



Stockholm
University

Core values – a continuous conversation

Summary of the 2018 project Living Values



Förord

This text provides a summary of the pilot project Living Values, and it covers the work surrounding core values that was conducted at Stockholm University during 2018. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in the text are from the responses received from the university's faculties, departments, and individual employees during this process. I would like to give a sincere thanks to all those involved in the project and who have made contributions, both individually and collectively!



ASTRID SÖDERBERGH WIDDING

President

Introduction

“Universities today face tremendous complexity and uncertainty. This is due to the increasingly varied expectations of internal and more numerous and diverse external stakeholders, the changing dynamics of national and international politics, increased competition for students and funding, challenges arising from internationalisation, and the rapid evolution of technology and communication.”
(Magna Charta Observatory: *Why are values increasingly important for universities?*)

“Professor John Goodenough, 97, is a professor of physics/chemistry at the University of Texas in Austin. He is responsible for the invention that led to the lithium battery. He has formulated and expressed these four thoughts about life:

- dialogue is sacred, for learning and for reconciliation alike*
 - the importance of metaphors and storytelling to convey wisdom*
 - the beauty of truth, both intellectual and spiritual*
 - we find meaning in life in what we strive for*
- In my opinion, these four tenets contain an essential part of what a university should represent.”*

Stockholm University decided in 2017 to apply for the advertised Magna Charta Universitatum pilot project, Living Values, on the subject of academic core values. The decision was based on a workshop with the same theme organised by the Magna Charta Observatory in Glasgow in January that year where I participated in my role as University President.

If by any chance you are not familiar with Magna Charta Universitatum, it is an agreement that was originally created in Bologna in conjunction with the 900th anniversary of the university in 1988. Magna Charta Universitatum – and its observatory – is a global keeper of academic core values, with institutional autonomy and academic freedom as the foundation, both concepts with a long history. When the agreement turned 30 last year, which was celebrated in conjunction with another anniversary

namely the 800th of the university in Salamanca, another party entered the agreement, making the total number around 900. At the same time, work is underway to develop the Magna Charta agreement without compromising its fundamental principles, in order to adapt it to a new era with new demands on higher education. The pilot Living Values was a step in this renewal process, in which Stockholm University was one of ten participating universities from around the world. The project was named Living Values precisely because its perhaps most important aspect relates to making sure that the values are not simply stated in a signed document, but that they actually permeate the activities at each university.

Ever since the first universities in Europe were founded, around one thousand years ago, the fundamental core values have always been present in some form, albeit with significant historical variations and rapid developments, not least since the Enlightenment. In addition to the original principles of **autonomy** and **academic freedom**, Magna Charta has later incorporated another two fundamental core values, namely **equity** – which comprises both fairness and equality – and **integrity** – which includes ethics, scientific integrity, and transparency. In addition to these fundamental values, many higher education institutions also have “institutional” core values in accordance with their own profiles. Stockholm University has come a long way from the time when these institutional values were mainly considered as slogans to define and communicate the university’s brand, to now, when they are taken more seriously to express our fundamental and societal mission in higher education.

But even if the core values have a long history, they were not sent from above or carved in stone. They are based on a type of social contract: a trust instilled in the higher education institutions. Today, they are being questioned and threatened in many places. This is due in part to external

factors outside the universities' control – in a world with multiple threats to democracy, there is also a threat to democratic institutions, the freedom of speech, and the freedom of research. In a post-truth society, where populist policies are gaining ground the universities must forcefully stand up for these fundamental values. It is also important to realise that the higher education institutions of today are not always viewed as the obvious representatives of the public good, but rather as elite institutions that safeguard a type of collective egotism, a self-absorbed culture that only promotes its own interests. In Sweden and elsewhere, there has long been the assumption that there is unity in our societies, a fundamental solidarity. Without falling into the perspective of the underdog, we now need to prove ourselves as higher education institutions and show that we are worthy of society's trust by proving that we are indeed at its service. This is the only way we can claim our privileges. Most of all, we need to look at the diversity that now characterises our societies. How can we relate to it, how should it affect our programmes and their content now and in the future? We need to reflect more deeply on our mission in society as higher education institutions and how this mission changes along with society's development. A renewed Magna Charta Universitatum would not only need to be based in the European university tradition, but it would need to be truly global.

Autonomy is still an absolute necessity, and freedom as well, but these concepts may need to be broadened to include not only academic freedom, but also pure freedom of expression and opinion. The higher education institutions also need to reflect on their knowledge base in the development of research and education. The future development of knowledge must be centred not least around the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Diversity is essential – the multiple perspectives that can be added in both research and education, but also the diversity of subjects that is necessary for sustainability. Openness is important – open access to research and open research data; it is a key issue for democracy. And finally, in an increasingly divided society, the development of global, universal, and socially necessary knowledge is a strong unifying force. This is why we need to keep the discussion of our core values alive.

