CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW
OF THE ÅBO AKADEMI, ÅBO / TURKU

CRE REVIEWERS' REPORT

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Foreword

Following two successful conferences dedicated to Quality and Evaluation, the Permanent Committee of the CRE (European Association of Universities) decided in 1993 to offer the association's 500 member universities the possibility of institutional audits focused on quality management.

The project hinges on external reviews by experienced university leaders from different systems of higher education in Europe (a pre-review and a review visit at each of the institutions involved in the project) preceded by, and based on, a self-analysis of strengths and weaknesses. It aims to have an input into the institutions' management efforts to ensure quality in a local, national and international context, by helping to identify the conditions and tools of future development.

By reviewing institutions in different countries, the CRE hopes to disseminate examples of good practice, validate common concepts of strategic thinking, and develop shared references of quality that will help member universities to reorient their strategic development while strengthening a quality culture in Europe. During the review, the university is helped:

- to examine how it defines long- and medium-term aims,
- to look at the external and internal constraints shaping its development,
- to discuss strategies to enhance its quality – if quality is defined as the adequacy of means to purposes – while taking account of these constraints.

The programme has been running since 1994-95, when the first establishments to have undergone such reviews were the universities of Göteborg (Sweden), Oporto (Portugal), Utrecht (Netherlands), and has developed to encompass over a dozen institutions Europe-wide each year.
Introduction

Åbo Akademi is the only wholly Swedish-speaking multi-disciplinary university\(^1\) in Finland, though neither the only university, nor the only institution of higher education, using Swedish as a teaching medium. It is one of the three institutions offering university-level education in Åbo. The other two are the University of Turku and the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, both of which are Finnish-speaking, as their names suggest (Turku is the Finnish name, Åbo the Swedish name, for one and the same city).

In the words of the university's promotional brochure, the foundation of the university owes a great deal to "tradition and a strong desire to safeguard higher education in Swedish for the Swedish-speaking section of the population". This special mission was given (not for the first time) a legal basis in the 1998 Act on Universities which states that "Åbo Akademi shall especially satisfy the educational and research needs of the Swedish-speaking population and take account of the bilingualism of the country in its activities" (section 28), and also provides that Swedish will be its teaching and administrative language (sections 9 and 17). It is "a minority university and in that sense not a local university" (self-evaluation report).

Åbo Akademi was founded as a private institution in 1918 in the wake of the revolution in which Finland emancipated itself from Russia, but is in fact heir to a tradition of Swedish higher learning which goes as far back as 1640. The university was taken over by the Finnish state in 1981.

Åbo Akademi has about 6,500 students on three campuses located respectively in Åbo, Vasa and Jakobstad, the latter respectively 350 and 440 kilometres distant from the historical core of the university. To the three original faculties founded in Åbo — the Faculties of Arts, Political Science (now the Faculty of Economics and Political Science after the absorption in 1980 of the independent Åbo Akademi School of Economics and Business Administration), and Mathematics and Natural Sciences — were successively added the Faculties of Chemical Engineering (Åbo, 1920), Theology (Åbo, 1924), Education (Vasa, 1974) and the Social and Caring Sciences (Vasa, 1992). In 1992, the foundation of the Österbottens Högskola in Vasa brought together as a separate unit within Åbo Akademi the two faculties which already existed there. In 1995, as the training of kindergarten teachers became the responsibility of Finnish universities, the Swedish-speaking school for kindergarten teachers was established in Jakobstad, north of Vasa, and placed under the responsibility of the Faculty of Education.

\(^1\) The Swedish-speaking Helsinki Business School also possesses official university status.
Site visits

The review team was composed of Prof. Inge Jonsson (president, Royal Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities, Stockholm), chairman; Prof. Dirk Bresters (former rector, University of Amsterdam); Prof. Sergio Machado dos Santos (rector, Universidade do Minho; president, CRUP).

The team secretary was Dr. Antoine Mioche (Université de Versailles/Saint Quentin en Yvelines).

The visits took place on 26-28 January 1998 (preliminary visit; Åbo and Vasa), and 18-20 May 1998 (main review visit; Åbo).

