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# Autonomy for researchers or for the institutions? Impact and excellence: a perspective from Sweden

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Vetenskapsrådet



# Swedish Research Council (VR)

*The largest governmental research funding body at Swedish universities, colleges and institutes*

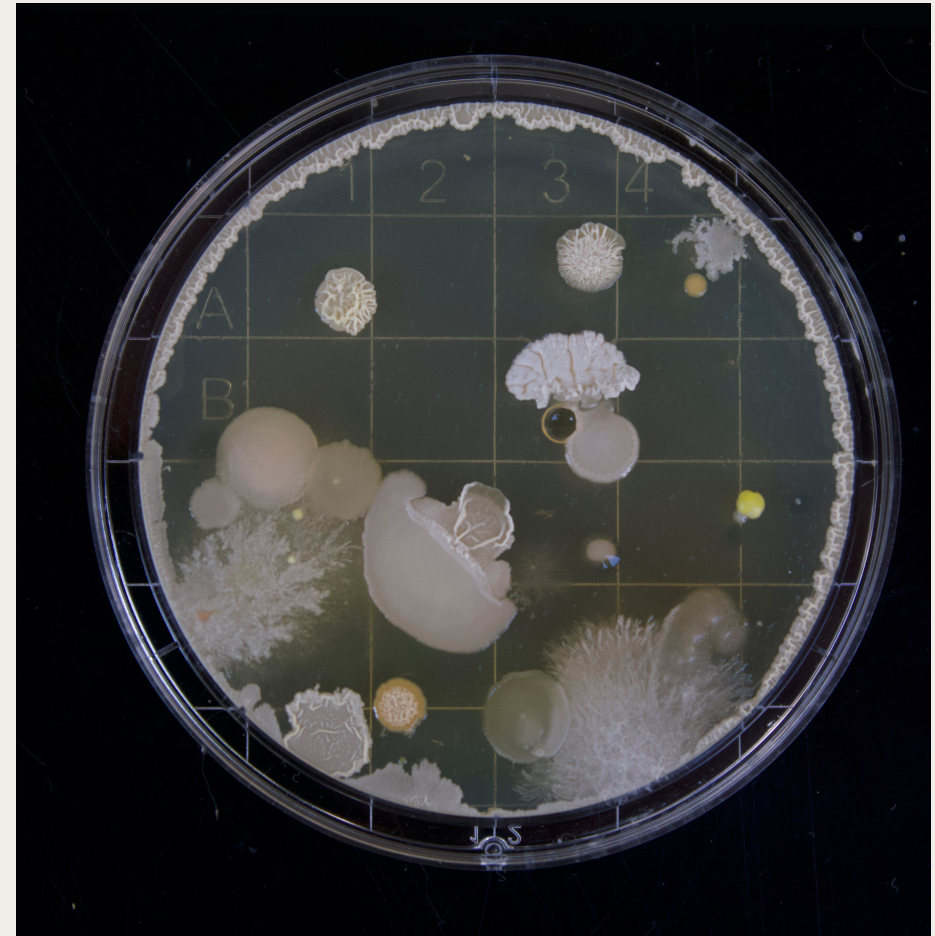
- We provide funding for researcher-initiated basic research
- We initiate and support strategic initiatives in research
- We work for an efficient research system
- We work to ensure that researchers gain access to advanced research infrastructure
- We analyze the conditions of the research, evaluate research and give the government advice on future research policy
- We coordinate and develop communication about the significance, results and conditions of research
- We promote international collaborative research



# Basic research prepares us for the future

## Basic research provides:

- a broad knowledge base
- new ways of handling challenges
- unexpected research breakthroughs
- democratic vitality





