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How is teaching, supervision and SoTL evaluated in reviews of professors' educational qualifications?

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How is teaching, supervision and SoTL evaluated in reviews of professors' educational qualifications?

Abstract

In this study, we analyze 94 external reviews of educational qualifications in 45 recent full professorship appointment and promotion assessments within a Scandinavian research-intensive university. National legislation requires that scientific and educational qualifications should be assessed with equal thoroughness. Consequently, increased attention has been devoted to the documentation and assessment of educational qualifications, nationally (Ryegård et al. 2010) and institutionally (Olsson et al, 2012). However, it is unclear how this has influenced the actual review practices. In fact, Fanghanel et al. (2016) in a sector-wide study point out that "the recognition and reward of teaching excellence is a significant and yet under-utilized tool for institutions" (p. 16) and that "[G]aining a clear picture of progress in this area is difficult due to the variation in implementation of policies and difficulty in gaining data from institutions about promotions." (p. 19).

The purpose of our study is to provide empirical data as a basis for the work of academic appointment and promotion committees and for development of instructions to external reviewers. The study is made in collaboration with a research group investigating another research-intensive university (Elmgren & Forsberg, 2017; Levander, 2017). The questions discussed and explicitly answered in our proposed presentation at the conference are:

To what extent are educational qualifications reflected in the external reviews?
Which educational themes are visible, and which are potentially missing in the reviews?
How do external reviews justify candidates' educational qualifications?
What views on educational qualifications are conveyed by the reviewers?

Overall, external reviewers use much less text space on commenting educational qualifications compared to comments about scientific qualifications. The reviews are mainly focused on what is easily quantifiable, such as years of teaching experience, or on personal characteristics that supposedly lead to good teaching and student learning, such as enthusiasm or engagement. Other recurring themes are breadth and depth of teaching and supervision experience. Acknowledgement and recognition of SoTL-work is largely missing, along with qualitative assessment of the teaching practice, student learning outcomes and educational development. We therefore see ample opportunities to raise the demands of the qualities of external reviews with regard to educational qualifications. One way to achieve this is to clarify instructions to external reviewers, thus facilitating the work of appointment committees. In the long-term perspective, the results of this study might potentially contribute to an academic *culture that learns* how to pay thorough attention to important aspects of educational qualifications.

Proposal details

The method used in this study is mainly document analysis. We have collected the external reviews of 45 recent (2012-2017) full professorship appointments and promotions. These reviews are related to 15 randomly selected applications from each of three faculties:

Humanities and Theology, Engineering and Social sciences in the same research-intensive university. Each application is reviewed by up to three external reviewers, adding up to 94 individual reviews in our sample.

The analysis has been done using a framework from a research-group doing a similar study in another Scandinavian research-intensive university (Levander, 2017). This framework provided initial thematic categories used for our analysis. However, in our data we also inductively identified additional relevant observations, such as the common mentioning of personal characteristics as a merit and a somewhat superficial treatment of a substantial, coherent teaching portfolio.

In our proposed presentation, we will share the results in relation to our research questions, and the above-mentioned framework. Furthermore, it is our ambition to invite the audience to discuss implications of our results, institutionally, nationally as well as internationally. The role of SoTL in academic application and promotion processes is in our opinion a central pathway to moving toward a learning culture.

Referenser

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