AQUA 16
Assuring Quality in University Administration 2016
An evaluation of the administration at University of Gothenburg
Panel report
Introduction

Background to AQUA16
The project "University of Gothenburg – renewed" aimed to develop a new organisational structure to better utilise the breadth and collective competence of the University so as to facilitate further improvements in education and research. The project also aimed at adopting stricter procedures for decision-making and delegation, a clearer leadership structure, and a more effective administration.

As a result of the project, the University Board adopted new rules of procedure, and the Vice Chancellor adopted a new policy for delegating authority that took effect on July 1, 2012. A new and more functional organisation for the University administration was one significant part of the project, and the new administrative organisation was launched on May 2, 2012, with a transition period lasting until the end of that year. An important starting point was that the new administrative organisation would support the changes in the rules of procedure and that such administrative support would utilize a reduced proportion of the University’s total budget.

Monitoring of the new organisation has been carried out in a number of ways. There have been subject-specific follow-up meetings that have been attended by managers of the central administrative units and by managers and staff of the different departments and faculties. A number of new meetings have been developed to ensure that the administrative management at the different levels of the University meet more frequently and discuss common matters. The central administration’s systematic quality-control work has also been an important part of the follow-up of the organisational change.

AQUA16 – method and process
When it was decided to initiate the “University of Gothenburg – renewed” project, the Vice Chancellor also mandated that the University Director would continuously monitor and follow up on the organisational change and to carry out an evaluation of the project after 2015.

RED10 and BLUE11 are examples of extensive evaluations of University of Gothenburg’s research and education by a peer review with external examiners. In 2010, an internal audit of the central administration took place, and since 2013 “unit audits” have been regularly performed within the central administration. AQUA16 (Assuring Quality in University Administration 2016) was initiated in the autumn of 2015, and the AQUA16 method is based on the university's tradition of peer review and audits.

The aim of AQUA16 is to deliver proposals for how the University of Gothenburg’s administration can best strengthen the University's education and research activities as well as its interactions with the rest of society. An important starting point for AQUA16 is that it should deal with comprehensive administrative processes that concern the University administration as a whole rather than focusing on certain areas. The evaluation panel’s mission is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the University of Gothenburg’s administration in terms of its mission, organisation, and working methods
and to make suggestions on how the administration can be developed to meet the University's needs in the future.

The first step in the evaluation process was an extensive survey in the form of interviews with the administrative managers at the central, faculty, and departmental levels (“Comprehensive follow-up of administration at the University of Gothenburg”, Irja Persson Utterhall 151230). The goal was to get a picture of whether the administrative organisation had developed according to the principles and guidelines established in the Vice Chancellor’s decision regarding administrative expenses, staffing, and competence. The purpose of the interviews was also to get a picture of the current state of the administration and to highlight issues that should be included in the evaluation.

In March 2016, a questionnaire was sent out to all of the University’s faculties and departments asking managers as well as teaching and research staff about their opinions on the administration. The questions concerned topics such as the administration’s mission and organisation, working methods, and tools for quality improvement. Every management team at the faculty and departmental levels filled out the questionnaire, and the answers were compiled into a short report in May 2016 – “Compilation of questionnaire answers” (Malin Asplund).

At the same time, a number of focus group interviews with teachers and researchers, as well as with administrative staff, were held to gather their opinions, and the discussions were compiled into the report “Results from AQUA16 focus groups” (Magnus MacHale-Gunnarsson & Daniel Berlin, May 2016).

In March 2016, an evaluation panel for AQUA16 was appointed. The panel consists of individuals with extensive experience from leading positions in the university sector in Sweden and Europe:

Ann Fust, Executive Director, The Swedish Research Council (chair of the panel)
Anders Söderholm, Vice-Chancellor, Mid Sweden University
Cecile Chicoye, Director of Administration, Toulouse 1 Capitole University
Esa Hämäläinen, Director of Administration, Helsinki University
Liz Winders, Secretary and Registrar, Sheffield Hallam University

In addition to the reports mentioned above, the evaluation panel was provided with other documentation such as web pages, organisational overviews, Vision2020, relevant policy documents and reports, action and activity plans, etc., (http://medarbetarportalen.gu.se/aqua16/Documents/). Based on the existing documentation, the panel prepared and carried out a site visit at the University of Gothenburg on October 11–13, 2016. The panel conducted 20 interviews that engaged around 70 individuals representing different perspectives within the university.

