Evaluation report

Lund University School of Economics and Management

Department:	PhD programme:	Date:
Business Administration	Business Administration	January 27 2022

Members of the peer-review panel: Chair: Professor Andreas Werr, Stockholm School of Economics   Other members: Professor Pervez Ghauri, Birmingham Business School   Professor Nefissa Naguib, University of Oslo   PhD candidate Patrik Stoopendahl, University of Borås
1. Area, Environment and Resources   *1.1. Subject of the program*   The PhD program in Business administration is a rather broad program covering multiple research domains including Strategy, Marketing, Organization, Entrepreneurship, Accounting and Finance. With these domains being core to business administration the breadth of the program is appropriate. The committee gained an insight into the program and its aims through the written material and the conversations with the administration, candidates, faculty and leadership. Overall, we find that the PhD program is well-functioning, cohesive and quite strong. The PhD students seem to be satisfied with the education and support they receive and the placement data show that candidates get interesting jobs within academia as well as in other sectors. That being said, we list below a number of specific comments outlining strengths and weaknesses of the PhD track in Business Administration (BA).   **Program aims and placement strategy**   The statement of the program's learning outcomes is quite general and almost identical to the Swedish qualifications framework's general descriptors. Without a more precise statement of the specific aims for the PhD program and the individual subject tracks, it is difficult to evaluate how structure, content, methods, resources and assessments of the program align with the aims, and in particular justify and relate to the three milestones for the program – research plan, mid-term seminar and final seminar.   The committee also finds that the program will benefit from a clear idea of what careers it prepares its candidates for. Looking at the placement data provided, a majority of candidates seem to continue in research and take up academic positions, whereas a sizable minority pursue careers in industry and the public sector. While all these career tracks are reasonable outcomes of a PhD program the committee could not find any strategy or goals related to these different placements, neither in the self-evaluation nor in the interviews with the different stakeholders. What is the program's target in terms of placement in different sectors? Are all sectors equally important or are any sectors prioritized? The committee also noted that most candidates begin and pursue their careers in Sweden. Given the continuous internationalization of Academia an increasing ambition towards international placement would provide further proof of the quality of the program and

provide an impetus for its further development. The committee thus encourages an increasing ambition to develop (and place) candidates for an international academic career.

Related to the identified lack of an overall strategy for the program, the committee also missed specific tactics for preparing candidates for the job-market in different sectors. This may require a clearer communication of the different career options available after a PhD and offering support to develop different career specific skill sets. Different trajectories in terms of the course part of the PhD related to different career ambitions could be one option. The lack of specific job market preparation seemed especially salient in relation to non-academic careers. However, also in relation to academic careers, the committee found an absence of dedicated preparation, especially when it comes to publishing – a skill that is vital for academic positions these days. Most of the preparation for the academic career took place in the supervision relationship, which made this preparation very much dependent on the specific supervisor and their preferences, background, and skills.

1. Area, Environment and Resources
1.2. Staff: quantity, competence and management

Supervision
Overall, the PhD cohort seems very satisfied with the quality of the supervision they get, and it is the committee's assessment that the quality of the faculty involved in supervision is high, with all supervisors being reasonably research active. We also note that supervisors seem to have a maximum of 2 PhD candidates which indicates that supervisors have adequate time to devote to each PhD student. We would also like to commend the system with appointing at least 2 supervisors for each candidate as this helps broadening the support base of the PhD candidates and avoids making them overly dependent on a single supervisor. The practice of involving more junior faculty as co-supervisors is also a good way of preparing younger faculty members for supervision. Appointing additional external supervisors to complement the expertise of the internal ones seems common and should be further encouraged.

With that said, the committee also identifies a strong decentralization of how the supervision relationship evolves (e.g. frequency of supervision meetings) that may cause a potential risk. Decisions on the frequency of supervision are decentralized first to the departments and then to the supervisors and the respective PhD candidate. We suggest formalizing this a bit more and require at least 2 meetings per semester.