The fundamental principles of the Magna Charta were foundational for the work carried out at Stockholm University. Added to these were the “institutional” core values that can be said to characterise our university in particular, with Stockholm University having already established three such values some years before the beginning of this project: openness, innovation, and willingness to cross boundaries. A fundamental purpose of the pilot project was to raise the subject of fundamental values for discussion within the university. Are they considered central to our activities? To what extent are they implemented? What could we do differently and better? Another aim was to examine the existing “institutional values” to see if they were still considered to be adequate. And if not, which new values should be formulated to better describe Stockholm University and its mission? These questions were the focus of discussions and comments throughout the project.

Living Values – project implementation

“One of our first reflections was that several of us were unaware that the university even had core values, not to mention what they were. [...] In conclusion, we would like to reiterate how great we think it is that all staff members were included in this project, and how important it is to have core values in order to communicate a common view on and within the university.”

As a pilot university, Stockholm University had a great deal of freedom in designing its own process together with a Magna Charta “ambassador” for support, Professor Caroline Parker, who participated actively in the process through continuous dialogue with the President of the university and through a film produced and shown widely at Stockholm University, in which she spoke of her own experiences in leading the core values work at Glasgow Caledonian University, and finally by participating actively in the university’s Employee Kick-off in 2018. Two employees within operational support, Eva Albrektson and Ulf Nyman, were appointed to coordinate the work. Eva Albrektson was at the same time assigned to edit the university’s strategies, which underlines a fundamental purpose of the pilot project – to provide a basis for work on the strategies and to clarify the exchange between central strategies and the university’s fundamental values. This also made it important to emphasise that the project was owned by the President together with the entire University Management.

One initial concern within the management was that the entire pilot project process would be burdensome, yet another addition to an organisation that was already involved in several forms of evaluation, when in reality, the aim was completely different: not to “value certify” the university, but rather to encourage an active discussion about the underlying values of our activities. It was therefore decided to use existing bodies and forums to the greatest extent possible for these discussions, but also to make the entire process as such a voluntary undertaking. There were thus discussions at the

central level within the Interdisciplinary Council, as well as group discussions at the President’s meetings with the heads of department. The Student Union was also consulted and gave a statement of opinion. The Deputy Vice Presidents/Deans brought the discussion to their respective areas and faculty boards, but they also invited the departments to contribute, which many did. Finally, the President invited all university employees to submit individual statements and comments. Some sixty responses were received, which have provided rich material to use in the university’s continued work with core values.

At the President’s meeting with the heads of department in autumn 2018, a preliminary summary of the results was presented. Most importantly, it indicated great interest in these issues – unexpectedly large and eliciting many comments – not only from the academic activities but also from the students and within the operational support function.

Secondly, it was clear that the staff felt that the process was the most important aspect, as a general value in relation to the substance of the discussions. Having a continuous conversation about values within the academic sector has apparently been a welcome and important addition for many.

Thirdly, the responses clearly showed that the established combination of value words for Stockholm University at that time was below par. Many employees responded well to ‘openness’, whereas both ‘innovation’ and ‘willingness to cross boundaries’ were perceived as too ambiguous. The discussion of these values constitutes a large part of the responses, while at the same time, they put forward a large number of suggestions for new core values. These – including the previously established core values – were also presented to the heads of departments and administrative managers in the autumn of 2018. A Mentimeter exercise, which unfortunately only worked at two meetings out of three – although the participants of the third meeting were given an opportunity to submit

comments afterwards, which they did – was a decisive step in the process to identify new values that a majority of those in management positions at the university feel they can support.

Last, but not least, emphasis was placed on the desire to receive feedback and to continue working on this matter through further discussions. This text, which aims to account for and summarise the fundamental ideas that have come out of the process, is a step in this direction. However, the most important thing is that the question of academic core values – meaning the values that fuel our activities as a university – is kept alive in the organisation and allowed to permeate our day-to-day work. This requires awareness and continuous development management at all levels of the university moving forward.

Core values in general

“If the university is to survive and maintain its autonomy, it must be attentive to the needs of society, and its relevance and value to that society must be clear to every citizen. In reality, the university is one of the most robust institutions in human history, which has been in existence for more than a thousand years. This longevity proves the success of the university institution in answering complex questions that have had a profound effect on society and in offering adequate intellectual education for generations of young people, while simultaneously keeping up with societal developments.”

“So what is the specific value and importance of the university in our time? To me, the central aspect of our activities is the concept of academic quality; that the discussions and conclusions that give us our daily bread are based on scientific methods and objective peer review.”

We *“appreciate [...] a more profound discussion on the type of institution that Stockholm University aims to be, and the academic core values are a good place to start.”*

This is how one of the departments opens its statement, and this stance seems characteristic for the majority of the statements received. The same department underlines that it would be better for the university to have *“more precise wording that addresses the difficult deliberations entailed by our long-term choices”*, rather than a string of positive value words. This is also something that the university’s central strategies are intended to cover.

