

External evaluation of the PhD programme of the faculty of Social Sciences at University of Oslo

Introduction

The Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Oslo decided that the PhD programme should be evaluated in 2015-2017. The first step was an internal evaluation with a report presented in November 2015. As the second step, the Faculty appointed 14 April 2016 the following external members to evaluate the PhD programme:

Professor/Head of institute Nina K. Vøllestad, The Medical Faculty, Univ of Oslo (leader)
Dr. Jens Jungblut, University of Kassel, Germany
Professor Ingrid Lunt, University of Oxford, UK
Professor Jon Mitchell, University of Sussex, UK
Professor Jakob Munch, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Professor Geraldine Pratt, University of British Columbia, Canada

The mandate states that the primary task is to evaluate the scientific quality in light of international standards and the efficiency of the programme. See further details in Appendix 1.

The evaluation is based on written documentation, information obtained through one video meeting with the dean of research and administration, and a site visit. The written material comprised the internal evaluation report, examples of theses from each track, evaluation reports for theses, and a comprehensive set of data on number of candidates, enrolment frequency, dissertations, course participation etc. Also, a self-description from each track was prepared.

The site visit was held 5-6 September and included an interview with a group of PhD candidates (one from each track) and individual interviews with the seven track leaders (see Appendix 2 for details of programme). The committee met with the Dean of research and PhD-administrators.

A comprehensive description of the PhD program is given in the internal review. We will here go into issues that we find important to describe for fulfilling the evaluation mandate.

General comments

The PhD study is organised as one programme in the Social Science Faculty with seven tracks. There is variability across the tracks, for instance regarding requirements for courses, early plans, evaluation of progress, and timing of midway assessment.

The students are connected to the track, rather than the program or the Faculty. The committee considers that this organization is appropriate, although some aspects should be improved to strengthen the program as a whole as well as the tracks. In general, we find that all tracks are well functioning, of good quality and show high levels of self-reflection and awareness of existing challenges. Below we first make some comments and

recommendations concerning common issues across the seven tracks, before moving on to evaluate specific strengths and areas of improvement for each track.

Aims of the PhD programme

It would be useful for the Faculty to clarify the question: what is the PhD for? There will be many perspectives on this, from society, the university, the faculty, the tracks and the individual candidates. Although more than half of the candidates seem to continue in research and take up academic positions, others continue in other professional careers. It would be useful to have a statement about the purpose and goals of the PhD to clarify future career options.

The current statement of learning outcomes is very general and almost identical to the Norwegian qualifications framework's general descriptors. Without a more precise statement of the specific aims for the PhD programme and the individual tracks, it is difficult to evaluate how the structure, content, methods, resources and assessments of the programme align with the aims, and in particular to justify the seven tracks. The committee gained an insight into the aims through the written material and the discussions.

A further related question concerns the optimal size of the program and the number of candidates enrolled in each track. Increasing numbers may not necessarily be better or even desirable for the Faculty, or indeed for individuals.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Faculty provide a statement describing the aims and purposes of the social sciences PhD programme**
- 2. That the Faculty provides a clearer statement of learning outcomes for the PhD programme and for each track**

Recruitment and intake criteria

Currently it appears that all the tracks attract strong candidates. Whilst some tracks require a disciplinary Masters or specific courses, this can make access to the PhD programme a challenge. It is also difficult to understand the rationale for strict criteria, unless this is related to specific aims of the track (see above). Some of the tracks are relaxing their intake requirements, a change the committee welcomes.

Almost all tracks expressed the challenge of integrating external¹ students with the internal students and the department. This would benefit from further consideration. Some tracks require external students to be present within the Department for a minimum period. Tracks should consider if this is appropriate, as a way of integrating external students. This may be achieved through an extended period of full-time presence (for example, one term), or by requiring regular attendance at seminars.

There seems to be a challenge to reach out to all students in the tracks (both external and internal). It is particularly important to ensure that all students have full access to the same information (guidance, seminar programmes, Faculty notices etc.) and are in regular on-going email communication with track and Faculty.

¹ We use "internal" and "external" students/candidates to distinguish between PhD students employed by or carrying out their research in an institution external to the Faculty

Recommendations

1. **All tracks consider the relaxation of intake requirements of a specific disciplinary Masters qualification**
2. **All tracks ensure the integration of external with internal students within the track and Faculty as appropriate**
3. **All tracks ensure that information (guidance, seminar programmes, notices etc.) is available to all students, external and internal, equally.**

Structure, progression and progress

The committee considers that the structure of the programme is appropriate. However, there are a number of ways that the program as a whole and the tracks can be strengthened in order to improve the PhD program. The tracks have different processes to secure progression and progress. Some tracks have rather weak structures for the development of plans and monitoring progression. It seems logical that such structures should be made at the programme level. Tracks may add supplementary requirements as appropriate.

