

Evaluator's report

# **Evaluation of research education at the Faculty of Health and Society**

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## Introduction

As part of its quality assurance procedures, Malmö University carries out regular evaluations of its doctoral education subjects. According to the Vice Chancellor's decision on *Evaluation of doctoral education subjects* (LED 2021/214, 11 October 2021), the purpose is twofold: 'partly to give new perspectives and recommendations regarding the development of doctoral education, and partly to cast light on how well the University's quality assurance system ensures a high quality of education.'

Based on these terms of reference, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Doctoral Education appointed a committee in November 2022 to evaluate the doctoral subjects of the Faculty of Health and Society. Minor changes were made to the composition of the group in spring 2023. Under the terms of reference, the evaluation group was tasked with examining the programmes' structure and processes, and offering recommendations for quality enhancement. Peer review and collegial exchange of experience were central to the process. An independent evaluation of four of the five subjects in the faculty was carried out (see chapter 1 for details), as well as a general evaluation of the faculty's doctoral education procedures.

The report is compiled based on a wide range of material, primarily:

- detailed self-evaluations written by each subject group in spring 2023;
- university, faculty and subject-level frameworks and regulatory documents;
- a selection of course plans, datafiles and individual study plans (ISPs) from each subject;
- a 4-day site visit from 26-29 September 2023, during which the evaluation group interviewed the faculty and departmental managements, representative groups of supervisors and doctoral students, administrative staff, and a representative of the University Library.

A preliminary version of the report was handed to the Faculty of Health and Society at the beginning of November 2023, at which point the faculty management, departmental boards of supervisors and administrative staff had an opportunity to check for and resolve any misunderstandings or misinterpretations and respond with comments to the committee. This final report takes account of such clarifications.

The report provides a cross-sectional analysis of the doctoral subjects in mid-2023, and on the information supplied at that point and supplemented by interviews carried out during the site visit. Subsequent developments are not included. Our evaluation of the doctoral education do reflect the different cultures of the subjects as well as the composition of the evaluation committee.

The evaluation committee

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# 1. Faculty of Health and Society – Faculty level

## Introduction

The Faculty of Health and Society (HS) is one of five at Malmö University (Mau). It has been part of the University structure since its foundation as Malmö University College (Malmö högskola) in 1998. Four of the five doctoral subjects in HS are evaluated in this report:

- Biomedical Science
- Health and Society
- Care Science
- Social Work

The fifth doctoral subject – Criminology – is outside the remit of the 2023 evaluation due to its recent establishment. We do not comment on it in detail, except insofar as it is connected with the other subjects through faculty structures.

This first chapter of the e issues raised in this report focuses on matters that are general to the whole faculty, on the faculty are of a general nature, and are with further subject-specific findings discussed in more detail in the subjects subsequent - related chapters.

## Working environment

In terms of numbers, the HS faculty is the one with the largest number of doctoral students at Malmö University. There are approximately 80 doctoral students across the five subject areas, of whom just under a third (29%) are externally funded.

The Faculty's title – Health and Society – emphasizes its diversity. As the Dean put it in our interview, the faculty covers research 'from cell to society, from micro to macro'. Key to much of its research is the connection between natural science and social science, and the relationship between health issues and the wider society in which they exist.

Each department has its own work environment strengths and weaknesses, and these are examined in more detail in subsequent chapters. In this first section, we report on some of the overarching issues that came up across the four subjects/departments.

**Attractiveness of Malmö University to doctoral students and staff.** In several interviews, the relative strengths and weaknesses of Malmö University as a research and academic environment were discussed. The university is a relatively young institution, and several supervisors and doctoral students emphasized that this was what attracted them to it. The vibrant city of Malmö is an excellent case study for many issues of health and society, given its diverse population and recent post-industrial economic development. The chance to be part of a university

environment that is developing (building its own traditions rather than weighed down by them) was also attractive to several staff and doctoral students, with a smaller distance to the university management than in some of the older universities. At the same time, it should not be underestimated how much development has already taken place in Malmö University's short history. As we discuss further below, the formal regulation of research education is comprehensively established, and research and teaching are increasingly integrated – even if the process of building quality assurance procedures remains an ongoing one.

**Physical location.** The departments are located in four (and shortly, perhaps five) different buildings, which in some cases are several kilometres from each other. There are practical and methodological reasons for this (space considerations, and co-location with the hospital and laboratory environment for some parts of the faculty), but the geographical separation of the departments was mentioned by almost all interviewees as a significant barrier to cross-faculty collaboration.

**Administration.** Several people are involved in the administration of doctoral education in HS. Administration tasks are separated by level and function. It should be noted that Malmö University's administrative structure is formally separate from its academic one: all administrative staff belong to a *Gemensamt Verksamhetsstöd* (GV) unit. This has its own chain of delegation, and departments buy in administrative support from the GV unit. In practice, GV is structured in parallel with the faculties and departments, such that there is a close working relationship between the academic and administrative staff at each level, but the employer liability lies within GV. Most Swedish universities have adapted a similar outsourced administrative system.

Matters that relate to doctoral students' education *per se* are mainly dealt with centrally at faculty level, while issues connected to their roles as employees and teachers are administered departmentally (where the same tasks for other members of staff are processed). The research coordinator calls a meeting every semester with the departmental administrative support staff to exchange information, develop common routines, and gather feedback.

At the faculty level, there is a research coordinator and a research administrator. The research coordinator works with (amongst other things) quality assurance and organizational development, and acts as secretary in the Board of Research and Doctoral Education. The research administrator handles all formal administration related to doctoral students (e.g., inputting student data to the Ladok computer system, and administering the system of Individual Study Plans (ISPs)).

At departmental level, the faculty-level support with educational matters is augmented administrative assistants, whose role is primarily to support the heads of departments, and who assist doctoral students with practical tasks such as IT-questions, ordering computers, and organizing dissertation defences.



In a meeting with us, the administrators emphasized that this arrangement generally works well. Many have been with the university for a long time and have good knowledge of its structures and systems. Modifications to the administrative structure have been made in recent years to make the structure more systemically robust. An example of this was given with regard to doctoral defences: one administrative assistant takes charge of the arrangements for each defence, but is shadowed by another from a different department. This means that there is cross-departmental learning, and also that there is back-up in case of an unexpected event.

