

Utbildningsutvärdering med extern bedömning
vid Göteborgs universitet

**Evaluation of Post-Graduate Education at Department of
Philosophy, Linguistics and Theory of Science, Faculty of
Arts, University of Gothenburg**

**(“Bedömarutlåtande för utbildning på forskarnivå vid
institutionen för filosofi, lingvistik och vetenskapsteori,
humanistiska fakulteten, Göteborgs universitet”)**

2018-12-11

Short background

The evaluation panel (see below) has been given the task of evaluating post-graduate education ("utbildning på forskarnivå") at the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics and Theory of Science within the Faculty of Arts. The point of departure for the evaluation is the University of Gothenburg's criteria for evaluation of post-graduate educational programs according to the policy for quality assurance and development (see [policy för kvalitetssäkring och kvalitetsutveckling](#)), as well as the guidelines for external evaluation of programs for post-graduate education at the Faculty of Arts (see [vägledning för utbildningsutvärdering på forskarnivå med extern bedömning vid Humanistiska fakulteten](#)).

The evaluation process has been as follows. In April 2018 the faculty and the department submitted a number of documents to the panel in preparation for the panel's first site visit. On 2 May 2018 the panel met with representatives from the faculty and the department in Gothenburg to discuss and plan the upcoming evaluation work. Following this meeting, the panel requested various complementary documents concerning the post-graduate programs in different subject areas ("forskarutbildningsämnena") within the department. The panel also formulated a number of questions that were directed to three constituencies: department leadership, teachers and researchers in the different subject areas ("ämneskollegor"), and doctoral candidates. Both the documents and the responses to questions were submitted to the panel in September (for an overview of the material, please see [Bilaga 1](#)). The panel's second site visit then took place on 24-25 September, during which the panel met for extended interviews and discussions with representatives from the three constituencies, as well as a representative from the faculty leadership (for the site visit program, see [Bilaga 2](#)).

This evaluation is thus based on a variety of sources such as submitted documents, the department's responses to the various questions, and the results of the two site visits. The panel has decided to write the evaluation in English in order to make it accessible for all colleagues within the department.

The panel consists of the following members:

- Simon Allzén, doctoral candidate in theoretical philosophy, Stockholm University
- Matti Eklund, professor in theoretical philosophy, Uppsala University
- Joakim Nivre, professor in computational linguistics, Uppsala University
- Jane Summerton, professor emerita in technology and social change, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, VTI

Strengths and weaknesses of the education; overall reflections

The general impression of the panel is that post-graduate education at FLoV is of high quality and to a great extent satisfies the criteria and achieves the goals stated in the guidelines. We see many strengths in the way that post-graduate education is organized and carried out at the department but also dimensions that can be further developed. In particular, there is a relatively large variation between different subject areas with respect to framework conditions, resources, and current level of activity. In short, the subject areas are in different positions at the moment, and their future prospects also appear to differ widely. Below we will discuss strengths and weaknesses, reflections and recommendations with regard to the eight main criteria included in the guidelines for the evaluation (see [vägledning för utbildningsutvärdering på forskarnivå med extern bedömning vid Humanistiska fakulteten](#)), as well as add some additional considerations. We will conclude with general observations and recommendations.

The eight criteria that are identified in the guidelines are:

1. **Student-centered education:** the education is centered on the PhD students' learning ("undervisningen sätter doktorandernas lärande i centrum")
2. **Goal fulfillment:** the actual study results correspond to expected learning outcomes and national examination goals ("de faktiska studieresultatet motsvarar lärandemål och högskoleförordningens examensmål")
3. **Scientific foundation:** the content and form of the education rests on a firm scientific and/or artistic foundation as well as proven experience ("undervisningens innehåll och form vilar på vetenskaplig och/eller konstnärlig grund samt beprövad erfarenhet")
4. **Teachers/supervisors:** the teachers have up-to-date and adequate competence in the subject area as well as relevant pedagogical and didactical competence, and the number of teachers is in proportion to the scope and content of the education ("lärarna har aktuell och adekvat ämnesmässig, högskolepedagogisk och ämnesdidaktisk kompetens samt att antalet lärare står i proportion till utbildningens omfattning och innehåll")
5. **Relevance for students and society:** the education is relevant for the needs of the students and of society ("utbildningen är relevant för doktorandernas och samhällets behov")
6. **Student influence:** the students can influence the planning, implementation and assessment of the education ("doktoranderna har inflytande i planering, genomförande och uppföljning av utbildningen")
7. **Learning environment:** the learning environment is accessible and adequate for all students ("en för alla doktorander tillgänglig och ändamålsenlig studie- och lärmiljö föreligger")
8. **Assessment and development:** continuous assessment and development of the education is carried out ("kontinuerlig uppföljning och utveckling av utbildningen genomförs")