Åbo Akademi represented a new development within the CRE Review Programme in that the CRE review process for this university was paid for by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (HEEC) set up in January 1996 to advise the Finnish Ministry of Education and to assist higher education institutions in self-evaluation. The review team would like therefore to declare here that this in no way altered their fundamental attitude and that they felt at no time under pressure from any public authority, although they had the honour and pleasure of an interview with the Chairman of the HEEC.

The review team make no claim to have acquired an all-encompassing knowledge of the university. They were not concerned with quality of teaching or research and concentrated instead on quality in management and capacity for change as the major components and instruments of institutional autonomy.

The findings summarised here reflect the understanding gained from the self-evaluation report, the supplementary information provided by Åbo Akademi, and the two site visits.
THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

A. Constraints and institutional norms

Åbo Akademi operates within an educational context characterised by the introduction nation-wide of a large measure of autonomy in university management by successive governments since the mid-1980s. Their object has been rationalisation and university profiling driven by a mixture of economic imperatives and scientific goals.

The 1986 Higher Education Development Act first set development objectives comprising the promotion of management by objectives within the universities and increased independence in decisions on the internal use of allocated resources. It introduced an assessment system at all universities, who are expected to produce regular performance reports, and consideration is taken of performance in allocating new funds to research and instruction.

The collapse of the former Soviet Union and its impact on the Finnish economy, which forced a fairly brutal reduction of public spending, only served to highlight the urgency of these early reforms as higher education funding declined by 16% between 1991 and 1994 to stabilise thereafter. There was thus a shift from earmarked appropriations and steering by legislation to management by result in face of the impossibility of long-term planning in an extremely unsettled economic context. In the words of a 1996 Ministry of Education brochure, *Higher Education Policy in Finland*, "the Ministry's new strategy for steering universities is [now] based on co-ordination and the application of academic, State and market regulation".

The move was accompanied by the establishment in 1991 of a non-university sector of higher education known in Finnish as *ammattikorkeakoulu* (AMK), fully operational since the autumn of 1996, as well as a reform of the degree structure to introduce shorter, 3-year degrees called Bachelors, and the creation in 1995 of a graduate school system at the universities. The latter changes must be understood against a background in which the first degree has traditionally been the Master's (gained after a minimum of five years' study) and average study times are in effect much longer.

Finally, the 1998 Act on Universities reaffirmed a number of principles such as free education in the case of studies leading to a degree (section 8) and the ability of universities to set their own criteria of selection for the admission of students (section 18; there is thus no national entrance examination common to all Finnish universities).
"In the current system of management by result by the Ministry of Education and the universities, the universities' operating costs are covered by allocations consisting of basic funding (c. 90%), performance-based funds (5%) and project funding (5%)" (Higher Education Policy in Finland, 1996). At Åbo Akademi performance-based funds in 1997-98 amounted to FIM 8.875m out of a total budget of FIM 350m (2.5% ; 3.9% of government funding), but within basic funding, already 15% were received on the basis of degree goals. Furthermore, the objective set by the government is 100% result-based basic financing by 2003, which seems no small ambition, quite apart from any other considerations, if one notes that "cost-effectiveness [is] defined broadly as the ratio of degrees to teachers in relation to the objectives set" (Higher Education Policy in Finland, 1996). Some flexibility is afforded by the possibility that universities have of carrying over unspent funds from one fiscal year to the next within a recommended limit of 10%, but this hardly diminishes the enormity of the challenge. However, the review team noted that although the new budgeting formula is regarded as harsh, it is also perceived as more transparent and equitable and therefore more acceptable on the whole than the previous one which had simply evolved in a piecemeal fashion. The university can decide on its own model of internal financing but Åbo Akademi, like most other universities, follows roughly the government model.

At present, Åbo Akademi relies heavily on external finance, which tends to be relatively short-term.² The figure for 1997 (FIM 110m out of a total budget of FIM 350m — 31.4%), shows a vast increase over the figure less than ten years ago (FIM 17m out of a total budget of FIM 143m — 11.8% — in 1988), a change which is to be ascribed mostly to the growth of contractual research.³ However, this average of approximately 1/3 hides the fact that the proportion is sometimes closer to 1/2, as is the case in Chemical Engineering. Research funds, such as those provided by the Academy of Finland, the national grant-awarding authority, go directly to researchers and the university only charges a small percentage (6%, to be raised to 10%) for overheads.