The present report contains the panel’s observations and recommendations, and it is the final product of the panel’s evaluation. The report is hereby delivered to the University Director.
Current state of the administration – the panel’s principal observations

Comments on the material and reports
The material and reports we (the panel) were given before the site visit gave us a good overview and understanding of the University of Gothenburg and its administrative organisation and how it has changed due to the "University of Gothenburg – renewed" project.

The report titled “Comprehensive follow up of administration at the University of Gothenburg” was based on interviews with administrative managers at the central, faculty, and departmental levels. The interviews were held just prior to the AQUA16 evaluation and the report showed us that although there has been a lot of work done following the adoption of the new organisation, there are still issues concerning things like the three-level structure of the University’s administration.

The report “Report AQUA – compilation of questionnaire answers” gave us an indication of the main strengths and weaknesses of the University’s administration and issues concerned with the gaps between administrative levels.

The report “Results from AQUA16 focus groups” showed that many of the interviewees believe that the meetings between managers at different levels in the University are important but that there is a mismatch between expectations, that the overhead costs are too high, and that some professional areas are highly valued while others are ignored.

Two other reports we took great interest in include "Renewing the University of Gothenburg administrative organisation” and "Investigation of teachers and researchers’ administration”.

The best and worst of the University of Gothenburg's administration
During the site visit, we started the interviews with the question, “*What, in your opinion, are the best and the worst parts of the administration at the University of Gothenburg, and what ideas do you have about improvement?*”

The most common answers for “worst” were issues related to Human Resources (HR). Other issues that were often mentioned as weaknesses were a lack of clarity regarding roles at different levels of the administration, a lack of competence, a lack of transparency, a lack of consistent processes, high overhead costs, the administration of the organisation for teacher education, and problems with administrative systems.

Several of the interviewed groups also mentioned a lack of dialogue between levels and administrative units as well as a lack of mutual trust regarding professionalism. As one of the interviewees expressed it: “*If I was an administrator, at any level, I would ask the academic staff what they need, not just tell them what they have to do.*”

Overall, strengths were addressed in relation to administrative processes that are clear in terms of regulations and division of labour. Positive aspects that were mentioned included

- The budget process
- Communication support
A common interest in developing the administration and a willingness to see the administration as an important asset for the University

A culture of open discussion with a shared view on what has happened, what is wrong, and where there is room for improvement

The administrative support at the departmental level, which is appreciated because of the closeness it creates between administrative staff and researchers and teachers in the departments

The perception that the University has good administration services compared with other universities in Sweden

An appreciation for the meetings initiated by the University Director

**Human resources**

At the time of the site visit, there was a strong and explicitly expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with how HR issues have been handled lately by the university management and the central HR unit. There was significant distrust, and it should be noted that the recent nation-wide attention on HR at the University of Gothenburg might have added to the strong criticisms we encountered.

A common opinion was that the importance of HR has been underestimated and that it has not been clear what the responsibilities are for the University’s different administrative levels when it comes to these issues. Some of the respondents had received different answers on the same matter when they contacted the HR unit on different occasions.

One respondent mentioned that it has indeed been decided what the different administrative levels are responsible for, but that “it does not work”, and that the main reason for this is a lack of capacity and a lack of competence on all levels. On the same theme, several respondents emphasised that HR have always been weak at the University (and deliberately so…) and that it is only recently when potential consequences have emerged that the issue has become evident.

