

Evaluation of STINT's programme Initiation Grants for Internationalisation



FINAL REPORT

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Summary

In 2011 STINT, The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, launched the programme Initiation Grants for Internationalisation. The programme aims to support the early stages in the establishment of new and strategically interesting international relationships through flexible short-term projects. In April 2019 the programme including two regional versions targeting Japan and the Middle East had funded a total of 259 projects with a total budget of 36.7 MSEK, an average grant size of 141kSEK. The programme has remained practically unchanged since the inception.

This evaluation aims to illuminate (i) the consequences the programme has had for its participants, and (ii) how the participation is distributed across different participant categories. It is guided by seven more specific evaluation questions. STINT specifically asked the evaluation to investigate the programme's role and importance. The evaluation has been carried out mainly through a web-based survey to 150 project leaders of whom 114 (76 percent) responded, and through studies of applications and final reports to analyse patterns of participation. The evaluation is also based on interviews with 12 individuals in or around the programme, studies of background documents, and a workshop at STINT.

The overall conclusion is that Initiation Grants for Internationalisation is a well-functioning programme with mostly highly satisfied grantees. The programme's main strength relates to its format, which allows flexible use of the funding. The participants also appreciate the efficient process for application and decision-making.

The impact of the programme is overall positive. A significant amount of the collaborations continues to live on and develop after the programme's funding ends, with funding secured from a broad range of sources – the programme should be viewed as a springboard for ideally the entire Swedish research funding system, rather than for STINT programmes alone. Two thirds of the projects have contributed to scientific publications. Exchange of researchers occur in almost all

projects, and nearly half of the projects have led to new collaborations with partners not in the projects.

STINT appears to communicate the programme efficiently overall, although there seems to be room for improvement. Participation is rather evenly distributed between the Swedish HEIs and across scientific fields, but the number of education-oriented projects and applications is low. Since 2015 the gap in success rates between different types of HEIs has decreased, and the composition of collaboration countries has become more diverse with increasing shares for strategically important parts of the world such as South and Central America and Africa. The participation of younger researchers, postdocs, PhD students and Master students is rather high. The success rates between fields possibly varies a bit too much, but the different characters of the fields make the issue complex.

The **overall recommendation** is:

- The programme is overall successful, largely due to its format, and should therefore not be subject to any major changes

Specific recommendations include:

- STINT should consider allowing funding to be used for 15–18 months, partly because some participants ask for it, partly because it already appears to be practiced when participants ask for prolongation and have a decent motive to do so
- STINT should investigate the potential of linking the programme (or parts of it) closer to other, larger programmes, and that way further increase the chance of producing long-term impact and give successful projects a better chance of attracting funding to a subsequent, more extensive project
- STINT should consider several initiatives to increase the education content in the programme – some suggestions are provided in the evaluation

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1 Introduction

STINT, The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, works to promote internationalisation in Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs). In late 2011 STINT launched the programme Initiation Grants for Internationalisation (*Initieringsbidrag* in Swedish, in this report also referred to as “IB” or “the programme”) with the aim to support the early stages in the establishment of new and strategically interesting international relationships¹ through flexible short-term projects.

In 2017 and 2018 STINT ran two regional versions of the programme, Sweden-Japan 150 Anniversary Grants and Middle East Mobility Grants. These were marketed as new programmes but were in practice part of the IB-programme and are treated as such in this evaluation. STINT expects that the IB-programme above all leads to continued and deepened international collaborations that are beneficial for Swedish HEIs. In April 2019 the programme including the two regional versions had funded a total of 259 projects with a total budget of 36.7 MSEK, an average grant size of 141kSEK. The programme has remained practically unchanged since the inception.

This evaluation was commissioned when the IB-programme had been running for a little more than six years. STINT has specifically asked the evaluation to investigate the programme’s role and importance. On the one hand, STINT has the view that the programme is appreciated by the participants and that there is a general need for the kind of financial support the programme offers. On the other hand, STINT also observes a somewhat low interest in the programme from parts of the higher education sector and that it attracts applicants who may not actually need the kind of small grants that IB awards. STINT has expressed the hope that the evaluation will bring some clarity to these issues, besides responding to the questions STINT has raised when commissioning the assignment. The programme was also evaluated in 2015, and this exercise has been partly modelled on the previous evaluation to allow for comparisons.

¹ STINT (2018). Initiation Grants for Internationalisation, call text 2018-12-19

1.1 Assignment

The evaluation aims to illuminate (i) the consequences the programme has had for its participants, and (ii) how the participation is distributed across different participant categories. The assignment has been guided by seven questions:

1. What are the consequences of the programme? Do the consequences differ between scientific fields?
 - To what extent do the projects lead to continued collaboration?
 - To what extent do the projects lead to research publications?
 - How large share of the projects lead to applications to, or funded projects in, other STINT programmes? What are the main reasons not to apply to other STINT programmes?
2. How have the collaborations developed during and after the funding from the IB programme? Has subsequent funding been secured, and if so, from what sources?
3. How efficient is the communication of the programme? To what extent does the programme reach new applicants?
4. How are the regional versions of the programme perceived?
5. a) How is the programme participation (also at the applicant stage) distributed between different participant categories? b) To what extent does the success rate differ between participant categories? E.g. regarding:
 - Participating HEIs
 - Collaboration countries
 - Collaborations within research alone, education alone, and a combination of research and education
 - Females and males
 - Participation of younger researchers, postdocs, PhD students and Master students
 - Scientific fields

6. In which aspects should the programme be developed to improve its contributions to the strategic internationalisation of Swedish HEIs?
7. How can STINT improve its communication of the programme to further increase the number of unique individuals the in the applications?

1.2 Methods

The evaluation was carried out through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. One source of qualitative information was **background documents** that were analysed to learn about the programme. As part thereof, we reviewed calls for applications, as well as the previous evaluation. We also studied STINT's webpage to learn about STINT's programme portfolio. The previous evaluation was important in the design of survey and interview questions as well as for the participant analysis. A significant part of the work consisted of **studies and analyses of applications and final reports**, conducted to respond to questions on participation.

A main source of quantitative data was a **web-based survey** to project leaders that were granted funding from July 2015 and onwards, – i.e. projects not covered by the previous evaluation. STINT provided contact details, and the survey was sent out in April 2019 to 150 respondents, of whom 114 (76 percent) responded. The response rate is higher than in most other similar investigations and implicate high significance in the analyses. The survey focused on collecting information on impact of the projects and (for finished projects) how the activities had developed after the funding ended, as well as getting the participants' views on key features of the programme.

The empirical studies also included **interviews** with 12 individuals in or around the programme: three STINT officials, five funded researchers, three internationalisation officers at Swedish HEIs, and one vice-chancellor at a large Swedish university. The interviews served complementary purposes – the interviews with STINT were mainly conducted to better understand the programme, while the other interviews primarily served to understand the programme dynamics and the role of the programme in the research system. The interviews were thus exploratory and conducted in a semi-structured fashion to

deepen the evaluators' understanding of the programme, and not intended to e.g. provide a systematic collection of impact.

Towards the end of the assignment, the documented results and impacts, reflections and tentative conclusions and recommendations were presented and discussed at a **workshop** at STINT. Besides STINT staff, a number of researchers who had been funded by the programme and internationalisation officers of HEIs participated in the workshop. Apart from STINT staff, the workshop participants did not participate in the interviews. The workshop participants provided useful feedback which has been worked into this report. Workshop participants are listed in Appendix B.

The evaluation was carried out between February and June 2019 by Tobias Fridholm (project manager), Sebastian Christner and Amauta Gisslandi, Sweco, with Olof Hallonsten, Lund University, in a quality assurance role. The team would like to thank all interviewees and workshop participants for generously sharing their time.

1.3 Report structure

The remainder of the report consists of six sections. Next follows a background to the programme and internationalisation of higher education and research. Section three concerns patterns of participation, while section four focuses on the impact the programme has made. The fifth section focuses on strategic issues raised by STINT in the evaluation, and the report ends with conclusions in section six and recommendations in section seven.

2 Background

This section introduces internationalisation of Swedish HEIs in a broad perspective and then gives an overview of the programme.

2.1 Internationalisation of the higher education sector in Sweden

Higher education and academic research are inherently internationally oriented and have been for a very long time.² In the past few decades internationalisation has gone further and created a global *market* of higher education and research and a continuously growing mobility of people and knowledge across borders.³ Sweden is no exception: The number of international students at Swedish HEIs continue to grow, and international research collaboration, as measured by the number of international co-publications, also increases every year.⁴

Clearly, internationalisation is a broad and vague concept, and difficult to measure. Swedish research and education policymakers tend to view internationalisation as something inherently good, tightly connected to enhanced quality and excellence.⁵ Some empirical evidence supports this argument: The Swedish academic system is unevenly internationalised, and HEIs with strong international profiles are usually identified as the top performers in higher education and research. On the other hand, some scientific fields in Sweden are strongly internationalised whereas others remain largely domestically oriented, and in those cases the correlation with quality is less evident.

² Section 2.1. is built on the equivalent section in the evaluation of STINT's programme Strategic Grants for Internationalisation, which Sweco evaluated in 2017. The original text was written by Olof Hallonsten, Lund University.

³ See Wildavsky (2010). *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World*, Princeton University Press; Hazelkorn (2011), *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence*, Palgrave Macmillan; STINT Impact Analysis 1994–2015, pp 2.