Against the dual imperatives of Ministry of Education and external funding, the Foundation for Åbo Akademi, on whose Board the rector of Åbo Akademi sits ex officio and whose Chief Executive is a former rector of Åbo Akademi, appears as the "guarantor of the autonomy of the University", one with "a very important role as an additional source of money and a security against variations in the state budget" (self-evaluation report). While,

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² This includes public funds other than those forthcoming from the Ministry of Education, usually on a contractual basis.
³ It is worth mentioning here that Åbo Akademi has been selected by the Academy of Finland as a "centre of excellence" in a number of areas, a status which carries with it not only prestige but also a substantial increase of resources for a certain period of time.
among its many activities, the Foundation administers scholarship funds as well as several museums (Museum of Maritime History, Sibelius Museum, Museum "Ett Hem") and a research institute, it is to be noted mostly for its role in infrastructural projects. "In accordance with the agreement between the Finnish state and the Foundation for Åbo Akademi, the Foundation owns and maintains the majority of the buildings in which the Akademi today operates," explains the university promotional brochure, although this would appear to mean little more than half. With the development of Åbo Akademi since the 1960s, the Foundation has continued in its original function of support by buying old factories for renovation or participating in the DataCity and BioCity projects in Åbo. It has plans for a new building for Administration (Hallen) in 2000 and new and restored buildings in 2002 for the Faculty of Arts and the Centre for Continuing Education (Arken, "HumanCity"), also in Åbo. There is also a major new building project in Vasa (Kvarnen) for both faculties there. Åbo Akademi, while acknowledging the importance of the support it receives in this form, has also undertaken to press for more leeway in using the Foundation's cash grants.

**Development**

Many of the problems encountered by Åbo Akademi are common to all Finnish universities, others are unique to it on account of its specificity as the only Swedish-speaking university in Finland, where the Swedish-speaking population is dwindling or barely stable (5.7% of a total population of 5 million in 1996, as against 10.1% in 1930).

Among the problems common to all Finnish universities (sometimes made more acute by the narrow recruitment base imposed by Åbo Akademi's linguistic and cultural specificity, see below) are:

* an excessive average length of study. This is in part a consequence of the inadequacy of government allowances, which encourages students to take up part-time jobs or seek employment over the long summer holidays. The onus of this problem now falls more squarely on institutions as the government has introduced its system of funding by "output" and the latter is measured by the number of degrees awarded, where "degrees" means Masters and doctorates to the exclusion of Bachelors and "Licentiates".

* high drop-out rates, with an average somewhat below 50% for the whole institution — of which 20-25% in the first year — which hides wide variations by faculty (from 22.7% in the Faculty of Education to 47.3% in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences). These reflect a nation-wide problem with the traditional degree structure and the

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4 Under the present model, degree-related funding is weighted thus: Masters degrees 65%, doctorates 35%. In the near future, the weightings will be 60% and 40% respectively.
length of study it entails. Although a new degree structure was introduced by the government in the mid-1990s to allow Finns to take degrees in three rather than five years, the effects of this reform have had little time to work through and the popularity of the new Bachelor degrees remains limited among students.

All those interviewed, whether students, academic staff or employers, voiced a concern over the decline of quality which they viewed as inherent in a shorter study time. Academics also pointed out — rightly, the review team would contend — the likelihood of competition with AMKs if universities were to develop Bachelors (at Åbo Akademi, three-year degrees are nevertheless offered in all study programmes except Engineering). Judging from the fact that result-based funding for universities does not take Bachelors into account, it would appear that the government's intention is to encourage a specialisation within the Higher Education system between AMKs, offering shorter education, and universities, offering the traditional Master's degree. In other words, the remedy to the high drop-out rate would seem to have been taken out of the hands of universities.

- the relative atrophy of post-graduate studies which translates into a shortage of doctors. In 1996 approximately 600 of Åbo Akademi's 6,000 students were enrolled in its post-graduate programmes, of whom a little less than half were studying for a licentiate degree and 325 for a doctorate.

The propensity to go on to do research is greatest in the Faculties of Mathematics and Natural Science (which alone accounts for about half of all doctorates) and Chemical Engineering. The Faculty of Arts, although the second-largest in the university, turns out few doctors (in 1997, 2 + 1 in psychology). The strong demand for language teachers means that few students in the Faculty of Arts go on to do research. Likewise, in economics, good research students in some fields are snatched up by industry.

