



FacultyBoard

Development plan for the Bachelor's programme in Development Studies (BIDS)

Background

The Bachelor's programme in Development Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences was evaluated in 2021 by an external expert group. The group consisted of Malin Nystrand, University of Gothenburg, (chair), Dr. Andrea J. Nightingale, University of Oslo, and Dr. Peter Kragelund, Roskilde University. The evaluation consisted of a review of programme and faculty documentation, including a self-evaluation of the programme and student evaluations. An on-site visit was planned for 25-26 May 2021, but due to Covid-19 restrictions this was conducted digitally.

The purpose of the evaluation was to identify strengths, challenges and potential development opportunities for the programme. The unique multidisciplinary nature of the programme was considered to be its main strength. Students are exposed to four different subject areas' perspectives on Development Studies and given the opportunity to put together a self-composed degree. Since the students also get a degree in one of the four disciplines included in the programme, this means that they actually get a degree with double subject specialisation. In addition, the teaching staff on the programme were praised for their enthusiasm, dynamic teaching and competence.

However, the multidisciplinary nature of the programme was not only its greatest asset, but also posed its greatest challenge in terms of the difficulties associated with coordinating the activities between two faculties and four departments. There were two main areas in which improvements were needed according to the evaluators, and each of these was given specific recommendations for improvement while maintaining the quality of education and relevance of the BIDS, namely:

1. The need for structural changes and the institutionalisation of the programme, which included:
 - 1.1. Development of job descriptions and clarification of roles and responsibilities of all constituent parties¹.
 - 1.2. The need to put in place a clear format for regular teaching staff meetings
 - 1.3. The need to improve communication between directors of studies, steering group members and programme coordinators.
2. The need to reformulate the BIDS brand and the vision of the programme, including a recasting of the syllabus and:
 - 2.1. The need to review the mandate, objectives and vision of the programme.
 - 2.2. The need to reassess the content and structure of the programme, coupled with a rethink of its success criteria.
 - 2.3. The need to define what the BIDS programme refers to by the term ‘development’.

A group of four people – Catia Gregoratti (SVET), Olle Frödin (SOC), Ellen Hillbom (EKH) and Magnus Jirström (KEG) – to monitor the implementation of these recommendations was appointed by the Faculty of Social Sciences. This working group is responsible for providing support to the administration of BIDS so that short-term improvements can be implemented in the spring semester of 2022. However, the working group is not empowered to take decisions on changes to the structure of the programme, but rather to make recommendations on how the programme should relate to the management and restructuring of the programme. These recommendations will be presented in a separate working report to be presented to the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The external expert group’s evaluation report was discussed on a number of occasions² during the autumn semester of 2021, including below:

¹ Constituent parties are defined here as all units and all employees involved in programme coordination/administration, including course directors, teaching staff, directors of studies and steering group members, but not students or student representatives.

² All meeting minutes are available on LUBox; access is given upon request addressed to Jeanne Cilliers.

1. A reflection meeting with all the constituent parties of the BIDS (11 November 2021);
2. Individual meetings of the BIDS steering group (5 and 22 November 2021);
3. Roundtable discussion with the administration of BIDS and student representatives (3 November 2021); and
4. A number of consultations between the BIDS administration and the working group

The establishment of the working group took place at the same time as the transfer of BIDS coordination, which was transferred to the Department of Economic History (EKH). Jeanne Cilliers (EKH) will replace Yahia Mahmoud (KEG) from January 2022. Until then, the two are joint programme coordinators.

Specific measures

The section that follows summarises both the ongoing and the proposed measures that will be introduced in response to each of the expert group's recommendations.

1.1 Development of job descriptions and clarification of roles and responsibilities of all constituent parties.

Many of the coordination concerns raised in the evaluation report are based on a) a lack of formalisation of structures and action plans, which in itself has led to an over-reliance on individual initiatives and tacit knowledge, b) divergent commitments to the programme from the four different departments, and c) a lack of continuity regarding teaching resources within the programme.