⁴ UK-ämbetet, *Statistikdatabas om högskolan*, <http://statistik.uka.se> (11 June 2019); Eurostat database, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (11 June 2019).

⁵ Nybom (2009). *Kunskap-Politik-Samhälle*, Arete Förlag, p 157.

Moreover, and not least in Sweden, higher education and research in HEIs is almost completely publicly funded. A natural tension therefore exists between the institutional structure of higher education and research, which is unavoidably national, and its content, which is just as unavoidably international.⁶ Key to loosening this tension, which will contribute to internationalisation in a deeper meaning, are partnerships over disciplinary and institutional boundaries, where knowledge and best practices can be shared and developed.

Another dimension is added by the fact that both higher education and research are highly individualised – few other professions put as much emphasis on personal achievement as the academic profession, and higher education is likewise most of all about individual advancement. This means that internationalisation on the individual level and internationalisation on the level of whole HEIs or higher education systems are conceptually different, and different from a policy and planning point of view. Students and researchers move and interact internationally in spontaneous exchanges and collaborations, with results for individual career advancement. This mobility and exchange has increased over time and will, to some extent, spontaneously aggregate to system-level effects. But it is also clear that internationalisation of whole HEIs or the entire Swedish higher education and research system is a process that requires planning and coordination.

Funding is a powerful policy instrument in the area of higher education and research, and so the role of STINT is potentially great. Nonetheless, internationalisation is a long-term process that requires sustainability and persistence in efforts and programmes, which means that there is a limit to what single funding programmes can achieve. For internationalisation to be durable and comprehensive, several actors need to be involved and remain active for a long time.⁷ Against that background, the IB programme has limited potential in making sustainable impact. However, as one tool among many, and in the role of a springboard towards other programmes that offer support to more comprehensive or extensive initiatives, the programme yet has the capacity of making an important difference.

⁶ Edqvist, O. (2009), *Gränslös forskning*, Nya Doxa, p 17.

⁷ STINT (2017). *STINT Impact Analysis 1994–2015*, p 14.

2.2 On the programme Initiation Grants for Internationalisation

The programme shall through short-term projects **promote the establishment of new and strategically interesting international relationships** between Swedish HEIs and HEIs in countries outside the European Union (EU) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)⁸ and that way make **long-term impact** on the Swedish HEIs in terms of strengthened **international competitiveness**.⁹ Since the programme's inception in late 2011, STINT has invited applications continuously throughout the years, with funding decisions made four times annually. Grants may not exceed 150kSEK and are to be used for costs associated with "internationalisation activities", e.g. stays, travels and conference costs. STINT does not cover salaries, other than in some cases for postdocs and PhD students. There is no requirement of co-funding, but the choice not to cover wages for senior researchers and teachers could in practice be interpreted as such a demand. STINT officials have expressed the intention that the programme should partly function as an entrance to other STINT programmes

To ensure that the projects contribute to internationalisation strategies at the HEIs, STINT requires written support from Heads of department (or the equivalent) both at the Swedish institution and the principal foreign counterpart(s). To underline the programme's intention to flexibly fund start-up activities, the funding is to be used within one year. STINT communicates restriction in granting extended use of the funding; however, if the grantees show good reasons, extensions are normally permitted.

Applications are reviewed by STINT staff, and final funding decisions are made by STINT's Executive Director. STINT's Board of Directors make decisions on the format and processes of the programme. The two main assessment criteria are:

- Contribution to the HEIs' activities (strategic importance of the partnership, expected outcome, plan for the future etc.)

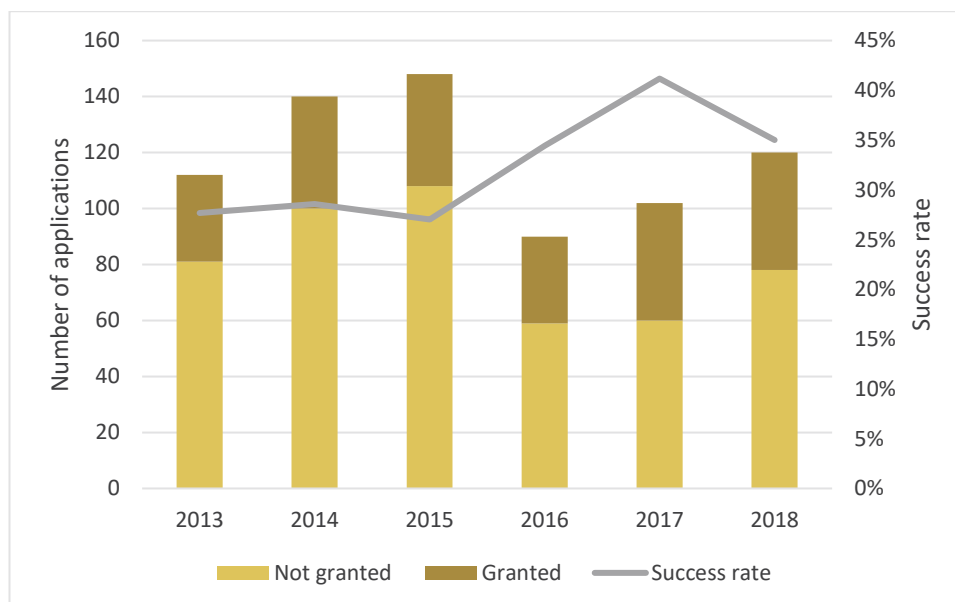
⁸ In 2019 EFTA consists of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland

⁹ STINT (2018). Initiation Grants for Internationalisation, call text 2018-12-19

- Project organisation and quality (Clarity and realism of the project plan, role distribution of partners, inclusion of both junior and senior researchers, cost efficiency etc.)

The programme has practically remained unchanged throughout its eight years history. By April 2019, a total of **259 projects have been granted a total of 36.7 MSEK**, an average of 141kSEK per project – in other words, almost all applications aim at the maximum grant sum. STINT has aimed at maintaining an even quality level across decisions rounds, which means that the budget has occasionally been unevenly spent throughout the year, depending on the number and quality of applications per decision round.

Figure 1 : Overview of programme applications per year (does not include the regional calls)



As Figure 1 shows, **the number of applications was higher during the first three years** of the programme than later. The success rate for entire period is 32 percent, a rate that has grown from 28 percent in 2013–2015 to 37 percent in 2016–2018. The decreased interest appears to be relatively evenly spread across the HEI sector and scientific fields; we shall return to the participation patterns in the next section of the report. The figure does not include the regional calls to Japan in 2017, which rendered 71 applications (12 granted) and the Middle East in 2018 with 24

applications (8 granted). The Japan call was co-founded by the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond Foundation and the Swedish Research Council.

2.3 Evaluation in 2015

In 2015 STINT internally evaluated the programme with questions similar to the those asked in the present evaluation: How have the funded collaborations developed during and after the period of funding? What impact has STINT's funding made? Who participate in the programme? Among the main findings were:

- The programme particularly attracted representatives from the humanities and social sciences while medicine appeared underrepresented
- The applications and projects indicate that the programme reaches out broadly among disciplines, HEIs and countries
- The funded collaborations had developed well even after the programme funding ended, despite only every fifth project received new STINT funding in another programme
- The grants were reportedly important or even decisive for almost all respondents

STINT concluded that the programme should continue in the same format, with two minor adjustments: risky projects with high potential should be slightly higher prioritised and the review criterion that STINT's funding should make a difference should be more clearly announced in the call text.¹⁰

¹⁰ STINT (2015). Utvärdering av Initieringsbidrag 2011–2015

3 Participation

3.1 Institutions and locations of collaborators

In total, the programme has attracted applications from 33 HEIs in Sweden over its six years of existence. These include all the 30 mainstream HEIs.¹¹ The largest institution that has never applied is the Red Cross College, which in 2018 employed a mere 38 PhDs. Grants have been awarded to 29 of the 33 institutions. As Table 1 shows, the most frequent applicants are all among the largest research universities.

Table 1: Top participating institutions

January 2012 to June 2015		July 2015 to December 2018	
Institution	No. of appl.	Institution	No. of appl.
Stockholm University	48	Uppsala University	62
Lund University	42	Lund University	59
Uppsala University	34	Stockholm University	53
Karolinska Institutet	29	University of Gothenburg	38
KTH Royal Institute of Technology	24	Karolinska Institutet	30
Linköping University	21	KTH Royal Institute of Technology	30
Total number of applications	356		491
Top 6 share of total number of applications	56%		55%
Top 6 share of PhDs at Swedish HEIs			53%

Source: STINT and Swedish Higher Education Authority (2019)

¹¹ Based on taxonomy in Holmberg and Hallonsten (2015). Policy reform and academic drift: Research mission and institutional legitimacy in the development of the Swedish higher education system 1977-2012. *European Journal of Higher Education* 5(2): 181-196.

There is however no unhealthy imbalance towards those institutions – although the top 6 institutions represent more than half of the applications, they also represent an equal share of individuals with PhDs¹² employed at Swedish HEIs. The institutions’ place in top 6 have however shifted slightly across time, with in particular a growth in numbers of applications from Uppsala University and the University of Gothenburg.

