



Vetenskapsrådet



**THE FUTURE OF SWEDISH RESEARCH!**

**OVERVIEW 2014  
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

## THE FUTURE OF SWEDISH RESEARCH

The Swedish Research Council developed a series of overviews and analyses in 2014 which serve as the foundation for the Board's summary conclusions and recommendations on research policy choices to promote Swedish research in the coming 5 to 10 years. This project is designated "The future of research" and will be summarised in a final report in the summer of 2015. As a whole, the material serves as the foundation in the documentation the Swedish Research Council is compiling for the government's upcoming research bill in 2016.

Overviews have been put together for the following seven research domains:

- humanities and social sciences
- natural sciences and engineering sciences
- medicine and health
- educational sciences
- artistic research
- development research
- research infrastructure

THE FUTURE OF SWEDISH RESEARCH! OVERVIEW 2014 HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL

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# SUBJECT OVERVIEW 2014: HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The subject overview was produced by the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, the Secretary General of the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences and colleagues at the Swedish Research Council and active researchers who have contributed as writers in their fields of research. The subject overview has been approved by the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences.

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# FOREWORD

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Subject Overview 2014: Humanities and Social Sciences gives a future-oriented overview of the current status of Swedish research. The overview is part of the knowledge base that the Swedish Research Council has compiled to provide a basis for decisions, in preparation for the government's upcoming research bill, and to allow scientific councils, academic councils and committees to set priorities. It can also be used as reference material in the research sector.

The overview was produced by the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences at the Swedish Research Council. A considerable part of the underlying documentation consists of research overviews written by active researchers, who have been selected by the Swedish Research Council's Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences. The research overviews are included in an appendix to this subject overview. The research overviews have been subject to discussion at a scientific council seminar. The preliminary draft of the compiled subject overview and the research overviews were posted on a web forum in 2014 and were commented upon by active researchers from around the country. Structural analyses produced by the Swedish Research Council's Department for Research Policy Analysis have also been included in the underlying documentation. Further information and documentation for the subject overview was gathered during the Secretary General's faculty visits in spring 2014.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed constructively to the subject overview. Special thanks go to the scientific council for many interesting and constructive discussions.

Stockholm, 9 January 2015

Kerstin Sahlin  
Secretary General for Humanities and Social Sciences

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# SAMMANFATTNING

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Humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning utvecklar kunskapen om människan, kulturer och samhällen. Forskningen adresserar dagsaktuella utmaningar men också historiska skeenden och grundläggande frågor om handling, mänskligt tänkande, språk och interaktion, kulturer och samhällets utveckling.

Ämnesöversikten tar sin utgångspunkt i den starka utveckling som präglat området under de senaste åren. Tillgängliga data vittnar om en kraftig internationalisering och ökad publicering. Humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning ger samtidigt avgörande kunskapsunderlag för det svenska samhällets minne, utveckling och debatt. Samverkan med samhället utgör en integrerad del av den humanistisk-samhällsvetenskapliga forskningen. Kunskapsutvecklingen inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap har gått hand i hand med en utbyggd infrastruktur och en stark metodutveckling. En översikt över den forskning som Vetenskapsrådet stöder inom området visar att tvärvetenskaplig forskning utgör ett väsentligt inslag samtidigt som den inomvetenskapliga forskningen har varit helt avgörande för att utveckla både kunskap för morgondagen och helt nya kunskapsområden bortom det som redan är känt.

Humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning betonar de långa och vida perspektiv som är nödvändiga för att göra rätt bedömningar idag och för framtiden och som motverkar en för ett demokratiskt samhälle farlig kontext- och historielöshet. Forskningen bidrar med en gedigen kunskapsbas för utvecklingen av ett starkt samhälle. Dagens forskning danar morgondagens utbildning och morgondagens medborgare. Den viktigaste spridningen av forskning sker genom den högre utbildningen. Närmare sex av tio av Sveriges universitets- och högskolestudenter studerar på humanistiska och samhällsvetenskapliga utbildningar. I mötet med aktiva forskare blir det möjligt för studenter att utveckla det självständiga och kritiska tänkandet och den kreativitet som en forskningsbaserad undervisning ger grunden för.

I ämnesöversikten rekommenderas ett antal tematiska satsningar där forskningen särskilt kan utveckla en kunskapsbaserad hantering av livets och samhällets utmaningar. Under varje rekommendation ges också exempel på det kunskapsunderlag som humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning bidrar med till människans och samhällets utveckling. Först konstateras dock att den fria forskningen, och det fria projektbidraget, utgör kärnan i Vetenskapsrådets forskningsfinansiering och behöver stärkas. En öppen humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning är grundläggande för ett öppet samhälle och en kunskapsbaserad debatt. De tematiska rekommendationerna samlas under rubrikerna Bedömning och beslut i samhället, Människan, naturen och de nya teknologierna, Förutsättningar för global sammanhållning, Nya förutsättningar för välfärden samt Det digitala samhällets möjligheter och risker. Temana baseras på de förslag som utvecklats i de ämnes- och forskningsöversikter som finns i bilaga.

Därefter ges strukturella rekommendationer för en stärkt forskning inom området. Vikten av en fri nyfikenhetsbaserad, kunskaps- och forskarinitierad forskning för ett öppet samhälle kan inte nog betonas. Stödet till fria forskningsbidrag inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap måste stärkas för att upprätthålla bredd och djup i kunskapsutvecklingen och för att överhuvudtaget upprätthålla ett system där forskare konkurrerar om forskningsmedel och där projektansökningar granskas för att säkerställa högsta kvaliteten.

Forskningen utgör grunden för dagens och morgondagens utbildning. För att möjliggöra att forskning och utbildning hålls samman och ge studenter en utbildning på vetenskaplig grund behövs en stärkt basfinansiering till universitet och högskolor. Vidare krävs tydliga karriärvägar för att unga forskare ska stanna kvar inom högre utbildning – som lärare och forskare. Osäkra anställningsförhållanden leder till att få unga vågar ta de risker som krävs för att utveckla banbrytande forskning som kan leda till nydanande kunskapsgenombrott.

Strukturella rekommendationer ges också för hur särskilt stark humaniora och samhällsvetenskap kan vidareutvecklas. Digitalisering samt register och databaser som ger svensk humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning unika förutsättningar måste byggas ut och underhållas. Kunskapen om digitalisering behöver utvecklas i takt med en snabbare digitalisering. Humanistiska och samhällsvetenskapliga forskare samarbetar över ämnes- och lärosättesgränser i Sverige och utomlands. Det behövs särskilda rambidrag för sådana något större projekt, också i kombination med utbyggd infrastruktur och med medel för internationell mobilitet.

Humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning producerar viktiga resultat och skapar ny kunskap internationellt och nationellt. De mått som finns för att mäta forskningens resultat samlat i form av publikationsdatabaser och bibliometri har en begränsad täckning av humanistisk samhällsvetenskapliga publikationer. För att samlat synliggöra resultaten behövs det därför bättre och kunskapsbaserade mått.

Ämnesöversikten avslutas med sammanfattande slutsatser rörande forskningens internationella och nationella genomslag samt slutsatser gällande morgondagens utmaningar för forskningens kvalitet och genomslag. I rapportens avslutning sammanfattas också rapportens rekommendationer i punktform.

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## SUMMARY

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Social Science and Humanities (SSH) research improves the knowledge of the human condition, culture and society. SSH research addresses current societal challenges, but also historical processes and fundamental questions relating to human conduct, human reasoning, language & interaction, cultures and community development.

The present subject overview illustrates the strong evolution in the research field in recent years. Available data show proof of strong internationalisation and higher publication rates. At the same time, the SSH research constitutes a crucial knowledge base for the Swedish society. The interaction with society is an integral part of the SSH research and the development of knowledge in the SSH research field has gone hand-in-hand with the development of infrastructure and new methods. A survey of the research funded by the Swedish Research Council has shown that a significant proportion of the research is interdisciplinary. At the same time, disciplinary research continues to play a crucial role in the development of future knowledge and completely new fields of knowledge.

SSH research stresses the broad and long-term perspective that is needed to make correct assessments, both today and for the future. This also contributes to combat the lack of context and history that forms a danger to democratic society. The research provides a solid knowledge base for the development of a strong society. Today's research shapes the education and the citizens of tomorrow. Research findings are mainly disseminated through higher education. Approximately six out of ten students at Swedish HEIs follow SSH courses or programmes. Interaction with active researchers enables them to develop their capacity for independent and critical thinking as well as their creativity through the research-based education.

