

## **INU Shadowing program –** Brief summary report for INU Secretariat

**From:** Jason Farren (Flinders University, Australia)  
**Visited:** Malmo University, Sweden (June 2009) and  
Leicester University, UK (July 2009)

Firstly a comment of thanks to the INU for running the staff shadowing program and for facilitating my recent visit to these 2 universities.

My rationale for selecting these 2 particular universities was to experience higher education administration (with particular focus on financial management issues) in both an English and non-English background. The Higher Education sector in Australia has developed from its English heritage and background, and yet over more recent times has become very international in its focus and outlook.

I spent a week at each institution, and found this time to be of immense benefit. I was able to gain a broad oversight of the national higher education context in which these universities operate and some of the particular challenges they face in their respective environments. I was left with the distinct impression that, whilst there are the inevitable cultural differences and their nuanced impacts, there is still very much a sense that as universities we all face similar issues. The benefit of being able to participate in the shadowing program is being able to discuss the different approaches to how these common issues are tackled – what has worked and what has not, what new plans or systems are being developed. And these discussions applied across a number of levels – from the smaller details, right through to the more strategic issues at the higher level.

Of course there are also interesting differences to note as well – such as the Swedish approach where no University is allowed to own its own facilities. This has a big impact on many of the traditional assumptions made in the Australian context regarding capital expenditure plans and financing / depreciation issues.

The insights gained from the program are many and already I have had the opportunity to make some suggestions about changes to the way we do things at Flinders as a consequence of understanding how other universities approach particular issues.

Not to get too bogged down in detail, some of the more pertinent observations I made during my visits to the two universities are as follows:

### **Malmo**

- Malmo has a more decentralised Finance function than Flinders, ie. more finance staff out at Faculty level.
- Monthly reporting with close contact with Faculties

- VSU to apply in Sweden in 12 months time – able to discuss some of the Australian experiences when this issue arose in 2007.
- Expenditure – 65% on staff costs, identical to Flinders and around the sector benchmark.
- Working towards implementing a data warehouse for improved reporting – a complex and difficult project.
- Financial statements format / content dictated by Government – similar regulatory framework to Australia but a lot simpler in terms of detail required (only 13 notes!).
- Budget model – historically has been an allocation approach; currently moving to contribution margin approach, with full revenue distributed to Schools.

### **Leicester**

- Has a big focus on distance learning – 2<sup>nd</sup> in UK.
- More centralised Finance function than Flinders, with an impressive Management Accounting team which supports Faculties and Schools.
- Budget approach – CM reporting. Excellent summary reports and diagrams produced, will be useful as Flinders develops similar changes to its resource allocation approach in the near future.
- Consulting Policy – Note that Leicester permits payment of salary / remuneration etc. Has been a useful benchmark for the recent review of the policy approach to this issue at Flinders.
- Extensive student accommodation service & facilities, with associated conference activities.
- Campus development review – obtained and found to be useful since Leicester is slightly ‘older’ than Flinders, and Flinders is in the process of developing its next major campus development plan.

### **SUMMARY:**

Once again I state my appreciation for the opportunity to be involved in this INU program. It was certainly interesting, informative and a unique opportunity. I am confident that the insights gained and the contacts made during the course of the program have greatly assisted my professional development and also stand me in good stead to make meaningful contributions to the future development of Flinders University on a number of issues. I would recommend without hesitation this program to any who were considering the opportunity.