



FACULTY
OF SOCIAL
SCIENCES

STATEMENT FORM EXTERNAL
EXPERT GROUP

Reg. No.
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2021-10-15

Programme evaluation of doctoral education in Service Studies: Statement from external expert group

Assignment and external expert group

The assignment of the external expert group (see composition below) has been to evaluate doctoral education in Service Studies. The evaluation is based on Lund University's eleven criteria for quality enhancement, with support from the Faculty of Social Sciences' instructions¹. The assignment includes raising the strengths, challenges, and development opportunities of the learning environment and the program/programs.

Prior to the evaluation, the expert group was 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 of students/doctoral students.

On September 27-28, 2021, a site visit was conducted (see the program in Appendix).

The external expert group:

¹ *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)*

- Professor Stefan Tengblad, University of Gothenburg (chair of the expert group)
- Professor Johanna Moisander, Aalto University

Summarized views and recommendations

Strengths

Doctoral students. It seems that the program is currently able to recruit highly qualified and ambitious doctoral students. While the cohort of doctoral students is relatively small (13 students), the students seem to be very active in self-organizing—organizing seminars and workshops to achieve the learning outcomes that they have defined for themselves, i.e., they have created a positive learning community. They also seem to contribute to the ongoing development of the doctoral program actively and independently, in a self-directed manner (as demonstrated by the “Input from doctoral students on the post-graduate education at the department of Service Management and Service Studies, Lund University” -document). The doctoral students, thus, would seem to constitute an important energizing force in the further development of not only the doctoral program but also research activities in the department more broadly.

Supervision arrangements. It is commendable that each doctoral student of the department is assigned a dissertation advisory committee consisting of two or three advisors who have formal training in doctoral dissertation supervision. The supervisors and other thesis advisors also seem to take pride and responsibility in performing this role, and doctoral students seem to genuinely appreciate the help that they get from their supervisors.

Funding of doctoral studies. It is also commendable that many of the doctoral students are recruited as employees and thereby also can potentially be integrated into the existing research

groups as productive members of the scholarly community of the department and the university. In this role, the doctoral students, thus, constitute a significant—currently, perhaps, under-utilized—resource for the continuous enhancement and reinvigoration of research excellence in the department. In this role they actively contribute to the development of the department’s scientific discipline.

Collegial and supportive informal organization. The doctoral students, in particular, find the informal organization at the department “generally friendly,” and the students that we interviewed emphasized that they always get help from the management and their supervisors—if only they know how to ask for it. In the interviews, the management and faculty also clearly demonstrated that they have the interests and welfare of the doctoral students at heart and also that they have genuine respect for their colleagues. The department, thus, seems to be a positive and supportive work environment for its doctoral students.

Challenges

Graduate profile and clear intended student learning outcomes (SLOs). It seems that the doctoral program takes a rather “old-school” approach to doctoral program management, focusing its efforts on educating unspecified doctoral-level experts—academics and professionals—of the many areas of what is discussed in the department as ‘service studies.’ The orientation of the doctoral level education seems unspecified in the sense that it is not clear whether the program mainly focuses on academic or professional educational attainment. This type of general, broad focus that has arguably worked well in the past, in the early phases of the doctoral program development, might prove to be a problem in the future for two main reasons.

First, in the years to come, the effective lack of an explicitly and strategically defined graduate profile may prove to be a problem

for the placement of program graduates. In the past, according to the self-evaluation material, the graduates have been able to secure employment—at least in the short term—within and outside academia (often as various types of project workers). But, in the future, there is reason to believe that this might no longer be the case, particularly for the graduates who wish to pursue international careers in the academic job market. Competition in the international academic job market is increasingly fierce, and it is often only the graduates who have focused on systematically developing their capabilities and social capital as academic scholars that can secure meaningful employment in the long run. Doctoral programs, thus, face the challenge of equipping their graduates with the capabilities that they need to succeed in this competition.

