



Faculty Board

## Development Plan for the Department of Political Science

### Background

The evaluation was carried out during the spring semester of 2019 and covered the Bachelor's programme in Political Science and the Masters' programmes in Political Science, European Affairs and Welfare Policies and Management, as well as freestanding first and second cycle courses in Political Science. The external expert group consisted of David Feltenius (chair), Ulrika Möller and Kristian Sjövik.

### Concrete measures

#### Increased teaching resources

A key element in both the external experts' statement and the department's self-evaluation is a need to increase the department's teaching resources. That process has started and has come quite a long way.

After vacancy announcements, interviews and trial lectures, the department has recommended that the academic appointments board proposes the appointment of two indefinite-term senior lectureships, one with a specialisation in comparative politics and one with a specialisation in political theory, and one associate senior lectureship with a specialisation in peace and conflict studies.

In addition, the department management intends to advertise two further vacancies in the near future: one associate senior lectureship with a specialisation in public administration, and one senior lectureship with a specialisation in European studies.

It is therefore hoped that a total of five new teaching positions can be appointed in 2020.

### **Revision of first cycle course structure**

The department has started a development project which aims to provide a review and revision of the course structure of level 1, 2 and 3 courses in the first cycle. This has not been due to the viewpoints of the external experts, rather that it is now about 20 years since the greater part of the design for undergraduate education was established. In light of this, we think there is reason to think more holistically about the balance between, and the structure of, our courses. The review is based, of course, on the collective experiences of the teaching staff, but also on the viewpoints that have emerged from the students' course evaluations over the years. It can be noted that the external experts' evaluation supports the current development work.

Regarding the level 1 course it concerns breaking up the large module *Politics and Government* worth 15 credits and instead creating two shorter courses in Comparative Politics and Public Administration each worth 7.5 credits. This would mean that the level 1 course consisted of four more delimited courses worth 7.5 credits that provide a better overview.

On the level 2 course, the students currently take a methodology course worth 9 credits first, then an elective theory course for 9 credits, and finally they write an academic paper worth 12 credits. To counteract the students receiving a premature specialisation in the subject, we want to shorten the existing courses and make room for an additional compulsory course with a theoretical orientation.

On the level 3 course, the development work concerns making the elective theoretical modules a little more general and less oriented towards the various research projects that in most cases have given rise to the courses. It would facilitate staffing and continuity in the range of courses on offer.

The review was discussed at teaching staff meetings and at a department away day. The work is carried out by three working groups, one for each level. The teaching staff who have responsibility for courses at a certain level are members of the group, and one of them acts as chair. The work is to result in concrete proposals in the form of course syllabus changes and new development of courses, which will then be presented to the

course syllabus group and the department board in the spring of 2020. The aim is for the new course structure to be in place for the start of the autumn semester of 2021.

### **Improved links with working life**

The external experts' group submitted interesting proposals for improving the links of courses and study programmes with working life. The department recognises that a lot has been done in this area over the past decade. However, the aim is to do even more. One of the department's programme administrators has within their duties been tasked with responsibility for the department's alumni activities. As a first step, she is currently working on organising a large alumni gathering to be held at Eden on 18 April 2020.

The department has previously had one of the larger alumni groups in Lund University's alumni database. However, no physical gathering has taken place since 2011.

In the first stage, we will focus on students who have studied the Master's (60 credits) and Bachelor's programmes in Political Science and freestanding courses. The aim in the second stage is to organise alumni meetings with students who have taken our international Master's programmes in European Affairs and Welfare Policies and Management. Experiences from our meeting in the spring of 2019 will determine when this can take place.

Starting in the autumn of 2020, we also plan to establish a special series of talks featuring invited alumni who meet our current students a few times per semester to talk about their careers and professional life. The department previously organised such an activity, but it has been dormant for a while.

### **Wider variation of assessment elements**

The external experts' group point out in their report that the level 1 course in Political Science is assessed exclusively through take-home exams, and that this entails a risk of providing a too narrow picture of the students' knowledge in relation to the learning outcomes for the course. The department agrees with that observation. We therefore want to introduce a larger element of invigilated written exams without, however, dispensing with the requirement that the students are to express themselves in writing on a slightly broader type of assessed assignment. (It can

be added that the level 1 course contains other types of compulsory components than take-home exams, but these do not lead to grades).

