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Vice-Chancellor

Strategy for Lund University's Strategic Research Areas 2020–2030

Approved by the vice-chancellor on 17 September 2020.

Introduction

The unique position and broad research profile of Lund University are keys to the success in creating strong research environments and interdisciplinary collaboration across the university. Over the years, the University has hosted more than 30 strong research environments, such as Forte Centres, VinnExcellence Centres, Linnaeus Environments and strategic research areas (SRAs), financed via competitive grants. Nine of the 43 national strategic research areas granted in 2010 are hosted by Lund University. University researchers collaborate within three areas hosted by other universities. Lund University utilized these opportunities to develop long-term focused research of the highest international standard, in broad knowledge environments with high societal relevance, entirely in line with the Government's remit to HEIs with strategic research areas.

Lund University is committed to developing the present 12 strategic research areas further, profiling high-risk high-gain, curiosity-driven and challenge-relevant research of the highest international quality. Our commitment to this goal is reflected in the special focus on strategic research areas in the University's quality evaluation of research, RQ20. The present strategy concerns the vision and strategic goals for Lund University's strategic research areas for the period 2020–2030. The strategy builds on the foundation of accumulated knowledge, and on the experience gained in development and governance of larger research environments. Valuable experience from the first strategic decision to invest in a new research area to managing and developing world-leading strategic research areas in response to new societal challenges is a valuable commodity for Lund University.

We use the term *strategic research areas* in a broad sense, where both development in new areas and advancement of the present areas are important. The strategy aims to ensure a clear division of roles and responsibilities, and to provide a basis for how to invest the University's strategic research funding for best effect. Lund University is poised to continue developing excellent strategic research areas to stimulate new knowledge for the benefit of society.

Strategic research areas at Lund University

The complexity of today's societal challenges requires new solutions in which world-leading research brought together in collective efforts over subject and sector boundaries complements strong curiosity-driven research. The strategic research areas at Lund University are poised to tackle the most important issues of our times. Although the size and organization of our strategic research areas differs, and the nature of the challenges they address varies, there are several common characteristics:

- They conduct research of the highest quality, both basic research and applied research, with continual renewal at the international research forefront.
- They contribute new knowledge of societal relevance with the potential to revitalize education at all levels.
- They are involved in external engagement on many levels: regional, national and international. This enables finding sustainable, relevant and effective solutions to society's current and future challenges in dialogue with relevant stakeholders.
- They are highly visible, attractive research environments which attract international talent.
- They have a critical mass that enables them to develop and run research infrastructure that broadly benefits the University.
- They have a collective strategic focus with common goals for research, education and external engagement, enabled by long-term funding that stimulates successful competitive research bids.

The points above are based on the successful model for strategic research areas, with a long-term commitment from the University aimed at research at the international forefront. Lund University has a responsibility to continue developing existing strategic research areas and to develop new areas based on this model and which meet the same exacting requirements. It is of utmost importance that these SRAs remain vital and current to continue to deliver and stimulate research that will drive new research of that will solve societal challenges in new ways.

The vision for Lund University's strategic research areas is:

The strategic research areas are central to Lund University realising its vision to understand, explain and improve our world and the human condition so that scientific and artistic knowledge make an impact on sustainable development.

Strategic goals

Research of the highest quality and renewal

The strategic research areas continuously develop, strive towards the forefront of international research, and respond to changing societal needs and new challenges. This requires a comprehensive strategy with established, clear goals, a dynamic development of the research profile, targeted recruitment, development of research infrastructures and the building up of a critical mass in the environment.

- Each strategic research area defines their own strategic goals, in line with the University's strategic plan and research strategy. Goals are renewed in response to evolving challenges and scientific developments.
- The strategic research areas are responsible for maintaining research quality by prioritising new focus areas by redirecting resources from less fruitful research directions. For areas with partner HEIs, this process must be coordinated with the University Management.
- Each strategic research area ensures that there is a mechanism for regular external advice from international experts, for example through appointing scientific advisory committees or reviewers.