Funding model
We see the current system of mainly relying on project funding for PhD students as both a strength and a risk. The recruitment of PhD students to projects, with the PI being the main supervisor, guarantees supervisor commitment and embeds PhD students in an ongoing project, but may also make it difficult for PhD students to develop their own projects or change supervisors if the relationship does not work out – although the right for this is clearly communicated to candidates. It also seems that this reliance on project funding makes it difficult to create strong cohorts (as PhD student may start throughout the year) and control the recruitment of supervisors (as those who bring in project funding will be able to recruit PhD students) and students (as PIs seem to recruit their own students without formal involvement of the PhD program level or department). While we do not want to discourage the recruitment of PhD candidates to projects a somewhat more formalized (and

centralized) recruitment process and vetting of supervisors by the department or PhD program may contribute to quality assurance moving forward (see also section 1.3).

Supervisor compensation
For those supervisors that take on PhD students outside of their own projects, and that might not have the same kinds of synergies between their own research and the PhD candidates' research, the compensation in terms of hours is very low and an opinion was raised that "the most qualified teaching task is the least compensated". In order to ensure high-quality supervision also among faculty that do not have direct project-related incentives to support their PhD students, an increase in the compensation to PhD supervision may be considered. It cannot burden the system as each supervisor has, on average, only two PhD candidates.

Program support
Finally, we would like to point out that the support of the head of the PhD program and the PhD administrator was repeatedly commended. They serve as an important information hub and are perceived as very approachable and supportive.

1. Area Environment and Resources
1.3. Research studies environment

The committee's overall assessment of the research studies environment is positive. The overall support structures seem adequate, and the formal (including financial) conditions and procedures are good and relatively clear. However, we see a number of areas which could be further improved and/or clarified.

Program size
Given the large number of sub-disciplines within the BA area, the current program is rather small, making it difficult to create a critical mass of PhD students in different sub-disciplines. Currently, there also seems to be no process to allocate and ensure a minimum number of students to different sub-disciplines. This practice is understandable given the strong reliance on project financing. However, it makes it difficult to build active and vibrant research environments in which PhD students can learn from peers (further developed below) and where synergies between projects and students might emerge along collective research programs. We encourage the department and program management to explore additional sources of funding that would enable the creation of strong PhD student environments in the BA sub-disciplines.

Peer support and specialized environments
The PhD students' research environment in the current structure seems to a large extent shaped by the candidates' relationship with their supervisor and the research project they are part of. This seems to be working rather well, but the research environment could be further strengthened by a critical mass of PhD students with related research interests which would enable more peer learning and create a more active and vibrant research environment.

The committee noted that there were few mentions of research groups within the department that might provide a more specialized research environment. There was no mention of how research groups within the department may be accessed by PhD candidates,

and it was communicated to the committee that there is a sparse amount of research groups in the department. Offering PhD candidates to engage in an active research group may be beneficial allowing them to develop as independent researchers through networking with other researchers. Becoming part of a team (e.g. a research group) beyond their already appointed PI and co-supervisor may aid the voiced concern about not having access to other senior researchers or "multiple persons of trust". It is not clear whether there is a regular seminar series in the school/departments or not. A regular seminar series, for example a monthly seminar, can create this collective research environment.

The building of strong research environments for PhD candidates may also be supported by creating cohorts of PhD students starting at the same time once or twice a year. The creation of clear cohorts may also help alleviate the issue of some PhD candidates feeling rather lonely and lost during the early phases of the PhD program. According to the self-assessment an annual intake has been discussed and we encourage management to pursue this further. This should be possible to realize also with a continued reliance on external funding dictating the start dates for projects as the recruitment process takes some months in any case.

The high reliance on external funding leaves limited control to the program in terms of building cohorts/critical mass within different BA fields and thus strong PhD environments that are more focused than the broad BA field.

PhD candidate selection
The committees' impression of the selection of PhD students is that this is very decentralized, driven by faculties' abilities to attract research funding. The recruitment process and who is involved in this seems to differ across recruitments which take place throughout the year. Although the management desires to have a fix intake period(s), once or twice a year, to create a better cohort and collective environment. In our opinion, it should be possible to have two start dates such as, January and August/September. This would also minimize a 'lonely student' incident.