One department describes the different governing principles that characterise the university and which are necessary to create both legitimacy and fairness: the collegial tradition, the administrative legal framework, the management control, and the representative democracy, arguing that the discussion on core values must be related to these four sets of governing logic.

The students for their part underline that the university should formulate *“its own direction/ identity and, as a result, strengthen its independence from political trends. In its efforts to strengthen its independence from political trends, the university must set up long-term goals and strategies.”*

Several respondents reflect on whether the core values should express something that already exists, or rather something to aspire to? Some make the connection to the Ethical Foundations of the State, reflecting on the role of that document in this context. One response is asking for a more detailed description of the university’s ethical foundations, as a basis for the chosen core values, and wonders whether the Ethical Foundations of the State is to be considered such a basis; it includes the terms democracy, legality, objectivity, transparency, respect, efficiency, and good service. Another response highlights the conflict between the desire for efficient governance with short decision paths and the principle of peer review, arguing that higher education institutions must become better at adopting an external perspective, at reviewing and developing our activities, and at showing our strengths – which in turn requires transparency.

One department points out *“the inherent paradox of our work: On the one hand, we are a conservative force (and I am not referring to politics), that manages our knowledge heritage [...] a knowledge tradition that I think should be considered in almost evolutionary terms [...] On the other hand, we are a progressive force seeking new knowledge”*. Another response expresses a similar thought: the universities need to *“have values reflecting the ‘present’”*, i.e. where the universities’ values and definitions can be affected by social changes, and *“have values representing continuity, which communicate the stable ethical foundation of the university”*.

Several departments, across disciplines, mention the sociologist Robert Merton, who described four ideals as being characteristic of research and which are associated with the core values: *“Communism*

– the common ownership and openness of material, ideas and research results to enable verification and criticism. Universalism – works are to be assessed on nothing but purely scientific criteria, and not on the basis of the researcher’s social background. In addition to these, Merton also counts disinterestedness and organised scepticism among his ethical ideals. Personally, I would like to place special emphasis on the last one, since any claims of finality will lead to dogmatism. Safeguarding the constant review through open and objective discussion is the best way to avoid this”. Another comment makes a similar remark, underlining that “What is new is good, because it asks unexpected questions and can bring us out of a ‘dogmatic slumber’. New ideas provide nuances and supplementation, but they must be reviewed like anything else. There must be a fixed point in the timeless demands for clarity and intersubjective controls, so that other researchers can review and question without being questioned. This anxious sensitivity to trends, which is easily manifested in young academic environments, must not be a characteristic of Stockholm University”.

One fundamental apprehension can be discerned from several responses, namely that the project is an attempt to introduce a new control measure. Some feel “*slightly hesitant about implementing ‘living values’ which truly govern our day-to-day work*”. One department emphasises the risk of creating “*quantifiable units, [...] quick results using checkmarks*”. Another writes about society’s demand for organisations to create positive narratives about themselves: “*In our department, we do not consider the initiative to discuss academic core values from this angle, but rather as a serious method of staying open, consciously and bravely, to who we are and who we can be – however, this is the exact reason why a warning against an instrumental orientation towards checklists should be included in such processes. It cannot be a matter of answering yes or no to a question – but about safeguarding values and principles*”. And this is indeed the ambition, to capture values that already exist in the organisation, to put words on the different values that we actually adhere to or strive towards, while at the same time reflecting on what we can develop further.

Several responses also emphasise the importance of having the core values permeate policy documents at all levels, but also suggest that they can be highlighted through concrete examples, such as

in the form of a narrative. What can they entail in practice? Several state that “*for the core values to really have an impact, the organisation and all its employees must ‘live’ the values established by the organisation. Implementation (continuous efforts) and follow-up become the keywords*”. Every new employee should for example be introduced to the values during their introduction. Concrete proposals made include giving each new employee and student a document on the university’s ethical foundations and core values to sign in order to certify that they have read them and will respect them, as well as giving all new students an introduction. Some hope that they will see these values in upcoming performance and salary reviews. One response notes that “*One difficult question is to decide where the department needs to ‘draw the line’, what is not OK according to the university’s core values*”. Another emphasises that “*we have to make it clear to all employees that it is our moral duty to stand up for our core values. Especially in times like these, when irrational forces have taken over much of the public debate, we need to be a strong guiding light for rational humanism*”. In general, many responses also express a wish for the core values to function to a greater extent as “*a good tool for strengthening the university further and contributing to the sense that this university belongs to all of us.*” Doing so requires better communication, both internally and externally.

Fundamental academic values

“The general core values of autonomy, academic freedom, fairness, and integrity relate to a condition and an approach that is permanent, long-term, and guided by values. As research is guided by curiosity, it often leads to the unexpected discovery that could not be anticipated. Academic freedom and autonomy are values that must be protected. Fairness and integrity are equally indispensable values. It is a matter relating, among other things, to having research and education that are strongly rooted in science.”

