



FACULTY  
OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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Faculty Board

## **Development Plan for Third-Cycle Studies in Sociology of Law at the Sociology of Law Department, Lund University**

### **Background**

In 2022, the third-cycle programme in sociology of law was evaluated alongside the Master of Science programme in sociology of law. The external expert group that evaluated the two programmes consisted of Associate Professor Annika Staaf of Malmö University (chair) and Professor Joxerramon Bengoetxea of the Oñati International Institute for the Sociology of Law. The external expert group based its evaluation on the department's self-assessment and relevant documentation, as well as on an onsite visit that took place in June 2022. The two programmes (at second and third-cycle levels) were evaluated together in a report made by the expert group. This development plan applies only to the third-cycle programme.

The overall impression of the expert group is that the third-cycle programme is an international, well-structured and sustainable third-cycle programme at the “cutting edge of the sociolegal discipline globally, with important doctoral theses over the last decades”.

### **Concrete measures**

The external expert group had some recommendations which we present below. We state if, how, by whom and when these recommendations will be addressed.

## **1. Strained teaching capacity**

The external expert group emphasised the importance of giving teaching staff enough time to ensure high-quality teaching, as well as time for the development of courses and teaching methods: “The teaching capacity is clearly strained, and in need of recognition”. It must be emphasised, however, that the supervision and teaching of doctoral students is a sought-after activity among staff, and we believe that this recommendation is more relevant to Bachelor’s and Master’s level programmes than to the third-cycle programme. We will therefore not take any action here.

## **2. Compulsory courses**

Some of the issues discussed by the expert group concern the third-cycle programme’s compulsory courses.

- a) The external expert group emphasised the importance of providing the compulsory courses in the first year of the programme, or possibly merging the courses with equivalent Master’s level courses. After hiring two professors, capacity has been strengthened and thereby so has our ability to deliver the compulsory courses as planned. Since the spring of 2022, we have offered the two compulsory courses in sociology of law (theory and methodology respectively) once a year, and we intend to continue doing so. This has been made possible because the courses are open to external participants, as it would not be sustainable for such a small department to make these courses only available to internal doctoral students. This has proved successful so far. The courses have been full and have had waiting lists. The other compulsory courses (research ethics and theory of science) are already offered every year by the faculty.
- b) The second issue concerned the evaluation of courses. We have not conducted a systematic evaluation of the courses so far, but we have emphasised the continuous development of third-cycle courses and evaluated them on an ad hoc and qualitative basis. From autumn 2023, we will introduce a more

systematic system for evaluating the courses, based on discussions and objectives developed by the faculty.

- c) The external evaluation team encourages us to focus more on ecologically/environmentally sustainable development in our teaching. This is something we will take into account when planning upcoming compulsory third-cycle courses in sociology of law.

### ***Responsibility and timeframe***

- a) The director of doctoral studies will continue to work towards offering doctoral courses in sociology of law every year.
- b) The director of doctoral studies will establish procedures for course evaluations and course evaluation reports in autumn 2023. We will use the newly designed course evaluation report template developed by the faculty during the process.
- c) The director of doctoral studies will work to introduce material on ecologically/environmentally sustainable development into the courses, starting in autumn 2023.

### **3. Opportunities for teaching**

The external expert group encourages doctoral students to teach, although they point out that there are limited opportunities for non-Swedish speaking doctoral students to do so as most courses at the department are taught in Swedish. There are certain measures that can be introduced to improve this situation, which we will look at in more detail, such as allowing doctoral students to give lectures in English on Swedish courses to a greater extent than is possible at present, co-supervising Master's students (the Master's programme is taught in English), lecturing on the Master's programme and teaching at other departments or at the faculty's Graduate School. It must be emphasised, however, that even taking these measures into account, it will be very difficult to achieve 20% teaching for non-Swedish speaking doctoral students in the department.

***Responsibility and timeframe***

An evaluation of different teaching opportunities for doctoral students will be carried out by the director of studies and the director of doctoral studies in 2024.

