



Programme evaluation of PhD educations in *human geography* and *human ecology* *Statement from external expert group*

1. ASSIGNMENT AND THE EXTERNAL EXPERT GROUP

The evaluation is based on Lund University's eleven criteria for quality enhancement, with support from the Faculty of Social Sciences' instructions¹. 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 report and input from doctoral students. On June 13, 2023, a site visit was conducted (see Appendix 1).

The external expert evaluation group consisted of:

- *Martin Gren*, professor of Human Geography, Linnaeus University (chair of the expert group)
- *Merritt Polk*, professor of Human Ecology, University of Gothenburg

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)

- *Ross Purves*, professor of Geographic Information Science, University of Zurich

2. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

We wish to thank *Henrik Gutzon Larsen*, the Director of PhD Studies, for the smooth and effective overall organization, and for his hospitality during site visit. We also extend our thanks to all the PhD students, supervisors, and staff that we had the privilege to meet at the department.

For convenience, we will refer to the two PhD educations (or “programmes”) in the abbreviated forms of “PhD-*HGEO*” (the PhD education in Human Geography) and “PhD-*HECO*” (the PhD education in Human Ecology). Since the programmes are housed in the same department, aspects of their internal institutional co-existence will also be addressed. We have tried to follow the structuring of the reasoning in department’s self-evaluation report, thereby also at times reproducing an awkwardness between sections (criteria). We end our statement with a summary of our group’s *view* and *recommendations* (see 4).

3. THE MAIN STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF THE PROGRAMMES, AND THE EXTERNAL EXPERT GROUP’S REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1a. General observations

When evaluating study results an obvious starting point is the *general syllabus* for a PhD education. Confusion arises for the PhD-*HGEO* because it refers to “third-cycle studies in *Human/Economic Geography* and *Geography*”

with a specialisation in Human Geography” (2020).² One may therefore wonder which “research field” or discipline the PhD students actually shall demonstrate their knowledge in?³

This has consequences for the assessment of study results on subject-specific courses, as they are supposed to support students in achieving the third-cycle degree criteria targets in their specific field of studies (i.e., Human Geography). One of the learning outcomes for the obligatory “thesis plan course” (SASP002) is that students shall be able to “situate their own thesis work in relation to relevant literature in the field of study”, which by the name of the course is “Human Geography *and Economic Geography*”.⁴ The obligatory general reading course (SASK001) “offers insights into different fields of study within Human Geography, aiming at a broad understanding of the discipline”, but its title suggests a course on “Human Geography *and Economic Geography*”.⁵ The optional specialization course

² It is clear from the department’s own website that the programme is a PhD education in Human geography (<https://www.keg.lu.se/en/research/phd-education/phd-human-geography>)

³ In the general syllabus for PhD-HGEO the degree criteria, which is the basis for operationalizing learning outcomes in a PhD programme, do not specify anything particular about the research studies subject. For example, in the first degree criterion under “Knowledge and understanding”, it is only generically stated that the student shall “demonstrate broad knowledge and systematic understanding of *the research field* as well as advanced *and* up-to-date specialised knowledge *in a limited area of this field...*” Although this general referencing of degree criteria is a rather common practice for third-cycle programmes in Human Geography (in the Swedish system), one also finds that subject specific references are inserted, or that subject specific aims are added. For example, “in human geography” instead of “in the field of research” (University of Gothenburg), or specific aims “for doctoral studies in human geography” (University of Karlstad).

⁴ *Human Geography and Economic Geography. Specialisation course – Thesis Plan* (SASP002).

⁵ At least judged by its Swedish title (“Kulturgeografi och ekonomisk geografi”).

(SASK002) “offers insights into a specialized field of study within Human *and Economic Geography*”.

A slightly different demarcation of the discipline (the field of study) is used in the *Specialization Course, Seminar Participation and Participation in Doctoral Activities specialisation course* (SASD001). As stated in the learning outcomes, students shall be able to “contribute to discussions of doctoral projects within *the broad discipline of social and economic geography*” (*our emphasis*). In fact, the only third-cycle course on Human Geography specifically to be found in the *HGEO*-programme is the obligatory general reading course (SASK001). Even though it aims to offer “a broad understanding of the discipline” (i.e., Human Geography), the course quickly turns the focus towards “different fields of study”, specified in the literature list as; “A. Development geography, B. Economic Geography, C. Cities, Environment, Landscape, and D. Geographic Information Systems”.

Study results are dependent upon qualified students. The PhD-*HGEO* recruits 1-3 doctoral students annually, with occasional recruitments for externally funded projects. The assessment criteria used in the selection process are adequate, also one that aligns with the learning environment (i.e., “possible contribution to the department and the department’s ability to support the proposed research”).⁶

In accordance with the general syllabus (PhD-*HGEO*), the applicant should have an educational background of

⁶ “Pertinence (and originality) of the proposed research in relation to human-geographical theory/methodology and debates/problems. Ability to write and structure an academic text. Ability to engage coherently and realistically with theory and methodology. Possible contribution to the department and the department’s ability to support the proposed research.”

“courses comprising at least 30 credits in the area of *human/economic geography*” [see our previous comments on the Human Geography subject/field], or, “has acquired equivalent expertise in another way”. We cannot easily detect how that “human geography equivalence” is measured and decided, but one of the questions used is; “How does your proposed research engage with human-geographical theory/methodology and debates/problems?”

A varied educational background leads to an educational tension in the PhD-*HGEO* programme. As the doctoral students put it:

Another discrepancy arises from the diversity of student backgrounds and experience in Human Geography. While the PhD program is designed to provide extensive training in the field, not all students have the same level of prior knowledge or experience. Some have completed a master's degree in Human Geography and are well-prepared for the required coursework, while others may need more introductory material on the various subdisciplines of the field.

The *doctoral thesis* is evidently a critically important measure in any assessment of a PhD programme. In Human Geography, 7 monograph theses and 21 compilation theses were successfully defended between 2013 and February 2023. Nothing indicates other than a high completion rate. An overall scanning suggests that they are of a quality that well fulfils the study result requirements for a thesis on a PhD programme in Human Geography. This assessment applies also for the doctoral theses in Human Ecology.

According to the Dept-*SER*, there has been an absence of formal quality assurance before the public defence. In practice, the final seminar, following two prior obligatory progress seminars, functions as a somewhat informal

quality assurance mechanism.⁷ For the PhD-*HGEO*, this is complimented by the appointment of a “green-light reader” among the department’s professors and docents. The PhD students are quite satisfied with this procedure, and they also “see opportunities to build on this foundation, especially relating to the Individual Study Plan (ISP) and supervision routines, thesis guidelines and PhD courses”. The department is working on ways to further improve the internal quality assurance process for the theses.

The *supervisors* at the department are very well qualified both in terms of formal rank and supervisor education and experience. No substantial conflict between student and supervisor has been reported during the time of the present study director’s appointment.

1b. Strengths

The main strengths of the PhD programmes in Human Ecology and Human Geography are strongly correlated with small size, which provides great possibilities to tailor both educations with respect to students’ individual needs and to monitor and secure their study results. The department has a “flat organization ideal”, which is often beneficial for educational flexibility.