Another issue concerning HR that was discussed during the site visit was the line structure at the University level and how it weakens HR management. Currently the line of responsibility for HR is the Vice-Chancellor – the University Director – the Head of Division – and the Head of Human Resources. We agree that this is a long line and will come back to this discussion below, together with its relationship to the academic line and in particular to the heads of department.

**Competence**

During the site visit, there were often discussions about the competence at different levels in terms of whether competence is lacking or sufficient. Several respondents emphasised that there has been a positive trend to focus less on reducing costs and to focus instead on what kinds of administrative competence and quality the University needs. On the same theme, several respondents expressed the opinion that it is not the organisation that is flawed, but rather that there is an issue regarding competence and an understanding of people’s different roles.

An opinion that arose during several interviews was that strategic competence needed to be improved at all levels. Among other things, the importance of planning in the case of retirements and voluntary leavers was highlighted.
We were informed that there has been a recurrent discussion about the possibility of sharing competence between departments, but that this has not been realised to a significant extent. Several of the persons we interviewed said that sharing competence is too complicated and is often problematic for the individuals concerned and therefore does not work.

**Culture and mindset**

The view that there is an “us” and “them” in relation to academia and administration is something that all universities struggle with. It seems that the University of Gothenburg has found a way to reduce this conflict and that it is changing for the better according to some of the respondents. As one said, “There are fewer clashes”, and it is assumed that the “University of Gothenburg - renewed” project is one of the reasons for this because administrators and professors at the department level now cooperate more on daily issues and the administrative competence at the department level has increased.

When we asked about the main task of the administration, the respondents often started with separating the administration into 1) law/authority practice and 2) internal support/service. This separation seems to be widely accepted, both in the interviews and in the strategy documents, and it is fundamental to the understanding of the administration’s mission. We are not totally comfortable with this clear distinction, and we will develop our thoughts on this below.

**Structure and standards versus flexibility**

During most of the interviews, the participants expressed a strong need and desire for a unified administration and for standardised administrative processes. This is to be compared with the lack of such an aim in the strategy and mission of the central administration. The central administration does not seem to perceive that it has a mandate to deliver standardised administrative processes that determine how the faculties and departments should work.

Some respondents expressed, however, that the balance between standardisation and flexibility cannot be decided on a general level for the whole administration, but needs to be discussed in relation to the different administrative areas. One respondent said: “The problem is that we have not yet analysed what should be standardized and what should not be”.

Several of the respondents indicated that there is a positive view of standardisation of approaches and processes, although this occasionally implied that what were currently well-functioning processes might be disrupted. Some of the respondents said that in some cases a base level of standardisation is needed and that this could then be improved upon or changed by the faculty or department. A process that was mentioned in need of standardisation was the “MBL” process (the Codetermination Act).

**Division of labour between the three levels of administration**

During the interviews, we received many comments about how to best distribute the work between the three administrative levels. Some respondents were of the opinion that the faculty level is not needed, or should only involve a very small number of employees whose task is to support the faculty board. Others commented that it is important to maintain a strong faculty level, not least because of historical, cultural, and collegial reasons. For some, the responsibilities of the faculty for developing strategies
and for tackling issues concerning quality enhancement were obvious, and they stressed the importance of the faculties not being the departments’ controllers but rather their facilitators.

Another reason for keeping some administration at the faculty level was that there are some tasks where it is difficult to maintain competence either at the central or departmental levels. An example was “developing a programme syllabus”, which was argued to be best handled at the faculty level.

A remark that was highlighted during the site visit, and that we find important, is that the three levels do not need to be seen as three hierarchical levels, but rather as three “domains” with different tasks.

**Overhead, efficiency, and cost control**

During our interviews, there were some critical comments about the level of overhead costs. One respondent asserted that the figures that are shown at different meetings are misleading because they only show overhead costs at the university level, and not the overhead at the faculty and department level, and that this is one of the reasons why the management argues that the University of Gothenburg does not have higher overhead costs than other universities. Either way, the overhead figures seem to be unclear to a lot of the staff. It should be noted, however, that the message regarding overhead costs is not consistent because there was a lot of discussion during the site visit about the need for increased support from the central level, which would increase overhead costs.

