National Coordinator Report on Ageing Research Programmes in Sweden

In Sweden public R&D funding is mainly allocated either directly to universities and colleges or through research councils and government agencies. In addition, in the early 1990's the Swedish parliament created a number of research foundations on the basis of a special wage-earner's funds. Sweden has very few research institutes in international comparison. Most publicly funded research is carried out at universities and colleges. The Swedish research councils mainly support basic research, whereas the government agencies finance research and development intended to meet the needs for knowledge in specific sectors of society and industry. Regional (county council) and local (municipal) authorities also finance research, primarily in the care sector.

There has been a major change in Swedish research policies the last four-five years and some of the Swedish initiatives started before the implementation of a new institutional set-up for research financing in Sweden. Looking back on the objectives, institutional barriers and implementation of Swedish ageing research, it is necessary to consider the shifting landscape of policy development and scientific priorities before and after the year 2001. The new era marked new and more focussed objectives for funding research in Sweden and the creation of four major state research financers (The Swedish Research Council, Formas, FAS and VINNOVA) out of 11 previous government research funding agencies.

As mentioned above, public funding of research in Sweden has been governed by two general principles. The first principle is the "research council principle" of allocation of financial support to research. The core function of this principle is that resources should be allocated in open competition according to scientific quality and that applications should be assessed by national or international scholars. The resource council-principle is also built on majority of scholars on boards and on review committees. In general, it involves a bottom-up perspective emanating from priorities within the academic community. The second principle is the sectoral research model where public agencies allocate resources according to a combination of public policy relevance and scientific quality. Further developments of Swedish government research policy, as exemplified by the Government Research Bill recently presented to the Swedish Parliament, highlights the objective of excellence and scientific quality even more. One striking feature of this bill is the research councils' task to strive towards the creation of strong research environments (centres of excellence).

There were several purposes for the reorganisation, one of which was the need for a smaller number of funders which would facilitate cooperation and coordination. The other major purpose was to make the research council the predominant type of a funding body. Research councils generally award research funds in competition between researchers and that competition for research funding makes for the highest quality research that has become a widely accepted premise.

FAS is an area research council with responsibility for both breadth and quality and for ensuring that important issues in a variety of social sectors are illustrated in research. It has chosen to work with both researcher-initiated (bottom-up) and targeted (top-down) models for funding. In addition to the researcher initiated support provided in the form of grants for research projects FAS also works with targeted support, which are generally higher and more long-term than projects. FAS targeted support is similar to a targeted research programme that is composed of a number of research projects which have been selected from an open call in a specific area and have been identified as in need of more research . However, after the grants have been awarded FAS does not work very actively with the projects or researchers in coordination or other types of management.

The research foundations created in early 1990's worked in similar ways to area research councils like FAS, but have other areas of responsibility and a stronger emphasis on targeted research support. Two of these foundations have their ageing research programmes included in these analyses. One of these foundations is the Swedish Foundation for Health Care Sciences and Allergy Research (also referred to as the Vardal Foundation). This foundation initiates and stimulates innovative, interdisciplinary health care science and allergy research. The second one is the Knowledge Foundation, whose aim is to increase Sweden's growth and competitiveness by developing knowledge and expertise. This is achieved mainly through the creation of distinctive research environments and development of postgraduate studies at new universities and colleges in a close association with industry.

1.1 Introduction to ageing research programmes studied

Five ageing research programmes have been studied in Sweden. Only one was a target programme and the remaining four were cluster of projects.

The first programme is funded by the Swedish Foundation for Health Care Sciences and Allergy Research (also called the Vardal Foundation www.vardal.se) and the title of the programme is "*The Vardal Foundation research on elderly*". It is a cluster of projects under a sub-theme of ageing. The funding started in 1996 and it is on-going but the elderly is no longer a specific subtheme. 70 projects have been funded in the area of ageing research with a total value of 5 million Euro. The focus of the ageing research is on health science research in the area of geriatric care, organisation of elderly care as well as research on elderly and their formal and informal caregivers. Ageing research projects can also be found within a special research programme on ethics, e.g., ethical aspects of palliative care, geriatric care and nursing as well as priorities made in health care and nursing.

The second programme was administered by the Knowledge Foundation (www.kks.se) but it was funded in collaboration with Swedish Foundation for Health Care Sciences and Allergy Research and the Swedish county councils. The title of the research programme is "*Information technology in health care with focus on regional cooperation, home health care and care of the elderly*" (ITHS2). The funding started in 2001 and it is still on-going (but there are no new calls). 11 projects were funded with a total value of 2.8 million Euro. Four of the projects have a direct relevance to the care of the elderly. The focus of the programme is research for the improvement of quality and efficiency of the health care system through the use of the information technology.

The third programme was funded by the Swedish Council for Social Research (SFR) and the title of the programme was "*SFR programme on ageing research*". It was a cluster of projects with a sub-theme on ageing and the elderly. The funding started in 1991 and ended in 2000

when SFR was reorganized into another research council (FAS). During 1994-2000 41 ageing research projects were funded with a total value of 5 million Euro. Research focused on processes of ageing, normal ageing and diseases of ageing, welfare and living conditions of the elderly, their role in society and service care for the elderly.