Table 2 shows the relative degree of representation of HEIs, calculated as the institution’s share of applications relative to its share of individuals with PhDs employed in the Swedish HEI sector. A quota above 1 indicates that the HEI is overrepresented in the programme, while a quota below 1 means that it is underrepresented. The quotas vary more the smaller an institution, why the highest quotas are found among the newer universities and university colleges. Mid Sweden University and University of Gävle come out on top, and among the established universities Luleå University of Technology, Stockholm University and KTH Royal Institute of Technology are the best represented institutions. Notably, several of the top 6 institutions above barely reach quotas above 1.

Table 2: Well-represented institutions (applications) 2012–2018

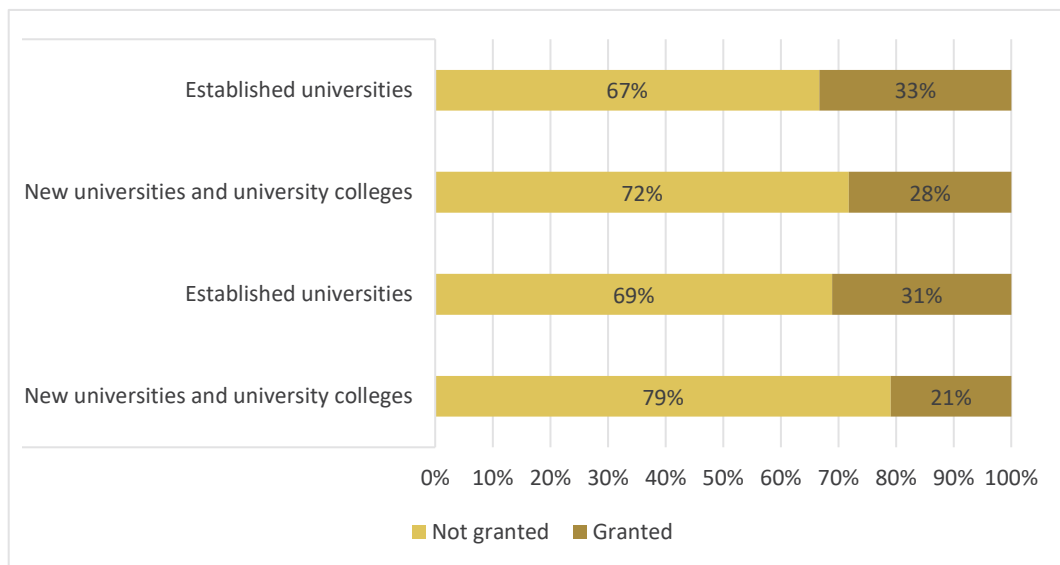
Established universities		New universities and university colleges	
Institution	Quota	Institution	Quota
Luleå University of Technology	1.72	Mid Sweden University	2.14
Stockholm University	1.43	University of Gävle	1.89
KTH Royal Institute of Technology	1.32	Halmstad University	1.49
Uppsala University	1.10	Malmö University	1.40
Lund University	1.05	Jönköping University	1.36

Note: The quota represents the institution’s share of applications to the programme divided by the institution’s share of PhDs employed at Swedish HEIs. Only institutions with 10 or more applications to the programme are included. Source: STINT

¹² In other words, this does not refer to “PhD students”, who are in daily speak sometimes referred to as “PhDs”, but to staff which have a PhD exam.

Swedish HEIs can be categorised in terms of volume, age and not least legal status (universities and non-universities). For analytical reasons, a division into “established universities” (universities founded in 1970s or earlier, which include all institutions with large governmental base funding for research) and “newer institutions” which include all the university colleges, universities established in the 1990s and later, and (albeit not entirely in line with the title of the category) a few small specialised university colleges in music, art etc. which trace their histories longer back in time. A common debate in the Swedish higher education sector concerns whether the established universities receive a higher proportion of research funding than they ought to get. Figure 2 shows the success rates of the two groups of institutions and reveals that although established universities have consistently been more successful, the gap has decreased by half since the previous evaluation in 2015; from 10 to 5 percentages.

Figure 2: Success rates of established and newer institutions

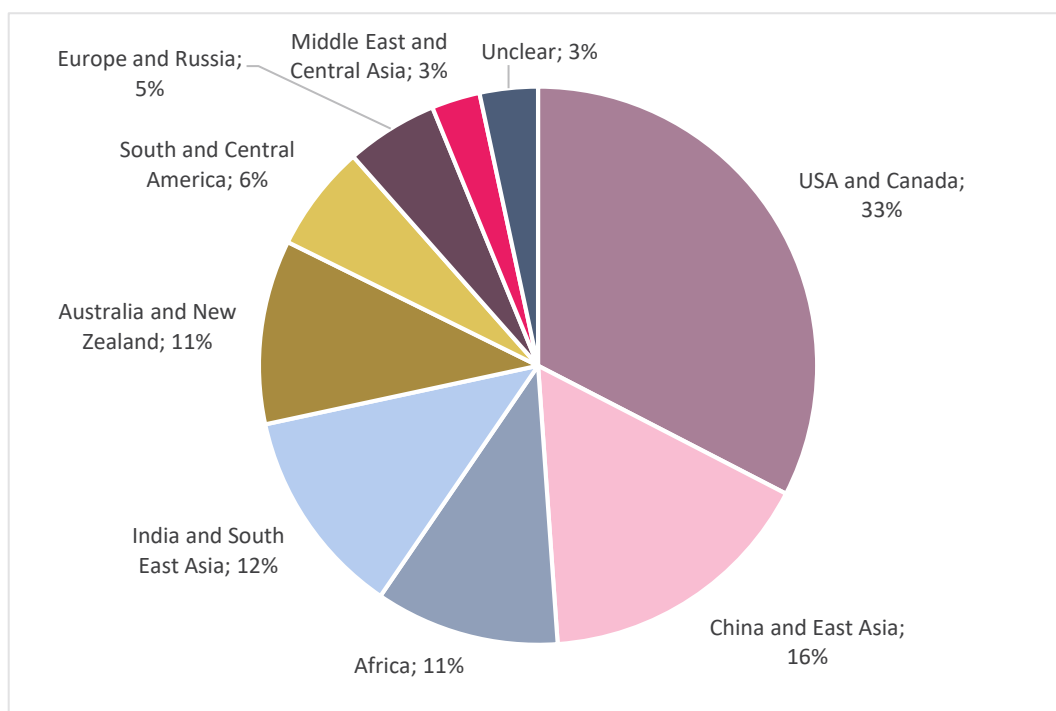


Source: STINT

The programme has reached out to a large number of countries: the 847 applications have addressed collaborators located in 75 different countries, and the

259 grants have been awarded to projects addressing 50 of those countries.¹³ The by far most common country is the United States with 190 applications, followed by Japan (106, largely due to the specific Japan call), Australia (63), China (56) and South Africa and India (45 each).

Figure 3 Location of collaborators 2012 to June 2015 (Japan and Middle East calls are not included)



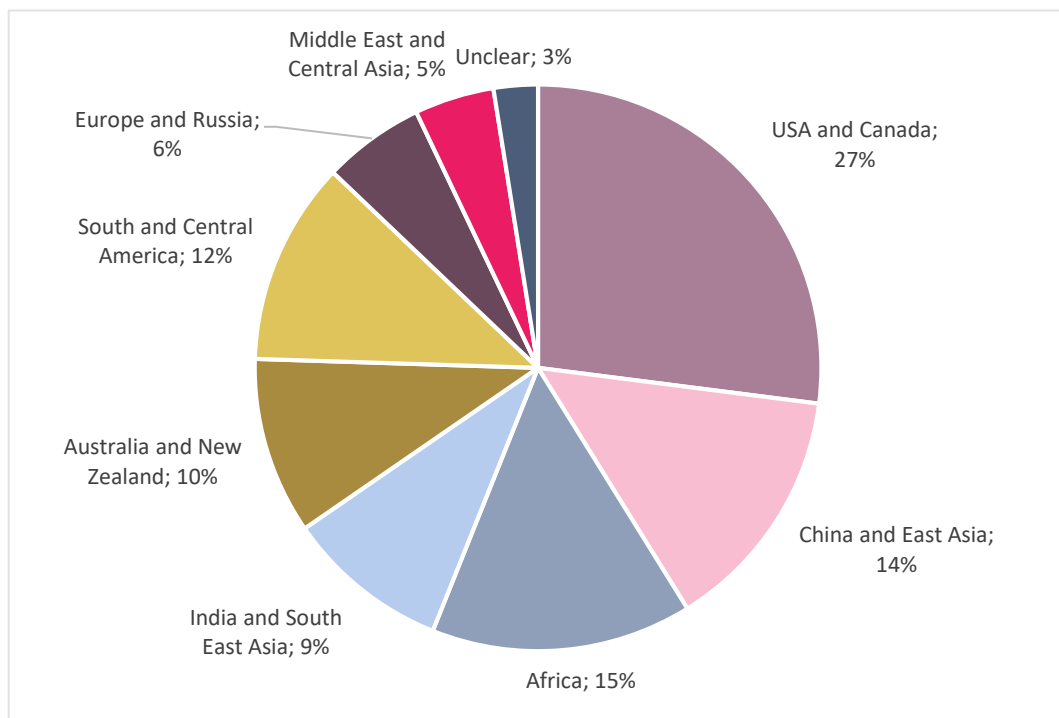
Source: STINT

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the locations of collaborators per geographical region of the world in the two periods of the IB programme. The figures show that the

¹³ The actual number of countries may be slightly higher, as the database excerpt from STINT only included information about the first registered partner. As a consequence, around 3 percent of the applications were listed on EU/EFTA countries, as the projects had partners also in these countries. The location of the mandatory and for our purpose relevant non-EU/EFTA partners are thus unclear in these cases. In addition, if projects addressed more than one non-EU/EFTA partner, not more than one of those are counted here. Our impression from the applications and final reports is however that very few projects addressed more than one of those countries.

programme has reached a more even spread across the world from 2015, with growing shares of applications to Africa and South and Central America. It is quite possible that other STINT programmes, in particular the Strategic Grants for Internationalisation (SG), have contributed to this development as South Africa and Brazil have been targeted countries in the SG programme during the last years.