Criterion 1: Student-Centered Education

There are many indications that post-graduate education at FLoV is centered on students' learning through the organization of courses, seminars and other activities.

The courses taken by PhD students are in most cases a combination of individual reading courses, which provide excellent opportunities for individualization, and courses taught to larger groups, often at other departments or through international summer schools. A recurring comment from

students is that information about the latter type of courses could be more systematic (see also Section 7, Learning Environment). The national PhD courses offered in philosophy provide a good example in this respect, which can be further developed and also serve as inspiration for other subject areas.

Active seminar series exist in all subject areas, although the level of activity varies. The seminars provide an important forum for learning and interaction, where PhD students regularly present their work (at least once a year, more frequently in some subject areas). There are no dedicated PhD student seminars, and some students indicated in their comments that a more informal type of seminar focusing on PhD students could be a good complement to the existing seminars.

Some of the recent initiatives at the department level, in particular the “researcher workshop” (“forskarverkstad”) and the “writing group” (“skrivarstuga”), are further examples of how the department works actively to promote students’ learning. Our clear impression is that these initiatives are already working well and are highly appreciated by PhD students.

Criterion 2: Goal Fulfilment

The panel does not have sufficient evidence to evaluate goal fulfilment in detail, but our overall impression is that study results generally correspond well to expected learning outcomes and national examination goals. All subject areas report that students overall graduate on time and find employment in relevant areas, and these claims are backed up by statistics on program completion (with a median net study time between 4 and 5 years), as well as by information about the current employment of alumni. At the same time, we note that some subject areas have had rather few graduations during the last five years, and it may be worthwhile following up on causes for non-completion.

When it comes to active measures to guarantee goal fulfilment, and quality control more generally, this works well when it comes to dissertation work, through the existing routines for discussing and evaluating on-going work on doctoral dissertations. Students in all subjects are required to present their dissertation work at least four times during their studies, and a system for final seminars (“slutseminarium”) or “green reading” (“grönläsning”) is implemented. In addition, students are encouraged to publish early in order to get feedback on their work, and there is funding for students to travel to conferences to present their work. There is, however, a need for evaluating PhD courses, which will be discussed in Section 8, Assessment and Development.

Awareness of the need to prepare students for a career inside or outside academia varies between subject areas, and some staff indicate that they specifically only take academic careers into account. Furthermore, comments from both students and supervisors indicate that career planning is largely left to the individual constellation of student and supervisor, although this situation seems to be changing thanks to several recent initiatives at the departmental level. Career issues are now an obligatory component of the annual revision of the individual study plan; the recently introduced researcher workshops appear to be focused on “tricks of the trade”; and there are ongoing discussions with Chalmers University of Technology about courses focusing on generic skills. We want to commend the department for these initiatives, which go beyond what can be found in most environments with which we are familiar.

Criterion 3: Scientific Foundation

Most of the available supervisors in the department are active as researchers, and their scientific competence is generally high (predominantly professor and docent level). We understand that in some subject areas in the past, there has not always been strong compatibility (a “good fit”) between the interests of the PhD students who been admitted and the specific expertise of the available supervisors. There is an awareness, however, that this has been a problem, and the department is now keen to ensure that there is a good fit between PhD students’ interests and the expertise of the various supervisors.

In some subject areas there are senior lecturers/teachers who are not docents and who are not active researchers. To the extent that this means that there are not enough qualified supervisors available for the PhD students, this situation might be a problem.

Much of the coursework within the various subject areas is in the form of individual reading courses. We have no reason to doubt that these courses rest on a solid scientific foundation, but due to the format, and the lack of course evaluations, it is not easy for the panel to assess the overall quality of these courses.