The subject overview contains recommendations on a number of themes, where research could particularly contribute to the development of a knowledge-based approach to societal challenges. Each recommendation contains examples illustrating how SSH research has contributed to the knowledge in the fields of human and societal development. The thematic recommendations are presented under the following headings: Judgement and decisions in social life; Human, nature and the new technologies; Conditions for global cohesion; New conditions for welfare; The digital society's opportunities and risks. The suggested themes are based on proposals presented in the enclosed subject and research overviews.

A number of structural recommendations are also presented, with a view to strengthening the SSH research. The significance of free, knowledge-based, curiosity-driven and researcher-initiated research for an open society cannot be over-emphasised. Support for general research grants in the humanities and social sciences must be strengthened, both to maintain the breadth and depth of the research and the existing system where researchers compete for funding and project proposals are subject to a peer review procedure to ensure that the funded research is of the highest quality.

Research in the humanities and social sciences forms the basis of today's and tomorrow's education system. Increased core funding for universities and higher education institutions is required to maintain the link between research and education and give students an education based on scientific knowledge. Furthermore, clear career paths are needed to make young researchers stay on in higher education, both in the capacity of teachers and researchers. Precarious employment conditions result in a situation where too few young people are willing to take the risks connected with pioneering research, which might give rise to innovative breakthroughs.

Structural recommendations are also presented for the further improvement of particularly strong SSH areas. Registers and databases, as well as digitization and historical and topical material, create unique conditions for Swedish SHH and must be strengthened and maintained. Knowledge on digitization must be developed to keep up with the increasing digitization pace. Researchers in the humanities and social sciences collaborate across institutions, disciplines and countries. Special framework grants are needed for larger projects of this kind, and should be accompanied by infrastructure development and international mobility funding.

The SSH research produces important findings and gives rise to new knowledge, both on the national and international level. The research indicators established to measure findings, in publication databases and

bibliometric databases, provide limited coverage of SSH research publications. Better knowledge-based indicators are therefore needed to measure results and impact of SSH research.

The final part of the subject overview contains summary conclusions on the national and international research impact, and on the future challenges with regard to the quality and the impact of SSH research. The report recommendations are also summarised in bullet points.

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# A RESEARCH FIELD IN STRONG DEVELOPMENT

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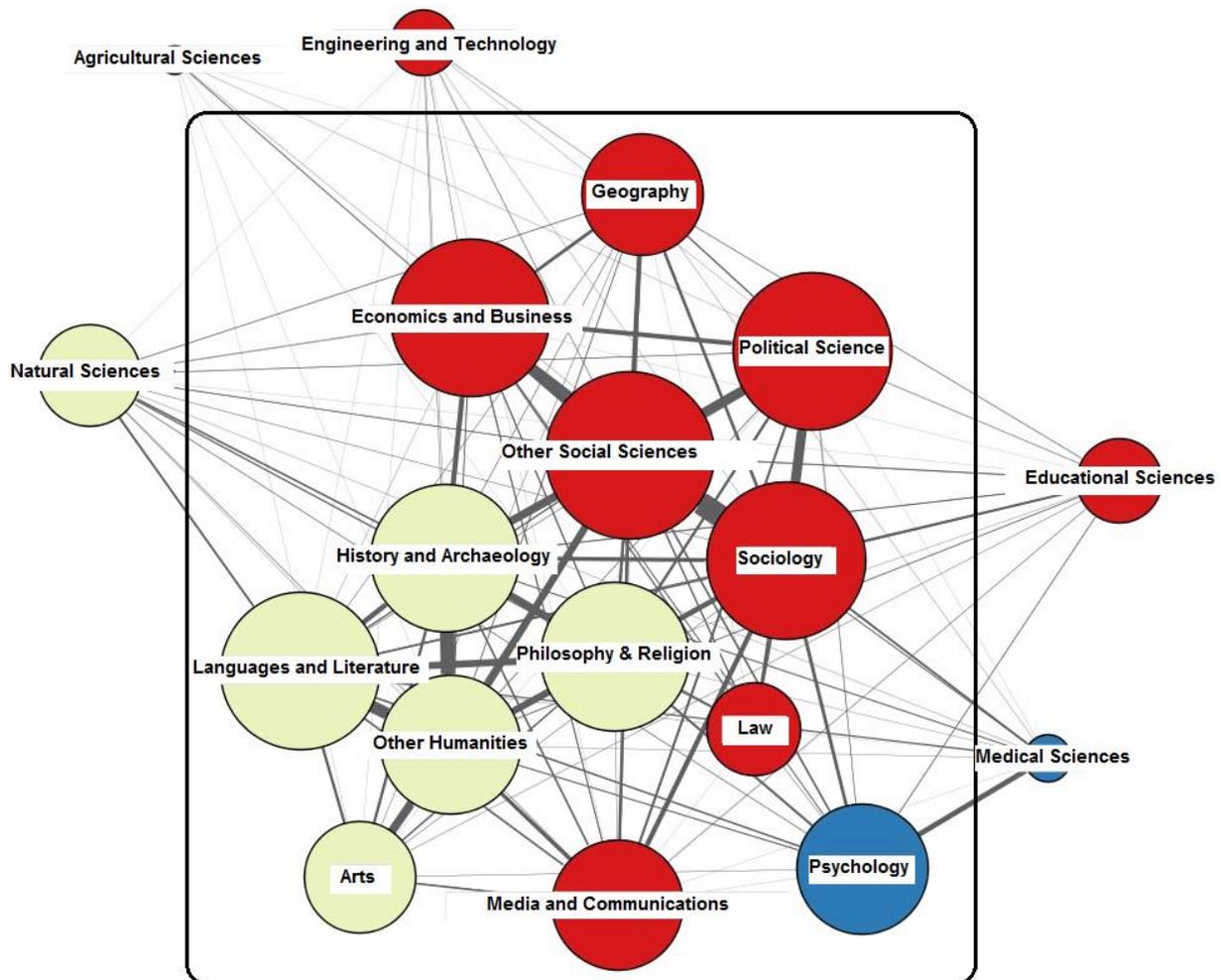
The humanities and social sciences field of research is developing strongly. One expression of this is the considerable increase in Swedish researchers' international publication. At the same time as the total number of publications in the international databases doubled between 2000 and 2012, Swedish publications in the field of humanities tripled and quadrupled in the social sciences. An increase in international research collaborations can also be seen; the proportion of Swedish publications with at least one foreign co-author increased over the same period from 10% to 20% in the humanities and from 10% to just over 30% in the social sciences. The international impact in terms of citation rates has also increased markedly in both the humanities and the social sciences. At the same time, the research in the field continues to provide necessary knowledge for the Swedish society and for societal reforms. Research in the humanities and social sciences is important to society, something which can be seen from the fact that researchers in this field appear in the media with their own articles or expert opinions more or less daily.

New methods, new data and new infrastructure have made it possible to study entirely new aspects of human development, interaction, language and action. The use of brain imaging and DNA has increased our knowledge of how social, linguistic, psychological and biological mechanisms interact. Unique Swedish registers are used to develop knowledge about, among other things, people's health in different ages and in different parts of society, educational levels coupled to health and economy and life conditions, family formation, housing segregation and gender differences in the labour market. The digitizing of both historical and contemporary material has enabled systematic studies to be made of large amounts of material, often with comparative elements. A part of this development is often termed "big data". Image and text analysis in the medialised society are competences that are undergoing rapid development and are necessary in the formation process of the knowledge society. New methods are being developed and used together with the systematic use of more traditional methods with archive studies, surveys, experiments, content analyses, interviews, source criticism, observations, etc.

The development of disciplinary research is crucial to allow new research questions and new knowledge to be developed and used in society. At the same time, the knowledge development in recent years in the humanities and social sciences has taken place in the interface between disciplines and the borders between disciplines are porous. This has strengthened interdisciplinary research and at the same time provided opportunities for collaboration with the natural sciences and medicine and for the establishment of entirely new fields of knowledge in the humanistic and social sciences, which have in some cases developed into strong education subjects. Interdisciplinary science and disciplinary depth go hand in hand. The most successful interdisciplinary science has evolved over time – not necessarily as a result of specially targeted forms of funding. Instead, this emphasises the importance of good interdisciplinary settings that are clearly based on fundamental concept development in each individual subject.

Almost three out of five students at Swedish universities and institutes of higher education study humanities and social sciences. To maintain quality and topicality in these programmes, strong research and linkages to research are crucial. The many teachers at universities and higher education institutions who hold doctorates constitute a good foundation for developing research in this field. The number of professors, lecturers, researchers and graduates in these fields has increased significantly since 2001. At the same time, data on university employees shows a generation shift among professors in the most recent years. Here a large number of well-qualified young researchers with up to date skills can potentially be found. Over the past two years, however, the application success rate for project grants in humanities and social sciences awarded by the Swedish Research Council has fallen to unacceptably low levels. The high application pressure is an indication of intensive and, in international contexts, well-oriented research. At the same time, such a low success rate means great uncertainty for the researchers and research of very high quality also receives no funding. The low success rate can partly be attributed to the increase in the application pressure and to the development of methods and collaborations in humanities and social sciences research that has led to research being conducted to a greater degree in larger groups, making it more expensive. There is a risk in this regard that the research development potential will not be tapped.