This structure has advantages and disadvantages. Central faculty administration of doctoral students' educational affairs ensures consistency, a clear point of contact, and coherence in forming a faculty-wide ethos in doctoral student matters. We were impressed during our site visit with the competence, knowledge and enthusiasm of the individuals concerned, and their deep knowledge of the faculty's affairs. At the same time, if any unexpected disruption were to occur at faculty level, the effect would not be isolated to one department. The impression we got from the interview with doctoral students was that they primarily see their working environment as departmental. Thus they do not necessarily understand the faculty-wide structures as clearly as the faculty management or outside observers would.

In our meetings with supervisors and departmental managers, there was relatively little spontaneous discussion about the administrative structure. Rather than reflecting any lack of appreciation of the role of the administrators, we interpret this in a positive light. In our experience, administration tends to come up as a topic for discussion when it is lacking or inefficient. The lack of discussion about administration hopefully indicates that the administrative support structures work unobtrusively to support supervisors and doctoral students in their roles.

**Library.** As noted in the Faculty self-evaluation (p.13), Malmö University has an excellent library with access to c.12,000 journals, and a proactive approach to assisting doctoral students. Agreements with major publishers provide for reduced or waived Open Access Charges (OACs). There are frequent seminars for doctoral students, writing workshops, and active assistance with publishing and literature searches. The librarians are highly experienced and stably employed, and experience shows that they are always willing to help and to order source material. Reportedly, doctoral students from HS and the Faculty of Odontology are those who make greatest use of the library facilities – perhaps because there is a separate branch of the library in one of the HS buildings (AS).

Nonetheless, the University Library faces growing budgetary challenges, particularly the rising costs of journal databases (partly due to the weakening of the Swedish kronor). Two consequences were evident around the time of our site visit: the 2023 funding for open access publishing had already been exhausted by the end of September 2023 (leaving a 4-month gap without replenishment until the 2024 budget year), and it was announced shortly after our visit that part of the e-book

collection would to be discontinued from the start of 2024 (*Malmö universitet – nyhetsbrev till medarbetare*, 6 October 2023).

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- It is important to ensure a faculty-wide doctoral research culture and identity, especially as the faculty is spread across several buildings. We encourage the faculty to continue the annual doctoral day for doctoral students from all departments (described on p.9 of the Faculty self-evaluation), and urge doctoral students to take greater advantage of this event. Another idea for increasing cross-departmental contact could be a series of regular faculty-level research meetings (e.g., short breakfast or lunch meetings).
- The faculty should work with doctoral students and supervisors to ensure that the difference between faculty-level and departmental administrative functions are fully understood.
- It is important that investment in library resources, e-books and open access funds remains a budgetary priority. As has been seen in other universities, library budgets are a relatively easy target for short-term cuts as they are less immediately visible than daily activities. But they take the university further from the cutting edge of research – on which its long-term reputation and sustainability depends.

### **Doctoral studies as a part of the University**

The Faculty of Health and Society's doctoral education quality assurance is embedded in Malmö University's wider doctoral education quality assurance framework.

The university has *Overall Guidelines for Doctoral Education at Malmö University* (LED 1.3.-2016/460, hereinafter 'Overall Guidelines') that apply to all doctoral subjects at the university. These are set out in a short framework document, which identifies overall goals and requirements. The detailed execution of these is decentralized to the faculties' quality assurance structures.

Decision-making takes place down two chains of delegation: an executive channel and a collegial one. The executive chain runs from the Vice Chancellor through the deans (who delegate part of their responsibilities in turn to their vice deans or heads of department). When it comes to collegial advisory boards, the overall collegial body at university level is the Advisory Board for Research and Doctoral Education (BFF), which comprises the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Doctoral Education, representatives of the faculties, as well as doctoral students and union representatives. A working committee, the Advisory Committee for Doctoral Education (KFU), has a particular focus on doctoral issues and reports to BFF. It comprises representatives from each faculty, as well as doctoral student

representatives. The Faculty of Health and Society is represented in BFF and KFU by its Pro Dean and Vice Dean for Doctoral Education respectively, alongside their counterparts from other faculties. Through these bodies there is university-wide discussion and cross-faculty co-operation and exchange of information.

There are faculty-level quality assurance guidelines (*Education-focused quality work within the doctoral education at the Faculty of Health and Society*, LED 2021/1346), most recently revised in 2021, which set out the responsibilities of each person and organ involved and the routines for assuring quality.

Collegial processes within the faculty take place on two levels – faculty and departmental. The Board of Research and Doctoral Education decides on certain research and doctoral education matters by delegation from the Faculty Board, and prepares other decisions for the Faculty Board or the Dean. There is an advisory Board of Supervisors for every doctoral subject area. These are primarily advisory and preparatory collegial bodies, but the chair of the Departmental Board of Supervisors formally decides on the appointment of supervisors (apart from the main supervisor, who is appointed by the Dean.)

In practice, there is a direct overlap between the doctoral subjects and the departments of the same name in which they are situated. The exception is the subject of Health and Society, which has a supervisory board (and doctoral student cohort) that crosses departmental boundaries and is connected to the management of the doctoral subject itself, rather than any individual department.

The regulatory framework appears to be comprehensive and adequate for the purpose. There is a commendably detailed Study Handbook that summarizes the main routines and regulations. We consider the existence of such a handbook to be a very valuable resource.

However, concern was raised amongst doctoral students that knowledge of the Study Handbook appears to be limited. We therefore urge the faculty to redouble its efforts to ensure that the Study Handbook becomes the standard reference work – and also urge doctoral students and supervisors to take their own responsibility for familiarising themselves with its contents proactively.

