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Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology
Research Committee

Report on the visit of the Scientific Advisory Board to the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology, June 2011

On 14-17 June 2011, the three members of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology (JFHT), Dr Linda Bree, Professor Peter Burke and Professor Oda Wischmeyer, visited Lund and conducted a series of discussions and interviews with Faculty representatives. They also met the Vice-Chancellor of Lund University and the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research. Various kinds of written material had been provided by way of preparation for the visit, including annual statements on JFHT research submitted by the JFHT Research Committee.

The SAB report (below) contains the impressions engendered by the place visit in conjunction with other sources of information available to SAB members. The report provides plenty of constructive suggestions as to how research at the JFHT might be improved. The Research Committee will work with them in the coming months, presenting various proposals wholly or partly on the basis of the report.

Not all measures suggested by the SAB will be possible to implement; and in some respects, JFHT representatives will hold views that differ from those articulated by the SAB. This is as it should be. The members of the SAB were asked to provide an interested and well-informed expert-outsider view of the situation in Lund, acting as 'critical friends' and telling us where they think we could do better: the essence of an evaluative report. The Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology in Lund are extremely grateful to them.

Lund, on 11 October 2011

Marianne Thormählen

JFHT Dean of Research

Introduction

This report describes impressions and offers observations following a four-day visit to the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology from 14 to 17 June 2011 by the SAB, in other words a team composed of three foreigners. We listened at length to doctoral students, post-docs, senior lecturers, professors and heads of departments, as well as meeting the vice-chancellor, the pro-vice-chancellor for research, three deans, the chief librarian, the book-publications specialist and some of the technical staff in the Humanities Laboratory. The doctoral and post-doctoral students and the teaching staff were clearly selected, on what criteria we do not know, but the individuals concerned seemed to be speaking frankly, and we had the impression (reinforced by the groups themselves when asked) that they represented a fair cross-section of the larger groups involved. Thanks to this range of participants, we believe that we have been able to view research in the JFHT from multiple perspectives. We also studied the RQ08 evaluation, the report from the RC (2010) and the JFHT Statement on Research (2011), from all of which we learned a great deal. All three of us had previously visited the University officially and will make comparisons in what follows with the research situation in the humanities and theology in Lund 2006-2008. We will also compare the situation in Lund with universities in our own countries, England and Germany.

We were asked to act as ‘critical friends’ to the university, but before offering any criticisms we would like to say something about our many positive impressions. We were assured by senior members of the Faculty that they enjoyed freedom of research and were not subject to North American-style pressures to ‘publish or perish’. We enjoyed our visit to the Humanities Laboratory and learned something of the ways in which new technologies are assisting research in archaeology and other disciplines. We met representatives from the prestigious interdisciplinary Linnaeus project, ‘Thinking in Time’ and learned that it had been successful in attracting foreign research students. We were glad to hear that Islamic Studies were prospering in LU. We were agreeably surprised to learn from the group of doctoral students who spoke to us that they were happy with their situation and with what the university was doing for them (in the case of history, for instance, funding participation in the annual conferences of the profession). Making comparisons with our impressions on earlier visits, we sensed that the climate of research in the JFHT had improved since 2006, thanks, we were told more than once, to the efforts of Dean Thormählen and in particular to the

introduction of ‘Research Terms’, as well as grants for renewed applications for external funding and for the editing of articles written in English.

In what follows, however, we will concentrate, as we were asked to do, on what might be improved and how it might be improved, whether in removing current obstacles to research, in furthering research in positive ways, or in making the results of that research more visible, both nationally and internationally.

We are of course aware that the work of the university is subject to a number of constraints, economic and political, whether confined to Sweden (employment laws), in the EU (demographic decline and the emphasis on ‘productive’ innovation) or in the wider world. Accordingly, we will focus on what can realistically be done at home, discussing in turn

- A. The institutional structures of the university and in particular of the JFHT.
- B. The problems faced by different kinds of people engaged in research, especially professors, lecturers and post-docs.
- C. The communication of research carried out at the university, whether by publication or by other means.

