



FACULTY  
OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

STATEMENT FROM EXTERNAL  
EXPERT GROUP

Reg. No.  
STYR 2021/2410

2022-06-07

## **Programme evaluation of PhD education in sociology and social anthropology: Statement from external expert group**

### **Assignment and external expert group**

The assignment of the external expert group (see composition below) has been to evaluate PhD education in sociology and social anthropology. The evaluation is based on Lund University's eleven criteria for quality enhancement, with support from the Faculty of Social Sciences' instructions<sup>1</sup>. The assignment includes raising the strengths, challenges and development opportunities of the learning environment and the programmes.

Prior to the evaluation, the expert group were given access to LU Box with a large number of documents from the department and the faculty, including the department's self-assessment and input from doctoral students.

On 17 May 2022, a site visit was conducted (see the program in appendix).

The external expert group:

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<sup>1</sup> *Instructions and procedures for programme evaluations by external experts at the Faculty of Social Sciences* (2021-02-04, reg. no STYR 2021/117) and *Instructions for external experts regarding programme evaluation at the Faculty of Social Sciences* (2021-02-04, reg. no STYR 2021/118)

- Linda Soneryd, professor of Sociology, University of Gothenburg (chair of the expert group)
- Vanessa May, professor of Sociology, University of Manchester
- Staffan Appelgren, associate professor of Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg

## General Comments

We wish to commend the committee involved in writing the self-evaluation report which is detailed and considers seriously and in a balanced manner the strengths and challenges under each of the assessment criteria. What shines through the various documents is a genuine interest in providing the best quality PhD programme, and a genuine care for student welfare. The commendably thorough processes in place, that are improved regularly, do require significant input in terms of time and effort from staff. In the academia in general staff workloads are increasing due to higher administrative burdens and limited research time. This should be taken seriously also at departments where this trend might not yet have reached the limit. Below we first assess each of the eleven criteria for quality assurance. Thereafter we summarize our view of the strengths and challenges of the programme as well as our recommendations, in which we also take staff workloads into consideration.

## Criteria for quality assurance

### **1. That the actual study results correspond to learning outcomes and qualitative targets**

Expected learning outcomes of the PhD education are divided into the categories *knowledge and understanding*, *competence and skills* and *judgement and approach*. A conclusion we can draw on the basis of the documents as well as the site-visit is that the PhD programme offers many support structures and resources available for the PhD students to facilitate that they reach these learning outcomes.

Many applicants to the PhD positions in sociology, together with a well-structured process for evaluating applicants, provide a good base for the admission of highly capable PhD candidates. In social anthropology the PhD students are few (currently

none), which is recognized as a problem. During 12 years (2011-2022) there have been 46 admitted PhD-students and 43 defenses (Table 2 Self-evaluation report).

The expert group has not assessed the content of the PhD theses, but recognizes that many PhD students complete the education and that many seem to write monographs (often in English, but also in Swedish). Examples of compilation theses exists as well. We could see at the portal.research.lu.se that there is a relatively large number of downloads of the monographs with open access, several are also published at international publishing houses, which is proof of their recognition and contribution to the knowledge field.

There are aspects of the learning outcomes that are not as easily captured in the dissertation and defense. Research ethics, time management, and the capacity to contribute to social development and support the learning of others are among the learning outcomes that are more dependent on a continuous working process and follow-up by scientific and pedagogical mentorships. Well-functioning supervision and integration in the research teams and teaching are therefore crucial. We can see that the department has many support structures to facilitate that this too is working well.

There is a well-structured process for the whole education, with a thorough introduction phase, the ideas seminar, midway seminar and final seminar and printing seminar, and continuous follow up through the Individual Study Plan. In the department a need to revise the process related to the final internal review of PhD theses is recognized.

Strengths are related to the many support structures available for PhD students and the outcomes in terms of high-quality and well-recognized dissertations. The reflective approach to the education and constant readiness to make improvements is yet another strength.

The challenges relate to how the learning outcomes are followed-up, which can be strengthened. Without stronger routines for following-up there is a risk that needs and potential problems among some of the PhD-students remain unnoticed. In addition, there is a need to ensure a good process for final review of PhD manuscript as well as PhD students' involvement in supporting the learning of others.

## **2. That the programme focuses on students'/doctoral students' learning**

From the documentation and site visit it is clear that student learning is the focus of the PhD programme. There are many forums and forms for discussions that could lead to the identification of needs to improve learning. Examples of individual study plans (ISPs) are provided. The content of the ISPs are relatively detailed and activities related to each learning outcomes are listed. The question is where reflection around needs/challenges to reach the learning outcomes and how to meet these needs, takes place. In the self-evaluation report the ISP is said to be the form for following-up that supervisors and PhD students are fulfilling their respective responsibilities. The Director of Doctoral Studies has the responsibility to connect different parties when needed. If this role is mainly reactive (rather than proactive), there is a risk that some needs remain unrecognized.