Whilst commending the regulatory framework as a whole, we noted that the English translations of many of the documents are inconsistent, which could lead to confusion. For example, the *Fakultetsstyrelsen* is sometimes the ‘Board of the Faculty’ and other times, the ‘Faculty Board’. The *Forsknings- och forskarutbildningsnämnden* (FFN) is translated in different places in the Study Handbook as ‘Board of Research and PhD Education’, ‘Board of Research and Doctoral Education’ and ‘Research and Research Education Board’. In the faculty’s self-evaluation document it is called by two different names: ‘Faculty Board of research and doctoral education’ and ‘Board of Research and Research Education’). Similarly, *handledarkollegiet* is variously translated as ‘Board of Supervisors’, ‘the department’s Supervisors’ Board’, ‘the Supervisor’s board’, ‘the supervisory board’, and ‘The Board of Supervisors for the third-cycle subject’.

We would urge the Faculty/departments to conduct an editorial review of the Study Handbook and related documentation, to ensure consistency. This is not only a matter of attention to detail, but primarily to prevent misunderstandings amongst doctoral students and supervisors (particularly international ones who many not be able to compare the Swedish and English versions) about exactly which bodies are responsible for what, and whether they are one or several. Occasionally these mistranslations actually lead to different procedures being described in the two languages.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Facilitate greater familiarity with the Study Handbook amongst doctoral students and supervisors, and use it as the basis for competence development and Board of Supervisor discussions.
- Supervisors and doctoral students must take responsibility for familiarising themselves with the rules set out in the Study Handbook.
- An editorial review should be conducted of the Study Handbook and quality assurance procedures (particularly the English versions) to ensure consistency of nomenclature and procedural descriptions between documents.

### **Recruitment and admission of new doctoral students**

The admission ordinance of Malmö University (*Antagningsordning för utbildning på forskarnivå*, LED 1.3-2018/478) sets out the basic requirements for the recruitment of new doctoral students. This in turn is complemented by faculty-level procedures, set out in the Study Handbook. The transparency of the faculty's doctoral recruitment depends on two things: how the faculty procedures meet the formal requirements of the Higher Education Ordinance and the University rules; and how the formal rules are implemented in practice

A documentary and regulatory framework for recruitment is clearly in place. Except for externally-employed doctoral students, positions must be publicly announced for at least two weeks but preferably longer. An assessment committee is required to review the applications and rank the candidates based on submitted material, references and interviews. They prepare a ranking of the top candidate(s), which is discussed by the Departmental/subject-level Boards of Supervisors and in turn discussed and recommended by the Board of Research and Doctoral Education to the dean for a formal decision.

The university's central admission ordinance requires that, if the number of applicants for an open position exceeds the number of positions available, 'selection must be carried out by scientifically competent persons in a collegial review process' and a 'student representative (doctoral representative) must be

given the opportunity to have insight into the selection process' (art. 3.1.4). The HS procedure, as described in the Study Handbook (p.9), is that:

‘Applications are then examined by a group of assessors consisting of two senior researchers and one PhD student representative.’

There is a degree of ambiguity in the guidelines for the formation of recruitment committees. First, the instructions differ between the Swedish and English versions of the Study Handbook. The Swedish version indicates that there should be ‘*at least* two’ members, whereas the English one says simply ‘two’ – so it is unclear if this is a translation error, or if two is normal in all subjects except Social Work (which indicates in its self-evaluation that there are normally three senior researchers in evaluation groups).

At other Swedish universities (and in some other faculties of Malmö University) it is typical to have more than two voting members on the selection committee. If two is indeed the norm, we would urge the faculty to consider enlarging the committee size to ensure greater transparency, which reduces the risk of a perception of conflict of interest or systematic patterns of recruitment preferences. It would also be beneficial to specify more precisely what is meant by ‘senior researcher’ – e.g., does this imply that they are qualified to *docent* level? Moreover, if it is allowed by the university’s delegation system, it would be beneficial to involve the head of department in the process, as it is he or she who will have operational responsibility for the new doctoral student’s workplace.

Finally, the description above seems to imply that the doctoral student representative (who by definition will not be scientifically qualified to PhD level) is an equal member of the committee and may be able to play an active role in the selection process, which is more than simply ‘having access to’ it and may contradict the university guideline that the applications should be reviewed by scientifically competent assessors. The Faculty is urged to review this to ensure that only scientifically qualified committee members play an active role in the selection process, but that that doctoral students have access to the process, to bring the faculty procedures into line with the university’s overarching requirements.

In some subjects, it is notable that there is a high prevalence of doctoral students who have previously completed their undergraduate and master’s education at Malmö University. (The majority of the doctoral students we met during the site visit noted that they had a prior connection to the university before applying for doctoral studies, for instance.) This could indicate that candidates emerging from the university’s own education programmes are competitive in an open market, when compared with applicants from elsewhere. In Biomedical Sciences, for example, there is a so-called ‘VIP programme’ for undergraduate students, which seeks to inculcate a research culture at an early stage – and this may play a role in ensuring that Malmö University undergraduates are well-prepared for a research career. At the same time, it important to ensure that the high degree of internal selection is merit-based and reflects impartiality between candidates with and

without prior connections to the university. Membership of selection committees is discussed collegially by the Boards of Supervisors, and the faculty highlighted that there is regular rotation of membership of such committees. This is an important aspect in maintaining impartiality in the selection process..

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Review of appointment review committee structure, to enlarge it beyond two scientifically qualified members and ensure that the selection is done by scientifically qualified personnel.
- Continue to ensure rotation of recruitment committees to ensure impartiality.

### **Supervisors and examiners**

Malmö University's Overall Guidelines (article 6) indicate that:

‘Excellent supervisory qualities will be provided, both in terms of how supervisory teams are composed, as well as in terms of individual skills in theory, methodology and in the specific subjects at hand. Supervision must maintain high quality and the number of hours of supervision will be sufficient for meeting the needs. Malmö University must provide supervisors with continuous training and development. There must be clear procedures for changes of supervisors to avoid any negative impacts on the programme or for the individual doctoral candidates concerned.’ (Art.6, modified translation)

This overarching goal is fleshed out in various university and faculty initiatives.

With regard to **supervisor choice**, suggestions are made by the departmental Boards of Supervisors and approved/appointed by the Dean. Main supervisors must be at least associate professors (*docent*), and all supervisors must have a PhD, according to the Study Handbook (p.14). Each doctoral student receives 80 hours of formal supervision (including reading time etc.) per year, which is in line with Swedish norms. The Study Handbook sets out the main tasks of supervisors and doctoral students relative to each other, and provides a template for dialogue between them. We commend this guide as a starting point for setting out expectations about each other in the relationship.