The fourth programme is funded by both SFR and its successor FAS and has thus been called the "*SFR/FAS programme on ageing research*". It is a target programme on ageing research with an initial funding period of six years. A special research programme was developed by a group of researchers appointed by SFR and the government allocated special funds in the amount of 3 million Euro per year. The programme emphasized the provision of stable structures for multidisciplinary, university based research and education. The programme includes four different types of support: Two national *ageing research centres* (a six-year funding); Six *research groups grants* (a six-year funding); eight *post-doc positions* (a four-year funding) and a grant for a *national survey* of elderly's living conditions (a two-year funding).

The fifth programme consists of ageing research funded by the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS). It is a cluster of projects entitled "*FAS programme on ageing research*". The funding started in 2001 and it is ongoing. So far FAS has funded 25 ageing research projects with a total value of 5 million Euro. FAS supports projects, research group programmes and research positions. *Ageing* is a sub-theme of FAS broad area *Public health* and *elderly care* is a sub-theme of the broad area *Social welfare*. Ageing research is also included in the main area of *Working life* in the form of studies of older workers, flexible transitions from work to retirement as well as studies of skills requirements, work organisation and social support in the ageing care sector.

1.2 Research methods used, how data gathered, problems and adaptations
Interviews were conducted with "managers" from four of the above five programmes. The manager of the second programme (ITHS2) was unfortunately not available for an interview. Interviews were conducted by the national co-ordinator who took notes in Swedish during the interview, which were summarized in English after the interview.

The main problem encountered was that most interviewees had problems responding to the questions due to the fact that their programmes were cluster of projects under a programme whereas the questions mostly refer to the management of targeted programmes. Many of the questions were therefore not immediately identified as applicable by the interviewees. In order to be able to answer the questions they had to be adapted to suit a cluster of projects under a programme, which is generally not managed in the same fashion. Thus many of the responses pertain to the operation of the council or foundation as a whole, of which the ageing projects make up a part or a cluster.

Section 2
2.1 About the programme/s
None of the programmes have had a scientific director or a steering committee. Both clusters and targeted ageing research programmes are included in the general management model of the research funders, with a general director/secretary and a programme director (not for a specific programme but for the entire organisation).

FAS works with two models for funding: researcher-initiated (bottom-up) and targeted (top-down).

Researcher-initiated support is generally provided in the form of 2-3 year grants for research projects and the *targeted* support is generally more long-term and is provided either in the form of six-year grants to research groups (in FAS terminology programme support) or in the form of research positions (postdocs or professors, 4-6 years). Targeted areas can either be given to FAS in its yearly mandate from the Swedish government (with or without new funds) or through a decision taken by FAS board, which is made up of a majority of reseachers but with representatives of the general public (or users). The only targeted research programme included in this report, *the SFR/FAS ageing research programme*, was the result of funds specially allocated to a targeted area by the Swedish government to SFR.

The targeted support for research is FAS main strategy for addressing socially relevant problems and requirements within its sphere of responsibility but a societal relevance is a criterion also in the assessment of researcher-initiated research project applications which make up the cluster programmes. Targeted support accounts for about one third of FAS yearly budget for research support, with the remainder being researcher-initiated.

At the Vardal Foundation targeted areas and programmes originate either in the board or in the special group set up for collaboration between the research foundations' General Directors.

Coordination between the projects in the programme/s
Since cluster programmes are created through the bottom-up approach and are clustered or categorized into an ageing theme after approval, there is no coordination built into them and little seems to occur 'naturally' between FAS projects directors.

However, some coordination between projects and researchers in the cluster programmes has been achieved by the special FAS *network grants*, which can be applied for twice a year. These funds are applied for in competition on a yearly basis (2-3 year support). Applications are assessed, for example on the basis of the perceived need for development of research in the particular area. Reports on achieved networking activities are required and evaluated after the end of the funding period, especially if new funds are applied for.

At the Vardal foundation every grant recipient (project and position grants) have to submit yearly reports and a final report. At FAS project directors are requested to produce one mid-term report and one final report about one year after the end of the project.

In the ageing research programme formulation developed by researchers for SFR/FAS it was stated that "The institutes should take on a responsibility for creating networks - between the institutes, researchers and research groups carrying out ageing research in Sweden as well as abroad. The creation of a network for coordination of at least some of the longitudinal studies ought to be an important task for one of the institutes. It should be possible to attract foreign researchers to work within such a network during certain time periods."

In the agreements between SFR and the two national centres it was specified that each centre should collaborate with the other centre and the other four universities, especially with the post-docs in ageing research created at those universities. In order to create a structural link between the two centres a provision was also made in the agreements that each centre would have a representative on the other centre's board.

Exchange of information on current activities and participation of researchers and students in seminars and courses has apparently occurred. No special funds were allocated for networking or for the purpose of coordination, however it seems that the centres have put higher priority to other tasks. The evaluators noted in their report that the level of collaboration between the two centres was disappointing. FAS was instrumental in providing information to facilitate contact between post-docs and the centres but it could have taken a more active role, for example by creating a forum to start the network off .

Although national networking and collaboration between the two centres were the aims of the SFR/FAS target programme there were no special funds set aside for this. Making special funds available is likely a more efficient way of achieving networking.

FAS emphasises the first phase of the process, i.e. commissioning, review and selection in order to ensure full competition and selection of highest quality research. However, after the best competitors have been awarded grants FAS does not work very actively with the projects or researchers in coordination or other types of management.

