Riis, Ulla (2012) *Is the Bar Quivering? What can we Learn about Academic Career Requirements from the 1999 Promotion Reform?* Uppsala: Pedagogisk Forskning i Uppsala, no 161

During 1999–2010 a Swedish senior university lecturer had the unconditional right to be promoted to the position of professor, provided that he or she had the competence for such a post. This was considered a rather large reform and when it was launched several concerns arose, e.g.: Would the level of competence of promoted professors be on a par with that of professors who were appointed in competition? Competence, or eligibility, is defined at the national level as a person having "demonstrated *both* research and teaching expertise [enough] to be qualified for employment as a professor" (our emphasis). Ahead of the reform it was also emphasized that the importance of teaching qualifications should be considered to a greater extent than previously and that gender equality should also be paid attention to.

Aims and questions

How did the promotion reform turned out at Uppsala University? The purpose of our follow-up study was to systematize knowledge of what is colloquially referred to as 'the bar' and our questions were, i.a.: What qualifications are required for a senior lecturer to be promoted to professor? Are there differences regarding how qualifications are assessed and promotion granted across scientific domains, faculties, between women and men, and over time? Scientific domains are Humanities/Social sciences, Medicine/Pharmacy and Science/Technology.

Material

During the twelve years some 700 Uppsala senior lecturers applied for promotion and just over 500 were promoted. Our empirical material was documents from 294 cases out of the 700 in the promotion process: The applications, including CVs, and the academic experts' written statements. In Sweden the principle of public access to official documents makes these documents available for e.g. research. The CVs would hold information about research, teaching, collaboration with society, mobility, research funds, leadership, and experience showing the academic community's trust in the individual, e.g. peer review assignments. Experiences accounted for in this way constituted the applicant's qualifications. We identified some one hundred variables which we coded and combined into six weighted indexes:

- Academic Qualifications
- Teaching Qualifications (three indexes)
- Trust shown by the Academic Community
- Leadership.

The weighting and the indexes as well as the justifications for them are discussed in the report, pp 12-23. Data was analysed in SPSS (frequencies, crosstabs and regression).

We also scrutinized the experts' written evaluations, and the attention they paid to the teaching qualifications of the applicants. Ahead of the reform it was stressed by the authorities that "the teaching qualifications should be attended to with the same conscientiousness as that regarding the scientific qualifications" (our translation).

Results

78 percent of the applications were from men and 22 percent from women. This was well in accordance with their proportions among senior lecturers at Uppsala University at the time; 74 and 26 percent respectively. Thus the men seemed keener to latch onto the new opportunity than the women. However the latter were more successful, as 79 percent of women applying were promoted, compared to 74 percent of the men.

Scientific qualifications, as expected, had a clear impact on decisions to promote or not. Overall, however, the results showed that the bar regarding scientific qualifications was lowered across the twelve years, though only moderately, while the bar for teaching qualifications was raised over time. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this.

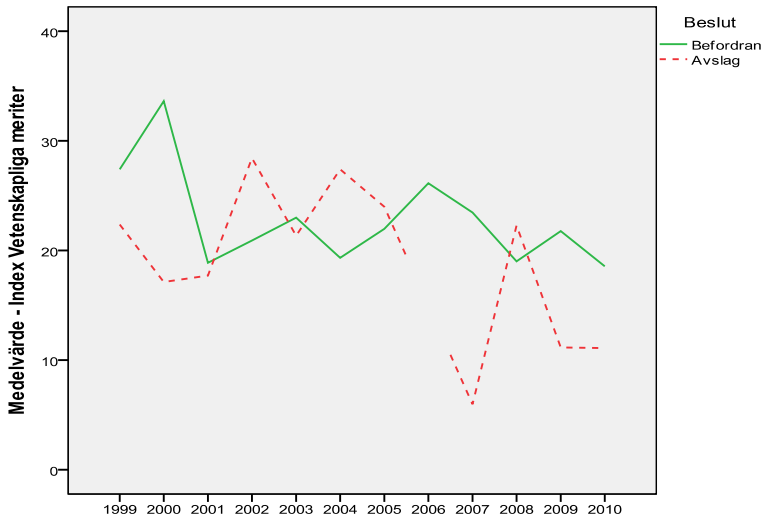

Figure 1. Index Scientific Qualifications (y=Mean–Index Academic Qualifications) over time and decision for promotion (green line) and those whose applications were denied (red, dotted line), mean. In 2006 no applications were denied promotion.