The committee recommends that the following milestones be initiated, as a basic structure for the PhD program and the tracks:

1. PhD candidates should establish with their supervisor/s a PhD Plan early in the PhD. This should build upon and substantially add to the existing research proposal upon which the PhD has been appointed. In particular, it should include concrete, detailed and timetabled milestones for the PhD project.
2. Annual Review of academic progress should be strengthened across the programme. Although for some tracks this is a strong, robust process, in others it is something of a ‘box-ticking’ exercise. The committee recommends that it be used more thoroughly as a means of identifying problems and issues with PhD candidates’ progress.
3. Mid Term Review should be strengthened, with clear guidance being given as to the progress a candidate is expected to have made by the Mid Term Review point.
4. Annual Performance Development Review should be performed for all PhD students, to gauge professional progress. This is also an opportunity for the PhD students to voice problems with the supervisor relationship

There is a tension in the programme, between (internal) PhD candidates’ status as student and their status as employee. Faculty involved in the review expressed a concern that the current review processes lack sufficient sanctions, and there was a lack of clarity about what Faculty/a track can do if they wish to terminate a stipendiat contract because of poor or unsuitable performance in the PhD.

The committee recommends that this important issue is discussed across tracks and at Faculty level to consider ways in which ongoing review could be made more meaningful, and whether performance/progress can be linked to the contractual obligations of the PhD candidate.

The Faculty might consider the possibility of ‘early exit’ qualifications for candidates who are struggling – for example, a kind of MPhil qualification as used in UK, by monograph or by publication; or a Postgraduate Certificate, or Diploma.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the Faculty adopts common processes and procedures for the PhD regarding student progression and progress**
- 2. That the Faculty adopts a clear PhD timetable of milestones which include the initial PhD Plan, annual reviews, and the mid-term review.**
- 3. That the Faculty considers ways to support the progress of students who are struggling, including the possibility of an ‘exit’ qualification.**

Inter-disciplinarity

Although international and national research agendas ask for increased inter-disciplinarity, the committee found limited attention to this in most of the programs and the tracks, apart from the TIC track, and the co-operation between the sociology and geography tracks. The structure of the programme should permit both the development of strong disciplines and inter-disciplinarity. The present structure of the PhD programme with seven tracks has a risk of developing isolated tracks with little ‘permeability’ between them. The committee gained the impression that the potential for inter-disciplinarity and cooperation across tracks is under-used and should be strengthened.

The committee would encourage joint supervision across tracks, where appropriate, and recommends that the programme as a whole consider ways of encouraging/incentivising cross-disciplinary discussion and research. Possible strategies include:

- a framework for cross-disciplinary research projects
- encouraging the development of cross-cutting inter-disciplinary centres of excellence
- incentivising PhD candidates to create inter-disciplinary seminars, rewarding them with academic credits and/or considering it part of their ‘required teaching hours’
- organising courses across tracks to a greater extent than currently, and with contributions from staff from more than one department.

These are not exhaustive suggestions, and the committee recommends the programme as a whole consider how best to foster cross-track communication and debate. Further development along these lines should also be viewed considering the intake criteria as discussed above. Possibly candidates aiming at cross-disciplinary projects might find the disciplinary tracks too narrow. The TIC track is an exception in this respect, as it is truly based on inter-disciplinary research.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Faculty develop a common understanding of how to encourage and support inter-disciplinarity**
- 2. That the Faculty encourage joint supervision across tracks where appropriate**
- 3. That the Faculty offers inter-disciplinary courses**
- 4. That the Faculty and the tracks collaborate on balancing the need for disciplinary and inter-disciplinary development**

Courses

There are essentially three types of courses provided on the programme: Theoretical courses; Methods courses; Generic/transferable skills courses. The committee found a

significant imbalance in provision of these different types of courses, and recommends a substantial review of provision both across and within the tracks.

Most of the tracks have a range of Theoretical and Methodological courses, with a mix of compulsory and optional courses that contribute to the required credit points. There is a challenge for all tracks to find the right 'level' and balance between more general education and specialisation.

The current Philosophy of Science course does not appear to be positively received, and there seems to be a need for further discussion at Faculty level concerning an appropriate common methods/ethics course. It may also be appropriate for Faculty to organise a small number of more targeted methods courses that are open across the tracks.

The committee noted that the Oslo Summer School provides important courses for a number of the tracks, and discussed whether the kinds of cross-disciplinary synergies that are developed there could be reproduced in a common Faculty-wide induction event (possibly modelled on the Faculty of Medicine's induction) that brings together all PhDs to participate in a series of problem-based activities.

There appears to be a lack of access to more generic/transferable skills training, for example: academic writing in English, getting published, time management, project management, financial management, working with your supervisor, teamwork skills, grant application, and communication – presentation skills, communication with the media, and management of social media as well as other 'soft' skills. The LERU documents regarding doctoral training present good examples for training researchers in these skills. The Faculty might also usefully consult the UK organisation Vitae, who have developed the Researcher Development Framework to assist in provision of generic skills, and to recognise what training needs researchers might have.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Faculty develops a clear course plan that builds upon the aims and learning outcomes of the programme and the tracks**
- 2. That the Faculty considers common methods/ethics courses across tracks**
- 3. That the Faculty develops a programme of courses on generic/transferable skills**

Quality issues

As far as could be judged from the thesis abstracts, and the evaluation reports the quality of PhD research is comparable to other research intensive universities internationally. The committee was concerned that if more inter-disciplinary PhDs were developed, that the programme maintain vigilance over issues of quality. Quality should be ensured by careful selection of supervisors from within and across the PhD tracks, and externally, to make sure that inter-disciplinary PhD projects are well-supported academically. Similarly, examination committees should be carefully chosen to ensure that appropriate inter-disciplinary expertise is included in the committee.