Good practice in FAS view is a kind of "soft" management, in which FAS attempts to provide fora for contacts and networks between researchers in the same area. This is generally carried out through the arrangement of conferences and by providing special grants for the creation of networks between researchers in the same area in need to development. The latter type of special grants for researchers to create networks is considered a good practice worthy of re-plication in other countries. The funder can be assured that networking is achieved since the grants have this specific aim and have to be used for this purpose only. Networking activities have to be reported on to funder in a final report.

Evidence based practice
Evidence based practice has not been specifically targeted in any of the ageing research pro-grammes. However, FAS is aware of one of its ageing research centres (ARC) being involved in a project which aims at providing a scientific overview of dementia problems by compil-ing a systematic review of established (evidence based) knowledge. The work is carried out in collaboration with the Swedish Council on Technology Assessment in Health Care (SBU).

On the general FAS level, FAS has given a grant to the Swedish Institute for Evidence-based Social Work Practice (IMS) for participation and development in the Campbell Collaboration (C2) network. FAS granted funds for this project for a period of 3 ½ years (2001 to spring 2004). Campbell Collaboration (C2) is an international network for preparing, maintaining and disseminating systematic reviews of the effects of interventions in social welfare, criminal justice and education. The network involves people with different skills and backgrounds: re-searchers, practitioners and funders. The overall aim with the C2 is to make the results of international effect studies easily accessible to practitioners and decision-makers, to improve knowledge development within the social services and to facilitate the development of know-ledge-based practices within the social services.

Commissioning
Two of the cluster programmes utilise a two step approach to project grant applications, in which a brief outline (3 pages) is first submitted to the council and then, if approved, a second full application (10 pages) is submitted after three months.

The SFR/FAS ageing research programme was created as a result of a special allocation of funds and a commission to the Swedish Council for Social Research (SFR) to develop a programme for ageing research in the Swedish Government Bill in 1997/1998 (National Action Plan on Policy for the Elderly). The funds amounted to an additional 3 million Euro per year. SFR appointed a group consisting of researchers in the area of ageing, the elderly and the SFR board members who developed a programme for ageing research in 1998. The programme proposed a creation of three national research institutes which were to provide stable structures for multidisciplinary, university based research and education, development of theory and methods in the area. In addition a national survey of living conditions of the elderly was proposed as well as a long-term support to research groups and post-doc positions. Swedish universities were invited to submit applications for the establishment of national institutes for ageing research and calls were launched for applications for a national survey of living conditions of the elderly as well as a long-term research group support.

With regard to the cluster programmes the proportion of project applications receiving funding has declined from about 20% in 2001 to 10% in 2004 at FAS. However, in the past year review committees have observed that a greater proportion of highly rated postdocs applications go unfunded as compared to project applications. At the Vardal Foundation about 15% of applications received funding and there was a definite impression that highly rated proposals went unfunded because of the lack of money.

FAS cluster programmes utilise the two step approach to project grant applications, in which a brief outline is first submitted to the council and, if approved, a full application is submitted at a later stage. The system has not been evaluated but it is generally appreciated by researchers since it saves them much time and effort and FAS considers the system a good practice. The disadvantages include firstly, a longer processing period (time between submission of outline and decision is 10 months), secondly, the large number of outlines (100-150) covering a broad spectrum of research topics dealt with by a limited number of committee members without reviews by experts in the specific areas put great demand on the review committee's ability to assess the outlines. Another drawback is that applicants do not receive feedback on why their outline was not approved, which is a common complaint. Due to the number of outlines it is not within FAS capacity to provide such a feed-back

The two-step system thus has advantages and disadvantages. A recommendation for replication in other countries cannot be given straight off. In a European perspective with calls involving large grants a one-step approach is probably recommendable in order to secure that each application is reviewed by experts and that the applicants receive feed-back on reasons for rejection.

Collaboration with other funders
On a general level, cooperation between the four public research funding councils is well developed. Their representatives meet regularly and in various constellations at the management level and in different working groups to exchange experiences and discuss issues of common interests. Over and above this partnership, meetings have also been held with representatives of all major research funding agencies in order to coordinate the work of public and private sector funding agencies.

During the fall of 2004 FAS led a special *work group* set up by the four Swedish research councils. The purpose of the group was to identify areas for collaborative financing initiatives.

Such collaboration could take the form of common calls for different types of research support: projects, positions etc. FAS has brought forward the area of ageing and the elderly, but the group has come up with the following three fields of future joint calls or initiatives: research on disabilities, research on medicine and technology and climate research with a social dimension. FAS has been given the coordinating responsibility for disability research, an area closely related to ageing research, and a call for new postdoc positions is forthcoming. Difficulties encountered include problems in finding a support form which all councils utilize and to overcome resistance among council representatives towards the idea of taking funds from one's own council budget to put into a pool for a common purpose.

The Vardal Foundation has good experience in collaboration with other funders in several projects (ITHS-2, Brain Power, Ethics in health care etc). There is a special structure in place for such collaboration in the form of a group of the Executive Directors of Research Foundations, who meet regularly and discuss ideas for collaboration. The group has been committed to collaboration since, by pooling funds they have been able to create large-scale projects which have attracted attention and good researchers.

2.2 Planning, reviewing and selecting projects

For the FAS cluster programme the evaluation of project outlines and full applications are done by review committees. Each committee is made up by FAS board members – both scientists and "public interest" members and additional outside experts selected by the chairman of the committee in collaboration with the secretariat. The identity of the committee members is public information.