That both programmes promote individual research trajectories and choices is a strength. The department values self-defined research projects, with open calls, and these can also help to ensure doctoral students’ independence. In the present academic audit culture, we commend that the department protects the monograph thesis option.

⁷ Something of a standard procedure in most social science research educations in Sweden.

Since 2022 there is a new application process in place, which means that the number of applicants for the PhD-*HGEO* have dropped from approximately 130-150 to 85. That is still a high number of applicants, which should guarantee a considerable pool of highly qualified candidates to recruit from (a key determining factor for achieving good study results). A strength is that the department shows a self-awareness of educational issues and areas in need of improvement (Dept-*SER* and interviews). Improvement actions have already been initiated.

1c. Challenges

Both programmes have internal quality and assessment procedures and systems in place. However, a flexible and somewhat informal way of organizing and conducting a PhD education does not necessarily always lead to transparency. Individual preferences among both students and supervisors may play a larger role for study results than they should. Small size is also related to difficulties to assess and ensure that actual study results correspond to learning outcomes, for example when courses with very few students become individually tailored.

The two programmes have degrees in two different subjects, but overlap in terms of everyday educational practice and sometimes also in disciplinary content. The department acknowledges (interviews) that “different requirements for the Human Geography and the Human Ecology educations are in some respects a challenge”, and that the “absence of formal quality assurance before the public defence is a challenge”, and that it “can be a source of concern for doctoral candidates” (the Dept-*SER*).

An overall pedagogical challenge is how the programmes can best be governed and coordinated under one educational institutional umbrella, with one study director for both, in ways that ensure that the actual study results correspond to learning outcomes and qualitative targets. One critical factor is the fact that the PhD-*HGEO* is much larger (recruiting 1-3 students annually). This introduces an uneven power-relation vis-à-vis the smaller PhD-*HECO*, which has difficulties in securing a regular intake of PhD students (the most recent student recruitment in Human Ecology took place in 2019).

1d. Reflections and recommendations - possibilities for development

Our impression is that both PhD-programmes educationally function relatively well and that PhD students' study results correspond to learning outcomes and fulfil the PhD degree criteria for Human Geography or Human Ecology. What follows are our suggestions for possible improvements that the department can, or at times is advised to, consider.

Our first recommendation is an overall revision and update of formal documents, i.e., programme and course syllabi, relevant guidelines, etc. The only research studies subject that is applicable for PhD-*HGEO*, in which a doctoral or licentiate degree can be obtained at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Lund University, is "Human Geography".⁸ There is no Doctor or Licentiate of Philosophy in "Human/Economic Geography" or in

⁸ *Regulations for third cycle education at the Faculty of Social Sciences*, STYR 2017/1434, p.4.

“Geography with a specialisation in Human Geography”.⁹

¹⁰

We have noted that the Human Geography doctoral thesis is set to 165 credits (courses are 75 credits), and in Human Ecology to 180 credits (courses are 60 credits), but we find no reason as to why (the formal minimum requirement for the doctoral thesis is 120 credits). As for Human Geography, one could here make the argument that the “thesis plan course” of 7.5 credits in (SASP002) borders to regular thesis work. On the other hand, the students in Human Geography perceive the course requirements of 75 ECTS “as quite extensive”. We believe that this “credits issue” is worth considering further, also because it has implications for the coordination of the two programmes.

There are advisory guidelines for compilation theses in place (although only in Swedish), but we are in agreement with the PhD students in Human Geography that guidelines also for monographs should be developed. As they argue, this could “help avoid confusion about the requirements for a monograph thesis and make it easier for new doctoral students to make an informed choice about the intended format of their

⁹ In the general syllabus of PhD-*HGEO* the section “2.1 Doctor of Philosophy” should be understood as “2.1 Doctor of Philosophy in *Human Geography*”. It follows that it seems to be inaccurate to state Human Geography is a subject area (research field) at the same level of disciplinary demarcation as “economic geography” and “development geography” (under “1. Subject description”). These are commonly referred to as sub-disciplines or areas within Human Geography. Consequently, it also appears to be incorrect to state that that “the objective of third-cycle studies in Human *and Economic geography* [...] is to provide students with specialised knowledge in human *and economic* geography” (p.1).

¹⁰ If the department would like to align the PhD degree in Human Geography with sub-disciplinary traditions one possible option is then to use “with specialization” (i.e., Degree in Human Geography: with specialization in Economic Geography, etc).

thesis". In addition, in social science there are now actually more possible theses formats, other than standard compilations and monographs, which could be considered. We generally recommend that advisory guidelines and course syllabi are considered in the context of the current state of affairs in both Human Geography and Human Ecology.

At the time of writing, the department is in the process of developing formal guidelines for the "green-light reader" and for the final seminar. However, these guidelines do not necessarily make the assessment criteria for the doctoral thesis transparent. We therefore recommend a concretization of the guidelines so that they more explicitly align with the degree criteria for the doctoral thesis (see Appendix 2). To be clear, we are not advocating an instrumental tool for ticking off ready-made criteria, the point is to make degree criteria applied for a thesis transparent.

When it comes to *courses* on the two programmes we see possibilities, and needs, for updates and revisions. We also recommend that course development includes an explicit operationalisation of learning outcomes into assessment/grading criteria, and that the doctoral students are invited to participate in that work. This could also contribute in resolving the present difficulty of course evaluations that the department has identified. In addition, work on courses should also consider the educational challenge that many students have a background in other subjects than Human Geography or Human Ecology. We recommend that course development considers contemporary research at the department, so that course decisions and design of specialization courses are further aligned with current internal research expertise, areas and groups.

For the PhD-*HGEO* programme we recommend a systematically designed and updated substantive general core course on Human Geography, and a similar core course in Human Ecology.¹¹ In interviews the PhD-*HECO* students have expressed that there is a too strong supervisor dependence when it comes to disciplinary knowledge, and it may vary between supervisors "how widely we should read". They also expressed a wish for more taught courses in Human Ecology, not only the reading courses that now dominate. The PhD students in Human Geography also raised concerns that have to do with what courses delivers in terms of discipline content and disciplinary identity. A core course in Human Geography is supported by the views expressed by the PhD students:¹²

While the PhD program is designed to provide extensive training in the field, not all students have the same level of prior knowledge or experience. Some have completed a master's degree in Human Geography and are well-prepared for the required coursework, while others may need more introductory material on the various subdisciplines of the field. The "general reading course" currently included in the syllabus, and which supposedly fulfils this function, does not in our opinion provide a solid introduction to Human Geography as a field for students who need it. While it reviews literature from different subfields, it

¹¹ As part of their programme education the students also take courses run by the Faculty of Social Science. We infer from interviews that students did not seem to be always happy with these courses, for example the course "Theory of Science" was "not at a sufficient PhD level".

¹² They also suggest the following alternative; "Instead of this course, and to address such issue, an introductory course in Human Geography could be recommended for those who need more training. This could be completed by taking a course at the master's level, or introduce in the required course portfolio an introductory course; and which will be offered systematically to ensure that all PhD students have a solid foundation in the field."

is not comprehensive or efficient enough for this purpose.