There was substantial discussion during the review on the issue of article-based and monographic theses. There was concern, in particular, that what has become common practice within individual tracks has become increasingly narrated and understood by both

students and supervisors as concrete requirements. For example, the requirement that a thesis by article contain at least three publishable articles has been interpreted in some tracks as requiring them to have been published. There was also a concern that candidates and supervisors were fixing their attention too narrowly on the published articles, to the exclusion of the overall orienting introduction (kappe), which remains a central part of the thesis by publication. In other tracks, where common practice has been to submit a thesis by monograph, some candidates and supervisors interpret this as not permitting thesis by published article. The committee would like tracks to consider these issues, by returning to the degree regulations and ‘loosening’ expectations of what is required and what is forbidden in any one track.

Recommendations

- 1. That the tracks create plans for monitoring and reviewing quality of inter-disciplinary theses**
- 2. That the tracks make explicit criteria for both monographs and article-based theses**
- 3. That all tracks consider the appropriate format of thesis (article or monograph) for both their track as a whole and for individual candidates.**

Supervision

There appears to be a wide variation in frequency of contact with supervisor. This is partly inherent in the different disciplinary track traditions, but not always. It is also not even across external and internal candidates.

The committee got an impression that the role and responsibility of the supervisor in securing progress is unclear. The problem is of particular importance for external candidates, but not only for those. Furthermore, a concern was raised regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of ‘main’ supervisor (within the tracks) and ‘co-supervisor’ (externally, in another track, or international).

In some tracks there appears to be a culture of seeking a higher achievement than necessary, which prolongs time to completion. For example, as outlined above, articles within a thesis should be publishable, but not necessarily published.

In general, there appears to be a lack of training and Continuous Professional Development for supervisors. With the changes occurring over the last decade, with more emphasis on supervision and progress, the Faculty needs to ensure that the roles and the responsibility of supervisors are understood by students, supervisors, employers and other members of staff.

The committee also suggests considering the provision of mentors (more experienced PhD candidates) for all new candidates in all tracks across the Faculty so that they can be more effectively inducted both into the programme and the research environment.

Recommendations

- 1. The committee recommends that the minimum expectations of supervision, and the roles and responsibilities of both supervisors and candidates, be clarified and codified across the Faculty.**

- 2. The committee recommends that ongoing CPD training of supervisors (internal and external) be mandatory across the programme, and Faculty should consider how best to implement this**

Information flow issue

There are considerable problems with information flow throughout the programme. It is difficult to find clear guidance to candidates about what to do if they have a problem – including provision for confidentiality in cases where a candidate is concerned about the supervisory relationship.

It is difficult to find information regarding courses provided by the Faculty and the tracks. We see a need for more advice by supervisors or the Department on how and where to find good quality PhD courses, including courses offered outside of the Faculty of Social Sciences, in Norway or internationally. In addition, the information flow between the tracks about courses, which could be relevant for a broader group of PhD students could also be improved. This is in line with the observation that there is an untapped potential for cooperation among at least some of the tracks of the PhD program with regard to joint PhD courses especially in the area of research methods. This could also be a solution for the problems identified with regard to the Philosophy of Science course.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Faculty and tracks should generate formal Handbooks with guidelines, expectations and information.**
- 2. That the Faculty develops a menu or handbook of all courses – Theoretical, Methodological and Generic – across the Faculty.**

Assessment - disputations

The assessment and examination process is robust throughout, although there appear to be rather rigid traditions surrounding the public defense. We recommend that the Faculty considers that the public defence starts with a presentation of the thesis by the candidate before the committee members ask questions. This will ease the burden on the committee members and make it easier to persuade experts from other countries to join assessment committees. Other faculties at University of Oslo have adopted this format where the candidate present the thesis.

The format of the disputation is also unusual compared with other countries as the student is required to present a trial lecture. The committee discussed the value of this, and whether it is necessary. We understand that this format is given and it is beyond the capacity of the Faculty to change. However, we suggest that the Faculty considers raising a discussion about the purpose and need for a trial lecture.

Completion times

In the period 2011-2015 time to completion has been around 3.8 years for the programme. The numbers are net time, teaching time and leaves (e.g. maternity leaves) deducted. The longest times are seen for Social anthropology, with completion times between 5 and 7 years, but with shorter times for the most recent two years (4.7 and 4.2 years). For the other tracks, the completion times fluctuate between 3 and 4.5 years, with no tendency towards shorter times in the most recent years. The completion time thus seems to be

higher than expected (3 years), and higher than what is typical for a PhD in the majority of these disciplines in most European countries. This situation calls for actions to ensure faster completion and the committee acknowledge that some tracks had already taken actions, for instance using midway assessments. In addition, some of the recommendations above might be helpful (e.g. regarding progress review and supervision).

