External review of study courses and programmes at University of Gothenburg

Panel statement for the PhD student program at the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science

2025-01-31

Short background

The panel (see below) has been tasked with assessing graduate education at the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science (FLoV) at the Faculty of Humanities based on the university's criteria, in accordance with the policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement. On May 28, 2024, a kick-off meeting was held on Zoom, where representatives of the FLoV department and the faculty informed the panel about the department and their tasks as evaluators. At this meeting, a date and schedule for the site visit was decided. Before the kick-off meeting, the department had provided the panel with relevant documents as a basis for the evaluation. During the kick-off meeting, the panel asked the department for further documents, which were provided before the site visit. A list of the full set of documents provided is available in Appendix 1. The site visit was held on October 22, 2024. The visit was held in the department at Gothenburg University. Sverker Sörlin, attended by Zoom due to illness. The program for the site visit is available in Appendix 2. Based on the documents and impressions from the site visit, as well as some additional clarifications by email, the panel has jointly prepared its statement. A shorter version of the statement is present in the main report, and a longer version is available in Appendix 3. The following persons are part of the evaluation panel:

- Lina Eriksson, Professor, University of Gothenburg, Department of Political Science
- Sara Stymne, Senior Lecturer and Docent, Uppsala University, Department of Linguistics and Philology
- Sverker Sörlin, Professor, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment
- Aron Zahran, PhD student, INALCO / Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique (CNRS) & Ghent University (student representative)

The education's main strengths and weaknesses as well as the assessment group's reflections and recommendations

The Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science includes the subjects: Theoretical Philosophy, Practical Philosophy, Linguistics, Computational Linguistics, Theory of Science, and Logic. Each of these subjects has its own research focus, its own PhD students, and its own subject collegium (*ämnesråd*). This department structure affects the PhD program in many different ways. The department manages to both preserve the integrity of the different research subjects and promote connections across subjects. The members of the different subjects in the department seem to agree about the importance of preserving the disciplinary integrity of the subjects so that the students learn the research and publication requirements and expectations of their respective subjects. There is also a strong consensus about the general structure of the department's graduate program and the principles determining whether a subject can accept a new graduate student in a given year. The research

collegia seem to be working well, ensuring that the graduate students get appropriate training in their respective disciplines. At the same time, the department facilitates informal connections and interactions across subjects, for example through a joint tea/ lunch room, and joint activities for all graduate students at the department. Further, faculty members at the department stress the importance of the graduate program, care about their students, and are in most cases actively looking for ways in which they can improve the students' learning environment even more.

1.   Achieved study results match intended learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance

Almost all the department's PhD students finish their dissertations, and those that have, are now employed. Almost all of these, in turn, have jobs in academia, which shows that the department's PhD students do well in the competitive academic job market and that their education has equipped them with what they need to be successful in competition with those who received their PhDs from other universities. A more direct evaluation of the quality of the work produced during the program would require us to critically analyze each of the dissertations, something we, unfortunately, cannot do due to time constraints. However, the committee notes that those PhD students who have written article-based dissertations rather than monographs, tend to publish their articles in well-known journals and well-respected conference proceedings, which further strengthens our view that the quality of the work produced by the PhD students in the program is high.

2.   Teaching is focused on student/doctoral-centered learning.

All departments face the problem of how to make PhD students develop both a deep understanding of their own research field and a broad understanding of and general competence within the discipline. Time and budget constraints usually result in more or less problematic trade-offs. Representatives of the different subjects deal with this problem in slightly different ways, depending on how "large" the subject is. Some subjects have a set of courses that all their PhD students take, and that are deliberately structured in such a way that they provide the students with a broad overview of the field, while others try to satisfy the need for educational breadth by encouraging and facilitating participation in courses given by other departments at the University of Gothenburg, or other universities. In some cases, the courses given by the department are based on the expertise of a visiting scholar, which is a great way of ensuring that this type of expertise benefits the students. However, if a big proportion of the course work consists of this type of ad hoc course, there is a risk that the students will not get the systematic overview of the field they are expected to have and that they may also need if and when they take up academic positions after their program. There might be subject-specific reasons to make different priorities in one subject than in others, but we do recommend a more general discussion across subjects about appropriate priorities and how to achieve them, including strategic choices regarding the department-financed one course per year and subject.

The fact that some of the subjects only can finance one PhD student at any given moment, makes it difficult for the PhD students to develop a community of students in their own subject at the department. The department creates opportunities for and encourages the creation of a sense of community among the PhD students across subjects in the department, which is really good. But this does not completely compensate for the disadvantage of being a single student in your subject. The problem(s) discussed here largely depends on the department structure, and we will discuss the challenges this structure creates more below. But we also want to point out that representatives of the different subjects are aware of the issues and try to alleviate the negative consequences.

3.   The content and form of teaching rests on scientific and/or artistic bases and proven experience

The overwhelming majority of supervisors are professors or docents who are active in research. This generally ensures a scientifically sound basis for a PhD program. The matching process of faculty-funded PhD students is mainly based on matching the interest of applicants with the competence of the available supervisor pool, which ensures suitable expertise of the supervisors. Recruitments have been performed which have helped to strengthen the supervisory capacity. Most, but not all, active supervisors have completed a pedagogical course on supervision in doctoral programs (PIL201). The department offers both organized PhD courses and reading courses/individual undertakings. The course plans for the organized courses that we have reviewed are sound and seem adequate for giving the students a scientifically sound basis. The many reading courses are harder to judge since they are not as regulated, and they are typically not evaluated, due to issues with anonymity. This means that the quality is up to each supervisor/teacher to ensure.