Criterion 4: Teachers/Supervisors

As mentioned above, the available supervisors are active as researchers, and the research that is conducted is of high quality. We have seen no reason to doubt the competence of the staff in teaching and supervising PhD students, either when it comes to research competence or when it comes to pedagogical competence. There are some uncertainties, however, when it comes to the number of teachers/supervisors that are available to PhD students. In some subject areas (e.g. computational linguistics, practical philosophy and theory of science) there are no problems; here we would especially like to commend the department for the positive development in theory of science, where a previously precarious situation has been remedied (specifically, four new docents are now available as teachers/supervisors). The situation is more problematic in logic, theoretical philosophy, and general linguistics. We understand that there are plans to hire a professor in general linguistics, which seems urgent, but even then it is not clear that the capacity will be sufficient.

In general, when it comes to teaching and supervisory competence (“kompetensförsörjning”) relevant to the PhD education, the department is advised to monitor the situation in these subject areas and find strategies for ensuring that all research environments have viable situations both in the short and the long term. This type of work includes strategies for recruitment that allow the department to compete for competence at the highest international level.

Criterion 5: Relevance for Students and Society

There are a number of indications that the education in each subject area is relevant for the needs of the students and of society. These indications include employment rates for past students, the number of students that fulfill their education, and positive student statements. Some subject areas are better suited for producing competent researchers in academia, while others appear to have a more natural overlap with industry, which is to a large extent a reflection of different orientations

between the subject areas. But even when it comes to subject areas more traditionally suited for a career in academia, the department could consider how to make it possible to train their PhD students for non-academic careers, as well as how to best provide information to students about such careers. Besides the general information on the departmental level, a more tailored hands-on approach to help students to more effectively convey to employers outside academia that they have useful skills would be beneficial. This could be done through existing forums (“forskarverkstad”) or in collaboration with existing efforts at Chalmers, but could also be carried out as a separate activity at the department.

Regarding the relevance of the education for the students’ needs, the panel’s overall impression is highly positive. The students have adequate access to supervision and strong possibilities to influence the content of courses. One concern that was voiced by some of the international students was that, unlike Swedish students, there were no opportunities for them to teach courses at the undergraduate level, which from their perspective can be somewhat detrimental to their education (i.e. lack of teaching qualifications). As far as the panel can discern, there are no formal restrictions regarding the language used in teaching undergraduate courses, so if this asymmetry in teaching opportunities is viewed as problematic, it could potentially be remedied by working to create possibilities for PhD students to participate in undergraduate courses by teaching in languages other than Swedish.

Criterion 6: Student Influence

It is the panel’s impression that PhD students at the department can influence their education to a high degree. Student testimonies reveal that the high level of individualization regarding course content is appreciated and contributes to a sense of participation in designing one’s education. Additional ways to ensure that students can influence their education are also indicated in how the department has structured the relationship between student and employer. At FLoV, the deputy head of department (“vice-prefekten”) is the PhD student’s employer, which makes it easier for a PhD student to change supervisor (or deal with other workplace problems) if necessary, since workplace-related issues between PhD students and supervisors are thus handled by the employer. Because the relationship between student and supervisor can be sensitive, the possibility to communicate directly with the deputy head of department in matters regarding supervision is highly appreciated by the students, as indicated in both written comments and interviews.

There is a PhD council at the department, which gives students additional opportunities to influence their education. Attendance and participation in the council’s meetings is, however, low which could mean that some students miss the opportunity to influence the content and organization of their education. We encourage FLoV and the council’s leadership to consider various activities (perhaps both academic and social) that could increase PhD students’ engagement.

An additional way to strengthen student influence could be to provide more structured information regarding available PhD courses nationally and internationally, as indicated earlier.

Criterion 7: Learning Environment

The panel's overall impression is that the various subject areas within the department indeed provide adequate and creative learning environment for PhD students, despite resource challenges as well as difficulties in achieving a "critical mass" of PhD students in the smaller environments. Intellectual and social contact between PhD students and their supervisors appears overall to be good, and PhD students typically appreciate the informality and flexibility that characterize their learning environments.