On a brighter note, it was said that the effect of graduate schools has been to boost the number of doctoral students, especially in small departments. Åbo Akademi is responsible for seven Graduate Schools (e.g. in chemical engineering, materials science, psychology). The Graduate School of Economics brings together 12 departments.

- a staff profile in which the important role traditionally recognised to professors translates into crying discrepancies between the tasks and numbers of full professors and non-tenured staff, as well as into a potentially worrying age pyramid that is the result of the limited attractiveness of non-professorial positions and poor promotion prospects. To illustrate: the social sciences, in their several departments in Åbo, employ twelve professors and only one associate-professor, while the remainder of staff, out of a total of thirty, is not required to hold a PhD or do research. Not only is there a lack of intermediate positions, but this gap between professors and doctors, on the one hand, and other non-tenured staff in
subordinate positions, on the other, is likely to widen with the planned suppression nationwide of the rank of associate-professor.

The situation may not be as serious as it seems, as the review team heard that the high number of professors relative to other positions is partly the result of the great number of subjects offered in the departments, and that staff who are paid out of research funds and are in effect the professors of tomorrow, do not appear in the statistics. But it came as no surprise that Åbo Akademi places great hopes in the development of the scheme being phased in by the Academy of Finland, whereby post-doctoral students will receive assistance to qualify for a professorship. Under this scheme, there are at present 90 post-doctoral students across the country in receipt of a 3-year Academy of Finland stipend and there should be 300 by 2001.

The emphasis which, by nature, Åbo Akademi lays on Swedishness within Finland confronts it with the following difficulties:

- the university suffers from a narrow recruitment base. It is faced with competition for resources and for students (also with the AMKs), a problem compounded — in the race for both — by the risk of academic drift. At least some departments at Åbo Akademi (among them chemistry, physics and mathematics) find it hard to find a proper balance between language requirements and quality. It is difficult in certain fields to recruit competent Swedish-speaking teachers and researchers.

Opening up to Finnish-speakers offers only a partial solution, as "experience tells that the number of Finnish-speaking students in a programme should not be allowed to be more than around a quarter, otherwise the language among the students changes to Finnish" (self-evaluation report).

The wording of the 1998 Act on Universities would appear to bring little comfort. Section 4 provides that, together with other institutions where Swedish is used as a medium of instruction, Åbo Akademi "shall be responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of Swedish-speaking persons are educated to meet national needs" (our emphasis). It seems plausible that a narrowing recruitment base might reduce "national needs", and that a reduction of those needs would then threaten decline for the Swedish language and culture, leading in a downward spiral to a further reduction in "national needs". An imaginative voluntarist policy is thus required of Åbo Akademi if it is to play its part in preserving Swedish-Finnish culture and identity.

The hard sciences at Åbo Akademi have sought to pursue just such a policy by deciding that Swedish will henceforth be used only to BSc level and be relayed by English to Masters level, an arrangement which would at once allow cooperation and the pooling of resources with Finnish universities in a neutral linguistic environment and also prepare science students for the language exigencies of international research. More, perhaps, than the
language arrangement, on which different views may be held, it is the emphasis on the break after three years which is interesting here.

• Åbo Akademi is split into two main campuses, one in or near each of the areas where the Swedish-speaking population is concentrated. To the recruitment/resources problem, which it makes worse, this adds an identity crisis of the split personality variety.

Vasa is an important centre for Swedish-speaking Finns, who make up 25% of the population in Vasa itself and 40% of the population of the wider area, as against 60% of Finnish-speakers. The Vasa campus was born of a political decision in 1974 to set up a Faculty of Education to counteract migration to Sweden (60,000 in the 1960s and 1970s). It is host to 23% of Åbo Akademi’s students.

• the Österbottens Högskola perceives as a threat the plan for a bilingual Faculty of Technology in Vasa and a branch of the (Swedish-speaking) Helsinki Business School. The fact that the University of Helsinki has started bilingual training for secondary-school teachers, which is officially the prerogative of the Faculty of Education in Vasa is also a cause for concern in Åbo.