A. *Institutional Structures*

1. Interdisciplinary research is prized in the university (rightly, we believe) as in the wider academic world, yet the institutional structures of the faculties appear sometimes to inhibit such research. The director of the ‘Thinking in Time’ project told us that he found the process of choosing PhD students slow and time-consuming, since he had to consult three different faculties who operated with different selection criteria, a bureaucratic hurdle that is surely unnecessary and counter-productive. Time is obviously precious in the world of research and we urge that thought be given to resolving this problem, for example by giving the project director more autonomy.
2. A related problem, far from confined to the JFHT or indeed to Lund University, is that of similar topics being studied in different parts of the university. Rhetoric, for instance, is studied in the CLL and also in the Department of Communications. The Department of History’s interest in the ‘new cultural history’ should allow them to talk to researchers in Cultural Studies, to the benefit of both sides (but do they?). Some kinds of historical research overlap with other departments, from CLL to

European Ethnology, and some kinds of research in JFHT overlap with other faculties, especially Social Sciences ('sociology of religion' for instance, or 'migration'), but also with natural sciences or medicine ('historisk osteologi', for instance, or cognitive studies, or medical anthropology). Such overlaps are not a bad thing, quite the opposite: our concern is about ways of connecting. We hope that (say) two specialists in rhetoric in different parts of the university will co-operate rather than working in isolation; and that the institutional structures, and senior individuals working within them, will encourage rather than inhibit such co-operation.

3. During our visit we heard only occasional references to the Pufendorf Institute, perhaps because it is currently focussed on astrobiology, but we hope that individuals and groups in the JFHT are thinking about projects that might be pursued in this framework, perhaps in collaboration with Social Sciences.
4. We were concerned that members of some departments of the JFHT, including PhD students, might be too inward-looking in the sense of concentrating attention on Scandinavia (if not Sweden) at the expense of the rest of the world. We were surprised to learn that 'Comparative Literature' in Lund more or less means Swedish literature. We were very pleased to hear that this is likely to change soon. We believe that it would be good for the Department and the Faculty if more genuinely international comparisons were encouraged. We spoke to a Sinologist in CLL who is effectively a historian of 20th-century China, but it seems that his talents are not utilized in the Department of History. Since it is impossible for every department to appoint a specialist in every subject, cross-utilization is obviously important. Research on the wider world needs to be encouraged because it feeds into teaching, into educating the next generation to be citizens of a world that is so much more closely connected than ever before. Excellence in this – huge – area would also attract foreign students to the university.
5. We were concerned about the state of small subjects, including subjects of global importance such as the study of Japanese, the language, history and culture of an important country being represented by one individual in a permanent post, a senior lecturer. To be part of such a small enterprise may be bad for the morale of research students. Having made the initial investment in a permanent post, it makes sense for the university to follow this up. We wondered whether external funding might be obtained - perhaps from Sony, given their position in Lund's economy - for a chair in

Japanese Studies (St Antony's Oxford, for instance, has an Institute for Japanese Studies that is largely funded by Nissan).

6. We were concerned about the evaluation of research in the university, in particular the new emphasis on innovation with practical (marketable) consequences, and on quantitative methods, notably bibliometry. We are aware that there are external pressures to evaluate in this way. All the same, we would like to express our disquiet. In the first place, the official definition of innovation discriminates against the JFHT, although its members innovate in other ways in their research. The definition encourages the belief expressed by more than one member of the faculty, that the humanities and theology are considered as marginal by the rest of the university. In the second place, an exclusive reliance on bibliometry has a number of disadvantages. For example, it privileges prolific scholars (who sometimes make the same points in different articles or books) at the expense of the authors of occasional 'seminal' articles, which may be only a few pages long but may transform their field for decades. One person we spoke to admitted that he was publishing in a less prestigious journal because it seemed to carry more weight in the bibliometric system currently in force, while another said that he was concentrating on articles rather than books for bibliometric reasons. Care should be given to ensuring that the bibliometric system chosen should reflect the needs of the particular subject or discipline that it is employed to assess.

B. Doing Research

1. In Lund as elsewhere, members of faculty with permanent posts face the problem of finding time for research while they are also engaged in teaching and administration, not to mention the '3rd task' (actually the 4th) of bringing their ideas and arguments to the attention of a wider public (to be discussed in section C of this report). As outsiders we found the system of percentages (20% or 40% time for research) to be confusing: more seriously, we found that insiders considered the system to be virtually impossible to manage. We were told again and again that research time was in practice eaten up by teaching and other commitments that overran their percentage yet were impossible to avoid. If the number of hours corresponded to the 20%, the variety of topics meant that preparation for teaching invaded the territory of research.

