



Faculty of Social Sciences

## Directional Decision Regarding Organisational Development Towards Fewer Units at the Faculty of Social Sciences

In the operational plan for 2022-2023, the Faculty of Social Sciences decided to pose the question, “to what extent could fewer, less complex organisational units and mutual coordination between them solve staffing challenges and reduce administrative transaction costs?” (Reg. no STYR 2021/2402, page 4). The following document is a summary of discussions among faculty management, the Council of Heads of Department (at three separate overnight conferences), and the Faculty Board.

Quality assessments of education and research clearly show that the Faculty of Social Sciences’ activities are very good, with the potential to be better still.

With few exceptions, the study programmes are very popular, a large proportion of students are international, teaching staff are committed, and students are satisfied. The faculty’s research is driven by inquisitiveness, is multi-faceted and relevant, and to a large extent externally funded, with scientific and societal impact. In order to retain the quality of the core activities as they face a rapidly changing wider world and ever-stricter planning conditions, it is crucial that the faculty’s management and administration are robust and effective.

The aim of a reorganisation towards fewer units is to equip the faculty’s leadership, management and administration ahead of increased demands and expectations, while retaining a high degree of autonomy in the core activities.

For some time, it has become increasingly clear that the core activities are suffering as a result of organisational and administrative challenges arising from the fact that in relation to its size, the faculty has far too many small organisational units (departments/equivalents). The issue has been noted by previous faculty managent, but the internal and external pressure for strategic

and efficient use of resources and the increased need for ever more specialised support functions demand action.

Today, the faculty has 778 employees, including 427 permanent staff (658 full-time equivalents), 5,839 full-time students and a total turnover of around SEK 837 million. The size of the faculty's 11 departments/equivalents varies widely (Full-time equivalents (staff): 23-103, full-time equivalents (students):120-1040, research: SEK 10-70 million, agency capital: -2/+17)

Some of the problems associated with small units include:

- Small budgets reduce the departments' capacity to make decisions, make them more vulnerable to volatility in terms of external funding and fail to provide the opportunities to co-finance research projects.
- It is more difficult for small units to staff their positions and to recruit heads of department and directors of studies.
- Low staff volumes make the long-term provision of expertise more difficult and increase the risk of poor recruitment as well as vulnerability to sick leave and parental leave, for example.
- The division of resources across many units within the faculty limits the strategic use of research funding at departmental level.

A few problems resulting from lots of units are:

- The coordination of the administration of finances, staffing and studies administration across several units is not resource-efficient. The coordination of faculty-wide development initiatives concerning HR, work environment, equal opportunities and communication are difficult to implement and adapt to units that vary in size and available resources.
- The large number of units, combined with a decentralised distribution of resources and decision-making powers complicates monitoring and increases the risk of mistakes.
- A lot of local interpretation of regulations and operational directives as well as lots of different processes for dealing with the same kind of matters.

A faculty with fewer, and more similarly sized units would not primarily result in financial savings but would create better conditions for a more efficient use of resources in terms of the faculty's education and research budgets:

- With financial size come both economies of scale and greater opportunities to plan strategically and to prioritise according to need.
- In order for the collegial elections not to be merely paper exercises, it is necessary for the collegial body to have at least a certain size.
- Collegiality presupposes that there are staff who are not only prepared to take on tasks, but also that there are younger colleagues who can be “trained” to take on tasks.
- Larger units create the opportunity for more advanced administrative support for management and therefore better conditions for an increased focus on strategic operational issues.
- Larger units increase the opportunity to separate questions of subject identity, academic freedom, etc. from administrative processes, structures and premises, which in turn can contribute to greater openness and flexibility.
- With fewer units, the faculty’s management (Departmental Leadership Team) can be more easily coordinated and assume greater responsibility for faculty-wide issues.

The Faculty of Social Sciences’ management is characterised by departments having very high degrees of autonomy. The faculty management and departmental managements agree that it is desirable for operative, but also strategic decisions to be made close to frontline activities and that the lion’s share of resources should also be deployed close to operations.

An alternative to reducing the number of units would be to reduce the autonomy of the departments and centralise more decision-making power to the faculty level. A decentralised organisation, however, has advantages that outweigh the alternative. A basic assumption is that de-centralised leadership puts high demands on the departments’ capacity for strategic leadership and management. Another option would be to completely professionalise the leadership and management organisation through giving up the collegial management in favour of recruited managers. That option is neither desirable nor compatible with the University’s rules concerning procedure and delegation.

Fewer units provide better conditions in order to maintain today’s diversified range of courses and programmes, combined with both broad and cutting-edge research. Exactly how big a unit should be in terms of budget and staffing remains to be defined, but

- An efficient and sustainable use of resources requires a certain budgetary size.
- The number of permanently employed teaching staff needs to be sufficient to enable the department to comprise a collegial body beyond the employees who staff the management roles, department board and nominating committee.

## Decision

The Faculty Board decides

- that the Faculty of Social Sciences organisation is to develop towards fewer units,
- that organisational changes are to happen in stages. The objective is for the number of departments/equivalents is to be reduced from eleven today to around half that number, with a reduction to eight units in the coming three to four years,
- to establish a project group and a steering group to drive the development of the organisation forward towards fewer units.

The project group is to take into account the risks identified by the Departmental Leadership Team that relate to issues of 1) subject identity and outward profiling, 2) asymmetry between units, 3) tensions between the existing delegation rules and renewed organisational structures.

The project group is to proceed within the following framework:

- It is to work towards achieving the objective of the directional decision.
- It is to conduct or order necessary investigations.
- It is to produce required supporting documentation for decision-making and negotiation.
- It is to ensure that the process is transparent and that the faculty's employees are kept informed.
- It is to ensure that the process and the decisions do not jeopardise the quality of core operations.
- It is to ensure that the process and the decisions do not restrict the academic freedom of teaching staff.

- It is to ensure that the process does not result in increased administrative superstructure and bureaucratisation.

The project group is to include at least one representative from the teaching staff and a representative from the administrative support organisation and is to be led by a vice-dean. The members of the project group are to be appointed by the Faculty Board. The project group is to work according to a project plan, which is updated ahead of each financial year.

The project group reports on an ongoing basis to a steering group led by the dean (project owner). The Faculty Board appoint members of the steering group after suggestions from the dean.

The Social Sciences Student Union appoints the student representative to the steering group.