4.   Teachers have up-to-date and adequate competence as regards their subjects and teaching and learning in higher education, and the numbers of teachers are in proportion to the scope and content of study courses and programmes

Most of the supervisors have taken the required courses. The level of scientific activity among the faculty members is also reasonably high. At least on paper, it would even be possible to expand the PhD training with the same staff. However, this impression is in need of some qualification. Those who uphold the formal competency to supervise may not have the adequate funding to do so. In addition, the students in some cases work on projects where the research intensity in the department is low. That supervisors have adequate training and level of competence does not necessarily mean that the training is up to date. It may be a good idea to keep the maintenance of supervisor competencies under observation in order to make the most of available resources and secure the interest of students to always be supervised by teachers with vital engagement in research of their own, preferably in fields that are close to the research topics of the PhD students they supervise.

5.   Study courses and programmes are relevant to the needs of the students/doctoral students and society

Relevance – admittedly a multi-faceted concept – is then often taken to mean usefulness to society, including both the private and public sectors. The criteria of relevance are, however, equally important for the meaningful career of the individual PhD candidate. These criteria can not be entirely separated from those of society. Potential careers of the PhD candidates are certainly dependent on opportunities in the labour markets. But they are also not entirely overlapping. For those students who wish to pursue an academic career, the wider societal relevance may seem of lower importance. Some kind of conscious and strategic balancing of these two main dimensions of relevance is necessary if the education should be regarded as "relevant to the needs of the doctoral students *and* society".

Given that context, the panel was surprised to see so relatively little discussion about this balancing act. The general impression was that the PhD training in most, if not all the degree-offering disciplines departed from established intra-disciplinary problems and concerns pointing predominantly to what may be perceived as the interest of those oriented toward an academic career. There were few connections to employment areas outside of academia, although with some variation between disciplines. Our impression was further reinforced by the fact that there seemed to be little interest in following up on alumni careers. We believe that the proportion of catering to internal needs and catering to needs elsewhere should at least be meaningfully and critically discussed actively. One

aspect of this low level of mobility linked to the hiring of PhDs is that it might increase the risk of reproducing PhD training as well.

It would also seem possible to argue for more collaborative elements across the several disciplines. This, in turn, would point in the direction of a more department-wide outlook on PhD training to build critical mass and share the burden of labour. The step from a PhD program to employment is often very stressful, and many PhD programs therefore explicitly include career guidance of some sort. This is true also for FLoV. However, we would like to suggest even more such guidance, providing students with information about publication strategies, available jobs, available or upcoming postdoc positions (and advice about how to apply for a postdoc position at a different university)..

6.   Students/doctoral students have influence in planning, implementing and monitoring study courses and programmes

FLoV PhD students generally feel they have significant influence over their education, with the freedom to select courses locally or from other universities, often tailoring reading courses in consultation with supervisors. While the department supports this agency, some students wish for more teacher-taught courses relevant to their research, as current options are limited due to diverse research topics and resource constraints. The quality of reading courses is difficult to assess due to anonymity concerns and lack of formal evaluation. Grouping evaluations across reading courses could address this and provide insights into their overall usefulness and student satisfaction.

7.   The study and learning environment is accessible and purpose-oriented for all students/doctoral students

The department provides an accessible and stimulating learning environment, supported by committed senior researchers and extensive collaborations locally and internationally. However, PhD students in smaller subjects, like theoretical philosophy, face challenges due to low student numbers and limited opportunities for meaningful interactions within their field. Their access to stimulating environments heavily depends on their supervisors' efforts to connect them with external networks, which risks being unsustainable. Imbalances in student numbers across subjects require attention. Measures like fostering interdisciplinary collaborations (while ensuring smaller subjects are not overshadowed) or systematically integrating PhD students into external networks could help. Additionally, theoretical disagreements in one subject have created a challenging environment for some students, but the department is actively addressing this issue. Economic disparities between faculty-funded and externally funded PhD students cause tensions, particularly regarding access to resources. Providing better support for applying for external funding and exploring other solutions could help mitigate these issues.

8.   The study courses and programmes are continuously monitored and developed

The full program is regularly evaluated. While organized PhD courses are evaluated, the many reading courses/individual undertakings are typically not evaluated, mainly due to issues with anonymity. We encourage the department to develop a model for evaluating reading courses systematically, e.g. in an aggregated way. Another way to ensure the quality of the PhD education is by having external reviewers comment on it, typically at seminars. All subjects state in their ASP that students have to take part in seminars during their education. It is not specified further to what extent, or what types of seminars. In practice, all students also have to have a "final seminar" which is required before the

dean can approve the final defense. It would also be possible to introduce half-time seminars in addition to the current brief half-time valuation, which does not include any external valuation.

9.   Other views from the panel

Other issues brought up during the evaluation are discussed in detail in Appendix 3. They include:

- The rotation system, and issues related to different types of funding
- Financing of necessary trips
- Information about external funding opportunites
- Compensation and prolongation rules for PhD students who teach
- Guidlines for determining co-authorships
- Issues for international students
- Collaborations between PhD students and senior researchers

Recommendations

- Strengthen Department-wide collaboration on PhD training and make the integrated Department a valid part of the learning environment for graduate training.
- Develop pro-active, coordinated activities to expand the volume of PhD training to facilitate critical mass and maintain quality, both in the PhD training at large and in the discipline-based learning environments.
- Maintain but possibly modify, the rotation system to avoid anemic episodes of student shortage in individual disciplines.
- Develop and keep up-to-date (when relevant) the 'guide' for PhD students ('lathund'). It should be quite comprehensive to maximize transparency and fairness and to avoid misunderstandings. Include in particular information and advice for international students.
- Monitor closely the relationship between faculty competencies/fields of concentration and supervision demand.
- Discuss how to achieve both knowledge depth and a broad competence in the subjects, in the context of the different subjects' respective conditions.
- Ensure that each student gets information about courses and conferences relevant to them. Preferably this should not only be the responsibility of the supervisors.
- Provide information about relevant stipends as well as practical guidance about applications. This is especially important for students whose dissertations require fieldwork.
- Develop career guidance as an element of the PhD program.
- In light of the difficulties faced by international PhD students, we encourage the department to take all the measures available to them. This includes, but is not limited to, offering 2-year contracts and writing guidelines addressing these problems.
- Discuss the issue of teaching hour allocation and consider department-wide principles, at least for PhD students. Make sure that information about the system is clearly communicated to the PhD students.
- Offer the opportunity and encourage all supervisors who have not yet done so to take a pedagogical course on supervision in doctoral programs.

