

Kunstakademiet:

Forslag til opprettelse av faglige utvalg på institusjonsnivå

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Summary: Mike Sperlinger

The faculty recognises the importance of the rectorate and the research department receiving advice and feedback from the other departments. We also understand that there are increasing formal demands from the ministry of education. However, we feel that the current proposals confuse these two issues and will not meet either need.

The faculty of Kunstakademiet had serious reservations about many aspects of the proposals and the process for deciding on them, which are outlined below.

1) Timing

The single most important response the faculty wished to give was that the proposals should not under any circumstances be put to the KHiO board before the new rector is in post.

Reevaluating the forms of coordination and collaboration between KHiO departments was a central aspect of Måns Wrangé's candidacy. When he met Kunstakademiet's faculty, he stressed the importance of bottom-up forms of interdepartmental collaboration. We think it would be completely wrong to pre-empt his rectorship with these proposals, which relate so closely to a central part of his mandate.

2) Remits & reducing bureaucracy

We think the committees have been defined in ways which separate out areas which need to be related strategically, whilst overloading individual committees with tasks which would be better handled at department level.

The individual committees are given remits which are much too broad. Whilst there are a few tasks which clearly need to be at KHiO level (e.g. allocation of KUF funding) there are many which we think should be handled at department level - e.g. revision of study plans, recruitment of PhD supervisors etc. We are simply not qualified to discuss issues at this level of detail in relation to other departments' curricula.

On the other hand, we are concerned that the separation out of research, education and the PhD programme into separate committees may create siloed decision-making. If the remits for the committee were restricted to decision-making regarding formal requirements (quality assurance etc) it might be possible to have a single committee, whilst the need for advice and discussion could be met by other more inclusive and informal fora (see below).

KHiO is under financial pressure partly as a result of the government's annual 1.5% 'anti-bureaucracy' cuts. In that context, we do not think it makes sense to commit increasingly scarce faculty resources to new administrative tasks that are defined in such an open-ended way. We would propose a rigorous 'Occam's razor' approach to devising any new structures: keep the emphasis is on maintaining devolved decision-making at department level wherever possible, with any new centralised structures only as a last resort.

3) Faculty working plans & part-time contracts

The proposal puts all responsibility for finding sufficient faculty hours for committee work on the individual departments, without any further resources. This is unacceptable and has serious implications for the academy's ability to deliver on its studyplan, in terms of the hours required for teaching BA and MA.

This is also reflected in the timescales proposed: four year terms also make very little sense in relation to the åremål contracts on which most faculty at KHiO are employed.

In our meeting with the prorektor she suggested that part of the problem with meeting the additional hours that would be needed is that KHiO has too many part-time staff. We are not aware of any prior meaningful discussion of this issue at KHiO, so this would appear to be an ad hoc priority from the rectorate. Part-time contracts are essential to Kunstakademiet, as to the other departments which wish to employ artists with a continuing practice outside the school.

Similarly we were alarmed to hear the prorektor suggest in that meeting that any shortfall in teaching hours could be made up by e.g. having students step in to teach. This would seem to be in direct conflict with the simultaneous demand for quality assurance, "teacher excellence" etc. Any proposals need to be start from the departments' actual teaching needs and resources, rather than imposing unilateral policies based simply on administrative convenience.

4) Research fellows' role

The proposals here are contradictory, suggesting fellows involvement in committees whilst noting that such work is prohibited under their current contracts. There is no proposal about how this could be resolved.

In terms of the research fellows roles, there is a much more pressing need for them to have the possibility to teach within their contracts and yet, after several years of discussions, this has still not been possible. This should be prioritised.

5) Relationship to deans

We are concerned that the deans appear to have been increasingly sidelined in KHiO's decision-making.

The deans are better qualified than most individual faculty members to have an overview of strategic issues and to canvas opinion so as to genuinely represent a faculty consensus. The proposals make no mention of the deans and it is not clear what their relationship would be to the utvalg.

6) Relevance of other institutional comparisons

It is not evident why the only other institutions researched for comparison within Norway were NMH and KMD. The risk here is that the proposals draw on models which either do not have the internal diversity of KHiO (NMH) or are part of a formal university structure with limited relevance (KMD).

KHiO should not default to following more academic, university models for self-organisation. We think it is imperative that other institutions outside Norway with more comparable remits and internal diversity are examined.

7) Lack of clarity about Ministry requirements

In our meeting with the prorector and head of research, it became clear that a large part of the committee's decision-making roles were based on new requirements from the Ministry around quality assurance, teacher excellence etc and the requirements associated with becoming a 'vitenskapelig høyskole'. Some of these would appear to be narrowly formal/technical, whilst others might have more substantive implications.

We think the proposals should be clearer on what these government requirements are and how we can interpret them in line with our existing school culture, rather than creating new centralised structures with broad remits simply to meet them.

We also think the need to meet these narrower, technical requirements should be separated out from the need for substantive possibilities for discussion and feedback between departments and the rectorate (see below).

The requirements from the ministry need to be clearly stated in writing and given out as soon as possible.

8) Democracy at KHiO

We do not think the utvalg model will increase internal democracy at KHiO. It is predicated on a small, relatively self-selecting group of faculty members who are likely to be:

- full-time
- on permanent contracts (because of the proposed 4 year terms)
- based in Oslo
- Norwegian-speaking

In the academy, this would already make them unrepresentative.

As the rector-elect proposed in his address, we would prefer to see more inclusive fora at KHiO which allow for a wider constituency to participate meaningfully (at least in terms of advisory roles). We would like to see a model in which the rectorate related outwards to the departments, participating in their projects and events, rather than trying to create new centralised structures.

9) Ambiguous status of research department

We are concerned that the status of the research department is still unclear. On the one hand, it appears to have been granted a similar status to the other 6 departments; on the other hand it has very few resources of its own and has been established with a broad remit which depends on the resources of the other departments.

Much of the need for the utvalg seems to stem from this mismatch. In the proposals, this is reflected in the fact that 2 of the 3 committees are related to research and post-doctoral practice. This ambiguity around the research department creates many opportunities for conflicts of interest and unclear decision-making – we would strongly urge that this relationship is clarified under the new rector.

Conclusion

The faculty of Kunstakademiet has very serious reservations about these plans. We think they do not meet the needs they are designed to, whilst they create new problems in terms of resources and unclarity around decision-making at KHiO.

We would reiterate, above all, our strong belief that these proposals should not be put before the board before the rector-elect is in post.