**4. The need for further training**

The external expert group identified some areas where doctoral students might need additional training – in sociology of law for students without a background in the subject, in research communication, and in data storage and security.

With regard to the first issue, they recommend that the supervisor identify early in the individual study plan process whether there is a need for extra training in sociology of law, and that the department, if necessary, provide this training as early as possible for new doctoral students. We will do this by identifying possible needs and offering an independent study course in sociology of law if necessary.

The external expert group identified among doctoral students the need to “improv[e] their communication abilities both in academic contexts and to media and the general public, especially as regards their research results.” The faculty is currently developing a course in research communication which we will encourage our doctoral students to take.

They also identified a need for more knowledge about data storage and data security. This is something that applies to most researchers in the department, and we are currently working on this at the departmental level. We have already organised seminars on this issue.

***Responsibility and timeframe***

Supervisors will be responsible for identifying any further training needs for their doctoral students in sociology of law as soon as possible after the start of the programme and, if necessary, offering and encouraging them to attend an independent study course in sociology of law. This will start in autumn 2023.

The director of doctoral studies will encourage doctoral students to participate in the faculty's research communication course as soon as it is offered.

The head of the department is currently working to ensure that all employees in the department have sufficient training in data storage and data security.

## **5. Supervision**

The department has moved away from a policy in which we aimed to be self-sufficient in terms of supervisors, to a system where we not only allow but also partly encourage doctoral students to seek supervision outside the department when needed. Sociology of law is an interdisciplinary research area, and the research topics of our doctoral students are very diverse and specialised. Our external supervisors offer students expert supervision in their field, as well as valuable contacts for their future careers. This is also important for the internationalisation of third-cycle studies and for creating networks and collaborations with other research environments, which is particularly important for a small department such as ours. However, the external expert group perceived the use of external supervisors as a weakness and has suggestions on how to limit their use, for example by starting with a broad pool of supervisors in the early years of the third-cycle programme. We do not believe this is practical and consider it important to have a stable constellation of supervisors in place as early as possible, which can follow the student throughout the programme. Additionally, the research team in the department provides feedback to doctoral students in addition to the ones they officially supervise through our start, midway and final reviews and more generally during the daily collegial discussions in the department. Of course, students also have the opportunity to change supervisors if they so wish. The main supervisor is always to be internal, and we have a fixed distribution of the allocated supervision hours in which the main supervisor always has primary responsibility and the largest share of the allocated supervision hours.

The external expert group also linked our use of external supervision to a general need for increased staff recruitment. This is a budgetary issue, and our ability to recruit new staff and in which categories is continuously discussed and addressed.

Finally, the external expert group suggested that we “offer paid visiting fellow schemes to invite visitors for a semester or a term and do special supervisions to the doctoral candidates”. However, we would rather use our resources to encourage and support doctoral students to go on research visits abroad, thus gaining international experience and establishing an international network.

***Responsibility and timeframe***

The director of doctoral studies is responsible for initiating an evaluation of how to develop a programme of international study visits as part of the doctoral degree programme. The work will start in spring 2022

**6. Gender balance**

The external expert group expressed concern about the gender balance of externally funded doctoral students, who were all male during the evaluation period. However, gender imbalance is not generally a problem in the third-cycle programme. It is a small programme with only eight doctoral students at present, and of these four are externally funded doctoral students, three of whom are men. Gender balance is always a guiding principle in our general recruitment of doctoral students, and we currently have an even gender balance in the group. We will continue to use gender balance as a guiding principle when recruiting doctoral students, for both externally and internally funded candidates.

***Responsibility and timeframe***

The head of department continues to monitor gender equality in connection with the recruitment of doctoral students.

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Finally, the external expert group emphasised the importance of getting back to normal as soon as possible after the pandemic, in terms of teaching, meetings and tutorials being held on campus. We agree with this and in principle we have already returned to normal, although we now have a higher acceptance for working from home a few days a week than we did before the pandemic.