

A word from the Deputy Dean

We are already in the midst of Advent, with only a couple of weeks left of the semester. The unusually mild autumn, which gave us sunny days all the way until November, has now entered its darkest stage, and one cannot help longing for the winter solstice, when it starts to turn brighter again.

The latter part of the autumn semester has been characterised by budgeting at every level, and the financial framework for 2014 is now in place. Increased costs for projects of common interest, such as the newly built Studenthuset and the renovation of the University Library, mean that everyone has to contribute funds but will hopefully also benefit from the broader service and more modern facilities. The University Library has a new board with a challenging task ahead of them: to manage an operation in tumultuous transformation. How will the University Library of the future look and function? What kind of service will researchers and students need in the future to acquire knowledge and convey research findings in the best way possible, and where is the library of the future: in cyberspace, in a physical building, or in a chip implanted under the skin?

In protest against the closure of four national resource centres in science and technology, which provide concrete classroom support to teachers at all levels, from preschool to upper secondary school, a number of deans of science and technology faculties around the country have sent a letter to the Ministry of Education and the members of the Parliamentary Commission on Education. At Stockholm University, we have the much appreciated National Resource Centre for Chemistry Teachers (Kemilärarnas Resurcentrum, KRC), which provides continuing development for teachers, offers inspiring resources/material for teaching chemistry in school, gives advice on laboratory safety and security, and disseminates knowledge and information about chemistry to the community. This and the other resource centres in physics, technology, biology, and biotechnology are now threatened with closure due to the establishment of one new centre for teaching and learning. Such a centre is welcome, but it cannot replace the practical support to teachers in the classroom, and the ideal is obviously to have these operations complement each other. It is difficult to understand the politicians' reasoning when they want to close down successful operations that improve the competence of teachers and should rather be strengthened.

At SciLifeLab, nine facilities in Stockholm and Uppsala have gained national status and will act as service and resource centres for researchers and projects from all over the country. At the same time, the recruitment of young researchers/associate senior lecturers to SciLifeLab is underway. A total of eight positions have been advertised, two of which are from Stockholm University, and the experts will soon submit their reviews of the candidates' qualifications. Many of the applications come from abroad, which is a sign that the advertising of these positions has worked well. More vacancies are already planned to be announced by the spring/summer. The Faculty thus has to decide in which disciplines we would like to see more recruitments, in order to broaden/deepen our own research and further strengthen our position at SciLifeLab.

At the end of November, the Swedish Research Council's Scientific Council for Medicine and Health (VR-MH) paid a visit to the Faculty. The Secretary General of VR-MH, Mats Ulfendahl, gave a presentation of the Swedish Research Council's various tasks and emphasised that VR is a government institution that has to comply with the directives from the government. This is true, of course, but sometimes we would like to see VR offer more resistance to some of the tasks given to them by the government, especially when large parts of the research community are critical of efforts that mainly seem to have a populist purpose, rather than to actually strengthen research.

Mats Ulfendahl also emphasised that VR only allocates a small portion (about 10%) of the total government research funds, and that the biggest portion is given directly to the universities in the form of government funds to research and research training. However, the discussion that followed showed that teachers/researchers are very concerned about the research councils' declining success rate, which in part is due to more and more funds being given to a small number of research teams. This suggests that a paradigm shift is about to take place, which is likely to result in only a small number of teachers/researchers being able to receive grants from research councils in the future. This means that the majority of teachers/researchers will depend on core funding from the universities' appropriation funds to even be able to conduct active research. I firmly believe that quality education is dependent on all teachers

having the opportunity to conduct research. Even if we at the Faculty follow the principle that all teaching positions are funded by appropriation funds, and that facilities and doctoral grants are largely covered by these funds, we are likely to need a great deal of innovation in our departments going forward, in order to fulfil our ambition that all teachers should also engage in active research.

I hope that everyone gets to enjoy some well-earned relaxation and recreation during the forthcoming holiday season. Also, remember our international students and researchers, so that they get to share the warmth and fellowship. I wish you all a pleasant time off with nice winter weather!

Ylva