Second, in the absence of a shared understanding about the desired graduate profile, it would seem to be difficult to define meaningful intended learning outcomes for the program. Yet, students often make decisions about their education based on the subjective expected utility or value of the educational offering in terms of what sort of capabilities and competencies they can gain for work life and future careers. Moreover, in the absence of clearly and explicitly defined program-level learning outcomes, it might be difficult for students and supervisors of the program to identify and articulate meaningful objectives—and thus expectations—for the students' personal and academic development. To illustrate, as some of the doctoral students interviewed pointed out, owing to the inadequate clarity of expectations, both students and their supervisors currently have difficulties in leveraging the full potential of the individual study plan (ISP) as a career planning tool. As a student pointed out, now the ISP is used primarily to keep track of students' course completions.

Integration of students into research groups: It seems that only a few doctoral students are recruited to work on their

doctoral dissertations as members of existing discipline-specific research groups, in which they have the opportunity to learn important academic competencies and meta-skills under the supervision and mentorship of, and in close collaboration with the senior scholars of the department. As members of these research groups, students find it easier to make sense of and construct their identities as academic scholars and get integrated into the relevant scholarly networks and communities of their respective fields of research. As members of these research groups, students are also able to benefit from the existing networks of their supervisors and the other senior faculty members of the group, which is increasingly important for the students to secure employment after graduation.

Graduate placement support. While Lund University does have general career planning-related training available for its students, it seems that the doctoral program has no systematic graduate placement service-oriented practices or processes in place. Supervisors do discuss career planning with the students but primarily at the initiative of the students themselves. This may prove to be a problem for two main reasons. First, whether we like it or not, one fairly commonly adopted view on measuring the quality of educational offerings is graduate placement. Second, the absence of systematic advice, mentoring and support for career planning may further exacerbate the distress and uncertainty that students experience and need to cope with as regards their future employability. This may be conducive to delaying their process of completing their doctoral degrees.

The amount and frequency of given courses. The department does a great job in offering courses in relation to the size of the faculty and number of doctoral students. However, there is a concern among doctoral students about how to be able to meet the course requirements within the time frame of their positions. Although we lack the detailed knowledge of the course content,

we noted a concern among the doctoral students about the need of 75 courses credits especially as some of the courses are not given on a regular basis according to the doctoral students. Perhaps all mandatory courses should be given at least every second year.

Reflections and recommendations

Clarifying the goals of the program. It seems that the doctoral program would benefit from a more strategic and carefully thought-out approach to recruiting and educating doctoral students. Our analysis of the self-evaluation material and the interviews with the doctoral students, in particular, suggest that the curriculum of the program would seem to benefit from a substantial revision.

First, it might be a good idea to decide whether the general educational orientation of the doctoral program is focused on delivering ‘professional’ or ‘academic’ doctoral-level education. It seems that a small doctoral program cannot necessarily successfully serve the interests and needs of both students who wish to pursue their careers in the industry and public sector administration and the students who wish to excel in academic research.

Second, as the “objectives and outcomes of third cycle studies” articulated in the evaluation material focus on identifying a set of general cognitive skills, it remains somewhat unclear how the program equips its students with the types of competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that allow them to pursue a successful international career in the world of academia. Hence, it might be a good idea to do a round of curriculum development. It would seem to be important to critically examine and reflect upon the existing—presently largely implicit or unarticulated—intended learning outcomes (what sort of academic skills and capabilities does the program offer?) and to carefully analyze how the different courses and learning modules offered actually

contribute to the attainment of these learning outcomes. The program development might benefit from some sort of curriculum mapping and constructive alignment (coordinating teaching and learning activities and assessment with learning outcomes).

Assurance of learning (AoL). Since the procedures and practices in place for AoL seem somewhat implicit and/or underdeveloped, the program might benefit from an explicitly articulated AoL policy that would provide a clear framework for curriculum development and planning. Specifically, to manage student expectations and to better coordinate the educational offerings of the program, the program would benefit from the development of more explicitly articulated, competence-based intended student learning outcomes and from an AoL policy for ensuring that the program offers an educational offering that helps students achieve these intended student learning outcomes. Currently, it seems that individual supervisors and students themselves have much of the responsibility for designing and implementing AoL practices.

Curriculum co-development for constructive alignment of the doctoral program. The program might want to consider launching a curriculum co-development project, involving both the students and the teaching staff in renewing its educational offering. The further development of the program would seem to significantly benefit from a better alignment of the components of the curriculum with a set of clearly and explicitly defined intended student learning outcomes and ideal graduate profile.