In this respect, the avowed aim is to achieve consolidation of teaching in Swedish around Åbo Akademi. It is in this light that one must view Åbo Akademi’s participation in the Co-ordinating Council for Higher Education in Swedish which has been set up "to put forward proposals and give reports with the aim of co-ordinating and developing Swedish-language higher education in Finland. This body, on which the Helsinki University of Technology and three Art Universities are also represented, is led by the Chancellor of Åbo Akademi and its members represent not only Åbo Akademi but also Österbottens Högskola, the University of Helsinki and the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration" (university’s promotional brochure). The review team noted, as an illustration of this negotiated division of tasks, that under an agreement with the University of Helsinki, Åbo Akademi students who had studied for a Bachelor of Law could take their Masters there.

Quality

"In 1990, the Ministry of Education issued an educational quality assessment programme to the universities. The goals of the programme were development of the monitoring and evaluation of student admissions, the content of instruction, curricula, the form of courses and the implementation of their goals, the progress of studies, utilisation of

5 Earlier plans of a merger of the Vasa campus of Åbo Akademi with the Business School were not realised, and such a project raises suspicions in Åbo Akademi, because the new entity might prove a stalking horse for Finnish-language universities.
student places and job placement" (Higher Education Policy in Finland, 1996). This information is collected in the KOTA national database. There have also been nation-wide subject evaluations since 1991 and institutional evaluations (at the institutions' own request) since 1992.

The Board for Quality Enhancement in Education appointed by the rector has been responsible for quality assurance at Åbo Akademi since 1996. It is not concerned with research, which is evaluated every third year by the Academy of Finland or, in the case of more applied projects supported by private monies, subject to evaluation by customer satisfaction.

Yearly faculty-centred evaluations which were submitted to the university senate under the pre-1998 system should, in the opinion of the review team, more properly be viewed as activity reports, as they are primarily concerned with targets and performance.

Organisation

Åbo Akademi has a chancellor who is appointed by the President of the Republic for four years from a university shortlist and whose role is to look after the general interests of the university and supervise its activities. The executive head of the institution is the rector, who is assisted by his executive team of administrative and academic staff and acts in matters of importance in consultation with the university senate. Under the 1998 Act on Universities the functions of the rector and the senate have been extensively revised. The changes are part of a trend over the last decade or more towards greater decentralisation from Parliament to universities' central administrations, and are consistent with the growth of external funding. The extension of the rector's term to five years in the new legislation, instead of the previous four, is accompanied by a strengthening of the role of the university senate.

Among its many roles, the latter is, as before, expected "to approve the economic and action plans and other large-scale plans of the university [and] to decide the overall lines of resource allocation " (section 11); in 1997-1998, this has meant that although 3.9% of Åbo Akademi's government grant was performance-related, this proportion changed to 8.5% in the senate's decision on the principles for allocating funds internally.

In addition, the senate is also in future to be called upon to "decide the division of the university into faculties or other units and into departments or institutes subordinate to them with a view to the organisation of teaching and research" (section 14). This is particularly important in view of the fact that altogether Åbo Akademi has seven faculties divided into fifty departments, which under the present system are all responsible for their
own budgets, including salaries. Already plans foresee that departments should relinquish
their financial responsibility to the faculty level, but there is some resistance to the reduction
of the number of departments. Students, for their part, sometimes remarked on the
fragmentation of departments to deplore the excessive power it gives some professors. The
division into several campuses also means that subjects are sometimes replicated and there
arises a need to arbitrate the allocation of responsibilities. The Faculty of Economics and
Social Sciences, which is divided between Åbo and Vasa, is a case in point.

The 1998 Act also specifies that:

"The university senate shall be presided over by the rector. In addition, the
university senate must include representatives of the following groups:

1) the professors and associate professors of the university;
2) the other teaching and research staff and other personnel; and
3) the students"

and may also include up to a third of external members (section 12). This puts an end to the
ex officio membership of deans, which seems in the past to have contributed to give the
senate a composition better adapted to a management than to a policy-making role. Indeed,
the review team found a surprisingly large consensus among senate members to say that
under the present system — the only one of which the interviewees had any experience — a
disproportionate amount of time is spent on technical matters. All agreed that too many
matters went to the senate, although the situation is changing as the Faculty Boards get more
teeth. Its (monthly) meetings are, as a result, regarded as too frequent, while the discussion of
financial matters from a management point of view makes limited sense as long as money is
distributed according to an agreed key.
B. The capacity for change

The mission

As was explained in the introduction to this report, the mission of Åbo Akademi is, expressed in broad terms, very clear. It is to "safeguard higher education in Swedish for the Swedish-speaking section of the population", a mission which has received legal form. Åbo Akademi sees itself — and judging from the legislation, is perceived — as "a minority university".