Figure 4 Location of collaborators July 2015 to 2018 (Japan and Middle East calls are not included)

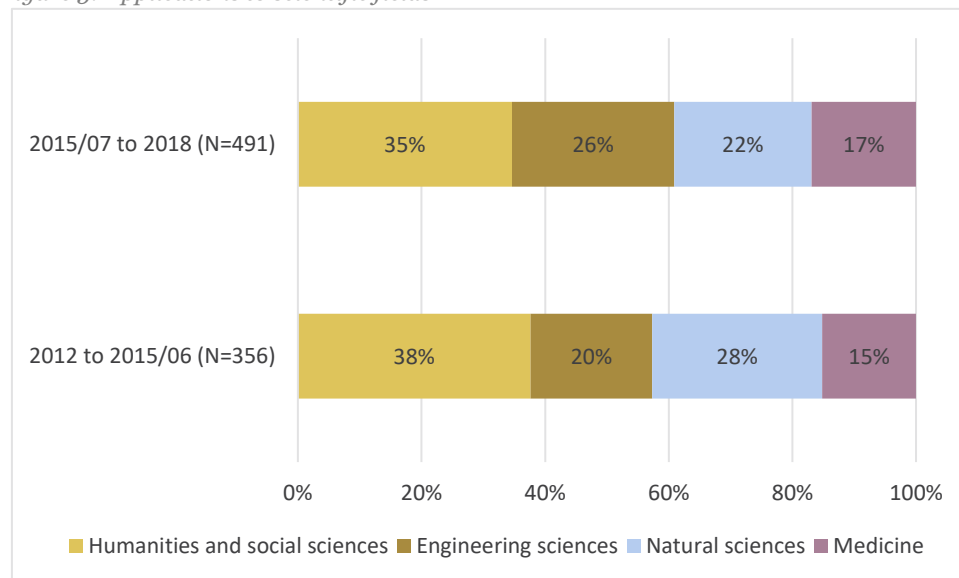


Source: STINT

3.2 Scientific fields and balance between research and education

A conclusion in the 2015 evaluation was that the humanities and social sciences were overrepresented in the programme, and medicine underrepresented. Figure 5 shows that the two fields have slightly levelled their participation during the last three years. The most notable change is however that the engineering sciences have strengthened their position in the programme, while the natural sciences have lost ground. The interviews and the workshop unfortunately gave no clues to this development.

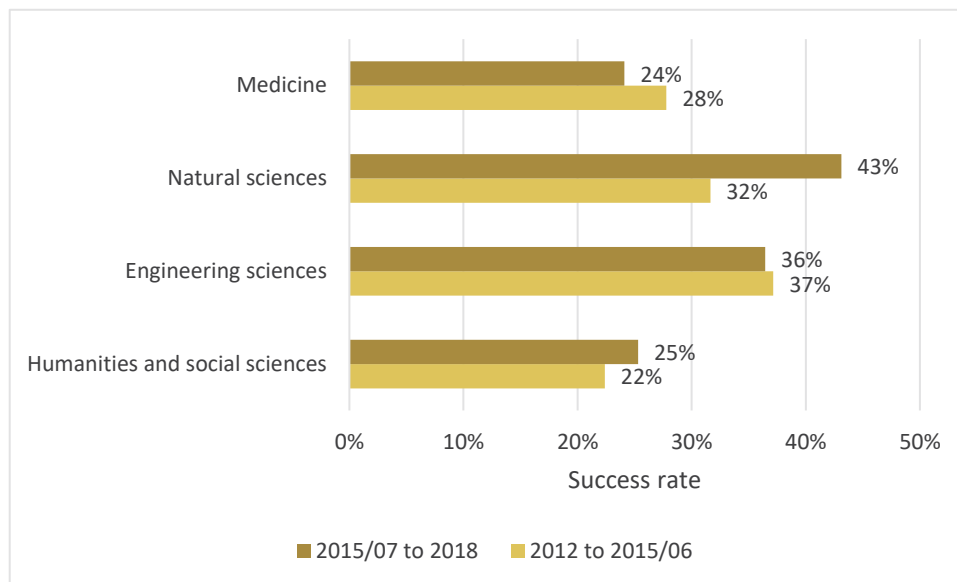
Figure 5: Applications to scientific fields



Source: STINT

Figure 6 illustrates the success rates in the different scientific fields. The higher overall success rate from 2015 is not seen across all fields; the success rates have in fact dropped slightly both for medicine and the engineering sciences. Just like in the previous evaluation, medicine and the humanities and social sciences represent the lowest success rates. The most notable change is the marked improvement of the natural sciences, where almost every second application has been granted since 2015. The engineering sciences continuously show a high success rate. Again, the interviews and the workshop did not offer any clear explanation to this development.

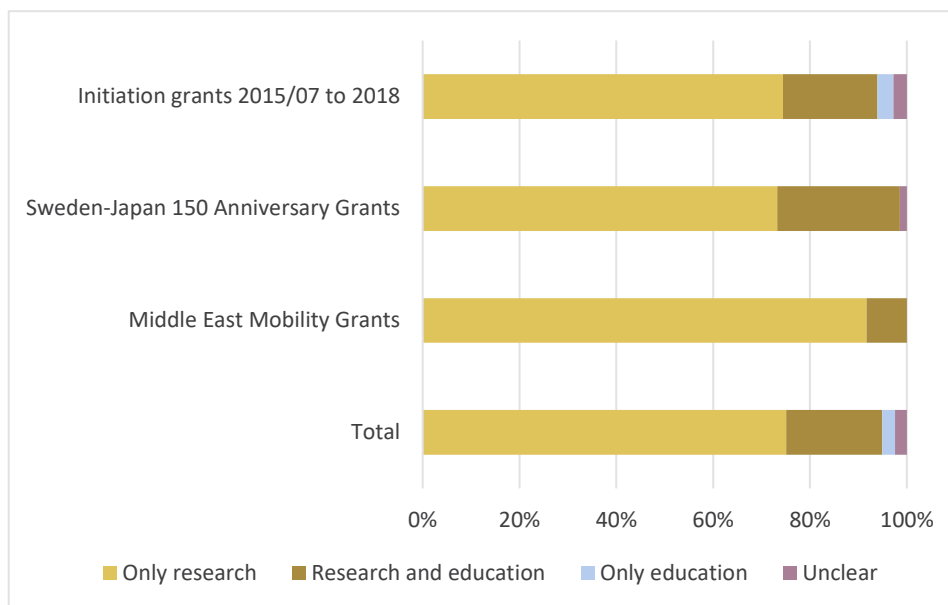
Figure 6 Success rate per scientific field



Source: STINT

The IB programme addresses both research and education. STINT has in the interviews for this evaluation expressed a clear interest in awarding grants to both kinds of activities, while also noting that research appears to strongly dominate. Figure 7 gives strong support for that observation. In the evaluation we classified all applications from July 2015 to 2018 into three categories – whether they concerned research alone, education alone, or both research and education. PhD research was classified as research, as was the inclusion of a Master student in a research project. Projects which include e.g. a lecture, but which otherwise concern research, are normally classified as only research. The outcome is that more than 95 percent of the applications had research content, and in three of four cases the applications concerned only research. The classification is somewhat arbitrary given the great multitude among the proposals – although a structured method was applied – but we consider the message clear: the programme has a challenge in attracting applications focusing on education. The success rate of applications with an education content, whether mixed with research or not, is equal to the success rate of applications that only focus on research.