Newcomers in particular found it difficult to protect their research, while more senior figures complained of being ‘trapped in administration’. In any case, one effect of the percentages, and the linking of these percentages to income from different sources, is that a lot of time and energy is expended in simply trying to calculate the balance of activities; another, even more serious, is to create a kind of ‘work-to-rule’ mentality, among post-docs at least, leading to reluctance to do a job that one is not paid for.

2. The juggling of responsibilities is inevitable but it emerged from our conversations with the Faculty that there may be ways of ensuring that the jugglers do not drop the research ball. For example, the introduction of research terms has been warmly welcomed but the researchers would appreciate the opportunity to submit briefer proposals (saving days of research time) and receiving a more speedy response.
3. So far as the financing of research is concerned, one problem expressed was that funding fluctuated, making planning ahead difficult. Even PhD students complained that they were forced to plan too long in advance for money for research trips. Where one individual was funded from different sources, clashes between duties might arise. Another point was that the official (government) emphasis on large projects (‘Big Research’ on the model of ‘Big Science’) was inappropriate for the humanities and theology, where individual or small-group projects are still the most common, and often the most fruitful. A third problem was the amount of research time spent, and generally wasted, on the paperwork necessary to applications for external funding, with a relatively small chance of success. It might be helpful for a single individual to be asked to monitor grant applications within each subject area, developing the expertise to see what works and to advise on good practice. This need not be a full-time job, but anyone thinking of applying for a grant should know to whom to turn.
4. We spoke to groups at different stages of their careers. We were impressed by the research activities of the full professors, all of whom seemed to operate with confidence in an international environment. The senior lecturers were much less sanguine about their research, feeling that the university chiefly valued them for their teaching skills and that their personal research came low on the list of institutional priorities. They all wanted to keep their research going but this was more for personal reasons than because they saw it as helping their careers. Their concern was chiefly to be able to ringfence their research time more effectively. PhD students generally felt that the university provided a favourable environment for their research and supported

them with essential funding for libraries and conferences. The group that collectively expressed most discontent were the post-docs, to some extent caught in the middle between permanent teachers and PhD students, less secure than the former and more career-oriented than the latter. Some of them were approaching middle age, supporting children yet living from hand to mouth from a succession of part-time appointments, doing some teaching, applying for jobs and in the time that remained carrying out their research. Some had too much teaching, but at least one, in French, had too little. We were told that it is more difficult for them than for PhD students to receive funding for attendance at conferences and we think that they should have a similar small 'pot' for research expenses. The insecurity felt by some members of this group is not conducive to effective research. Another problem for this group was lack of communication. After working for the PhD on a topic defined by themselves, they found difficulty adjusting to a greater degree of freedom and expressed frustration about not knowing what was expected of them.

C. Communicating Research

In this section we would like to discuss the ways in which research is communicated at present or might be communicated in the future, thinking not only of ways of bringing the results obtained by LU researchers to the attention of the community of scholars, but also of making the work of the university more visible, both nationally, to as broad a public as possible, and internationally. One of the possible ways of increasing this visibility was discussed in the SAB report of 2007: the foundation of an annual Humanities and Theology Lecture, given in English or Swedish and aimed at a wide audience (colleagues in other disciplines and a wider public), with a fee large enough to attract prestigious scholars from different countries and therefore the attention of the media. It might be possible to find external funding for this (how about 'The Ikea Lecture in the Humanities'?).

In what follows, however, we will concentrate on other ways of communicating research in the form of books, articles, etc, whether in print or in electronic form. We were impressed with what looked like very efficient working of the library. Books by Lund authors are given prominent display, and in general the librarian hopes to meet reasonable demands from individual scholars and PhD students to acquire particular books. We were also pleased

to see that an appointment had been made of a person whose aim was to co-ordinate and take forward the research publications of Lund scholars and others.