Internationalization

All tracks have international interaction and the Summer School is an important arena for this. However, it seems that most tracks have the same problem that few candidates have a stay abroad, although most travel on shorter visits (seminars, conferences etc.). It is unclear to the committee to what extent these actions promote international networks and collaboration. The individual tracks should consider ways in which internationalization can be further encouraged among their PhDs, remembering that this can be achieved not only by sending candidates abroad, but also by establishing ‘internationalization at home’, or virtually through Skype etc.

Recommendation

1. **That the tracks should generate a specific and appropriate strategy for internationalization**

The tracks

Political science

Program structure, training and courses

The political science track experienced a significant increase in applications for its internal PhD positions in recent years, including also a growing number of international applicants. This can be seen as a sign for the growing visibility of the Department and its PhD track. The number of applications is smaller for thematically pre-determined PhD positions. As the applications for thematically open positions are ranked purely based on the quality of the proposals, the spread of candidates among the sub-disciplines of political science is uneven. In combination with the lower number of applications for the thematically pre-defined PhD positions, this could present a future challenge for the sustainability of the breadth of the program, as a lack of high quality candidates especially in the less “popular” sub-disciplines potentially threatens the breadth of the existing research environment.

The amount of necessary course work seems sensible and the freedom for students to pick courses that fit their PhD project and attend also courses outside of the Faculty of Social Science is highly welcomed. The focus on theoretical and methodological courses to provide students with a strong foundation for their projects is a good choice and the cooperation with the Oslo Summer School for Comparative Social Science is a good way to offer additional courses. The idea to offer joint methods courses for MA and PhD students can be one way to make the course program more predictable – a problem which has been raised as part of the evaluation - through increasing the number of course participants. However, these new courses should be evaluated carefully to ensure that the PhD students find the level appropriate to their needs.

Research environment

The research environment of the political science track seems to be strong. The Department offers monthly PhD seminars, where students present their work or receiving training in specific skills. In addition, the PhDs are also encouraged to visit the weekly Department seminar. As the Department is not organized in research groups, the involvement of PhD students depends on their direct work environment. Those internal PhDs involved in larger research projects can be seen as the best integrated in a research environment, while those internal PhDs working on individual projects that do not overlap with active research in the Department can become more detached and “lonely”. This is an even greater challenge with regard to external PhDs who spent most of their time at their primary workplace outside of the Department.

While the Department already implemented the measure to require also external PhD candidates to attend at least 10 seminars over the course of 3 years, we still see some room for improvement here and maybe additional requirements, such as spending a semester as a “visiting scholar” at the department could strengthen the ties between the external candidates and the research environment at the department.

The Department works actively to create also a social environment for the PhD students through supporting social activities. Given the potential differences between internal and external candidates these activities should be continued as they can be an additional way to create more coherence among the PhDs.

Internationalization

The number of international students recruited by the different tracks over the last years is rather small with 316 of 375 admitted candidates being Norwegian. Thus, similarly to the overall situation there is a potential for increased internationalization in this track.

Regarding the international outflow of PhD students the political science track is rather active. It encourages students to go to international conferences and many PhDs take at least one part of their course component abroad. Furthermore, about half of the PhDs also spent a longer time at an institution abroad as a guest researcher. The Department supports all these activities with research funds. Similarly to the remarks regarding the research environment, external PhD candidates face more difficulties with regard to internationalization as the Department is not their employer and there is more internal research funding available for internal candidates.

Supervision and progress of doctoral dissertations

The examination procedures in the political science track seem robust and the theses and candidates produced are of high international quality. One indicator for this is that students regularly publish articles often as part of their PhDs in well-known international peer-reviewed journals. Also the use of international external examiners for PhD defenses is a good indicator for the fact that the candidates in the political science track have an internationally competitive profile.

The political science track has some problems regarding the time to degree of the candidates as only 45% of the PhDs from 2006-2011 completed their degree within a time frame of 6 years. However, measures such as the midway assessment are seen as very positive and might counteract some of the underlying problems in the future. Furthermore,

annual progress reports and meetings with the PhDs are described to work very well. Challenges persist in two areas. Again, external candidates seem to be harder to track in their progress than internal candidates.

Social Anthropology

Oslo has a broad, traditional-style social anthropology department, and this is reflected in the work of the social anthropology track. There is a strong emphasis on individual fieldwork, research monographs, and working within/preserving the ‘old’ traditions of the discipline. Like Norwegian anthropology as a whole, there is a combination of Norwegian-focused research projects, which tend to be on the more ‘applied’ side of anthropology – looking at medical issues, migration etc. – and ‘overseas’ focused projects, which cover the range of anthropological themes.

Program structure, training and courses

The track has already put into place a number of initiatives to strengthen its provision. A number of courses are mandatory though not necessarily credited (e.g. the weekly Reading course). The social anthropology track has an important role in the Oslo Summer School, which provides a valuable element in the training of PhD candidates.