Full applications are also sent to one or two independent external experts. Their opinion is an important input into the work of the review committees. Independent external experts are generally from academia. Experts from outside Sweden are sometimes used for narrow research areas where national experts are scarce. The scarcity of national experts within a narrow area of research also increases the probability of conflicts of interest occurring due to past collaboration between the applicant and the expert a more common problem for the external experts.

Unlike most other Swedish research councils, FAS does not use a standardised form for the assessment of research grant applications, but rather specific evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria applied are: Scientific quality of the proposal (originality, theoretical framework etc); Scientific standing of the proposer; Contribution to knowledge within the research area; Relation to other research; Policy relevance; Feasibility of the project plan; Suggested overall budget. Before the meeting project outlines and full applications are rated into three categories by all committee members including public representatives (Approval, Rejection and Discussion). These ratings are only used as a working instrument to facilitate reaching conclusions regarding funding recommendations at the meetings, they are not publicly available and are not sent to the applicant.

Standardised forms may constitute a good practice since it standardise the procedures ensuring uniform assessment of applications, facilitates the process for reviewers and makes the assessment clear and comparable for the applicants. Is to be recommended for replication in other countries.

The practice of all review committee members is to read all applications and to submit preliminary ratings.

This procedure has been judged by FAS as positive and it is highly recommended. The alternative practice of not requesting ratings from all committee members is judged to make for a lower level of involvement in the assessment of each application.

Project outlines and full applications are available via Internet to the committee members and external experts. The review committees meet at least once during each stage of the process. External experts do not participate in the committee meetings but submit their opinion in writing. Applicants cannot defend their proposals in person and cannot change their proposals whilst they are being evaluated.

The outcome of the review process is in the case of project outlines a formal acceptance/rejection decision taken by the review committee. In the case of full applications the review committee acts as an advisory body to the Board of FAS. The outcome of the review process is a recommendation to the board of FAS concerning funding.

Review committee meetings usually take one day at each stage of the two-step process. It is not possible to estimate the time spent on each proposal but all of them are read beforehand by all members of the review committee and by one or two members of the secretariat.

There are no independent observers of the review process. However, the presence of public interest members in the review committees constitutes a check against any bias in the process. Committee members are also required by law to report any conflict of interest and they are not, in such cases, parties to the deliberation or decision made by the committee. All final decisions on funding of projects in cluster programmes are taken by FAS board.

In the cluster programmes about 25% of the outlines are invited to the second stage by submitting a full application. About half of the full applications are approved (equivalent to 15-20% of outlines). There is no doubt that there are highly rated full applications which go unfunded due to the lack of funds. This was deemed true especially for postdoc applications in 2004, in which only about 10% were approved.

The review and selection process is different for targeted research support, such as the SFR/FAS ageing research programme. Special review committees are sometimes set up, since FAS permanent ones may not be suitable for the targeted area. In addition all applications received are reviewed by groups of three to four external, international experts and applications are rated and ranked. FAS focuses on grouping the applications so that the same group of experts can review the same applications and rank them in comparison to each other but this is not always possible due to the experts not perceiving that they have competence to review all applications. In the case of the national ageing research institutes hearings with applicant groups from six universities were conducted by SFR and its experts.

The board of SFR approved the following support based on recommendations by external experts: six-year funding of two national centers and six research groups, two-year funding for a national survey of living conditions for elderly. (The universities which received funding from SFR for national centers were required to contribute matching funds.) In addition the 4 universities which did not receive national centers were offered funds for the appointment of two four-year post-doc positions each for ageing research (one in the medical and one in the social science area).

At the Vardal Foundation applications for research projects are evaluated by the Foundation's review committees, no external experts are used. A common form is filled out by all members. The form includes the following criteria: Research question(s), methods, applicant competence for proposed project, application's relevance for the call. The applications are rated with marks from a maximum of five down to one. Points are compiled and summarized before meeting, one person presents application and makes a recommendation (rejection or approved). The review includes the following: Short description of project and assessment: Research question, methods, feasibility, scientific value, budget, relevance for call, competence for research task, scientific production, ethical aspects, project progress, societal relevance. Societal relevance is assessed on the basis of two criteria: extent and importance of the problem. Applicants receive a copy of the assessment.

The reason why a form is used is to standardize the procedure (which means it is the same for everybody), is to facilitate the process for reviewers and to make the assessment clear and comparable for the applicants.

Vardal Foundation has three review committees and the committee chairmen are also members of the board, which consists of eight members. All board members are appointed by the government. Vardal Foundation has received criticism due to problems with conflict of interest and will change their organisation so that the chairmen of the review committees are now longer members of the board. The chairmen will present recommendations to the review committees but will not take part in the decision. The review committees only consist of researchers and has no general public representatives. The respondent at the Vardal Foundation is positive towards the practice of having public representatives on the review committees in order to put more emphasis on the criterion of social relevance.

2.3 The national context of the programme

Ageing research has been a high priority for research in Sweden. In the end of the 1990's a National Action Plan on Ageing resulted in the SFR/FAS target programme on ageing research and a special allocation of funds.