In practice, however, this status gives Åbo Akademi no special privileges but rather puts it under extra obligations of a kind that would not be incumbent on another institution⁶, as "in accordance with its mission, Åbo Akademi is responsible for many small fields of education with low productivity and high costs per degree" (self-evaluation report).

The institutional policies

"In the short run," states the self-evaluation report, "the search for enhanced quality and efficiency demands a consolidation of resources within areas of strength and specialisation rather than expansion into new areas". This appeared to the review team to be an acknowledgement of the necessity to regard Åbo Akademi primarily as a university, and only secondarily as a minority university, in realisation of the fact that in an increasingly competitive context a university that fell short of its academic obligations would not fulfil its other missions. If, as it appeared, consolidation is understood as the need to take stock and rationalise organisation and management, the review team fully support the view and they would stress that all disciplines stand to gain from such a re-appraisal.

Mid- and long-term strategies

If Åbo Akademi's administrative structure must be seen as rather traditional, this in no way implies that it is incapable of initiating reforms. The thorough analysis presented in the strategic report of April 1997, together with the very substantial and candid self-evaluation prepared for the CRE visit, give evidence that the university is determined to take its future into its own hands.

⁶ Instruction at the University of Helsinki is only partially in Swedish.
The strategic group set up in 1994 to respond to budget cuts proved the collective mind behind the 1997 strategic report. This plan could only be approved in principle, but not in detail, by the senate, owing to the conditions in which the rector, pending the 1998 legislation, was elected first for one year under the old legislation before he could stand for a full five-year term. However, the proposals contained in the plan will now be implemented from September 1998 and, in this connection, the review team would like to express their support for the recommendations accepted by the senate in March 1998 to arrive at a more efficient use of the week, with lectures spread over more days; to make a better use of semesters; and to consider setting homework in the summer.

Looking to the longer term, the review team noted that the relations between the main campus and Vasa/Jakobstad are constantly improving. It is only natural that people outside Åbo should feel a little impatient and wish to speed up the building programme there, but everyone seemed to agree that the integration procedure was moving in the right direction.

The reviewers were also impressed by the principle of a division of labour with other Swedish-speaking institutions, which should in their opinion be upheld and pursued as a framework for future development, as well as by the very extensive cooperation between Åbo Akademi and the Finnish-speaking higher education institutions in the city. Examples of such co-operation include:

- the national PET centre with researchers from Åbo Akademi and the University of Turku;

- the Fax Programme of the Faculty of Arts, which combines two languages and economics as a first subsidiary subject and is open to both Swedish- and Finnish-speakers (the latter make up 20-25% of the enrolled student population in the Faculty);

- the work of the Faculty of Chemical Engineering "with the other faculties and institutions of technology in Finland. Together they have a joint admission scheme for students, for example. [The Faculty also] collaborates with the Department of Odontology at the University of Turku (...) in developing unique biocompatible ceramics (...)" (university's promotional brochure);

- the Turku Centre of Computer Science, which brings together Åbo Akademi, the University of Turku and the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration;

- ElectroCity in which is found the three universities' joint materials research centre;

- a Joint Institute of Economics and the International University of Turku/ Åbo which also bring together all three institutions in Åbo.

7 Three-year plans are drawn up by all Finnish universities as the basis for discussion of funding.
There are also advanced plans for a joint library in Vasa with local Finnish-speaking institutions. Given this level of engagement, the review team would only recommend that co-operation with Finnish-speaking institutions in Åbo and Vasa become integrated in overall strategic thinking and that a blueprint for future developments be drawn up.

Links between academe and society at large are embodied in the Centres for Continuing Education of Åbo and Vasa, which provide courses for professionals as well as distance education (through the "Open University"). Links with social partners are well established and the Council for Society and Industry Relations bears witness to Åbo Akademi's wish to maintain these good relations. The career services also give evidence of the seriousness with which the university views its obligations to students and society.