Bibliometric measures are often used to describe the structure and development of the fields of research in general terms. Research publications in humanities and social sciences show considerably greater breadth than is covered by the most prominent publication databases, which are largely limited to articles in English-language journals, mainly those published in the US and the UK. To provide a general picture of the field, we here include a cluster analysis based on the applications in the humanities and social sciences submitted to the Swedish Research Council between 2011 and 2013.<sup>1</sup> The figure shows quite clearly the diversity of the subjects in the field and the interdisciplinary links, both within humanities and social sciences and in relation to other scientific fields.



<sup>1</sup> Every application is classified by research subject level according to the Statistics Sweden standard, with up to three different subjects chosen by the applicant. The subjects have been grouped according to Statistics Sweden's three-digit level. The sizes of the circles are in proportion to the number of applications classified in the area, and the widths of the lines between the areas indicate the number of linkages. The colours of the circles indicate identified cohesive clusters, which largely correspond to the division into humanistic and social sciences subjects. *Other social sciences* primarily comprises the subjects of *Gender Studies*, *Interdisciplinary Studies* and *Working Life Studies*. *Other humanities* comprises *Classical Archaeology and Ancient History*, *Cultural Studies*, and *Ethnology*, among others. *Geography* comprises *Cultural Geography* and *Economic Geography*.

## Basic research for human and societal development

Humanities and social sciences research analyses and problematises complex states of affairs, where the value often lies in questioning habitual attitudes and ideological points of departure. Research creates knowledge through new discoveries as well as through the development of new perspectives. These two ways are not independent of each other since new conceptual and methodological approaches often lead to new discoveries, at the same time as discoveries may question prevailing norms. Statements and simplified pictures are examined, not only from the point of view of source criticism but also from an ideological and conceptual perspective. Humanities and social sciences research can offer resistance against dogmatic, simplified notions of reality. It may be a matter of problematizing common categorisations or relating what appears to be essentially different traditions of thought, in for example natural sciences and art or medicine and religion, to each other. Thanks to long-term perspectives and comparisons, we can gain a deeper understanding of and new knowledge about both individual phenomena and the course of development in the broader sense, and of their causes and effects. Values that have influenced social structures and their development over the centuries can inter alia be uncovered through research on the language through which these values are expressed. Language is an effective instrument in the hands of those in power and the mechanisms that are used can be elucidated by means of analyses in for example the areas of critical discourse analysis and pragmatics.

Research on the conditions and development of humans, on societal structures and linguistic usage, and on literature and different cultures has an intrinsic value. People want to know, for example, about world history, old literature, development of societies, how happiness can be expressed, and the migration patterns of previous generations. The thirst for knowledge in itself justifies curiosity-based research being given sufficient space. Aesthetic research and research on cultural heritage are important bearers of tradition but also create new ways of thinking and perceiving the world. New knowledge drives new visions and provides a foundation for new ways of acting, it creates new solutions not before conceived and it gives us tools to discover new unsatisfactory states of affairs that are crying out for action to be taken. Truly crucial discoveries cannot be made until we discover things that we did not realize we did not know anything about.

In today's multicultural society, in the global economy where reality is constantly changing and in a world filled with information flows, research is needed that can help us see the big picture and think critically. Free formation of knowledge is central to all enlightened and civilised societies in order to prevent corruption and to develop and maintain democracies. Cultural skills and classical humanism also have their given place in the business world, just as they are a prerequisite to be able to better understand today's nationalistic currents and political, religious and ethnic conflicts. Some of these currents follow from events that take place today, others build on long historical courses of events.

The echo of past times in current times cannot be emphasised enough. When Russia annexed Crimea in spring 2014, the western world's response was lightning-fast. The Cold War had re-emerged, albeit in a different guise. When the Swedish Navy was tracking foreign submarines in the Stockholm archipelago in autumn 2014, dark newspaper headlines blared out, "Cold War Winds in a New World". History is thus constantly at hand to put words to the present and the future, thereby shaping how we think. The dramatic Cold War is still strongly rooted in people's minds and acts as an interpreting framework for contemporary events. In Sweden and the rest of the Baltic Sea region, relationships to Russia and people's conception and interpretation of what was reported during 2014 are also reflected in a collective writing of history that dates back several hundreds of years. References to the Cold War echo against a soundboard of western European alienation from the Byzantine cultural sphere. Historical analogies abound. Research on cultures and rituals in relation to monuments shows convincingly how history hooks itself into our own times. Plans for the future are braced against how people lived in the past. The financial crises of recent decades are another example of how previous decades' crises also influence current events and the current debate. At the same time, important lessons can be learned from studying history on how crises develop and are handled and their consequences. Echoes from the past resound in the current debate. All social, political and cultural relationships, together with many technological and scientific relationships, are thus embedded in history. A deep knowledge of history and other languages, cultures and societies, both dead and living – in other words education – is the tool with which humans can understand who they are and try to form the prerequisites for their ways of life.

Humanities and Social Sciences make a crucial contribution to approaching human problems. But too one-sided an occupation with society's major challenges can at the same time restrict the knowledge task. There is therefore good reason to call attention to other aspects of the knowledge process: communication, cultural competence, critical thinking and the ability to problematize and see things in their context. Judgement and decisions in social life; Human, nature and the new technologies; Conditions for global cohesion; New conditions for welfare; The digital society's opportunities and risks provides crucial bases for handling society's great challenges. This research is in turn founded on basic research on human, culture and society. There is no clear demarcation line between basic and applied research. Research makes our times intelligible, which in turn facilitates thoughts and forecasts of the future. Nor is it possible, given changes in society, to establish with any certainty what research results will be of most use in the future. Curiosity-driven free knowledge-seeking is therefore an absolute necessity for human's and society's development and welfare. Good research requires a long-term approach and is driven by curiosity. Naturally, we can point to areas where new knowledge is needed, but what is useful research only becomes apparent in a later stage.

A valuation of research that emphasises short-term benefit too strongly risks undermining and erasing areas of knowledge and scientific skills that have been built up over decades, areas of knowledge that make up the foundation of education all the way from compulsory comprehensive school to research institutes, that give society capacity to understand, interpret and reinterpret the world and that define science's preparedness to travel and defend new research questions. The future is by nature unpredictable and research in the humanities and social sciences must therefore also maintain skills in fields of knowledge where immediate short-term benefit may be difficult to measure. It is impossible to predict what subjects and knowledge will be central to future societies. Experience that does not lie very far in the past shows that what Germans call *Orchideenfächer* has quickly proven itself to be of the highest relevance. This applies to Iranian Studies after 1979, Chinese in recent decades, Islamic Studies after 11 September 2001, Eastern European History after the Crimea crisis, etc.

## Humanities and social sciences research to handle the global challenges

It is obvious that many of the challenges facing society today are generated by people's decisions, actions and way of life; poverty, war and conflicts, climate changes, financial crises, demographic changes, global migration, urbanisation, illiteracy, health problems and pandemics. Research on languages' importance and changes, art's power to portray and emancipatory potential, societies' development and sustainability, political power, the importance of religion, man's social intercourse and the influence of history reveal the valuation patterns and mechanisms that facilitate or prevent the resolution of difficult economic, democratic and environmental problems. Societal challenges such as environmental problems and war prove that technological innovations and medicines alone cannot resolve problems in Sweden and the rest of the world. Knowledge of our human and societal structure is crucial as a basis for good decisions. Humanities and social sciences research shows that social trust and non-corrupt economic, political, social and cultural institutions are indispensable to resolve problems effectively.

The ability to deal with climate and environmental problems is one of the key issues of our time. Our present situation is a result of long historical processes. The problems require action and adaptation in the present at the same time as the consequences of today's decisions and actions will be decisive for several generations to come, perhaps even for man's survival. It is therefore important to study earlier people's reactions to climate changes, for example the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, where Archaeology and Ancient History interact with Paleoclimatology.