In some of the interviews, there were comments that indicated that there is a lack of transparency around the reasons for the size and costs of the administration, in particular at the central level, hinting that the local support is good and needed, whereas the central administration could (easily) be downsized. In the documentation, it is clear that the central administration has made efforts to achieve major savings, but these were not discussed during the interviews to any great extent.

A few respondents mentioned the need for increased efficiency, in particular to maintain trust and relevance.
Reflections and recommendations

Below, we discuss our main observations and conclude with a recommendation on each issue. Our recommendations focus on things to change and things to reconsider. They are, for obvious reasons, based on critical observations and interpretations. However, as we see it, the administration of the University of Gothenburg is still in the middle of a positive change process that has not yet been fully accepted in all parts of the organisation. The ambitious reforms initiated in 2012 together with the systematic quality work within the administration have had positive effects on different points, for example, bringing better service to the core activities and bridging the gap between academia and administration. Thus, we see a general need to continue the implementation of the changes that were introduced with the new administrative organisation. Our observations and suggested improvements are offered as the basis for improvement at the current stage of development. Nevertheless, we are confident that our recommendations are important to consider to ensure the continued development of the administration.

The way we have sorted our observations and recommendations indicates the issues that we see as most important. However, the different areas overlap to some extent. We think that it is important that the University decides how to approach this report and makes its plans accordingly. Even if our recommendations are not fully carried out, our observations and recommendations should be discussed systematically. The discussions might lead to new reflections and associations that can be converted into changes and improvements.

1. Structures

In general, people seem to support the administrative structures that have resulted from "University of Gothenburg - renewed", including the implementation of the principle of placing administrative support close to the core business. The University’s effort to systematically develop the administration seems to have had positive effects. But there is a feeling that all parts of the current administrative organisation are not yet fully implemented, in particular how the central and local administration should work together and what role the faculty level should play in the new structures.

To some extent, it has been decided what administration needs to be on each level, but this has been not fully accepted by everyone involved. In particular, the administration at the faculty level seems to be unclear. Hence, there seems to be a need to continue the overall implementation of the new structures and to consider alternatives in some areas where the changes have for different reasons not come about as intended or do not work well.

Although it is not desirable to have 'one size fits all', and the size and shape of elements within the structures will vary, it is important that similar functions, roles, and responsibilities are consistently defined wherever they appear in the new structures. Also, based on our discussions during the interviews, it seems that a department needs about 100–150 staff to be able to support a viable and efficient administration.

One of the major issues we wish to bring to the University's attention is that an administrative structure with 39 departments and 39 separate points of management is a huge challenge when it comes to developing a professional administration with consistent and effective ways of operating and with the necessary levels of competence. Such a structure makes it very difficult to co-ordinate
activities across the organisation, and it also creates a big challenge to ensuring effective services and resource planning and to controlling costs.

Overall, "University of Gothenburg-renewed" has led to arrangements that benefit the University as an academic organisation; however, it is not necessarily the case that the same arrangements will work as well for administration in all instances. We suggest that more work could be done to draw on the practices of other universities in order to consciously design the best administrative structures without compromising the benefits for the academic organisation.

**Recommendation:** It is necessary to sort out and agree upon what aspects of the administration really need to be close to the core academic business and need to be located and managed at the departmental level. Administration that does not need to be at the departmental level should be placed centrally or at the faculty level to allow for more uniformity of administrative processes and improved efficiency, including lower costs. It is also possible to have administrative services located locally but managed centrally. However, the analysis of such an arrangement needs to be made separately for each function within the administration (e.g. what is best for finance, student administration, communications, etc.) because there is no general solution that can be implemented across all areas of the University.

The administration at the faculty level, in particular the exceptions to the general organisational model, needs to be analysed and discussed in relation to how the administration has developed so that informed decisions are made about whether the faculty administrative arrangements are still valid.