Figure 7: Balance between research and education



Source: STINT

In the interviews and the workshop, the low number of applications with (partial) focus on education was addressed. The input should be considered speculative; no respondent claimed deep insight into the issue, but we nonetheless contend that it is relevant and reasonable. Explanations to the low number of applications include:

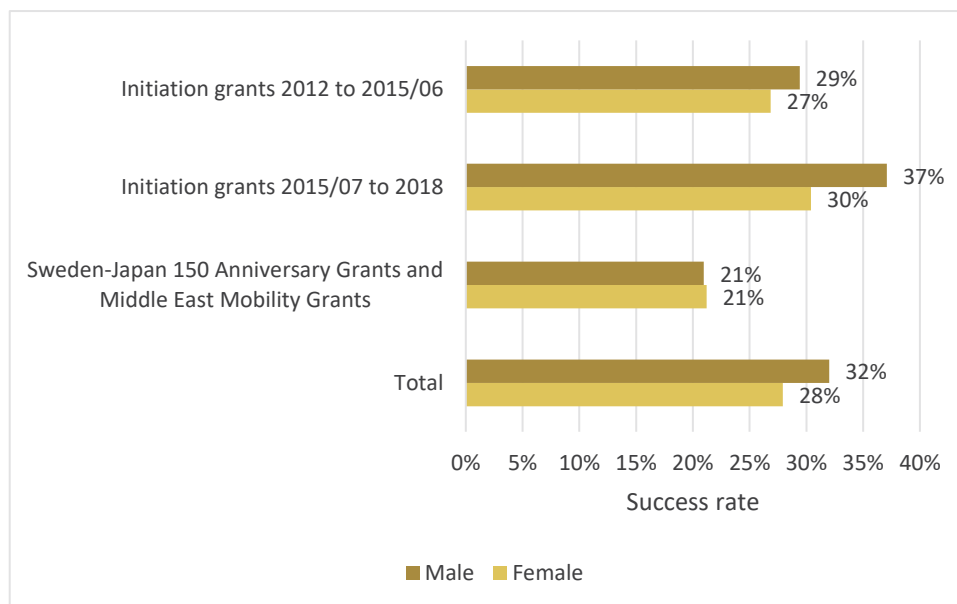
- Many teachers having difficulties to get away from teaching during semesters for a period long enough to be able to carry out an IB project, especially since the funding should be used within a year, which is a short time from a teaching planner’s horizon
- A lack of culture within HEIs culture to look for funding for education development – also individuals who regularly seek, and get, external funding for research, often seem to lack a similar entrepreneurial spirit when education is concerned
- Lack of information about the IB programme to the education leadership at HEIs – several respondents question whether STINT has considered the organisations for education within the institutions, which means that the programme is perhaps only marketed through the research channels

- Difficulties in funding the teachers’ work – since the IB programme does not fund wages for tenured staff, there may be organisational challenges in using government base funding for education to work of this kind; base funding for research is more flexible in that respect

3.3 Gender balance and career stages

Figure 8 shows the success rates for females and males, and how those have developed during the course of the programme. The most striking result is that since 2015 the difference has grown between the sexes, to the benefit of males. However, closer investigations reveal that it is explained by the differences between scientific fields as witnessed in Figure 6. In the hypothetical situation that females and males had identical success rates within each field, a difference of five percentages would remain. The remaining difference is insignificant; it is equivalent to 1.7 granted applications. The average career ages (our best available proxy of seniority) of female and male applicants are identical, and the shares of applicants from each sex has remained more or less stable since the programme was launched.

Figure 8: Success rates for females and males



Source: STINT

As shown in Table 3, almost four in five applications involve young researchers. Most common are PhD students (57 percent of the applications) and postdocs (47 percent), but also Master students are frequently part of the teams – one in four applications involve a Master student. The average success rate for these applications are higher than the success rates for other applications. The differences are partly, but not fully, due to differences between scientific fields – the humanities and social sciences, which have lower success rates, do not work with these categories of researchers in the same ways as the other fields do, and therefore include them less often.

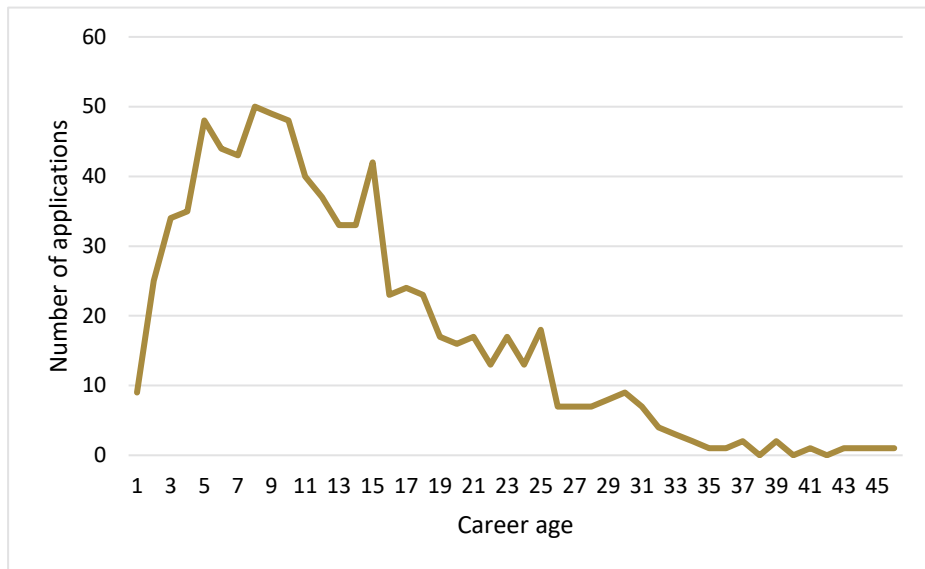
Table 3: Applications with young researchers from July 2015

Programme	Total number of applications	Applications with young researchers	Success rate for all applications	Success rate for appl. with young researchers
Initiation grants 2015/07 to 2018	396	311	35%	38%
Sweden-Japan 150 Anniversary Grants	71	53	17%	19%
Middle East Mobility Grants	24	20	33%	35%
<i>Total</i>	<i>491</i>	<i>384</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>35%</i>

Note: Young researchers are defined as postdocs, PhD students or Master students. Source: STINT.

Figure 9 shows the “career age” of participants from the programme’s inception in 2012 until 2018. The average career age is around 11 years, but the tail is long – the most senior applicant submitted his proposal to the programme 45 years after obtaining his PhD. The most common career ages of the applicants are between four and 14 years. This indicates that the programme particularly attracts researchers at a stage when they actively build their careers and establish international reputations.

Figure 9: Career age of participants



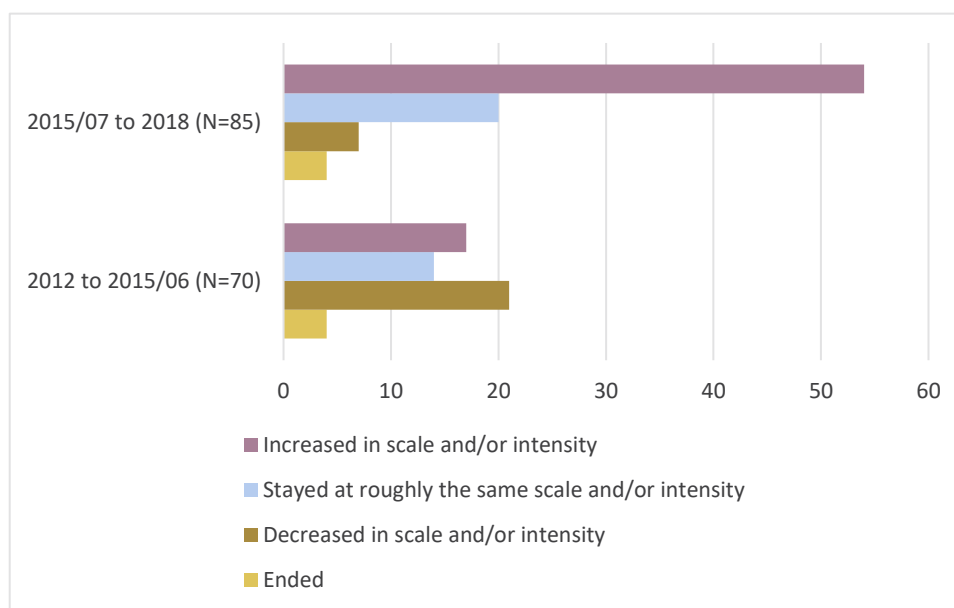
Note: Career age is defined as number of years between obtaining PhD and application to the IB programme. Source: STINT

4 Impact

4.1 Impact on collaboration

An important question for the evaluation is to learn about how the funded collaborations have developed after the funding has ended. Figure 10 shows the results in this regard, of this evaluation as well as the 2015 evaluation. Two out of three collaborations have increased in scale and/or intensity after the funding ended, which is a remarkably positive result. As the figure shows, this effect has increased since the 2015 evaluation. We however advise the reader to compare with great caution; such a large difference is very unexpected since the programme has remained virtually unchanged and suggests that the questions in the two evaluations might have been interpreted differently. The main message from the figure should nonetheless be that a significant amount of the collaborations continues to live on and develop after the IB funding ends.

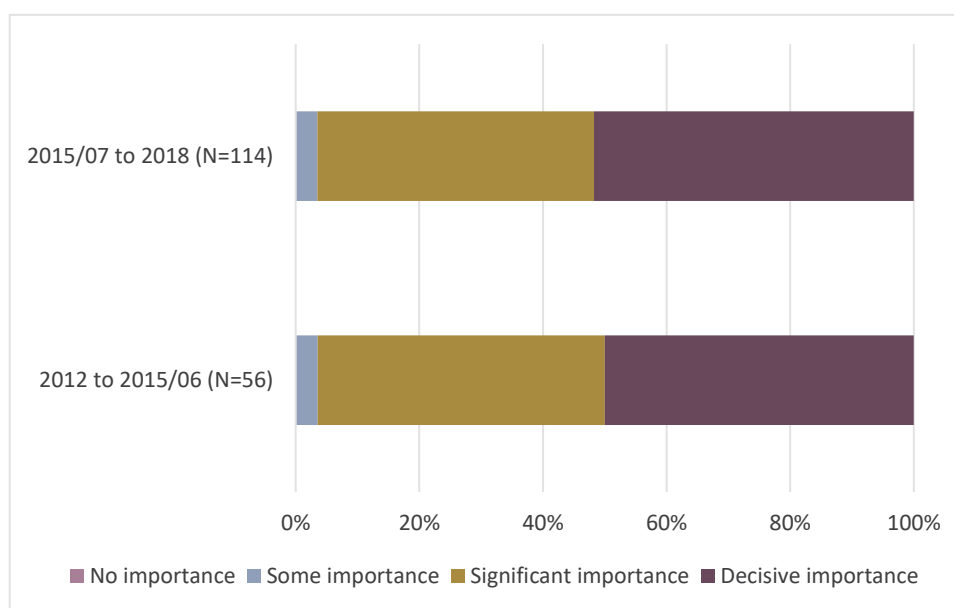
Figure 10: Continued collaboration



Note: The question in 2015 was “What is the status of the collaboration today?” and the question in this evaluation was “How has the collaboration with the project partner(s) developed since the project ended?” Source: Web survey and STINT (2015). Utvärdering av Initieringsbidrag 2011-2015.