That said, the track could usefully review its methods training for PhD candidates. Whilst there is an assumption that candidates coming in from the Masters programme will have solid research training – and research experience in the field, including language expertise – the compulsory training that is offered in the PhD track appears itself to be rather basic/generic. We recommend the track consider reviewing and expanding its provision of more advanced research training. This could be done in collaboration with the other tracks, or with other Norwegian social anthropology departments, and might include more specialist anthropological or cross-disciplinary methods training – for example: visual anthropology, ethics for anthropologists, material culture, urban anthropology, applied anthropology, anthropology and advocacy, fieldwork in conflict situations etc.

At the same time as reviewing the methods training, the track would benefit from reviewing its more analytical-theoretical course provision, including considering the balance of compulsory/optional and credited/non-credited offerings.

Research environment

There are good linkages between the Oslo social anthropology track and the broader Norwegian social anthropology community, including a course taught jointly with the University of Bergen and a strong involvement with the Norwegian Anthropological Association, through which they have established a national supervisors’ forum.

The track appears to have a slight problem with the integration of externally-funded PhD candidates. The review recommends that the track works with its existing PhD candidates to consolidate its efforts to incorporate the diversity of its PhD cohorts, through both formal and informal activities, seminars, awaydays, socials etc.

As well as this ‘community-building’ within the track, the review felt that more could be done to establish linkages between the social anthropology track and others, to promote more cross-disciplinary knowledge both within the track and within the others. Such

interdisciplinary work is increasingly valued in world anthropology, and the track should consider its position vis-à-vis interdisciplinary research.

Supervision and progress of doctoral dissertations

Although the track has already done a considerable amount of work on completion, the amount of time it takes candidates to complete their PhDs remains rather long, compared to international standards. Whilst a target completion time of 3 years is unrealistic for a discipline based on long-term fieldwork, an expectation of completion within 4 years should be a target.

The track is moving towards the practice of joint supervision, with second supervisors often being international scholars. This is to be commended.

The structure and scientific merit of doctoral dissertations

The track produces PhD candidates – and PhD theses – that are of a high quality, relative to international standards. The examination processes are robust at the point of final submission and defense.

Internationalization

The review notes that (perhaps unexpectedly) the rates of internationalization – measured in terms of visits to international research institutes or departments – are relatively low within the track. Whilst we accept that many (most?) candidates have international experience through fieldwork, we would nevertheless recommend that the track consider more actively promoting internationalization. Two obvious contexts for this would be advanced methods training (and in particular, language training in advance of overseas fieldwork), and international co-supervision. For example, where candidates have an international co-supervisor, it might be made mandatory for them to visit the supervisor in their home institution for an extended period.

The track (and Department) has a bit of a tendency towards self-reproduction. Most PhD candidates are drawn from the cohorts on the existing Masters programme in social anthropology at Oslo. At the same time, the track refers to an increase in applications from overseas candidates. To capitalize on this, and further internationalise the track, we recommend it consider offering PhD places to incoming students with relevant Masters-level methods training, though not necessarily the substantive research experience of a 2-year Masters in social anthropology. Loosening these entry requirements a little might be of substantial benefit to the track, and the department.

Economics

Overall we find that the PhD track in economics is well-functioning, cohesive and quite strong. That being said most of the general comments and suggestions for the PhD program in Social Science apply to the economics track. Below we list a number of specific comments outlining strengths and weaknesses of the PhD track in economics.

Program structure, training and courses

The economics track has changed its enrollment criteria recently in terms of the number of core courses in economics required for admission. On the one hand it makes sense with less strict enrollment criteria because this will presumably allow for more international students. On the other hand, one also needs to make sure the admitted students are highly

qualified to make up for the fact that the program is short relative to competing PhD programs in economics abroad.

We find that the PhD track in economics offers a quite extensive and varied supply of internal specialized PhD courses. In addition, the track offers a course in how to publish in the economics discipline. By contrast, the offered summer school courses appear not to be very attractive for Economics PhD students.

The economics PhD track requires course work equaling 45 ECTS, which is more than the other six tracks. The reasons for this difference are not clear, and it seems inappropriate given that a three-year track is short in comparison with PhD programs in economics in other countries. In essence, PhD students in the economics track must write their dissertation in slightly more than two years, which puts them at a disadvantage when competing in the international job market with candidates from other programs, where more time typically is spent on research.

Research environment

We think the research environment in the economics track can be strengthened. The PhD students organize a weekly PhD seminar on their own initiative and no staff members attend. While it is very commendable the PhD students have taken this initiative, we recommend the seminars are structured and organized by the track leader. This will have several advantages. It will be a way to monitor if all PhD students, including the external PhD students, present their own work and discuss other's work. It will also increase the visibility of the track leader, which appears to be a general problem for the social science program. For example, the seminars can be used to inform PhD students about current events and they can function as a way to incorporate other track-specific activities such as preparations and training for the international job market.

Internationalization

As for the other tracks, the number of international students recruited to the economics track appears to be low (of the 375 admitted students to the entire social science program 59 are non-Norwegian corresponding to 16 percent). The track has potential for attracting more international students as coursework is in English, the supervisors appear to be well linked internationally and there are generous stipends.