The PhD student community highlights that “the different requirements of the programmes with regard to course credits, routines around progress seminars, green light reader etc. cause an unnecessary institutional divide, and they “encourage decreasing these barriers”. The Human Ecology students expressed (in interviews) a wish for “better coordination between the two programs”, even a joint administration with the same type of guidelines and formal support structures. As an example, “the Human Geography students receive course credits for thesis planning, which is not possible for the Human Ecology students”.

We recommend an investigation into coordination options that may include a revision of the institutional, educational and disciplinary barriers between the two programmes, and the possibilities for a further coordination in light of their differences. On the other hand, there are also arguments for clarifying and even solidifying the existing disciplinary and educational boundary between the two programmes. The PhD students in Human Ecology regard (interviews) their subject to be “a unique transdisciplinary field”, which is “not the same as Human Geography”. As we understand it, there is some real concern among them that Human Ecology might lose its disciplinary uniqueness. It might also be possible to detect a general internal division between students that have been “in house”, with a master’s from the department, and those who have an education and degree from elsewhere. On the other hand, focusing on the core and identity of a discipline in a programme is not necessarily always a good thing. As

one external student said; “I chose Lund University because it is so flexible”.

2. That the programmes focus on doctoral students’ learning

2a. General observations

As identified in the Dep-SER, course evaluations are a general concern. We have previously noted the absence of assessment/grading criteria for courses in the material provided. Assessment/grading criteria articulate more in detail what the student is actually expected to learn, and in that sense they provide a focus on students’ learning. In the material provided, and in interviews, we cannot detect any explicit pedagogical/didactic strategy in the programmes for how a focus on student’s learning is to be handled.

A central component in, and critical factor for, student’s learning is *supervision*. The department provides each doctoral student a total of 72 hours of compensated supervision per year. How these hours are divided between supervisors differs, but a standard split is 48 hours for the main supervisor and 24 hours for the co-supervisor: Per semester it means 36 hours, which translates to 1.8 hours per week of supervision (by comparison, Gothenburg University allocates 40 hours per semester, 80/year).

In educational practice, it by and large falls on the supervisors to monitor and give feedback on students’ learning and their study results, and assess whether or not a PhD student achieves the learning outcomes and meet other targets, including qualitative ones. The formal place for documentation is the legally binding *Individual Study Plan* (ISP). However, the material provided is

limited to only 3 ISP's for admitted PhD students in Human Geography.

2b. Strengths

The department values self-defined research projects as an admission criterion, which also paves a way for a focus on students' individual learning. Human geography has regular recruitments.

2c. Challenges

Both programmes recruit students with varied educational backgrounds, which potentially both enables and hinders a focus on students' learning. The ISP is central for monitoring students' learning, but it is not always actively used in educational practice, and variations between supervisors exist. How to make further use of the ISP as a pedagogical tool that is beneficial for students' learning, and without adding a counterproductive administrative burden, is a challenge worth addressing.

2d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

Supervision is critically important for student's learning in general, and particularly so for their individual research. Most doctoral students are likely to rank the importance of supervision as very high when evaluating their own PhD programme. However, we have found it somewhat difficult to assess and evaluate the role of supervision for doctoral students' learning on the basis of the material provided.

For both supervision and student's learning, the ISP becomes an important tool. The ISP comes in an electronic ready-made format in which supervisor and doctoral student report on a prescribed regular basis. Even though "the set-up is not ideal", it is believed that

the “ISP procedure works reasonably well”, especially for “overarching planning” (Dept-*SER*). It is less clear when it comes to a more precise monitoring of actual study results, one claimed reason being that “the students do not want it [the ISP] to be too detailed, risking to fail if they do not fulfil the study goals” (interviews). The department recognizes that the ISP oftentimes is not very actively used in practice, but emphasizes that feedback on actual study results also take place (as it should) more informally outside of the strict ISP procedure.

There also exists a variation between supervisors in how the ISP is actually used. We note that the students in Human Geography “experience that there is a discrepancy between how different supervisors work with the Individual Study Plan, and that in general there is still a lack of knowledge of the legal and practical function (e.g., related to extensions) of the ISP”. The students see a “need for streamlining between supervisors with regard to how the ISP is used”, and “clarifications and knowledge development among HR department, supervisors and PhD students”. To note is that students’ experiences refer to variations in terms of content and frequency of supervision and supervisor involvement (for example, in writing proposals, responding to thematic calls, etc).

We recommend that the department investigates how the ISP can be more actively used in ways that more clearly focus on students’ learning, with a focus on monitoring, assessing and providing pedagogical feedback on their learning, rather than ticking off the box of deliverables (course credits, papers, conferences, etc). Some kind of a more pedagogically informed “ISP strategy” can also reduce discrepancies between supervisors, and be communicated to students so as to decrease their

experience of even “large variations between supervisors” (interviews). A “mainstreaming of ISP use” has to be developed very cautiously so it does *not* become another administrative burden or a mere instrumental solution that imposes unnecessary formal restrictions. Individual variety among both students’ learning and supervisors’ feedback on their learning need to be respected and protected.

The department has a “Supervisor Committee”, which has been expanded and now includes “all faculty members”. The forum meets once a month, and has an “informal nature”. If the department wants this committee to be a forum for assessing and developing supervision in relation to students’ learning, actual study results, and secure that these correspond to learning outcomes and qualitative targets of the PhD programmes, then perhaps the Supervisor Committee can be assigned a more explicit role in a way that further ensures that these purposes are met?

Not only regarding the ISP above, we also recommend considering the possibilities for more formalized structures for the programs overall, including milestones and guidelines so that the students received comparable quality in their education including advising.

3. That the programmes are based on a scientific foundation and proven experience

3a. General observations

The Department of Human Geography provides a strong scientific basis for the PhD programmes, including a track record of proven research education experience, documented by research evaluations and publication record. The current academic staff in Human geography

consists of 5 assistant professors, 9 associate professors and 3 professors. The department is also currently in the process of hiring 3-6 professors in Human Geography. When it comes to the Human Ecology division, the scientific foundation, proven experience and research environment is smaller in terms of size (academic staff).

3b. Strengths

The scientific foundation and proven research track record, together with a long and considerable research education experience, means that there is a strong research environment at the department that provides a solid basis for both PhD programmes. This applies especially for the PhD-*HGEO* due to its larger size. That students apply on open call with self-defined doctoral research projects have the potential to push existing research frontiers.

3c. Challenges

Although there is clearly a strong research environment at the department, existing research traditions and fields may also “carry a potential of reproducing old structures” (Dept-*SER*). One challenge for the department then becomes to consider how existing research areas, traditions and groups, can be updated and revised, in ways that further strengthen the research education for both PhD programmes.

3d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

We here use the PhD-*HGEO* as the prime example, but, in principle, our comments potentially apply also to the PhD-*HECO*. In the general syllabus for PhD-*HGEO* it is stated that *research* at the Department of Human Geography “is focused into three subject areas: *human geography* (especially urban and landscape geography),

economic geography and *development geography*".

Actually, this ought to mean that present research in Human Geography at the department is focused on four sub-disciplinary fields: (1) *urban geography*, (2) *landscape geography*, (3) *economic geography* and (4) *development geography*. Most PhD theses in Human Geography published by the Department 2013-2023 can be categorized as belonging to one, or several, of these four sub-disciplinary areas.

