practice the individual's research record was what really counted.

In response to a verbal question about the ways in which involvement in Council projects, and commitment to enhancing teaching generally, had enhanced (or failed to enhance) career prospects, the responses from individual project leaders were evenly divided. Some were happy to acknowledge that their success in obtaining a Council grant, together with the local impact of the project, had contributed in identifiable ways to promotion or to other forms of recognition within their university. One respondent, for example, explained how the success of his project led to a decision to establish a separate department concerned with educational issues in his discipline, of which he was now Head.

On the other hand, half the respondents to this question felt that their association with the project, and the perception by their colleagues and supervisors that they were primarily committed to teaching, had inhibited their careers. As one person put it, after enthusiastically describing the nature and impact of his project, "it is still a waste of time for your career".

The contradictory nature of these responses is what might be expected of a culture in transition, where some universities and perhaps more often some departments within universities have responded more quickly and more effectively to the new emphasis on teaching. There may also be a sense in which the Council, by recognising and rewarding innovation in and commitment to teaching, has raised individual expectations that cannot easily be met in the short term by a higher education system which, like all such systems, typically takes some time to adapt organisationally to change. Finally, there continues to be a lack of confidence, amongst those people in universities who are responsible for assessing academic performance—for appointment, promotion and for like purposes—in the criteria by which such performance are assessed, as opposed to a relatively high level of confidence in the means by which research performance is judged.

Adoption

The question of “take-up” or “adoption”—more useful and meaningful terms than “dissemination”—lies at the heart of the Council’s consideration of its future directions and priorities, as indeed it does for all similar bodies internationally. In an increasingly tight financial climate, we need to be able to demonstrate that the “return on investment” extends beyond the identification of positive cultural change—always difficult to define—and local benefits, and leads to identifiable examples of take-up and adoption both within institutions and across the system.

Ideally, a successful project—that is, successful in meeting its original aims as outlined in the application—will go on being successful. In other words, the new way of doing things will survive and prosper and even multiply, benefiting more and more students and subsequent generations of students. There are some striking examples of where that has happened, and where a successful project has led to profound pedagogical changes in entire programs. But this is not typical. There was a strong sense from project leaders that the continuing success of the project and its results depended on their own continuing enthusiasm and that of their colleagues.

Perhaps surprisingly, the fact that the Council project funding inevitably came to an end was not seen as a significant impediment to continuing with the fruits of the project. The problem seems to be more a question of successfully embedding the project and its outcomes in the culture and priorities of the department or course. In other words it was felt that the project had to expand beyond its funded life and be increasingly influential, or it would tend to contract and, in the words of one respondent, “fade away quietly”. Standing still was not really a viable option.

Adoption is one thing; impact is another. In advocating continuing support for developmental work in teaching and learning, we need to be mindful of the increasing importance of establishing the real worth, the real impact—to governments, to institutions, to academics, to students and to employers—of innovation. It is important to build up a coherent and convincing body of evidence that counters the sceptical view that innovation has become its own justification, that innovative teaching methods tend in any case to be more costly than traditional ones, or that what really drives many enthusiasts for teaching innovation is a fascination with the new technologies rather than a fascination with pedagogical issues.

While not necessarily sharing this sceptical view, it is important to acknowledge firstly that it exists and secondly that it is not entirely without foundation. One of the greatest difficulties faced by bodies such as the Council is that they have been required to assess and predict the value and

long-term usefulness of technologies that are developing at an unprecedentedly rapid rate. They have certainly not been alone in this dilemma, as we see in the difficulties the business and corporate sectors are having in harnessing the capacities of the new technologies to the best advantage. Moreover, a fascination with the new technologies is not in itself a bad thing. As one respondent said with admirable candour, “my interest in teaching grew out of my enthusiasm for the Internet” rather than the other way around.

No sector, least of all the corporate sector, has been entirely successful in predicting where the new technologies will confer the greatest benefit. It is therefore no surprise, nor should it be a source of unwarranted criticism, that some of the Council’s projects in which technology has been an important factor have not lived up to their original expectations. That is at least to some extent the price of innovation. However, it can be said that we have reached a new point in the growth of the new technologies, where the web has begun to dominate all the relevant debates. The question, at least as far as the role of technology in teaching is concerned, is now not so much assessing which aspect of the new technologies will confer the greatest benefit, but instead has become how best to deploy the web, and its extraordinary impact on the management and accessibility of knowledge, in a strategy of effective learning.