Appendix 1: Documents provided to the evaluation panel

INNEHÅLLSFÖRTECKNING

1. ASP Datalingvistik
2. ASP Lingvistik
3. ASP Logik
4. ASP Praktisk filosofi
5. ASP Teoretisk filosofi
6. ASP Vetenskapsteori
7. Doktorander 2008-2024
8. Kostnadsinventering FU
9. Arbetsbeskrivning VP 2021
10. Delegation Arbetsmiljö VP 2021
11. Delegation Studierektor 2021
12. Doktorander Statistik 2019-2023
13. Länkar till avhandlingar 2024
14. Handledare FU 2024
15. Datalingvistik
    Sommarskola APL-ESSLLI
    Kursmaterial LT31020
    Kursmaterial LT33010
    Kursmaterial LT34010
    Seminars CLASP
    Reading group: Cognitive systems
16. Lingvistik
    LI30010 Classics
    Lingvistik Seminarium Schema
17. Praktisk filosofi
    Kursmaterial FP30090
    Läskurs Morality and Mathematics
    Financial Ethics Seminar 2023-2024
    PPPT Seminarier 2023-2024
    Delrapport VR NoNo 2024
18. Teoretisk filosofi
    Metafysisk förklaring
    Presentism
    TP Seminarium 2022-2023
19. Logik
    LOG5010 Advance Proof Theory
    Läskurs Advanced Set Theory
    Seminars in Logic 2023-2024
20. Vetenskapsteori
    FLVT302 KlassikerVTHumaniora VT2021
    FTME002 KeyThemesSTS HT2023
    HFVT301 VetenskapsteoriHumFak VT2019
    Interna seminariet i vetenskapsteori
    Joint GUChalmers STS seminar
21. Forskningsutbildningsgruppen (FUG) Mötestider & anteckningar
22. FU Lathund 2023-08-31
23. Finansieringavdoktorandkurser 2023
24. Doktorandpot 2023
25. Riktlinjer för ämnesråd 2018
26. Turordning för intern finansiering av doktorandtjänster 2023
27. Rekryteringsprocess FLoV doktorander 2018

28. Doktorandregler beslut 2023-02-09
29. Verksamhetsplan FLoV 2023-2025
30. Avtal Amandine Decker 2023
31. APT anteckningar 20231205
32. ARK summary PhD meeting 2023
33. International PhD seminar
34. ARK enkätresultat
35. Utvärderingsunderlag 2018
36. Comments from the PhD group
37. Läsguide till informationsunderlag FU FLoV
38. Bedömarutlåtande 2018 - 12 - 11
39. Åtgärdsplan FLoV 2019 - 06 -04
40. GU Vision 2021 - 2030
41. Humanistiska fakultetens strategier
42. Rapport RED19 2017 - 2019
43. Guide till reflektion handledare doktorand
44. Ekonomisk ram - doktorandkostnader
45. Kompletterande information handledare (3 dokument)
46. Exempel ISP (6 dokument)
44. Alumni 2014-2024

Övriga kommentarer till innehållsförteckningen

Intern information om FU för doktorander och medarbetare finns på Sharepoint på följande länk:

htps://gunet.sharepoint.com/sites/k2-institutionen-for-filosofi-lingvistik-och-

vetenskapsteori/SitePages/Forskarutbildning.aspx

Appendix 2: Program for the site visit, November 22, 2024

Schema platsbesök utvärdering FU

Rum J557

8.00 – 08.45 Möte med institutionsledningen, inklusive studierektor och ev verksamhetsstöd

8.45-9.15 Möte med fakultetsledningen

9.15 – 10.15 Möte med doktorander, två grupper, 30 minuter vardera

10.15-10.45 Fikapaus

10.45 – 11.15 Möte med handledare från logik

11.15 – 11.45 Möte med handledare från lingvistik

11.45-12.15 Möte med handledare från datorlingvistik

12.15- 13.15 Lunch

13.15-13.45 Möte med handledare från vetenskapsteori

13.45-14.15 Möte med handledare från teoretisk filosofi

14.15-14.45 Möte med handledare från praktisk filosofi

14.45-15.15 Fikapaus

15.15-16.00 Arbete i utvärderingsgruppen

16.00-17.00 Återföring med institutions- och fakultetsledning, inkl doktorandrepresentant.

Appendix 3: Detailed report

The education's main strengths and weaknesses as well as the assessment group's reflections and recommendations

The Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science includes the subjects: Theoretical Philosophy, Practical Philosophy, Linguistics, Computational Linguistics, Theory of Science, and Logic. This means that the department covers six different subjects in total. Each of these subjects has its own research focus, its own PhD students, and its own subject collegium (*ämnesråd*). This department structure affects the PhD program in many different ways, and we will therefore come back to this structure in relation to several of the points discussed below.

The department manages to both preserve the integrity of the different research subjects and promote connections across subjects. The members of the different subjects in the department seem to agree about the importance of preserving the disciplinary integrity of the subjects so that the students learn the research and publication requirements and expectations of their respective subjects. There is also a strong consensus about the general structure of the department's graduate program and the principles determining whether a subject can accept a new graduate student in a given year. The research collegia seem to be working well, ensuring that the graduate students get appropriate training in their respective disciplines. At the same time, the department facilitates informal connections and interactions across subjects, for example through a joint tea/ lunch room, and joint activities for all graduate students at the department. Further, faculty members at the department stress the importance of the graduate program, care about their students, and are in most cases actively looking for ways in which they can improve the students' learning environment even more.