The department's strong dependency upon individual reading courses (and thereby strong specialization) as the core learning mechanism for PhD students makes it particularly important, however, to create multiple arenas to expose PhD students more broadly to other scientific parts of the subject area and thus achieve a good balance between specialization and breadth. Some of the environments within the department have good routines in place for strengthening their local environments in this regard, e.g. reading groups, project seminars, subject area and other seminars. These approaches should be further developed in all of the environments; we would particularly urge all of the subject areas to encourage even more active and sustained participation in seminars on the part of all senior and junior researchers (where we also note that the department is far from alone in having challenges in this area).

Another way to strengthen small learning environments is to provide PhD students with opportunities to participate in workshops, conferences, research visits, networks or other activities in other departments both locally, nationally and internationally. Some subject areas have well-developed such networks and cooperations of various kinds that are readily available to students. As noted earlier (Section 1, Section 6), it appears, however, that there are few structures in place to ensure that PhD students gain systematic access to information (and encouragement) about relevant opportunities at an early stage. Instead there are indications that it is typically "up to each PhD student" to find information and advice about both options and procedures. We would encourage the department to more systematically and pro-actively provide relevant information early on. Similarly, we would recommend offering more explicit orientation material to support PhD students "getting started", e.g. information on how the program is organized, what are informal/formal expectations and institutionalized milestones during the "PhD pathway", who to contact with issues or questions. This type of explicit orientation appears particularly important for non-Swedish speaking PhD students. Similarly, the department might consider providing reading lists of core introductory texts within the respective research areas "early on".

Criterion 8: Assessment and Development

As noted earlier, it appears that none of the subject areas have carried out systematic course evaluations of either individual reading courses or other PhD courses. While this situation is not unique to the department, it is not in keeping with high international standards for continuous assessment and development of robust, high-quality PhD education. We recognize that there can be some challenges when carrying out systematic evaluations of individual reading courses (e.g. anonymity, high variability in course content, high variability of responses due to the individualized nature of the courses). We nevertheless recommend the department to explore various approaches and mechanisms for evaluating all courses, as well as methods for systematic follow-up of results.

One possibility might be to introduce routines that enable PhD students to evaluate reading courses on an aggregated level (that is, to provide overall feedback on several/all courses that they have taken), which might address potential challenges related to anonymity.

Another means of strengthening the PhD education is to ensure that various tasks (e.g. individual courses, project courses, specific steps in text production, seminar presentations) are guided and evaluated by more than one senior person/supervisor. For example, taking courses taught by several teachers can be a useful instrument for broadening the scientific perspectives that the PhD student is exposed to during her/his education.

An additional possibility for strengthening on-going assessment of PhD students' work is to consider more systematically introducing "half-time" seminars with e.g. external commentators, external evaluation group and concrete follow-up. In our experience, such seminars are sometimes highly valuable as a means of assessing – and providing useful feedback to both supervisors and PhD students on – the on-going PhD work. These seminars can readily be adapted to formats of both monographs and paper-based dissertations by developing guidelines about what scope/number of papers or chapters that are normally expected to be presented.

Additional Considerations

Before moving on to conclusions and recommendations, we would like to comment on three topics that are not directly covered by the evaluation criteria above: funding, admission procedures, and gender balance.

Our first comment concerns funding challenges and potential responses to these challenges. A recurrent theme in the responses provided by the department is the perception that funding for PhD education internally from the university has decreased over time and that funding from external sources has therefore increased in importance, which raises a number of issues. For example, funding restraints can limit the number of PhD students that can be admitted at a given time, which negatively affects the ability of the various subject areas to achieve a "critical mass" of students (or, in unfavorable circumstances, any students at all during a given year). Opportunities for obtaining external funding may be unevenly distributed over different subject areas, which may lead to an imbalance between internally and externally funded PhD students either within or across subject areas.

We would urge the department to consider developing active strategies for dealing with these issues and for more explicitly supporting researchers in their on-going efforts to increase external funding. The departments' current funding challenges are far from unique within Swedish universities (perhaps especially within the humanities), and some research environments have developed explicit strategies for strengthening their skills in an increasingly externally funded research landscape. Examples of such strategies that are currently being implemented are "application writing skills" seminars with external resource persons (for example, from grant offices, funding agencies, pedagogic/communication experts), cross-departmental seminars for collegial exchange of "tricks of the trade" in writing funding applications, and more structured application processes whereby draft applications are collegially reviewed well in advance of deadlines. We would urge the department to consider these (or other) supportive mechanisms.