# Funding research of the highest scientific quality

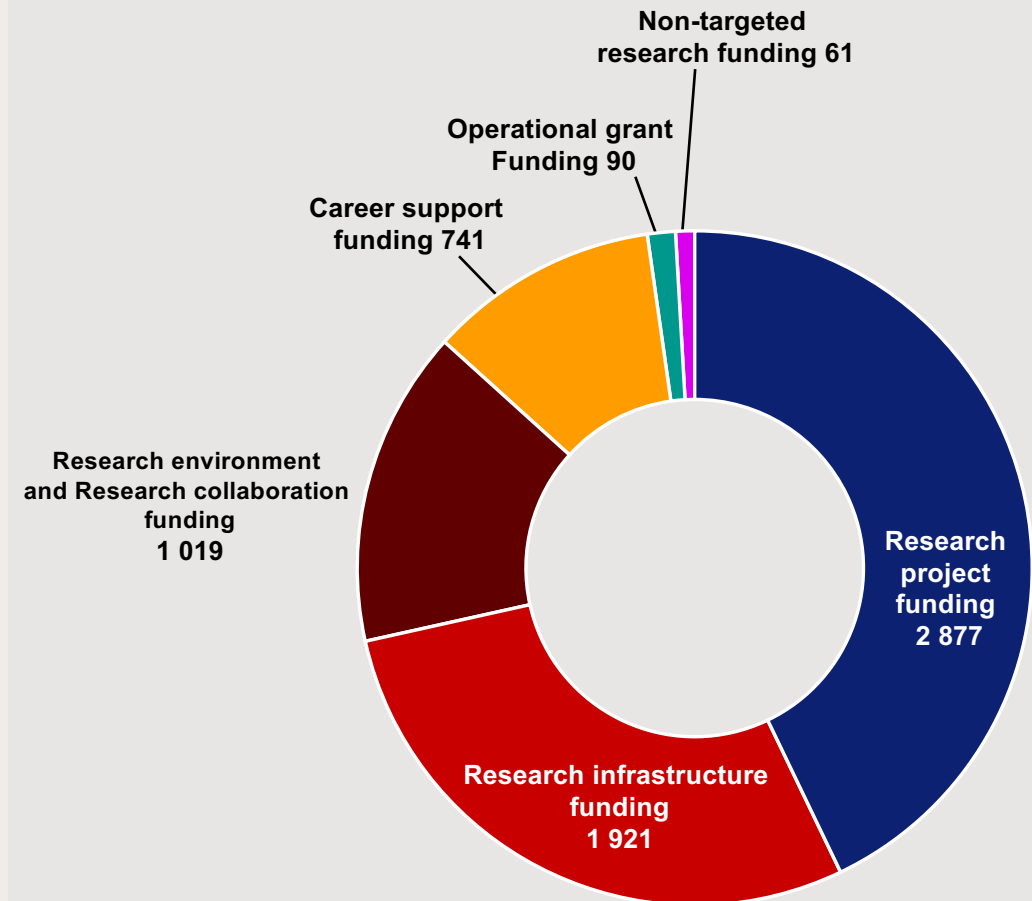
- Open competition where the best research ideas are rewarded
- Efficient, clearly-defined processes
- Peer review for highest research quality
- Researchers on subject advisory boards, councils and committees





## Distribution of forms of grants 2018

- The Swedish Research Council finances just over a tenth of the research at higher education institutes.
- **Distributed research funding:** SEK 6.7 billion