The committee also notes that the head of the PhD program has no influence over which PhD students are accepted and which faculty members act as supervisors. This is quite normal as the supervisors need to see the match between their own research interests and that of the candidates. However, we see a potential for a lack of quality control of candidates and the appointment of less suitable supervisors. The committee would thus recommend that the head of the PhD program or head of the respective department should be more actively involved in selecting PhD students and appointing supervisors, particularly for the candidates that are not coming in on externally funded projects, as in these projects, PIs judgement should be respected. A shared process for the assessment of candidates' abilities and fit with the program (how this will be assessed and who will be involved) should also be considered.

PhD process
PhD candidates only have two required milestones to pass throughout their studies – the research proposal (during the 1st year) and the final seminar (about 6 months before planned viva). A third milestone is the half-time seminar, which is not mandatory, but many candidates do it. The time between the research proposal seminar and the final seminar is

extensive and with the aim to identify PhD students not thriving in the process as early as possible, we would recommend making also the half-time seminar mandatory.

Mentorship program
A mentorship program among PhD students was mentioned. This seemed to be perceived as very helpful among students. It could be considered to formalize and expand it. Moreover, it should be made clearer that PhD candidates may ask for a change in their mentor.

1. Area Environment and Resources
1.4. Summary evaluation

The committee concludes that the PhD program in Business administration has an adequate focus and provides good support to its candidates. Supervisory resources are very good and candidates are offered a strong course-package creating both a shared basis and leaving freedom for choice in relation to research focus and interests. However, we also see that due to the current funding model the program is rather small, and recruitment decentralized, making it difficult to build strong specialized research environments. We further find that the placement strategy and support for the PhD program in BA could be further developed. We also suggest some additional formalization of the PhD process to ensure its future quality.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes
2.1. Achieving objectives – knowledge and understanding

Overall, the committee finds the objectives formulated for the program appropriate and we see that they are largely met by the program. However, we see some potential improvements in the course portfolio and how students use this as well as the participation in conferences.

Course work and course portfolio
A central vehicle for achieving the objective in the area of knowledge and understanding is the coursework done by the students. A sizable part of the PhD program consists of course work (90 ECTS). The committee considers that the portfolio of course work offered to the candidates is appropriate and of high quality. The freedom for PhD candidates to pick courses that fit their PhD project and attend also courses across the different disciplines at the University of Lund is highly appreciated, as is the collaboration with other universities to expand the course portfolio in especially business administration. We recommend that this portfolio is further developed to move away from its current "ad-hoc" state and made available and communicated early on in the program to assist the candidate in identifying appropriate course packages. Candidates should, for example, be encouraged to take the compulsory course package in the first year. Today, the portfolio is not fully exhausted in practice, but is rather a construct that few candidates (it seems) manage to fully benefit from.

The PhD office, and Charlina in particular, was commended for circulating information but a joint space for announcing available PhD courses both within Lund University as well as at partner universities and beyond is encouraged.

It was also brought to the committee's attention that the current course portfolio within Business administration at LU is very strong in the area of qualitative methods but perceived weaker in the area of quantitative methods. This may be addressed by further developing the collaboration with other faculties within LU and beyond.

Conferences and conference participation

Conferences are an important vehicle towards obtaining specialized up-to-date knowledge. We are thus pleased to see that candidates are encouraged to participate in conferences and present their own work. Adequate funding for this seems to be available in the program. Some confusion was, however, voiced by a PhD candidate regarding the possibility to gain such funding, but this may be easily solved with clearer communication of guidelines.

Opportunities to participate in conferences have been especially affected by the pandemic and the committee therefore notes that no specific strategy or activities have been presented regarding how to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the candidate's possibility to network and develop specialized knowledge through conference participation. We thus encourage the department to look into strategies to compensate for this potential loss through other activities or initiatives.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes
2.2. Achieving objectives – competence and skills

The objectives related to competencies and skills for the PhD program are adequate. However, we see some areas of improvement regarding developing candidates' skills to publish their work in well ranked journals and engage with society with their research.

Learning the craft of publishing

Given the increasing importance of peer reviewed journal publications to succeed on the international job market we noted the lack of emphasis and courses on academic writing (such courses might be part of the optional course program). For an article-based PhD, it could be considered to require that at least one paper should be published (rather than all being "publishable") in the fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD.