Measures

- a) One of the central tasks of the incoming programme coordinator will consist of documentation, coordination and approval of all rules for delegation and work processes specific to the BIDS. To ensure transparency, these will be made available to all constituent parties on BIDS' internal Canvas page (see point 1.3 below) and archived centrally (via LUBox). Regulations concerning, for example, updating of course literature have already been introduced. Similarly, work is underway to develop rules for student placements and admission/re-enrolment in courses, which will be presented for approval by the steering group at its first meeting in 2022.

Timetable: ongoing – spring 2022

- b) Documents describing the respective roles and responsibilities of the BIDS programme coordinator, programme administrator, student advisor, steering group, course directors, teaching staff, steering group members and teaching staff and student representatives will be prepared by the programme coordinator in cooperation with the constituent parties and be available on BIDS' internal Canvas page (see point 1.3 below) and archived centrally (via LUBox).

Timetable: ongoing – spring 2022

- c) Experience and knowledge of BIDS courses should not only be managed by individual course directors, but should be compiled and managed centrally. It will be crucial to rely on documentation of this type when appointing new course directors/teaching staff, thereby enabling the utilisation of previous institutional and pedagogical lessons. The procedure for the transfer of course responsibilities between existing and incoming course directors, or the introduction of new teaching staff to courses, will be developed by the programme coordinator in consultation with the incumbent UTVC course director and will be made available to all constituent parties on the BIDS internal Canvas page and archived centrally (via LUBox). Where possible, permanent employees should be recruited as UTVC course directors to contribute to greater continuity of the courses offered by BIDS.

Timetable: spring 2022 and then ongoing

- d) New, standardised course pages in Canvas for UTVC courses have been developed and will be launched in spring 2022 (UTVC23 and UTVC24). Canvas's built-in functionality for archiving information will be utilised as an institutional memory bank for previously completed courses.

Timetable: spring 2022

1.2 The need to put in place a clear format for regular teaching staff meetings.

There is also a prevailing view that structural problems have arisen as a result of poor coordination between teaching staff. The consensus is that more regular meetings between course directors and teaching staff are necessary while taking into account that the allocated hours for teaching staff on BIDS courses is limited and therefore an appropriate number of meetings should be held. Priority should

therefore be placed on having more regular meetings between course directors and BIDS administrators.

Measures

- a) The aforementioned reflection meeting with the participation of all the constituent parties within the BIDS (held on 11 November 2021) was the first opportunity for steering group members, directors of studies, course directors, teachings staff and the BIDS administration to jointly reflect on the external evaluation process. As constituent parties of BIDS, a total of 24 people attended this meeting. A general consensus was expressed on the recommendations made in the evaluation report and further comments on course development were also expressed. It was agreed that there was reason to have a separate meeting to discuss more comprehensive restructuring of the programme's range of courses.
- b) A committee consisting of current course directors for first-year UTVC courses, the programme coordinator, and a representative of the BIDS working group will be created in spring 2022. It will be tasked with examining how to restructure first-year courses, with an emphasis on how to update the syllabi of the four UTVC courses to better reflect current challenges in the subject area of Development Studies and offer a more balanced exposure to the four subject areas that the programme encompasses (see points 2.2 and 2.3 below). In January 2022, the committee will present its recommendations to the programme coordinator, who will then compile them into items on the agenda of a meeting to be held in February 2022. After this meeting, the committee will communicate its formal recommendations to the steering group and the faculty.
- c) The programme will establish procedures and format for an annual workshop for teaching staff, which will serve as a reflection forum for UTVC course directors on the previous academic year's experiences and allow for discussions on updating course content and course adjustments between individual courses, should such a need arise. The workshop will act as a platform for pedagogical reflections, development of new learning methods in Development Studies and addressing broader issues related to course development and objectives of the programme (detailed in point 2 below). Compensation will need to be set aside for the participation of teaching staff.