In a new *Bill of research* presented in early April 2005, special initiatives are proposed in research in medicine, technology and sustainable development. At the same time, priority is given to internationally competitive research environments, for example centres of excellence. The transfer of knowledge from academia to industry will be boosted by R&D programmes involving the business sector and by providing more resources to industrial research institutes and holding companies at universities and colleges. To meet the growing need for trained researchers, the government wants to commit new resources to postgraduate education and to positions for young researchers at universities and university colleges.

Ageing research is not mentioned as a high priority area and no special funds were granted to FAS for ageing research. Instead FAS received special funds for support to centres of excellence, children's health, research on obesity, diet and physical activity as well as research on sickness absence. Some ageing research, especially the two FAS-financed research centres, may benefit from small additions of support for strong research environments. A new Government bill on Elderly Policy is expected during the fall of 2005 which will hopefully include new directives on the development of ageing research. However, the shifting demographic landscape in Europe with special emphasis on ageing and migration, was one the priorities of the Swedish contribution to the formation of the Seventh Frame Work Programme.

The new focus is not mainly on ageing as such, but on ageing in a social and economic context also considering migration and social cohesion.

Another development in a Swedish and European context, is to develop a new institutional setting for bridging the gap between society and science, taking ageing as an example. The idea of the so called Societal Motivated Research Platforms (SMRP) can be seen as a part of the Seventh Framework programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities (FP7) as a complement to the Technological Platforms. Work is currently ongoing in Sweden for the promotion of ageing population research for a SMRP.

2.4 Interdisciplinary research
Research conducted within FAS's sphere of responsibility covers a broad spectrum of academic subjects within the social sciences, medicine, technology, the natural sciences and to a limited extent, law and the humanities. A lot of this research is multidisciplinary.

The researcher's choice of problem can be based on an intrascientific (within science) premise or a desire to study important issues occurring in society scientifically. If one adopts the intrascientific approach, the scientific theories generate new hypotheses, or opposition between theoretical approaches and empirical results compel the generation of new hypotheses. The research is often monodisciplinary. The other approach starts with problems in society or nature that the researchers wish to illustrate scientifically. This research is often multidisciplinary and, despite its premise, the projects usually constitute basic rather than applied research. Most researcher-initiated research supported by FAS is based on the latter approach and is hence also definitely multidisciplinary in nature.

FAS places a high priority on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research (the terms will be used interchangeably in this text) and is monitored in FAS database and reported in its yearly reports to the government. Depending on the definition, the percentage of multidisciplinary projects supported by FAS varies between 20 and 40. Multidisciplinarity is monitored and recorded in the data base of approved projects. One definition used by FAS is the following: researchers with Ph D in the project who have received their degree in different disciplines. With this definition 28% of FAS projects (not ageing research specifically) were multidisciplinary in 2004. For some projects there is only one person with Ph D involved, which means interdisciplinarity cannot be measured. If these projects are excluded the proportion increases to 42%. If interdisciplinarity is defined as researchers with Ph D working on the project having received their degree from different faculties the proportion is 21 % (in the project involving at least two researchers with Ph D).

Multidiscplinarity or even demonstrated ability to work in a an multi- or interdiscplinary manner, was one of the main criteria used both in the competition for national ageing research centres in the SFR/FAS targeted ageing research programme. The application of one of the centres (Aging Research Centre) built on an already existing collaboration between researchers from different disciplines (geriatricians, psychologists and sociologists) who worked together utilizing the same longitudinal data bases. The other application (from the National Institute for the Study of Ageing and Later Life) was awarded funds was partly that it came from Linköping University (a non-traditional cooperation across subject and faculty borders defines the interdisciplinary approach if this university).

2.5 Ethical issues

FAS cluster ageing programme: FAS has had an *Ethics Committee* which was responsible for the ethical evaluation of applications for research grants. As of 2004, Sweden has legislation in place to regulate the ethical aspects of research involving humans. Since this legislation is monitored by regional Ethics Committees, FAS no longer require its own Ethics Committee. Review committees are still responsible for reviewing ethical aspects not covered by the legislation.

FAS has a *Gender Equality Committee* which is to consider gender and equality issues arising in connection with the council's work. The promotion of equality has been specified in gender-based statistics on the distribution of research funding. FAS continuously monitors the distribution of its research funding to women and men, respectively, with regard to principal investigators and co-workers on projects and research programmes. It reviews the size of grants from a gender perspective. Regular monitoring will continue over the next few years to ensure that the material can be compared over time and any changes noted and analysed. FAS also strives to ensure equality in the composition of its Evaluation Committees and other groups with specific tasks. The evaluation Committees are likewise encouraged to strive for a gender balance in their selection of external expert reviewers of applications. The minority gender's share should not be less than 40 percent, but competence criteria should nevertheless be consistently prioritised and unreasonable exploitation of the under-represented gender avoided.

At the Vardal Foundation, the review committees also consider gender mainstreaming but there are no special instructions provided.

FAS and Vardal Foundation has developed rules for the management of conflicts of interest among members of the board and review committees. Many research councils in Sweden have recently received complaints in which the impartiality of decisions regarding grants has been questioned. For example, it has been noted that researchers from review committee members' own departments have received what is considered a disproportionate share of grants. As a result the rules regarding conflicts of interest have been made stricter regarding the time interval for collaboration between reviewer and applicant. Members who have or have had close professional or personal relationships to an applicant shall not take part in deliberations or decisions that relate to the matter in question. This is ensured by the member in question leaving the room. FAS rules for conflict of interest have been translated into English and may be made available if upon request.

