



Vetenskapsrådet

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Utvärdering av Vetenskapsrådets anslag till konstnärlig forskning och utveckling 2001-2005

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VETENSKAPSRÅDET

103 78 Stockholm

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ISSN 1651-7350

ISBN 91-7307-110-9

Grafisk Form: Erik Hagbard Couchér, Vetenskapsrådet

Omslagsbild: Gösta Wessel

Tryck: CM Digitaltryck, Bromma 2007

SUMMARY

Evaluation of grants for artistic research and development

In autumn 2005, the Swedish Research Council appointed a Nordic expert panel to evaluate the Council's support for artistic research and development (R&D), which has been provided since 2001, in terms of the guidelines defined in the Research Policy Bill, *Research and Renewal* (Govt. Bill 2000/01:3). To date, some SEK 115 million has been allocated to this area. Initially, these funds were provided in the form of Grants for Artistic Research and Development (for research networks or 'collegia'). Since 2003 the funding has been in the form of support for small projects that are still under way, and for a number of guest professorships. The annual budget for this support has been SEK 20 million. The evaluation is to cover the seven collegia and the first seven projects.

The evaluation panel comprises Professor Kirsten Langkilde (Berlin University of the Arts), a visual artist; Professor Pentti Paavolainen (Theatre Academy in Helsinki); Professor Halina Dunin-Woyseth (Oslo School of Architecture and Design); and the undersigned Henrik Karlsson, senior lecturer in Musicology. The panel's report is to be presented in February. This article summarises the main features of the report and its key recommendations. For further details, please see the full report.

Assignment

The proposal for an evaluation was made by the working group that allocated the grants. Guidelines were issued by the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences in order to provide documentation and guidance for the Council's further support for what was described as 'similar work'. It is no secret that within this Scientific Council there have long been differences of opinion regarding support for artistic R&D and whether this new research field should be given special treatment, as hitherto, or placed on a par with the arts disciplines in the Scientific Council.

The guidelines for the evaluation panel, based on the Research Policy Bill and the first calls for applications for artistic R&D grants, were as follows:

1. Have the collegia contributed to a development of methods for artistic research, and if so how?
2. Have the activities in the grant-receiving collegia fulfilled the criteria in the call for applications?
3. Have the collegia reported on their work satisfactorily?
4. Have the collegia promoted collaboration between artists and researchers?
5. Have the organisational differences among the university colleges of fine arts in Sweden (those in Stockholm being public agencies in their own right, while the ones in Gothenburg, Lund and Malmö form part of the universities concerned) influenced the collegia's work, and if so how?
6. How has international collaboration been organised within the collegia, and how has this functioned?

In our work, we have followed the current routine for evaluations of research projects at higher education institutions (HEIs): assessment of documentation (monographs, dissertations and preliminary final reports), 'self-evaluations' (questionnaires) and site visits (hearings). After the first site visits and discussions with the collegia, we noted that it was hardly possible to discuss one of the criteria, 'programme modules focusing on documented theoretical reflection on research and development work in the artistic sphere'. This was because both the Swedish Research Council and the collegia had evidently, in reality, attached less importance to this criterion. We then made a request for supplementary material from collegia and projects, in the form of a series of questions about the development of theoretical and methodological issues, and thereafter received ample documentation for assessing that aspect as well.

The assignment has been instructive and intriguing both for us personally and in terms of research policy. One complication is that relevant examples and methods for simultaneously assessing both scientific and artistic merits are lacking. Evaluation methodology in this area may be said to be at the same tentative experimental stage as the development of the paradigm (if it may be described as such) of artistic research, or not even there. The SWOT method (analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is usable to some extent. The thick manual entitled *RAE 2008. Panel criteria and working methods* (Panel O) for the arts and cultural spheres that the British RAE (Research Assessment Exercise; see www.rae.ac.uk) issued in 2006 is a rigorous, detailed schedule that is impossible to apply, since our university systems are so dissimilar. Other difficulties are that language and termi-

nology for quality assessments in the artistic research category are lacking, and that the university colleges of fine arts, and practitioners themselves, only reluctantly commit such assessments to paper.

In its report, the evaluation panel has opted to focus on the future and what we perceive as the most urgent challenges to artistic research, in order to foster higher quality and a sensible way of distributing resources. The intention is not primarily to act as a judge of completed projects, but to argue for the development opportunities we have been able to identify. An introductory chapter of the report therefore describes artistic R&D in a European context: the harmonisation of higher education in the Berlin–Bologna Process, variants of doctoral degrees and the challenge that the university colleges of fine arts, with their traditional subject programmes and boundaries, are now facing from the global environment, notably the ‘creative industries’, in a contemporary digitised media society that requires highly trained and skilled people in art, as in other areas.

Summaries

Turning now to answer the Swedish Research Council’s six questions, we encounter a complication connected with the imprecision of the Council’s own application calls and instructions. One key word is ‘collaboration’, between artists and researchers and with international networks. Since ‘collaboration’ is not defined in detail, the question may unreservedly be answered in the affirmative. But closer scrutiny shows that collaboration can vary from individual guest lectures and consultations among ‘friendly faces’ to forms in which scientific and artistic institutions have cooperated on equal terms and with the same levels of input. Are all forms of collaboration, then, of equal worth or have they yielded equally valuable results?