The evaluation of the graduate program is structured according to the criteria listed in the evaluation instructions. However, we also have comments that do not directly concern any of these criteria, and these are listed at the end of the evaluation report.

1.   Achieved study results match intended learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance

Almost all the department's PhD students finish their dissertations, and those that have, are now employed. Almost all of these, in turn, have jobs in academia, which shows that the department's PhD students do well in the competitive academic job market and that their education has equipped them with what they need to be successful in competition with those who received their PhDs from other universities. A more direct evaluation of the quality of the work produced during the program would require us to critically analyze each of the dissertations, something we, unfortunately, cannot do due to time constraints. However, the committée notes that those PhD students who have written article-based dissertations rather than monographs, tend to publish their articles in well-known journals and well-respected conference proceedings, which further strengthens our view that the quality of the work produced by the PhD students in the program is high.

2.   Teaching is focused on student/doctoral-centered learning.

The program prioritizes the PhD students' learning in many different ways. The program should provide the PhD students with an education characterized by both a broad and a deep understanding of

their subjects. Achieving both depth and width is something that many PhD programs struggle with. Depth is achieved through the PhD students' dissertation research, which gives them a high level of expertise on that particular subject. Width is usually achieved through a set of courses aimed at giving the students an overview of and a general competence within the broader field, something which is necessary for their future careers. However, it is often the case that departments have to prioritize between depth and width because of time and budget constraints.

Representatives of the different subjects included in the FLoV Department deal with this dilemma in slightly different ways, depending on how "large" the subject is. Some subjects have a set of courses that all their PhD students take, and that are deliberately structured in such a way that they provide the students with a broad overview of the field, while others try to satisfy the need for educational breadth by encouraging and facilitating participation in courses given by other departments at the University of Gothenburg, or other universities. In some cases, the courses given by the department are based on the expertise of a visiting scholar, which is a great way of ensuring that this type of expertise benefits the students. In these cases, the department is providing the students with a broad knowledge of the field by making use of the various expertise present at the department at the moment, which is great. However, if a big proportion of the course work consists of this type of ad hoc course, there is a risk that the students will not get the systematic overview of the field they are expected to have and that they may also need if and when they take up academic positions after their program.

The issue of balancing a need for depth with a need for broad competence in a field is something all graduate programs struggle with in one way or another, and it is thus not specific to this department. However, as the decisions are now made by the subject collegia or by the supervisors, there seems to be little general discussion of and consensus about the appropriate balance between depth and general competence, and there is, as far as we know, no kind of evaluation of whether the current balance in the respective subjects is the appropriate one, even though the subjects make rather different prioritizations. We therefore recommend the department to discuss this issue in a forum that includes representatives from all the subjects. There might be subject-specific reasons to make different priorities in one subject than in others, so we do not necessarily recommend that every subject should deal with the issue in the same way. But we do recommend a more general discussion across subjects about appropriate priorities and how to achieve them.

In many cases, the reason for drawing on the expertise of visiting scholars for creating courses is that several of the subjects at the department are quite small, in terms of the number of researchers, teachers, and PhD students, and this obviously affects the capacity to offer courses. The department pays for one course per subject and year, but it is often difficult to create courses that suit the interests and level of all the PhD students in that subject in any given year. This seems to be a likely reason behind some of the priorities currently made. But even so, we recommend a general discussion of the issue.

The fact that some of the subjects are quite small and that lack of external funding makes it difficult for them to fund more than one PhD student at a time, also means that it is difficult to create opportunities for the PhD students to develop a community of students in their own subject at the department. The department has created several different opportunities for and encourages the creation of a sense of community among the PhD students across subjects in the department, which is really good. But this does not completely compensate for the disadvantage of not having any other students to talk to in your own subject. At the moment, the single subject that only has one graduate student is theoretical philosophy. However, we want to point out that it was not long ago that two

other subjects were in the same situation, and there is a risk the problem will arise again for these and/or other subjects in the department.

The problem(s) discussed here largely depends on the department structure, that is, on the fact that there are six quite different subjects under the same roof. The division into different subjects creates several challenges for the PhD program, in particular, related to the learning environment, and we will return to this issue below. For now, we just want to note that representatives of the different subjects are all aware of the issues and try to alleviate the negative consequences, for instance by supporting student-driven seminars. Among other things, they have created joint courses and seminars for all the PhD students in the department regardless of subject. However, some problems remain because the identity and organizational integrity of the subjects are an important priority. This does not mean that the subjects should not be prioritized in this way, but it does mean that the learning environment of the PhD students is not the only priority, and this, in turn, means there are some negative consequences for the students. We will comment further on this issue below.

3.   The content and form of teaching rests on scientific and/or artistic bases and proven experience

The overwhelming majority of supervisors are professors or docents who are active in research. This generally ensures a scientifically sound basis for a PhD program. The matching process of faculty-funded PhD students is mainly based on matching the interest of applicants with the competence of the available supervisor pool, which ensures suitable expertise of the supervisors. Recruitments have been performed which have helped to strengthen the supervisory capacity in theoretical philosophy where there were previously few active researchers who could be supervisors.

Most active supervisors have completed a pedagogical course on supervision in doctoral programs (PIL201). However, 8 of the currently active supervisors have not done so or have not yet completed this course. We urge the department to give these supervisors an opportunity to take PIL201, or some other equivalent course, in the near future, as one step towards strengthening the pedagogical competence of supervisors

The department offers both organized PhD courses and reading courses/individual undertakings. The course plans for the organized courses that we have reviewed are sound and seem adequate for giving the students a scientifically sound basis. The many reading courses are harder to judge since they are not as regulated, and they are typically not evaluated, due to issues with anonymity. This means that the quality is up to each supervisor/teacher to ensure. While we have not received any reports of issues with this, we do not have enough information to make a statement about the quality of these courses. While more organized courses would be desirable, we understand the issues with this in environments with few PhD students, where it is hard to get a critical mass of participants. Some subjects cooperate across Sweden, which gives a larger student body.