**Supervisory training** is offered at several levels. The university has a formal course in doctoral supervision that is a prerequisite for at least one of the supervisors, preferably the main one. (In practice, most main supervisors have completed this course, according to the datafiles supplied to us; it is usually a prerequisite for appointment to the level of associate professor. But uptake amongst other supervisors is more variable.) This course is once-off and often undertaken

several years before supervisors are actively involved in doctoral education, however, so continuous development and peer support are vital in order to maintain quality. The various subjects have different routines in place for this, as detailed in the separate reports for each. One good example came from Care Science, where we were told in the interviews about discussions that had been held amongst doctoral students, and in the Board of Supervisors, about what were considered to be indicators of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ supervision practice. The two sets of responses were compared and discussed, without personalizing the issue.

Since 2022, the Faculty has also developed an annual collegial training day for supervisors, led by the vice dean and pro dean (as detailed in the faculty’s self-evaluation, p.14). This is a commendable initiative, though we are aware of it only because the faculty management itself noted it in the self-evaluation and the interviews. Notably, none of the supervisors whom we interviewed about their training mentioned it on their own initiative. This indicates that, as the self-evaluation itself puts it, ‘it takes time to create a culture of full attendance’. We commend the faculty for taking the initiative and would urge it to repeat this training annually – as well as strongly urging supervisors to take advantage of it.

In respect of **supervision changes**, the instructions in the Study Handbook (p.15) meet the requirements of the university’s Overall Guidelines by setting out a clear routine for this. A written request should be made by the doctoral student via the research administrator. A meeting is held between the ‘person responsible for doctoral education’ in the department (it is not stated which one) and the doctoral student, in which the Vice Dean may also be involved. The doctoral student can suggest a new supervisor – but does not have the right to have a particular person appointed. A change of main supervisor must be supported by the Board of Research and Doctoral Education and approved by the Dean.

In the self-evaluations, and the discussions during the site visit, we noticed inter-subject discrepancies regarding how departments dealt with supervision changes in practice, especially in externally-funded projects. It would be unusual for the principal investigator (PI) of an externally-funded project not to be considered as a serious candidate as main supervisor for a doctoral project related to their research area. However, the responsibilities that an individual PI has towards the funding body may not always be the same as the duties he or she has towards a doctoral student, and there may be a tension between these roles. In some departments (e.g., Biomedical Science, as described on p.10 of the self-evaluation and the interview with supervisors) there seemed to be an automatic assumption that the PI would be the main supervisor from the outset, and – as far as we understood – it is rare for supervisors to change during the project. In other departments, more consideration was given to the different demands of these roles, or to switching supervisors during the course of the project if necessary.

We take no view as to whether either of these positions – low supervisor rotation or frequent rotation – are desirable or not, as this depends on the circumstances, the

individual project and the academic value of changing the supervision arrangements. At this stage, we simply note that there appear to be different cultures relating to supervision changes in different departments within the same faculty. To this background, the doctoral students noted that – notwithstanding the formal routines in place – they would feel reluctant to request such a change, except in exceptional circumstances.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Incentivize/encourage fuller attendance at HS training events, and develop the Faculty supervisor day as a recurring annual quality-enhancing event.
- Improve awareness amongst supervisors and doctoral students of the routines regarding supervisory changes.
- Give thought as to whether the principal investigator of an externally-funded project should automatically be the main supervisor of that project.

### **Review and progression**

The Overall Guidelines requires that there should be regular collegial progression checks, which should be documented in Individual Study Plans (ISPs) that are updated once per year.

All subjects require the doctoral students to undertake a mid-way seminar and a final seminar, whilst some also require a ‘concept seminar’ in the first year of study. Though there are brief formal guidelines set out in pp.21-22 of the Study Handbook, there is variance as to exactly how these seminars are organized. The basic framework of progression seminars is laid out in Study Handbook – but the detailed procedures and practices are department-specific. As such, these issues are discussed in more detail in the reports that follow.

Malmö University implemented a digital ISP system several years ago that allows for systematic archiving of ISPs. This initially had some ‘teething troubles’, but the process is now routinized. Review procedures around the ISP differ from department to department. In our interviews and in the self-evaluations, a number of points of stress were identified relating to workloads and competing demands from teaching, research, and external employment (in some cases). We urge the departments to see the ISP as a pedagogical and planning tool in which the doctoral student’s training and workload are viewed holistically (including, if appropriate, their external employers).

Every doctoral student has a specially-appointed examiner, in line with the university’s Overall Guidelines. Discussions with the doctoral students indicated that, in some cases, the examiner’s role was simply a formality. We urge the faculty to put focus on clarifying and developing the valuable role that examiners



play in the process of ensuring the quality and appropriateness of each doctoral student's training.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Focus on developing the examiner's role in quality assurance, as well as a valuable mentor for the doctoral student's academic planning process.
- Make more use of the ISP process for the holistic planning of doctoral students' workloads, research and teaching plans.

### **Programme/course content**

All subjects at HS require doctoral students to attain 60 higher education credits (hp/ECTS), divided between several rubrics. Courses are organized at departmental, faculty and university levels.

We note several aspects of importance:

**Quantity of coursework.** The total of 60hp of coursework is typical for Malmö University, and similar to that found at comparable educational institutions elsewhere in Sweden in these subjects (though there are some that require more). The range of categories, mixing subject-specific training with wider scientific and methodological knowledge requirements, ensures breadth to the educational training.

**Distribution of credits across categories.** Until 2023, there was very little scope for optionality (only 1hp out of 60hp), though this has been changed by reducing the number of required credits in other categories for future doctoral students. The new requirements are for 22hp of subject-specific courses; 22hp in the theory of science/methodology; 3-5hp in pedagogy; 4hp in ethics; and 7-9hp optional. It will presumably take several years before these requirements apply to all doctoral students, as many will still be on previous General Syllabi under which they were admitted. At a practical level, we would also note that these totals do not map easily onto course sizes (which are often based on 'round' numbers such as 5hp, 7.5hp, 10hp or 15hp).

