



Faculty Board

Development Plan for Third-Cycle Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Department of Sociology, Lund University

Background

The third-cycle programmes in sociology and social anthropology were evaluated in spring 2022. The group of external experts included Linda Soneryd, professor of sociology at the University of Gothenburg (chair), Vanessa May, professor of sociology at the University of Manchester, and Staffan Appelgren, associate professor of social anthropology at the University of Gothenburg.

The evaluation is based on a self-evaluation with relevant documentation, an onsite visit (17 May 2022) and a report produced by the group of external experts. We also held a meeting with the chair of the group of external experts, faculty management and department management (head of department and director of third-cycle studies) in which feedback was shared.

The report produced by the group of external experts was presented and discussed at a department away day (August 2022) attended by all the colleagues from both divisions. The report has also been presented and discussed in the Committee for Third-Cycle Education and the doctoral student assembly. In addition, a draft of this development plan was presented to and discussed in the department's management group, the Committee for Third-Cycle Education, the doctoral student

assembly and the Department Board. It has also been approved by these groups.

The members of the evaluation group were very impressed by the Department of Sociology's third-cycle programmes and stressed that they maintain "high quality in all respects". The department's rich international research environment and multiple forums for intellectual exchange and collegial support were identified as particularly beneficial for the third-cycle programmes. The evaluation group pointed out the high level of quality in the supervision and third-cycle courses and the clear structure of the programmes in terms of the thesis seminars and other support structures that exist along the path to achieving the title of doctor. In addition, the department was praised for its high degree of self-reflection and willingness to identify and address problems along the way.

Another identified strength of the department pertains to its accommodation of two subjects – sociology and social anthropology – but certain issues in their relationship were identified in terms of the balance between them. This was discussed in more depth in relation to the concrete proposed measures, which we will return to below. Challenges were also identified in the follow-up of the development and learning outcomes of doctoral students as well as in relation to their teaching opportunities, especially in terms of language background.

Concrete measures

Based on the three challenges identified by the evaluation group, seven recommendations were formulated into concrete measures. These are presented below, in addition to the measures we intend to take to address them.

Follow-up of doctoral student development and learning outcomes

The evaluation group pointed out the importance of having a sound process in place to follow up the development of doctoral students to ensure that problems can be discovered and remedied in time.

However, they also expressed an awareness that this type of process can entail a risk of more administrative work that can be perceived as cumbersome and even “controlling” by the doctoral student, supervisor and director of third-cycle studies.

Evaluation group’s proposed measures:

- 1) The department is to consider whether compulsory yearly planning meetings between the doctoral student, supervisor and potentially the director of third-cycle studies could be helpful. The aim of the meeting would be to follow up the doctoral student’s development in relation to what is stated in the ISP – both through evaluation of what has been done and what is planned for the upcoming year.
- 2) The department is to continue its ongoing work to follow up problems related to the pandemic.
- 3) The department is to look for more proactive ways to identify potential problems in the situation of doctoral students, above all by attempting to ensure that all doctoral students take part in staff appraisals.
- 4) The department should establish well-functioning structures for assessing final seminar manuscripts. Stronger structures are proposed here to ensure that the internal Examining Committee members have sufficient time to assess doctoral student manuscripts. The time proposed for this is at least one month.

Department’s proposed measures:

The department’s discussions on these proposed measures have been constructive, and we propose the following measures:

- 1) The director of third-cycle studies will emphasise to the Committee for Third-Cycle Education the importance of planning meetings related to the ISP. Yearly meetings related to the ISP are already in place since the ISP system reminds the supervisor and doctoral student one year after the last modification that it is time for a revision. One issue is that the

timing is different for all doctoral students since changes have been entered at different points in time (especially after the Covid-19 pandemic). The question of whether it is possible to improve the system and e.g. conduct all yearly revisions at the same time has been posed to the faculty management (in the quality discussions). Doing so would help everyone involved to schedule planning discussions. An attempt to “restart” all active doctoral student ISPs will be made in January 2023 to ensure that all of the revisions take place at the same time. However, we do not believe it is necessary to implement yearly meetings between the doctoral student and supervisor in which the director of third-cycle studies also takes part. Good procedures are already in place that guarantee that the director of third-cycle studies has insight into the doctoral student’s development. These include the yearly staff appraisals and formal meetings with supervisors in the Committee for Third-Cycle Education (which meets six times a year) and the availability of the director of third-cycle studies to take part in meetings should problems arise. These procedures are perceived as being well functioning.

Responsible: Director of third-cycle studies, supervisors

Timetable: Ongoing.

- 2) The department is attentive to lingering – or new – negative consequences of the pandemic on the work of doctoral students.

Responsible: Director of third-cycle studies, supervisors

Timetable: Ongoing.

- 3) The majority of doctoral students took part in a staff appraisal during the year prior to the evaluation, but a few did not. The department named this as a potential problem in the self-evaluation. All doctoral students on doctoral studentships took part in a staff appraisal this year (2022). In addition, the director of studies contacted and met with doctoral students who had recently concluded their doctoral studentship, but had

not yet defended their thesis, for a more informal discussion. Our assessment is that doctoral students not taking part in staff appraisals constitutes a low level of risk, and consequently do not intend to take any specific measures on the issue at present. The director of studies also intends to stay in contact with doctoral students who have concluded their doctoral studentship.