Our second comment concerns coordinated allocation of internally funded student positions. The departments' admission processes for new PhD students are currently handled separately by each subject area, and there seems to be a consensus in the department that this is preferable to having joint admission (even though it is generally a good idea to coordinate admissions in time, if possible, in order to create groups of students starting together). The allocation of internally funded PhD student positions to different subject areas is based on a rotational cycle, where factors such as capacity for supervision are also taken into account. These principles are well described by the department leadership but appear to be less well known and understood among teachers and supervisors in specific subject areas. It might thus be worthwhile to, for example, add this information to departmental documents describing procedures for admission.

Our final comment concerns gender representation, which often has consequences for working environments as well as symbolic importance for PhD students about, for example, perceived career opportunities in academia. In some subject areas and some categories of staff within the department, women are very clearly underrepresented. While there are limits to what the department can do to remedy this situation, especially in a short term perspective, it is important to be aware of these issues and to consider ways of counteracting any problems that this gender imbalance may lead to.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our overall impression of the current work and future prospects for FLoV's PhD educational program is positive. FLoV has existed for just ten years but appears to us to be a well-functioning and cohesive department with active, intellectually dynamic research environments. Several of the subject areas are clearly thriving. Several recent initiatives (e.g. the researcher workshop, the writing group, the fact that the deputy head of department is now officially the PhD students' employer) clearly contribute to strengthening the PhD students' education.

Nevertheless we have some recommendations for the department, some of which we find especially important ("recommendations"), while others have the character of more tentative suggestions ("suggestions").

Recommendations

- While some subject areas are doing very well in terms of staff and available supervisors, the situation is more difficult in linguistics, theoretical philosophy, and logic. The department needs to consider what it can do to strengthen these subjects in both the short and the long term. Additional recruitments will be required, especially in linguistics and possibly also in theoretical philosophy, in order to enable and guarantee a suitable research and learning environment for PhD students
- Many PhD students ask for more explicit and systematic information about possible courses (and other external opportunities) outside the department, both at the University of Gothenburg, nationally and internationally. The department should consider approaches and forums of providing this type of information more systematically.
- Given the extent to which Ph.D. students take individual reading courses, improved quality control in this area should be given priority. We recommend that the department explores

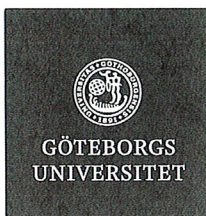
ways of evaluating individual reading courses so that their quality can be continually assessed and improved in a more systematic manner.

Suggestions

- Some PhD students expressed a desire for more informal seminars centered on PhD students as a complement to existing research seminars. It is not clear to the panel how widespread this opinion is, but it may be worthwhile to follow up on the issue within the department.
- The department might consider developing a more tailored hands-on approach to help PhD students to more effectively show employers outside academia that they have useful skills (as well as prepare students for such future opportunities). This type of work could be done through existing forums such as the researcher workshop, or in collaboration with similar efforts at Chalmers, but it could also be initiated and carried out as a separate, cross-department activity.
- The department may want to create opportunities for non-Swedish speaking PhD students to gain teaching experience by doing undergraduate teaching.
- The department may also want to think about ways to provide systematic information, including scientific reading material, to PhD students early on. More specifically, this type of information should include both practical/institutional information about organization of the PhD track, expectations and institutional milestones, as well as things such as initial reading lists so that students right away can start to orient themselves scientifically in areas relevant to their field. Some of these dimensions are especially important for non-Swedish speaking PhD students.
- The department might want to consider developing strategies or mechanisms to more actively support on-going processes in connection with applications for external funding.
- The principles for allocating internally funded PhD positions to the various subject areas are clear and adequate in themselves, but are not well known among all teachers and supervisors. The department might want to consider making this information available and clear in a more transparent way.
- Women are underrepresented in certain subject areas and staff categories. The department should be aware of any effects that this may have on the research and learning environment.