“Why do we all share these values? One possible key to answering that question is to note that all of these values serve to support the university’s core mission (not only that of Stockholm University, but of universities in general). This mission can be understood as the search for knowledge through rational argumentation. The university is a place where we seriously contemplate difficult questions; where we systematically attempt to go beyond our superficial impressions to reveal deeper truths. We strive towards this goal by engaging in open and inclusive debate, by rigorous examination of disparate views based on facts, evidence, and logical argumentation. We value autonomy because this search for truth must never be distorted by political or economic circumstances. We value academic freedom because it is impossible to know in advance where the most important progress will happen, so we need to be free to follow all imaginable research paths (as long as they are compatible with legal and ethical standards). We value fairness because it is necessary to give every voice a fair and objective assessment (as long as they present us with rational, evidence-based arguments) and it is more likely for a diverse array of opinions to yield stable and robust results. Finally, we value integrity because a productive debate must be based on respect for others and a commitment to truth and intellectual acuity.”

The Magna Charta core values are generally seen as relevant, as “a natural backbone” and a good foundation for the activities of a university. Similarly, a number of departments highlight the

great importance of the academic core values, especially in times of fake news, where “post-truth” has become an established concept, where “*fundamental ideas and notions within the democratic society are being challenged. The universities play a morally significant role in ensuring freedom of speech and people’s equal value and freedom*”. This is necessary in a time when mistrust of “experts” and arguments based on emotion rather than evidence are commonly occurring, in direct contradiction to the core values that the university represents.

One department underlines that the values reinforce each other: an essential element of the universities’ autonomy is the peer review process, i.e. the fact that only other researchers within the same discipline are qualified to assess the research conducted. If their integrity is compromised, meaning that their assessments can be questioned, this is also a threat to autonomy. One response refers to the SULF report on employment processes in the academic sector, arguing that if such elementary criteria for fairness and integrity cannot be met, it is impossible to even start talking about academic core values.

Autonomy as a concept is not being questioned, but it is problematised in several ways. Many suggest that autonomy is a relative concept, seeing that Swedish universities are also government agencies. Several note that in a publicly funded organisation, it is reasonable to have some form of external control, for example in terms of educational assignments and having an external review of activities. A few departments are of the opinion that micromanagement has declined slightly, while emphasising that internal autonomy within the university is important – this entails great freedom. Several argue that the autonomy of the departments is something that should be emphasised and safeguarded. Some state that the autonomy of the universities must be utilised more effectively in general, by ensuring that they become a more distinguishable voice in public debate. One response

underlines that *“an independence from other central actors in society [...] is an important principle”*, but also that *“pluralism and freedom of opinion is a fundamental condition for the rational autonomy of researchers to be expressed freely”*.

Academic freedom is also generally accepted as a principle, even if several asks how it should be interpreted on a case-by-case basis, for example relating to an individual researcher or university. There are opinions regarding the strategic calls for proposals for different research fields, which some feel have become too restrictive. The rise of corporate culture in society is also said to be a risk; it is generally hierarchical and driven by more short-term goals; corporate researchers rarely have the long-term perspective and the associated need for academic freedom that must be safeguarded at the universities. This entails a risk for recruitment to be guided by financial considerations – the researcher’s ability to obtain external funding – and for the basic funding allocated to research to be caught in demands for matched funding rather than be used for free research, which also entails a restriction of academic freedom. Another department also states that performance systems where quantitative measurements provide the basis for allocation of funds can have negative consequences for academic freedom, especially in small environments where activities risk being directed towards tactical choices in research and education and less towards innovation and risktaking. Some emphasise the problems relating to researcher safety and the risk of vulnerability and harassment, that currently limits the freedom of individual researchers. A few departments comment that the active steering towards open publishing and the problems with effectively offering appropriate laboratory premises are also restrictions of the individual researcher’s freedom. One response also specifically emphasises the risk of steering in education, and the risk that individual agreements between the Government and various universities is *“evidently a way to give the government power to control the activities at higher education institutions”*. At the same time, several units within the operational support function indicate that there is a risk of the term being misused: *“The principle of academic freedom should not be used as an argument for administrative leniency which may jeopardise the principles of due process, equal treatment, or efficiency”*.