Today's societal challenges require deeper knowledge of the past. The time perspective must be constantly kept up to date in research, in knowledge development, in the social debate, in culture and in man's understanding of himself. The long-term perspective – historical and future-oriented – needs to be brought up to date among other things in the light of an alarmist agenda, policy development, and focused research support. The social debate at times demonstrates a reluctance to look at the past to put the present day in perspective. We emphasised above that historical research has an intrinsic value. In discussions on societal

challenges, we should also remember that the present also changes. In thirty years' time, we may very well have an entirely different situation to today and we must then have the really broad historical foundation to be able to provide new keys to understanding and action. It is furthermore just as important to develop and investigate long perspectives that can take on the question of which changes – in human behaviour and in society's institutions – that are needed now for us to be able to handle our responsibility towards future generations. However, not only the present is changing but also our picture of the past. Our conceptions of what has happened through the ages change over time. The past takes shape in the present, which in turn contributes to constantly changing expectations on the present and the future. The three dimensions of time are like inter-communicating vessels.

Humanities and social sciences research has in many respects followed on from society's technological and social changes and from a need to understand how changes have arisen and what they mean for the present and the future. Research has made the driving forces and consequences of development intelligible. But nonetheless, the world appears largely powerless in the face of many challenges since solutions require people to change their behaviour both individually and collectively. It has become increasingly important to make intelligible what society's technological and social changes mean for today and tomorrow. A too one-sided focus on research in technology and natural sciences will not be enough when it comes to understanding the importance of human action. Technological and medical innovations are of course needed to solve the world's climate and health problems. A social and human sciences approach is however needed to be able to understand why people despite knowing better continue to use coal for heating, get into their cars every morning or over-prescribe antibiotics.

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## THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

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The most important strategic initiative in humanities and social sciences research is to increase the free project grants, in combination with ensuring that higher education and research are funded and structured in such a way that research and higher education are kept together. Free research and research that maintains active knowledge development about the whole of society in all its diversity and about human's entire life situation and development give us a preparedness to face a development that can take directions that we today cannot predict. Within the free research, particular themes can be identified that address risks and problems that today's society is facing and where Swedish research has great potential to contribute with innovative and relevant knowledge.

In this section, we will make recommendations concerning thematic support in five areas: Judgement and decisions in social life; Human, nature and the new technologies; Conditions for global cohesion; New conditions for welfare; The digital society's opportunities and risks. Our proposals reflect areas of strength in Swedish research, and at the same time identify crucial questions for human and society to be able to handle the societal challenges of the present day. The thematic recommendations are based on analyses and proposals presented in the research and subject overviews that can be found in the appendix.

### Judgement and decisions in social life

People's understanding of different aspects of reality and their use of this understanding to promote their interests and choices influence the development of society for the better and for the worse. In social, political and cultural contexts, this influence manifests itself through people's judgements and decision-making. Such decisions are of decisive importance for choices of direction, outcomes of negotiations, conflicts of interest and collective problems and conflicts of opinion. History is at the same time full of poor judgement and failed decision-making. It is thus of great societal interest to improve our knowledge of how people make assessments and decisions in different kinds of contexts. The media are conveyors of meaning and shape people's conceptual worlds, and thereby how they think and act. In that context, the production of knowledge in the media sphere then becomes entirely central.

Studies of decision-making are conducted within a broad spectrum of research traditions in for example economics, ethnology, philosophy, gender studies, history, psychology, law, social work, sociology, language and cognition, and political science. The research explores both experts' and novices' judgments, actual action and interaction in professional contexts during both short and long decision-making processes and where the outcome of the decision-making has minor or major possible consequences. These situations include decision-making in healthcare, the legal system and the world of finance, and decisions with consequences for lifestyle and consumption. In many contexts, assessments of various kinds of risk are an important component. Forms of decision-making in some contexts are moreover institutionalised and there are thus established procedures and rules. The growth, use/manipulation and criticism of such procedures are important matters in institutional contexts, as are questions of how such procedures can be improved.

One central research theme has been to compare human decision-making with what has traditionally been considered rational behaviour with the purpose of determining whether and how people's decision-making differs from normative models. Research has developed our knowledge of how decisions are made at the same time as many normative models' very narrow assumptions concerning rational decisions have been questioned. With the knowledge developed, alternative, broader rationalities have been formulated at the same time as a constructive discussion is going on about what constitutes an appropriate conceptualisation of good, rational decisions. Researchers have to an increasing degree and in a broader way looked at the question of what kinds of objectives decision-makers try to achieve in different situations.

Humanities and social sciences research contributes important insights about decision-making's basic mechanisms and practicable knowledge of what influences different forms of decision-making. Research within this field should also not only look at the decision as such but the entire course of events, i.e. how one or more layers influence the development of the decision question, how the formation of information about various

possible alternatives is handled, how different kinds of judgements are made as various possible choices take shape, and the implementation and consequences of the decision. It is also vital to develop knowledge of the linguistic side of communication in connection with decision-making. It is partly a matter of linguistic-philosophical aspects and partly of purely linguistic skills.

In societal contexts, decisions are generally made in various social interactions, in private and professional life and inside and outside organisations. This contributes to make it of both theoretical and applied interest to study decision-making processes as they take place on the individual level, inside the family and in more public contexts such as the legal system, inside and between various authorities and corporations, and in relation to clients, consumers, recipients and users. Another example is that of decision-making with consequences for the climate and in other regards for individuals, authorities and organisations.

## Human, nature and the new technologies

Important judgements regarding climate, health, food supply, energy and transportation concern how we value nature. The exploration of human's relationship to nature in a societal challenge perspective belongs to the humanities' and social sciences' most urgent tasks. What conceptions, attitudes and norms influence people's perception of the natural environment and how do we value and relate to what is sometimes termed eco-system services?

Human's relationship to nature changes with technological advances. Technological progress in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was rapid and sweeping. The conditions of life are in many ways radically different today compared to a hundred years ago. It is likely that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will see changes that are even more revolutionary through advances in science, technology and medicine. But embedded in these advances lie potential risks. What institutional and ideological relationships will be required to handle dramatically changed technologies and a possible displacement of the relationship between human and nature?

Human's variable relation to nature has not least been studied within the aesthetic sciences. Studies of art and literature provide knowledge of human's relation to nature at various times, in different contexts and in different places. It is also perhaps logical here to think of nature romanticism. Parts of today's literature, music and art bear the stamp of a new kind of nature romanticism. Nature is also of great importance for religious perceptions. When people in the Nordic countries tell about spiritual experiences, these are often linked to perceptions in nature, something that is less common in other parts of the world. Considering the Scandinavian nature tradition, which is unique in an international context, this interdisciplinary field stands out as particularly important to analyse with new questions and angles of approach. Nature's role as a nation-reinforcing ideological element, as an alternative view of life in an age of secularisation – as well as in the return of religion as an aesthetic category and as a literature and art-historical theme steeped in tradition (the long, continuously enriched tradition of Linnaeus) – is an area with great research potential. Research on human's relation to nature can also give us considerable new insights as a result of the new opportunities to study images and text as was mentioned in the introduction to the overview.

## Conditions for global cohesion

Advances in technology, the natural sciences and medicine presupposes a global context. In humanities and social sciences research, globalisation has been characterised in terms of several co-existing trends: international mobility and the importance of proximity and stability, the decreasing importance of the nation state and neo-nationalism in various forms, English as the dominating language of science and awareness of every language's unique cognitive content, the return of the world religions in public life and secularisation, the importance of what humanity has in common, and the importance of the culture-specific, the long perspectives and rapid changes.

International mobility, be it as regards markets and taxes or refugees and returners, is today in focus in many sciences within the humanities and social sciences. Our age is seeing human migration on a scale of which we have no previous experience. Many researchers claim that climate changes will force even more people to leave the areas where they are now living and settle in areas that have the prerequisites for survival. How are

integration and distribution of assets to take place? These are to a large extent political issues, but with developed research new strategies can also be developed to meet these challenges. When everything is mobile, a need arises for what can be regarded as stable. With modern methods we can investigate the importance of proximity and local establishment as an organising principle in a society increasingly characterised on the one hand by increasing mobility and on the other by a need for solidarity.

The nation state has in some respects decreased in importance, in others it has become more incorporated in trans-national decision structures and contexts. This has for example been shown in political science, economic, and legal research. International and transnational organisations create agendas and new forms of law. Many problems, for example environmental crime, internet-related and international crime presuppose collaboration between several states if they are to be resolved. Here it is important to find and establish norms that are applicable independently of national borders. Humanities and social sciences research is central when it comes to exploring changes in the relationship between the state and the citizens, as it is with regard to international and transnational relations. Neo-nationalistic movements and their prerequisites, spread and background are studied in the present, but no less important are studies that enable historical parallels to be drawn and the historical background to today's conditions and circumstances to be understood.