Moreover, it would seem to be important to rethink the existing practices of engaging and involving teachers and students in curriculum development for the program. The department should strive towards creating a shared understanding of the mission and strategic goals of the program. To that end, the faculty might want to form a committee that critically examines and finds consensus on what works and what does not work — to better

understand and explicitly articulate what the intended learning outcomes of the doctoral program are and how are they aligned with the key competencies that an aspiring scholar needs to develop to succeed in the world of academia.

Based on student feedback, such a committee might find it reasonable to significantly downsize the purely coursework-based degree requirements, particularly mandatory elements of the curriculum. It might be a good idea to critically assess whether the existing curriculum helps students complete their doctoral dissertation within the expected time frame and whether the existing curriculum actually supports their development towards the experts and future academic leaders of their respective disciplinary fields, which seem to be theoretically significantly dispersed. Since the students pursue very different career paths, there would seem to be no one-size-fits-all solutions for this co-development work.

We furthermore believe that the doctoral students aiming for an academic career need more specialization during their first years as scholars, that is, it is hard to understand interdisciplinary research before experience is gained from disciplinary research. This is not to say that the effort to make cross/inter-disciplinary work in the service area should be abandoned but to focus on a small number of sub-fields and then to encourage cross-fertilization.

Graduate placement support. The program would benefit from collectively developing and articulating some sort of a policy and practices for providing their graduate students with the advice, mentoring, and support that they need to prepare themselves for a successful job search after graduation. The program might want to consider providing its graduates with job placement service or a job placement program in some modest shape or form. While it might be unrealistic to assign the responsibilities of a graduate placement officer to a member of the faculty, the program might want to highlight the importance

of career planning and mentoring as part of the responsibilities of the doctoral dissertation advisory committee. In general, it would seem to be important for the program to focus its attention to better preparing its graduates for the international, academic job market.

Reflections on the specified criteria

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

Today, the quality of education is often assessed and demonstrated based on information about *graduate placement*. To illustrate, Wikipedia defines graduate placement as “a statistic used by colleges, universities, and other schools to statistically report the successfulness of their graduated students to find a job in the student's chosen field of study” and highlights that graduate placement information “is generally used to indicate the efficacy of the teaching methods and educational opportunities for prospective students looking for a good school to spend their tuition money.” Moreover, as generally emphasized by higher education accreditation organizations like the AACSB, to improve this metric and to continuously develop the quality of educational offerings, higher education organizations are expected to engage in systematic curriculum management by having explicit Assurance of Learning (AoL) systems and practices in place. To illustrate, AACSB expects universities to use “well-documented, systematic processes for determining and revising degree program learning goals; designing, delivering, and improving degree program curricula to achieve learning goals; and demonstrating that degree program learning goals have been met.”

The self-evaluation material does not explicitly address these topics. It rather seems that the main responsibility for AoL-oriented activity in the program is borne by the supervisors and the students themselves. It is stated that “the doctoral student’s

learning process is largely individualized and tailored in dialogue between doctoral student and supervisors.” Hence, while there are formal progress review practices in place, it is unclear how the curriculum and the educational offerings systematically support student learning and help them to make progress with their research. It seems that students need to identify their individual learning needs rather independently.

With this said it can be stated that an appropriate quality assurance is in place regarding the qualification of supervisors, and the seminar structure that forms a gate which the doctoral students have to pass in an orderly manner.

2. That the program focuses on students’/doctoral students’ learning

The first step in ensuring that the program focuses on students’ learning would seem to be to clearly define the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the students are expected to learn and then develop a curriculum that helps them to achieve these learning outcomes. The self-evaluation material discusses the intended student learning outcomes on a fairly general level. It states that “the objective third-cycle studies in Service Studies” is “to provide students with specialized knowledge in service studies and to train them to become independent and critical researchers with broad knowledge of social science theory, methodological skill and judgement, and the ability to conduct research projects.” In our interpretation, the students are expected to demonstrate that they are well-read (they have adequate knowledge of the relevant theories and methods in their respective fields of research), have adequate analytical and critical thinking skills for scholarly research, and that they have developed some sort of scholarly expertise in their own research area. While this is a very good starting point for defining intended student learning outcomes, the curriculum management team might find it useful to further elaborate this objective.