2.6 Involvement of users

At FAS the community representation is achieved through the appointment of such representatives by the government to the board of FAS. The same representatives also take part in the assessment of applications in review committees to give their overall judgment but especially to rate the social relevance of projects. All committee members read all outlines and applications and send the preliminary ratings to FAS as a preparation for the discussions.

Through this procedure the members of the board are familiar with and engaged in the process of granting research support at FAS and have good insight into the decisions for support taken by the board. At FAS this has been judged as a good practice. However, this practice can also be judged as unsuitable due to the fact that the same people are involved in the assessments and decisions to approve grant applications. It would be preferable to separate these two steps of the process.

2.7 Dissemination and implementation of findings of the programme and of its projects
In Sweden a distinction is made between dissemination and implementation. Dissemination generally means the dissemination of information about research results and implementation generally means the application of research results in practice, practical work.

FAS has the task of distributing information on research, promoting dissemination of knowledge as well as dialogue with those who use research results and developing different ways of doing so. For FAS as an area research council, this entails an extensive information and communication assignment.

However, FAS views the primary responsibility for communicating research to the surrounding community as resting with the universities and colleges and, not least, with the researchers themselves. FAS' task is to facilitate communication between researchers and other groups in society by developing formats for research communication and making it easier both to produce and access good popular science.

Within FAS, knowledge dissemination is characterised by developing and designing a number of functions aimed at reaching out the Council's primary target groups. Good practices in this sense comprise a number of tools and channels for communication and dissemination of research ideas and research results. FAS experience in this case is that one needs a combination of various tools to reach out with research ideas and research results*:*
- newsletter in Swedish and English,
- a popularised journal to give short summaries of finalised projects,
- an updated website in Swedish and English in combination with a grants data base,
- thematic conferences in collaboration with other financing bodies and actors in various fields,
- thematic popularized pocket-books on the outcome and impact of FAS-financed research,
- support to scientific journalists' study periods within research environments,
- support and grants to scientific publication in the form of journals, etc.

At FAS plans for popular dissemination of results are requested as part of research proposals, but not implementation plans. Researchers are also requested to report on popular dissemination of results in their final project report to FAS.

FAS makes popular scientific abstracts and other project information available on its website in order to give a broader public access to the research funded by the Council. Abstracts are written by the researchers themselves. FAS requests short and easily accessible accounts of the results of funded projects. The information is also available in English. Researchers themselves can update this information at any time after the final report when new publications come out. This is considered an example of good practice by FAS.

FAS has initiated a special project for the development of researchers' communication and dissemination of research findings. In this pilot project about 30 FAS researchers are invited to participate in an intervention including training and support in communication during a period of three years. A control group of FAS researchers who does not receive any special attention is also randomly selected. After the study period the two groups will be compared with regard to their performance in different aspects of research communication in an effort to evaluate the effects of the intervention.

Since the results of the project are not available yet it is too early to say that it is a good practice but the researchers taking part in the project express appreciation of the help and training they receive in terms of writing popular texts, press releases and general contacts with the press.

Research into working life, public health and welfare has many interested parties, including government ministries and agencies, local authorities and county councils, parties on the labour market and a variety of other stakeholders. In addition there are interested parties at the operational level, for example. in the medical health and care systems, social insurance offices and individual companies.

Research funded by FAS can rarely be converted directly into products or services but it can provide the basis for developing societal processes and methodologies. Transferring the knowledge gained from research and bringing research and practice closer together is a long-term process. For FAS it is important to continue its efforts to strengthen partnerships with interested parties and promote contacts between research and practical work. Dialogue with interested parties can provide FAS with a valuable knowledge base on significant research issues both short and long term. Another important aspect of this cooperation is that it reduces the gap between research and practice (the gap still appears to be wide).

Several measures could conceivably reduce the gap between research and practice. One would be to increase the employment of scientifically trained persons in these operations, while another would involve providing employees, for example of local authorities and county councils with a limited amount of researcher training along the lines applicable to so-called industrial doctoral candidates.

A third alternative would be the creation of more forums for researchers and practitioners. Operational representatives of the social services and researchers have met annually since 1996 in the Social Services Forum, and FAS is currently working in partnership with the Association of National Social Insurance Offices, among others, to establish an equivalent forum for researchers and persons associated with the social insurance system. This venture, entitled the Working Life Forum, was held for the second time in 2003 and is also a forum for researchers and practitioners in the field of working life.

The Social Services Forum have thus been held for ten years. Ageing and the elderly have been the topics for the forum several times, the last time in 2005 (Living conditions and need of the elderly). It can be considered a good practice, it is very popular among social work practitioners and a great number of them have to be turned down every year. The number of participants is limited to about 100 in order to make a dialogue feasible. About half of the participants are researchers and the other half is made up of practitioners, and the organisers secure a good mix of junior and senior representatives. The topics are chosen on the basis of two criteria: good quality research results available and the issues should have direct relevance and be useful for the practitioners.

At the Vardal Foundation dissemination is carried out through the website, reports (popular and scientific versions), newsletter and conferences. The foundation has experienced difficulties getting practitioners to attend conferences. There is little money available in the health care system to pay for these types of activities. The Foundation perceives that there are difficulties with getting research results known and implemented.

A new form of grant is therefore planned: demonstration/trial projects to try to implement research findings in practice. These projects would be run in collaboration with health care system with ., for example county councils co-financing the projects.