The presence of religions in public life in the form of welfare players like City Mission or terrorist organisations like The Lord's Resistance Army is impossible to ignore. Forty years ago, there were few who foresaw that religions would come to play an important role in world politics today. If the return of the religions is a noticeable societal change in recent decades, this does not make it a universal phenomenon. Secularisation in the sense of individuals' low or reduced involvement in religious organisations is first and foremost apparent in East Asia, large parts of Europe and to some extent in north-west America. Secularisation in the sense of functional differentiation, where religious institutions have limited influence on areas such as economics, politics, the legal system and technology, is widespread but also questioned. That secularisation should be a self-evident component in modernisation and modernity, as was generally believed until a few decades ago, is nowadays rejected by most researchers. They speak instead of "multiple modernities", where the European variant with a high degree of secularisation is not the only one. The return of the religions and secularisation are an important thematic field when it comes to understanding present-day conflicts, disputes and streams of refugees. The understanding of current developments, however, demands both a contemporary perspective and longer time lines.

What is perceived as being common to humanity is sometimes culture-specific. It is therefore important that the generalisability of research findings in the humanities and social sciences field is tested by allowing people from parts of the world other than the Nordic countries, Western Europe and North America to participate in the research. Another way of looking at what is common to humanity is to agree on some common rules such as the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. An important research question in humanities and social sciences concerns the understanding of meaning and culture. Such research can investigate how understanding of various kinds – including values – changes, is recreated, and disseminated to, and between, people in contexts of varying size. A closer study of how concepts like culture, tradition, language, collective memory and understanding of identity relate to each other is urgently needed. Here it is important to remember that groups are not homogeneous. Culture and cultural differences cannot be reduced to questions of demarcation between ourselves and others. People live in and reproduce several cultural worlds simultaneously.

Long perspectives are important for the understanding of global processes. The fact that people buried in Uppsala hōgar in the 6th century were wearing silk from China bears witness to the existence of early global trading routes. To understand long future perspectives, and to focus on our responsibility towards future generations when it comes to nuclear waste for example is just as urgent. The long perspectives are challenged by periods of rapid change. Such rapid changes can seldom be foreseen, but it is nonetheless important to be prepared for changes, both disciplinary, societal and global, to take place quickly and without warning. Research in humanities and social sciences can both describe how people in different cultures and in different parts of the world have responded to rapid change – in some cases disasters – and draw conclusions about how people are expected to react in situations of unexpected change.

## New conditions for welfare

Swedish research on welfare makes important international contributions to the historical and contemporary understanding of institutions like democracy, labour market and social politics, closely linked to studies of individuals' social mobility, life conditions and co-determination. "The Swedish model" has acted as a kind of laboratory that researchers have been able to use to elucidate both basic research questions and more policy-determining issues. Other countries' interest in "the Swedish model" and in Swedish welfare innovations like "folkskola" (the former elementary school) and pension systems has also made Sweden an important object of study internationally. The changes that have been characteristic for the population and social life over the past 35 years bring to the fore the need to study societal conditions for the individual's power, influence and possibility to shape his or her own life. Displacements and new blends of private and public have taken shape within welfare, trade and industry and society. This creates new opportunities for development but also demands for regulatory frameworks and scrutiny. Studies of new conditions for welfare span a broad spectrum of humanistic and social science perspectives, from basic research on welfare's changes, content and significance to endeavours to produce knowledge of immediate importance for society's future development.

The labour market, which has been a central mechanism in "the Swedish model", is undergoing a sweeping structural change, where the labour force is ageing and increasingly fewer people have lifelong careers in traditional blue- and white-collar professions, at the same time as more and more people risk being excluded from the labour market for all or part of their lives. This not only has consequences for the labour market's functioning and distribution policy but is also of significance for society's valuation of work, for people's view of work and its identity-creating role. The Swedish school system, which for a long time was at the forefront internationally, has changed fundamentally and is strongly questioned, but knowledge of how this change affects the prerequisites for Sweden as a knowledge nation is still non-existent. What importance does the free choice of school have? The times in which we live in many ways mark a demobilisation of the model and raises issues about the Swedish model's contextual prerequisites and socio-cultural conditions. Here there is a need for humanities and social sciences research that comprises cultural-historical studies of how people view work over time and space, ethnic and socio-psychological studies of social and cultural exclusion mechanisms, economic analyses of the financing of pension and social security systems and organisation studies of the changes in trade unions' influence to name just a few areas.

When we speak about change we like to do so as if it were a homogeneous linear process, whereas in actual fact cultural and social changes take entirely different forms for different groups, economies and artefacts. Some changes are fast and sweeping, for example the globalisation of the economy and the digitization of the information flow, while others are slower, such as displacements in class and population structures. An equally important but under-studied insight is thus our perception of changes in society taking place on several time-scales simultaneously. Deeper understanding is needed of how such time-scales interact and "hook onto" each other along with more knowledge of how people perceive and relate to time and to changes in time-scales at different distances from themselves.

Greater individualisation brings with it greater scepticism towards collective solutions and weakened or alternative collective identities. In parallel with individualisation, we can note a greater orientation partly towards the body and bodily aspects as foundations for people's identity and partly a more emotion-oriented economy, culture and politics where the individual's emotional relationships and reactions are often of central importance both for understanding and explaining social courses of events. Individualisation also emphasises differences between people that can both have negative consequences and open up for new solutions, for example elderly people's, disabled people's and migrants' conditions of life. Research is needed in this respect to addresses linkages between individual identity and different forms of group affinity, the importance of new and alternative community values and the consequences of individualisation for welfare, power and democracy in Sweden.

With growing nationalistic and separatist currents and a deep economic crisis, the EU's prerequisites to guarantee welfare for Europe's populations are strongly questioned. Despite Europe always having been characterised by nationalistic, separatistic and xenophobic currents, discussions are rarely carried on in a longer perspective. The answers to many of the difficult questions we ask today can be found in the light of historical

and comparative research: How do negative perceptions of stigmatised groups arise and how are they spread? What is universal and culturally conditioned in how people understand and misunderstand each other across cultural, social and political borders? How does individualisation influence encounters between people and change the understanding of the other person? What role do religious communities have, and what role have they had, in contributing to and counteracting segregation?

A thematic initiative on research on welfare's changed conditions will further strengthen this Swedish field of research that is well-established internationally and, at the same time, new interdisciplinary collaborations can be opened towards basic research with very good potential to advance and broaden the research front and provide necessary explanations and paths of action to handle societal challenges.

## The digital society's opportunities and risks

A central issue for the future is how the increased flow of information and our modern lifestyle of being constantly connected and shifting between different sources of information influence children's and adults' thinking, social interaction, work, education and well-being. Technological development in the form of efficient, relatively cheap support systems for processing and storing information in both working and private life is drastically changing our way of learning new things, representing knowledge and unlearning less relevant skills. The new digital technology shapes and widens people's prerequisites for a broader handling of information and media sources at the same time as knowledge of the value of the content of different sources may be unreliable. This multi-medial development of society is leading to new strategies for communication, information processing, thinking and social interaction and brings with it both risks and an opportunity to shape future education systems, aesthetics, forms of cultural expression, work environments and private spheres.

Technology has long been pointed out as a catalyst that allows us to do more with less time and effort. Several media theory studies emphasise that technology and media are extensions of our being and thereby both amputate and increase our cognitive abilities. A central task is thus to understand and predict how fundamental changes in the digital knowledge society influence people's psychosocial functions and skills over their life cycle. As with all technological changes, today's multi-medial society has both direct and indirect effects on how individuals, over their entire life cycle, learn new skills, handle everyday tasks and communicate with each other. Digital communication dominates everyday life and social life, but national and international research on the e-society's short- and long-term effects on people's socio-psychological and physical well-being is still too fragmentary. The information society's demands and increased pace of both working and private life contribute to potential risks and dangers. Particularly vulnerable is the growing group of older people and people with disabilities and impairments. Nor has the significance for democracy, associations and business of several new digital forums and communication channels attracted very much interest. At the same time, we must be aware of the "digital gap", i.e. that the largest part of mankind lacks direct access to computers and the web.

A few sociological studies have documented the fact that people are performing more and more apparently simultaneous and varying tasks and that this increase has been greatest among employed women. Separate psychologically oriented studies have also shown that constantly shifting between different tasks has far-reaching consequences for our thinking and how we act. One such finding is that simultaneous use of several sources of information, primarily mobile phones, the Internet and other digital media, leads to a broader attention field. This broadening of the focus of consciousness brings certain advantages but also a deterioration of other psychological functions, principally increased sensitivity to distractions, a greater need for quick reward and also degraded school performance. An increase in depressions and social anxiety are other negative effects of frequent shifting between different work tasks and information sources.