The Council recognised early on that familiarity with the technology was one of the keys to its successful deployment in the support of effective learning. There continues to be an important role for the Council in emphasising and encouraging the organisational development necessary to use the new technologies effectively and to ensure that they underpin rather than dominate the primary aim of increasingly effective student learning.

The student perspective

I met five groups of students at different universities in Sweden and had the opportunity to talk to them about their experiences of being involved in the implementation of Council funded projects. It would be unwise to draw conclusions from so small a sample, but some interesting themes emerged. For example, all students valued the experience of being part of a developing project, both as “recipients” of innovative methods of teaching, and in most cases as people actively involved in the progress and monitoring of the project’s effectiveness.

All reported some initial student resistance to the prospect of being “experimented on”, but all reported too a growing awareness of the value

of the project and the positive impact it was having on their own learning, or at least on their understanding of the process of learning. Not unexpectedly, students spoke of the difficulty of balancing the different methods of teaching, and the different requirements of teachers, across an entire course. All students experienced, in the words of one, “the old and the new ways together”, and found that this increased the demands on them. What students typically perceived was a lack of pedagogical coherence or consistency across their full course of study. Projects would more often than not be located within a single subject or set of subjects, and would not therefore be consistent with the more general ethos of the department or course. This led to problems for some students, while others felt that dealing with different styles of teaching and learning was part of the educative process.

It is important to emphasise that students did not always feel that the “old” was bad and the “new” was good. One student in particular was very articulate in explaining that traditional teaching methods could, in the right hands, be very effective, while another student complained with humorous exaggeration that teachers who were committed to innovation and new ways of approaching teaching could sometimes be “too enthusiastic”. Without exception, the students I spoke to felt that the projects in which they had been involved, or the learning methods they had been encouraged to adopt as a result of the projects, better equipped them for the world of work.

The students referred specifically to the confidence they gained in such areas as communication, group work, leadership, research skills and reliance upon their own initiative and capacity to solve problems. On the less positive side, there were several references by students to a concern that the emphasis of the new ways of teaching was all on process, and that by comparison with students who had been taught similar material by more traditional methods they may have a less secure grounding in the basic knowledge underpinning their discipline.

Pedagogical consultants

I have referred to the fact that senior university administrators generally felt a certain distance from the Council, and a lack of familiarity with the details of its work. Perhaps more surprisingly, pedagogical consultants expressed similar views. (By pedagogical consultants, I mean members of university staff with expertise in teaching and learning, generally located in a central unit such as a Centre for Teaching and Learning dedicated to pedagogical enhancement within the university.) They felt as a group somewhat

marginalized by the Council, with their involvement in Council funded projects within their own universities tending to be “on an *ad hoc* basis”. It was relatively unusual for the pedagogical consultants to play an assigned (as opposed to an *ad hoc*) role in the development of applications from their own university, or in a process of advice and review to prospective applicants. In some cases a picture emerged of the Council as a kind of rival to the Centres of Teaching and Learning for the loyalty and commitment of the academic staff.

It is difficult to say with any certainty why this should be so. One possible reason lies in the way in which the Council has, as part of a deliberate strategy, sought to establish strong links with practising teachers. In doing so, the aim has been—in outcome rather than intention—to “cut through” existing institutional bureaucracies and to encourage cultural and pedagogical change at the grassroots. As indicated above, this approach has brought considerable success. In the process, however, one of the consequences may have been that those in universities who are charged with responsibility for pedagogical issues have felt, with some justification, that they have been sidelined.

There is also an ideological or cultural issue that is relevant here, one that extends far beyond any individual university or national system of higher education. Many academics are committed to good teaching and to the pursuit of innovation and the enhancement of student learning. Many of these academics in turn derive their enthusiasm from a commitment to their own discipline, and their authority as teachers derives from their standing as scholars in that discipline. They are not necessarily experts in pedagogy, and they can, in many cases, be resistant to what they see as the intervention of such experts into the triangular relationship of teacher, learner and discipline.