We support the flexibility of the program to support different thesis formats (including monographs), but encourage that PhD candidates from an early stage get involved in article writing activities – e.g. in the form of conference papers. When writing a monograph, a publishing strategy should be developed in parallel, based on the material in the monograph. This is especially important to allow the candidate to achieve the objective of "significant contribution" to the field.

We also look positively at co-authoring with supervisors or other faculty members, especially in the early phase of the PhD to learn the craft of publishing articles and encourage the department to spread and legitimate this practice more widely.

Learning to engage with society

One of the objectives of the program is to gain the ability to present and discuss research findings with society in general. However, the committee was not able to deduct how this ambition is structured or performed. A mentor-program with actors outside university can

be a solution. Otherwise, the department could provide the candidates with a platform from which they may reach out to society, e.g. a blog, a podcast or other popular media outlet. We also encourage further engagement with organizations in the LU network in PhD research to identify research questions with high theoretical as well as practical relevance.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes
2.3. Achieving objectives – judgement and approach

It is the committee's view that the objectives in this area are adequate and well achieved by the program

2. Design, implementation and outcomes
2.4. Summary evaluation

The committee concludes that the design of the program overall is adequate to reach the stated goals regarding knowledge and understanding, competence and skills and judgement and approach. However, we see that further help could be provided to PhD candidates to identify and combine suitable courses from the strong course package and to strengthen the development of skills in publishing and engaging with society.

3. Working life perspective

While the self-assessment report lists a career day as an important support to PhD candidates to find future career opportunities, the committee finds that more could and should be done to support the PhD candidates' future careers.

First it seems that the department lacks an overall view and strategy for what kind of careers PhD students are prepared for. Different stakeholders seemed to have different views regarding what possible and desirable careers for PhD candidates in BA are.

Second, career support should be strengthened. While support for thesis writing is strong, support to succeed on the job market once the PhD is completed is less developed. PhD candidates reported feeling worried about what will happen once they finish. PhD supervisors had different opinions regarding to what extent placement is part of their responsibility. Even though the ISP contains a heading regarding career paths, supervisors may vary in their motivation and ability to support PhD candidates in this area. We thus suggest increasing the involvement of the PhD program and department in this issue, making it more of a joint responsibility. Some initiatives at the department and faculty level have been put in place, but they can be developed further.

Third, the course package offered to PhD candidates could be extended with some content related more towards roles outside of academia – such as a course on how to consult to organizations on an academic knowledge base.

Fourth, candidates seem to feel they have adequate opportunities to engage in pedagogical development, including teaching roles which we see as a good way to support employability in especially academia. However, the processes of granting teaching opportunities to PhD candidates seems rather ad-hoc and could possibly be made more transparent.

4. Doctoral student perspective

Overall, it seems doctoral candidates are quite satisfied with the quality of the program and their ability to shape and influence it. However, in the area of PhD students' mental health we see that more could be done.

PhD candidate mental health

We commend the current initiatives on the faculty level. However, these activities do not seem to be aimed at the root cause, but rather the symptoms. Relying on the individual PhD candidate's ability to maintain their mental health may be a risk. We learnt that the candidates felt more could be done regarding mental health issues, and therefore the applied strategy by the faculty should be evaluated and complementary mechanisms – regarding for example the working environment – should be explored. A mapping of the specific and most pressing anxieties of PhD students may be a good basis for identifying such alternative mechanisms.

5. Gender equality perspective

We did not detect any issue with gender equality. However, we noted an overrepresentation of male candidates enrolled (71%) which could warrant a specific strategy to ensure gender diversity at any given point in time (the set of graduated candidates seems more gender balanced).

We also noted how the department chose to account for gender using the traditional male/female-dichotomy without further problematizing this conventional divide. The self-evaluation by the department admitted the strive to "create a level playing field", but no activities have been defined regarding how this is done culturally or structurally. We were left with a notion that maybe more could be done within this area, and strongly encourage additional activities that can develop the PhD program to go further than what is required by the general gender equality guidelines defined by Lund University.

6. Sustainability perspective

Considering the importance of sustainability, social issues and reducing inequalities, research on these topics should be encouraged. We acknowledge and support the initiatives to adjust the ISP's mandatory activities and engage in specialized research schools such as the Agenda 2030 Graduate School.