**Pedagogical training.** The decision to make 3-5hp of pedagogical training compulsory has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, lecturers in Swedish higher education establishments are typically expected to have 15hp of pedagogical training before embarking upon a teaching career. Many doctoral students teach undergraduates, and basic training in pedagogy can be a useful foundation for both their current teaching and future pedagogical development. Moreover, communication in science is a useful skill for all researchers to have (and a required intended learning outcome under the HEO). On the other hand, given the limited number of coursework credits in the PhD, it may be that some doctoral students would benefit more from deeper training in their subjects, or in

methodology that is directly relevant to their doctoral research, rather than from compulsory pedagogical training. It is relatively unusual in the field – but not unprecedented – for pedagogical courses to be a compulsory part of the PhD coursework, as laid out in the General Syllabus.

**Course menu.** It is noted in the faculty’s self-evaluation (p.11) that *‘in some cases it has been difficult for the doctoral students to find subject-specific and relevant courses and they are then free to apply for courses at other higher [education] institutions or faculties’*. This is a question taken up in more detail in each of the subject reports later in this document, as it affects the different subjects to a greater or lesser extent. In the Care Science self-evaluation (p.15), for instance, it is noted that ‘students must put a lot of effort in trying to identify courses, specifically with relevant subject content’. Doctoral education is a specialised education, and even though it is resource-intensive, it is through the subject-specific training that the ethos of the subject is imparted. A need for more training in quantitative methods was mentioned by several doctoral students and staff in our interviews.

In line with article 9 of the university’s Overall Guidelines, which state that doctoral students should have access to necessary financial resources to cover fees in relation to the education, each doctoral student is allocated a sum of SEK 50,000 as a so-called ‘rucksack’ to assist with costs related to their education. However, a guideline from the university’s Advisory Committee for Doctoral Education in 2022 was that the ‘rucksack’ should not need to be used to fund core courses that are essential to the degree. Being ‘free to apply elsewhere’ should therefore be seen as *added value*, to enhance the educational experience, rather than a substitute for/outsourcing of the core teaching in the subjects in which the university offers doctoral education. Beyond the core courses, however, synergies with other higher education institutions can enhance the breadth of courses available, and mobility can also bring alternative perspectives. A recent agreement with the university alliance *Lärosäten Syd* also means that fees will be waived for other LS universities’ doctoral students, if the courses as fee-free for their own.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- In a situation of scarce resources, place a strategic focus on which courses are best offered ‘in-house’. As a starting point, we would suggest that the core subject-related courses, reflecting the unique ethos of the Malmö doctoral subjects, should be prioritized. Methodological courses could lend themselves better to cross-university mobility.
- Develop a deeper range of quantitative methods courses.
- Make strategic use of the *Lärosäten Syd* alliance to extend the range of suitable doctoral courses for Malmö doctoral students (and also to advertise Malmö University’s to other universities)

- Consider whether pedagogical training should continue to be a compulsory part of PhD coursework, or part of the optional courses.
- Review the number of coursework credits to ensure that necessary totals in each category can be reached easily with component courses.

## Assessment and dissertation

To reach the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the Higher Education Ordinance, Malmö University's Overall Guidelines (Art 12) require that public defences be held that are non-partisan, legally sound and of high scientific quality.

The university has delegated responsibility for this to faculties, and HS has a number of procedural rules to implement these goals (though they are slightly different for Care Science compared with the other subjects – see the relevant report). Generally, according to the Study Handbook, application should be made to hold a defence at least three months before the planned date. The date, opponent and examination committee are formally appointed by the Board of Research and Doctoral Education (FFN) – in contrast to some faculties at the university, where it is a decision taken in the executive chain of decision-making – and the Dean presides over the public ceremony, unless otherwise delegated.

The committee should comprise three people (plus one alternate member), both men and woman, and all should be qualified to the level of at least *docent* or equivalent. Note the English translation states that they should be 'assistant professor' (p.27), whereas the Swedish version makes clear that they should be of *docent* level (usually seen as equivalent to 'associate professor' in the English-speaking academic world – a higher grade than 'assistant professor'). This is another translation issue that is consequential, as it may imply that a lower level of qualification is acceptable. It is the Swedish version of the rules that should take precedence, but the faculty should ensure that there is no misunderstanding arising from this translation error, and that all defences are conducted with examiners of the required level.

## Suggestions for quality improvements

- Ensure that the Study Handbook in English is correctly translated, to avoid ambiguity about the qualifications of examiners.

## Continuing development and future career

Continued career paths after a doctoral dissertation can move in academic and non-academic directions. Given the wide range of areas covered by the doctoral subjects at HS, this is a particular challenge when it comes to providing a structure for career advice and pathways.

When it comes to academic career pathways, the faculty mentions in its self-evaluation that it is investing in **junior academic positions** (postdoctoral fellowships and junior lectureships). In the interview with faculty management, however, it was indicated that the current strategy is to redeploy these resources more towards boosting the Health and Society doctoral subject. (The faculty keeps 25% of the state research finance for strategic development, and delegates 75% to departments.)

A degree of academic mobility can be beneficial for both doctoral graduates and the renewal of the university, so it should not automatically be the case that Malmö University doctoral graduates should slot into junior lectureships created in the same departments. On the other hand, there can be benefits in being able to utilise the skills of new doctoral graduates whom the university has invested time and resources into educating, and who are familiar with the environment.

Though all doctoral students undertake at least 3hp of pedagogical training, the **opportunities to teach** vary somewhat, partly related to the language of teaching and the availability of Swedish-speaking doctoral students to teach on the primarily Swedish-speaking undergraduate courses. This can be an inhibiting factor when it comes to the future career paths of international doctoral students, who may end their doctoral studies with less teaching experience and be placed at a disadvantage when it comes to the attractiveness of their CVs. We therefore urge the faculty to think strategically about how best to ensure wider opportunities in the pedagogical field for all doctoral students, as well as support for language-learning. (Those who wish to remain in Sweden would be well-advised to learn Swedish for the benefit of their future careers in the country, and could perhaps utilise the university's own language training as part of their career planning.)