d) Annual meetings on logistics between UTVC course directors and the BIDS administration will also be introduced in the future. These meetings will mainly address practical procedures regarding course management (admission/re-enrolment of students, course schedules, literature lists, evaluations and internal end dates) and will take place approximately 10-12 weeks before the start of the course to ensure that changes to courses (e.g. changes to literature lists) can be approved by the steering group in advance. Such meetings for the core courses given in the spring semester 2022 took place on 17 November 2021 (UTVC23) and 19 November 2021 (UTVC24). Updated course literature lists were adopted by the steering group at a subsequent meeting on 22 November. As soon as the launch of the Canvas page for BIDS teaching staff (see point 1.3 b) below) is completed, the need for this type of meeting may be reconsidered.

e.) In addition to the introduction of institutionalised meetings between UTVC course directors and teaching staff, a need for formal meetings with the BIDS administration and student representatives has also been identified. Currently, students (one student representative per year group and specialisation is appointed by the students) have the opportunity to have two of their representatives present to raise issues at the quarterly meetings organised by the steering group. One or two reflection meetings per year will be introduced in the future when all student representatives are invited to participate together with the BIDS administration (date to be set). Such a first meeting took place on 3 November 2021, with a planned follow-up meeting in January 2022.

f) Information meetings with the BIDS administration and students (e.g. when students are to be informed about elective courses, placements and choice of major) will be coordinated between all participating departments to be held at the same time each academic year.

g) A BIDS calendar will be developed to coordinate meetings and end dates, and shared via Canvas with all BIDS constituent parties.

Timetable: ongoing – spring 2022

1.3 The need to improve communication between directors of studies, steering group members and programme coordinators.

Although there was agreement that more regular meetings are needed between different constituent parties within BIDS, it was also decided that other forms of communication will be used.

Measures

- a) In order to improve communication between directors of studies and the BIDS administration, it is proposed that the directors of studies of the participating departments be represented in one form or another in the steering group. A separate working group report will produce a draft of possible options for changing the governance of BIDS with this objective in mind.
- b) In the future, new digital tools will be of great importance in improving asymmetries within the flow of information between different constituent parties within BIDS. Canvas will host the information hub that is under construction for teaching staff on the Bachelor's programme in Development Studies. This hub will be a so-called "living" website with the ambition to continuously provide new information that teaching staff need to get a good idea of what is happening in relation to their students, fellow teaching staff members and the administration within BIDS. In addition, the plan is to use this website as a direct communication tool through which teaching staff can post on a bulletin board if they have questions or are looking for assistance or interaction with other BIDS teaching staff.
- c) The existing BIDS pages on Canvas for the individual student cohorts (i.e. information pages for the different graduation year cohorts of students) will be continuously updated and developed by the programme coordinator.
- d) An annually produced internal evaluation report of the programme will be compiled by the programme coordinator and made available on BIDS' internal Canvas page, centrally archived (via LUBox) and shared with the directors of studies at the participating departments. In addition, this document will be presented at the annual BIDS workshop for teaching staff (see point 1.2 c)).

Timetable: ongoing – spring 2022, and then continuously

2.1 The need to review the mandate, objectives and vision of the programme.

On the issue of new approaches to the subject area of Development Studies, on the one hand, there is a tendency towards a subject extension that covers more than the global south, while on the other hand there is a hesitation to move too far away from the core issue of addressing fundamental challenges to development (see point 2.3 below).

Furthermore, the question of the extent to which the BIDS programme will prepare students for the existing labour market (within aid organisations, NGOs, etc.) versus preparing them for further academic studies has been discussed at a well-attended BIDS reflection meeting on 11 November 2021.

While most of our students do not finish their academic studies after their Bachelor's degree, it would nevertheless be important to provide them with even better skills and training in methodological areas. Such, and further, proposals for future reform of the methodology courses within the BIDS will be discussed within the Committee on Programme Restructuring (see point 1.2).