It follows that the PhD-*HGEO* programme would benefit from third-cycle courses in these sub-disciplinary research areas. For example, the specialization course (SASK002) could then be revised so that it specifically offers specialization options accordingly. A revision at the level of courses could then further strengthen that the PhD-*HGEO* programme is "based on a scientific foundation and proven experience", and create additional synergy between the research education and the current research environment. However, it is also possible to consider other research fields (or sub-disciplinary areas) for the PhD-*HGEO* programme. For example, from the department's own website, we learn that potential candidates could in fact also be *social geography*, *cultural geography* and *GIS*.¹³

A concern is PhD students' claim that the research groups "only exist on paper" and "do not function in practice as formal internal research units". When there is a seminar "everyone is invited", but then there is a "lack of presence of senior staff", suggesting that they are

¹³ "[R]esearch is broad in scope, but rests on longstanding traditions within economic, social and cultural geography, with development geography developing into an area of specialization in recent years", and "our expertise in GIS and remote sensing is increasingly integrated in the above research areas" (<https://www.keg.lu.se/en/research>).

“engaged elsewhere” (interviews). According to the Human Ecology students, there are “no defined research subjects in Human Ecology” and “no communal conversation”. They also express a wish and need for more “scholarly research conversation”, but that an inhibiting factor is that the Human Ecology division “lacks research leadership”. If that is the case, we strongly recommend that this is addressed and that appropriate action follows.

More generally, the PhD students experience that they take on a great deal of responsibility, and they have expressed that they want more programme responsibility in return. We note that there is ongoing work at the department that aims to improve the organization of departmental higher seminars and the scheduling of a research seminar program. We recommend that this work continues, in order to further strengthen the research basis, and hence the learning environment, for both PhD programmes.

We recommend a review, and potential update, of research areas and groups in light of how they further can strengthen the scientific foundation and proven research experience as basis for both PhD programmes. Since the students apply by submitting self-defined doctoral research projects, it becomes a challenge to fit their individual projects and needs with the department’s research areas and research groups. We recommend that the pros and cons with thematic calls are investigated, and also funding strategies for increasing the number of externally funded research projects, particularly for the PhD-*HECO*.

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

4a. General observations

The supervisors at the department are generally research active, and teaching staff has appropriate subject-expertise in both Human Geography and Human Ecology. Teaching capacity is generally sufficient, but supervisor capacity is currently strained in the PhD-*HGEO* programme. An uneven workload between supervisors can also be detected. Given this, the department is not admitting as many PhD students as it could until new staff is in place.

All main supervisors are located at the department, which facilitates doctoral students' access to (at least) their main supervisor, and ensures their institutional anchoring. Six external co-supervisors are currently involved in the Human Geography research education, and two in Human Ecology. This is a strategy to secure PhD student's access to competences in certain areas, and it counterbalances the present gender imbalance at the department.

Supervisors at the department have taken the Lund University's course in doctoral supervision or have equivalent qualifications. The Supervisors Collegium is "an important setting" for collegial mentoring in house (Dept-*SER*), and it "provides particularly the younger academic staff [with] opportunities to develop supervision experience". However, we have little detailed information on the role and function of the collegium when it comes to supervision and supervision mentoring.

The PhD students identify a “discrepancy between different doctoral students and their interaction with their supervisors”, which creates an ambiguity around what is expected in the supervisor-student relationship. They also perceive that “a great deal of responsibility is being put on the doctoral student from the first day and a reliance on a working student-supervisor relationship”. This “relates back to the large discrepancy between supervisors on their level of involvement, which is evident in the noticeable variation in the frequency and quality of supervision meetings between the respective supervisors”.

4b. Strengths

A strength of the research educations is that main supervisors and most co-supervisors at the department are well qualified, and that they typically are experienced researchers within their field of expertise. The teachers involved in the programmes have appropriate and relevant subject teaching expertise in Human Geography or Human Ecology. They are well qualified to teach on third-cycle courses on one of the PhD programmes, and many are very likely to be qualified to teach on both.

4c. Challenges

The main challenge appears to be primarily related to the fact that supervision capacity, and to some extent also teaching capacity, is strained at the department. If more PhD students were to be enrolled, then there is a risk that it would exceed what “the size and competences of the academic staff can sustain” (Dept-SER). A general challenge, which applies to all PhD educations, is about how one can further improve the form, content, organization, and quality of supervision.

4d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

The doctoral students in Human Geography suggest that improving supervision can be done by “setting up clearer guidelines of what is to be expected in the student-supervisor relationship, such as how often it is recommended to meet or essential themes to discuss in supervision”. Doing so “would help clarify expectations”, and they also “see a need for knowledge development with regard to research ethics and the pedagogical approach for doctoral supervision”.

We recommend some work in response, which implies articulating a more consistent and transparent pedagogically informed “supervision strategy” for the PhD programmes. One possibility is that the Supervisor Collegium takes an active role in that. Ideally, this can reduce unnecessary discrepancies between supervisors, and decrease a common tendency among PhD students to evaluate supervision all too much on the basis of personal experiences. We have attached a contract between supervisor(s) and doctoral student as just an example of what such work may contain (Appendix 4). To be clear, we certainly do *not* mean that that supervision is to be boxed in a “one size fits all”. On the contrary, clarifying a “supervision strategy”, and communicating that to students, must also acknowledge and respect individual variety among both supervisors and PhD students (see also our previous comments on the ISP in 2).

The department is presently operating at strained capacity and an expansion of the PhD programmes in the short-term is not feasible. The PhD educators are basically “alright” with that, but “one concern is that Human Ecology is small, and an increase would be good” (interviews). We understand that “growth” is not a

viable strategy during the present strained capacity, but we nevertheless recommend that the department further consider the possibilities for expanding the programmes, particularly by external funding as this is the main expansion route nowadays. Regardless of funding, there is a need to secure a sustainable strategy for recruiting students to the PhD-*HECO*.

5. That the programmes are to be relevant for the doctoral students and meet the needs of society

5a. General observations

The Dept-*SER* presents the relevance of the PhD programmes primarily in terms of research. The PhD students “pursue individually defined research projects, and /.../ have significant scope for selecting courses in relation to their research needs and interests”. As for the relevance of research in relation to society’s needs, the department value that “most of its doctoral students pursue research that first and foremost serve society’s need for basic research and well-trained researchers”.

Another area is teaching opportunities, and at the department students can teach (or perform other departmental duties) up to 20% of their worktime. Dept-*SER* mentions that “pedagogical training is central for the educations’ relevance”, but does not mention if there is a more systematic teaching strategy within the programmes for this (other than the doctoral students can take a course on higher education pedagogics). We note that the PhD students have expressed that “the pedagogical part (teaching and pedagogical training)” is a “general problem of the programmes”.

Of relevance for the doctoral students are also the possibilities to collaborate with senior scholars at the department, also in the context of career development.

However, according to the PhD students in Human Geography, these “are often limited to the supervisor/s and the networks that they have. This implies that opportunities for career development varies depending on the supervisor’s access to networks, and, in some cases, external funding”. In conclusion, the doctoral students “would appreciate a more collective responsibility among senior staff to help PhD students with career development”.