There is also a large potential for increasing the international outflow as the vast majority of graduates appear to settle for employment in Norway and especially in Oslo. This should not only be valued by the PhD students but also by the Economics Department as the placement record of the PhD track plays an important role in the recognition of the department's research. We suggest the economics track right from enrollment directs attention towards what it takes to be successful on the international job market and put in place a structure for how to better help and promote PhD students, who decide go down that route.

Returning to the recruitment, a larger number of international students may encourage all students to think more internationally as international students typically are more mobile and should be more likely to go on the international job market.

The structure and scientific merit of doctoral dissertations

Based on evaluations by assessment committees for all 12 PhD theses defended in 2015 we arrive at the following conclusions. First, members of assessment committees are internationally renowned scholars (mainly European) within their fields. Second, one PhD thesis had to be revised before the public defense. Third, assessment committees generally come to quite favorable assessments of the theses. Fourth, around half of the PhD students manage to publish or to get revise and resubmits for one or more chapters in their theses, which is impressive given the rather short duration of the PhD track and the relatively long publication process in economics. In a few cases the publication outlets are at the level of top field journals. Fifth, fully in line with the established tradition in economics all 12 theses are based on articles, and most have at least four articles where some of them are coauthored. This seems to be a consequence of program-specific and track-specific rules for the required number articles with and without coauthors. For example, the track specific rules stipulate that “Normally, if one paper has more than one co-author, or more than one of the papers have co-author(s), then the thesis shall consist of more than three papers.” This restriction rule out the “American” structure of PhD theses, where one article is a single-authored job market paper (the paper the PhD student puts most effort into writing) and two other papers that potentially are written with coauthors. We recommend such restrictions are dropped and instead let it be down to the assessment committees to decide if the theses meet international standards. Related to this, to increase attention to the “job market paper strategy”, it may be worth considering having more members from American universities in the assessment committees.

The attractiveness of candidates for academic and non-academic positions

An internet search of the 12 graduates from 2015 shows that one graduate is employed by University of Oslo as Assistant Professor, one is a visiting scholar at Columbia Business School, one is at the World Bank in Washington DC, six are employed in public institutions in Norway (e.g. Statistics Norway and the Norwegian Central Bank), and three are employed by private consultancy companies. Assuming this picture can be generalized the candidates from the economics track manage to find attractive jobs, but it is also noted that none are employed in assistant professorships or postdoc positions outside University of Oslo. Again this suggests that the international placement record of the economics track can be strengthened.

Psychology

The PhD track in psychology is large, highly diverse, well-functioning and provides a strong PhD programme. This track has the largest number of PhD candidates in the Faculty (about one third of the total both of doctoral and post-doctoral fellowship positions within the Faculty are located in the psychology track); these are spread across the very different (and largely separate) subfields within psychology. There are five main sub-fields reflected in strong research groups, and reflecting the breadth and diversity of psychology: neuro-psychology, organizational psychology, child and developmental psychology, clinical psychology and therapy, cultural and social psychology. To an extent these sub-fields adopt very different research paradigms and methods, some highly quantitative, others qualitative, and therefore result in different training courses and different seminar programmes.

Program structure, training and courses

The psychology track is the largest track in terms both of student numbers and range of courses. Candidates have to take 20 ECTS points of mandatory courses (scientific theory,

research ethics, international publication, participation in research seminars), and 10 ECTS points of optional courses (normally provided by the particular subspeciality within psychology, and based within the particular research group). Within the track there is also a 7 year programme which enables a small number of suitably qualified candidates to gain both a PhD qualification and a specialization in clinical psychology.

Data for 2006-2011 show that there was a total of 158 candidates admitted, the majority of whom were 'external' candidates. Of the 158, 70% are reported to have completed the PhD, 59% within 6 years. Admissions data for 2010-2015 shows 138 admissions of whom 79 were 'external' and 59 internal candidates. The gender balance reflects international trends with a significant majority of female candidates.

The committee was told that there is little interaction between psychology and other tracks. There are many factors that contribute to this. These include: the size and diverse nature of the programme, the location of the department, and the fact that two significant subfields (clinical psychology and neuropsychology) are highly specialized with greater orientation towards medicine. Questions arise as to whether some of the courses provided within psychology might also be available to candidates from other tracks, and, conversely, whether candidates from the psychology track might benefit from participation in course provided by other tracks. There is clear potential for interaction with other tracks within subfields of social psychology and behavioural economics, and possibly others.

Research environment

The research environment in the psychology track is strong. Each research group has its own programme of regular seminars which PhD candidates are expected to attend. Candidates from this track are expected to present their research at departmental seminars and receive feedback; the panel was also informed that the midway assessment functions well and provides a forum for useful feedback and independent evaluation of the candidates' research.

Internationalization

There is a small number of international students recruited to the psychology track. Most of the teaching and coursework are in English and the supervisors appear to be well linked internationally. The psychology track provided the largest number of candidates going abroad in 2015 (Although second to economics in terms of length of stay). Data for 2011-2015 suggest that there were 35 stays abroad during this period to a wide range of countries; in addition to this there are shorter visits, conferences etc. The limited participation of candidates from the psychology track in the Oslo Summer School may be explained in part by their attendance at courses provided by other institutions both in Norway and abroad.