Intertwining of research and education

The strategic research areas constitute an excellent resource for contributing to the renewal and development of teaching and education at all levels, contributing important perspectives in training the next generation of academics and professionals. With their expertise and contacts with public authorities, the business sector and society as a whole, the strategic research areas are well placed to identify needs in education towards meeting new societal challenges. The strategic research areas strong focus on societal challenges can attract highly motivated students to our programmes. In addition, the organisational structure of the strategic research areas makes them excellent arenas for thematic programmes that cross faculty and subject boundaries. This contributes to attaining a critical mass of students in cross-disciplinary fields.

- Faculty organization should support and facilitate educational initiatives over faculty boundaries with consideration taken for the strategic research areas' research.
- The strategic research areas should be active in renewal of first and second cycle programmes and third cycle courses and programmes, and in initiating new programmes in close collaboration with the faculties. This applies particularly to thematic programmes that link to societal challenges and cross subject boundaries.
- By engaging in teaching and new development at graduate schools, the strategic research areas provide training in the application of tools, theories, technologies and new research methods for doctoral students.
- By providing internship opportunities for first and second cycle students, the strategic research areas offer students the opportunity to work with, and learn from, active researchers.

Impact on society

The strategic research areas, with their diverse external contacts, offer an opportunity for challenge-focused dialogue between researchers and wider society. Mutual exchange ensures that solutions to societal challenges are based upon a strong foundation of knowledge. The dialogue with wider society can help to identify relevant research problems, establish joint research projects, compile syntheses of current knowledge and thereby convert research results for the benefit of society.

- Each strategic research area is to actively work to develop research in interaction with stakeholders in society, including through cross-sectoral research and contract research where relevant. An example is stimulating increased mobility for staff and doctoral students between the University and public authorities or the business sector.
- The principle of academic autonomy and critical thinking is to permeate the strategic research areas' dialogue with stakeholders, necessitating an open discussion in the environment about the aim of the dialogue.
- Each strategic research area should strongly encourage researchers to contribute as experts in regional, national and international bodies such as international expert panels, government inquiries, and sector and business councils.
- By proposing and participating in commissioned education, in close cooperation with Lund University Commissioned Education, the strategic research areas contribute to high-quality professional development for employees in public authorities and the business sector.

Visibility

High national and international visibility is crucial in order to fulfil the University's vision for its strategic research areas. Visibility is also important for being able to attract new grants and be relevant partners in external engagement. In addition, the strategic research areas help to further strengthen Lund University's attractiveness and global visibility.

- The University and its faculties are to make the strategic research areas a special focus in communication about research to the general public, strategic partners, business sector, public authorities and the Government. For this purpose, the strategic research areas' Collegium and the University are to jointly draw up a communication strategy in 2020.
- In addition to the strategic research areas being visible through their research publications and at conferences, the areas have a responsibility to communicate broadly about their research and its societal relevance at regional, national and international level. Each area is to have a communication plan and clear goals for this purpose.

Leadership, gender equality and diversity

Well-developed leadership reflecting values such as gender equality, equal opportunities and diversity is a key factor for success for the strategic research areas. Leaders work to develop environments in strategic directions, strengthening research and building trust within the University and with actors in society. The leaders serve as a role models for future researchers and research leaders, encouraging the next generation of researchers. Successful leadership attracts early-career researchers to the environment. The strategic research areas consider these aspects in order to identify and remove overt, concealed and subtle mechanisms that lead to discrimination in their organisation. This is done by bringing attention to these issues on a daily basis and through active work on career and leadership development.

- The strategic research areas have a responsibility to promote and develop an environment and leadership that is characterised by gender equality, equal opportunity and diversity.
- The strategic research areas offer leadership roles at all levels, with regular rotation and promotions in order to promote and train a new generation of leaders. A plan for renewing leadership is to be in place to ensure the retention of knowledge, leadership and expertise. This is a condition for research to continue to maintain the highest quality.
- Each strategic research area will systematically monitor their gender equality regarding leadership, career opportunities and access to resources, as well as take measures to eliminate any imbalance.