In some faculties of Malmö University, there are teaching mentoring courses, which pair doctoral students with experienced university teachers (usually not their supervisors) for a year. These are over and above the formal pedagogical courses taken by doctoral students for credits, and are intended to alleviate the stress often experienced by first-time teachers. Doctoral students and their mentors attend various pedagogical seminars together, and they can use their individual 'mentors' as a sounding boards for advice and feedback, reflect on teaching techniques, and then develop a teaching portfolio. The faculty could consider organizing something similar.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider strategies for how doctoral students should be given equal opportunities for teaching and continued academic careers. Can some course elements in the first cycle courses be given in English? Can favorable conditions for attending language courses in Swedish be offered to non-Swedish-speaking doctoral students?

- Organize a teaching mentoring programme for first-time doctoral student teachers.

## **The forthcoming chapters**

This introduction has focused on the main overarching issues that affect doctoral education in the Faculty of Health and Society as a whole. The remainder of the report examines different aspects of doctoral education in more detail, Chapter 2 is primarily based on the interviews conducted with doctoral student representatives during the site visit and gives voice to their perspectives. Chapters 3-6 examine, subject-by-subject, the specific challenges facing the four subjects under examination. Finally, chapter 7 provides an overall summary and conclusion, based on the findings of the whole report.

## 2. Doctoral students' voice

### Introduction

Ten doctoral students from across the different departments within Health and Society attended a group discussion around their experiences as doctoral students at Malmö University. Here, their experiences and perspectives on the faculty and subjects were discussed for an hour and half.

Participants were first asked why it was that they chose to attend Malmö University. The majority of participants expressed some form of previous connection to Malmö University; many had gained their master's at Malmö University while others had experience as project assistants, teachers, or within internships. Other reasons given by students who did not have a previous connection to Malmö University included closeness to family and project collaboration.

The committee was interested in developing understanding as to what had drawn these students to Malmö University and the Faculty of Health and Society. The answers given show that pre-existing connections to the school/faculty and proximity were determining factors. However, the sample size present in this discussion was limited and as such no major conclusions can be made. However, it is important to make note that none of the students indicated that they were drawn specifically to the university or faculty due to a specific research speciality, a professor that they wished to work with, or an ability that Malmö University had to assist with a research question that was not present elsewhere.

Throughout the discussion nine main issues were raised by the PhD representatives. These were:

- Introduction of new doctoral students.
- Seminar timing.
- Seminar culture.
- The use of the Study Handbook.
- Courses offered.
- Individual Study Plan
- Externally-employed vs. university doctoral students.
- Contract timing.
- Questions and conflicts in communication with supervisors

What follows is a brief overview of the discussion points made during the discussion. After this the content of what was discussed will be triangulated with the rest of the discussions taken during the site visit as well as the documents provided for analysis in the review process.

## **Introduction of new doctoral students**

Doctoral students expressed that currently the main way students are integrated into the University, Faculty, and Departments is through the goodwill of other students. While they acknowledged that there were some formal levels of introduction (a seminar once a semester for the faculty and an all-day conference once a year for the university) the information provided was often too broad or hard to disseminate at the early stages of the doctoral studies. As such, it largely falls on more experienced doctoral students to tell new doctoral students informally how to navigate the university. From the Doctoral Student Union's (DSU's) perspective this is a common issue with new doctoral students across the university as there is an appreciated lack of consistency in messaging for new doctoral students.

The Care Science Department had developed a useful means to cope with this situation by developing a peer-mentor programme. In this, veteran doctoral students were assigned new doctoral students as partners and given the task of helping them adjust to doctoral student life. Any questions the newer doctoral students had could first be directed to their mentor who could either help them directly or direct them to the relevant channels to find answers. This is an excellent initiative that would hold value across other departments within the faculty and across other faculties across the university.

## **Seminar timing**

A prominent concern that was highlighted in the discussion process was uncertainty, or perceived ambiguity, surrounding the timing of progress seminars (seminars tied to the 25%, 50%, 75%, and 90% points of PhD progress). Students reported varying interpretations of what it is that these seminars, which are attached to pay increases, are exactly tied to – time spent, or progress made. They reported that it seemed that the timing of the seminars seemed to be connected to the supervisor team more than to any coherent policy on progress of project or duration of contract within the faculty. This has resulted in some supervisors pushing their students through these checkpoints rapidly, or at least on time, while others have acted slowly and delayed their students from advancing through this internal system. This is a particularly sensitive issue for doctoral students given the fact that many of the seminars involved in this process bring with them increased remuneration.

## **Seminar culture**

Attached to the issue of seminar timing was the broader issue of seminar culture within the departments across the faculty. These seminars extend beyond the progress seminars spoken of to include all variations of seminars held within the different departments. Students reported that there is consistently low attendance at seminars, something that erodes a sense of academic comradery, support, and

seriousness within the different departments. Furthermore, some students expressed that they were explicitly told that they need not bother attending seminars. While reportage of this was limited, it is a worrying admission and something that should be addressed within the faculty as it is evidence of a poor culture around seminars. Attendance and participation should be encouraged rather than discouraged.

## **Use of Study Handbook**

The Study Handbook theoretically provides guidelines that should set the precedent for practices within the faculty. However, the interviewed doctoral students stated that nobody follows the Study Handbook and that there are different procedures for its implementation across the faculty and even within departments. The Study Handbook is difficult to find for doctoral students. It was only really mentioned during the introduction seminar and is only used to find specific answers when information is not disseminated informally (though it was noted that part of the problem lies with the fact that it is difficult to find online: one doctoral student noted that the information in it was useful, but hard to locate).

## **Courses**

The issue of course availability, specifically a lack of quantitative methods courses, emerged as a prominent concern within the discussion. Ambiguity was expressed regarding what courses needed to be taken, when it is best to take them, and where relevant courses – especially those not offered in Malmö – can be taken. It is notable that students acknowledged that part of the problem in the lack of some courses being offered is not due to a lack of expertise but is rather a result of a lack of ability to consistently recruit five students to participate (the minimum participation requirements).