4.   Teachers have up-to-date and adequate competence as regards their subjects and teaching and learning in higher education, and the numbers of teachers are in proportion to the scope and content of study courses and programmes

GU has regulated its criteria for who can serve as supervisor and holding a docent level of competence is required for at least one supervisor of each PhD student. The total number of such faculty in the department is c. 35 (excluding emeritus professors). The total number of students is on about the same level, which seems to indicate a quite high supervisor/PhD student ratio. In addition, some external experts are called in to serve as supervisors of certain students. Most of the supervisors

have taken the required courses. The level of scientific activity among the faculty members is also reasonably high. At least on paper, it would even be possible to expand the PhD training with the same staff. However, this impression is in need of some qualification. Those who uphold the formal competency to supervise may not have the adequate funding to do so. Teaching makes up a considerable amount of staff time. Also, a sizable portion of the research time of some of the potential supervisors is taken up by research projects in which there are no PhD students. In addition, the students in some cases work on projects where the research intensity in the department is low. We have made no systematic analysis of the proportions between areas of existing competencies in the faculty/staff and the actual needs of competencies generated by the PhD projects. The proportions do not seem to cause much concern among the faculty we spoke to. This could possibly be explained by the fact the hiring of new PhD students, although in theory reflecting the quality of the applicants may in reality also be influenced by the capacity to supervise them, which is indeed also an explicit factor in the hiring process. That supervisors have adequate training and level of competence does not necessarily mean that the training is up to date. It may be a good idea to keep the maintenance of supervisor competencies under observation in order to make the most of available resources and secure the interest of students to always be supervised by teachers with vital engagement in research of their own, preferably in fields that are close to the research topics of the PhD students they supervise.

5.   Study courses and programmes are relevant to the needs of the students/doctoral students and society

The relevance of the PhD training has been a growing concern internationally and in Sweden since a few decades back. Relevance – admittedly a multi-faceted concept – is then often taken to mean usefulness to society, including both the private and public sectors. Funding from both public and private sources has been concentrated on areas of particular interest for industry in areas such as material science, digital technologies, and AI, but also to knowledge areas of particular relevance for addressing major global challenges. The purpose is ultimately to enhance capacity in growing fields and also to strengthen Swedish competitiveness. The criteria of relevance is, however, equally important for the meaningful career of the individual PhD candidate. These criteria can not be entirely separated. Potential careers of the PhD candidates are certainly dependent on opportunities in the labour markets that may open up in the private and public sector areas where knowledge in philosophy, linguistics, and cogent fields are in demand. But they are also not entirely overlapping. For those students who wish to pursue an academic career, the wider societal relevance may seem of lower importance and may even seem problematic if a lot of time and effort is spent on building relevance for careers outside of the university. Some kind of conscious and strategic balancing of these two main dimensions of relevance is necessary if the education should be regarded as "relevant to the needs of the doctoral students *and* society".

Given that context, the panel was surprised to see so relatively little discussion about this balancing act. The general impression was that the PhD training in most, if not all the degree-offering disciplines departed from established intra-disciplinary problems and concerns pointing predominantly to what may be perceived as the interest of those oriented toward an academic career. There were few connections to employment areas outside of academia, although with some variation between disciplines. Perhaps this situation can also be seen as in the interest of the department itself and its members. To continue an existing and respected activity as it has been going on for some time is not necessarily wrong. Admittedly, this has been a long-standing pattern in Swedish academia; it is arguably still the expected modus operandi in many humanities and social science departments. But it

remains somewhat surprising, given that the broader societal relevance criteria are so clearly emphasized in the program, that it is not perceived as more of a challenge to address more vigorously.

Our impression was further reinforced by the fact that there seemed to be little interest in following up on alumni careers and problematizing their outcomes in a more comprehensive way. In the period 2014 to 2024, for which data was presented, 28 students had received PhD degrees in the Department. Only two of these worked outside of academia (one as a high school teacher, and one at RISE, a large research institute). Of the remaining 26, 14, more than 50% were employed in the FLoV department, which is the same institution as the one where they were trained. One could of course argue that the reproduction of the internal needs of teaching staff is part of "relevance", but one could also argue that this is a quite narrow understanding of the concept. We believe that the proportion of catering to internal needs and catering to needs elsewhere should at least be meaningfully and critically discussed actively. One aspect of this low level of mobility linked to the hiring of PhDs is that it might increase the risk of reproducing PhD training as well, since the incentives to change the education that trained the internal staff themselves successfully may be limited.

We are aware of the fact that it is both costly and a major effort involved in taking on new, fully funded PhD students and that the primary interests of the faculty must be in place for this to happen. What made us wonder was rather the relatively low presence of an engaged discussion on how the balancing of the two dimensions of relevance should take place in order to live up to the set criteria. We were also somewhat surprised by the relatively little reflection on the future of the Department with such a high degree of internally trained PhDs.

It would, for example, seem possible to argue for more innovative and engaged approaches to the curricula. It would also seem possible to argue for more collaborative elements across the several disciplines. This, in turn, would point in the direction of a more department-wide outlook on PhD training to build critical mass, share the burden of labour, and optimize the use of experiences and skills in order to live up more fully to the relevance criteria. On the positive side, we may also raise the opportunity to enhance chances to present large coherent ideas for future research that could be designed to attract bigger, long-term, and multiple grants to support a given research area shared by bigger parts of the department (see also section 9 below). So, it may be interesting to look at the issue of relevance as not a burden imposed on the department and its disciplines, but rather an opportunity to consider the legitimate interests of students, university, and stakeholders in a perspective of enhanced opportunities and visions for developing, deepening and also expanding the PhD program.

