



Faculty Board

Development Plan for Third Cycle Studies in Social Work at the School of Social Work

Background

In the spring semester of 2019, an evaluation was conducted of the third cycle studies at the School of Social Work as the faculty's pilot project. The evaluation group, Peter Dellgran (chair), Marjaana Seppänen and Ivar Lødemel, were also tasked to comment on the evaluation process itself. The group's conclusions were that the programme "essentially works well" but point to three areas that are recommended to be prioritised for development. The proposed measures below are related to one of these areas even though most of the measures are significant for all three areas.

Discussion and input for the development plan at the department

Discussions about the evaluation and development plans took place in an open meeting for the department's staff (21 October 2019) and formed the basis for this development plan. A draft of the development plan was discussed and revised after viewpoints were submitted in the professors' council (22 October 2019). The plan was then sent to the doctoral students' group, the supervisors' group and the department board via email to enable comments and viewpoints to be submitted within five days (according to a previous agreement). Furthermore, the

development plan was communicated at a staff meeting (29 October 2019).

Concrete measures

Forms of quality assurance and quality enhancement

The evaluation group comment on the risk of overly fluid, informal governance and control of the third cycle programme. Both the supervisors and doctoral students perceive our current procedure as working well, but admit that a clearer definition of the division of responsibilities and duties should benefit all those involved in the third cycle programme. Even though it is the head of department who ultimately takes decisions on most matters relating to the third cycle programme, we concur particularly with the need for a clearer structure and division of responsibilities in development and follow-up matters. The following measures are to provide greater clarification of the present structure with certain additions. They are reckoned to be implemented immediately.

Measures

- 1) The supervisors' group becomes a third cycle studies group (with continued doctoral student representation) to indicate that it covers both supervisors and potential supervisors. The third cycle studies group meets about four times per semester and constitutes the foremost advisory body for the director of studies. Furthermore, the meetings of the third cycle studies group are strengthened by the presence of the head of department. *The director of studies is the convenor.*
- 2) The director of studies is present at some of the doctoral students' meetings for the ongoing exchange of information. *The doctoral students' coordinator is the convenor.*
- 3) The newly established professors' council is to guarantee the intertwining of research and the third cycle programme and be given responsibility for ongoing

follow-up and development of the third cycle programme with an aim to monitor long-term quality enhancement.
The professors' council propose and implement the above in consultation with the director of studies, the third cycle studies group and ultimately the head of department.

The role of the director of studies is, among other things, to be a link between doctoral students, the third cycle studies group and the professors' council by communicating discussions between the groups and establishing support for proposals, decisions and changes.

To ensure that the doctoral students achieve learning outcomes and qualitative targets

The evaluation group proposes that thesis-related as well as “added” activities (conferences, being a reviewer etc.) should have a more systematic and documented review. We do not want to add to the documentation in the area, but see the ISP as an existing aid for such a systematic approach. In addition, the director of studies has an important “check-in” role for each individual doctoral student. We therefore consider that the director of studies *must* have an individual appraisal annually with all doctoral students (and not as previously on a voluntary basis).

Measures

- 1) In addition to the supervisor's ongoing planning conversations, the director of studies is to conduct an individual “third cycle studies appraisal” with all doctoral students annually to ensure that the planning covers all learning outcomes and qualitative targets. These appraisals are related to issues concerning the opportunities for learning that can be offered at the department (e.g. membership in research teams, conference participation etc.) *The director of studies arranges third cycle studies appraisals as of 2020.*

- 2) Quality management includes the systematic identification of critical obstacles for completion of the third cycle programme with an aim – to the extent that we can influence – to remove or reduce such obstacles. *The director of studies has ongoing responsibility for these issues being addressed in the third cycle studies group, professors' council and in the faculty's third cycle studies council.*

The doctoral students' working conditions and psychosocial work environment

The evaluation group notes a consensus among doctoral students and management on the importance of addressing issues regarding a good work environment and intractable stress. The evaluation group also urge that the doctoral students' request for better information on existing support structures is heeded.

Measures

- 1) A half-day every year to provide information and discussion on support structures that apply to all doctoral students, not just the newly admitted. *The director of studies plans the day in consultation with the doctoral students' coordinator and it will be conducted for the first time in September 2020.*
- 2) An annual research and third cycle studies away day, the content of which is adapted according to important issues. The year's away day took place in October 2019 on the theme of writing and "completing in time." *Planned by the director of studies in consultation with representatives of the supervisors and doctoral students. The next away day will be in October 2020.*
- 3) A professional development seminar day for the third cycle studies group about doctoral students and the reasons for unhealthy stress with appropriate guests, e.g. from the Occupational Health Service. *Planned by the director of studies and conducted during the 2020/21 academic year.*

Other comments

It can be added that the measures above address the evaluation's viewpoints and focus more on forms of quality assurance than the content of quality enhancement issues. The department's content-related quality management is ongoing in the above-mentioned groups and councils. The addressing of needs and important issues as well as changes are initiated not least through viewpoints from doctoral students. Recently implemented changes include an extension of the time devoted to a final seminar, proofreading of Swedish theses as well (on a trial basis), consensus discussions on what an internal examination entails etc. An additional procedure is that the director of studies offers discussions after the final seminar in order to check on the path to the thesis defence. Changes to procedures in doctoral student admission are to be discussed further in the third cycle studies group, professors' council and the doctoral students' group.