

Lund May 19, 2023

LUSEM response to the evaluation of the PhD program in Economics

The PhD program in Economics underwent an evaluation by an external peer-review panel in the fall of 2022. It was based on the program self-evaluation report and interviews with the program management as well as a selected number of teachers/supervisors and doctoral students at a site visit in November 2022. The doctoral students were invited to nominate a member of the peer-review panel as well as to write a response to the self-evaluation report – offers that they accepted. The results of the evaluation were presented in a report, and based on the suggestions by the panel, the department was given an extended period to develop strategies and start the implementation hereof to address the concerns put forward by the panel and to further improve the quality of the program.

Overall, the peer-review panel was positive towards the PhD program in Economics and found it to be working well and quite strong, not least based on through put and placement of PhDs. The panel pointed to relevance and strengths, including a cohesive program structure and good availability of supervisors. The panel found that the goals of the program were fulfilled.

The panel also identified some weaknesses and causes for concern and gave valuable suggestions how to improve various aspects of the program. From a strategic point of view, the panel pointed at some features of the program that deviate from other programs in Economics and suggested changes to streamline, for example when it comes to courses (content and course load). The panel also pointed at some features that potentially were at the detriment of the students' learning process and development into mature researchers. The panel was concerned about the lack of courses and senior expertise in macroeconomics and suggested that this was resolved. Moreover, the panel suggested that the department provided more unique PhD courses instead of Master courses, and that the total course load was adjusted upwards to correspond to the general level for programs in Economics (105 HEC instead of 90), thus better reflecting UKÄ quality standards as well as the needs and actual workload of the students. The panel also raised concern about the geographical separation between PhD students and senior researchers and suggested that there should be an integration of the groups. This is closely connected to a suggested revision of the allocation of supervisors, which was also pointed out as something that could be improved. As for the inner workings of the program, a better process for work with the Individual Study Plans (ISP) was suggested. Finally, the department management was encouraged to engage in stress issues, which are currently a problem among PhD students.

In their response to the evaluation report, the department management addresses all these points of concern and suggestions for improvements and offer several promising solutions and further developments of the program. Their response indicates that they will use the result of the evaluation as a tool to improve the program, and it also shows that the management of the department is responsive to concerns from both external reviewers and students at the department. Given that the department management secures the diffusion of new ideas and implements routines to innovate and revise the program, the program will likely be strengthened in the foreseeable future.

The LUSEM management agrees with the propositions made by the peer-review panel. When it comes to proposed improvements, we would like to stress that it is vital for the department

to safeguard macroeconomic competence. While it is hard to recruit, not least in this field, it should be high on the department's agenda but in the meanwhile, course content should be secured through collaboration with other departments in Sweden or the Nordics. The department should consider adjusting the course load to better reflect general standards among Economics programs and student workload. When doing so, students should be encouraged to take the course in Research Ethics early in the process to be prepared for designing and engaging in their PhD projects. Relatedly, the faculty management encourages the department to make sure that supervisors engage in the work with Individual Study Plans in a coherent manner and make sure that it is used appropriately as a tool for planning and evaluating the student learning process over the course of the four-year cycle. The faculty's common standard for ISP is a good starting point to develop further.

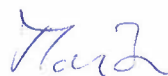
The LUSEM management believes that collocation of different groups should be prioritized for the integration of PhD students into research groups. While this is a considerable undertaking, it will likely have beneficial effects for students, but also for the overall research environment at the department and potentially improve the ability to attract external funding, which is important and encouraged for the sake of competitive research. The Department of Economics should also revise the supervisor allocation process and make sure that students relate to supervisors related to their research project earlier in the program. Finally, the department is encouraged to keep up with its work monitoring student well-being and issues regarding stress/time management but also gender equality and work-family balance. In this work, the department is encouraged to benefit from general programs and initiatives at the faculty and LU level.

On behalf of the LUSEM management team



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