In particular, the intended learning outcomes would seem to benefit from further development and updating based on input from various stakeholders, especially the students, and a more clearly defined graduate profiles for the program—to make sure that the graduates are ready for the challenges of the world of academia. It would seem to be important to reflect on the following questions: What sort of cognitive, personal, and interpersonal competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) do the graduates need? What are the most important cognitive and scholarly capabilities that the program needs to focus on and develop across the learning modules of the curriculum? Which specific personal and interpersonal competencies do the students need to successfully pursue their careers as scholars and experts? How can the program help the students further develop these competencies? The rearticulation of the learning outcomes, based on these types of reflections, might help the program to prioritize and better communicate its expectations and goals for teaching and learning to both teaching faculty and the existing and prospective students of the program.

It seems increasingly important that doctoral programs offer learning opportunities and experiences that not only provide students with rigorous academic content (knowledge of theory and methods) but also foster, if not equip them with, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and the many meta-skills our aspiring scholars need to thrive in the complex, rapidly changing world of academia.

To collectively reflect upon the nature of the desired graduate profile of the program, the directors of the doctoral program could perhaps form a ‘doctoral program committee’ (bringing the teaching faculty and students of the program together with representatives of key external stakeholders) that would be tasked with continuously developing the program within the AoL system of the department and university.

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

The teaching faculty of the program has been active in generating external research funding and carrying out academic research in the broad field of service studies. The faculty also publishes the results of this activity in peer-reviewed academic journals. There are thus reasons to believe that this research underpins the curriculum content of the program and that the teaching faculty, thus, offers research-led teaching.

Sometimes the students of the program also have the opportunity to do their doctoral research in externally funded research projects, as members of research groups. But since the research designs of these projects are often empirically defined, it is unclear how these projects help them to construct their identities and develop their academic expertise in specific disciplinary fields. Moreover, often these types of externally funded projects focus on doing applied research that focuses on generating managerial and practical applications and policy recommendations. Such research experience does not necessarily train them in publishing in the best journals of a particular scholarly field—which, today, seems to be necessary for pursuing a successful career in the world of academic research.

A challenge is, moreover, that service studies—“a cross-disciplinary research area focusing on studying and problematizing services with the aim of trying to understand, analyze and create knowledge on service society”—doesn’t seem like a scholarship or not even a cohesive, internationally active multi-disciplinary scholarly network or disciplinary field. It rather consists of multiple, theoretically distinct approaches to studying services “from perspectives based on sustainability, economy, space, culture and societal concerns, and focuses on services in the public, private and non-profit sector.”

Hence, while service studies, as it is defined in the documentation, would seem to constitute a solid interdisciplinary

basis for MSc and BSc education, it does not necessarily offer a solid disciplinary foundation or a shared scholarly identity (complete with an international scholarly community with conferences and journals) for doctoral studies as aspiring scholars and academic researchers. It would seem unfair, in fact, to assume that the doctoral students recruited in the program are able to develop a “a cross-disciplinary focus on services” in their work—given the fact the faculty has not in any greater success been able to do that over the last 15 years.

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

All the doctoral dissertation supervisors have formal training in supervising doctoral dissertations. According to the self-evaluation material, the supervisors also “regularly produce high-quality research output which indicates a strong scientific foundation for the doctoral program and the competence of the supervisors. This suggests that the teaching staff has appropriate expertise for serving as supervisors and instructors in the doctoral program. This criterion will be further advanced if future recruitments of doctoral students are made in connection to identified strong sub-specializations and viable research groups, and that subsequent recruitments of senior faculty are made in order to strengthen selected sub-specialization.

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

According to the self-evaluation report the doctoral students have had few problems in finding jobs either within academia or outside academia after finishing their doctoral studies. Several have continued working in the department, but also elsewhere in academia, which is seen as an indication that the doctoral

program provides competence others find valuable. It is noted that there is a trend towards compilation thesis, and we suggest that the department should encourage this trend and to share experiences among the faculty about supervision skills to supervisors less familiar with this format.