The quality of doctoral dissertations

Doctoral dissertations almost always take the form of article-based dissertations. This may create additional pressure for the candidates, particularly with length of time to publication. A number of other challenges were discussed; these included the problem of inadequate coherence, integration and overview (this was frequently the reason for examiners' requirement for resubmission), the question of authorship and identification of the candidate's own contribution, and the issue of examiners being asked to examine material which has already been reviewed and accepted for publication.

The psychology track produced between 30% and 40% of the PhD theses defended in the years 2013, 2014, 2015. There is a wide range of topic, reflecting the very diverse nature of the track. Topics include a large number of applied projects within clinical psychology and psychotherapy, research within neuropsychology, brain functioning and cognitive function, and topics within the broad field of social psychology. Almost all of the dissertations have been written in English. The quality of dissertations is high, and members of assessment committees tend to be internationally renowned scholars. Most of the dissertations follow the 'three article' structure, frequently two published and one submitted for publication. Many of them appear in good quality international journals.

Human Geography

The PhD track in Human Geography admits roughly 5 candidates a year, for a total of approximately 22 students in the track at any one time. There is a mix of internal and external candidates, typically fewer of the latter. The quality of the PhD program appears to be high and builds from and reflects the excellence and international stature of a good number of the permanent faculty. The theses cover the range of human geography: from urban and transportation policy through labour geography, development studies and geopolitics to climate change.

Program structure, training and courses

The Human Geography track has developed an appropriate range of course offerings, largely through a number of effective collaborations. The heads of research in Human Geography and Sociology jointly teach three mandatory courses: at the start, midway and towards the end of the PhD degree. The track makes effective use of the Oslo Summer School by using it as an opportunity to invite leading international scholars to teach in this program. It is also part of the Norwegian Research School of Geography, coordinated by the University of Trondheim, which currently is being scaled up to the Nordic region. The department is encouraging faculty with external research funding to field project-based PhD courses. Through a variety of efforts, therefore, a relatively small complement of human geographers has managed to ensure a range of courses, both methodological and theoretical.

Research Environment

The Geography and Sociology tracks instituted in spring 2016 a monthly seminar run by both heads of research at which two PhD students present their work in progress and another two provide comments. This appears to be running well and provides an occasion for extended intellectual exchange across the two disciplines and between external and internal students.

The track should be encouraged to continue their efforts to improve supervision, administration and communication. At present, the track's administrator appears to bear key responsibility for communication and annual reviews. The majority of students are co-supervised and it is unclear that co-supervisors are communicating with each other. An annual review meeting at which student and co-supervisors are present seems essential to ensuring a student's smooth progress through the program.

Quality and timing of doctoral dissertations

All but one thesis has been written in English in recent years and most are article-based. Dissertations appear to be rigorously reviewed to international standards. For the majority of PhD candidates, at least one of the opponents was located outside of Norway and the list of opponents reads as a 'who's who' in international Human Geography. The articles that have comprised the PhD theses in the last two years are a mix of refereed papers and book chapters, mostly sole-authored. The journals in which thesis papers are being published are international journals, some top-tier generalist journals, most highly ranked specialist journals. In 2015 a number of theses required substantial revision. However, weighing the caliber of the external commentators and the journals in which most students are publishing their work, this does not seem to indicate a systemic problem in terms of quality.

Data provided from the track indicate that the mode and median time to completion has been five years (subtracting parental and sick leaves). This completion time is in line with international disciplinary norms (though closer to North American than British norms), given that one year of work experience is included within this time frame.

The track anticipates improved completion times with recent improvements in their management of the program. The Human Geography and Sociology tracks began collaborating in the fall of 2015 on a program of training supervisors. The tracks invite internal and external supervisors to a fall meeting to discuss requirements of the PhD and expectations of the supervisor. The head of research of the Human Geography track described a cultural shift within the track, from a 'hands off' approach to supervision to one in which supervisors are expected to communicate regularly with supervisees and establish a schedule of expectation in terms of work accomplished and delivered.

Internationalization

Most of the teaching and course work is in English and many of the supervisors are well linked internationally. Many of the students conduct field research outside of Norway. However, given family responsibilities, extended research visits to other institutions is not possible for a good number of doctoral students and thus the track has devised strategies of 'internationalization at home' through, for instance, an effective use of the Oslo Summer School. All but two of the PhD candidates who have completed since 2007 have employment, all in Norway, within the university system or at research institutes or in governmental or nongovernmental organisations.

Sociology

The Sociology track admits roughly 10 PhD students annually, typically half externally funded.

Program structure, training and courses

The Sociology track has identified eight research areas and students are affiliated with at least one of these. The track meets its course needs in part through collaboration with Human Geography and through the Oslo Summer School. Small numbers have made it difficult to field substantive and more advanced methodology courses. The discipline of Sociology is exploring a regional consortium similar to that established by Human Geography to augment existing courses.

Although the track considers that the current faculty-wide course on epistemology is not meeting the needs of its students, it supports the development of faculty level thematic interdisciplinary courses, for instance around a theme such as migration.