Equity is generally perceived as positive, but is perhaps even more ambiguous. Some feel that the term’s relation to the core activities is unclear. Several relate the concept to democracy. Some emphasise legally secure processing of matters, others that the administration has a special responsibility in ensuring compliance with this value. Some highlight the language issue in a multilingual working environment with Swedish as the official language. The importance of an inclusive environment at the university, including both availability and accessibility as well as gender equality and equal opportunities, is emphasised in several responses. *“Equity should therefore be about how we offer an education programme that is accessible and which promotes the development of everyone, how we make it possible to make all employees feel included.”*

Integrity is also ambiguous, however, this is not necessarily perceived as negative. Employees in operational support functions emphasise the importance of integrity in the role of officials. Representatives of core activities and departments within the operational support function alike highlight the importance of scientific integrity and credibility for research. One response specifies that *“A researcher should never be banned from a department at Stockholm University for writing an opinion piece in a trade magazine”* – meaning that political aspects must never be prioritised over scientific ones. One department proposes a *“broader diversity of opinions”* as a value; an acceptance of the “extreme” might *“enable a diverse environment that accepts new and innovative ideas”* – and that this requires a high level of integrity. Some argue that the university is perceived as hierarchical and that the decision paths are long, which requires a high level of integrity in the communication between employees. One department also indicates that the concept of integrity as such needs to be more clearly defined: *“a scientific foundation should be the only or at least the decisive factor when designing an education programme”*. They also underline that truth is not part of integrity, but rather the pursuit of truth. Integrity is important, not least in recruitment; the element of competition – *“recruiting only the best researchers”* – runs the risk of undermining the substance of the assessment.

Academic values at Stockholm University

“That the university should be characterised by openness, innovation, and a willingness to cross boundaries is a given. However, these values are not specific to academic activities; they can as easily be ascribed to the preschool Blåbäret, the restaurant Riche, a gaming company, or anything at all.”

“What do we want to achieve with the core values? Do we want to promote SU to new students? Do we want to attract international researchers? Do we want a UNIFIED university/to create loyalty to SU among existing employees and students? The core values give no direction in this respect.”

The term “institutional values”, as used by Magna Charta in the Living Values project, has provoked some negative reactions and raised some questions. “How is this term to be perceived, is it inclusive or exclusive?” Several people also problematise the purpose of such values. As initially mentioned, much criticism has been directed at the previous value catchwords of openness, innovation, and a willingness to cross boundaries, criticism that also conveys many important observations concerning the university’s activities and its profile that demand further attention. Most significant was the widespread unawareness of the existence of these values. They have clearly not worked as “living values”, but have rather been viewed “as a PR product whose aim is unclear from an operational perspective” or “something for external audiences – they are far too undefined to create a sense of solidarity internally”. Some are calling for clearer leadership and more focused decisions regarding the core values. Others question the need for specific core values for Stockholm University and suggest it should be sufficient with the general values.

At the same time, some responses indicate that the core values “serve as a yardstick for what we communicate and how we act as an organisation”. One response proposes that the values should be more clearly linked to SU’s “brand strategy”, in the process of “creating coherence in the university’s

external/internal profile”. In the communication culture where the universities operate today, it is not possible to get by without values. The core values fall within this pursuit – but they are not the only ones. They contribute, perhaps to a lesser extent as unique terms and more in combination with each other and with the formulations of the strategies, to profiling the university. In this way they represent some of the key words in the narrative of Stockholm University.

Many employees have evidently recognised themselves and their university in the term “openness”, and several departments indicate that this is a valid core value unlike the other two: “*This appears to be a core value that greatly characterises Stockholm University*”. One department emphasises that “*Teachers and students have an obligation to participate in and lead both international academic discussions and public debate in Sweden. At Stockholm University, uncomfortable ideas should also be open for dialogue as long as this is done with respect for those with opposing views and for the academic discussion.*”

Several people suggest that the focus in the description of openness is primarily on cooperation – one person emphasises however that the existing cooperation with the business sector remains invisible in the official documents – but that open science (publication and data) does not feature at all in this picture, which is seen as a failing, especially as the university is a prominent driving force in these areas. Some emphasise the need for work with broadened recruitment in this context. In one response, it is also linked to good research practice – aside from open science, cooperation and collaboration – and it is suggested that this can be expanded to also encompass tolerance and inclusion; “*values that are central in a time where the function and ethical foundations of universities are under attack by anti-democratic elements*”.

As far as “innovation” is concerned, a large number of responses mention that the descriptions focus excessively on what was historically innovative at the time of the university’s foundation, rather than on current research results or other forms of innovation. At the same time, one department suggests that *“IF there is no innovation, then you die!”* – another comments that the term *“can be seen as redundant; research, in any case good research, is inherently innovative”*. It is also pointed out that the values generally *“appear inspired by a market/business mindset, especially ‘innovation’”*, which is seen as a possible threat to free basic research. Several suggest that it could be replaced with *“development-oriented”* or *“operational development”*, which is central to many. In one response it is suggested that creativity be added to innovation, as the term *“to innovate”*, as defined in the Oxford Dictionary, does not include the creative formation of new ideas, insights, and concepts. One respondent thinks that Stockholm University should not strive to be innovative at all in the sense conveyed by some higher education institutions that generally employ more experimental approaches on courses etc. *“SU should instead guarantee a consistent, high quality and incomparably broad scope in its education and research”*. Another respondent points out that it is important to utilise the creative thinking and innovation of the individual, and that this is currently under threat through the focus on strong environments and large research groups. One response from a department highlights that the university today does not attain the ideal of innovation, as doctoral students are too often encouraged to *“pick low-hanging fruit”* rather than venture into riskier projects.