Responsible: Director of third-cycle studies

Timetable: Ongoing.

- 4) The department considers that the evaluation group's proposal of at least a one-month assessment period for the internal Examining Committee members is a good one and intends to implement it. The issue has been discussed in the Committee for Third-Cycle Education and the doctoral student assembly, with the goal that it be included in our existing guidelines for final seminars, printing meetings and public defences.

Responsible: Director of third-cycle studies

Timetable: The issue is being discussed in the Committee for Third-Cycle Education and the doctoral student assembly, and new guidelines will be produced in autumn 2022.

Teaching opportunities for doctoral students

The evaluation group emphasised the importance of teaching experience for the future academic careers of doctoral students. They deemed that the department, thanks to its extensive teaching activities, can offer many opportunities for doctoral students to teach and obtain important experience. At the same time, a need was recognised to address the differences between the opportunities afforded to doctoral students in relation to their language skills.

Evaluation group's proposed measures:

- 1) Consider reintroducing or bolstering mentoring procedures when doctoral students are introduced to and take part in teaching.

Department's proposed measures:

- 1) We intend to reintroduce teaching mentors. A discussion on how best to do this was initiated at the department's away day and will continue over the upcoming year. In addition, and in particular to counteract the risk of a division between teaching tasks among Swedish and English-speaking doctoral students, yearly individual planning meetings are to be offered to doctoral students and the directors of first and second-cycle studies. The director of third-cycle studies already does a follow up of teaching experiences and wishes in the staff appraisals.

Responsible: The director of third-cycle studies and the directors of first and second-cycle studies are responsible for developing mentoring activities and discussing doctoral student teaching in the planning discussions (directors of first and second-cycle studies) and in staff appraisals (director of third-cycle studies).

Timetable: Discussion on the issue will continue in the Committee for Third-Cycle Education and doctoral student assembly during autumn 2022. The framework for mentoring activities will be produced during spring 2023 and will be implemented in autumn 2023. The directors of first and second-cycle studies resumed the individual planning meetings for doctoral student teaching in autumn 2022.

Relationship between sociology and social anthropology

The evaluation group identified the difference in size and finances between the subjects sociology and social anthropology as a challenge, but at the same time recognised potential to strengthen collaboration.

Evaluation group's proposed measures:

- 1) The department should formulate a clear vision for the future relationship it wants to achieve between the two subjects. The department should consider whether it wants a "critical mass"

of doctoral students in social anthropology in the future and, if so, how this can be achieved. The same questions need to be posed in relation to the third-cycle programme in sociology. Based on this vision, a review to ascertain appropriate future recruitments – of both senior researchers and doctoral students – needs to be conducted.

Department's proposed measures:

- 1) This is a priority issue. The department is united in that the subject social anthropology needs to develop and grow to achieve a better balance. This could lead to a positive development and strengthening of both subjects. Opportunities for collaboration, particularly within third-cycle education, are deemed to be very good, not least due to the successful cooperation that already exists in the Bachelor's and Master's programmes and in the department's various research environments and seminars. We recognise additional opportunities, specifically in relation to third-cycle programmes for
 - a. sociology and anthropology supervisors to supervise students together.
 - b. the development of joint third-cycle courses.
 - c. amplification of the courses available in social anthropology in the form of reading courses and in cooperation with other social anthropology departments in Sweden and Denmark (similar to the model used in the subject sociology).
 - d. social anthropology doctoral students to be included in the same groups and seminars as sociology doctoral students (in particular the doctoral student assembly and the series of seminars on upcoming theses known as "Avhandling-på-gång"). In addition, recruitment is a key issue. Since the self-evaluation was written, a new professor of social anthropology has been recruited (1 June 2022). The department management also intends

to announce two doctoral studentship vacancies in social anthropology in December 2022, with admission to the programme in September 2023.

Responsible: The director of third-cycle studies, in close collaboration with the social anthropology division (primarily the new professor), is responsible for the development of courses, supervision and incorporating doctoral students into the department's work. The head of department is responsible for recruitment issues.

Timetable: The process to admit doctoral students in social anthropology is to begin in December 2022. A review of available courses will be conducted in conjunction with this process. The review is expected to continue during spring 2023 (and then continue on and be adapted to the needs that arise in doctoral student projects in the same way as with the third-cycle programme in sociology).

Summary comments

In addition to these three challenges and the proposed measures, the evaluation group also formulated a final and more comprehensive recommendation for the department: make the employee workload, and the importance of not increasing it, a priority issue. The evaluation group points out that evaluations such as this one tend to lead to a number of proposals that result in extra work on the part of employees, which can counteract positive development for the organisation. The evaluation group notes that the Department of Sociology is already aware of this, and emphasises its support of the department's efforts.

The evaluation of third-cycle programmes in sociology and social anthropology has been an enriching process. We are pleased to note that a great deal of our work related to the programmes over the past decade has strengthened us and enabled us to offer our doctoral students a high-quality, invigorating and rewarding education that prepares them well for subsequent working life. We recognise good

opportunities for further development through the measures proposed by the evaluation group and look forward to improving our programmes further.