7. Other comments

Struggling PhD students

While the committee generally understands that candidates are progressing well and finish their studies within the available time frame, we also noted that quite a few of the PhD students currently enrolled have spent more than 4 years in the program. While this may be legitimate due to teaching commitments or different kinds of leave, there are probably also students that are struggling with fulfilling the requirements of the program. The committee lacked a clear mechanism for detecting these at an early stage to provide additional support or help them to alternative careers if this does not work.

In relation to this, we could not see a clear guidance on the impact of different milestone, especially in case the candidate does not provide a satisfactory report or defence. We were informed that in that case the candidate is asked to revise and resubmit the report. However, it is not clear that what if, after a couple of attempts they still cannot produce a satisfactory report…Or for how many times they can try to revise and resubmit? We, thus see that the Annual Review of academic progress should be strengthened across the program. It is useful in identifying problems and issues early on with PhD candidates' progress to provide additional support. Such a review should involve someone outside of the supervisor-candidate relationship (e.g. program management or the collective of supervisors) as it may be in the joint interest of supervisor and candidates to hide potential problems.

Where extra support is not sufficient to get a candidate back on track, the Department might consider the possibility of "early exit" qualifications for example, a kind of MPhil qualification as used in the UK, or a Postgraduate Certificate, or Diploma. Making these options more explicit to candidates might also make it easier for those who for different reasons do not fit in the program to leave.

Ensuring future program quality
Both the department and faculty-level take great pride in sending off high quality doctors to other parts of society, and nothing could be identified by the evaluation committee that would refute that claim. However, there was little described in the self-evaluation regarding how the PhD program at the department was structured to ensure this specifically, and it was noted by the committee that "best thesis" had not been rewarded a BA PhD graduate since 2012. Our impression is that the success of the program is based on and relies upon the individuals that currently occupy the formal roles, e.g. the engagement and commitment of the director of PhD studies, the PhD program coordinator and the community of respected and prominent researchers acting as supervisors. If this understanding is true, it warrants a strategy to develop an infrastructure that secures the continuation of a high-quality program in a future where recruitment of capable employees may become more difficult. Otherwise, the high quality may deteriorate relative to the success of the department in recruiting and/or retaining the elite of BA scholars and administrators.

8. Summary evaluation and recommendations

The committee's overall assessment of the PhD program in BA at the university of Lund is that it is of high quality, providing students with a relevant and solid knowledge and skill base within the area of BA. Among the strengths of the program we especially note:

- A varied and high-quality package of courses available to candidates. It is appreciated that about 50% of the courses are mandatory while the other 50% can be chosen based on the candidate's interests and topics.

- A set of committed and competent supervisors that provide candidates with the support they need to write good dissertations.
- Reasonable and well-communicated financial and working conditions for PhD candidates.
- A committed management and administration of the PhD program that provides appreciated support to PhD candidates.
- Good opportunities to develop pedagogical skills by getting involved in teaching activities.
- A mentorship system for all new candidates coming in and the informal way in which this relationship is maintained.

However, we also see a number of areas in which the program could be further improved. Recommendations have been provided throughout this report, but the most important issues to address include the following:

- A more explicit strategy for PhD student placement that may guide recruitment, program design and career support. What careers does the program prepare candidates for and how is this done in the best way?
- Job market preparation – whether for a career within or outside of academia – should be further developed. For academic careers this may mean further developing publication skills and experiences in the PhD program. For non-academic careers, additional courses on more generic and transferable skills could be developed. Responsibility for career support also needs to be clarified.
- A strengthening of research environments with critical mass of PhD students. The current program is very reliant on the specific relationship between candidate and supervisor. Fixed starting dates once or twice a year would be one way of supporting this by building PhD cohorts.
- The PhD process should be further formalized, adding at least one additional milestone (mid-term seminar) and mechanisms to detect and address under-performing students clarified.
- The current financial model with a high reliance on project funding limits the department's and the program management's influence over key decisions such as candidate selection and who gets to supervise. In order to ensure quality, we suggest a stronger involvement by the department and/or program in these key decisions.