“Willingness to cross boundaries” is an ambiguous term with many interpretations. In a number of comments, it is suggested that it is not necessarily a positive one. The meaning of this term for the university’s activities is questioned. The technical and administrative staff at one department note that *“As civil servants at a government agency, ‘willingness to cross boundaries’ is not exactly a watchword in our operation”*. Some respondents warn of the term’s proximity to “boundary crossing and violating”, and suggest a conflict of objectives in relation to fairness and integrity. Other argue that the term is contained within openness or innovation. One response alludes to a potential paradox wherein the emphasis on research that crosses boundaries

has an inherent risk of curtailing academic freedom, and therefore advocates that the general core values are kept separate from other policy values at the university.

Many perceive the term as primarily pertaining to interdisciplinary collaboration. One department praises existing interdepartmental centres like the Bolin Centre for Climate Research and the Baltic Sea Centre. Others argue that the cross-boundary element to some extent characterises the research activities but not the education programmes. One department notes that it does not necessarily have to be a matter of working with an interdisciplinary approach, but rather about being inquisitive, which is viewed as more important. Another department suggest that willingness to cross boundaries, in the sense of interdisciplinary science, should not be seen as a value in itself, but rather as *“a means of obtaining knowledge that may be difficult or impossible to obtain within disciplinary boundaries”*. However, if this was explicit in an actual goal, intradisciplinary work would have an inherently lower value. Again, others perceive it more as an organisational term, and believe that SU needs to review its organisation and further promote both external and internal collaborations across boundaries. One department says that there are no interdisciplinary meeting places for spontaneous meetings. Several also emphasise that the organisation is too focused on “being self-sufficient”, or only being concerned with one’s own interests; one response proposes the term “empathy” as one solution so as to promote the need for trust between colleagues and towards students.

The possibility of proposing new value terms was received positively by a large number of departments, units, faculties, and individual employees. Various potential approaches to identifying these have been formulated, for example: 1) *“find words that describe the most important of the goals we are pursuing in our daily activities”*; 2) *“look for words that describe behaviour that we consider as being close to the four fundamental academic core values. These may be classical expressions of the ideal university”*; 3) *“search for words that describe a desirable change”*. Many emphasise that regardless of the values chosen, it is important “that they are given a meaning, that their significance in and for our organisation is made clear, and that they are used”.

The long list of submitted proposals includes: academic approach, academic community, responsibility, accountability, attractiveness, learning, breadth and excellence, broadened diversity of opinion, civil courage, democracy, effectiveness, reflection, empathy, a university/ knowledge as society's focal point, a challenging university, flexibility, feedback, research quality, basic research, sustainability, integrated education and research, internationalisation and mobility, international solidarity, collegiality, communication, competence, "conservative progressivity", creativity, critical thinking, knowledge, quality, responsiveness, diversity, curiosity, independence, impartiality, professionalism, relevance, rationality, respect, legal certainty, truth, truth-seeking, scepticism, excellence and diversity, metropolitan university, reliability, trust, tolerance, credibility, cross/multicultural, interdisciplinary, enlightenment, development, authenticity, transparency.

On the basis of the responses received, a number of criteria were formulated regarding the so-called department-specific core values which were also presented at the head of department meetings:

- They are to characterise one specific university
- They are to emphasise the core of the university's operations and thus be sustainable
- Together, they are to say something important about Stockholm University
- They are not to be advertising slogans
- They are not to be "politically correct" even though they also have a political dimension out of necessity

The Mentimeter exercise resulted in a focus on three values: **knowledge, enlightenment, and truth-seeking**. Critical thinking was also very popular. It is worth quoting some of the comments that concerned these and similar terms.

"One of the most important tasks we have as a university [is] to seek new knowledge – if universities did not exist, society would stagnate."

"We believe that the most important focus of the academic sector, knowledge, and universities as knowledge-creating institutions, should have a more central and prominent place in establishing fundamental and institutional core values."

"Creating knowledge for its own sake must be an integral part of an organisation for higher education."

"...for me, there are two essential core values missing; safeguarding basic research and the intrinsic value of knowledge. [...] SU currently has a unique position with its strong basic research, and this must be preserved/defended. The intrinsic value of knowledge needs to be highlighted and clarified. This applies not only to the university level but also, and perhaps even more so, to all stages of education. Knowledge and information are too often equated with one another."

"Participation – knowledge and information are of no value if they are not shared with other = enlightenment!"