This can lead to a situation in which the academic sees the pedagogical consultant as an advocate for a rival discipline, encouraging the academic to become an expert in pedagogy rather than an expert in history or chemistry. The pedagogical consultant on the other hand sees the academic enthusiast as relying too much on naïve enthusiasm and not enough on theory and evidence derived from past practice, and therefore, in constant danger of “reinventing the wheel” (a phrase that recurs repeatedly in any discussion of these issues.)

As so often in these kinds of cultural debates, both sides have a point. However, if the Council is to expand its brief, and to move towards the facilitation of inter- and intra-university collaboration and the funding of larger, strategically motivated projects, it is crucial that the human resource

that is present in all universities—namely the expertise in pedagogy—is incorporated into that process.

Society of Living Pedagogues

In support of its mission to enhance the status of teaching, the Council in 1990 established the Society of Living Pedagogues. The intention was to create a body similar to a research academy, and thus to recognise outstanding achievement in teaching by admitting individuals with appropriate records to membership of the Society. A membership ceiling of 200 was established in order to emphasise the value and significance of membership.

With hindsight it can be said that while the concept was admirable, not enough attention was paid at the time to specifying such matters as the role and terms of reference of the Society, the detailed intentions behind its establishment, the criteria for admission, and the means by which the Society would continue to be a lively and influential force in higher education in Sweden.

For example, there seems to be a general impression amongst the higher education community that the basic qualification for admission to the Society is a pedagogical prize from the home university. When the Society was first established, the Council did invite all academic staff in Sweden who had been awarded their institution's prize for outstanding teaching qualities to join the newly created Society. In practice however, the central criterion is by nomination from a chapter of the Society, ratified by the Society's Board. "Membership can only be obtained by nomination—from a member or from the Union of students at the particular institution. This means that a pedagogical prize neither is required, nor is a guarantee for membership; it is up to the Chapters to recommend new members to the Board of the Society, which makes the final decision."

While the intention of this rule can be inferred as being to ensure that the members themselves are responsible for the maintenance of the standards of admission (along the lines of many research academies in many countries), it is not difficult to see how the admission rules could be perceived by outsiders as being insufficiently rigorous and inclined to perpetuate conservative standards.

As a result, there is a feeling now even among its most enthusiastic supporters that the Society would benefit from a reconsideration of its role and structure, and that it is in need of revitalisation. Some respondents went so far as to advocate its disestablishment. Of all the subjects raised and

issues referred to by respondents, whether in writing or in discussion, the Society of Living Pedagogues drew the most diverse range of opinion.

Members of the Society were typically very supportive, citing the honour they felt at being members of the Society, and the recognition it gave to the importance of good teaching, but even more importantly the opportunity it provided for like-minded people to meet on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest. This was particularly so in some areas of the country where the local branch of the Society was very active. In other locations the local branch seemed to have faded away, and only a few members continued the attempt to keep it alive. Members of the Society regretted the fact that the role of the Society as a potential lobby group or source of expert advice on matters of educational policy has never been fully realised, and that from that point of view a national resource was not being effectively utilised.

On the other hand, many people were highly critical of the Society, if indeed they were aware of its existence at all, as many were not. In the words of one person “the time has come to close down the Society of Living Pedagogues”, a sentiment that was very widely shared by those who knew anything of the activities of the Society, although it was not normally expressed so bluntly. Some people even saw the Society as having exactly the opposite impact to the one that was intended when it was established, namely that it brought into question the status of teaching rather than enhancing it.

The sheer force with which some of these comments were made, coming as they did from people who were otherwise quite supportive of the Council and its aims, merits further consideration. It is based partly in the lack of clarity surrounding the Society; its aims, its status, and the basis on which membership is decided. There is also a problem with the somewhat whimsical name of the Society, which many felt was associated with a particular time in history and which has not worn well. (This view was expressed equally both by members and non-members).

