

Heading for troubled waters

After winning more votes than any other party in September's election, it is time for Sweden's social-democratic SAP party to follow through on its pre-election promises. The SAP manifesto included plans for an innovation council and fund overseen by the prime minister, as well as a long-term research plan agreed between all parties.

But putting those plans into practice will be difficult. The SAP formed a coalition minority government with the Green party on 3 October, and there are likely to be a number of internal differences on policy priorities. This could limit the government's powers to act decisively on research, and the promises made this summer may take some time to be fulfilled.

The scope of the innovation council, for instance, has not yet been decided. Several research groups have said that the council's approach must be broad and that it should be located across ministries to influence policies at different levels.

"It has to take more of a helicopter view," says Anna Nilsson Vindefjärd, secretary-general of Research!Sweden, a life sciences interest group. "When it comes to life science, the ministry of health and social affairs has to be involved also."

The distribution of research funding is an area of potential disagreement in the coalition, although both parties have made it clear that basic funding for

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research and higher education must be maintained. Whereas Sweden's former, centre-right government emphasised "excellent science" and top scientists, the SAP and Greens want to ensure that funding is spread evenly. Helene Hellmark Knutsson, the newly appointed research minister, said in an interview with Sveriges Radio that she wants to increase funding for the social sciences and humanities in particular, because it is harder for researchers in this area to win external funding.

But any redistribution of funds is likely to be opposed by those who would receive less as a result.

Such conflicts could pile increasing pressure on prime minister Stefan Löfven, who is likely to take some of the planned research policy changes under his wing. Löfven struggled to form a government after he shut out the Left party and was rejected by the runner-up Moderate party as a coalition partner. The SAP-Green coalition together received only 38 per cent of votes in the election, and may find it difficult to assert itself.

Mats Benner, a professor of research policy at Lund University, says that the government's relatively weak standing may prevent it from following through on its pre-election promises. "The government has neither the space nor the capacity to offer anything radically new," he says.

nordic in brief

Cheating does not decrease trust in science, report finds

The Swedish public's trust in research and researchers is not affected by media reporting on academic cheating, a report, published on 16 October by the SOM-institute at the University of Gothenburg has found. Instead, factors such as where people live, what education they have and what media they are exposed to, have an impact.

Tampere universities to merge

The University of Tampere, Tampere University of Technology and the Tampere University of Applied Sciences are planning to merge into one interdisciplinary institution in order to raise their international profile. The university will combine basic research with technological development and its practical uses.

Foundation plans spending increase

The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Research, the SSF, is to increase the amount of funding it provides, from 600 million Swedish kronor (€65m) to kr1 billion in

2018. The SSF said the extra funds were intended to fill a gap in innovation in technology and medical research. The SSF hopes that the extra money will result in more research being commercialised.

Norway publishes open-access guidelines

Forskingsrådet, Norway's research council, has published an open-access policy that aims to make publicly funded research data freely accessible to the public. The Research Council's Policy on Open Access to Research Data makes an exception for data that may threaten personal or national security, or personal data that is sensitive or private.

Companies lack innovation, warns Tekes

Finnish companies are not putting enough effort into developing innovative products and services, a report by innovation agency Tekes has said. Companies would rather cut expenses and prolong the lifetime of products than take on bold innovation projects, a report by the agency found. Only one in five Finnish companies have launched a product or service in the past 2 years.