5b. Strengths

It is a strength of both PhD programmes that there is a significant scope for individual tailoring of research and courses. It is also a strength of both research educations that there are teaching opportunities, and thereby the possibility to gain practical pedagogical experience that contributes to qualifying students for a post-doctoral career as university teachers.

5c. Challenges

For the programmes it becomes a challenge to ensure that a wide range of educational individual possibilities to tailor research and courses do not become too individualized, and that too much of the responsibility for individual educational relevance falls on the doctoral student. In addition, what is relevant to students may not necessarily be as relevant in the perspective of an education that shall meet the requirements of a PhD in Human Ecology or Human Geography, nor in the perspective of meeting “the needs of society”.

The opportunities for teaching and pedagogical training could potentially introduce a challenge in combining the demands of a research education with post-doctoral university teacher requirements. It also becomes a challenge to provide students on the programmes with relatively equal teaching possibilities.

5d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

The PhD students (on both programmes) seem to take considerable responsibility for organizing their own seminars, which may include seminars with other than research focus. We recommend that they receive further support, and commend that initiatives from the department are underway also for other than research seminars like on career development.

There is an “open policy to teaching”, but opportunities in practice may vary over time and term and also have to be matched with student’s individual availability and qualifications. We recommend a review of the teaching policy on both programmes in order to ensure that students have a relatively equal access to teaching possibilities.

The Dept-*SER* emphasizes that “virtually all the department’s doctoral research projects are highly relevant to the society’s needs for critical as well as problem-solving knowledge on acute social and social-environmental challenges”. However, there is no further discussion on society’s needs, or visions about how the department would like to address these in the PhD programmes, other than by established research and education approaches.

We would therefore like to take the opportunity to expand on what the department refers to as “problem-solving knowledge on acute social and social-environmental challenges” in relation to “the needs of society”. In the present, as well as in the foreseeable future, “the needs of society” cannot be addressed apart from “climate change”, or, to use a more contemporary vocabulary, the climate and ecological emergency/breakdown. All this, arguably, requires serious and proactive attention today

when addressing “the needs of society” in a research education.

For both PhD programmes, we therefore propose a re-consideration of what knowledges and skills that are to be relevant both for doctoral students and for society’s needs in that perspective. Moreover, both Human Ecology and Human Geography, as disciplines and research fields, are undoubtedly well equipped for raising up to this challenge, and a variety of highly qualified “climate-ecological relevant research” is indeed already conducted at the department. We recommend a review of the PhD programmes in order to investigate how the research education in the two disciplines can respond to this historically unprecedented planetary situation.

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

6a. General observations

According to the Dept-*SER*, doctoral students have decisive influence on the planning, execution and follow-up of their education. For students this influence is established by the self-defined research project that is part of the recruitment process, and followed up by their central role in the preparation of a research plan for the first-year seminar.

As previously noted, doctoral students influence is further strengthened by the relatively wide possibilities for selecting courses in the programmes. Students also have a strong influence on the planning, execution and follow-up of their own education through the ISP. Our overall impression is that both programmes provide the students with considerable possibilities to exert their

influence, and also that students are taking responsibility in return.

6b. Strengths

The possibilities for doctoral students to have a considerable amount of influence on their own individual education is a strength of the research education in both PhD programmes. That the students appear to take a great deals of responsibility is a strength. The relatively small size of the PhD programmes is a likely strength factor, as it tends to reduce the distance in decision-making and makes it less likely that individual students disappear into an anonymous PhD collective.

6c. Challenges

Possibilities and opportunities for having a strong influence also come with a great deal of individual and collective responsibility that may impinge negatively on other tasks and demands, and thus introducing, or contributing to, unnecessary burdens or stress. How to strike a balance between student and programme responsibility thus becomes a challenge, which is also acknowledged by the department.

6d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

Doctoral students have an influence on planning, implementation and follow up of the programmes that satisfies formal requirements. There are also informal possibilities for student involvement, perhaps reflecting the department's tradition of having a form of "bottom up approach" to leadership. Students have a representative on the Department board, but we note their opinion that "most decisions are taken by the head of department". An issue of internal coordination has also been raised by

the Human Ecology students, which is that the director of studies (for both programmes) should take “more responsibility for the Human Ecology programme”.

That “students take a lot of responsibility” has been expressed and confirmed by supervisors and the director of study. However, we also note that the doctoral students believe that their own level of taking responsibility for their PhD education is not sufficiently matched by the PhD programmes (i.e., ISP, organizing seminars and research groups). We suspect that experienced uncertainties is partly due to informal communication, as one student succinctly suggested; “formalize some of the informal”.¹⁴In addition, that students express concern about “stress and anxiety” deserves to be taken seriously.

As we understand it, there is no board for any of the PhD programmes where students can exert direct influence over their education. We recommend that such a board, or advising group where the students can be involved, is considered, with student representation from both research educations. Among its tasks could be to follow up both research educations, participate in internal systematic quality control, and be involved in short- and long-term planning of the programmes that now seems to be somewhat lacking. If there is not already an internal website for the PhD programmes, where relevant

¹⁴ The PhD community experiences “a general lack of structured information and routines regarding the set steps of the doctoral programme, such as routines leading up to the defence, requirements for the progress seminar related texts, etc. This creates unnecessary insecurities, and leads to the PhD students in practice relying on informal information from their supervisor(s) – which may differ between the respective supervisors. We therefore see a need for establishing routines and communicating these to all supervisors.”

information, such as documents, research seminars, upcoming events, and schedules for term/year can be posted, then we recommend that such a site is considered.

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

7a. General observations

It seems to us that the doctoral students are sufficiently provided with the infrastructure they need, and have an educational right to, at the department. There is a functioning support system, it is more a matter of how well that (hard to define) system functions in practice.

To note is that the students are employees so they have all of the entitlements that all governmental staff have to a good social, organizational and physical work environment. It is important that the department have clear support structures and goals for supporting their work environment which should also include PhD students. This should include strategies to handle stress, work conflicts, problems with supervisors etc. These should be clearly outlined in the PhD guidelines, so that the students both know their rights and where to go when they need support. All supervisors also need to be aware of these work environment related responsibilities of the department and the support structures that exist in terms of Company health services, union representation, and conflict management.

7b. Strengths

As the PhD community concludes; “the physical work environment is generally satisfactory”, which means that at that level there is a “well-functioning support system”. That there is a relatively open and active research environment at the department, which, at least in principle, is “available to all”, suggests a study and learning environment that is a strength of the research educations.

7c. Challenges

One present challenge arises from a recent proposed revision of ethical research rules and guidelines in Sweden, which puts a demand on the department to provide storage for data. At present, there is an “absence of a system for secure storage research data at the department”, but we assume that this will be resolved at faculty level.

PhD students’ study and learning environment can also be assessed from the point of view of health. A general concern is that the Faculty of Social Science stands out negatively in that regard (interviews), and how to address health issues among students, such as stress and anxiety, also at the departmental level is a challenge. It is also a challenge that research activities in the department, to a considerable extent (or too much) depends on the initiatives of individuals, PhD students included, which may negatively affect well-being (Dept-SER and interviews).