This clearly presents a difficulty for the Council. The Society of Living Pedagogues includes many distinguished and devoted teachers who value the opportunities that the Society provides for sharing ideas and learning more about best practice in teaching. It is important to ensure that these teachers are not led to feel that their expertise and commitment are somehow no longer valued. On the other hand there is a general feeling, most strongly expressed from outside the Society but from some members as well, that despite the best intentions in establishing the Society it has now

lost its way and needs to be fundamentally rethought if the original aims are to be met.

Teacher exchange program

The Council's Teacher Exchange Program ran from spring 1994 to autumn of 1998. The aim of the scheme was twofold; to provide students with the opportunity to encounter different teaching methods and different concepts of the discipline, and to provide teachers with the opportunity to benefit from the experience of teaching in a different university environment. Each year about 100 Swedish university teachers were able to participate in the program. Detailed statistics relating to the program have recently been posted on the Council website.

Although it was not the main focus of my enquiries, I had the opportunity in visiting Swedish universities to meet a number of people who had participated in and benefited from the Teacher Exchange Program, as well as heads of department other academic administrators who had responsibility for managing the scheme locally.

The enthusiasm for the scheme and what it achieved was striking. The common opinion of the respondents was that it was particularly effective for the newer disciplines such as Nursing in establishing networks and international contacts. These networks may in other more traditional disciplines have already existed as a consequence of a history of collaborative research, but in the newer disciplines they were still in a fairly embryonic stage. The Teacher Exchange Program played a genuinely developmental role in assisting departments and individuals in the non-traditional disciplines to establish these networks.

Most impressive was the extent to which initial forays into teacher exchange funded by the Council had led in some cases to sophisticated and ongoing programs that have been supported and extended by departments and faculties out of their own resources. This has brought considerable benefit to the students in terms of variety of teaching input, as well as facilitating internationally collaborative research and pedagogical development.

The Teacher Exchange Program is an excellent example of the Council identifying an issue at just the right time, developing an appropriate response, and following it through to a satisfactory conclusion. The Teacher Exchange Program no longer operates, but interestingly none of the respondents who spoke specifically about this issue saw that as a problem. They recognised that the scheme was set up to address a particular

issue and to achieve certain outcomes, and that it succeeded admirably in fulfilling its aims. There was now a culture of and commitment to exchange and interaction in departments that previously had not had such a culture, and furthermore, there were now sources of support, both within and outside the universities and including the European Union, that had not existed when the scheme was first established by the Council. In that sense there was universal agreement from those who commented that the Teacher Exchange Program had met its objectives.

Future directions

There are several ways in which the above issues can be addressed, and the Council may wish to give consideration to some or all of them. In particular, the following strategies may be considered as ways of both maintaining and increasing the already considerable impact of the Council in its role of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Swedish universities. These strategies may include:

- Encouraging and rewarding collaboration in the development of project applications and the definition of intended outcomes
- Adopting a more directive role and inviting applications under certain categories or themes, developed in consultation with universities
- Establishing a category of major grants designed to benefit one or more universities or larger organisational units
- Forging stronger and more productive links with pedagogical consultants in universities
- Introducing a searchable on-line database containing summaries of all reports of completed projects and all progress reports on continuing projects
- Developing a more systematic program of workshops and conferences designed to showcase successful projects
- Creating “steering groups” to oversee the implementation of a project or category of projects in order to monitor progress, and to provide advice and feedback, including advice on project management, to project leaders to assist them in achieving the desired outcomes
- Adopting more direct methods of enhancing the status of teaching, such as the experimental project recently supported by the Council, the Summer Institute
- Restructuring the Society for Living Pedagogues and considering the introduction of a national annual program of recognition for excellence in teaching
- Reasserting the independence of the Council as a free-standing body concerned with the enhancement of teaching and learning
- Making a robust case for increasing the overall level of funding to the Council

Encouraging and rewarding collaboration in the development of project applications and in the definition of intended outcomes

The extent of take-up or adoption depends very much on a sense of ownership of the outcomes. The so-called “not invented here” syndrome typically works against the wholehearted adoption of methodologies and techniques that have come from outside, whether “outside” is defined as another country, another university or another department within the same university. Indeed it almost seems, on anecdotal evidence, that the closer the source of the innovation—for example in a department in the same university—the more strongly the “not invented here” syndrome can seem to apply.