Likewise, international relations are well-planned and the object of purposeful promotion to admirable effect — in 1997-98 Åbo Akademi hosted approximately 350 foreign students from 46 countries (of whom approximately 25% from Sweden, a natural and useful catchment area), the second-highest level in international student exchange among Finnish universities.

Nonetheless, there are areas of concern. Åbo Akademi in its present general organisation has a clear corporate culture, in which both students and staff identify strongly and fondly with the institution, but leaving to individual departments acting separately the whole burden of renovation as well as of innovation seems unrealistically hopeful. The review team would therefore recommend reducing the number of departments and drawing in the process on the valuable considerations presented in the strategic plan.

The review team heard that faculty administration already serves smaller departments which do not have their own administrative support, and that mergers between departments would in this respect be cost-neutral, while the preservation of departments of even modest size remains useful as a framework for cooperation with other Finnish, or foreign universities. However, they believe in the necessity to develop the Faculty as a level of administration and policy thinking, which argues not simply for the strengthening of the position of deans but also for a concomitant development of Faculty Boards. Already the Faculty of Chemical Engineering seems to have started in that direction. The risk of fragmentation of the university inherent in this type of enterprise would need to be met by inter-faculty cooperation — as exemplified by the TUCS computer project — facilitated by the central administrative apparatus (rectorate and senate). This in turn would be made easier if deans could serve terms longer than two years.

Taking account of the number of Masters and PhDs to the exclusion of other degrees, seems somewhat simplistic, particularly for Åbo Akademi, given its specific responsibility as a guardian and promoter of Swedish culture in Finland. This duty has caused
the university to offer a number of subjects which may never be able to attract enough students to meet government demands for degree output but nonetheless contribute to a cultural mission recognised in law. The review team were also surprised to notice that a government which has introduced Bachelor degrees does not give the universities any encouragement to offer such degrees. They are of opinion that a system which would incorporate the recognition of credit points rather than only degrees would lead to a fairer distribution of resources.

The problematic, even precarious, situation of many doctoral students also calls for special attention. The review team believe that the establishment of graduate schools has been a significant improvement and would recommend that consideration be given to the extension of the system. Easing publication requirements for PhD theses may also go a long way, at very little cost, to reduce study times and raise the quality of what eventually does get into print.

The number of positions below the professorial level, as has been pointed out, seems rather low and planning for an optimal staff profile must be a priority.

The need to integrate research more firmly in strategic thinking appears all the more pressing as research funding tends to be relatively short-term. Research projects must be assessed against a development plan based on clearly articulated principles, lest Åbo Akademi lose a sense of direction and become an R&D facility with no long-term backers. Major new projects, which divert resources away from less lucrative areas of research, may be hard to sustain once industrial funding has petered out.

Last but not least, as this point bears on all aspects of future development, the review team would like to suggest that the optimal size for Åbo Akademi become a matter for consideration.

The operation of change

The present senate is inadequate for strategic planning. It is either too large or too small to have a valuable influence on policy.

Regular informal meetings between the rector and the deans will be all the more important in future if deans are to lose their ex officio membership of the senate under the 1998 legislation, but the senate should remain the forum for policy decisions.
REVIEW SUMMARY

Academic leadership

Academic leadership at Åbo Akademi is strong and collegial, in line with the traditional university type on which the institution is modelled.

Accountability

Accountability is not an issue at Åbo Akademi. A re-invigorated senate and the revival of consultations between the deans and the rector should be seen as desirable improvements in a context that is altogether healthy.

Managerial capacity

Åbo Akademi seems able to rely on a pool of able and devoted non-academic staff. Improvements in managerial capacity, the review team think, is essentially a question of structures. In this respect, it is necessary to re-invigorate the faculty level and the senate. The new legislation, far from imposing new constraints, may provide the means to achieve this change.

Envoi

Åbo Akademi has to be thanked for its generous and friendly hospitality and the excellent arrangements that made the reviewers’ visits rewarding experiences. The clarity and quality of the self-evaluation report, as well as of the supplementary information provided in time for the main review visit, are gratefully acknowledged here. What emerges is the picture of an institution that enjoys great support from its students and staff, but finds itself at a critical moment. The foundations of future development exist, and steps have already been taken to gear revised management structures to a successful outcome. That this process has begun and is the subject of debate within the institution is highly encouraging.