Strengths are related to the high-quality on-campus courses in collaboration with other universities together with many individual study courses, that there is an emphasis on the role of well-functioning supervision, and that there is a thorough introduction to the programme.

Challenges can be seen in relation to too few campus courses. There is a need to keep a balance between joint courses in which PhD students get the chance to meet each other and to be exposed to general discipline-oriented knowledge and the individual reading courses, that have a tendency to be closer to individual research interests. Another challenge is the risk that the ISP becomes an administrative burden rather than a helpful tool for planning and follow-up.

## **3. That the programme is based on a scientific and/or artistic foundation and proven experience**

The department has a strong and successful international research profile, and a long track record of producing high quality PhD theses. The department is one of the 100 best

sociology departments in the world according to the QS ranking. Moreover, the RQ20 is praising the department for being successful also in integrating the PhD-students in this high-profile research environment. There is a well-structured process for assessing the scientific quality in the applications and ability of candidates to the PhD programme.

Researchers at the department are successful when it comes to applying for and achieving externally funded grants. There are strong international research networks and collaborations, as well as a strong publication record among researchers at the department.

The presence of the two scientific disciplines – sociology and social anthropology – is perceived as a strength among researchers at the department. The well-recognized international research environment in which PhD students feel included, is a clear strength and beneficial to the whole PhD programme. A challenge relates to the vulnerability in ensuring senior competences.

**4. That teaching staff, including supervisors, have appropriate expertise in terms of subject, teaching and learning in higher education and subject teaching as well as other relevant expertise, and that teaching capacity is sufficient**

The teaching staff are highly qualified and active researchers. This ensures high quality in the courses as well as competent supervision. The courses provided are a mix of on-campus courses, individual study courses and joint faculty courses. The high competence among staff as well as collaborations with other universities provide the expertise as well as critical mass of PhD students needed.

There is a well-structured process for ensuring that competent supervisors are paired with newly admitted PhD students. When it comes to externally funded PhD students' who are working in research projects, the policy is that one of the supervisors should not be connected to the research project. Pedagogical training is a requirement for the supervisors, and pedagogical issues pertaining to

supervision are continuously attended to both at the department and faculty-level.

A strength is the high competence in staff, both disciplinary-oriented and pedagogical competences, which ultimately ensures that quality in courses and supervision can be kept. Decreasing number of senior staff is however a cause for concern. Challenges are related to the recruitment of senior researchers – in sociology as well as social anthropology, even though the need is even stronger in the relatively smaller discipline of social anthropology. Increasing workload and to maintain a healthy balance between teaching and research is a further challenge.

**5. That the programme is to be relevant for the students and doctoral students and meets the needs of society**

That the programme is relevant for the PhD students in terms of their interests and relevant for their future careers is ensured by the high level of influence that the PhD students have on their own education and the many support structures that is provided to guide students through the education and complete their dissertations. The teaching opportunities for PhD students are crucial for those who wish to continue an academic career. The self-evaluation document indicates that graduates from Lund do well on the job market, both academic and non-academic.

The relevance for society's needs is ensured through the research that is conducted on topics that are of high societal significance. This is reflected in the PhD topics in the department, which range from gender in/equalities to social movements to digitalization to professions.

The department also has a number of established collaborations with non-academic partners, such as regional and municipal actors, and museums.

The many examples on societal relevance mentioned-above are clear strengths of the programme. A challenge is related to the unequal/different teaching opportunities for English speaking students and Swedish speaking students.

**6. That the students and doctoral students have an influence on planning, implementation and follow up of the programme**

PhD students are formally represented in decision-making bodies at both departmental and faculty level. PhD students are well-represented in those contexts that the content and forms of educations are discussed. The PhD students also express that they feel they have actual influence and that their concerns are attended to.

The PhD students have a strong influence in the choice of supervisors. The PhD students' influence on their own education is also ensured through the many personalized forms of education in individual study courses, supervision and other collegial exchanges.

Overall, there are many strengths related to PhD student's influence. It is important that PhD students attend the staff appraisal meeting, since this is an opportunity to make individual needs attended to.

**7. That an appropriate study and learning environment is available to all and includes a well-functioning support system**

The well-structured introduction to the research education ensures a good start and make a well-functioning learning environment and support system available to all. PhD students also express that the day-to-day exchanges among junior and senior colleagues at the department are supportive and provide an appropriate learning environment.