7d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

Health issues among the PhD students deserve attention, but in interviews we have identified little that really stands out from the ordinary (stress and anxiety)

that comes with life as a PhD student. This does not mean that students' health and well-being at the department can or should be neglected. As we see it, there are some reasons for research educators at the department to consider how existing support systems can be improved for the benefit of students' health and well-being. We also believe that support for supervisors should generally be taken into account because their health and well-being are critically important for a "healthy" PhD programme. The Supervisor Collegium has an important supportive role to play, and it is likely a part of its present function.

On a positive note, the students are themselves contributing to departmental social well-being, and to the study and learning environment by organizing seminars and by trying to create a "space for informal discussions with more senior staff and support collegiality and professional development". However, they believe that these student-led initiatives can be a negative burden to carry, and "could be complemented with more engagement at the department level, for example by facilitating more opportunities for exchange between PhD students and staff based on similar research interests".

The PhD students have access to a range of highly qualified research competences at the department, but they also express that they "could benefit from more structured or institutionalized research environments". While recognizing the dangers in imposing rigid structures, they believe "that a more defined research community (or communities) could provide better starting points for scientific collaboration and learning". How to align a research education with a local research environment is always a challenge, and we have no recommendation other than this is a factor worth considering when moving forward.

In the perspective of a “well-functioning support system” and work environment, we recommend development work aimed at further decreasing the potential for student ill-health tied to real or experienced burden of responsibility. It seems to us that this could include improving programme-led communication strategies, and increasing the programme responsibility for students’ research community or communities. This would involve clarifying cross overs between research areas in the department and the two PhD educations.

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

8a. General observations

The Dept-*SER* recognizes, and rightly so, problems in following up research educations that are relatively small in size (the admission rate for both programmes is approximately 1-3 students per year). In general follow ups are conducted “through continues contacts with the doctoral students as a community and individually”, which also “includes annual one-to-one staff talks with doctoral students /.../ conducted by the director of studies (or, for doctoral students supervised by the director of studies, the head of department)” (Dept-*SER*).

As for the department’s internal third-cycle courses (in Human Ecology or Human Geography), the students take these “when it fits their research and plans for other courses”. As a practical educational solution, these are often given as individual reading courses, which also “makes it difficult to evaluate each course in a traditional sense, and impossible to do so anonymously” (Dept-*SER*). The only reference to a course evaluation, in the

material provided, is for the general reading course in Human Geography (SASK001) that a group of doctoral students pursued in the spring of 2022. The course was “evaluated through a meeting between the doctoral students and the director of studies”, and “has informed the instructions for the group intending to pursue the course in spring 2023”.

8b. Strengths

We agree with the Dept-*SER* that it is “a strength that the [small] size of the doctoral community, and the doctoral students’ daily work alongside the academic staff, facilitates ongoing follow-up on doctoral courses within the department and the doctoral educations in general”.

8c. Challenges

We also agree with the Dept-*SER* that it is indeed “a challenge that the department does not have procedures for systematic evaluation and development of doctoral courses within the department and the educations in general”. Another challenge is how to formulate some kind of plan, or vision, for the future development of the PhD programmes.

8d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

The self-identified lack of formal “procedures for systematic evaluation and development” (Dept-*SER*) is related to the small size of the programmes (and especially so for the PhD-*HECO*). It perhaps also bears traces of an internal tradition of informal governance at the department that seems to privilege some kind of

“bottom-up leadership”.¹⁵ Nevertheless, some of the “informalities” could benefit from a bit of formalization in order to secure a more transparent and systematic “continuous follow up and development of the programmes”.

We recommend some work in that direction, and we also believe that this resonates well with what the PhD students has expressed and recommended. To be clear, we do *not* take formalization to be a magic solution for securing “a continuous follow up and development of the programmes”. Not least small programmes have to, and should, depend on a mixture of formal and informal follow ups, but at times a clarification of the line in-between formal-informal is beneficial.

One important factor in the follow up and the development of a PhD programme is whether there is a plan or vision that articulates some kind of targets for what one wants or wishes to achieve in the near- or long-term future. We recommend work on development plans for both programmes, including their internal coordination, and differentiation, at the department.¹⁶ This also raises a host of bigger questions such as, budgeting, strategies for funding, the co-ordination and leadership of two different programmes housed in the same department with one director of study, and where the future development of the smaller PhD-*HECO* demands special attention.

¹⁵ From interviews we have learned that the Dept-*SER*, which in a sense is all about the follow up and development of the programmes, has mainly been written by the director of study. It was then circulated, but little review comments and input was received from the supervisors.

¹⁶ We can here criticise the Lund university’s common criteria for not having a criterion on “visions or plans”.

We also recommend that student involvement is secured, and that caution is taken so that programme development planning does *not* introduce additional administrative burden. After all, the PhD programmes, especially at this size, *are* the specific students that happens to be enrolled during a limited period time. Finally, several of our reflections and recommendations under previous criteria (1-7) are relevant also for the assessment under this criterion.

9. That internationalisation and an international perspective is promoted in the programmes

9a. General observations

The programmes are housed in a department where there is plenty of international academic staff, and where the working language is English. This serves as a guarantee for a high level of internationalisation, even though it “is not formally promoted in the research educations” (Dept-*SER*). During education, most doctoral students pursue courses and participate in conferences outside of Sweden, and many conduct research that involves extensive international fieldwork and networking.

9b. Strengths

In agreement with the Dept-*SER*, we conclude that the international composition and research orientations of the academic staff and doctoral students is a strength of both research educations.

9c. Challenges

Internationalisation also comes with challenges. Even if doctoral students are “international”, it is often a

challenge to incorporate them (in the best of ways) into a Swedish academic culture and research education.

Practical issues may become a challenge, for example when doctoral students are recruited from other countries (particularly outside of the European Union), which may lead to problems with visa issuance. And then there is the challenge in counterbalancing a potential hegemony of English, so that an “international perspective” does not become educationally reduced to Anglophone academic discourse.

9d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

Both the PhD-*HECO* and the PhD-*HGEO* are doing well in terms of promoting internationalisation and an international perspective, when measured by the standard yardstick of internationalisation at Swedish universities. One could of course scrutinize in more detail, and then probably find out that international student representation and recruitment are far from evenly distributed. This could, for example, potentially lead to a consideration of present and future recruitment strategy and programme marketing.

In Swedish higher education it is not uncommon that “international perspective” translates to Anglophone academic discourse. We do not know to what extent other perspectives are promoted in the programmes, “indigenous perspectives” is an obvious top candidate, or if doctoral students are encouraged to write and publish, including their doctoral thesis, in other languages than English.¹⁷ We have no specific recommendation, other

¹⁷ According to Lund University’s regulations that is possible (which may indicate that the general programme syllabuses need to be revised accordingly).

than emphasising the importance in continuing to critically reflecting on what more specifically constitutes an “international perspective” in the two research educations.

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

10a. General observations

The department has not formalised gender equality and equal opportunity perspectives in the research educations. In educational practice things may be different, and “such perspectives are central to many individual doctoral research projects and are often pursued through course work” (Dept-*SER*).