Timetable: spring 2022

2.2 The need to reassess the content and structure of the programme, coupled with a rethink of its success criteria.

One proposal is that core courses be divided between the departments, so that each department is given sole responsibility for one UTVC course. The argument for this is that students do not get a good enough grounding in the various core subjects during their first year of study. Against this, it can be argued that this only becomes problematic if students do not get a satisfactory good grounding in their chosen subject area in the final phase of their degree. Students should achieve their subject competence in their second academic year as they take the elective course within their chosen subject specialisation. It can also be added that the attraction of BIDS is precisely its multidisciplinary core and that there is a strong will to preserve this. However, the current multidisciplinary structure requires more resources allocated to course directors as additional time must be invested for coordination within and between courses. Anchoring these requirements with a real situation with limited resources will be needed. Looking beyond the original programme vision of the combination of courses would be one way of addressing the issue of development of the programme, e.g. by designing UTVC25 as an extension of UTVC22 and

UTVC26 as a continuation of UTVC24, whereby the teaching teams can coordinate efforts for subject advancement.

Students further demand more dedicated contact time with teaching staff and one of the key issues here is the current design of UTVC courses in blocks of 15 credits each.³ Instead, allowing the courses to run in parallel during the semester (September-January) would allow both teaching staff and students to achieve set learning outcomes. This could make it easier for 1) more continuous evaluation, 2) more frequent feedback and, 3) more time for students to assimilate and reflect on the course literature well in advance of submissions/exams. A challenge that may arise with parallel courses may be the need for funded students to demonstrate achievement of credits within specific time periods in order to receive continued funding. Another possible problem may be the fact that teaching staff need to set aside time for a relatively longer teaching period.

From the perspective of achieving the programme's objectives, the aim is for students to become familiar with all four subject areas relatively early in the programme. As things stand now, this does not happen in their first semester. One solution to this could be to divide the UTVC courses during the first year into four 7.5-credit courses, with two of these given in parallel during each semester.

All of the above-mentioned proposals, and others that may be added, to restructure the methodology courses within BIDS in the future will be discussed within the Committee on Course Changes (see point 1.2 above).

Timetable: spring 2022

2.3 The need to define what the BIDS programme refers to by the term 'development'.

A balance is needed between responsiveness to the research generated along the research front for Development Studies, and recognition of the need for Bachelor's degree students to obtain a thorough grounding in fundamental subject literature. Defining what is meant by "Development Studies" within the BIDS programme is also important. In this context, a differentiation between the UTVC courses and the elective courses that students study in their second year is required, the latter of which can potentially be given greater flexibility. The UTVC courses should thus

³ For example, the current UTVC21 is given from early September to mid-January, which means that the contact time for this course of 15 credits is effectively limited to only 8-9 weeks.

provide students with a broad overview and clear theoretical grounding, while second-year elective courses within the respective departments should provide opportunities to connect to the contemporary research front and challenges in the field of development studies.

Another proposal put forward is to add a UTVC course that specifically focuses on contemporary development challenges. By strengthening the two methodology courses and/or splitting up the UTVC courses during the first year in course blocks of 7.5 credits, time could be freed up within the programme for a new course in the very challenges that contemporary development processes face.

With regard to issues related to academic paper writing and internships, the programme should be able to allow flexibility in what is acceptable during a trial period, rather than adopting a rigid stance on what counts as developmental topics and what falls outside the subject.

A pragmatic approach is possible here and specific situations can be evaluated if and when they appear if necessary. This type of point is also appropriately addressed in a separate meeting forum. As has been done in previous years, the UTVC26 course will also this year host a panel discussion that will take place on 17 December, which can be a springboard for such a discussion. The title is “What are Development Studies and why do they matter?” In this session, the panelists (with third-year students as a participating audience) will talk about what constitutes research in Development Studies and why it is needed. Jenny Lorentzen, a postdoc fellow at the Department of Political Science, will act as moderator for the panel discussion.

The panelists are:

- Yahia Mahmoud, Senior Lecturer (KEG)
- Sascha Klocke, researcher (EKH)
- Sarai-Anne Ikenze, doctoral student (SVET)
- Barbara Magalhaes Teixeira, doctoral student (SVET)