The step from a PhD program to employment is often very stressful, and many PhD programs therefore explicitly include career guidance of some sort. This is true also for FLoV. However, we would like to suggest even more such guidance, providing students with information about publication strategies, available jobs, available or upcoming postdoc positions (and advice about how to apply for a postdoc position at a different university). This would include important networking fora, and, when applicable, information about conferences of extra importance for students on the job market. Most, but not all, PhD students from FLoV's PhD program get jobs in academia and it may well be that the share working outside academia grows in the future. It might therefore be useful, and indeed relevant, to include explicit information about the job market for graduates outside of academia, perhaps by inviting alumni with non-academic jobs to talk to the students about the ways in which their education helped make them successful in their jobs, and what future employers might be looking for. We recommend that the career guidance provided is organized in a way that is not too tied to individual instructors in the respective subjects. To some extent, the information is subject-specific. But in order

to ensure all students get access to relevant information, we think some level of general department coordination is necessary.

6. Students/doctoral students have influence in planning, implementing and monitoring study courses and programmes

FLoV PhD students generally feel that they can influence their education. This sentiment is shared by the senior staff. The students are free to choose many of their courses, including from different universities. Locally, they develop appropriate reading courses in consultation with supervisors. Overall, it seems like the department is doing its best to ensure that the students have agency in forming their own programs.

Some students expressed a desire for more relevant teacher-taught courses, having to rely mostly on reading courses for the topics that are most relevant to their research. However, the limited course options cannot be strictly attributed to a lack of freedom or influence, it is rather a consequence of diverse research interests and limited resources.

It is more difficult to get insights into the quality evaluations of courses since many of them are individual reading courses that are not evaluated. The choice not to evaluate these courses is due to problems with anonymity as well as a lack of formal requirements for such evaluations. The problem of anonymity could potentially be resolved by evaluating all reading courses together. This would at least provide basic insights into whether students across the different subjects generally find the courses useful and feel like they have enough influence on their implementation.

7. The study and learning environment is accessible and purpose-oriented for all students/doctoral students

The department hosts an accessible and appropriate learning environment in many ways, and all subjects have an adequate number of supervisors. The external evaluation committee has the impression that the senior researchers place great importance on PhD education and are committed to maintaining its quality. The department at large also provides a stimulating learning environment through extensive collaborations and networks both within GU, in Sweden, and internationally.

The study-social environment at the department offers many opportunities to meet across subject boundaries. For PhD students, there are, for instance, joint writing sessions, which started as a PhD student initiative, and many informal meeting points such as the joint lunch room. That being said, some PhD students face certain challenges that in essence are symptomatic of the broader dynamics of the department. Students in the larger subjects have a more stimulating learning environment than students in the smaller subjects. PhD students in smaller subjects (currently mainly theoretical philosophy, but in the near past also logic and linguistics) struggle to find spaces in which they can have meaningful and stimulating interactions with researchers and peers from their own field. For such students, their access to a proper learning environment is very, and in our view too dependent on their supervisors' abilities to introduce them to stimulating contexts outside the department and/or the university.

In the smaller subjects, the low student numbers are perceived as perhaps the largest issue for the learning environment by both the students and senior researchers. In contrast, the senior researchers of

larger subjects do not necessarily think of low numbers as a big issue because of the aforementioned initiatives that create an inclusive study-social environment for students of all subjects.

In the view of the external evaluation committee, the consequences of the imbalance in student numbers need to be addressed. Taking measures to boost student numbers for the smaller subjects through internally funded recruitment might be controversial considering the general consensus of the rotation system. Nonetheless, actions could be taken in order to dampen the consequences of the imbalance. On a more general level, the department could explore the intersections between its subjects and identify more ways of collaborating across subject boundaries. Such collaborations are already in place between certain subjects (e.g., Linguistics and Computational linguistics), and it seems as if these efforts have had a positive effect. If such collaborations are pursued, a warning should be issued against the larger subjects "devouring" the smaller ones. It is desirable for the smaller subjects that such collaborations are indeed mutual.

Another potential measure is to implement some sort of systematic integration of PhD students from smaller subjects, into external networks and learning environments. The fact that these efforts are currently dependent on the initiatives of the individual supervisors (and sometimes of the students themselves) poses a threat to the long-term sustainability of such efforts.

Another challenge for the learning environment was identified in a particular subject. Theoretical disagreements between senior researchers had created an environment that newly introduced PhD students find difficult to navigate. It was referred to as a "minefield" and was explicitly said to impede the students from participating freely in critical discussions. Our impression is that the department management is working on these issues in collaboration with the subject representatives. It is important that this work continues.

The economic conditions are different for faculty-funded versus externally funded PhD students (including research school PhD students) and project-funded students because the latter often have access to extra resources and travel money through the project. This seems to cause a lot of tension between students with different conditions. While this is a hard problem to address fully, our proposal of improved support for PhD students in applying for external support for travel costs etc. can be one measure to somewhat alleviate it. We also propose starting a discussion to see if there are any other possible measures to take.

8.   The study courses and programmes are continuously monitored and developed

One important way in which the PhD education is evaluated is by evaluations like the current one, with an external board. Such evaluations are regularly undertaken.

The department offers both organized PhD courses and reading courses. These courses are also evaluated by the students taking them. The many reading courses are typically not evaluated, mainly due to issues with anonymity. We also encourage the department to develop a model for evaluating reading courses systematically, even if it is hard to do so in a fully anonymous fashion. As mentioned, one option is to do this in an aggregated way, where many reading courses are evaluated together, possibly led by a person who did not teach these courses, such as the director of graduate studies.