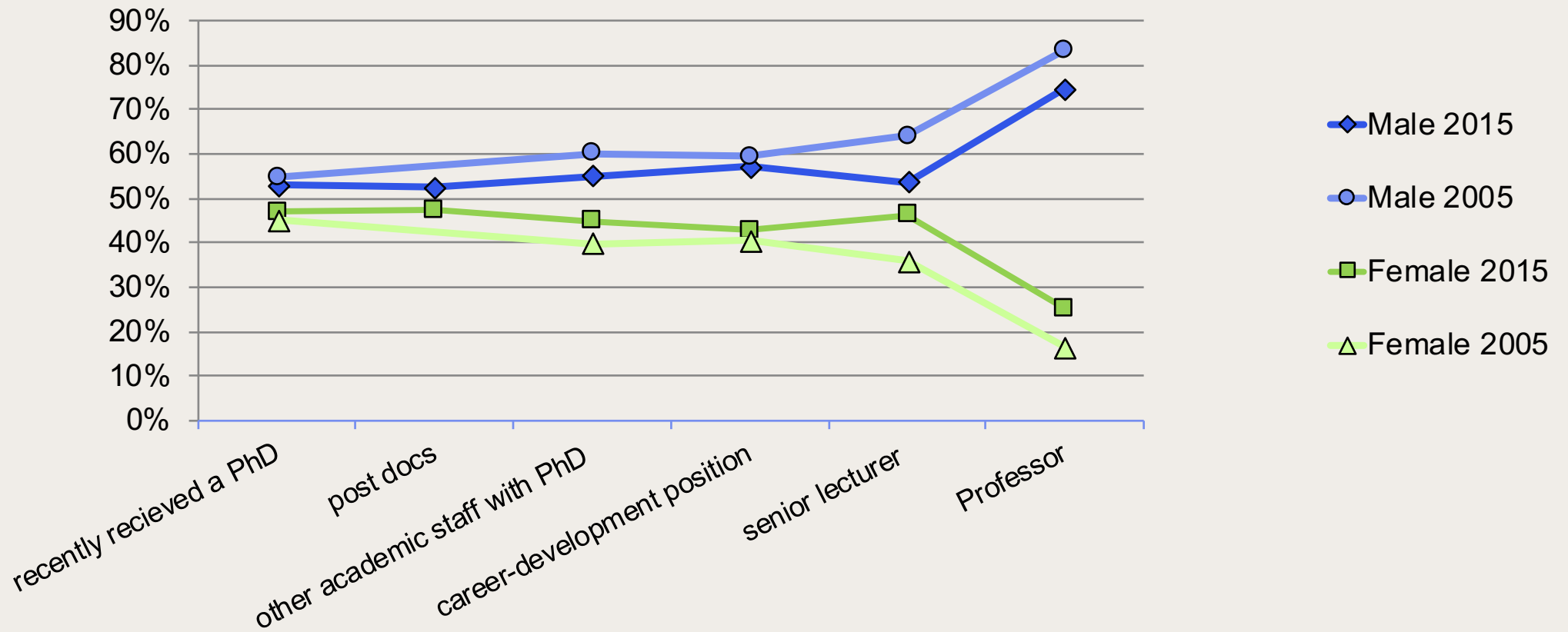


# The Swedish Research Council's gender equality goals

- To work towards the proportion of women and men applying for grants corresponding to the proportion of women and men among potential research applicants
- To achieve and maintain equal gender distribution in our review panels
- To achieve the same rate of grant awards and the same average grant amounts to women and men
- To include a gender equality perspective in every analysis and evaluation
- To integrate a gender equality perspective in the Swedish Research Council's external communications