It is not simply a question of blind resistance to innovation. One of the most closely guarded values of the academic profession is intellectual autonomy, and it is not surprising therefore that, all other things being equal, individual academics or small co-located disciplinary groups will prefer to develop their own ways of teaching, just as they develop their own curricula. Dr. Becher identified these issues in his 1992 report, and his comments are equally valid now:

“It is often remarked, in relation to educational change, that much time and effort is wasted ‘reinventing the wheel’.” But “teachers need to reinvent the wheel as part of their necessary learning process.... Very few educational innovations—and certainly very few that are far-reaching in character—can simply be picked up and used in a more mechanical way outside the place where they originated.”

What has changed however in those eight years is the extent to which we now recognise the cost of innovation, particularly where technology plays a significant part. Notwithstanding the fact that there is merit for the individual in the process of innovation itself, suggesting as it does that a certain amount of duplication is not only acceptable but even necessary, the rising costs of what we might call duplicated innovation will increasingly become an issue for the higher education system.

One way to encourage the sense of involvement in innovation while at the same time ensuring wider adoption of outcomes is to focus on the issue of collaboration. For such collaboration to be effective, it needs to be embedded at the very beginning of the project, and it needs to be real rather than token. The Council may wish to give consideration to ways in which it can develop criteria that require such collaboration—either within or amongst universities—and that identify the ways in which all participants will adopt the outcomes of the project.

Adopting a more directive role and inviting applications under certain categories or themes, developed in consultation with universities

Many respondents referred to the ways in which the Council might take a more directive role, identifying for example priority areas for a particular year, and calling for applications under those categories. In discussions around this issue, some participants pointed to its dangers, suggesting for instance that this approach could become something of an artificial exercise, in which prospective applicants would spend far too much time and energy working out how the project they wanted to do could be rewritten to fit into one of the approved categories.

The Council itself has had some experience of this approach. It has managed a number of special initiatives over the years—for example in women in engineering and in the embedding of environmental content across the curriculum—and has funded projects specifically in these areas. Notwithstanding the success of these initiatives in their own terms, they appear with hindsight not to have been as clearly related as they might have been to the overall stated aims and activities of the Council. This may be because the process by which these initiatives were developed seemed, at least to “front-line” teachers, to have been imposed on the system rather than arising from a dialogue with it.

The Council may therefore wish to establish a formal process by which it seeks regular input from the higher education system—from all categories of staff and from students—on the question of priority areas, and from that process develop a rolling three year plan of identified priorities that can be reviewed annually in the light of changing circumstances. In developing such priority areas and setting aside funds to support them, it will be important however to ensure that there remains the flexibility to support projects and proposals that may fall outside the annual priorities.

Establishing a category of major grants designed to benefit one or more universities or larger organisational units

Universities internationally are being driven to adopt broader strategic approaches, and to look to a range of partnerships—with other universities and with external bodies—as a way of acquiring the critical mass necessary to implement these broad strategies effectively and to achieve the necessary economies of scale. There is a role for the Council in acknowledging this trend and in setting up mechanisms for facilitating institutional partnerships as they apply to teaching and learning. In particular, the Council may wish to support a small number of large, inter-institutional projects, in which

both the participating institutions and the Council make significant financial contributions to the total cost of the project.

Forging stronger and more productive links with pedagogical consultants in universities

The pedagogical consultants may be defined, in the context of this report, as an under-utilised resource. Ideally, they are the drivers and facilitators of pedagogical change at the institutional level, just as the Council is at the national level. More could be done to bring these two groups together to their mutual benefit. It will be important to ensure in doing so that the educational agenda is not seen by the broader academic community to be driven solely by what we might call “pedagogical expertise”, at the expense of the needs and priorities of the individual disciplines. With that caveat in mind, there would be merit in establishing an advisory body or reference group to the Council, comprised of pedagogical consultants, and chaired for example by a member of the Board of the Council.