Consideration should be given to alternatives for the administrative support to small departments, including the suggestion that such departments might be “clustered” for the purposes of administration.

2. **Strategic leadership and development of the administration**

   It is not clear who is responsible for leading and developing the administration. Currently, the University Director is responsible for the central administration, the deans are responsible for the faculty administration, and the heads of department are responsible for the administration at the departmental level. There is a need for a clear strategy for the development of the University administration as a whole, as well as for the different administrative areas. Authority and responsibility for the leadership and development of functions and processes is unclear and inconsistent. In some areas, the central administration has the mandate to develop administrative processes, for example in IT and facility management. In other areas, for example in HR, the mandate is perceived to be weaker.

   At the same time, faculties and departments seem to lack clear guidance on how to deal with issues, and in particular issues within HR, and there is a desire for clear direction from the University level, not least due to the legal risks involved. It is natural that the mandate varies between different functional areas (for example, quality assurance of education and research is, and should be, primarily the responsibility of the faculties and departments), but discussions about how to develop different areas within the administration in the context of the development of the whole University seem to be lacking.

   Many universities have adopted the principle of "one administration". The development of "one administration" does not necessarily entail a single line of management; however, 45+ managers cannot be expected to make and drive the strategic development of the administration as a whole.
**Recommendation:** The University Director should develop an overall strategy for the administration and operating priorities for the next five years. This should be done in collaboration with the faculties and departments and should align with and support the objectives of the University’s strategy.

The University Director should be responsible for guaranteeing the functioning of administrative processes for the University as a whole, and this should be clearly stipulated in the internal regulations. The central administration should have a clear mandate to provide internal guidelines with the aim of developing more efficient and effective administrative service processes.

Clear line management relationships should be defined throughout the entire administrative structure, and these should recognise the functional leadership for different parts of the administration. It should also be ensured that the faculty and departmental administrations are connected to strategic leadership from the University Director and to the central administration departments through 'dotted line' relationships.

The responsibilities for functional professional leadership of the different administrative disciplines (e.g. IT, HR, finance, student guidance, etc.) should be defined and allocated. This professional leadership involves setting professional standards and operating policies, developing good practice, and leading professional development efforts.

3. **Human resources**

As mentioned above, at the time of the site visit there was a substantial amount of frustration and dissatisfaction with how HR issues have been handled recently by the University management and the central HR unit. We have been informed that there is an action plan in place for how the University will move forward in relation to HR issues. The central HR department has begun a piece of development work concerning its mission and working methods, and specific questions were discussed with the faculty deans and heads of department at an internal HR conference. We are positive about these developments but nevertheless wish to give our reflections and recommendations about HR.

We found that it is critical that the operational responsibility for HR issues be at the departmental level. This is something that was decided through “University of Gothenburg - renewed” and will continue, but we feel that this system, especially when it comes to employment matters, is vulnerable. It appears that a major shift in HR management and operations was implemented through the renewal without an overarching HR strategy.

The devolved administration – in particular with HR issues – is a challenge because staff recruitment is one the most important processes for the University’s success. There is a strong need for support and clear guidelines for all departments in regard to HR issues. Of course, HR leadership might currently be weak and need to be strengthened – however, stronger HR leadership would not compensate for the vulnerability of local HR services.

We also regard the long administrative line within the central administration as especially vulnerable (the Vice-Chancellor – the University Director – the Head of Division - the Head of HR), and we have difficulty seeing a clear role for the head of division. If it is not possible to change the structure on this matter, we recommend for there to be a 'dotted line' in the management arrangements to avoid ineffective and slow communication and operations. There should also be dotted line relationships between HR operations in the individual departments and the Director of
HR/central HR department to ensure consistent processes, appropriate standards, professional competence, and compliance with regulations and laws.