# Females less higher positions





# Research funding and system in Sweden

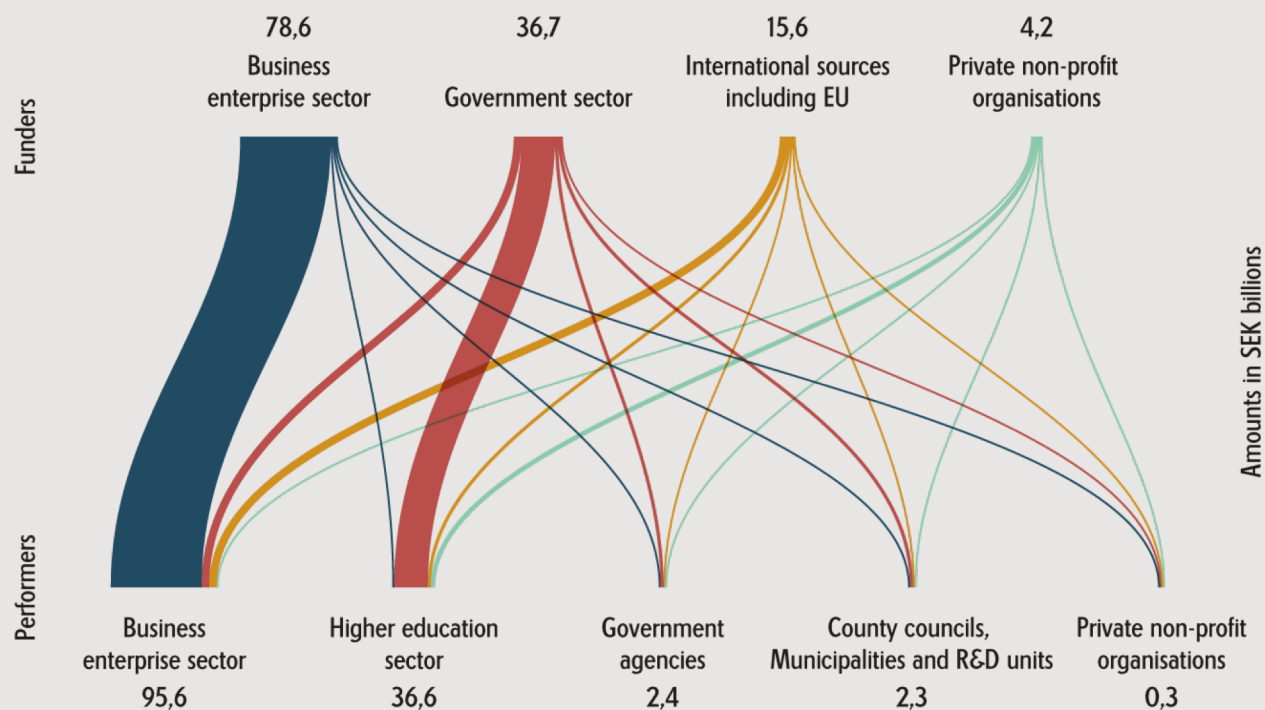




# Funding providers of R&D in Sweden 2015

Total SEK 135 billion

Source: SCB