Another way to ensure the quality of the PhD education is by having external reviewers comment on it, typically at seminars. All subjects state in their ASP that students have to take part in seminars during their education. It is not specified further to what extent, or what types of seminars. In practice,

all students also have to have a "final seminar" which is required before the dean can approve the final defense. However, these seminars are not stated as obligatory in the ASPs:s, which would be suitable. Another common type of seminar at other departments is half-time seminars. Currently, no subjects have these, even though there are ongoing discussions in some subjects about this. There is a half-time valuation, to reach a higher salary half-time, but this valuation is done by the Associate Head of Department for Doctoral Studies, after a check with the supervisor, and does not include any external valuation. We think half-time seminars could be a valuable addition to the current seminars, to ensure external monitoring and valuation during the PhD studies and not only at the end. We encourage a department-wide dialog about this option.

9.   Other views from the panel

Learning environments and the rotation model

There is high support for the rotation model among all subjects, and at the same time also a common understanding of the need for externally financed PhD students, who are needed to build a critical mass of PhD students in the department and its PhD subjects. The differences in opinion concern minor details in exactly how the system should work. For instance, there is no mechanism in the system for handling cases where a PhD student leaves the PhD program early, and thus the subject cannot take advantage of that full finance cycle. Another issue raised by some subjects was that they thought that since externally funded PhD students often require co-funding from the department (to some extent), a few such students could be counted as equivalent to one student from the rotation. Others argue that externally funded PhD students don't create net costs for the department, and stress the importance of a broad range of research topics in a subject, a goal which might not be achieved if all PhD students in a subject are project funded. Overall, though, the current model is seen as a functional model, given the limited resources. Given this strong support, we see no need to propose any radical change to the model itself, but modifications of various kinds could be contemplated.

It may be argued that the focus on the rotation model takes up unnecessary energy. It is, after all, only a limited portion of the total number of PhD students that are recruited that way. The major source of income is related to performance if we by 'performance' also mean the capacity to write and win grants that can fund PhD positions. Under the current regime of PhD training at the GU humanities faculty, this situation is a given. It is hard not to put that precondition in relation to the long-term strategic function of training PhDs. We have identified the following functions, more or less articulated in the documents we have seen and the interviews we have conducted:

- Provide the Department with internally recruited teaching staff (after the degree)
- Provide the Department with supplementary teaching and admin
- Offer career-making opportunities to mid-career staff (since supervision is required for promotion) and to senior staff (for widening the research base and funding opportunities)
- Maintain existing disciplinary nuclei and consolidate disciplinary identities within a broad integrative environment on the Department level
- Build a diverse research environment, with researchers at different stages of their careers

The 'rotation PhD students' of course contribute to this, but so do project-funded PhD students. The rotation students may perhaps do so even more as they can be seen as the exclusive properties of the disciplines. This is especially true for the function of maintaining disciplinary identities. If a discipline for a longer period of time has no or extremely few PhD students, it may seem that the discipline has a not-so-bright future. At the same time, to use the PhD students as a currency in this respect may not be fully congruent with the common good or with the interests of the PhD students themselves. It

seems reasonable therefore to focus on maintaining a high level of external income to sustain a robust additional flow of PhD students.

A complementary way of looking at the dilemma – maintaining multiple disciplines with small resources – would be to use the base-funded PhD students as more of a collective resource, that could be used in a concerted, solidarity-based common effort in the entire Department to increase income, and thereby the total volume of PhD students. In practice, this would suggest a slightly more flexible allocation model. The sound basic principle of sharing among all is sound and can still stand. What would be altered would be periodization and rationale. In such modified sharing, PhD positions may, obviously after careful consideration and vetting on the Department level, sometimes be allocated in coordination to support common projects and research lines of priority, typically in relation to external funding opportunities. This kind of approach may be of benefit not just for the PhD training, but also for the dynamics of the Department as a whole. It has certain risks, especially that already weak fields are left even poorer in the initial phase of such an effort, but that could be overcome by clear income/PhD guarantees. We bring forth this idea not as a hard recommendation but rather as a thought experiment in order to stimulate new ways to think about the current quite rigid rotation format and to invite the Department to, in due course, consider more dynamic approaches that could in the end offer both more collaboration in PhD training and incentives to collaborate in creating externally funded platforms for research that may also benefit the PhD programs across the department. We are quite aware that this requires delicate and careful considerations. If, however, the department is able, and willing, to present a strategy of this kind, chances should be good that the faculty/university may look at it favorably. Perhaps an initiative along these lines could be aided by additional funding in the initial phase, as an investment in the common good. It may also help release the collaborative potential that to us seems considerable in the Department.

Regardless of which, if any, adjustments are made to the rotation model, we think it is important to strive for more collaborations regarding external funding. To develop more pro-active collaboration of this kind it may be a good idea to consider the collegial fora that are installed for making the Department-wide functionalities effective. Here we find the Associate Head of Department for Doctoral Studies, with a particular responsibility for PhD training, but even more so the FUG. Our general impression is that these functions mostly serve the task of information and communication and of discussion of issues of common concern, within the general framework of the rotation principle and a high degree of autonomy for the six disciplinary "learning environments". These organs could be strengthened and be tasked with a more pro-active 'developmental' mission to make sure that the potential harnessed in the construction of the integrative Department is released also in the very large activity that PhD training represents. This would concern, e.g., common courses if and when possible, summer academies, and other training activities, but also opening up for more visiting PhD students from other universities. Another key function would be to build as much critical mass as possible to minimize the effects of the uneven distribution of PhD positions across the six disciplines. This would also compensate for the lack of "community" reported in some of the smallest disciplines. An undertaking of this kind would also serve as an attempt to link, on a continuous basis, the efforts to fund the PhD training in the Department to the building of funding opportunities through projects and programmes, especially those that are big enough to host PhD students. In sum, to move in this general direction would be a way to think more proactively about the entire Department as a "learning environment" as well, alongside the six disciplinary learning environments.

