

Summary

# Evaluation of the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research

Evaluation of the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research,  
regarding the period 2009-2013  
On request by the University of Gothenburg  
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Performed by analyst Emilia Johansson, Oxford Research Inc.  
Oxford Research Inc.  
PO Box 7578  
SE- 103 93 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Tel: +46 8 24 07 00

Translation: Debbie Axlid, November 2014



## Preface

Last year, in 2013, the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research celebrated its 15 year anniversary. Similar to most anniversaries, this sparked thoughts and reflection on what has been and what may be. A lot has happened since the Secretariat's last major anniversary. The number of staff has increased, new assignments are in place and the management structure has changed. A lot has also happened in the world around us. The digital revolution implies new demands when it comes to the Secretariat's communication work. Changes in national research policy also affect the conditions for gender research.

What does all of this mean for the development of the Secretariat and our work? How do all of the new considerations fit with the old assignment? Can we build our organisation in a smarter way? We kept asking ourselves these types of questions. And perhaps the most important question of them all was: How do those we target and work with perceive us? We concluded that we should ask to be evaluated.

In 2009, the Swedish government transferred the responsibility for the Secretariat to the University of Gothenburg. Although the Secretariat had at that point already been administered from Gothenburg for over a decade, it had been operated subject to a special ordinance and under the auspices of a government-appointed board. The core assignment emanates from the national research policy, but since 2008 the Secretariat has also been given more specific and project-oriented assignments by the minister in charge of gender equality matters. In addition, the University of Gothenburg has placed a so-called centre of expertise and research for gender research at the Secretariat, and in 2012 the Secretariat won a bid to host NIKK (Nordic Information on Gender) on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

So, the Secretariat has grown a lot and at a fast pace in recent years. The external assignments are for a limited time period and require a great deal of flexibility both economically and in terms of specialised competence. Today, in September 2014, the future of several of our assignments is unknown. We don't know what 2015 will be like and must therefore be ready to both finish and continue projects. This situation adds stress to an organisation, both economically and with respect to staffing. At the same time, however, we feel that the new assignments have been very stimulating and fun to be involved in. We feel we are doing a good job! However, we also realise that, in order for us to keep developing, we need to review our organisation and consider how we can achieve better synergy in our operations.

We are therefore very happy that the University of Gothenburg agreed to have us evaluated. It is our hope that the outcome presented in this document will help strengthen the Secretariat and serve as important input in the work of change that has been initiated. We have grown significantly since 2009 and are, admittedly, experiencing some growing pains. However, we are still convinced that we have a great potential for continued growth and development. That's what we are preparing for!

Kerstin Alnebratt, Director



## Summary

In spring 2014, the University of Gothenburg assigned Oxford Research the task of evaluating the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research. In 2009, the Swedish government transferred the responsibility for the Secretariat to the University of Gothenburg. Although the secretariat had at that point already been administered from Gothenburg for over a decade, it had been operated subject to a special ordinance and under the auspices of a government-appointed board. The purpose of the evaluation was to ‘conduct an analysis of the external operations in relation to stated aims and the internal organisation 2009-2013’. To this end, the Secretariat’s externally oriented operations have been assessed in relation to specified aims and the internal organisation during the same period.

In order to complete the evaluation within the given framework, its scope has been limited to the Secretariat’s overall performance. Oxford Research has not been able to evaluate each of the Secretariat’s assignments individually. We can still conclude that the commissioning bodies involved are generally very pleased with the Secretariat’s work. The delimitations are reflected in the choice of method. The results of the evaluation are based on document studies, one questionnaire study focusing on the impact of the Secretariat’s work and one focusing on the communication work, and an interview study where 40 individuals were interviewed. The delimitations were of particular importance for the selection of interviewees and for the choice of which web portals to use for the distributions of questionnaires. Three assessment criteria were used to guide the data collection and the analysis:

- Efficacy: Potential for goal attainment and the extent to which goals are achieved
- Relevance: How well something (such as aims, organisation or activities) corresponds to the purpose
- Sustainability: Sustainability in the results and effect of the work.

The most important general conclusion of the evaluation is that the Secretariat is a well-functioning organisation that has managed to achieve good results during a period of considerable growth. An important reason for the growth since 2008 is that the Secretariat has taken on a number of external assignments in addition to the original government assignment, which in 2009 was transferred to the University of Gothenburg. The external assignments have contributed to an increased number of commissioning bodies as well as a broadening of the Secretariat’s initial focus on gender research to also include gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

The results of the evaluation indicate that the Secretariat has been successful in making Swedish gender research more visible. The Secretariat’s work contributes to making information about gender research and gender equality in Sweden and the Nordic countries more accessible. Particularly remarkable is the Secretariat’s ability to disseminate relevant information of high quality and at an appropriate level for the different types of respondents that Oxford Research has contacted for the purpose of the evaluation. A clear majority of the recipients find the information useful and indicate that the Secretariat has contributed to increased knowledge with respect to gender

research and gender equality. This was found for both researchers and individuals who do not work in academia. The external actors contacted by Oxford Research are satisfied with the Secretariat's forms and channels of communication. However, the Secretariat's choice to concentrate its communication efforts to the internet has led to a need for improved websites.