**Recommendation:** The University needs to develop its capacity as one employer. Strategic management of HR needs to be on the agenda and needs to be represented in all levels of management at the University. The administrative support for HR needs to work within a consistent (and lawful) framework in close collaboration with managers, in particular at the departmental level. Processes and working methods need to be defined and implemented between the central HR unit and local support, and it is of fundamental importance that the HR unit has a strong leadership to meet the challenges that are outlined here. The central HR unit, in close collaboration with the University management, needs to take the lead to develop the HR processes. Competence levels for the central and local HR support need to be scrutinized and developed, and a continuous dialogue between the administrative levels in these areas is crucial.

The University should consider using the HR business partner model that is common in universities and other organisations both nationally and internationally. This involves a member of staff from central HR being responsible for guiding and advising local HR operations and managers on HR issues in order to achieve their local HR objectives as well as being a relationship manager between departments and central HR. Such a staff member would also be responsible for ensuring HR policy and regulatory compliance throughout the University.

4. **Competence and professionalization**

Concerning competence planning, the panel observed that there do not seem to be any tools or strategies to define, agree upon, and secure the right competence at the different levels within the different administrative functions. In our view, it is problematic that each level and locality is free to define this themselves. Obviously, professionalism takes time to develop when major changes are carried out, but it will not happen if there is a lack of an organisational approach to ensuring competence (e.g. clarity of roles, competence profiles, etc.). It seems to us that the current discussion about, for example, career tracks, how professionals should be recruited, and how competence levels are improved are ad hoc and anecdotal.

As the system stands today, there is a risk that the administration is both overstaffed and has the wrong competences because there is no overall understanding of staffing needs or of the long-term priorities between different administrative tasks. There were some observations that this risk is already materialising at the University.

**Recommendation:** Within the different administrative areas, we recommend that the University create a clear plan for administrative competence. For example, there should be core role descriptions for common roles in each functional area and at each of the levels, and the competence requirements should be defined for each role.

Recruitment should be conducted so that the central administration experts are deeply involved in guaranteeing the recruitment of qualified experts locally. It is therefore important to have mechanisms for joint planning of administrative work and a University-wide budget process for support functions. This could imply that the University Director should delegate decisions on the administrative budget, the administrative staffing, and the recruitment needs to other levels.

5. **Co-ordination and communications**

It is important that the central administration has close relationships with the core academic business and that it develops clear feedback and service quality evaluation mechanisms. Several
people suggested the possibility of rotating staff between the central, faculty, and departmental levels for short or long periods as part of professional and career development. We agree that this can be a rewarding and fruitful method for internal competence development.

The panel recognises that several new meetings have been developed in recent years, which is positive. However, there is a need for a more systematic way to engage and co-ordinate people from different levels, and it is necessary to agree on a common information flow. Communities of practice are a good mechanism for sharing practice and for briefings, but they are not so effective for operational communications, routine liaison, or, in particular, for driving and ensuring action and delivery. This is why it is important to develop clear professional lines of management and co-ordination. When workshops and seminars are used, they should always be focused and results-oriented.

**Recommendation:** The central administration needs to strengthen its dialogue with the departments, mainly with the heads of department but also with their administrative counterparts, and to develop a shared understanding of the administration’s tasks and working methods.

Meetings need to have specific agreed purposes and leadership, and they must lead to results and improvements and should not just “perpetuate themselves”. The effectiveness of meetings and networks should be evaluated continuously, and they should be ended or revised if they do not fulfil their purposes. Operational results should be driven through clear management responsibilities and accountabilities rather than through networks.

The business partner model that is recommended for the HR function could also be used for other administrative areas. The general model is that central administrative units have people who act as dedicated links to their counterparts in local administration and to local managers.