A strength is that the principles as well as forms for the introduction are thought-through and seem to work well. A challenge, identified also in the self-evaluation, is the lack of follow-up on these introduction activities later in the program.

**8. That there is continuous follow up and development of the programme**

There is a range of forms used to follow-up on and developing the program, such as course evaluations, staff appraisal meetings, continuous discussions about the research education in quality dialogues etc.

Strengths are related to the many forms for follow-up that are in place. There are regular meetings held in the College of PhD Supervisors, that are well-attended. In these meetings discussions about quality, challenges and needs of improvement are continuously discussed.

Course-evaluations are conducted for all on-campus courses, while the individual study courses mainly rely on oral feedback. The Individual Study Plans are important documents for following up on individual PhD students' progress and needs, and these are overseen by the Director of the PhD Studies. The structured seminars along the entire PhD education is yet another form for following up on the quality of the programme. PhD student representatives are overseeing the quality of the admission process.

A challenge is the risk that some PhD students' needs are not recognized. Staff appraisal meetings is yet another form that can be used to follow up on individually related needs and problems.

#### **9. That internationalisation and an international perspective is promoted in the programme**

Internationalization is reflected in the international profile of staff and students, as well as the range of international topics for PhD theses (e.g. women in the Middle East, queer refugees in Turkey). International scholars visit and present at the seminars, and PhD students attend courses abroad.

It is commendable that there is funding offered to each student to use for attending international conferences and summer schools and to visit institutions abroad.

The many examples of successful international exchanges and opportunities are clear strengths of the programme. A challenge may be related to the routines of following-up individual PhD students' needs and how they make use of these opportunities.

#### **10. That gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives are integrated in the programme**

The department is clearly genuinely concerned with issues of equality, not just in relation to gender. There is, more or less, equal proportions of women and men among staff and supervisors. There is a gender imbalance at the top level of staff



(professors and associate professors are predominantly men) that is a challenge.

We have noted a gender imbalance on the reading lists in the classical courses. One way of overcoming the problem of early classics being men is to introduce already from the beginning critical feminist literature, as well as decolonial/postcolonial critiques on these classics.

### **11. That subject-relevant perspectives on sustainable development are promoted in the programme**

Sustainability, both environmental and social, is a key focus of ongoing research in the department, and this research is in various brought into the PhD programme through the PhD supervisors. The department also clearly has a day-to-day interest in sustainability as a practice in the workplace, indicating that sustainability is of genuine concern. This is not to be under-estimated, as it is not just those who research sustainability directly who should be concerned with this, and it is likely that questions of sustainability will become increasingly embedded in other sub-disciplines (see e.g. Lynne Jamieson's recent work straddling sustainability and family sociology).

### **Summarised views and recommendations**

The department has a rich international research environment with many collegial forms of intellectual exchange and collective support. That the department hosts two subjects – sociology and social anthropology – is a genuine strength, but there is also a fragile balance between the disciplines and some risks related to this, that we point to below and try to suggest remedies to in our recommendations.

The PhD education is of high quality in all respects. The education is well-structured, with many support structures and resources available for the PhD students. As part of the education, high-quality courses are offered as joint faculty courses, discipline-oriented campus courses in collaboration with other universities, and individual reading courses. There is an international research environment that PhD students feel a part of. There are also forms of support offered when it comes to acquiring skills important for the future career such as writing articles. Well-functioning supervision is emphasized as an important part of the education. The highly reflexive attitude and

readiness to deal with problems as they appear and to make improvements of the programme is a further strength.

Challenges relate to following up on learning outcomes and PhD student's progress, teaching experiences for PhD students, and the balance between sociology and social anthropology.

There is a need for stronger processes for following-up, as there is a risk that some PhD students' needs and potential problems are left unrecognized. It is a challenge to find forms for following-up that are not too demanding, or seen as extra administrative work, but that are actually of help in identifying problems and dealing with them.

Teaching experience is crucial for future career opportunities, and is related to the learning objective of being able to demonstrate capacity to support others' learning. There are some differences in teaching opportunities between international/non-Swedish speaking and the Swedish PhD-students. This is a tricky problem that exists at all department with limited number of English courses, which nevertheless should be attended to in order to ensure good career pathways for all PhD students.

The imbalance between sociology and social anthropology is primarily a challenge due to a potentially rather small group of PhD students in social anthropology. The newly recruited professor is a good start in ensuring senior competences in the social anthropology PhD-programme. While this may not be enough to ensure a stable ground for the PhD education in social anthropology, we believe that an explicit idea of what you want in terms of balance between the two subjects could be helpful.