The currently 17 active doctoral students are reasonably diverse”, and “12 are women and 5 are men” (Dept-*SER*). The opposite gender imbalance is notable among staff at the department, and it is partly addressed by appointing external (female) co-supervisors. Although the gender equality is improving, 24 of 35 supervisor roles are nevertheless still filled by men and only 11 by women. It is recognized in the Dept-*SER* that the gender imbalance in supervision roles is a real challenge, but the department expects this imbalance to be reduced over time (on the condition that the gender balance of the academic staff continues to improve).

10b. Strengths

It is a strength that department has recognized the importance of gender issues for the PhD programmes, including identifying a present gender imbalance among

supervisors, and that is also has taken proactive measures.

10c. Challenges

A challenge for the department is to make gender equality and equal opportunity perspectives more visible in the research educations. Another challenge is how to address the uneven gender distribution among doctoral students, and the gender imbalance in supervision roles.

10d. Reflections and recommendations – development opportunities

On the basis of the written material provided it is not possible to assess how “equal opportunities perspectives are integrated in the programmes”, and a recommendation could therefore be to articulate that more explicit. From interviews there are no indications that that doctoral students are being disadvantaged or have unequal opportunities for their educations.

In the Dept-*SER* it is claimed that the observed “gender imbalance among the students is not a current challenge”. However, one could nevertheless ask why this unequal distribution of women and men among the students is not considered a challenge for “gender equality” at the programme educational level? The department has not applied policies for gender equality and equal opportunity in the enrolment of doctoral students, and we believe that this might be something worth considering.

This criterion, and rightly so, refers to “gender equality”. However, one could question why the accounts on “gender” in the Dept-*SER* are only reduced to the categories of *women* and *men*? In social science, year 2023, there are other ways of categorizing gender. This should be evident, not least in Human Geography since Gillian Rose’s landmark book; “Feminism and

Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge” (1993), which opened the door to subjectivities.

Any research education is inevitably and inherently tied to the production of social subjectivities, and not without power implications. From this follows that education on a PhD programme is likely to be ordered and conducted in ways that privileges some subjectivities over others (traditionally conceptualized as feminine and masculine, but now including many others). One point here is that the department’s well-intended ambition to take action against an unequal distribution of men and women among staff, but not among doctoral students, does not explicitly address the production of social subjectivities, nor does it automatically solve that issue unless gender equality is reduced to a matter of women and men.

There is a “Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities Committee” at the department, which is in a process of reconstitution, and it will have representation from the doctoral students. This presumably means that the previous committee’s action plan of 2016 will soon be updated. We recommend that the new action plan is used as to strengthen the integration of gender equality and other equal opportunities perspectives also in the PhD programmes.

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

11a. General observations

According to the Dept-SER, sustainable development is “not promoted specifically in the educations”. However, it is simultaneously claimed that it “is a strength of the research educations”, and that “in one version or

another, sustainability is a central concern in virtually all doctoral research projects". It is further claimed that sustainable development, with explicit reference to its three dimensions (ecological, social and economic), is a "core feature of both Human Geography and Human Ecology".

11b. Strengths

One could question why sustainable development is not specifically, or more explicitly, promoted in the programmes, but we nevertheless subscribe to the claim that "subject-relevant perspectives on sustainable development" constitute a strength in both PhD programmes. It is also a strength that many of the doctoral students' research projects, one way or the other, are indeed engaging with sustainability issues, as evidenced in the department's PhD theses in both disciplines.

11c. Challenges

The first challenge is how to more explicitly promote subject-relevant perspectives on sustainable development in the programmes. The second challenge is about placing sustainable development in relation to the planetary climate and ecological emergency/breakdown, which challenges both the contemporary sustainable development research educational agenda, and subject-relevant perspectives grounded in, or aligned with, that agenda. The overall educational challenge then becomes how to re-design research education in Human Geography and Human Ecology that provides doctoral students with subject-relevant knowledges and skills that adequately respond to this historically unprecedented planetary situation.

**11d. Reflections and recommendations –
development opportunities**

We recommend that the department investigates ways for how this unprecedented urgent planetary situation, which poses “an existential threat to humanity” in the vocabulary often used by the UN secretary general, can be further developed educationally in the two PhD programmes. This requires an examination also of relevant subject-specific knowledges. There are also many potential synergies between Human Geography and Human Ecology that provide a solid ground for also moving beyond the traditional sustainable development agenda.

Using Human Geography as an example, it is possible to argue that most subject-specific perspectives on sustainable development (evident in many of the department’s PhD theses) have thus far operated on the almost taken-for-granted assumption that the Earth is a relatively stable passive backdrop. However, the times have changed, and landscapes, places, spaces, regions, territories, are now over-layered by another planetary Earth that is mutating climatically and ecologically in real time. The Earth is no longer a passive unchanging background for Society and Nature, nor for sustainable development.

How to address and incorporate this new “Earth of the Anthropocene” in the curriculum and syllabi thus becomes an urgent challenge for the PhD-*HGEO*, and similarly so for the PhD-*HECO*. It also goes beyond subject-specific educational concerns.¹⁸ In their “Climate

¹⁸ “Humanity is well into the Anthropocene, the proposed new geological epoch where human pressures have put the Earth system on a trajectory moving rapidly away from the stable Holocene state of the past 12,000 years, which is the only state of the Earth system we have evidence

Emergency Statement” of 2021, the American Association of Geographers (AAG) warned the global community “that human and other species habitation of Planet Earth is in extreme danger of collapse due to the impacts of anthropogenic climate change”.¹⁹

Acknowledging that the responses to the climate emergency so far have been “tentative at best”, AAG stated that “[a]t worst there is no way to imagine what the world will look like by mid-century”.

Lund University has joined the Climate Framework for universities and higher educations in Sweden, and thereby committed to by 2030 having implemented measures to be in line with the 1.5 degree target of the Paris Agreement. Calls for “climate action” thus challenges also what doctoral students shall learn and acquire through their research education, as set by learning outcomes in the realms of knowledge and understanding, competence and skills, judgement and approach. In order to provoke reflection, and by alluding to one scholar at the department, even learning “how to blow up a pipeline” might now be considered on a research education in both Human Ecology and Human Geography.

of being able to support the world as we know it. These rapid changes to the Earth system undermine critical life-support systems, with significant societal impacts already felt, and they could lead to triggering tipping points that irreversibly destabilize the Earth system” (Rockström et al: Safe and just Earth system boundaries, *Nature*, May 2023).

¹⁹ American Association of Geographers (2021): *AAG Climate Emergency Statement*.

4. SUMMARISED VIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our conclusion is that both PhD-programmes educationally function relatively well, and that PhD students' study results correspond to learning outcomes and the PhD degree criteria for Human Geography or Human Ecology. The Department is recruiting well qualified and motivated PhD students, and the programmes are successfully leading to **completed PhD educations**. There are, of course, always potential development opportunities for a research education. Our recommendations focus on:

- 1) Improving the use of existing documents and processes by updating them to be more specific to the programme, and using existing processes more effectively to give feedback and monitor progress.
- 2) Defining more discipline specific content to the PhD programmes, and giving both sets of PhD students a shared core set of knowledge and learning objectives.
- 3) Extending and enabling existing self-organised offerings and Departmental seminars to put these on a more solid footing.
- 4) Reviewing and reflecting on the mid and long-term strategies of the programmes in terms of expertise, growth and direction.
- 5) Developing a shared vision that pays attention to important societal issues.