As discussed above, whether the program is relevant for its students depends on the sort of careers the students intend to pursue. There is hardly any one-size-fits all solution for curriculum management and AoL. It seems that the program would benefit from critical examination and collective reflection on what actually is, in the contemporary societal context of the program, relevant for students—the skills and competencies that the program should help its students develop. The relevance of the program, in this sense, would seem to be an area that would benefit from further development.

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

According to the self-evaluation report the doctoral students meet the program director regularly. The report state that doctoral students have a strong influence of their education on an individual level thanks to a continuous dialogue between supervisor and doctoral student regarding the direction of the research project. It is also possible for the doctoral student to change their supervisor. However, since there doesn't seem to be a systematic AoL process in place, it is difficult to see how the students have an influence on curriculum development.

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

The support system for the doctoral students is of critical importance, and the basic requirements of offices, equipment etc. seem to be sufficient. It is an impression from the field visits that the emphasis on the doctoral students to be independent is a bit

too strong since it might be a difficult for a doctoral student to pick a topic and independently craft a research design within given time frames.

We therefore recommend including doctoral students in research groups, and to define research areas/broad topics in beforehand to which the students can apply for could be something to consider. This could also enhance the development of the research groups.

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

How is continuous curriculum development carried out and by whom? Is there a formal process?

Since there doesn't seem to be a systematic AoL process in place, we fail to see how the continuous follow up and development of the program works. The process seems to be informal, and it is interesting that it seen as a concern in the self-evaluation report that the ISP-system can be overly formalistic i.e., there seem to be a strong preference to informal follow-up. While informal follow-ups have merits there could be beneficial to combine it formal follow-ups with some regularity.

9. That internationalization and an international perspective is promoted in the program

It is important to help the students to identify their key “international networks” and scholarly communities. How is this done—as the department seems to be comprised of many different groups that represent very different scholarly communities? It is positive that doctoral students are encouraged to present their research at international conferences and that funding is available for this.

As a stretch goal for the department, we recommend the faculty to increase international collaboration in the next following years by utilizing the increased competence in video-conferencing and

video-lecturing. We see it as beneficial that the doctoral students are exposed more to international scholars on a regular basis and that the Department develop a few key strategic collaborations with units outside Sweden with an interest to collaborate with ISM researchers.

10. That gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives are integrated in the program

According to the self-evaluation report, equal opportunities and gender are topics that are on the research agenda at the department, and therefore these perspectives are naturally brought into the agenda at seminars and similar activities. Furthermore, the department's research includes not only gender but also for example post-colonial perspectives, which provides the research environment with a broad repertoire in this regard. There is an equal opportunities and diversity group at the department and their work includes doctoral students. The group have identified a need for further investigations into sick leave, as female doctoral students are overrepresented in this. As evaluators our impressions are that department is performing well regarding gender equality and equal opportunities, although the increasing dominance of female employees and doctoral students should merit discussions and perhaps activities for increase the attractiveness for male applicants to seek positions at ISM.

11. That subject-relevant perspectives on sustainable development are promoted in the program

Sustainability is a core research topic at the department, and the self-evaluation report mentions that there is several internationally acknowledged in this area. Accordingly, this makes such questions an inherent part of the doctoral education. Doctoral courses include key questions of sustainability from an economic, social, and ecological perspective, such as service

work and theories of values and the coming course on resourcification.

Appendix: program for site visit

Day 1 – 27 September 2021

9:00-11:30 Expert group's own work

11:30-12:00 Welcome to Campus!

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:15-14:00 Interviews with doctoral students 1

14:15-15:00 Interviews with main supervisors

15:15-16:00 Interviews with doctoral students 2

16:00-17:00 Expert group's own work

Day 2 – 28 September 2021

9:00-9:15 Gathering

9:15-10:00 Interviews with doctoral program management

10:15-11:00 Interview with supervisors

11:15-12:00 Intervjuer med institutionsledning och kvalitetssäkring / Interviews

with department management and quality assurance

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:00-14:00 Sakkunniggruppens eget arbete / Expert group's own work

14:00-14:30 Återföring till institutionsledning / Feedback to department management