The Secretariat's impact when it comes to improving the conditions for gender research of high international standard and facilitating the internationalisation of Swedish gender research has been somewhat lower. One reason for the lower impact in these areas is that the Secretariat's assignment specification from 2009 opens up for a broad and flexible approach.

The broad and flexible approach has turned out to have both advantages and disadvantages. Flexibility is helpful for a small and still developing organisation, yet in the longer term it may impact the development negatively due to a lack of effective tools. In order to continue serving as a good host for external assignments, the Secretariat must focus on developing the long-term management and control of its operations. When the responsibility for the Secretariat was transferred to the University of Gothenburg, the important control function provided by the government-appointed board disappeared. The functions of the board were only partly transferred to the review committee and have since the closing of the review committee been the responsibility of the Director. The present control functions are largely dependent on the Director's good relations with the University and its management, and are as such assessed to be too person based. The University's accounting system contributes strongly to a reactive type of financial control, which is not coherent with the Secretariat's need for proactive budgeting. There is a risk that the lack of control mechanisms, vagueness of the assignment specification and need for improved functions for internal competence transfer may prevent the Secretariat from realising the growth potential that has been built up in recent years. Against the background of these conclusions, Oxford Research gives the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1. Clarify the Secretariat's identity and orientation by focusing its work in the direction of its strengths.
- Recommendation 2. Limit the focus of the work to geographic arenas where the Secretariat may make an impact and where its presence is the most relevant for its target groups.
- Reformulate the general assignment (see recommendation 4) with respect to the part of the Secretariat's operations that concern gender equality.
- Recommendation 4. Reformulate the assignment from the University with an aim of defining a clearer framework for the operations.
- Recommendation 5. Operationalise the assignment specification with a system for follow-up based on clear operational objectives.
- Recommendation 6. Develop management control measures for strategic planning of the orientation and financial aspects of the Secretariat's work.
- Recommendation 7. Develop a model for results-based management based on clearly formulated objectives.
- Recommendation 8. Secure the supply of competence and an improved system for

transfer of competence by means of secure employment and further development of the present structure of responsibilities.

- Recommendation 9. Strengthen the good communication work with improved websites and increased clarity that the published information comes from the Secretariat.



## Delimitations

Based on its bid for the assignment and in consultation with the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research, Oxford Research has chosen to set certain limits for the evaluation in terms of time and scope as it would otherwise become too extensive in relation to the available time and resources. The limits set have in turn affected the choice of method for data collection.

In accordance with the University of Gothenburg's assignment specification, time-wise the evaluation is limited to the period 2009-2013. Current descriptions of the Secretariat's organisation, governance, management and staff composition can be included as the evaluation is carried out in the spring and summer of 2014.

For time and resource reasons, the scope of the evaluation is limited to the Secretariat as a whole since 2009. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the Secretariat's organisation and the total contribution of its activities to results in relation to the assignment specification formulated for the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research. Oxford Research does not have the capacity to evaluate the Secretariat's external assignments individually and therefore does not relate to the assignment specifications for the individual external assignments in the assessments made.

Thus, the results of the evaluation apply at a general level. Results in areas that are primarily managed within the framework of individual assignments should not be considered to be exhaustive. In order to assess the Secretariat's performance in relation to individual assignments, the data collection should include more interviews and other web portals than those selected. An individual evaluation has previously been undertaken of the so-called Jämi assignment (which concerned gender equality in public authorities).

The evaluation aims to assess results attained by the Secretariat in relation to actors that the Secretariat has interacted with since 2009. Hence, the evaluation is focused on the Secretariat's impact primarily among established contacts and actors who have voluntarily contacted the Secretariat. The evaluation does not cover the effects of the Secretariat's work on the position and status of gender research nationally and internationally. Such an evaluation would require a more extensive assessment of the current and previous position and status of the research in an international perspective. Similarly, the review of the Secretariat's budget and use of resources is limited to whether its economic prioritisations are in line with the assignment specification. However, we do not assess whether the resources are used efficiently in relation to the results attained.

We distinguish between external control and internal management of the Secretariat. External control refers to the general policies, objectives, resource allocation and follow-up requirements that together constitute the Secretariat's operational framework. In contrast, internal management refers to the formal and informal processes employed by the Secretariat to carry out its work in relation to objectives, budget considerations and results.