6. Culture

We found a strong separation within the administration between 1) a law/rules/authority ethos and 2) a service/support ethos. This seems to be an obstacle to the development of the administration. Currently, some of the units and sections in the central administration focus too much on rules/laws/authority. It is important to remember that all tasks that the administration discharges are service and support and that providing services includes giving advice and guidance (and even direction) concerning the rules. One part of the expert service is to provide solutions that do not conflict with the law and are compliant with University policy and regulations, but which also meet the departments’ needs. Similarly, it is important that the services and support in departments operate in accordance with the law/rules and the University's policies. The consequences of not doing this can be seen in problems experienced with gaps between the University’s HR practices and legal requirements. Overall, there is a need to achieve a balance in the administrative culture across central and local administration between the focus on laws/regulations/authority and the focus on support/service.

**Recommendation:** It is important to change the culture in the central administration to have a holistic view of service versus a law/rules/authority ethos, and this should also be reflected in central policy documents. The IT organisation and grants support could be a model for other services, and it is interesting that these services are centrally managed but delivered locally. However, it is also important that the departmental administration understands and applies appropriate laws, regulations, and University policies. Our other recommendations about clarifying
and strengthening professional leadership, line management relationships, and competences will contribute to achieving the right balance within the administrative culture.

7. Resource planning and cost control

It seems to the panel that there is a lack of a discussion about resource planning and cost control mechanisms for the University's administration. Instead, there seems to be a general and perhaps arbitrary discussion and criticism of the overhead system. It is a positive development that there is a focus on the quality of the administration; however, there is surprisingly little focus on ways of planning resources across the administration and of achieving increased efficiency. Efficiency should be perceived as one part of the quality of the administration. It is, of course, important to understand how overhead is calculated, but it is more important that there is an understanding of administrative costs for each administrative function at the central, faculty, and departmental level in order to be able to agree on common targets for the administration and to plan the allocation of resources accordingly.

Currently, there is a lack of an efficiency driver and there do not seem to be any University-wide mechanisms for the 'sign off' and control of administrative resources in all areas and at all levels. Attention to this issue will help address concerns expressed about the level of overhead and will help to build trust and transparency around the cost of the administration. This is also one approach to prevent overstaffing and parallel administrative processes on different levels.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the strategy for the administration include agreed efficiency objectives and mechanisms for administrative resource planning and for authorising the allocation of administrative resources. The University should also set targets for administrative efficiency, and these should apply to all parts of the University's administration, not just the central administration. The University should take a view on how much the administration should cost, in total and in its different areas, in a way that is consistent with the University's strategy for its overall development and its aim to achieve reasonably consistent levels of costs for similar administrative functions.

Also, there should be incentives for administrative staff to increase their efficiency (as a whole, not as part-optimisation) because this will free up resources that can be used to improve quality and develop new services.

Digitalisation was not discussed much during the interviews. This requires a lot of investment of time and resources, but because it would be a means for providing services more efficiently, there should be a good return-on-investment for implementing such measures.

Where possible, the University should consider benchmarking the cost of its administration against other universities.

8. Standardisation and processes

In the view of the panel, it seems that there is a tension between the faculties' and departments' desire for standardisation and their wish to adapt their administration to their specific needs. We also observed that the central administration's responsibility for processes seemed to stop at the point of handover to faculties/departments, and after that point local processes varied between different faculties/departments.
**Recommendation:** The University should review and agree upon its key administrative processes, including where standardised processes will be used and where there will be local discretion to vary processes to meet local needs. Standardisation does not entail detailed instructions, but rather a common and shared framework. As mentioned earlier, there are different fields that imply different levels of standardisation or flexibility. In addition, processes should be designed on an "all-through" and "end-to-end" basis, which sets out how the process will operate across all areas and levels of the administration. To achieve this, it will also be necessary to define process owners, to set up arrangements for process governance and management, and to conduct regular process reviews.

Finally, we would like to highlight a few of the challenges that were raised during our site visit but that we have not yet mentioned in our reflections. For some of them, there may be 'simply' a misunderstanding or a lack of information, but in any case, we feel a responsibility to raise them:

- Administration around the new organisation for teacher education
- Lack of central study counselling and career planning
- Lack of discussion and vision for digitalisation in the administration
- Lack of a coherent strategy and plans for the development of the University's administrative systems