Different digital innovations have in a short time contributed to drastic changes in communication, information handling, social intercourse and handling time at work and in leisure activities. The borderlines between different tasks have become more diffuse both in time and space; we perform more tasks during the same working hours as before, these are carried out both locally and globally, and we are constantly connected and updated in a flow of information. Often, this flow of information neither can nor needs to be memorised for later use and reproduction but facts and skills can be "googled" "just-in-time". In somewhat simplified terms, the computer acts as an external memory for planning, coordinating and monitoring more complex actions and

interactions. This structural change in information handling, communication, social interaction, aesthetics, education and work is having substantial effects on different levels of society. The change is drastic and ongoing but its positive and negative effects are very much unclear. Our total knowledge of the effects of digital technology on human existence and societal life is very limited, not least its consequences for education and learning. How does learning develop with digitalisation and how are the schools and learning of the future to be developed to optimise pupils' and students' prerequisites for e-learning and handling of different digital sources of information? One important task for future humanities and social sciences research is to understand how today's digital and multi-medial society, with its opportunities and demand for simultaneous presence and broader handling of tasks, affects people's well-being, health, education and work.

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## STRUCTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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Against the background of the above description of the essential features of current developments in humanities and social sciences research, this section will make some structural recommendations. The aim is to enable a continued strong development of Swedish humanities and social sciences research, remove obstacles to such a development and to ensure that research-based knowledge is made available to students and society to a greater degree. The research system and research funding should also provide more scope for knowledge breakthroughs. Besides the recommendations for the research system as a whole, there are also specific recommendations which concern the research support provided by the Swedish Research Council.

### A strong Swedish research and education system

Almost three out of five Swedish students study Humanities and Social Sciences. Students are entitled to a research-based higher education. They have the right to meet active researchers and develop the independent, critical thinking and creativity that research-based education lays the foundation for. Active, topical research forms a solid base for and provides knowledge to the entire Swedish education system, from pre-school to higher education. The free research grants offered by the Swedish Research Council guarantees qualitative research with breadth and depth that is needed for society's development and preparedness for the future. In order for the development and quality potential in both research and education to be taken full advantage of, research and education must be cohesive. This benefits quality and development in both research and education and thereby by extension the students' future exercise of their profession and society's development.

A transparent and clear career structure is needed that provides opportunities for research-based education; just like in our neighbouring countries, teachers need time to conduct research within the framework of their employment. The insufficient funding of research conducted by Swedish university teachers does not provide a firm foundation for research. Added to this is the fact that most of those who apply for funding from the Swedish Research Council and other research funding providers are never given money and time to conduct the research. 1108 applications for project grant support within the field of humanities and social sciences were received by the Swedish Research Council in 2014. Of these, 94 were granted, often with a strongly reduced budget. This is equivalent to a success rate of 8.5%. Many projects that are judged to lead to high-class research can thus not be carried out. In particular, really innovative, slightly divergent research – which carries an element of risk but at the same time provides the foundation for knowledge breakthrough – perhaps risks not being realised.

### Free project-funded research

Free project-funded research must constitute the backbone of funding for prominent Swedish research. New discoveries, perspectives and knowledge breakthroughs can be developed with this support. It is of utmost importance that there is sufficient scope for the best researchers to be able to apply for and be granted research funding in competition. This competition, along with the thorough assessment, also serves to promote quality in Swedish research. Too diluted support for free research and too low a success rate risk leading to a situation where the great amount of work that goes into formulating high-quality research projects is never translated into practical research. Of particular concern is whether the very limited scope for funding of free projects means that the most innovative and thus the most risky research is being screened out. Funding in competition in the form of free project grants is crucial to the possibility to continue to conduct high-class Swedish research.

### The need for good conditions and support for young researchers

The universities' staff constitute a large untapped research resource. Between 2001 and 2012, the number of postdocs in both the humanities and the social sciences at universities and higher education institutions

increased strongly. Career development positions in the humanities account for the most rapid development in relative numbers, where the number of postdocs has almost tripled over the period.

At the same time, many young researchers are leaving the universities. It is naturally positive that there is an attractive labour market outside the research field but new recruitment is needed in higher education and Swedish research. Young researchers' work situation is characterised by great uncertainty, with non-permanent positions and too great a dependence on short-term external funding. This is leading to more researchers than is desirable leaving research for other employment. Many of those who remain at the universities instead switch to administrative duties or where possible to teaching positions without opportunities for research. Nor are career opportunities entirely equal. It takes longer for women to attain a career development position and they are to a greater extent than men employed in positions with less time for research (lecturers). Men also attain positions as professors faster. A higher proportion of women than men also leave the university after their career development position comes to an end. The higher education sector needs a career system characterised by clarity and predictability. Such a system would give young researchers more secure conditions and provide a good foundation for further development of a more equal research system.

If we look at the project support provided by the Swedish Research Council in humanities and social sciences, 45 % goes to projects led by young researchers, an indication that young researchers' work is of high quality. At the same time, the particularly insecure conditions under which young researchers work today is also noted. Newly graduated researchers need increased and long-term research funding after the postdoc period to be able to establish themselves as independent researchers and build up internationally recognised research. Increased support should therefore be designed such that it also provides a foundation for competition for EU funds and other funding. The support should provide scope for the young researchers to develop international collaborations and spend time doing research at universities in other countries.

## Digitalisation and developed registers

One of several explanations for the positive development of humanities and social sciences is that Swedish researchers have had access to the unique data, and the unique openness as regards data, that exist in the Swedish system. The use of large amounts of data for research has developed strongly with digitalisation. This applies to both historical and contemporary material. In a more global perspective, it can be claimed that Swedish researchers have a responsibility to develop such knowledge, which actually to a certain extent cannot be done at other locations, due to the unique access to various kinds of data that we enjoy in Sweden. It is of utmost importance to maintain the pace as regards digitalisation and to ensure that contemporary digitalised material is quality assured.

Swedish humanities and social sciences are developing successfully as infrastructure is built up. Brain imaging techniques are being used, particularly in psychology, economics, philosophy and linguistics, and not seldom in collaboration with researchers in medicine and natural and technical science. The use of DNA techniques has developed archaeology, among other fields. Many infrastructures have also been built up within the humanities and social sciences fields, for example language laboratories and humanistic laboratories, with extremely strong knowledge development as a result. Digital humanities and social sciences are today creating opportunities to develop techniques and methods to make existing forms of research more efficient and formulate new questions. New combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods offer opportunities for extensive interdisciplinary collaborations between literature and language researchers, historians and many other humanists and social scientists. Digital humanities has over a short period of time developed into a strong research field in Sweden. Registers and databases are used and built up in as good as all subjects in the humanities and social sciences. New data can give unique opportunities to explore such areas that have already been extensively studied in new innovative ways. With the new possibilities offered by data, new answers can be found to old questions.

New technology has made it possible to collect almost incredibly large amounts of data. Examples include text from millions of electronic documents, detailed purchasing data from hypermarkets' scanners, sound loops from voice-controlled mobile phones, high-resolution images of brain activity or video films from cameras in different vehicles, large-scale web surveys, network data of relationships between individuals, and financial

transactions. Behind selling newspaper headlines and commercial promises about the so-called “big data revolution” lies an indisputable reality, with great methodological demands and an escalating need for research initiatives in statistics and visualisation.

The infrastructures – registers, databases and laboratories – are crucial to the knowledge development, but they are not always large and visible. It is extremely important that the responsibility and funding for these, often in relative terms somewhat smaller infrastructures, is clearly defined. Even a little support for humanities and social sciences research in these respects may be crucial. In this context it can also be mentioned that humanists and social scientists are admittedly only to a small degree users of the large infrastructures currently being built up in Sweden (for example Max IV, ESS and SciLifeLab). On the other hand, these large establishments will redraw the landscape for Swedish research and Swedish regions and perhaps parts of Swedish industry. There are therefore important research tasks for humanists and social scientists linked to the build-up of both large and small infrastructure.

## Support for international mobility and a national collective effort

There is great international interest in Swedish research and also in coming to Sweden on the part of foreign researchers. International mobility, however, is moderate and is slowed by the insecure career system. This makes it difficult and insecure for foreign researchers to move to Sweden. It is just as difficult and insecure for Swedish young researchers to do research at foreign universities. Many young researchers do not see any possibility to move without risking their positions. A clear position structure and earmarked support for international mobility will further help develop the internationalisation of humanities and social sciences.

Good research as a rule needs to be developed in a setting with several strong researchers. Collaboration between researchers and between research environments – across disciplinary and university boundaries – is also of great importance for developing or maintaining a critical mass. Such settings also generally have international members, *in situ* or in developed researcher networks. This may be of particular urgency in the humanities, with many small entirely central disciplines for a knowledge nation like Sweden, to facilitate and support collaboration across university boundaries in order to maintain and develop sustainable research environments. It is important that competition between Swedish universities does not lead to fragmentation of the research environments. There may be reason to develop special forms of support that encourage collaboration between researchers across university borders both in Sweden and internationally.

