

Evaluation report

Lund University School of Economics and Management

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| Department: Business Administration | PhD programme: Research policy | Date of visit: 26th April 2022 |
| Members of the peer-review panel: Chair: Professor Rosemary Deem, Royal Holloway, University of London Other members: Professor Björn-Ola Linnér, Linköping University Professor Sujatha Raman, Australian National University | | |
| 1. Area, Environment and Resources 1.1. Subject of the program <p>The rationale underlying the Research Policy PhD Programme and its subject content and emphasis was made strongly during the site visit. The history of the degree was also carefully sketched out for the panel, including its inception in 2007 and how it came to be relocated to the Department of Business Administration in 2013. Research policy is a specialized applied field of research, internationally as well as in Sweden. Due to its interdisciplinary breadth and practice orientation, it is seen as a sanctuary for a cohort of students who are either looking to move beyond lab-based science (but continue to study science-relevant topics) for their PhD or looking for academic rigour to inform their work within research organizations (most notably, research councils and other funding bodies). The Programme therefore fulfils an important requirement, offering high-achieving students who don't fit into traditional disciplines, or seek a more specialized Research Policy training, a clear pathway for doctoral work. As the PhDs are attractive for employers outside academia, it is important that the programme can secure a sufficiently large cohort of doctoral students.</p> <p>An error in the description of the specified and specialist coursework credits in the self-evaluation document missed out the Theory unit but that omission was corrected during the site visit. The specialist input is obviously well regarded. Similarly, the opportunity to take elective courses from elsewhere in the university or even outside is clearly highly beneficial and the students we spoke to during the visit specifically mentioned this as a strength of the Programme.</p> | | |
| 1. Area, Environment and Resources 1.2. Staff: quantity, competence and management <p>All students on the Programme are entitled to two supervisors, who must be research active, and at least one must be at Associate Professor or higher. It was not clear if any external supervisors were paid for their work. The staff whom we met at the site visit are extremely well qualified and highly competent in the subject matter of the degree and also more than capable of managing, teaching and supervising the Programme but there are few of them. Some supervisors come from other disciplines and departments, which provides flexibility. Not only have the core staff mostly been attached to the Research Policy degree for a considerable time but also their publishing portfolios and record of grant capture are outstanding. The former is important as they pass their writing expertise onto their students and the</p> | | |

latter is essential as the students on the Programme are funded from projects. In addition, considerable know-how about how to successfully bid for research grants is also passed onto the doctoral researchers. The Faculty and University have appropriate regulations on appointing and also about changing of supervisors (if requested). The agreed workload for supervisors at 80 hours, with 60% going to the main supervisor, seems appropriate. The regularity of supervision seemed quite variable.

1. Area Environment and Resources

1.3. Research studies environment

We noted that all students admitted to the Programme must be in receipt of full funding for four years and that all vacancies must be advertised in the public domain, internationally as well as nationally. The entry requirements are regulated by national law and candidates are interviewed and ranked based on eligibility, quality of the research proposal and able to be matched with identified competence in a supervisory team. The funding basic starting level must be the same for all candidates, it is a salaried post and increments are based on academic progress. There is also a pension scheme and parental leave benefits as well as annual funding for conference attendance. As the degree is a small programme, there are two possible starting points, usually January or September. Doctoral candidates are encouraged to network with other doctoral researchers and academics in and outside the Faculty. Theses may be either a monograph or a compilation of papers. There is a series of milestones for students. They are also encouraged to present papers at seminars and conferences but it is unclear if this is monitored and if the funding for conferences is sufficient. The Department of Business Administration has a Committee on Research and Research Education, chaired by a Director of PhD Studies and committee members are from each of the relevant specialisations. The Committee also advises the Head of Department about things doctoral and the Committee Chair also sits on a Faculty committee of Heads of PhD Study. The PhD Studies Director also holds two open meetings a year for Doctoral Researchers and there are equivalent meetings for supervisors. The main aspects of the environment, resources, processes and activities are very positive.

The Research Policy Programme students also have a (voluntary) Research Plan seminar at a midpoint in their studies and a final compulsory seminar which critically evaluates the draft thesis, with an external academic present. There was some discussion during the site visit about whether the Research Plan seminar should be made compulsory. Indeed, in practice, it seems that all candidates do engage in such a seminar. It is unclear what role the Faculty has in student progress except for the final seminar. There could have been more detail on how the final seminar works (how the decision is made about progress and what feedback is provided, for example) and on the instructions given to students and external evaluators.

1. Area Environment and Resources

1.4. Summary evaluation

We found the subject focus on Research Policy clear and appropriate and the staff highly competent, with outstanding research profiles, as well as being very committed to the Programme and supportive of students. The overall environment is very good.