Other comments

There are issues with financing for necessary trips, such as field trips (in several subjects) and conference trips associated with a publication (relevant at least for logic and computational linguistics). Such activities are necessary for completing certain PhD projects. Several students expressed they were admitted to the PhD program with a proposed project that is not possible to perform without attracting additional financial support for such travel. They felt that this was not communicated when they were admitted. We propose that such conditions are made clear before a PhD student is employed. Furthermore, if a student is admitted with a proposal including these activities, there should be a plan for how to finance them.

Another related issue is that the knowledge about opportunities for additional funding, such as scholarships, is mixed among the students. It can also be hard to write your first grant application on your own, so having support for how to write applications is also important. At the moment, information about and help with writing funding applications seems to fall solely on the supervisors, and this is unfortunate because not all supervisors will be equally good at it or have time for it. Further, knowing how to apply for funding is an important skill for PhD students, and writing applications is something they ought to learn during their PhD program (as pointed out by the management). Some department-level efforts are made to point students toward financing opportunities. However, they are often targeted at general resources, such as the GU overall scholarship webpage, which can be hard to navigate. In this case, more specific knowledge of a lower number of specific, relevant funds is much more useful for students.

Overall, we got the impression that most PhD students do some teaching, which we find positive. However, there is no department-wide system for teaching compensation. It varies year by year due to the current finances, and the process also varies between subjects. This means that most students do not understand how their teaching hours are compensated. They often think that they do not get enough compensation for teaching, and the lack of transparency in the system probably worsens this. They also think that the compensation is arbitrary, and not fair between PhD students across subjects. With the current system, it is hard to know if these issues of fairness are real, or only perceived as unfair. We recommend considering a transparent system, based on a template that at least covers PhD students. We appreciate that it is hard to design a system that works for all situations and all types of teaching across subjects, but to initiate a discussion around this seems vital, and we propose at least stating some basic principles for teaching compensation. We believe that having department-level systems/principles for PhD students also could help in fostering a community feeling across subjects. We also recommend better communication of how the system of teaching hour allocation works.

In many subjects, it is common for PhD students to co-author papers with others, including their supervisors. We also believe that co-authorship is becoming more common across subjects, and also in cross-disciplinary research, with authors with different disciplinary backgrounds, making it increasingly challenging to handle. However, currently, there are no guidelines for co-authorship, neither at the department nor at a higher level at the university. We believe that it is important to have some guidance for this since it is challenging for PhD students to navigate, especially given that they are in an imbalanced relationship with their supervisors. While it is challenging to have strict rules that are applicable across a range of subjects with different traditions, there are international standards for defining what is an appropriate contribution for a co-author, such as the Vancouver recommendations, which are adopted by many other Swedish universities. We recommend the department to adopt guidelines for co-authorship.

International students encounter certain problems that are not specific to the department, but general for PhD students across Sweden. These typically have to do with issues related to work permits and waiting times for getting a personal number. These issues lead to problems with paying salaries at the beginning of employment, and issues with travel during breaks between work permits. Unfortunately, most of these issues are outside of the control of the department, and cannot be addressed at the local level. Our impression is that the department does a good job at trying to ease this situation by providing information and having routines for such situations. The responsible administrative staff seems to have good networks and collaborations with other administrators in devising strategies. Strategies that are being discussed and used at the department are to plan around periods with VISA issues, such as planning teaching during such periods, and planning travel when that is possible. The department is also, at least to some extent offering employment longer than 1 year after the first period (which has to be 1 year), which can help this group of students. We encourage the department to keep working with the measures available to them. We also encourage them to consider writing some guidelines, particularly targeting this student group and problems they may encounter, in line with the existing general guidelines for third-cycle studies (*FU-lathund*). Another useful small measure could be to support the exchange of information from older to younger PhD students, who may have navigated similar issues. Despite these potential actions, though, problems remain that have to be solved at a higher level.

Collaborations between PhD students and faculty members are a great way of supporting learning, research, and publications for PhD students. In general, these collaborations seem to be working well. However, we received an indication that some faculty members sometimes do not prioritize their tasks in these collaborations, which means the PhD student in question has to take on a larger workload than planned. The relationship between PhD students and faculty members is by its very nature unequal, and the consequences are usually much bigger for the students than for the faculty members if a particular collaborative project is not getting done. This puts pressure on the students to pick up the slack. We do not have any reason to think this is a general problem, and we do not have detailed information about the extent or details of the problem in those cases where it has occurred, but we want to acknowledge that the issue was raised with us during our visit to the department. We therefore recommend that the department addresses the issue.

Recommendations

- Strengthen Department-wide collaboration on PhD training and make the integrated Department a valid part of the learning environment for graduate training.
- Develop pro-active, coordinated activities to expand the volume of PhD training to facilitate critical mass and maintain quality, both in the PhD training at large and in the discipline-based learning environments.
- Maintain but possibly modify, the rotation system to avoid anemic episodes of student shortage in individual disciplines.
- Develop and keep up-to-date (when relevant) the 'guide' for PhD students ('lathund'). It should be quite comprehensive to maximize transparency and fairness and to avoid misunderstandings. Include in particular information and advice for international students.
- Monitor closely the relationship between faculty competencies/fields of concentration and supervision demand.
- Discuss how to achieve both knowledge depth and a broad competence in the subjects, in the context of the different subjects' respective conditions.

- Ensure that each student gets information about courses and conferences relevant to them. Preferably this should not only be the responsibility of the supervisors.
- Provide information about relevant stipends as well as practical guidance about applications. This is especially important for students whose dissertations require fieldwork.
- Develop career guidance as an element of the PhD program.
- In light of the difficulties faced by international PhD students, we encourage the department to take all the measures available to them. This includes, but is not limited to, offering 2-year contracts and writing guidelines addressing these problems.
- Discuss the issue of teaching hour allocation and consider department-wide principles, at least for PhD students. Make sure that information about the system is clearly communicated to the PhD students.
- Offer the opportunity and encourage all supervisors who have not yet done so to take a pedagogical course on supervision in doctoral programs.