2.8 Evaluation of the programme

The cluster programmes have not been specifically evaluated. However, part of the SFR/FAS ageing research programme has been evaluated. The multidisciplinary research centres were evaluated after the first four years of operation.

In 2000 the external experts reviewing the research centre applications were referred to information provided in the government document regarding the creation of national institutes of ageing research. This included the recognition of the need for long term, stable research structures, covering broad issues relevant to ageing with a high quality of research component. The following key aspects were recognised:
1. the need to have individuals involved at all ages of their career,
2. excellence within and between disciplines,
3. a critical mass of professionals, who were multidisciplinary in nature in their affiliation with universities and integration with practice,
4. good networks with potential for dissemination and international collaboration.

The evaluation was based on the self evaluations submitted by the centres, agreements made between SFR and the universities in question. Site visits were also made, at which further presentation of activities were provided as well as the opportunity to ask detailed questions about the reports for which the evaluation team would like to express their gratitude.

The evaluations were based on the following criteria or questions:

1. Were the commitments made by the respective institutions in the agreements fulfilled (e.g. with respect to provision of positions and establishment of educational programmes)?
2. Level and quality of productivity – publications, reports, conference presentations, guest lectures.
3. Grant success and level of funding raised.
4. Graduate and postdocs affiliated with the centres.
5. Quality of multidisciplinary programme including the degree of cooperation between the two centres.
6. Policy relevance of output.

The evaluators noted that the two centres started from different positions which had to be taken into account in the evaluation. The evaluators gave a very positive review of ARC, which had a strong basis of ageing research to build on. ISAL, which was a new initiative and had to build up a programme from scratch, had not attained the same level but had made major steps forward and was to be commended or praised on their progress. The evaluation reports are in English and can be downloaded from FAS website (www.fas.forskning.se)

The centres were evaluated by the same two groups of international experts that reviewed the original applications for establishing the centres. The evaluators all expressed an interest in following up the results of their earlier recommendations.

However, it is possible that the evaluators may have felt somehow tied by their involvement in the original recommendations and that new experts, looking at the centres' activities with fresh eyes could have come to more independent conclusions. A more optimal composition of the evaluation group may have been a combination of original and new evaluators.

2.9 The future funding of the programme/s

The future funding of the target programme is a problematic issue and negotiations are on-going between FAS, the government and the universities. FAS is very satisfied with the development of its ageing research centres but sees difficulties in continuing the funding of the centres from its own resources. First of all, it is felt that it is not the responsibility of a research council to permanently fund such research institutions. The funding should be taken over by the universities, preferably with sufficient funds provided by the government. The universities claim not to be able to take over the entire funding. Secondly the new tasks given to FAS in the recent research bill in combination with previous budget commitments make it impossible for FAS to continue funding the ageing research centres at the same level. FAS has recently decided to fund the ageing research centres during another four year phasing out period during which the funds will be cut down by 25% every ear. However, some money may become available to the ageing research centres through the recent Research bill and the new initatives to create strong research environments (centres of excellence).

2.10 International collaboration

Most research projects and research programmes funded by FAS in 2003 involved some form of international collaboration. Almost 10 % had some connection to the EU research. FAS has other measures which aim at promoting international exchange. Grants that directly promote international collaboration include travel grants, overseas scholarships and grants to visiting researchers.

FAS is a member of the European Science Foundation (ESF), a collaborative organisation for a number of European research councils and academies. FAS takes part in various ESF activities within its sphere of responsibility, such as the European Social Survey, a comparative study of social conditions and perceptions in several European countries which is also supported by the EU. FAS also contributes to the ESF program Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences (QMSS). FAS also contributes towards the cost of the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), a comparative database covering income distribution in different countries which was launched in the early 1980s. In 2003, FAS made an evaluation of its involvement in LIS and decided to continue its support up to and including 2005.

Earlier applications within the ESF programme European Collaborative Research Projects in the Social Sciences (ECRP) were submitted and evaluated nationally. This, however, was experienced by many as cumbersome. The applications did not fit in with the ordinary time schedule for applications and review committees did sometimes not appreciate the special nature of these applications. ECRP has now become a EUROCORES programme, which means that the review of proposals is handled centrally but the decision on funding is made nationally (in this case by FAS board).

At the Vardal Foundation international collaboration is encouraged and such plans have to be described in application. Foreign researchers have to be employed in Sweden to receive money from the Foundation. Vardal has had extensive collaboration with Japan around ageing research projects of two researchers. Japanese municipality is now interested in visiting Swedish municipality to study telemedicine in elderly care (part of ITHS-2 project).

In Sweden there are few legal rules laid down with respect to research funding in general or to international, joint research funding efforts in particular. Thus, there are no legal obstacles with respect to programme funding jointly with counterparts in other countries, neither for pooling resources to a common pot, nor for joint calls, nor for joint peer reviews. The impediments that exist are mostly of an administrative or political nature.

The direct funding by a Swedish funding body of an individual researcher (or a group or researchers) based in a research department outside Sweden could, however, create problems both of a legal nature and with respect to audit. Such situations can, on the other hand, easily be avoided when resources are pooled.

A general principle in public governance in Sweden concerns public access to official records. All documents (with very few exceptions) sent in for assessment to FAS by researchers (Swedish and non-Swedish) are covered by the principle and are considered as public documents.