The panel recommend that the mid-degree Research Plan seminar is made compulsory for all Research Policy candidates, so that there are all together three compulsory check-points where the doctoral students can receive feedback: Research plan, mid-term and final seminar.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.1. Achieving objectives – knowledge and understanding

The Programme aims to give students a deep understanding of relevant theories, concepts and methods. This is done both through coursework and supervision. Students are encouraged to become autonomous researchers following a research agenda they have devised. Students and supervisors regularly focus on thesis progress, which is linked to a syllabus based on broad and specialized knowledge as well as familiarity with both general research methods and specific methods for the PhD project. It was the panel's view that the key objectives related to knowledge and understanding were being achieved in the work of the Programme.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.2. Achieving objectives – competence and skills

Competences and skills which are emphasized in the project include critical and precise identification and formulation of issues, the use of appropriate methodologies within a given time framework and the evaluation of work undertaken. Other skills include making a significant contribution to the formation of knowledge through the research undertaken, developing the capacity to present work in external contexts and engage in dialogue with the wider academic community and identifying future possible research in the same or a cognate field. Conversations with staff and students convinced us that these objectives were being addressed in both supervision and coursework and largely achieved. However, instituting a compulsory interim Research Plan seminar for all candidates would add a further layer of certainty in that regard.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.3. Achieving objectives – judgement and approach

There is a clear emphasis on being able to demonstrate intellectual independence, honourable and moral disciplinary practices and the capacity to formulate ethical judgments and specialized insights into the potential and limitations of research in society. Study plans are updated at least annually and help link the department's doctoral syllabus to students' own performance and progress. These judgement and approach objectives are quite evidently emphasized in the Programme but are perhaps more difficult to assess than some other objectives, not least because of the interdisciplinarity of the Programme. What happens if a student and their supervisors disagree on the

ISP was not made sufficiently clear, nor was it entirely evident how the ISP dialogue was structured.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.4. Summary evaluation

The design of the Programme enables the implementation of the highly relevant design and learning outcomes across a range of objectives. Nevertheless, making the Research Plan seminar compulsory would ensure that no candidate ever falls through the net at a critical stage in their studies. Establishing good disciplinary practice is particularly challenging in interdisciplinary fields like Research Policy but here the considerable expertise of the staff involved is invaluable.

3. Working life perspective

Developing a working life perspective in the Research Policy Programme is quite demanding as the range of jobs that doctoral graduates in this field might undertake is quite wide, from research funding agencies and research governance to academic posts, with the latter including higher education research, science and technology studies, science communication or organizational studies. Most graduates in the Programme (as can be seen from the jobs occupied by alumni listed in the self-evaluation document) do not wish to stay in higher education. For anyone who does, this is challenging if they wish to teach, as Research Policy is not a typical part of either Bachelors or Master's degrees, so even obtaining teaching experience as a doctoral student is difficult. The Faculty organizes an annual careers day to which all doctoral candidates are invited and where help with CV writing and other practical tips are available. However, it might also be useful to have occasional careers-related workshops across the academic year. The Report from the Economics and Management Doctoral Student Council at LUSEM suggested four possible such workshop activities:

- Round table with doctoral alumni from all departments, who are working outside academia;
- Workshop with the Careers Service on how to write a good CV and cover letter;
- Workshop regarding what business cases are and how to develop them (since those are increasingly required during recruitment);
- Mock interviews and a guided process about how to do a "self inventory" with the Careers Service.

The Faculty has also recently established workshops on stress management for both doctoral students and the staff who support them. This is a good idea but it was not clear to the panel whether these workshops were developed prior to or during the Covid-19 pandemic or what was meant by 'stress' in this context. It was also not apparent whether issues like structures adding to stress or difficulties with academic writing were included in the stress management sessions.

4. Doctoral student perspective

Though we had the opportunity to talk to some current doctoral researchers on the Programme (which was very helpful), we felt it was a pity that the Research Policy students did not initially submit their own report as part of the self-

evaluation process prior to the visit. The students did, however, submit a report after the visit, the content of which is now reflected in our report. Doctoral researchers in Sweden occupy a dual organizational status as both staff and students. As staff the standard employment rights and representation apply. As students, however, a different kind of representation is required. The Research Policy students are currently not represented on either the Department Committee for Research and Research Education or the Departmental Board, which means they lack a departmental voice as students. Given the small numbers, one of them could be co-opted.

5. Gender equality perspective

The Programme is subject, as are all other activities at Lund, to equality laws and guidelines. The Department has an Equality Plan (which the panel were not sent) and this is referred to when recruiting doctoral students and when considering and monitoring the working environment. The panel did not identify any gender related concerns but also wondered about intersectionality, race, ethnicity and disability and their monitoring in relation to doctoral recruitment and doctoral education. Of course, Sweden has legislation on these characteristics, as do many other European countries but as the literature on doctoral researchers, diversity and inclusion demonstrates, nowhere does this guarantee that there is no bias or discrimination. Fortunately, we did not uncover any signs of problems of this kind during our site visit.

6. Sustainability perspective

There are clearly some staff members who undertake research on sustainability topics. Students also have the option of taking courses available outside their School on the topic, notably, the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies. However, sustainability seems to be rather neglected by the Programme, as although no-one is discouraged from including elements of it in their thesis if they wish to do so, equally there is no protocol about the importance of all Research Policy projects paying some attention to sustainability and relevant sustainable development goals. We recommend that some clear advice on sustainability is provided to all new Research Policy students when they begin their studies.

