

A word from the Deputy Dean



Spring is finally upon us, with green grass and sunny weather. The arrival of spring also forces a more intense work pace, as there is much left to finish before the semester ends and the summer holidays take over.

On the educational side, several processes for promoting development and quality enhancement are in progress. I am not thinking primarily of the major, resource-intensive evaluations of PhD programmes and other higher education planned by the government and UKÄ. Granted, stirring the pot and focusing on a few specific issues usually leads to some improvements, so this can be expected to happen this time as well, but the question is if we are not approaching total evaluation hysteria? Where is the limit to how much time the staff of a higher education institution can spend on constantly recurring evaluations without this having a severe negative impact on the quality of research and education?

No, I am actually thinking more of the internal processes for enhancing the quality of our education regardless of the evaluations launched by UKÄ and the Ministry of Education. The Vice-Chancellor's announcement of funding for enhancing the quality of education has led to intense discussions in our departments and sections, and, of course, on the advisory committee for undergraduate studies (GB), the teacher education committee (LUS), and the disciplinary domain board (ON). The commitment that permeates many of these discussions is remarkable, and the desire to conduct good teaching is just as strong as the frustration over small student groups and low completion rates. Many teachers ask themselves what can be done about the situation. I do not believe there is simple answer, but one thing is clear: both the global educational landscape and the students we meet today are vastly different than they used to be. We must keep up with these developments and meet the new requirements. At the same time, we should defend what we believe in and what has been scientifically proven about learning. Many young people today see knowledge as something that exists on the Internet and that does not need to be learnt. However, the Internet mainly provides information, not knowledge per se, and all too often it is disinformation. In order for the information to become knowledge and be useful in creative thought processes, it must be sifted through and internalised, become our own. This requires hard work, which not all students are able or willing to do. Perhaps they do not have the study technique, or do not see the point. We teachers, on the other hand, are far too often stuck in the habit of giving long-winded lectures that provide students with too little stimulation and activity. We often forget that learning must be an active process for the learner.

In teacher education, there is an ongoing discussion about changes to create more cohesive study programmes, in which different elements nourish and relate to each other in a natural way. An excellent evaluation of the so-called "core subjects within educational science" was carried out late last autumn, which provided a solid basis for the work to implement changes in both the short and the long term. When it comes to subject studies for teacher candidates, the challenges for subject teachers are more or less the same, regardless of whether the

students are going to become teachers, researchers or something else; besides, they often study together. In other words, teaching methods that activate students more are likely to lead to enhanced subject-specific knowledge and, hopefully, higher completion rates in general, while they also help train more competent school teachers.

A completely different area of intense discussion these days is infrastructure, including the Swedish Research Council's (VR) current announcement of continuation grants for research infrastructure. An example of a national research facility seeking continued funding from VR is the National Genomics Infrastructure (NGI), which is the largest of the national facilities within SciLifeLab. In July, SciLifeLab will have a new scientific director, Olli Kallioniemi, who is also director of the Institute for Molecular Medicine Finland (FIMM) at the University of Helsinki. It will be interesting to see if this will lead to increased opportunities for collaboration with the University of Helsinki in the field of life science.

Another type of infrastructure, although related to SciLifeLab's operations, is different types of data services and genome analysis functions, as well as direct bioinformatics support for researchers. There are plans to coordinate many different operations in larger consortia in order to create a better organisation and more clarity within and between different operations.

In this context, I would like to mention that the Faculty, together with BILS (Bioinformatic Services to Swedish Life Science), will start to have a bioinformatician on site in the Arrhenius Laboratory one day a week to give advice and direct bioinformatics support to research groups. The idea is to enable research groups to discuss project planning, receive advice and help concerning bioinformatics in ongoing projects, and be referred to a suitable specialist when necessary. Of course, this service cannot replace the support provided by BILS for two weeks, or the extended support that researchers can apply for from WABI (Wallenberg Advanced Bioinformatics Infrastructure).

Despite my initial words about intense work and stress in the spring, I hope that you will have some time to enjoy yourselves – this period is so short and transient. A moment in the sun at the bus stop, a flowering tree on the way to work, a blackbird at dusk – pause for a moment and take it all in – it costs so little and is worth so much.

/Ylva