**We have formulated the following recommendations in order to meet these challenges:**

**Consider the possibility to conduct mandatory annual planning meetings with PhD students.** In order to ensure that all PhD students are getting the support needed in their individual following-up and planning their work, mandatory annual planning meetings could be held between the Director of the PhD education, PhD students and supervisors, or between the PhD-student and supervisor. These meetings could both ensure that challenges or needs are identified and that the planning of future work is facilitated, and thus have a similar function as the staff appraisal meetings, that PhD students do not attend to. This

could be a way to ensure a genuine follow-up and planning opportunity with relevance for the ISP-document.

**We recommend that potential pandemic-related problems and needs are followed up.** This could be especially important among PhD students. This is something the department plans to do already, and we wish to support this ambition.

**Elaborate on forms for a more proactive approach to identify needs/potential problems.** Staff appraisal meetings are one form to identify potential needs and problems among the staff, and it is important to ensure that PhD students attend to these, or at least motivate why they don't attend if this is the case.

**The department should ensure a well-functioning internal review of final PhD-thesis manuscripts.** To ensure a good internal review process of final manuscripts the department should decide upon a time frame that is reasonable and must be adhered to and therefore calculated with the same inevitability as are other hard deadlines such as sending the thesis to print, etc. A suggestion is that the internal committee member be given a month for reading and getting back comments, on top of which the the PhD student should calculate a set period of time in which to undertake any suggested revisions.

**Consider to re-install/strengthen the routine of having mentors for PhD students when teaching.** The department has previously used mentors for PhD students who do teaching. We wonder whether this could become a more regular and continuous element in the support of PhD students in their teaching. Perhaps mentorship could even be a means to balance between the different opportunities among PhD students to teach in Swedish and English.

**Strategic investments and recruitment prioritizations could be made more explicit in relation to a clearer vision about the balance between sociology and social anthropology.** We believe that future investments and prioritizations could gain from being connected to a clearer idea about what the department wants in terms of balance between the two subjects. Is the aim to achieve a critical mass of PhD students in social anthropology in the future? What number of students is required for a critical mass, and what are the strategies to work towards such goals? The same can be said about sociology: how are

investments and prioritizations made in order to ensure that the good quality and critical mass of PhD students, and senior competences, are maintained?

**Make the aspect of staff workload among all staff, and the goal of not increasing it, a more explicit priority.** To not increase staff workloads could be an explicit priority in all decisions and especially important to consider when you have high ambitions to constantly improve of the education. The department is already working along these lines, for example in efforts to help staff to avoid fragmentation by freeing longer periods from teaching to ensure concentrated research time. We encourage that you continue with these efforts.

## Appendix: programme for site visit

<b>17 maj, 2022, Sociologiska Institutionen, Lund</b>
8.30-9.00 Studenter
Deltagare: Yannick Deller (SASAN), Laurine Palomba (SASAN), Linnea Karlsson (SASCO)
9.10-9.40 Doktorander
Deltagare (SOC): Linn Alenius Wallin
9.50-10.40 Lärare MA
Deltagare SASCO: Chares Demetriou, Dalia Abdelhady, Britt-Marie Johansson och Christopher Swader
Deltagare SASAN: Tova Höjdestrand, Nina Gren, Ulf Johansson Dahre
10.50-11.20 Studierektor m fl FU
Deltagare: Sara Eldén (studierektor), David Wästerfors (handledare SOC), Åsa Lundqvist (handledare SOC), Nina Gren (SAN)
11.30-12.00 Studievägledning & utbildningsadministration
Deltagare: Susanne Lindberg (admin SASCO + FU), Christian (admin SASAN), Britt-Marie Rönn (studievägledare SASCO +SASAN)
12.00-13.00 Lunch
13.00-14.00 Institutions- och programledning
Deltagare: Lisa Eklund (prefekt), Mikael Klintman (ställföreträdande prefekt och forskningsansvarig), Mimmi Barmark (studierektor sociologi och övergripande ansvar GU), Sara Eldén (studierektor FU), Chares Demetriou (programkoordinator SASCO), Tova Höjdestrand (programkoordinator + studierektor SASAN), Magnus Ring (arbetsmiljö- och internationaliseringsansvarig).
14.10-14.40 Visning av lärmiljö och undervisningslokaler
Deltagare/guider: Lisa Eklund, Mimmi Barmark, Magnus Ring

14.50-15.50 Sakkunniggruppen arbetar enskilt
16.00-16.30 Återföring till institutionsledning
Deltagare: Lisa Eklund, Mikael Klintman, Sara Eldén, Mimmi Barmark, Tova Högdestrand