Shortage of courses means that students are forced to search for courses outside of Malmö University. Part of this is positive and is part of academic enrichment, however, students expressed that there were difficulties in identifying relevant courses and navigating the logistics of gaining enrolment in courses outside of Malmö University.

However, it was acknowledged that there has been a considerable improvement of information dissemination in recent years, following the introduction of a single portal for all doctoral courses, and the standardization of the admission process.

## **Individual Study Plan (ISP)**

The ISP is something students express some level of confusion over. Here again it seems that who the supervisor is on the project makes a significant difference to clarity in the ISP process. Some doctoral students actively work together with their supervisor and get the ISP updates done while others are left to largely do it themselves.



## **Externally-employed vs. university doctoral students**

A significant portion of the discussion revolved around the distinctions between externally-employed (e.g., by the municipality, region or companies) and university-employed doctoral students. The prevalence of externally-employed doctoral students within the faculty was acknowledged, with participants highlighting advantages associated with this employment structure. Externally-employed doctoral students expressed the benefits of grounding their research in the practical applications and practise of their respective fields as well as continually developing the connection between academic pursuits and the business facets of the industries.

However, alongside these advantages, complexities emerged in navigating the distinct employment structures for doctoral students in these two realms. A crucial point was the absence of a 'rucksack' which leaves industry doctoral students reliant on external funding to cover expenses such as conference fees and travel requirements. This financial hurdle can impede the ability of industry-based doctoral students to fully engage in academic activities beyond their immediate research.

Moreover, the challenges extend to balance between work and study. This is a particular issue during the summer months for those involved in the health sector. During these months the intense workload during this period often renders research pursuits unattainable. While there is a purported 50/50 split between work and research mandated throughout the year, the practicalities of this division become untenable during the summer, distorting the intended equilibrium. Consequently, the workload dynamics fluctuate, creating a scenario where the actual distribution deviates from the intended 50/50 split.

## **Contract timing**

One of the biggest issues raised was around practices of finishing. Numerous doctoral students expressed that it was communicated to them that it is best for them to defend their PhD a number of months before their contracts expire. This, it seemed, was due to a sense that this is considered a mark of a good project and positive work. This is not something that is formally communicated but is instead informally communicated within different departments. This is an important practice to make note of as it undermines the structures put in place throughout the university and creates a sense of expectation to finish early amongst the students. This adds pressure for students and undermines formal practices within the university.

## **Questions and conflicts in communication with supervisors**

The issue of conflicts or other issues between doctoral students and their supervisors emerged throughout the site visit period. This led to a closed-door

session to discuss the situation where participants could be guaranteed some level of anonymity. The doctoral student cohort conveyed varying experiences, with some departments facing numerous situations of miscommunications and conflicts with expressed wishes for formal change of supervisor(s), while others reported relatively few. The prevalent approach to conflict resolution involved initial discussion among the doctoral student cohort before escalation of the matter to the head of the department.

Supervision across the faculty was largely praised by the participating PhD students. However, the discussions unveiled a few common issues that should be discussed. A relatively common complaint voiced surrounded the reluctance among some supervisors to engage in projects and/or act in an adversarial manner with certain doctoral students. This is an issue that goes both ways and should not be laid exclusively at the supervisors' feet. Yet, the number of problematic supervisory relationships across the faculty necessitates a response. In this conversation the doctoral students suggested that the implementation of more robust supervisor selection methods and the development of clear, well-enforced conflict resolution mechanisms would be of benefit. This should be addressed and involve evaluation of work processes at the faculty as well as departmental/doctoral subject level.

## Reflections

It is important to understand that the information given in this session is not necessarily indicative of a lack of process, policy, or practice. However, the issues raised do illuminate how it is that doctoral students interact with the governing structures of the faculty and their respective departments. This makes the information provided important in developing insight into the practice of being a doctoral student within the Health and Society Faculty at Malmö University.

Not all complaints are grounds for the creation of new policy or documents, and some may be based on misunderstandings. However, the discussion does at least point to a *perception* amongst doctoral students of several problems, which the faculty needs to address in order to ensure the efficient resolution of them. This may include further training for doctoral students in routines, and more explicit reminders of information, obligations and procedures, as well as ensuring through the other quality assurance methods that the university meets its obligations towards them.

A clear example is the use of the Study Handbook. Students complained that it was difficult to access. However, they all also acknowledged that they knew the handbook existed and that it was a good source of information when they were confused about expected practice. Thus, it is important that the use of the Study Handbook as a guideline is implemented amongst supervisors and doctoral students alike, and that it is accessible and easy to find when needed. Responsibility also

lies with the doctoral students to access the Study Handbook and familiarise themselves with expected practices.

However, familiarisation with the Study Handbook is only of use if the practices expressed within it are followed. Doctoral students expressed a sense that there was a lack of adherence to practices by their departments and team of supervisors. This is to say that adherence and knowledge of the rules and expectations was highly context-dependent, as some supervisors are knowledgeable about issues and others are not. This creates a work environment in which some doctoral students are put on a path that follows the rules established in the handbook, while others had more *ad hoc* and informal direction. This was particularly prevalent in issues around progress seminars, ISP completion, timing of contract completion, and course offerings.

Separate to this is the issue of supervisor and doctoral student conflict. While not all voices were heard in the room regarding this topic, the tenor of conversation was significantly different than when we spoke to the supervisors and department heads across different departments. Stories of supervisors reluctant to be involved in projects and being adversarial with their students emerged. Again, the scale of unsatisfactory relationships is hard to gauge based on the information gained through this meeting. However, since multiple departments reported supervisor changes not related to unavoidable and normal circumstances (e.g., career or geographical movement of supervisor, need for other competences within the project or strategic career planning for assistant supervisors), it is evident that issues do exist. While the evaluation committee acknowledges that certain departments have different practices and expectations around changing supervisor, it seems appropriate to recommend that the faculty develop a more robust and preventative process to address the issue of contentious doctoral student – supervisor relations.