Bilaga 1 Underlag till bedömagruppen

Bilaga 2 Program platsbesök, 24–25 september 2018



HUMANISTISKA FAKULTETEN

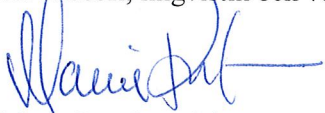
Beslut

Datum:
2018-06-14

Dnr:
V 2017/406

Mottagare:
HFS, institutioner vid den Humanistiska fakulteten

Ärende	Underlag för utbildningsutvärdering på forskarnivå vid Institutionen för filosofi, lingvistik och vetenskapsteori
Bakgrund och beslutsunderlag (ev. hänvisning till föredragnings-PM)	<p>Enligt Vägledning för utbildningsutvärdering på forskarnivå med extern bedömning vid Humanistiska fakulteten, 2017-2023 (Dnr V 2017/406) ska dekan, i samråd med institution, besluta om det underlag som ska användas av den externa bedömargruppen. Nedanstående underlag har tagits fram av institutionen och diskuterats tillsammans med bedömargruppens representanter vid ett upptaktsmöte i maj. Bedömargruppen har uppmanats att inkomma med synpunkter på materialet och om det är ytterligare underlag som behövs.</p> <p><u>Innehållsförteckning</u> Institutionens läsanvisning Bilaga 1 – 6 Allmänna studieplaner Bilaga 7 Förteckning över doktorander Bilaga 8 Kostnadsinventering forskarutbildning Bilaga 9 Delegation för viceprefekt för forskarutbildning Bilaga 10 - 11 Redovisning av handledarkompetens Bilaga 12 Urval av kursplaner, kursguider, litteraturlistor och kursuppgifter i Teoretisk filosofi Bilaga 13 Urval av kursplaner, kursguider, litteraturlistor och kursuppgifter i Praktisk filosofi Bilaga 14 Urval av kursplaner i Logik Bilaga 15 Urval av kursplaner, kursguider, litteraturlistor och kursuppgifter i Datalingvistik Bilaga 16 Urval av kursplaner, kursguider, litteraturlistor och kursuppgifter i Lingvistik Bilaga 17 Urval av kursplaner, kursguider, litteraturlistor och kursuppgifter i Vetenskapsteori Bilaga 18 Förslag gällande beredningsgång för individuella läskurser</p>

	Bilaga 19 PM Samordnad antagning till forskarutbildningen Bilaga 20 HP/VP 2018 - 2020 Bilaga 21 Introduktionsrutin Bilaga 22 Lathund Bilaga 23 Brev till opponent och betygsnämnd ISP, tillgång via tittfunktion	
Föredragande och övriga närvarande	Mikael Strömberg, föredragande handläggare Houman Sadri, doktorandrepresentant, via telefon	
Beslutas	<i>att</i> fastställa underlag för utbildningsutvärdering på forskarnivå vid Institutionen för filosofi, lingvistik och vetenskapsteori enligt innehållsförteckning ovan  Marie Demker, dekan	
Kopia till	Bedömargruppen, Viceprefekt för forskarutbildning, HFS Original till registrator

Bilaga 2, Program platsbesök, 24–25 september 2018:

Måndag 24 september, T340 (Olof Wijksgatan 6)

10.00–10.50

Möte med ämnesföreläsare/handledare från Teoretisk filosofi, Praktisk filosofi och Logik.

11.00–11.50

Möte med ämnesföreläsare/handledare från Lingvistik och Datalingvistik.

12.00–12.50

Möte med ämnesföreläsare/handledare från Vetenskapsteori.

12:50–14.00 - Lunch

14.00–14.50

Möte med doktorander från Teoretisk filosofi, Praktisk filosofi och Logik.

15.00–15.50

Möte med doktorander från Lingvistik och Datalingvistik.

16.00–16.50

Möte med doktorander från Vetenskapsteori.

Tisdag 25 september, Mötesrum 112, Dicksonsgatan 4

09.00–09.50

Möte med doktorander från alla ämnen

10.00–10.50

Möte med institutionsledningen

11.00–12.50

Arbetsmöte för att ta fram synopsis för rapporten

12:50–14.00 - Lunch

14.00–14.30

Ev. kort återrapportering till fakultetsledningen