When, in several cases, the replies to these questions contain reservations of this kind it suggests, in our estimation, either that the Swedish Research Council’s primary strategy for support for and development of the area of artistic R&D has not been understood and complied with by the collegia, intentionally or otherwise, or that the actual basic idea, as such, was conventional and fruitless. This is because as conceived by us it was based on the hope that organised *encounters* between Art and Science would bring about the creative environments that would result in a corpus of texts and other results. Several of the collegia have pointed out that the collegium model lacks solid support among the university colleges of fine arts, and that the ‘encounters’ between Art and Science are based on dichotomies that tend to lock the status quo instead of promoting the emergence of a new research field on its own terms.

In any case, reports and results from several of the collegia are, in our view, strikingly scanty and highly fragmented. Indeed, a couple of them were terminated prematurely since the Research Council deemed the results inadequate. The results from the seven projects are, in part, entirely different – exemplarily well documented and innovative – but this is also due to the fact that they were based on specific issues and the use of established, defined methods, without being subject to the demands for general theoretical development that were imposed on the collegia. The combination of the collegia's more experimental and exploratory way of working and the result-oriented empirical methods of the projects nonetheless yields a satisfactory reply to the Council's first question: yes, they have all contributed to the development of methods and the enhancement of individual and institutional knowledge in this field.

The report contains more detailed discussions of what we perceive as shortcomings in the collegia's management of their grants on the one hand and, on the other, the Research Council's lack of 'coaching' and advice for a new research field. In its establishment phase, this field needed considerably clearer guidelines, notably on what was expected by way of reports and results. If the aggregate impression of support for artistic R&D is not unequivocally positive, responsibility for this should be divided equally between the Council and the collegia.

We have seen many good initiatives and results, and noted that interest in artistic R&D has been broadened and intensified in all HEIs. We therefore propose concerted efforts and new arrangements aimed at consolidating artistic R&D as an independent, freestanding research field with university status and on a competitive European level. The measures we propose below, partly outside the scope of our assignment, are in harmony with the current overview of resource distribution and control of research and post-graduate education that is under way in Sweden (*Resursutredningen*).

Recommendations

The evaluation panel recommends that the remaining projects in the Swedish Research Council's artistic R&D be completed and evaluated. The panel also recommends a transition to a second phase based on a long-term development strategy and a programme spanning all grant levels from artistic development to research projects at the highest level.

Amalgamation of the eight university colleges of fine arts in Stockholm to form an independent university of the arts, with the right to award doctoral degrees, is proposed. Permanent organisational collaboration on this level should be the condition for setting up a graduate school in Stockholm,

with the aim of rapidly establishing sufficient critical mass and a research environment. This would also facilitate effective participation in the Bologna Process through joint harmonisation of Bachelor, Master and PhD levels in a common EU standard.

Henceforward, evaluation of applications in artistic R&D should take place in two stages, with external experts assessing the most advanced applications. The applications that are approved should be drawn up in detail in consultation with the research secretary or administrator according to the practice followed in several of the research foundations, and the projects should be monitored continuously by the grant providers concerned.

An international reference group should be formed to take charge of contacts with and information about international developments. This group should be independent of aesthetic paradigms, art forms or Swedish higher-education policy. The group should serve as a general advisor in the drawing-up of a long-term research strategy.

We have noted that systematic quality assurance and quality assessments are a neglected area, and we therefore recommend a working group with the task of discussing and formulating criteria for quality assurance of artistic research projects. This area is in acute need of established practice and language for assessment of artistic aspects, which have also been strikingly neglected in the assessment of doctoral theses that have been debated in 2006.

Finally, we recommend the Swedish Research Council to arrange a high-level conference to build bridges between the university colleges of the fine arts and the closely related arts disciplines, the purpose being to eliminate once and for all the misunderstandings and distrust that prevail between them and have increased, rather than decreasing, since support for artistic R&D was introduced. Progressive development of artistic research is possible only if there is collaboration with the closely related artistic disciplines, and both parties have everything to gain from a mutual exchange. Unless artistic R&D can be accepted as a research field in its own right, with an earmarked annual budget and the same independent status as, for example, the Committee for Educational Sciences in the Swedish Research Council, our conclusion is that a different public agency or principal for artistic R&D support should be considered.

On behalf of the evaluation panel,

Henrik Karlsson

I regeringens forskningsproposition 2000/01:3 angavs forskning på det konstnärliga området som ett av sex prioriterade forskningsfält. Medel avsattes inom ramen för Vetenskapsrådets budget från år 2001. Fram t.o.m. 2007 har sammanlagt 115 mkr disponerats för konstnärlig forskning. En särskild arbetsgrupp inom rådet har fördelat bidrag ur detta anslag, först till ett antal större nätverk (kollegier) och från även 2003 till mindre projekt.

Stödet till konstnärligt FoU har nu utvärderats av en nordisk expertgrupp, som här lägger fram sin rapport. Granskningen har omfattat de sju stora kollegierna och de sju första projekten. Expertgruppen har bestått av professor Halina Dunin-Woyseth (Oslo), professor Kirsten Langkilde (Berlin), professor Pentti Paavolainen (Helsingfors) och docent Henrik Karlsson (Uppsala). Förutom utvärderingen av kollegiernas och projektens resultat lämnar gruppen även ett antal förslag i syfte att konsolidera den konstnärliga forskningen i Sverige och utveckla dess konkurrenskraft i ett internationellt perspektiv.



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ISSN 1651-7350
ISBN 91-7307-110-9