It seems an excellent idea to co-ordinate the various series of research publications, to give the university a more attractive and more clearly branded 'research face'. It will be good when present plans to make these books more clearly and attractively available on the Lund website, and able to be bought by credit card through a direct link, are fulfilled.

We were less sure about the initiative currently under consideration for the establishment of a Lund University Press. We had discussed this possibility back in 2006, but technological developments over the past five years have not necessarily worked in favour of the success of such an initiative if made now. Very careful consideration would have to be given to

- the publishing model to be chosen, and how it would be financed
- the marketing model, nationally and internationally
- how books in a new Press would sit and be perceived to sit, by authors on the one hand and the outside world on the other, alongside the existing Lund series publications.

Conclusions

Looking back to the whole exercise of our Lund visit, we feel that there is a certain lack of a forum accompanying the process of generating knowledge in the humanities and theology.

People from different positions in the JFHT seemed to be concerned with the issue of what their discipline should be for and how their research might be esteemed (in the case of Swedish literature, for instance). This raised for us the general question, what kind of research is done in the humanities and theology in Lund? Or more exactly: what kind of knowledge is expected and intended to be generated by scholarship in the humanities and theology in Lund?

Some more detailed questions might make our concern more clear:

- To which parts of our world are the investigations of research in the humanities and theology related?

- In which ways is it possible to demonstrate the contributions of research in the humanities and theology for the whole of society?
- In which fields is co-operation with other methods of research and with other faculties needed, and what hybrid kinds of knowledge will be generated in these fields?
- In which respect will this hybrid kind of knowledge (for example in the language laboratory) develop or change the kind of knowledge so far associated with the humanities and theology?

Recommendations

1. We recommend that the university consider being more open in its appointments, so that it is more able to bring in senior people with international reputations. The loss of internationally respected scholars owing to retirement might be compensated for by senior appointments to avoid the loss of cultural capital (the international reputation of the department, its traditions, etc).
2. We recommend that the duty of research should be emphasized more than at present and that it be reinforced by recognizing one research day in the working week, free from teaching and also from meetings. The research term, being short, needs to be completely free from other commitments, with the possible exception of the supervision of PhD students.
3. We recommend the official encouragement of teaching (lecture courses, seminars, etc) based on and close to current research.
4. We recommend that the administrative load of teacher-researchers should be lightened, making more use of professional administrators, perhaps as assistant to the head of department, taking care of the routine paperwork and briefing the head in the way that permanent civil servants brief ministers.
5. We hope and believe that the new building for the JFHT will encourage the contacts between disciplines that many researchers felt were needed, but only provided that a generous central space is allocated to a meeting-place with comfortable chairs, coffee, etc. Joint seminars should be easier to organize in the building, and we hope that they will be encouraged. However, the need for people in JFHT to talk to people in social sciences still needs to be addressed.

6. We recommend that something should be done at the institutional level to encourage the use of English and other foreign languages by PhD students, and to offer them advice about their future careers.
7. While many of the PhD students and post-docs were happy with their supervisors, they were unsure what to expect from them. We recommend that a short, informal code of practice be drawn up, so that supervisors and their students will be better informed about what they might be expected to do.
8. The ‘third task’ of diffusing knowledge more widely needs to be officially recognized, alongside research, teaching and administration.
9. We recommend that everything possible be done to publicize the Linnaeus project through interim as well as final reports and also by conferences and articles in journals.
10. We recommend the reinforcement of the research culture by practices such as the display of new books by members of each department and by the establishment of prizes for outstanding contributions to research.
11. In order to deal with the crucial questions raised in the conclusion we recommend an advanced forum in which these issues can be discussed in a regular, systematic and sustainable way from the different perspectives of the departments as well as from professors, lecturers, postdocs and doctoral students. Such a forum seems to be particularly necessary from the point of view of the postdocs, who should discuss the kind of knowledge that society expects them to work on. These debates could give them the chance to become part of the spearhead of a national or even international discourse about the *benefit* of the humanities and theology, a discourse that has turned out to be the main concern of the university’s leadership. The shape of the forum should be determined by the dean of research in discussion with departments and research groups.
12. Since many of our recommendations emphasize teamwork and more open communication between different subject areas and levels of seniority within the university, we suggest that this report be circulated as widely as possible.

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20.7.11

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