This concerns a large course with almost 200 students each semester, so a transition to more invigilated written exams would, as we see it, presuppose that this could be done in the form of digital exams. The director of studies is responsible for investigating the experiences and possibilities that exist in the area and initiating the gradual introduction of more invigilated written exams. In addition, we plan to change certain elements that are currently compulsory components to graded elements in the courses.

### **Broadened methodology teaching**

The external experts' group put forward the opinion that quantitative methods are underrepresented in methodology teaching. Here there is balancing act between several matters of principle and practical considerations. The level 2 methodology course has the nature of an introductory overview, and four of 15 teaching sessions are devoted to quantitative methodology. The level 3 methodology course has certain compulsory components concerning quantitative methodology, and an elective specialisation thread in which the students who wish to can specialise in quantitative methodology, usually in small groups so that the lecturer has the option to adapt the teaching to the students' prior knowledge and needs.

On the second cycle methodology course, we will increase the quantitative element in the autumn semester of 2019. This will be done partly through the introduction of a new compulsory course component relating to regression analysis, and partly through a special thread running in parallel to regular teaching in which the students who so wish can work using quantitative methodology in the computer room under the supervision of one of the course's lecturers.

### **Course report and course representatives**

The department pointed out in its self-evaluation that there is often no written course report in connection with the evaluation of courses, and the external experts' group also raised this as something that needed to be rectified. As of the autumn semester of 2019, this will be done for all courses. The course reports will

then be made accessible for the students on the course web page. The course reports will then be collected by the lecturer who administrates our course evaluations, and be presented to the department board in a collected form once per year. The director of studies is responsible for this being carried out.

As of the autumn semester of 2019, we shall also work with the students' union for social sciences students to appoint course representatives for the courses.

The course representatives are to act as a communication channel between students and lecturers, but also participate in the evaluation meetings held after courses are completed.

### Other comments

On certain points the comments of the external experts' group occasion no immediate measures. These include the views on the design of learning outcomes and the call for more specified learning outcomes.

The emphasis we have today on more general skills and overall competence is thought through and serves the purpose regarding how we see our subject and the aim of our courses and study programmes. However, our review work may, of course, also entail certain adjustments at a later stage in the formulation of learning outcomes.

The external experts' group also discussed the design of course documents and the development of clearer assessment criteria. If what is alluded to is the development of formal grading criteria, we have previously had a discussion that led to us not wanting to work in that way. Our assessment is that this type of detailed criteria-based grading system creates a false impression of precision and rarely works satisfactorily, which is also supported by pedagogical research (see e.g. Sadler, Royce D., 2005. "Interpretations of Criteria-based Assessment and Grading in Higher Education", in *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*). On the other hand, the ambition is that the review of the course structure is to also result in the instructions for courses and the presentation of our assessment criteria being formulated in a more coordinated way.

Another point on which the department's assessment is that we will not implement any immediate changes concerns strategies for teaching qualifications. The teaching staff's continuing

teaching qualifications are discussed every year in staff appraisals with the head of department. The department is very well represented in the faculty's Teaching Academy.

We perceive the views put forward regarding the premises in the basement at Eden as something that we cannot directly affect. The premises do not belong to the Department of Political Science as they are under the Room and Conference Booking Service, and they are used not only as study spaces, but also as exam rooms.

The external experts' group also refer to procedures for information about support functions and placement courses. Our assessment is that there is ample information of this type, and that our three study advisors devote a large part of their time to holding information meetings about different parts of our activities, not least the placement courses.

Another viewpoint of the external experts' group concerns the possibility of reviewing course syllabi and reading lists with an aim to ensure that the students can gain exposure to international perspectives, and to enter into more exchange agreements outside Europe. Most of our courses are in that respect already strongly internationalised. We realise that the geographical spread could be stronger, but it is a subject with a clear Anglo-Saxon predominance. There is often a discussion about ensuring that we actually have Swedish literature and a Swedish perspective in the courses and study programmes. Agreements for outgoing exchange students is handled nowadays at faculty level.

The development plan is approved by the faculty board and will be followed up in the faculty board after two years.

The development plan is published on the faculty's website along with the external experts' statement.