Several earlier excellence support initiatives have been too big to be appropriate for research environments in the humanities and social sciences. Successful humanities and social sciences research teams often consist of between five and ten researchers and a mix of junior and senior researchers. To form such powerful research collaborations and research programmes that can take on bigger and perhaps more challenging questions than can be accommodated by means of an individual project grant, there is a need for special support that is somewhat longer and greater than project grants. The recommended support could take the form of a framework grant. The purpose of such support should be to consolidate and thereby strengthen the Swedish research environments, in particular those that go crosswise.

Humanities and social sciences research has developed as research infrastructure has been built up. Far from all such infrastructure is national. A special form of support for teams of the kind described in the previous paragraph, which would be shaped around and benefit an infrastructure and where special funds would be given for the use and/or development of the infrastructure, would further strengthen this positive development. It should be noted in this context that the research infrastructure that has been developed brings with it an increased need for new professional skills and categories of profession, for example research engineers for experiments and database maintenance. Research support and career paths must be designed such that they can also cover the need for and facilitate the development of such expertise.

## Interdisciplinary science and disciplinary research in interaction

A greater element of interdisciplinary research is often sought after in today’s research policy contexts. Interdisciplinary collaboration is common today in the entire humanities and social sciences field, not least

among the most prominent researchers. Such research develops best if it is founded on meetings between solid subject-specific areas of knowledge and through researchers' own initiatives and collaborations. Good interdisciplinary science develops in interaction with disciplinary research development. Cross-disciplinary collaborations also lead to the establishment of entirely new fields of knowledge and subjects. Gender research is one example of a subject that has developed in the borderland between many fields of knowledge and become a strong research and education subject in its own right today with great relevance to society. The constant changes in society shape and reshape the knowledge needs and interests – and thereby also the prerequisites for organisation of knowledge in disciplines or in other ways. Support for interdisciplinary research should therefore not be separated from – but integrated with – support for disciplinary research. It is just as important that quality is assured in interdisciplinary research. The presented examples and experiences show that there is no reason to compromise the quality in the name of interdisciplinary research. An important step in this context is the interdisciplinary review that the Swedish Research Council has begun with a special focus on ensuring that interdisciplinary projects of good quality are not disadvantaged.

## Nuanced measures and methods are needed to measure research results

Increasing emphasis is being put on measuring the results and impact of research. This is an international trend that has developed with the demand for more relevant research, competition for international research funds and international researchers and with improved possibilities to measure, compare and disseminate such assessments. Bibliometric comparisons, ranking lists and evaluations are expressions of this global development. Some of the results and findings of humanities and social sciences research, however, are often left outside such assessments, primarily due to the difficulty in measuring and assessing the results with the aid of bibliometric measures. The international publication databases contain a very incomplete coverage when it comes to research in the humanities and social sciences. This has to do with the fact that research publications in this particular field show considerably greater breadth than is covered by the most prominent publication databases. They are largely limited to articles in English-language journals, mainly those published in the USA and Great Britain. Better measures and databases for humanities and social sciences research are therefore needed. The publication database Swepub must be developed and become more comprehensive and quality-assured with the purpose of making humanistic and social science publications more accessible and enabling systematic analyses of publications in the field. Active research is being conducted in the field of humanities and social sciences on just bibliometrics, ranking systems and evaluations. It is important that the development of new measures of research findings be research-based and take advantage of the findings that exist in the area.

At the same time, it is clear that simple measures cannot give an accurate picture of a scientific development that to a high degree spans the international and the national, the intra-disciplinary and collaboration with society as a whole. The quality and the impact of the research must therefore be assessed through peer-reviews and through an ongoing dialogue within the discipline and in the collaboration with the research community and society at large. The review system and the peer-review expertise that exists at the Swedish Research Council constitute a quality assurance and function as a driver for the development of Swedish research. Simple bibliometric measures must not be allowed to replace genuine peer reviews.

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## INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

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Publication patterns for humanities and social sciences show that researchers conduct research simultaneously both internationally and nationally. Available data shows a strong internationalisation and an increased publication rate. At the same time, humanities and social sciences research provides crucial knowledge foundations for Swedish society's memory, development and debate. Collaboration is an integrated part of research in humanities and social sciences. Roughly one third of registered humanistic and social science publications in the universities' publication databases are international articles, slightly less than one third are chapters in books, and 5% are books. Among the articles, books and chapters can be found publications in Swedish, English and other languages. The increase in the publication rates and the international impact can be seen in many fields. International publications, often targeting one discipline, have grown at the same time as books, articles and reports in both Swedish and other languages are written for a broader knowledge-seeking group in society.

It should be noted in this context that the international publication databases only cover a small proportion of all the publications in the field. Between 10% and 50% of social science publications (depending on subject) and 5% of humanistic publications are registered in the most commonly used international databases.

Viewed in a longer perspective than the bibliometric measurements are able to provide, it can be clearly seen how dissemination of Swedish research has gone hand in hand with the societal development and with researchers' use of Swedish data. Other countries' interest in "the Swedish model" and welfare innovations like the former elementary school (folkskola) and pension systems has to a great extent been made possible through scientific studies and has at the same time contributed to increased interest in Swedish research. Research on social development in Swedish – often with comparative and historical approaches – is particularly important in an international perspective.

International research projects presuppose a common language. In most contexts, this lingua franca is English and in recent decades international research collaborations have been built up in all disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences. In some disciplines, for example psychology, anthropology, economic sciences and large parts of sociology and archaeology, English is the dominating language for communication and publication. English, however, is not the only international scientific language and it is important that research collaboration with for example German- and French- but also Spanish- and Russian-speaking settings is also given prerequisites to continue and be deepened. The humanities are sometimes termed "interpretative sciences" and a typical humanistic research question is "What does X mean?". Researchers in the humanities often conduct research on conditions in a certain culture. For these researchers, the national languages form an integrated part of the research data and, for the sake of precision and depth, data presentations must be made in these languages. The importance of language must thus not be underestimated, nor the risk that in several humanities and social sciences disciplines, research in languages other than Swedish means that precision and depth risk being weakened. Important research findings concerning specifically Swedish conditions as a rule need to be able to be conveyed via two different channels: an international channel where the subject-theoretical and subject-methodological discussions are carried on (often in English), and a national language channel (here Nordic) where detailed data presentations can be made. Detailed reporting of data can rarely be accorded space in international journals and such journals do not always have access to reviewers with the competence to assess articles and culturally rooted conditions. The entire humanities and social sciences field does however need to have forums where detailed presentations of data can be made. Otherwise there is a risk that the internal controls within the subject field will be reduced and that unfounded claims will be disseminated; in simple terms a risk that the quality assurance will deteriorate.

International research in humanities and social sciences presupposes basic knowledge of conditions in different parts of the world and presupposes language skills. Research in languages, for example Latin, Greek, Chinese, Turkish, French, Japanese and Spanish, is crucial to our knowledge of the world and our capacity to conduct research on the world's development.

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## TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES

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Some development trends in humanities and social sciences research were described in the introduction to the overview. Knowledge development in the field is particularly strong, among other things as a result of new methods and new data. The research has developed to become more interdisciplinary, not least through the use of various forms of laboratories and infrastructure, but also as a response to complex research questions that require different expertise and different fields of knowledge to be combined. The most successful interdisciplinary science is developed through collaborative research and curiosity based on strong disciplinary research. Good disciplinary science, with basic theory and method development, is also the foundation of good interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary research takes time and may take unforeseen routes. Today we can see an excellent natural growth of interdisciplinary research. The research has become increasingly international both in terms of publications and documented collaborations. At the same time, extensive collaboration is going on with the surrounding society. Researchers in all areas of the humanities and social sciences participate in studies, collaborations with industry, general education, social debate, government commissions, etc. A science with long perspectives also provides a foundation for more applied research. An important challenge for future research funding is therefore to safeguard basic research and also provide support for such method and research development that does not apply directly to the present-day questions.

In the introductory section, some important research questions were briefly described along with results of humanities and social sciences research. The focus is on human as acting, thinking, speaking, feeling and symbolising beings. The task of research is both to be a bearer of culture and to lay the foundation for cultural self-understanding and cultural self-reflection. Too strong an emphasis on immediately utilisable research risks impeding the renewal of research. Continued good knowledge development requires scope for free research. Project grants applied for in competition enable the development of such basic research that at the same time constitutes – through the peer review process based on sound scientific criteria – important quality assurance for Swedish research in its entirety.

Today's very limited scope for free project grants in the humanities and social sciences results in unreasonable amounts of effort being put into writing applications that for resource reasons cannot be translated into research. With so few applications being granted funding, it has also become more difficult to motivate researchers to participate in quality assessment and reviewing of applications. The system is becoming overloaded by assessment and underutilised for research. The low success rate of applications for project funding in humanities and social sciences risks undermining the development of basic knowledge in the field. At the same time, the development of the research, through new methods and the need for infrastructure, has meant that humanities and social sciences research has in many ways become more cost-intensive.