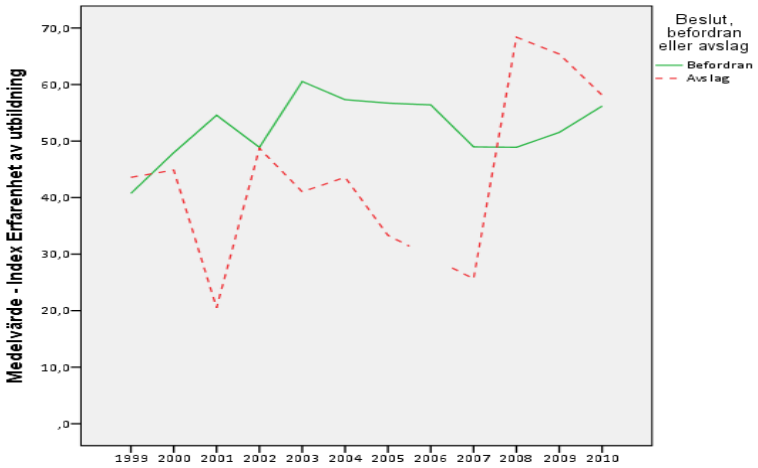

Figure 2. Index Teaching Qualifications (y=Mean–Index Experience of teaching and educational planning over time) and decision for promotion (green line) and those whose applications were denied (red, dotted line), mean. In 2006 no applications were denied promotion.

We noted that more applicants with relatively good scientific qualifications and weak teaching qualifications were denied promotion than the reverse. The standards of the vice-chancellor's decision making in the promotion cases improved over time – the bar would often lay still.

In addition, the most prominent results can be summarized thus:

Scientific qualifications

- Publication traditions varied a great deal among scientific domains and within faculties. Therefore, no meaningful comparisons of scientific qualifications – nor of teaching qualifications – could be made on the basis of simple frequency calculations, and therefore we chose to construct weighted indices,

- Even after the three domains' scientific qualifications via index had been balanced against each other, considerable variation remained within in each of the three domains.

Teaching qualifications

- There was a clear tendency to equate the number of doctoral students being supervised with teaching competence (even though the Swedish Higher Education Appeals Board had rejected such an abriged procedure),
- Teaching qualifications exhibiting reflections on teaching and education did not carry weight for promotion.

Women and men

- Women applying for promotion, as a group, had somewhat weaker academic qualifications than corresponding men,
- Women were promoted on somewhat weaker academic qualifications than men, and the level for women whose applications were denied was, with some exceptions, also lower than for corresponding men,
- Women applying for promotion, as a group, had somewhat better teaching qualifications than men,
- Women were promoted on somewhat weaker teaching qualifications than men, but the level for those whose applications were denied was the same for women and men,
- Women had considerably more experience than men of leadership assignments. The same held true for assignments that reflect the trust of the academic community,
- Requirements for women and men varied, and they varied simultaneously *over time* and *among* and *within* scientific domains.

Collaboration with society at large, mobility and research funding

- Experience of collaborative activities did not seem to play any role for promotion,
- Mobility varied quite a deal over scientific domains. Research stints abroad most often, though not within the Humanities and Social sciences, furthered promotion,
- Rather few applicants had received funding, but among those who had, men had received more grants per person than women, and their grants were larger than those of women,
- There was a clearly positive correlation between the number and the volume of funding grants and a decision to grant promotion.

The role of experts and their statements

- Expert statements became shorter over time. Within the domains of Science/Technology and Medicine/Pharmacy the expert statements were very short and overall they lacked feedback and quality-promoting information,
- Experts did not devote the same amount of attention to teaching qualifications as to academic qualifications,
- Applicants' descriptions of their own qualifications improved a good deal over time. This did not prompt a corresponding effect in the experts' descriptions of these qualifications – on the contrary, the experts appeared to 'rationalize' their work over time.

The results focusing the valuing of teaching qualifications were later published for an English-speaking audience: Levander, S. & Riis, U. (2016) Assessing Educational Expertise in Academic Faculty Promotion. Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, no 2