This reference group would be in a position to provide valuable input to the development and review processes of the Council in such areas as (a) criteria for the assessment of project applications (b) setting of priority areas for grants (c) evaluation of projects (d) strategies to ensure more effective adoption and (e) criteria for effective learning. Less specifically, but equally importantly, the Centres for Teaching and Learning and equivalent bodies in universities could act, in a more concerted and organised way than currently, as the linking point between the Council and the individual universities, and as both a disseminator of Council information to the university and a central source of feedback and comment.

Introducing a searchable on-line database containing summaries of all reports of completed projects and all progress reports on continuing projects

The Council has been very effective in ensuring that a vast range of relevant documentation is accessible through its web site and in many cases also in published form, often with accompanying translations into English. However, as more and more people turn to the web as their first source of information, there is now a case for a review of the design of the web site itself. The review should focus on the need for more straightforward navigation paths within the site, and in particular on the development of the site as a database searchable by keywords. This will have the effect of making it much easier for prospective grant applicants and prospective adopters of new methodologies to locate the relevant material, and in doing

so, to avoid the duplication or repetition of existing work that might otherwise occur.

Developing a more systematic program of workshops and conferences designed to showcase successful projects

The Council has from time to time organised conferences and workshops for the purpose of publicising particular outcomes, seeking feedback, and facilitating wider adoption. Reports of these activities have been compiled by the Secretariat and are available on the website. There would be merit now in adopting a more consistent planning approach to these forums, ensuring that (a) they take place at regular intervals, (b) wide consultation takes place in agreeing the topics for these forums, and (c) participation is actively sought from all sectors of the universities, both students and staff.

Creating “steering groups” to oversee the implementation of a project or category of projects in order to monitor progress, and to provide advice and feedback, including advice on project management, to project leaders to assist them in achieving the desired outcomes

The Council has adopted this strategy from time to time, most notably in the case of MedCAL (Computer Assisted Learning in Medicine, Odontology and Veterinary Medicine) which was established as it were retrospectively in order to provide overarching support to a range of projects in the area of Medicine and Health. MedCAL has had mixed success, providing valuable input and direction in some cases but failing in other cases to create an effective dialogue with project leaders. This mixed result can be explained partly by the fact of retrospectivity. In other words, the projects came into existence before the steering group, rather than the other way around. There may be merit in requiring all projects (or categories of projects) to work with the advice and guidance of a steering group established by the Council, and in incorporating that requirement into the conditions of grants. Thus a structural link would be formed between the project and the Council that would have the dual role of monitoring progress and providing appropriate advice and input.

Adopting more direct methods of enhancing the status of teaching, such as the experimental project recently supported by the Council, the Summer Institute

For the most part, the Council has sought to enhance the status of teaching by indirect means, most notably by the system of competitive grants. An

exception is the Society of Living Pedagogues, which is discussed more fully elsewhere in this report. More recently, the Council has supported as a pilot the Summer Institute, a nationally competitive program to identify “highfliers” in teaching in the early stages of their careers and engage them in a short intensive program of pedagogical and career development.

The program is potentially controversial, in that it focuses not on projects but directly on individuals, and thus by implication may be seen to endorse the concept of a hierarchy of teachers. On the other hand, in a time when the academic profession is not necessarily seen by young, well qualified graduates as a desirable career path, this program signals both the social value of university teaching as a career and the means by which the individual’s increasing effectiveness as a teacher may lead to advancement within the profession. Without anticipating the results of any evaluation of the Summer Institute, the Council will doubtless wish to retain the flexibility to support such innovations from time to time.

Supporting strategies to assess the effectiveness of student learning from the perspective of the employers and the professions

It is noted earlier the extent to which successful projects were felt by respondents to enhance student ability to meet the demands of the contemporary work place. In describing project outcomes, emphasis was placed on the development of skills in such areas as communication, group work, leadership, research and problem solving. There is a relative dearth of information, however, on just how these skills, as acquired by students through innovative approaches to teaching, actually function in the world of work. The Council may wish to consider ways, possibly by means of a commissioned project or projects, that the opinions of industry and the professions on the effectiveness of pedagogical innovation can be sought.

