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Assessment of teaching skills – experiences from a national course for prospective assessors of pedagogical qualifications

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Appointment and promotion of academic teachers in Sweden is regulated by the Higher Education Ordinance, together with local appointment rules at University level, and complementary instructions at Faculty level. Universities have local definitions of pedagogical qualifications and local assessment criteria. External experts are used more or less regularly in the assessment procedure but the routines, and therefore the prerequisites for assessment, vary considerably between universities.

Similar to most European universities the autonomy of Swedish universities has increased considerably during recent years. During the process of writing new local appointment rules, quality assurance of the procedure for assessing pedagogical qualifications has been much debated. The role of external experts, and how teacher appointment committees use expert assessments, has been debated in a report from Uppsala University (Ris, Hartman & Levander, 2011). Education of external experts, especially assessors of pedagogical qualifications, is highlighted as a priority.

We present a national course for assessors of pedagogical qualifications that has been given on two occasions at Uppsala University, with Umeå University as the course manager. The aim of the course is to enhance the potential to assess pedagogical qualifications at universities locally by offering support and education at a national level. Assessments by experts could potentially act as drivers for quality enhancement if they contain constructive developmental feedback. This aspect is a fundamental part of the course.

The course was developed as cooperation between universities that previously have collaborated in a major project about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Swedish Higher Education (Ryegård, Apelgren & Olsson, 2010). During the course, corresponding to one week of full-time work, each participant assesses five teaching portfolios and writes two assessments. The course work is both performed on an individual basis, and carried out in groups. Experienced assessors serve as mentors during the entire process. It is important to point out that completion of the course does not mean any authorisation as a potential external expert. This is a process entirely governed by each individual university.

During the session we will discuss our experiences from local arenas and the national Swedish perspective, and also broaden our discussions, together with session participants, to an international level. Although local definitions and assessment criteria seem to differ a great deal, a common perspective based in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is evident.

References
