

Om styr-, och resursutredningen

Jag ska först påpeka att jag tycker att vissa intentioner i utredningen är bra t ex vad gäller målsättning om ökad långsiktighet. De kommentarer jag bifogar nedan på engelska är alltså inte alls heltäckande utan gäller vissa speciella delar av utredningen. De har författats snabbt (inom ca 30 min) i ett kommentarsfält till en text på Linnéuniversitetets internwebb för personal, med relaterade begränsningar.

Kommentarerna bygger på:

1. min erfarenhet av att alla vill att universitetslärare ska göra mer av nästan allt och helst av sådant som tvingas på uppifrån och allra helst sådant som politiker begriper. Det de framförallt ska göra i mindre grad verkar vara att forska.

2. mitt bevittnande av, och förfäran över, ungdomsskolans bedrägliga tillstånd (först från mina barns skolgång sedan med släktingar som lärare) som en följd av en rad ogenomtänkta politiska beslut (av i stort sett alla regeringar sedan början av 90-talet, minst). Min rädsla är att det nu är dags för högre utbildning då, så att säga, möjligheterna för politiker att uttrycka sig på ungdomsskolans område är uttömt. Där är det nu krishantering som gäller.

3. min mindre upplyftande läsning av ministerns direktiv för den aktuella utredningen under en nattlig flygresä från Kanada samt en del research i samband med det PM från ifjor somras då försök gjordes att skriva in regler om "breddat deltagande" i högskolelagen.

4. mina erfarenheter av forskning och grundutbildning från flera lärosäten (Lunds Universitet, Högskolan i Kalmar, Linneuniversitetet, King's College London, Stanford University (sabbatical), McGill University (sabbatical)) och en rad internationella och nationella samarbeten. Jag undervisar på en rad kurser på grundutbildningen för biomedicinska analytiker, farmaceuter och andra universitetsstudenter, men handleder också 2 doktorander, 3 postdocs och en senior forskare. Jag har externa forskningsanslag från VR och deltar i en av VRs beredningskommittéer samt har utfört utvärderingar för flera andra Europeiska forskningsråd. Dessutom har jag deltagit i 3 på varandra följande FP7-Horizon2020 projekt. Jag deltar för närvarande i ett FET-proaktiv Horizon2020 projekt 2017-2021. Slutligen har jag 4 patent (varav ett USA patent), har startat ett företag och har fått ett innovationsstipendium på 100 000 kr.

5. mina erfarenheter av en "klassresa" där ingen av mina föräldrar hade mer än 7-årig folkskola ff a pga avsaknad av ekonomiska resurser.

Vänliga hälsningar
Alf Månsson
Professor i Fysiologi

Comments in English

It is surprising, to me as a University teacher and researcher, that no one in the organization has asked me, or as far as I know, any of my colleagues about what we think about this proposal.

A major problem with the ideas put forward in the proposal (I also read the terrible document that is the instruction from the minister) is that it, to my mind, does not express real insight into some major challenges in teaching and research today. Furthermore, it is very clear that the major purpose is to reach political goals that will be more or less forced upon the Universities once a new law is in place, not to make the University teaching and research better. If the ideas had been to achieve the latter, one possibility would be to look at one of the most successful Universities world-wide, Stanford University (where I did a sabbatical some years ago). This University has world-class undergraduate education as well as postgraduate education and is one of the leading research Universities with about 20 Nobel Laureates as faculties. Additionally, Stanford University is world-leading in entrepreneurship (important in foundation of Silicon Valley). However, Stanford University enrolls just about 2000 undergraduate students per year and has less than 500 students per Nobel Laureate. Broadened recruitment at Stanford is achieved by making excellence central for enrollment. The cost for students with parents who are not rich (e.g. my daughters) would be lower than in Sweden because stipends cover also accommodation in addition to tuition fees. In contrast to Stanford, the Swedish higher education system is, according to the Instructions from the minister, going to achieve all what Stanford Univ is doing but also the education of 100 000 undergraduate students per Nobel Laureate (or something similar). Of course there are costs and the costs are multifaceted as well as extremely worrying.