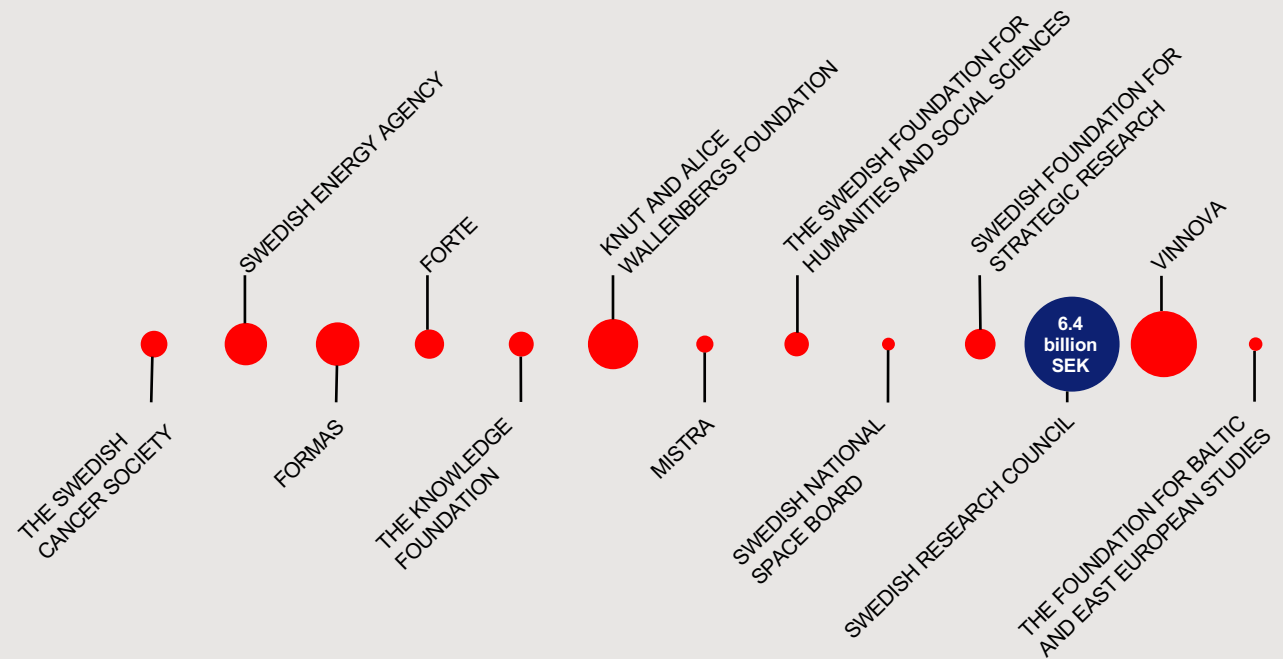




# Distributed research grants 2017

Selection of Swedish research funding organisations

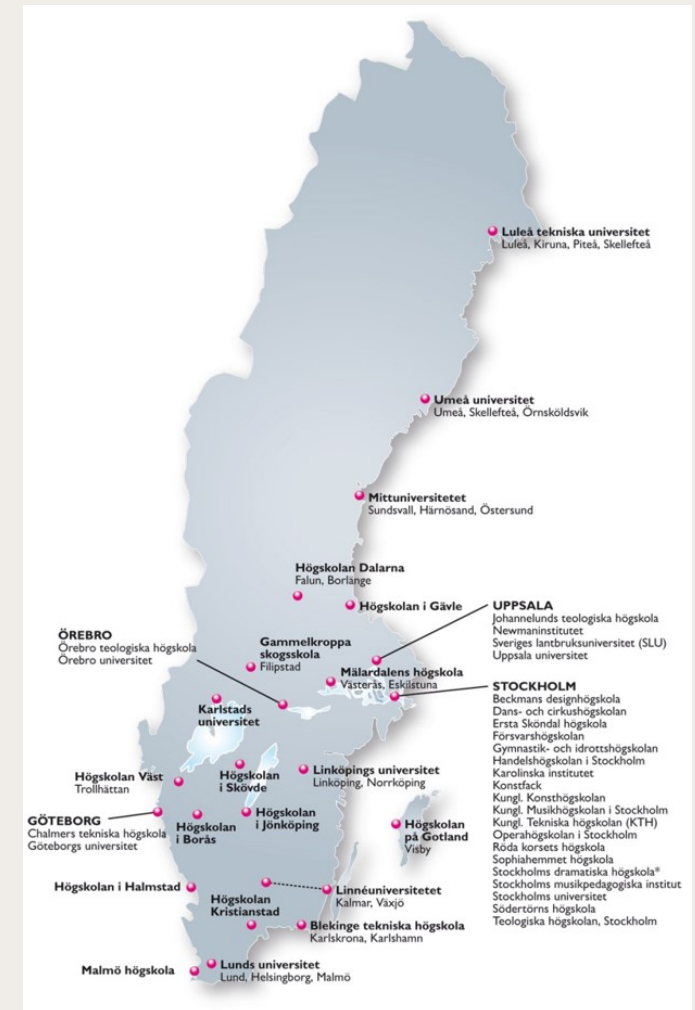
Source: Each organisation's annual report 2017