We strongly recommend an overall revision and update of formal documents, i.e., programme and course syllabi, relevant guidelines, etc. Many documents are too generic, and more specific content would help

address uncertainties and remove dependencies on implicit knowledge.

We also strongly recommend a **systematically designed and updated substantive subject-specific core course in both Human Geography and Human Ecology**, and where a variety of students' educational backgrounds need to be considered.

At the level of individual courses, we recommend a more **explicit articulation of assessment/grading criteria**, which enhance the focus on students' learning and could contribute in solving a self-identified problem with course evaluations.

In response to student's expressed concerns, we recommend articulating a more consistent and transparent pedagogically informed supervision strategy (including the usage of the ISP). Currently this appears to be primarily a form filling exercise, and using the ISP more effectively (e.g. by explicitly stating in writing that students are on track) would be beneficial. The Supervisor Collegium could also take a more active role in discussing and agreeing on norms for supervision. Ideally, this can reduce unnecessary discrepancies between supervisors, and decrease a common tendency among PhD students to evaluate supervision all too much on the basis of personal experiences or hearsay. Most importantly, clarifying a "supervision strategy", and communicating that to students, must also acknowledge, respect, and ensure individual variety among both supervisors and students.

The programmes are doing well in terms of promoting internationalization, and we only recommend that critical reflections on what constitutes an "international perspective" in the two research educations continues. We also recommend that how "gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives are integrated in the

programmes” are made more explicit, and that gender is broadened so as to include the production of social subjectivities. There is a “Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities Committee” at the department, and we recommend that their upcoming new action plan is used in ways that strengthen the integration and visibility of gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives in the PhD programmes.

The PhD students (on both programmes) take considerable educational responsibility on themselves, for example by mentoring activities and organizing their own seminars. We recommend that they receive further support that counterbalances their experienced share of responsibility, further strengthen and secure the research basis, and hence the learning environment for both PhD programmes.

We commend ongoing work at the department that aims to improve the organization and scheduling of departmental higher seminars, and initiatives for other than research seminars like on career development. We propose adding a **regular PhD retreat**, attended by PhD candidates and supervisors, to the Department’s activities, where there is an opportunity to discuss and reflect on content away from the normal business of Department affairs.

The department has itself identified a lack of formal “procedures for systematic evaluation and development” that requires attention, and we recommend that action is taken in response to that. We believe that some of the organization and management “informalities” would benefit from a some formalization, not least in order to secure a more transparent and systematic “continuous follow up and development of the programmes”. We recommend a review of the teaching policy on both

programmes in order to ensure that students have a relatively equal access to teaching possibilities.

As we understand it, there is no board for any of the PhD programmes where students can exert direct influence over their education. We recommend that an initiation of such a board is considered, with student representation from both research educations. Among its tasks would be to follow up both research educations, participate in internal systematic quality control, and be involved in short- and long-term planning of the programmes that now seems to be somewhat lacking.

If there is not already an internal website for the PhD programmes, where relevant information, such as documents, research seminars, upcoming events, and schedules for term/year can be posted, then we recommend that such a site is established.

We recommend an investigation into **coordination options** that may include a revision of the institutional, educational and disciplinary barriers between the two programmes, and the possibilities for a further coordination in light of their differences, one of them being that the PhD-*HECO* is smaller in size. It is important that research education on the programmes are aligned with the research expertise of staff, areas and groups at the department, and we recommend a **review, and potential update, of research areas and groups**, in the specific light of how they can further strengthen the scientific foundation of both PhD programmes. We believe that the research environment in Human Ecology, in relation to the PhD-*HECO*, then needs to be particularly considered.

Although capacity is presently strained, we nevertheless recommend that the department further investigate, and consider, the **possibilities for expanding the programmes, particularly by external funding**.

Regardless of a longer term expansion or funding, it must be taken into consideration how the PhD-*HECO* can best be further supported.

We also recommend that **short- and long-term development plans** are developed for both programmes, including their internal coordination and differentiation at the department.²⁰ Such planning would also address a host of broader questions like budgeting, strategies for funding, research groups, profiling, the coordination and leadership of two different programmes housed in the same department with one director of study (an increase of the study director's service on the programmes could be considered), and where the future development of the smaller PhD-*HECO* demands special attention.

Lund University has joined the Climate Framework for universities and higher educations in Sweden, and thereby committed to by 2030 having implemented measures to be in line with the 1.5 degree target of the Paris Agreement. Calls for "climate action", in response to "the needs of society", fundamentally challenge also what doctoral students shall learn and acquire through their research education. Both PhD programmes, and the disciplines of Human Geography and Human Ecology, not only provide solid grounds for sustainable development but also for moving beyond. We recommend a review of both PhD programmes in order to investigate how the research educations in Human Ecology and Human Geography can further respond to the unprecedented urgent planetary situation we are facing, i.e., the climate and ecological

²⁰ We can here criticise the Lund university's common criteria for not having a criterion on "visions or plans".

emergency/breakdown. This review should consider both how research in the Department can contribute to this area, and the possibilities of taking real climate action (e.g. not only with respect to choices of field sites and resulting travel).

Recommendations and development opportunities easily land on the document level, how to increase formal transparency, how to build a common structural standardized educational order. While some (further) formalisation and development is recommended, the educational work involved should be balanced and certainly not distract from the good work already being done at the department by both PhD educators and students. And beyond formalities there are also creative visions, passionate ambitions, flexibility, and educational thoughts that dare to travel beyond existing institutional and disciplinary taken-for-granted confinements. This is especially possible, as well as an asset, on the department's PhD programmes.

Assignment and external expert group

The assignment of the external expert group (see composition below) has been to evaluate PhD educations in human geography and human ecology. The evaluation is based on Lund University's eleven criteria for quality enhancement, with support from the Faculty of Social Sciences' instructions²¹. The assignment includes raising the

²¹ *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)

strengths, challenges and development opportunities of the learning environment and the programme/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 of students/doctoral students.

On (date), a site visit was conducted (see the program in appendix).

The external expert group:

- xx, xxx university (chair of the expert group)
- xx, xxx university
- xx, xxx university

The main strengths and challenges of the programme, and the external expert group's reflections and recommendations

(The external expert group statement is to include an analysis of the main strengths and challenges of the learning environment and the programme/programmes. The statement is also include the external expert group's reflections and recommendations for development, based on Lund University's eleven criteria for quality development. The criteria below can serve as headings in the statement.)

- 2. That the actual study results correspond to learning outcomes and qualitative targets**
- 3. That the programme focuses on students'/doctoral students' learning**
- 4. That the programme is based on a scientific and/or artistic foundation and proven experience**

- 5. 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**

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

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

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

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

- 10. That internationalisation and an international perspective is promoted in the programme**

- 11. That gender equality and equal opportunities perspectives are integrated in the programme**

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

Summarised views and recommendations

Appendix: programme for site visit