Figure 11 shows that funding from the programme continues to be important for the funded actors. Just like in 2015, half of the respondents rated the importance of the grant as “decisive” and almost everyone else rated it as “significant”. This indicates a strongly positive effect of the funding.

Figure 11: Importance of funding



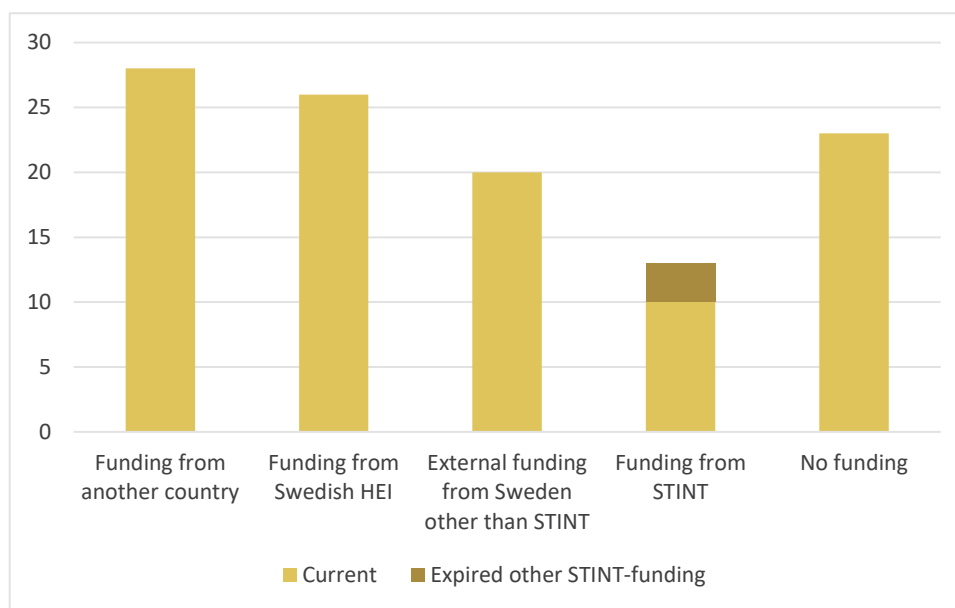
Note: The question in 2015 was “How important has the Initiation Grant been for the development of the collaboration?” and the question in this evaluation was “How important has STINT’s funding been for the collaboration with the project partner(s)?” Source: Web survey and STINT (2015). Utvärdering av Initieringsbidrag 2011-2015.

Collaborations that live on after the end of IB-funding, are funded in different ways, as Figure 12 shows. In one third of the cases, funding comes fully or partly from abroad, while external Swedish funding is also relatively common – in 20 of the 77 cases from other sources than STINT, and in ten cases from other STINT programmes. Three collaborations had also had other STINT funding that had ended.¹⁴ In quite a few cases funding comes from within the Swedish HEIs, and there is also, in practice, internal funding from Swedish HEIs hidden in the bar “No

¹⁴ According to STINT’s own data, that figure may be exaggerated – STINT was only able to locate seven cases which indicated IB projects that continued in other STINT programmes. E-mail correspondence with Hans Pohl 2019-04-17

funding”, since this means continued collaboration within the framework of the researcher’s existing employment. The many open responses contain a very wide range of funding sources, where the EU and the largest Swedish external research funders dominate.

Figure 12: Continued funding for the collaboration (N=77)



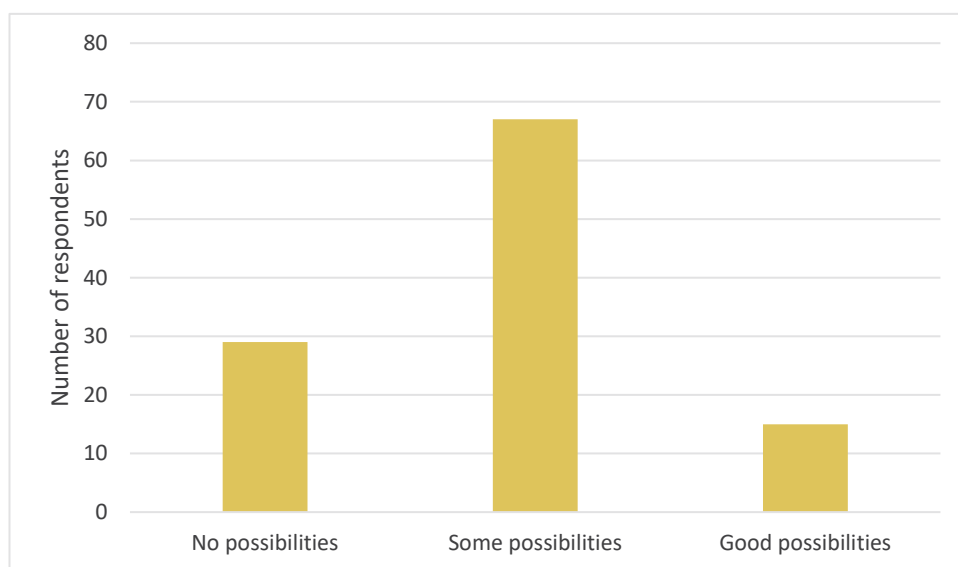
Note: The question was “How is the continued collaboration with the project partner(s) funded?” The respondents were able to select more than one alternative. “Expired other STINT-funding” refers to grants from other STINT programmes for subsequent projects that had ended at the time of the evaluation. Source: Web survey

Though not an explicit part of the assignment of this evaluation, it makes sense to ask if the programme satisfies a need for funding that no other Swedish funder or programme meet, in other words, whether funding for the same kind of activities be secured elsewhere. Figure 13 reveals that only a small minority of the project leaders considered the IB programme to significantly overlap with other accessible funding. At the same time, most respondents observed “some” possibilities to use other funding. A closer investigation indicates differences between scientific fields – in each of the humanities and social sciences, and the natural sciences, 35 percent of the respondents saw “no possibilities” to attract similar funding elsewhere,

whereas respondents representing medicine and the engineering sciences were more positive in that respect.

The figure to some extent also addresses an observation made STINT officials: that the programme attracts applicants who are known for being very well-funded, which they found questionable since those researchers could be expected to use other grants to cover the small expenses of the kind the programme addresses and thus not make the effort to write an application. The figure indicates that the “problem” is not very extensive, and interview responses suggest that the flexibility of the programme makes it more rare than perhaps STINT officials are aware of – the funding may be used for purposes that other funding cannot cover, and as such it may still meet needs also among financially otherwise very well-equipped researchers.

Figure 13: Other funding possibilities (N=111)



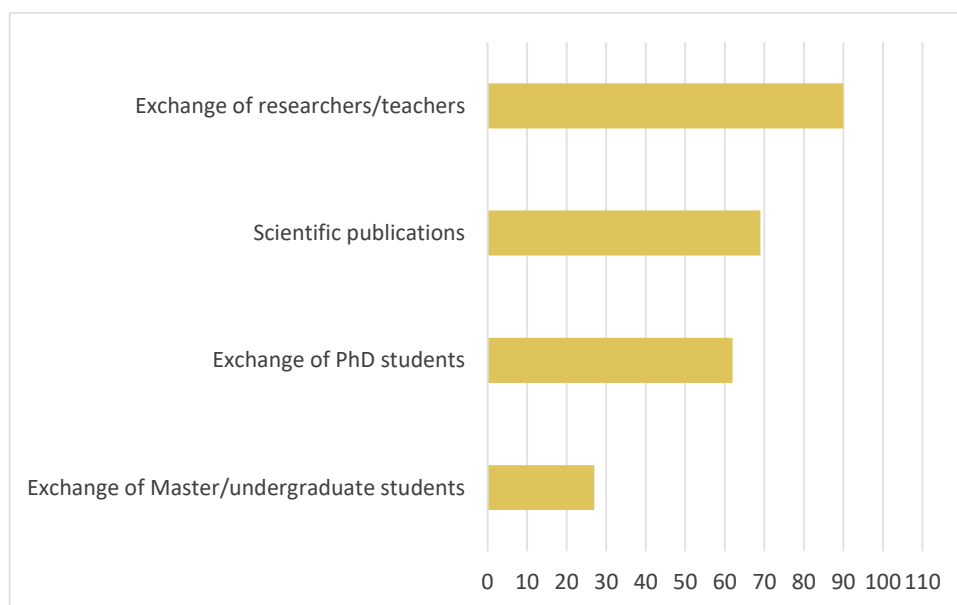
Note: The question was “How was your possibility to fund the project activities from another source of funding?” Source: Web survey

4.2 Other impact

Short-term mobility is a primary target of the IB programme. In that light, Figure 14 should not come as a surprise: Among 110 survey respondents, 90 report

exchange of researchers or teachers. A majority also report exchange of PhD students, while one in four state exchange of Master or undergraduate students. Both the exchanges of PhD students and of Master students are as expected given the extent to which these appear in the applications. Two thirds of the project leaders report that the projects have led to scientific publications – although, given the small size of the grants, “contributed” to scientific publications would be a more accurate term: the lion’s share of the research and writing should in virtually every case have been funded by other sources.