Restructuring the Society for Living Pedagogues and considering the introduction of a national annual program of recognition for excellence in teaching

For the Society of Living Pedagogues to continue exactly as before is not really an option. There seem to be two basic alternatives for the future. One is to open up the Society, and to structure it more as a professional association with membership open to all those who have a keen interest in pedagogical issues and in the enhancement of teaching. The alternative is to restructure it so that it more closely resembles a research academy, with detailed and transparent criteria for membership.

Whichever alternative is chosen, the Council may also wish to consider the establishment of a national program of recognition for excellence in teaching, the winners of which would automatically become special members of the restructured Society. While there has been considerable scepticism from the academic communities in the UK and Australia when such schemes were introduced, there is no doubt that they have served to highlight the importance of university teaching amongst the wider public, and to bring genuine recognition to the winners of such awards.

Reasserting the independence of the Council as a free-standing body

I note that the report into *New Conditions for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in Sweden* recommends the reestablishment of the Council as an independent body. I support this recommendation, specifically in the light of the revisions to the brief of the National Agency and particularly its role in a national system of quality assurance. It is important to both bodies that the assurance role and the developmental role are seen to be separate, although there will naturally continue to be mutually beneficial interactions.

Making a robust case for increasing the overall level of funding to the Council

Although this is the last recommendation, there is a sense in which it should be the first, because much of what precedes it is dependent upon additional funding. This is largely because I believe it is not advisable to pursue these new directions at the expense of what the Council currently does—namely, its support of a scheme of individual competitive grants—but rather in addition to them.

I note in this context that the report into *New Conditions for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in Sweden*, in advocating an expanded role for the Council, recommends a doubling of the Council's annual funding. I note too that the Council's total annual funding has been declining in recent years, for example from 30,400,000 SEK in 1998 to 25,000,000 in 1999 and 20,000,000 SEK in 2000. (During this time the Council has protected the grants program from the full impact of these reductions, preferring to make savings elsewhere, in for example administrative costs.)

There are several reasons for recommending a reversal of this trend, thus allowing the Council to retain a significant component of its commitment to individual projects while at the same time taking some new

directions. One is the very practical issue of the way the Council is currently perceived and the support it attracts. Much of this support is based on the goodwill of the individual teachers who have either benefited directly from grants or who have at least had the opportunity to apply for them. Simply to abandon a practice—the awarding of individual grants—that has over the years been so important to so many people, and continues for many to be the essential justification for the Council’s existence, would send a very negative message. It could even have the effect of sending the very opposite signal to the one the Council wants to send—namely that it continues to have as its primary focus the enhancement of teaching and learning, for the benefit of all students and staff.

The Council will also want to retain its ability to identify and support genuine innovation, which typically arises from individual or small group initiative. By simply deleting the category of individual grants, the Council’s strongest and most successful link into the university system—namely with individual teachers with a deep commitment to teaching—would be lost, before there had been time to build up the broader and complementary links at the organisational level.

However, in introducing categories of larger and more collaborative grants, two things are likely to happen that will have the effect of taking the current (and in my view unsustainable) pressure that is now being put on the Council from the sheer numbers of hopeful applicants for individual grants. Firstly, the introduction of larger grants will provide alternative opportunities for many. There will be people who have “cut their teeth” on individual grants and who will now welcome the possibility of participating in larger, more ambitious projects.

Secondly, a process that can already be identified in individual universities will almost certainly continue, and at a rapidly increasing rate: namely the commitment by universities to establish internal granting mechanisms that are to some extent imitative of the Council’s past and current practices. It is likely that in doing so universities will themselves increasingly take on responsibility for identifying and supporting those innovative projects that are likely to assist them to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the departmental and faculty level, and in doing so encourage a culture of innovation.

The Council’s considerable achievements to date have been made on the basis of a very cost effective allocation of central funds; particularly when the total amount of those funds is considered in relation to the total budget for higher education in Sweden. If the recommendation contained in the *Report into New Conditions for Learning and Teaching in Higher*

Education in Sweden regarding Council funding is adopted, it will greatly increase the opportunities for the Council to built on its achievements to date. In particular, it will increase the opportunity for the Council, in partnership with universities, both to respond to and to anticipate change and to facilitate the integration at the structural level of policies and practices that will ensure continuing positive outcomes in teaching and learning.

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