"Enlightenment can be interpreted in two ways. One is that the modern university originated from the ideas of the age of enlightenment and is driven by its spirit. The other is that the university enlightens society in general through its outreach activities. Both of these interpretations clearly point to Stockholm University, which has its origins in a modern, radical university founded in the spirit of enlightenment and where open lectures have been an important part of its activities since the beginning. The defence of the Enlightenment's legacy of ideas in a time of fake news also appears to be particularly vital."

"The term truth [...] would fit well alongside the four fundamental values. Well aware of the Swedish fear of the bombastic, I feel that in a time of so-called alternative facts, certitudes and fake news, there must be no doubt about the university's position: Innovation, dissemination, and defence of knowledge on scientific grounds."

"But perhaps 'truth-seeking' could be a value that we can all get on board with? Note that I am not suggesting 'truth'. The university's claims in this respect were already demolished by Fröding ('what is truth in Berlin and Jena, is a bad joke in Heidelberg'), but rather simply truth-seeking as an expression of the pursuit without a specified goal or end."

Several employees have got in touch afterwards and asked about the new institutional core values. How will they be interpreted, and what does it mean that three words have been crystallised in the process? Does this mean, for example, that "openness", which many respondents affirmed as a specific core value but which was not particularly prominent in the mentimeter survey, is now invalid? Of course not. The most relevant way, albeit not the most

economical, to describe Stockholm University's core values, if these are defined as the values that drive the employees and permeate the organisation, would of course be to include all proposed terms and combinations of value terms. The specific value terms that have now emerged, and which are in themselves coherent, must be complemented by the variety of other values that are highlighted in the strategies and other steering documents as central for the university. As many have pointed out, the core values must never be reduced to slogans but rather must function in the broad context of the university's overall vision and ambition.

Concluding reflections – the way forward

“[We] welcome the initiative to talk about academic and institutional core values. In these times of hybridisation of organisations, it is particularly important to raise issues relating to the special nature of the university as something other than a company, but also as something different from other public authorities. This does not mean that we are arguing in favour of a general closedness, or even worse, that we want to put an end to definition processes once and for all. Instead, it is about us welcoming the initiative to keep discussions alive.”

The Living Values project is formally completed, but the discussion on the university’s core values and strategies needs to continue. What, if anything, can we learn from what has emerged during the process?

First of all, it can be noted that a number of concrete suggestions of different types have been put forward. For example, one person proposes a mandatory day to discuss value issues for all students, while another pitches the idea of regular student surveys regarding how the core values are perceived and complied with. One department advocates earmarked financial resources for outreach activities to promote rationality and academic engagement in society, for example, through “engagement fellowships”. One person suggests that it is a weakness in the organisation that it primarily singles out individual “stars” among the teachers, rather than collaborations and team spirit, and they suggest instead that attention should be directed to “particularly successful courses and programmes where researchers, teachers, and technical and administrative staff have collaborated to yield good results”. Yet another department, which has alluded to the problem of increasingly widespread mistrust in experts, suggests that an in-depth discussion be held within the university to address this specific challenge.

At the same time, a more general insight apparent in several responses is that the values are always greater than the operational plans. From time to

time in the constant flow of daily work, with the external and internal requirements that need to be met, the university needs to remember its function in society and the values that form the basis of its mission.

It is also clear to anyone reviewing all the responses that there are a number of values that are consistently shared and highlighted by the employees at the university, in the same way as the term “openness”. In fact, the consensus that emerges between many of the responses is evident. Many describe the values that they perceive to be particularly characteristic for Stockholm University. One department suggests that “it is important to preserve the tradition that teachers at Stockholm University are expected to be prominent in research, teaching, and administration, rather than being increasingly seen as different career paths.” It is also highlighted as a benchmark that Stockholm University “should be the most attractive higher education institution in Sweden for the top researchers. Significant academic mobility is central to the exchange of ideas, as opposed to preserving research environments, and we should have mobility on par with leading international environments. We are working actively to combat nepotism...”. The same department emphasises the value in the university “breaking patterns and challenging ideas, not copying what others do”. Recruitment issues are the focus of several of the responses; another department emphasises that “an important characteristic for Stockholm University is that it does not want to be a researcher hotel in the same way as other institutions are.”