Figure 14: Impact on mobility and publications (N=110)

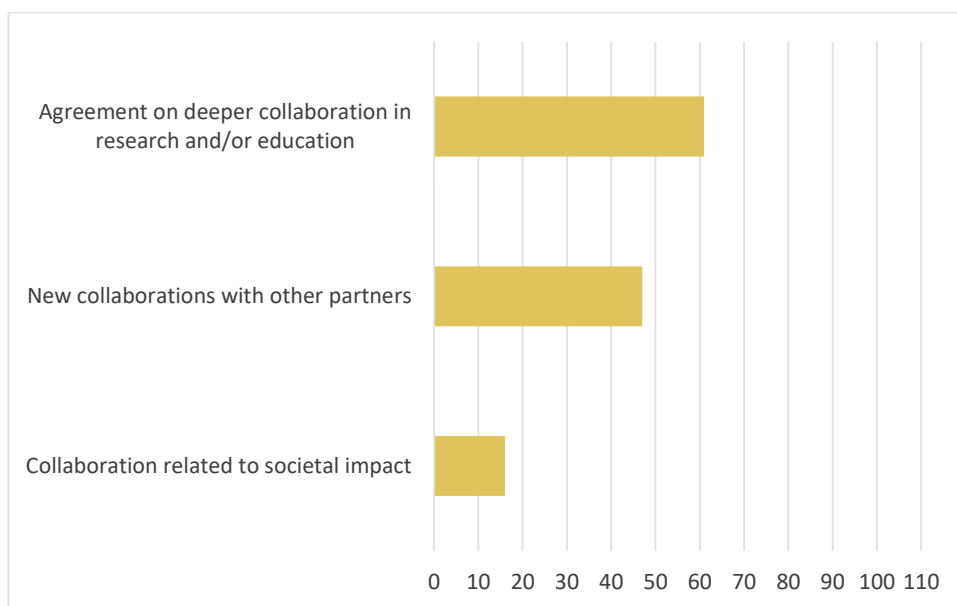


Note: The question was “Which of the following results/impact has the project led to?” Several alternatives possible. Source: Web survey

Regarding continued and expanded collaborations as result of the projects, Figure 15 shows that nearly half of the projects led to collaborations with other partners than the one(s) in the project – an impact that perhaps is expected, but nonetheless positive. That does not implicate that collaborations with the initial project partners have ended; in most cases these are probably partners in the expanded networks too. Around half of the respondents indicate that the projects have led to agreements on deeper collaboration. Some workshop participants stated that more formal agreements were typically the products of pressures from the foreign

partners, who more often than Swedish universities want written commitments. To avoid time-consuming administrative procedures and to preserve a flexibility of action, Swedish partners often try to avoid more formalised agreements. Very few projects concern societal impact, which is also the evaluators' firm impression from the applications and final reports.

Figure 15: Impact on further collaborations (N=110)



Note: The question was “Which of the following results/impact has the project led to?” Several alternatives possible. Source: Web survey

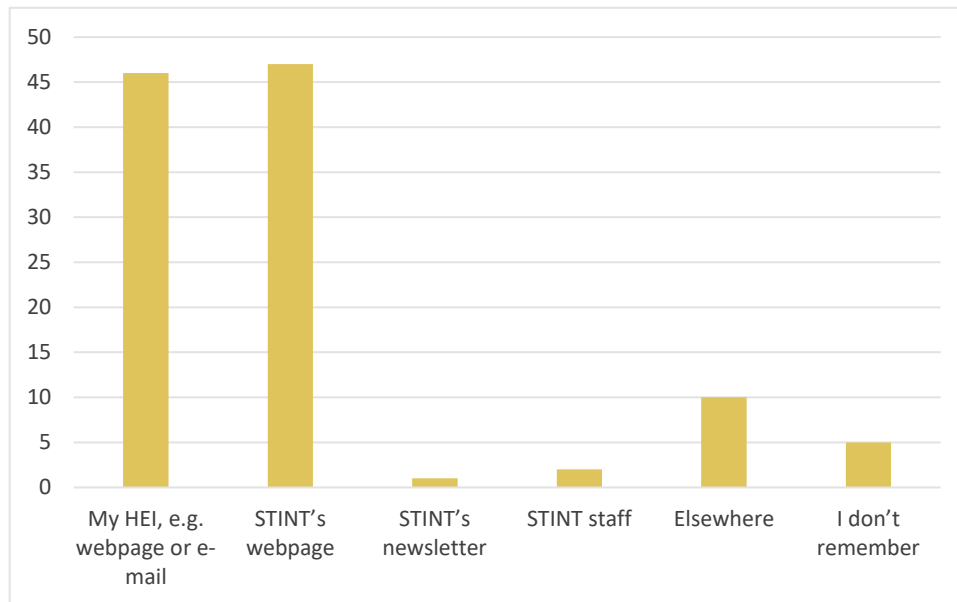
5 Strategic issues

This section concerns a couple of issues specifically raised by STINT in the procurement or beginning of the assignment. They concern STINT's communication of the programme, the regional versions of the programme – Sweden-Japan 150 Anniversary Grants and Middle East Mobility Grants – and whether STINT should better use the programme budget for other purposes.

5.1 Communication

One of the evaluation questions was whether STINT communicates the programme efficiently to the target groups. Figure 16 show the main sources of information about the programme. To get a clear response, the respondents were only allowed to select one of the of the alternatives. As the figure shows, almost every respondent received the information from STINT's webpage or from their own institutions, e.g. at a webpage with funding alternatives or in e-mails circulated from e.g. grant's office. The high response on the latter alternative is a positive sign and indicates that information from STINT reaches also second-hand receivers, and not only those who are on STINT's email lists or who actively chooses to visit STINT's webpage. The very low figures regarding STINT's newsletter and information from STINT staff may appear surprising but are probably explained by the fact that the newsletter has only existed for a short time and that STINT staff may have prompted e.g. a visit at the organisation's webpage, which then has been named as the main source (given how the survey question was formulated). Open responses to the survey indicate that "elsewhere" primarily concern information from colleagues at the institution.

Figure 16: Main source of information about the programme (N=111)



Note: The question was “How did you learn about the programme?” respondents could only select one alternative. Source: Web survey

5.2 Regional versions of the programme

In 2017 STINT tried a regional version of the IB programme targeting Japan, related to the celebration of 150 years of diplomatic relations between Sweden and Japan, which was noted through a range of politically initiated activities within culture, business research, education and more.¹⁵ The result, Sweden-Japan 150 Anniversary Grants, had an identical format as the IB programme, and was judged as a great success with 71 applications¹⁶ (compared to around 25 applications targeting Japan to IB in the period 2013–2017) and well-spread marketing. STINT therefore followed up with another regional call in 2018, Middle East Mobility Grants, which however attracted less interest with 24 applications.

¹⁵ Japanska Ambassaden i Sverige (2018). ”150 år av diplomatiska relationer mellan Japan och Sverige”. <https://www.se.emb-japan.go.jp/150.html> [Accessed 2019-06-10]

¹⁶ The term ”success” thus does not refer to the number of grants. STINT’s budget only allowed 12 grants, which implicates a low success rate that STINT was unhappy with.

Survey respondents representing projects from those two calls were asked whether they would prefer STINT to continue funding regional calls of a similar kind, or whether the general IB programme was to be preferred. Of 15 respondents, 9 opted for continued regional calls while 6 would prefer calls with no targeted regions. However, in the interviews and the workshop, the participants favour latter alternative, usually with the argument that the entrance to a programme of this kind should be as wide as possible.