Recruitment and retention of staff

Recruitment of teaching staff and early-career researchers is crucial to ensure rejuvenation and long-term excellence. Recruitments are also a valuable tool for developing an inclusive environment where consideration is given to diversity and gender equality. Excellence and diversity are therefore to be given the highest priority in recruitments.

The strategic research areas' well-developed international networks, their infrastructures and the research communities constitute attractive environments that assist faculties and departments in the recruitment and retention of internationally prominent and strategically important researchers. The strategic research areas are also well positioned to actively develop and contribute to a culture characterised by gender equality and diversity in inclusive environments.

- The faculties are to plan long-term for recruitments that take into consideration the strategic research areas' strategic plans and future initiatives.
- The strategic research areas make recruitment more attractive by offering starting grants and access to research facilities, stimulating, international research environments and leadership opportunities within the environment.

Funding, organisation, monitoring and evaluation

The strategic research areas at Lund University are interdisciplinary organisational units, often of significant size, and are highly important to the University. As such they lie outside the University's line organisation requiring specific management. The strategic research areas and the line organisation are to work together according to clear allocation of roles to allow the SRAs to develop and fulfil their strategic goals.

- Funding for the strategic research areas is currently provided in the form of earmarked block grants to Lund University. Future financial conditions will be revealed in the Research Policy Bill in the autumn of 2020. In the case where Lund University receives previously earmarked funding for strategic research areas as a part of the University's framework for block grants, this funding is to be reserved for the University's joint initiatives in strategic research areas according to the information below.
- The vice-chancellor will commission an action plan that will be drawn up after the Research Policy Bill has been presented and the University's quality evaluation, RQ20, has been completed. The action plan is to contain clear and specific quality criteria, specified on the basis of the present strategy, for the evaluation of strategic research areas and for new initiatives. The action plan will include a long-term plan for support of the strategic research areas and for the development and establishment of new strategic research areas and any discontinuation of strategic research areas that do not fulfil the quality criteria.
- The vice-chancellor, in consultation with the faculties concerned, is responsible for regularly evaluating the strategic research areas in terms of the quality criteria stated in the action plan. On the basis of this documented evaluation, the vice-chancellor decides to submit a proposal to the University Board, which then decides on continued support, new initiatives and discontinuation of strategic research areas.
- The vice-chancellor is responsible for university-wide strategic matters concerning the strategic research areas, including matters concerning cooperation with partner HEIs. This applies in contexts such as working on strategic plans, which are drawn up by the strategic research areas in consultation with the faculties concerned, annual follow-up discussions with the principal faculty and the coordinator of the strategic research area, and joint meetings with the areas regarding strategic matters with an aim to continue development of the strategic research areas.
- The principal faculty for the strategic research area, in consultation with the other faculties concerned, is responsible for conducting annual dialogues with the coordinator of the strategic research area to follow up the area's development and long-term strategic planning regarding education, recruitment and infrastructure in the SRA in order to ensure continued development. In the event of a strategic research area being discontinued, the principal faculty, in consultation with the faculties concerned, is responsible for deciding on any new organisational form and associated funding.
- The strategic research areas' forum constitutes a platform for the coordinators of existing and new areas to exchange experiences and knowledge about building and further developing the strategic research areas. This knowledge is of great value to the University and should be

managed and passed on by current coordinators to new coordinators in the development of new strategic research areas. The chair of the forum is the University's contact person for the implementation of this strategy and, for example, consultation papers through which views are collected within the University or similar.

- Procedures for communication are to be drawn up at University, faculty and department levels to ensure that information flows between the line organisation and the strategic research areas and that coordinators of the strategic research areas receive the information they need to fulfil their remit.
- Each strategic research area is to define and annually monitor and report key indicators for its remit. A common base of indicators covers personnel, including gender equality, qualifications, research publications and finance. In this work, Lund University's current research information system is to be used as much as possible.
- Each strategic research area is to take part in regular evaluations (conducted externally or initiated by the University every five years) with external assessors to ensure continued high quality and renewal in the collective research environments (including research excellence, societal impact and education) of the strategic research areas.