Research Environment

Beyond course work, the research environment is enlivened by annual 1-2 day seminars within each research group and a monthly seminar with the Human Geography track at which PhD students present and comment on each other's work.

Internationalization

The 4-year open scholarships have allowed the track to attract international students, mostly from Europe. A number of their PhD students have had the opportunity of research exchanges or extended visits to leading institutions in the US, UK and Europe and it is expected that they present papers at international conferences. Balancing the expense of course work at other institutions with international conference attendance appears to pose some challenges.

Quality of doctoral dissertations

The quality of the PhD student work appears to be high.

Concentrated efforts have been made in recent years to improve the administration of the program and the quality of graduate supervision. The Sociology and Human Geography tracks began collaborating in the fall of 2015 on a program of training supervisors. The tracks invite internal and external supervisors to a fall meeting to discuss requirements of the PhD and expectations of the supervisor. Sociology recognizes the need to further these efforts, perhaps most particularly for externally-funded students and students with external supervisors. Supervisors do not at present meet jointly and regularly with PhD students to ensure that students are receiving consistent advice. Supervisors do not attend the midway assessments of students. We recommend that both of these practices be instituted.

Technology, innovation and culture (TIK)

This PhD track is one of the smaller tracks, in terms of number of candidates, with about 8 % of registered candidates and 14 disputations in 2010-2015. The track is highly interdisciplinary and is built on the two research areas of the TIK center, Innovation studies and Science and technology Studies (STS). Topics for the dissertations cover a wide range, including for instance politics of climate change, digital culture, health technology and knowledge trajectories. About 2/3 of the candidates continue in academic work as postdoctoral fellows or researchers.

Program structure, training and courses

The candidates have to take 14 ECTS points of mandatory courses/seminars, while 16 ECTS must be completed by elective courses. The mandatory courses are the Faculty courses (6 ECTS) and 8 ECTS through 3 track seminars and a specialization course (5 ECTS) in either STS or innovation. The elective TIK courses are covered by courses given at the Summer school, or by external institutions. TIK arrange summer school courses with topics closely connected to the two research areas of TIK candidates. Over the last years several changes have been implemented regarding the courses, to better cover the needs of the candidates.

Furthermore, TIK is part of Nordic and international research schools and capitalizes on this for training of the candidates. Presentations at international conferences can also be accepted as part of the educational component. The impression from the candidates was that they are satisfied with the availability of relevant courses.

A total of 21 candidates were admitted in 2006-2011 and 10 candidates have completed their PhD. Seven completed within 6 years. The relatively low number of admitted candidates seems to be steady at around 3-4 per year, although 8 candidates were admitted in 2015. This increase was mainly due to UiO internal funding of 5 scholarships. There is an almost even fraction of males/females among the candidates.

It is somewhat surprising that the number of candidates is low, as interdisciplinary research of technology, innovation and culture is a rapidly increasing field. There should be a potential for a larger number of candidates. This will possibly require loosening of the requirements that the candidates should be affiliated with one of the two research areas of TIK. Although there might be a limitation regarding the capacity of internal supervisors, there opening up of the TIK track might also bring in more external supervisors. Given the rather small number of candidates enrolled, the committee recommends that the track seek increased sustainability by enrolling more candidates.

The links to the other tracks are rather weak, although there are benefits at the organizational and administrative level. Co-supervisors are often from other departments. Yet, the potential of this cooperation seems to be under-used in terms of synergy and scientific interaction.

Research environment

The candidates of the track are part of one of the two research groups within TIK. They are therefore well connected to active researchers and given access to a wide range of networks and scientific activities. There is also an awareness of securing the external candidates' interaction with the research groups. The interaction with the international research schools is also seen as an important asset which provides excellent opportunities for networking.

Internationalization

Most of the candidates are Norwegian, although there are applicants from a wide range of countries for the scholarships, and in particular from Europe. Several of the candidates have a stay abroad and almost all participate in international conferences, courses, seminars, etc. Yet, the average number of days abroad per candidate is low.

The quality of doctoral dissertations – assessment committees

There seems to be no clear preference for either monographs or article based theses, with 3 and 5 respectively, for the 8 theses in 2011-2015. The chosen format is probably related to the traditions within the research area. All theses are written in English and will therefore have a potential for reaching out to the international community.

The seven assessments of theses from this track showed that the committees acknowledged original and novel ideas, the inter-disciplinary approaches, and also the breadth of methodologies and designs. However, several challenges were also identified, including underdeveloped analyses or discussions, and methodological issues. Formal

(e.g. the use of references) and linguistic aspects were also commented. The assessment reports were thorough and constructive, and leaves an impression of high-quality of the theses from TIK.

There were international and renowned scholars appointed as members of all the assessment committees ensuring an evaluation based on international standards. Also, staff from TIK were appointed as members. Given the relatively small staff of TIK with seven full time academic positions, this leaves an impression that one member of the assessment committees is rather close to the candidate and the supervisor. From the outside this may appear as a possibility of having a member with conflict of interest. We recommend that the Faculty and track consider this concern. Possibly common rules or guidelines for appointment of internal committee members could be developed.

Oslo/Copenhagen/Kassel/Oxford/Brighton/Vancouver

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