5.3 Participants' satisfaction

The survey, interviews and workshop clearly give a picture of a programme with satisfied participants. The satisfaction is primarily related to the flexibility of the programme, which has several aspects:

- It gives the participant a good chance to do work that is strategically important to them, with little demands on adaptation to specific requirements posed by the funder or the format
- Applications that are comparably easy to write, and decisions that come relatively quickly
- Some participants also mention the programme's reputation of having a comparably good success rate

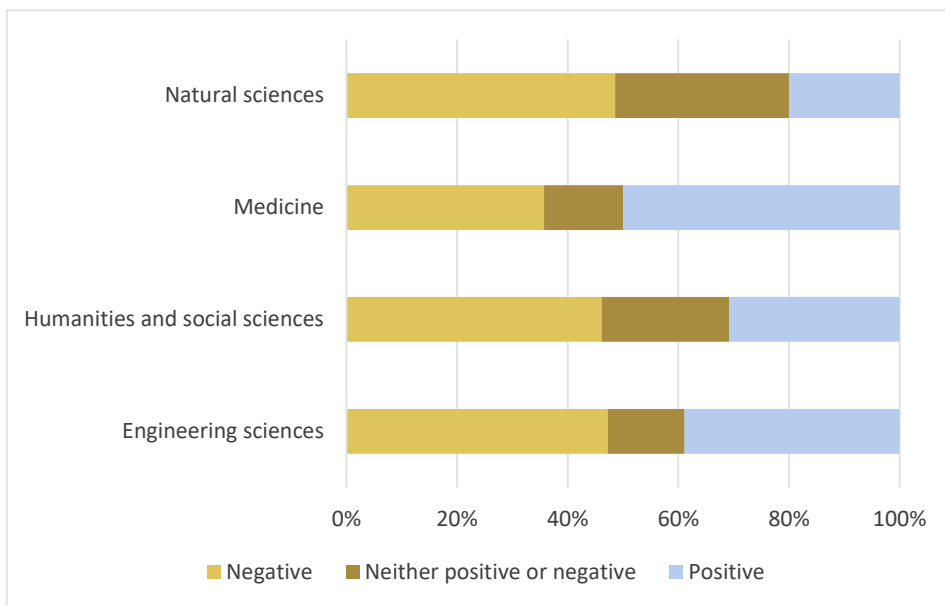
On the negative side, participants most frequently ask for:

- Better opportunities to get funding in other programmes after a successful IB project – they are afraid their investment through the project gets lost if they cannot continue relatively soon with more extensive work
- More flexibility in the funding as such, either in opportunities to use the funding for more than 1 year, or in possibilities to receive larger amounts of funding than 150kSEK

To challenge the survey respondents, a question was included that prompted the respondents to choose whether STINT should keep the programme or better use the budget for programmes that support larger three-year-projects. Figure 17 shows the response, which was fairly equally distributed across the scientific fields (the results for medicine should be interpreted with caution, as the number of

respondents was clearly lower for that group than for the others). The figure reveals a mixed picture, with a slight overweight for respondents who would prefer the programme to remain. The results may be coloured by some respondents answering from their own, personal needs. Since they already had IB funding, this could mean that they look for three-year-funding, and consequently, that the result is slightly tilted towards the termination alternative.

Figure 17: Opinion on whether or not STINT should terminate the programme (N=111)



Note: The question was “Suppose that STINT terminates the programme and redistributes its budget to programmes that support larger three-year-projects. What would your opinion be?”
 Source: Web survey

6 Concluding reflections

The evaluation's overall conclusion is that Initiation Grants for Internationalisation is a **well-functioning programme** with **mostly highly satisfied grantees**. The programme's **main strength relates to its format**, which allows flexible use of the funding. The participants also appreciate the efficient process for application and decision-making.

The **impact** of the programme is **overall positive**:

- A significant amount of the collaborations continues to live on and develop after the programme's funding ends
- Around two thirds of the projects have led to scientific publications
- Exchange of researchers occur in virtually all projects, from senior researchers in around 90 percent of the projects to PhD and Master students in around 60 and 25 percent of the projects, respectively
- Nearly half of the projects have led to new collaborations with partners not in the projects

STINT officials have expressed the intention that the programme should partly function as an entrance to other STINT programmes. However, the results in the evaluation indicate that it mostly does not – in only around ten cases participants have secured subsequent STINT funding. Interviews and the workshop indicate that STINT should instead view the programme in a broader perspective, and this evaluation draws the same conclusion – the meagre success of IB-grantees in other STINT funding programmes is not disappointing as long as the grantees locate funding elsewhere, which they do to a reasonable extent. Funding has been secured from a wide variety of sources, both Swedish research funders and foreign ones, not least the European Union. Collaborations also continue based on funding that comes with the researchers' and teachers' ordinary employment. The IB programme should be viewed as a springboard for ideally the entire Swedish research funding system.

The evaluation concludes that **STINT communicates the programme efficiently** overall, although there seems to be room for improvement. Since

applications to the programme are rather evenly distributed between the Swedish HEIs, and also across scientific fields, STINT evidently reaches out well in the system. Moreover, the evaluators' view is that the question should be posed together with another one: How many applicants does STINT want? The success rate is around 30–35 percent, which is higher than for most other research funding programmes. Given the small grant sizes and the intention to fund exploratory, early-stage efforts, this evaluation concludes that the success rate is at a reasonable level – most of the applications are still rejected, and we have to assume that this is done on reasonable grounds. Thus, unless STINT increases the budget, there is little need to attract a larger number of applications. That said, the evaluation questions whether STINT reaches out sufficiently well among those predominantly active on the education side of Swedish HEIs. It seems that “education strategists” are not included on e.g. STINT’s e-mail lists: for instance quality assurance units, staff that work with pedagogical training for HEIs’ teachers, functions such as deans, heads of departments etc. that control “strategic funding” for education.

The regional versions of the programme are perceived well among the participants. However, the evaluation questions the need for more regional versions of the programme unless they are connected to specific larger initiatives and function as integrated and well-marketed tools in such contexts. The success of the Japan initiative is probably related to the fact that it was launched at a point when collaboration with Japan was high on the agenda in Sweden. Similarly, the apparently less attractive Middle East call does not seem to have enjoyed the same external boost. On a principal note, the evaluators' firm view is that research funding programmes generally benefit from being restrictive with detailed demands on the format and content of the applications (e.g. avoid targeting specific regions), and by being around for a long time and with closing dates around the same time(s) every year.

The programme **participation and success rates are on the positive sides for most of the investigated participant categories:**

- The participation across HEIs is rather evenly distributed, and the gap in success rates between different types of HEIs has decreased

- The composition of collaboration countries has become more diverse during the last three years of the programme, with increasing shares for strategically important parts of the world such as South and Central America and Africa
- The participation of younger researchers, postdocs, PhD students and Master students should be judged as rather high (but it is after all stated as a positive criterion in the call for proposals), and the success rates of such applications is higher than others

There are, however, also **a couple of partly unsatisfactory results:**

- The participation of different scientific fields appears acceptable, but the success rates arguably vary a bit too much between fields – although it is a complex issue to analyse since the fields differ in intensities and forms of internationalisation activities
- The number of applications with education content is low, less than one in four, and only a few percent of the applications have a purely educational focus

7 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions in the previous chapter, the evaluation presents a number of recommendations:

Overall recommendation

- The programme is overall successful, largely due to its format, and should therefore not be subject to any major changes

Specific recommendations

- STINT should consider allowing funding to be used for 15–18 months, partly because some participants ask for it, partly because it already appears to be practiced when participants ask for prolongation and have a decent motive to do so
- STINT should investigate the potential of linking the programme (or parts of it) closer to other, larger programmes, and that way further increase the chance of producing long-term impact and give successful projects a better chance of attracting funding to a more extensive project that builds on the IB project:
 - Can the programme be integrated with other STINT programmes in a “first-stage – second-stage-model”?
 - Can STINT collaborate with other funders and use the programme to strategically support key initiatives elsewhere? For instance, at the Swedish Research Council, Formas, Forte, the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond Foundation, the Knowledge Foundation or the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Research?
- STINT should consider several initiatives to increase the education content in the programme:
 - Expand the call texts with examples of what the funding may be used for, to stimulate creativity in general and specifically to encourage teachers to apply

- Include more education representatives on e-mail lists when calls are communicated, for instance quality assurance units, staff that work with pedagogical training for HEIs' teachers, and functions such as deans, heads of departments etc. that control "strategic funding" for education
- Consider whether a part of the programme budget can be used together with e.g. the Swedish Council for Higher Education, the Swedish Institute or the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions for a specific education initiative
- Consider whether the programme can be used for leadership education, student union partnerships and other less traditional education-related activities

Appendix A References

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Appendix B List of interviews and workshop participants

Interviewees

Name	Position / Role	Organisation
Åkesson, Eva	Vice-Chancellor	Uppsala University
Alexandersson, Erik	Grantee, natural sciences	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Areskoug, Linn	Grantee, humanities and social sciences	Uppsala University
Granlund, Agneta	Coordinator of the IB programme	STINT
Gunnarsson Payne, Jenny	Grantee, humanities and social sciences	Södertörn University
Göthenberg, Andreas	Executive Director	STINT
Lindlöf, Ludvig	Grantee, engineering sciences	Chalmers University of Technology
Mattsson, Viktoria	Head of Collaboration, Ext. funding and Innovation	Luleå University of Technology
Pohl, Hans	Programme Director	STINT
Svensson, Ingrid	Head of Division at International Office	Umeå University
Tran Lundmark, Karin	Grantee, medicine	Lund University
Wikse, Maria	Head of International affairs	Stockholm University

Workshop participants

Name	Position / Role	Organisation
Ackemar, Johanna	International Coordinator	Karolinska Institutet
Björkwall, Anders	Grantee, humanities and social sciences	Örebro University
Cars, Gustaf	Project manager at the International office	Uppsala University
Granlund, Agneta	Coordinator of the IB programme	STINT
Göthenberg, Andreas	Executive Director	STINT
Hedin, Niklas	Grantee, natural sciences	Stockholm University
Mahmood, Aamir	Grantee, engineering sciences	Mid Sweden University
Pohl, Hans	Programme Director	STINT
Russo, Alejandro	Grantee, engineering sciences	Chalmers University of Technology
Tirado, Veronica	PhD student, medicine	Karolinska Institutet

The evaluation team was represented by Tobias Fridholm and Amauta Gisslandi.