Others are more general values, applicable for many higher education institutions, where some are specifically attributed to Stockholm University. This includes the term “learning”. Departments from all areas emphasise the university’s role in “contributing to the learning of society, something that stretches beyond what the education of admitted students gives rise to. It is about knowledge, critical thinking, and a

scientific approach”. One response stresses that “*The term denotes the position of Stockholm University as a capital city university, with its tradition as a university and the stability in an ever-changing – and at times fact-resistant – world that the university’s scientific focus gives.*”

The term “quality” also belongs to the more general values. One person writes that “*I cannot think of any more important core values to promote than autonomy and academic freedom. In addition, I would like to have something that indicates an ambition for quality, such as world-class research and education.*” Another response expresses astonishment “*that ‘academic approach’ and ‘high quality’ are not included as core values in the university’s strategy. We probably take this for granted to such an extent that we do not even think of problematising these issues, which are key to the success of the university. [...] As regards high quality, there is increasing emphasis on the importance of developing a quality culture within a university. The pursuit of high quality in the operations must permeate all levels and all parts of the organisation, from teaching to research and administration. Everyone has to join in to achieve this goal. It is therefore also important to break down the barriers between the various parts of the organisation and promote collaboration between researchers, teachers, and technical and administrative staff.*”

One response emphasises that “*It should be included as both an academic and institutional core value that the central activity, acquiring new systematic knowledge, maintains a high level of quality. This activity should demonstrate rigour, be well supported and methodologically thought out, and result in original knowledge. It would also be fruitful to include competence in quality considerations.*”

Another such value is “collegiality”. One response states that “*a core value that we agreed characterises SU, also when compared to other high education institutions, is collegiality. SU’s decision-making structure gives the staff ample scope to exercise co-determination; SU is a university and a workplace that has a deeply democratic structure. This is not only positive in itself, but also promotes the core values of autonomy and academic freedom.*” One department speaks of “*a collegial fellowship between teachers and support activities with joint responsibility for the institution’s international impact*

within research and teaching”. “Internationality” is also generally emphasised in the responses as an existing and important value. In combination with this, the importance of clear academic leadership at all levels is also stressed. All these are also key terms in the university’s strategies.

However, it is equally important in the process to discern the values that the university’s employees have perceived as more in the background or neglected, and which may need to be highlighted and further clarified moving forward. Several responses allude to some of these, such as the suggestion that the university should better express that it is “*part of the present. That the university contributes to knowledge within technology/ innovation, environment, and sustainability*”. Stockholm University should emphasise “*its important role as a catalyst for solutions to contemporary and future major challenges (i.e. a link to Agenda 2030), both through research and education, and as a fundamental building block for an open and democratic society*”.

This also encompasses education issues and the student perspective, which are consistently mentioned as relatively neglected in discussions on values: “*The student perspective needs to be elevated.*” One department writes that “*We do not see education being mentioned specifically*”, and another states that “*We encourage our students to think for themselves*” [...]. *We advocate and believe that successful cooperation between students and teachers is vital for everyone to be able to achieve their full potential, and that the students and the teachers and department must grow and improve.*” Another emphasises that the core values “*should more clearly highlight and include students as well as the significance of the core values upheld by Stockholm University [...] becoming part of the students’ identity when they move on to another career after graduating*”.

Another department notes that the education programmes in many aspects have difficulty living up to the ideal that the core values reflect; “*There is very little openness/curiosity for new forms of teaching.*” “*The lack of openness and curiosity is also reflected in the very small number of truly interdisciplinary courses [in the subject]*”. Another response that greatly emphasises the student perspective proposes curiosity as a core value:

“Curiosity is a word that I, in any case, felt permeated my education, as a student and doctoral student. A strong driving force to learn more about the world”.

One opinion links the education issues to critical thinking, and suggests that Stockholm University is falling short in international comparisons; the discussion is too opinion-based and irrational. Instead, the university, as a leading academic institution, needs to develop better research-based teaching that can more effectively promote the programmes in general and the students’ learning.

One response also alludes to the tension between, on the one hand, the term “knowledge” that has characterised the university’s education, with a close connection to research and the search for new knowledge, and on the other *“the mission of youth education [...] to teach established truths”*. Today, the latter “knowledge” is becoming increasingly valid at the university, with *“an instrumental view on a task that is to be effectively transferred and assessed using a seven-point grading scale with clear criteria”*, as opposed to a more searching mindset that questions the given. *“Safeguarding the university’s idea of education as the art of seeking knowledge involves, in this context, a critical approach to different discourses on both teaching and education, and treating the educational assignment with the same rigorous and independent approach as the scientific assignment”*.

Some respondents call for a core value that *“is more directed towards SU as a workplace”*; it could be *“an inspiring workplace”* or *“an attractive workplace”*, as another response suggests. One department writes: *“All employees at the university should have a feeling of professionalism, pride, and inclusion when it comes to our successes, and we should all share the responsibility when we fail”*. Another states that the goal is to *“strive to be as inclusive an environment as possible”*. Several respondents mention the employees’ own responsibility to contribute to upholding the values within the operations, and *“our shared responsibility to create a good work environment (in a broad sense, e.g. accessibility and context in the physical, pedagogical, social, and digital sense) at the university for students and employees. We are all co-creators, in different ways, in the work with research and/or education”*. The specific emphasis on the shared responsibility for the university as a whole, and for how this is formulated

and shaped through both core values and strategies at all levels, is perhaps the most important insight of all to take away from the work with Living Values. It is, by definition, also a process that needs to be carried forward within Stockholm University for the future.

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