7. Other comments

None

8. Summary evaluation and recommendations

Overall the panel was satisfied that the Research Policy Programme was a very sound, specialist Doctoral Programme, with a clear subject-related focus and remit, excellent and committed staff and a suitable research environment, with very good objectives and learning outcomes. The working life perspective, doctoral student perspective and gender equality perspectives are all more than satisfactory and were referred to both in the self-evaluation document and during the panel meetings. We have some concerns about the sustainability perspective and have made some suggestions about making improvements. We also have a number of other observations and recommendations to make but none of those detracts from the observable quality of the Programme assessed. All of the following points were satisfactorily addressed bar one (sustainability).

- The actual outcomes meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes
- The program puts the learning of the doctoral students in focus
- The education is based on scientific ground
- All supervisors and course instructors have sufficient and appropriate disciplinary and pedagogical training (quality of staff)
- The program has a sufficient quantity of staff
- The program is relevant for the doctoral students and answers to societal needs
- The doctoral students have influence over planning, implementation and evaluation of the program and of their studies
- The learning environment is appropriate and accessible for all doctoral students
- There is a well-functioning support for doctoral students in need of such support
- The program is continuously evaluated and its quality is appraised
- Internationalization and international perspectives are promoted in the program
- Gender equality and equal treatment perspectives are integrated into the program

Panel recommendations for consideration:

1. We thought it would be important for the Department to do some succession planning in order to future-proof the Programme's existence. Some staff associated with the Programme will be retiring in the next few years and failure to replace them with staff who have comparable grant capture skills would be disastrous for the Programme, whose funding comes almost entirely from externally funded research projects. A five year plan for the Programme from the Department would be worth the time invested in producing such a plan.
2. The Faculty could similarly develop a plan to provide overarching strategic direction for individual department/units and their PhD programmes. Such a plan would not need to infringe the autonomy of individual units or seek to prescribe what Programmes do in disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts. However, it could provide some overall guidance and markers on key aspects of planning for the future, sharing staff development good practice and providing further support for students where they have requested it.
3. The Faculty appears to have several small PhD Programmes such as Research Policy and it would be worthwhile considering whether it might make sense to group these together in some way, sharing administrative support, research methods training, workshops, peer learning and support etc, without needing to sacrifice the individual distinctiveness of the Programmes themselves. While being part of Business Administration has

worked reasonably well for the Research Policy Programme in the past few years, it may not necessarily be the Programme's 'forever' home.

4. Within the larger Faculty or Department level, one could then respond to the specific request from students in the Research Policy Programme for supplementing the annual careers event with half-day workshops on specific aspects of career searches and job applications. An occasional workshop on academic writing would also benefit those working towards a thesis monograph, as well as those utilising the compilation of papers format. If it does not already do so, the Faculty could run an annual doctoral conference for all its students, which would help facilitate wider networking and foster interdisciplinarity.
5. It would be worthwhile considering developing an active doctoral alumni group (including a social media platform) across the Department or even at the Faculty level. This would strengthen awareness of doctoral graduate employment trajectories and opportunities, as well as providing a valuable source of mentoring and support for doctoral researchers and a reservoir of expertise and knowledge about changing employment prospects, in addition to fielding people able to participate in occasional seminars and workshops.
6. The Department and Faculty could be more proactive in advertising international mobility possibilities to doctoral researchers, as well as considering the development of virtual and blended mobility options for those whose other commitments do not lend themselves to longer exchange visits.
7. The Programme and the Department would find it worthwhile to investigate and summarise lessons learned in relation to doctoral education adaptations made during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a view to retaining some of those changes such as remote seminars or workshops which have been beneficial to all concerned.
8. There needs to be further scrutiny of the situation whereby the Department does not provide any fourth-year top-up funding for Research Policy students, even though it receives money for such funding for its doctoral students, as it chooses to only provide it for Business Administration doctoral candidates. All though the faculty has been very successful in attracting external funding, also for doctoral students, the Department's current strategy not to guarantee funding for the fourth year is likely to be negative for the ability to raise external PhD funding, as most projects are awarded for three years. We recommend the department to consider the conditions for attracting external PhD funding and building larger cohorts for this Programme, in its funding strategy.
9. The issue of making the voluntary interim Research Plan assessment seminar (which is *de facto* done by every candidate) compulsory needs resolution.

10. Sustainability seems to be rather neglected by the Programme, as although there is a course available on it and no-one is discouraged from including elements of it in their thesis if they wish to do so, equally there is no protocol about the importance of all projects paying attention to sustainability and relevant sustainable development goals. We recommend that some clear advice on sustainability is provided to all new Research Policy students when they begin their studies.

11. It is not evident whether development sessions for experienced supervisors are regularly provided by the University or by the Faculty. If not, this is something that certainly needs to be considered. It is a sound way of spreading good practice and keeping supervisors up to date.