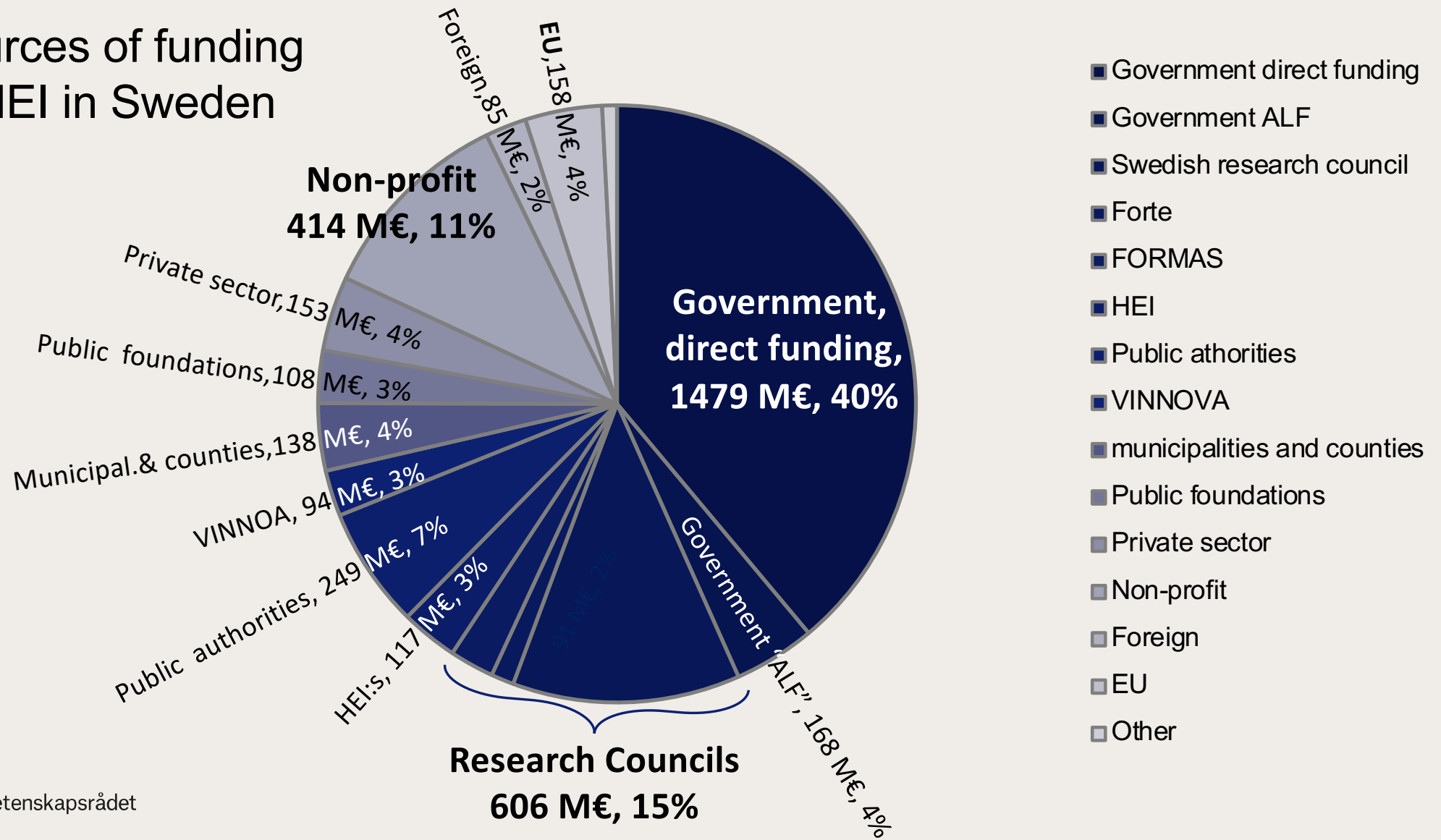


# The Swedish research system - overview

- Responsibility for higher education and research rests with the parliament and the government.
- They decide on the regulations and determine objectives and the allocation of public resources.
- Sweden has a model where public resources for research primarily are linked to universities.
- There are 47 universities and university colleges, 34 of these are public.



# Sources of funding of HEI in Sweden





# *A long-term, Coordinated and Dialogue-based Governance of the Higher Education Sector*

The Commission of Inquiry on Governance and Resources of Higher  
Education (SOU 2019:6)

Investigator: Professor Pam Fredman



## ***Promote academic freedom, quality and responsibility***

Guarantee the free pursuit of knowledge and promote a strong quality culture through maintaining focus on results and quality while avoiding detailed steering or misaligned incentives.

## ***Promote societal responsibility***

A basis of strong academic integrity, HEIs should be expected to do what they can to ensure that the knowledge and competence they build contributes to society in various ways.