The diffuse and insecure career system for young researchers entails further risks for the renewal and continued development of the research and curbs mobility. Clearer career paths are needed, guided by clearly defined criteria. In that context, it is also a concern that tenure track requirements differ widely between universities. The forms of support to increase international mobility (international recruitment of prominent researchers and international postdocs) need to be complemented with more flexible forms of support that enable short stays abroad and development of research collaborations with international researchers, who do not move here permanently. Joint calls with research councils in other countries also promote mobility.

The composition of staff categories in research shows that many fields are facing generation shifts. Among professors and senior lecturers a generation shift has been going on since 2001, particularly noticeable among the senior lecturers, with the retirement of older lecturers and extensive recruitment of new lecturers in their forties. In connection with the generation shift it is especially important to note the great potential resource that has developed with the entry of the younger researchers. Improved conditions for these researchers cannot be emphasised enough. It is also of particular importance to ensure that Swedish post-graduate education in the field continue to be of high quality and sufficient extent. Post-graduate education – and education more generally – creates the research of tomorrow.

From an equality perspective, the situation at the universities continues to be a cause of concern. The proportion of men and women is equal among senior lecturers, researchers and holders of tenure track positions

in humanities and social sciences. Development in the case of professors, however, is lagging behind in this respect. In 2001, between one quarter and one fifth of professors were women and today the number is one third. Among the research grants awarded by the Swedish Research Council, the equality is considerably better. In 2014, the proportion of female main applicants was 44% and these applicants were awarded 46% of the funds. In humanities and social sciences, gender research constitutes an important and successful line of research. From and including the 2014 application round, gender research has also been integrated into other lines of research in the field. A follow-up of the 2014 application round shows that the application success rate of gender research applications is as high as or somewhat higher than that of other applications in the field. It is important to continue to monitor how the field develops and to ensure that it is not disadvantaged through the structure of the review process.

Many humanities and social sciences settings are relatively small, with only a few students and several universities have discontinued subjects for this reason. This applies in particular to languages. A developed society such as Sweden cannot have a higher education system that lacks important humanistic subjects. Language skills are of utmost importance for the future career opportunities of individuals and for Swedish society, which is highly interlinked with the rest of the world. Once again, it should be pointed out that research is needed to develop subjects and direct contact with research for students is needed for them to develop the ability to think in new ways and do new things. In this context, the Swedish language constitutes a particular problem. Research in the Swedish language is crucial to the development of Swedish culture and Swedish society. At the same time, the measures of research development, which are to a large extent based on bibliometric measurements of international publication, do not fit research in the Swedish language, which by necessity are almost exclusively published in Swedish. Corresponding problems exist as regards other languages. Development of higher education and research in languages therefore needs to be paid particular attention so that they do not disappear with an increasingly standardised format for assessment of the subjects' importance and knowledge development. At the same time, it is natural given the large number of universities in Sweden for several research and teaching settings, among other things in languages, to be very small. Good research develops best where there is a critical mass that enables developed perspectives and cross-border exchanges of particular traditions, methods and theories. Expanded and future-oriented collaboration between universities is needed in order to secure Swedish competence and to create settings with a critical mass.

One strength in Swedish humanities and social sciences research is the access to substantial registers and databases, not seldom longitudinal data of a kind not found anywhere else. As regards large amounts of data, for example in the form of registers, archives and databases, Swedish researchers have both an advantage and a great responsibility. Swedish researchers have benefited from the openness as regards data and the, in an international perspective, exceptional access to documented data on people's life circumstances and other registers and databases. Where other countries have focused significantly on digitalisation of both historical and contemporary material, Sweden is however trailing behind and risks losing an important strength when it comes to prerequisites for humanities and social sciences research. It is not only digitalisation of material that has fallen behind; knowledge of digitalisation also needs to be strengthened. Work needs to continue on making register data and large databases accessible. With a humanities and social sciences research that makes increasing use of large amounts of data and of different kinds of infrastructure, it is also important that long-term support exists to develop and maintain this infrastructure and secure the methodological expertise that analyses of large amounts of register data require.

Increased knowledge of human, cultures and societies is crucial to the possibilities to develop functioning societies in Sweden and other countries and to solve the global challenges – the climate threat, energy, poverty, war, technological development, the global health problems, migration, etc. The greatest challenges for the future therefore lie in the need for continued innovative humanities and social sciences research, which is developing in the wake of societal change.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

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The report contains the following recommendations aimed at handling the challenges and opportunities in the humanities and social sciences field of research:

## *Thematic recommendations*

The most important strategic investment in humanities and social sciences research is the increase in the free project grant funding, in combination with ensuring that higher education and research are funded and structured in such a way that research and higher education are held together.

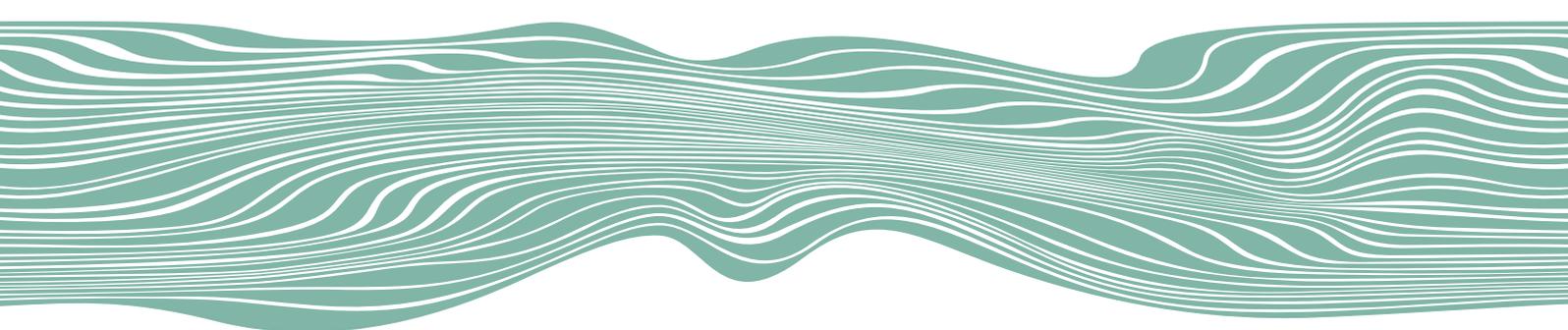
Five themes are suggested where social science and humanities research can contribute to handling and solving societal challenges.

- Judgement and decisions in social life.
- Human, nature and the new technologies
- Conditions for global cohesion
- New conditions for welfare
- The digital society's opportunities and risks

## *Structural recommendations*

- A strong Swedish research and education system
  - Increased quality based basic funding to universities
  - A clear and transparent tenured track career system
- Increased support for free project-funded research
- More long-term support for young researchers
- Sweden should regain a leading position as regards digitalisation and registers
  - Continued and intensified digitalisation of historical material
  - Quality assurance of contemporary digitalised material
  - Research initiatives are needed in visualisation, statistics and methodological expertise for research where large amounts of digitalised material are used
- Support for international mobility and national mobilisation
  - Special support of a framework grant nature for powerful collaborations and research programmes that can take on bigger and perhaps more challenging questions than can be accommodated in an individual project grant, and that can enable research across university and subject borders nationally and internationally.
  - Special framework grants of the kind described under the previous item, where earmarked funds go to research on and/or development of an infrastructure
- Support for interdisciplinary research should be integrated with disciplinary focused research. Peer review of interdisciplinary applications should be further developed.
- Nuanced measures and methods to measure the research findings
  - Speed up the development and the quality assurance in Swepub
  - Safeguard peer reviews

The Swedish Research Council is a governmental agency under the Ministry of Education and Research. Within the Research Council there are separate decision-making bodies. In 2014 these scientific councils, advisory bodies and committees compiled overviews of trends and challenges in six different research domains and an overview of research infrastructures in particular. The initiatives taken within the scope of “The future of Swedish research” are part of the Swedish Research Council’s measures to support and strengthen researcher-initiated fundamental research, point out strategically important areas and promote an effective research system. These initiatives are taken on a recurring basis in the run-up to the Government’s Research Bills. The full versions of the overviews were published (in Swedish) in 2015. The final report from the project is called: Direction to the Future Swedish Research System: Goals and Recommendations.



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The Swedish Research Council has a leading role in developing Swedish research of the highest scientific quality, thereby contributing to the development of society. Besides research funding, the agency advises the government on research-related issues and participates actively in the discussions to create understanding of the long-term benefits of research.