



Explanatory comments on Swedish data: Cautions on EUEREK use of Sweden's university data

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<http://thoughtsmart.com/euerek/Sweden-DataCaveats.pdf>



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Explanatory comments on Swedish data

Sweden's universities have gone through numerous changes from 1993 to present, due to various causes. Some of these are solid reasons that data should be interpreted with considerable caution.

Please note the below caveats before attempting to extrapolate from the Swedish data:

Colleges and functions have been absorbed or spun-off in response to external policies

The universities studied have changed domain during the period studied. Since 1994 there have been a number of reorganisations in the Swedish higher education system. Health colleges, for instance, offering education in nursing and other occupations in the medical and health sphere, were previously run under the auspices of the county councils. (The 21 Swedish county councils represent a level between the municipalities and the state government, and are politically elected with the primary task of being responsible for all health care, including hospitals, and public transportation of their respective counties). Within the framework of unification of all Swedish higher education into one system, and as a consequence of trying to uphold the ambition that all higher education should be linked to research ("rest on scientific foundations" according to the Higher Education Act), the health colleges were gradually transferred into the state system, sometimes being incorporated into nearby university colleges or universities.

In Jönköping, the Health College was incorporated into Jönköping University as the School of Health Sciences in 2000, adding another school to the three created earlier.

Another reorganisation was the creation of Malmö University College which entailed that all teacher education located in Malmö that at an earlier stage had been incorporated into Lund University, was now to transfer into Malmö University College. In addition, some engineering programmes provided in Malmö became part of the new college. On the other hand, the education for dentists, previously a separate school in Malmö, became part of the University of Lund and merged with the faculty of medicine there. All such changes have taken place during the period studied, with subsequent effects on the basis from which statistical data is generated. In many cases nationwide, such changes in university domain have arisen in response to Swedish national or regional policy, and not as an effect of an individual university's entrepreneurialism.

Non-core income is systematically underreported

It is important to note that some / much income from commercialisation of various kinds, contract education, consultancy services or research-based products etc. are not visible in the annual reports of the HEIs or in the statistical information provided by Högskoleverket (Sweden's National Agency for Higher Education). This is because the HEIs have created separate external companies to deal with these tasks. Some of these are wholly-owned by university holding companies, some are partly owned, and some are owned by other principals such as professors, but operate in some form of *symbiosis* with the universities. In some cases the university agreed, for example, to a ten-percent ownership of the spin-offs. This is largely due to the fact that Swedish HEIs are administrative units of the state, not legal persons, and as such they cannot enter into legally binding contracts or agreements with other parties (three exceptions include Jönköping University). In addition, as part of the government, HEIs cannot independently bring cases to court, hire staff, take up loans, have command over capital and own real estate without the limitations that apply to all agencies of the state. And as we have reported elsewhere, university researchers in Sweden retain rights to commercialization and intellectual property ownership of their innovation (this is called the "academic exception"). In many cases it is therefore preferential to run commercial or externally-directed activities in corporate or foundation form. These companies file financial reports according

to corporate law, and income from such entrepreneurial activities often is not reported in the university accounts. Yet it can be the package mix of the university and private combination that makes a university department, research team or position attractive (this is cited as a factor that retains researchers in Sweden; see "Getting it together." *New Scientist*, 27 March 2004, p. 50-51). Donations to universities can also be creatively funnelled through mechanisms allowing greater (or lesser) latitude or control. There are many avenues existing that allow workarounds as countermeasures to organizational and legal rigidities. In as much as entrepreneurial mechanisms grow in these ways, the published data may move in the opposite direction.

Data definitions and formats have changed

The data definitions are not exactly the same from year to year. Both the HEIs and Högskoleverket have adjusted the definitions and formats which makes comparisons over time. The Agency rather carefully charts details of these changes, but the annual reports of the universities are not necessarily explicit about their discrepancies. To compare data between universities in one and the same year using Högskoleverket's figures can be done with a high degree of confidence, but more than that becomes rather tricky. The fiscal year in Sweden has also changed: 1995/96, was the last fiscal year reported from July 1st to June 30th; from 1997, the fiscal year became the same as the calendar year. In this transition, data was published for an 18 month period.

Another difficulty is with determining teaching staff data. Some technical staff and many doctoral students teach courses. But we cannot simply count doctoral students as teachers. Though all doctoral students in Sweden must have full funding prior to entry, some are paid as employees while others receive fellowships. In the latter case, due to tax implications, they are not supposed to teach, but often do. Finally, the teaching load at most Swedish universities is quite low in international comparison. Full-time equivalent data is thus deceptive. If course hours offered were the starting point, perhaps data would be more robust; instead, people are counted and determined as full or (to some extent) partial employees.

In Sweden, "private" does not always mean "non-state"

The driving force for becoming a private university as an entity under private law (which was the case with Chalmers and Jönköping) was primarily as follows:

- to build up funds of one's own
- to own land and buildings
- to decide about the organisation
- to develop an employment structure of one's own
- to develop a recruitment procedure of one's own

Another effect of this status is the relative ease of entering into agreements with organisations or individuals having independent legal standing, to control real estate or capital, and with freedom to form new legal standing, merge or split legal status without the need for special permission.

It is not unusual for the government to choose to "hand over" some public administration tasks to be carried out in other forms than through public authorities. Such transfers of authority are legally regulated and cannot be considered simply "private" (or non-state).

Nationwide negotiations determine compensation per student; individual negotiations between the state and each institution (including private institutions) determines maximum number of students for whom compensation will be paid. In practice, the Swedish government's ultimate funding of programs also controls what programs are offered. Universities as a rule may not charge tuition.