The political goals in the proposal, without clear projected benefits, include, as seemingly central elements, broadened recruitment and more extensive interactions with the surrounding society. Both of these goals are in themselves highly desirable (cf. Stanford) but these kinds of political goals are usually implemented in a completely erroneous way in the Swedish system, primarily because the ruling politicians do not have a clue of what they are doing (an example of caution is their currently left playground of pre-University education - in that field it is currently not reforms but crisis handling that applies). To force researchers/university teachers (by law or by funding opportunities) to collaborate with the surrounding society will lead to a number of undesirable consequences that will severely compromise quality. It will for instance make several people (researchers/teachers; not all) feel obliged to do things that they are not primarily interested in, e.g. inventing projects just to get grants but really wishing to do something else. This is not a way to achieve something new and innovative nor starting any new companies. With regard to broader recruitment, the right point of attack would be to change the pre-University education to make all students independent of background feel that they wish to enter higher education. Obviously the political ideas aiming to achieve this from the nineties and on-wards have completely failed. Usually, when the broadened recruitment has been considered explicitly previously the political solution has been to simply increase the number of student enrolments with the hope that the Universities will find the right students. A key problem here is that the Universities cannot make students motivated for higher education if the lower education over 12 years has failed in this regard. A final particularly serious consequence of the proposal is that it opens for large shifts of the Swedish Research Budget towards basic education. This is the only natural flow of money, as most likely no overall increases are considered (understandable). Such a direction of flow is especially apparent if the government

will resuscitate the PM from last summer about “increased participation” in higher education. Such resuscitation was already indicated by the minister at the time when the PM was rejected. To shift funding from research to basic teaching in this devious inexplicit way, one should consider all consequences, e.g. (but not limited to): 1. the position of Swedish University Research and its international competitiveness, 2. the connection between REAL research and basic education and 3. the future recruitment of University teachers (cf. present situation in lower education). With regard to the latter point it should be mentioned that meaningful research time today can only be given to about 15 % of researchers/university teachers who actually apply to the Swedish Research Councils. I also know from my own experience that numerous colleagues are currently only teaching and they are increasingly plagued by a range of administrative duties (cf. lower education). I wonder if, in the future, young people can really feel stimulated to enter a Research education (were you need to be interested in research) with very little chance to actually do any research in their future work, but rather focus more and more on various administrative duties (e.g half a day to administer just the increasingly complex preparation for an examination).

Stop the ideas which only are politically motivated because they will backfire!! What may help to achieve such a prohibition is some true critical thinking, openness to radical ideas (cf. Stanford) and, not the least, some careful listening to all those who are really involved with teaching and research.

Alf

I would also like to come back to cooperation with society.

This is one thing that really sticks out from the proposal how important this is perceived by the government. They seem to be much less interested in improving teaching and research - possibly because they do not understand those issues as well.

Increased focus on cooperation with society in an undefined way as proposed by Andrei also has the drawback that it dilutes existing resources .

Someone may wonder then, are really Swedish research resources connected to higher education lower than with leading international competitors. Whereas the total funding for research is high in Sweden (per capita), a dominant fraction is development costs within industries. Furthermore, state funding to University goes back to the state to an unspecified degree via Akademiska Hus and their profits. Finally, the costs for one PhD student and one postdoc is about 3-fold higher in Sweden than in US and Canada something that was entirely different when I was a PhD student (when I had a fellowship at 1/3 of today's cost [corrected for inflation]). This means that a standard grant from VR today will basically just pay the salary of one PhD student or a postdoc and very little more. This explains why my Canadian colleague can have his lab full of fancy equipment without having appreciably higher grants than I have. Now, I do not say that good conditions for PhD students and postdocs is bad. It is the fact however, that the unfinanced reforms which have led to these conditions effectively have reduced the Swedish research funding level by probably at least 50 % during the last 10-20 years.

Another problem with the proposal is that it is stated that teaching is valued much less than research by the Universities. Then it should also be mentioned that in order to stay within research within the current system you need to be like a toy with a weight in the foot or, as my wife have usually put it when I have mentioned some time that maybe we should convince our children to go into research: "I would not have this for my children!!" It may be worth mentioning that she has worked as social worker for many years.