When it comes to evaluation and peer review the general legal rules concerning disqualification due to conflict of interest, prejudice and partiality are applicable to FAS. In addition FAS, as well as mot of the other research councils and foundations, have adopted specific directions regulating its practice.

Section 3

1. PREPARATION/About the Programme
Different stages of preparation include at least following: initiating the programme, cooperation of funders, planning of the programme (and programme memorandum), decision-making on the programme (aims, budget, time span of the programme, coordination).

Good Practices	- Iniatives from researchers as well as users - Development of programme by group representing researchers and users - Permanent group of high-level funder representatives with tasked with cooperation
Arguments	- Due consideration of societal relevance in addition to scientific relevance of research
Pitfalls and problems	- Commitment from other funders hard to achieve

Issues to be discussed	

2. COMMISSIONING
Stages include at least the following: call for applications, review of applications and decision making (rating and ranking), guidelines for applicants and reviewers (review forms), structure of funding (how funding can be used at project level)

Good practices	- Calls in open competition between all researchers - Peer review of application by external scientific experts and committees with researchers in majority - Criteria for review openly available - Applicants receiving feed-back (external reviews and committee decision basis) - Representation of public interest/users on review committees - Decision-making by bodies with researchers in majority
Arguments	- Transparency of review process
Pitfalls and problems	

Issues to be discussed	- Advantages and disadvantages of one- vs two-step approach for applications

3. OPERATION

Stages include at least.: coordination, management, steering group, follow up, mid-term evaluation, communication.

Good Practices	- Separate budget for coordination by funder - Separate grants to researchers for the creation of networks
Arguments	- Separate budgets and grants ensures that resources are allocated for purpose and requires separate reporting
Pitfalls and problems	

Issues to be discussed	

4. INTERDISCIPLINARY AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH
Should include all good practices identified in this area and any interesting innovations.

Good Practices	-Inter/multidisciplinary approach used as criterion for evaluating proposals -Grants awarded to research groups with demonstrated ability of or tradition of working in a inter/multidisciplinary fashion
Arguments	- Planned inter/multidisciplinary research often fails in execution phase if no prior tradition or relations between researchers is non-existent
Pitfalls and problems	- Review of inter/multidisciplinary research applications require broad expertise

Issues to be discussed	- How to facilitate inter/multidisciplinary research? One way in which a successful Swedish centre achieved this was by researchers from different disciplines working with same data sets

5. ETHICAL ISSUES
This should include any good practices on responding to ethical issues in programme management .

Good Practices	- Approval from ethics committees required if necessary acc to Swedish law - Development of and compliance with gender equality plan - Development of and compliance with plan for managment of conflicts of interest (reviewers and decision-makers) - Public access to official documents at government authorities
Arguments	- Avoidance of discrimination and partiality in assessments and decisions - Principle of public access to government documents
Pitfalls and problems	

Issues to be discussed	- The need for creation of plan for managment of conflicts of interest at European level

6. THE INVOLVEMENT OF ALL TYPES OF USERS IN THE PROGRAMME
This should include any good practice examples regarding how to involve users at any or all stages of the programme; development, design, commissioning, operation, evaluation and dissemination

Good Practices	- Users (i.e. representatives of public interest) represented in all review committees and and decision-making bodies
Arguments	- Due consideration of societal relevance in addition to scientific relevance of research

Pitfalls and problems	

Issues to be discussed	

7. DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

Dissemination covers at least the following: dissemination plan, impact of results, reports, implementation plan…

Good Practices	- Inclusion of plan for dissemination (scientifi and popular) in applications - Carefully planned conferences between researchers and end-users of research results allowing for discussion - Media and presentation of research results adapted to relevant target groups - Special grants for demonstration/implementation of research results
Arguments	
Pitfalls and problems	- Difficulties getting end-user to attend conferences due to lack of money in e.g., social work, health care sectors

Issues to be discussed	- Final report from programme published by funder or researchers own publishing?

8. INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

This should include good practice on research programme collaboration across countries.

Good Practices	
Arguments	
Pitfalls and problems	- few legal obstacles but Swedish principle of public access to government documents (including names of external reviewers) may create problems

Issues to be discussed	

9. PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Stages include at least: objectives, planning and budgeting of evaluation, use of evaluation results. Research programmes are evaluated in relation to the starting points, their objectives and funding volume.

Good Practices	- Plan for midterm and final evaluation of programme - Evaluation carried out by group of external experts - Research groups submit self evaluations as basis for evaluation - Evaluations include site visits/interviews with research groups - Use of original evaluators of applications in final evaluation
Arguments	
Pitfalls and problems	- Final evaluation group (if consisting of original evaluators) need to be supplemented by new, independent evaluators

Issues to be discussed	- Meetings between funders of programme and research groups for exchange of experiences, feed-back from researchers to funders etc

10. THE FUTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

This should include any good practices on extensions to programmes or the development of new programmes based upon the results of the old one.

Good Practices	- Plan for continued funding after end of programme period agreed with universities receiving funds for research institutes, centres of excellence etc
Arguments	
Pitfalls and problems	- Research councils should not fund research institutes and centres on permanent basis but universities claim lack of resources to take over funding

Issues to be discussed	

List of Appendices
- Profiles of ageing research programmes (Appendix 1)
- Road map of funding from design to projects (Appendix 2a)
- Organisational map (Appendix 2b)