



FACULTY
OF SOCIAL
SCIENCES

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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Faculty Board

Development Plan for Third-Cycle Programme in Sustainability Science at LUCSUS

Background

The third-cycle programme in Sustainability Science was assessed in the spring of 2023. The expert group consisted of Anders Hansson, associate professor at Linköping University (chair) and Anja Nygren, professor at the University of Helsinki.

Their assessment is based on a self-evaluation and the associated documentation. A site visit took place on 15 June 2023 and included interviews with doctoral students and supervisors. Based on this information, the expert group compiled a report. In addition, a feedback meeting was held, attended by the chair of the expert group, faculty management and the director of LUCSUS.

The expert group's report was presented and discussed at the LUCSUS kick-off (August 2023) with the supervisor team and doctoral students. In addition, the draft of this Development Plan was presented to, discussed and adopted by the board of LUCSUS.

In general, the members of the assessment group were impressed by the LUCSUS third-cycle programme. They emphasised that “at present, the LUCSUS third-cycle programme holds a very prestigious position within the existing third-cycle programmes in Sustainability Science in Europe”. The assessors gained the impression that the doctoral students themselves were satisfied with the third-cycle programme due to an academic culture characterised by flat hierarchies, openness to new perspectives, methodological diversity,

interdisciplinarity and extensive international collaboration within LUCSUS.

The centre's rich international research environment and many forums for intellectual exchange and collegial support were also identified as being particularly favourable for the third-cycle programme. The high quality of supervision and third-cycle activities was emphasised, as was the clear structure of the courses in the form of academic paper seminars and other support structures on the path to a doctoral degree. Furthermore, the centre received praise for its high degree of self-reflection and willingness to tackle problems along the way.

Nevertheless, there are challenges on matters concerning financial resources and faculty support that are discussed in more detail in the specific proposal for measures, an area we return to below. In addition, challenges were identified in the follow-up of the doctoral students' career paths and in relation to teaching opportunities for doctoral students.

Recommendations for specific measures have been formulated based on the challenges identified by the assessors. These are described below, in combination with the specific measures we intend to take to address them.

Challenges and specific measures

- 1. The assessment group emphasised the importance of core funding to maintain continuity in third-cycle studies and to reduce the considerable reliance on external research projects.**

The assessment group's proposed measures:

Sufficient basic funding is fundamental in order to reduce the considerable reliance on external grants, and to facilitate well-planned recruitment of staff and necessary infrastructure services. It is in this way that the LUCSUS third-cycle programme will be able to maintain and even improve its position in the world's increasingly competitive third-cycle education markets. Core funding and strategic recruitment of future staff is crucial for retaining the prestigious position that LUCSUS has and to reduce vulnerability and the considerable dependency on external funding.

The centre's proposed measures:

Discussions on these proposed measures have been constructive and we propose the following measures:

- Discuss how basic funding for third-cycle studies can be increased and how LUCSUS can ensure administrative and academic support for third-cycle studies.

Responsible: director of LUCSUS, director of third-cycle studies and head of research

Schedule: completion by December 2025

2. The assessment group emphasised the future challenges of keeping the LUCSUS third-cycle programme relevant amid the competitive environment for sustainability programmes.

The assessment group's proposed measures:

LUCSUS needs to conduct thorough strategic planning in order to maintain its highly relevant research niche and strengthen its profile within critical social sciences and in the fast-changing sustainability science landscape of the (near) future.

The key issues here are a strong focus on innovative theoretical approaches, ground-breaking conceptualisations, advanced interdisciplinarity and the development of multiple new methods that are suitable for the current research topics. The current profile of LUCSUS within critical social sciences, with a focus on subjects that are highly relevant for interdisciplinary social sciences, natural sciences and the humanities, and for external societal actors, makes it a very attractive third-cycle programme internationally.

The centre's proposed measures:

There have been constructive discussions at LUCSUS on these proposed measures and we propose the following measures:

- The head of research, director of third-cycle studies and supervisors at LUCSUS engage in collective and strategic research planning. This includes proactive mapping of future-oriented sustainability science and societally relevant research in which funding opportunities are anticipated to be available.

Responsible: director of LUCSUS, director of third-cycle studies and head of research

Schedule: completion by December 2025

- 3. The assessment group also emphasised the third-cycle programme's limited educational capacity. LUCSUS only offers one internal third-cycle course, and it has not been offered on a very regular basis.**

The assessment group's proposed measures:

Regarding the core course offered by LUCSUS, "Sustainability Science and the SDGs" (SGR016F), the panel recommends that the course should be offered more regularly in the future and that it should be restructured to focus on the core issues in sustainability science. Even though the course receives relatively high marks in the students' evaluations, many doctoral students would like to have a more cohesive course that systematically explores the most important topics and methods in sustainability science.

The higher education institution's proposed measures:

- Revision of the course is underway with input and recommendations from doctoral students. The course will include more interactive sessions in which core issues in sustainability science can be integrated in several project-related third-cycle topics. The course can also be actively marketed to students in other disciplines within social sciences and the humanities.
- Additional courses will be offered in cooperation with other networks at Lund University, such as the Agenda 2030 Graduate School.
- The strategic mapping of ideas for additional courses could form the core of the third-cycle programme.

Responsible: director of third-cycle studies, supervisors and head of research

Schedule: completion by December 2024

- 4. The assessment group emphasised the potential challenges in external project-related third-cycle processes, including discussions about co-authorship, developing independently**

versus completing external projects, and prioritising project-related activities versus teaching and administrative duties.

The assessment group's proposed measures:

These tensions can probably be mitigated by adept management and a discussion about expectations. It is therefore important to make the different interests of the doctoral students and project partners more explicit and maintain an inclusive dialogue among the members of the research project groups, in the interaction between supervisors and doctoral students, and at department meetings.

The higher education institution's proposed measures:

- Issues relating to co-authorship are discussed at department board level and guidelines for co-authorship (Vancouver guidelines) have already been adopted in the form of a guidance document in order to alleviate any potential conflicts over expectations.
- The use of an expectations matrix for supervisors and doctoral students is encouraged at the start of third-cycle studies as a tool for establishing and discussing the differing expectations of doctoral students and supervisors.

Responsible: director of third-cycle studies, supervisors

Schedule: completion by June 2024