## ***Promote the ability for strategic action***

Provide long-term conditions that allow HEIs to take responsibility according to their different profiles.



## The Review proposes.....

### Strengthening norms in the Higher Education Act:

- *the responsibility to protect and promote academic freedom*
- *the freedom of teaching*
- *collegial responsibility and influence*
- *the work of academic staff should normally include both teaching and research.*

## VR agrees



## The Review proposes.....

A coordinated, dialogue-based and forward-looking process:

- *a Bill for higher education and research once during each term of office*
- *a dialogue process which results in a four-year planning horizon and HEIs specific appropriation directives*
- *plus four-year Government-HEI Agreements*

**VR agrees partially**





## The Review proposes.....

### Education and research:

- *research and education should be handled together and ascribed to equal importance*
- *institutional funding should form half of total HEI research income*
- *a separate review of state external funding, regarding both organisational structure and funding procedures*

## VR agrees partially



## The Review proposes.....

### Analysis and follow-ups:

- *an analytical function to be created with the mission to collect or commission independent analyses*
- *group of experts with broad societal representation and be hosted by the Swedish Higher Education Authority*
- *provide a report to inform the Bill for higher education and research*

## VR do not agree



## The Review proposes.....

### Public engagement and societal impact:

- *HEIs should work to ensure that societal benefit is derived from their knowledge and competence – strengthen in Higher Education Act*
- *evaluation and follow-up of HEIs' public engagement work - an integral part of the national quality assurance system*
- *a separate inquiry of the role of HEIs in the innovation system*

## VR agrees



## The Review proposes.....

### Gender equality:

- *gender mainstreaming should remain the overall strategy for increased gender equality in HEIs*
- *Swedish Higher Education Authority a clear responsibility for evaluation and follow-up of HEIs' work for gender equality*
- *abandon the current targets for the proportion of women among newly recruited professors*

## VR agrees partially



## The Review proposes.....

### Resource allocation:

- *one, common budget allocation for education and research*
- *increase in direct funding by redistributing funds from state research councils*
- *redistributed funds should be allocated to the various HEIs according to their historical levels of funding*

## VR do not agree



## **VR strongly believes in:**

### **Researcher-initiated research and undirected researchers:**

Undirected researchers and curiosity-driven research form the foundation for new knowledge, innovation and societal development.

To create prerequisites for society's long-term development, support for undirected research must be strengthened and allocated on the basis of research quality, peer-reviewed in national or international competition.



## **VR strongly believes in:**

### **External funding and direct government funding:**

External funding awarded in competition is needed to drive the development of Swedish research quality.

The main goal of direct government funding to HEIs shall be to provide the best researchers with better, more long-term and stable conditions.

The interplay between direct government grants and external funding by government agencies assumes a clear division of roles and a clear picture of how the different types of funding are used.



## **VR strongly believes in:**

### **Prominent research environments:**

Strong and creative research environments are an important factor for conducting research of high quality and for linking together research, education and society as a whole.

Primary responsibility for building up research environments rests with the HEIs, at the same time as external funding forms an important complement.

The HEIs should collaborate to a greater extent to create the best prerequisites for strong research and education environments.





## **VR strongly believes in:**

### **Evaluation and quality assurance:**

Evaluation of the results of research drives quality. In order for Swedish research to achieve the highest scientific quality, all research must be peer-reviewed.

Evaluations conducted by higher education institutions and national actors should be implemented in such a way that they complement each other.



## **VR strongly believes in:**

### **Gender equality:**

Research quality is strengthened by a gender-equal research system. To achieve this, the responsibility of HEIs to promote gender equality must be developed and reported through monitoring, for example of how direct government grants are allocated in terms of gender..



## **VR strongly believes in:**

### **Ethics, good research practice and scientific misconduct:**

Ethics in research is a cornerstone for the execution and quality of research and trust in research. Research ethics reviews must work in a satisfactory and uniform way across the entire scientific field, including within international collaboration.



**Thank you!**