## 3. Doctoral education subject: Biomedical Science

### Introduction

The Department of Biomedical Science (BMS) has a multidisciplinary approach to the subject. Areas of competence and professional activities include Biomedicine, Medicine, Biomedical Laboratory Science, Chemistry, Pharmacy, Physics, and Biomedical Technology (General Syllabus 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle education). A common theme in research and postgraduate education is biological processes studied at nano, micro and macro level to identify technological solutions to medical challenges to promote and support health and quality of life for the individual and at a societal level. Firmly anchored in knowledge generated from intra- and interdisciplinary research, a substantial amount of the ongoing research is application-driven and in close collaboration with clinics, clinical laboratories, and external companies. These partnerships have a large impact on the doctoral education within the department and many doctoral student projects are financed and executed in collaboration with external partners and the national industrial postgraduate school ComBine, BMS is closely associated with and have an active role within the university research center “Biofilms – Research Center for Biointerfaces” (BRCB). The document “HS Strategiska prioriteringar 2023 – 2025, (Dnr. LED 2023-447), identifies ComBine to be important for continued development of the faculty’s cooperation with the surrounding society.

BMS provides three educational programs, bachelor’s in biomedical science (professional certificate BMA), the bachelor’s program in Pharmacy (Receptarie programmet) and the master’s program in “Biomedical Surface Science”.

### Working environment

The staff at BMS is characterized by a relatively high degree of seniority and research activity. The group include 11 professors (2 visiting and 1 senior), 4 associate professors, 7 senior lecturers, 4 associate senior lecturers, 8 post-docs and 1 adjunct (department web site September 2023). The current number of registered doctoral students is 15 active and 2 inactive. Of those, one is financed by the faculty, 14 externally funded (5 ComBine national industrial postgraduate school, financed by the Knowledge foundation) (self-evaluation appendix). Five doctoral students are scheduled to defend their thesis during 2023, and 4 during 2024. This highlights the issue of continuity of funding and resources, critical mass of doctoral students versus senior staff/supervisor capacity and the need for supervisor assignments as career development at post-doctoral level.

The recruitment and funding of doctoral students and their research activities are largely dependent on external research grants awarded to the senior PI of the project, or R&D applications identified by collaborating companies. The doctoral students are recruited to projects that have received funding for at least 3 years, a fourth year supported by the department, and the PI of the project routinely becomes the main supervisor. This may facilitate that the new doctoral students more naturally become an important member of the project team and develop a loyalty to the project. A negative consequence may be that doctoral student is not involved in the work processes around new research questions, project planning and design on a larger scale as well as included in the work with major grant applications. Also, from the available information it is difficult to estimate the total volume of financial support from the department and faculty with respect to doctoral student salaries and running expenses.

The workplace and atmosphere at BMS are described as informal with “open doors” and easy access to supervisors. The degree of practical lab work at campus and at companies facilitates daily contact with colleagues and informal discussions. The doctoral students are in two different university buildings, Forskaren and Skåne University Hospital, campus Malmö. In most cases the doctoral students main activities are located close to the research group they belong to. Several of the externally-employed doctoral students are affiliated with external companies where the doctoral studies to a varying extent also take place. Thus, collaboration, communication, dissemination of information and social networking and team activities amongst the doctoral students are challenged by their geographical locations. Common activities like monthly seminar series and the Junior Researchers Forum (JRF) are initiatives to promote both social networking and informal communication of research amongst the doctoral students. Unclear to what extent externally-employed doctoral students take part in campus activities.

There are indications that several of the externally-employed doctoral students with less than 100% activity rate combined with their regular job at the external company have difficulties to schedule their participation in courses and seminars. Also, situations where deadlines coincide for the company and doctoral training activities are identified as potentially stressful.

There are several seminar series at BMS, but the attendance of doctoral students is unclear. A challenge mentioned by the “supervisors’ group” during the interview is that the broad range of fields of projects may counteract high doctoral student (and supervisor) attendance at seminars and dissertations. BMS run monthly research meetings with the departmental staff, a mixture of project work presentations by doctoral students, other presentations, and joint discussions. JRF representatives uses those meeting for discussions and dissemination of information. The doctoral students and

senior staff have a mixed international background and English is the common language for communication.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- Strategy to develop a strong and attractive research environment to attract new external funding over the next decade to support continued doctoral student training.
- Strengthen the communication with external companies and include them in the planning of externally-employed doctoral activities and have this documented in the ISP to minimize the risk of work overload and competing activities.
- Define and implement formal routines for dissemination of information at departmental and faculty level independent on physical location.

### **Doctoral studies as a part of the University**

Most of the research and doctoral education are based on experimental bench work and thus require a critical mass of methodological competence, technical equipment and technical know-how about methods and applications. Biomedical science research is constantly undergoing fast development with new and refined methods, dedicated analytical methods and instrumentation. This is costly with investment in instrumentation and running expenses including externally performed analyses in proteomics, genomics, metabolomics. The availability of dedicated labs and equipment, experimental resources and strategic investments are essential for a future development of the research and postgraduate education in BMS.

To create a common research facility with laboratories, core facilities and equipment possibly together with a clinical training facility is currently discussed at the departmental and faculty level. This should be an important future resource and support for the doctoral students' working environment as well as facilitating other aspects of research collaboration, transfer of methodology and hands-on experience and better opportunities to finance expensive equipment.

Since new doctoral students mostly are recruited to a dedicated project, the competence profile often requests methodological competence and skills not always available at the department. The doctoral student thus faces a role as "the specialist". Consequences will be the need to implement those skills in the team for continuity and to avoid that the doctoral student spend too much time supporting other projects.

To support the doctoral students networking and development of their knowledge of the field (may be difficult in a research surrounding with many disparate projects and specialties), BRCB have an annual conference with

doctoral student presentations (oral and posters). ComBine organize an annual workshop where the affiliated doctoral students present their ongoing work. BMS encourage multidisciplinary collaboration, but one challenge with the broad research milieu and scientific networks is to get a good balance between broad knowledge, focus and deep skills. The impact of application-driven projects and industrial doctoral students may be a challenge from the point of view of training in “academic thinking and work processes”.

An attractive doctoral training research milieu includes high quality courses, suitable for the local doctoral students and attractive from a national and international perspective. This is a challenge but through networking with other universities (internationally) and companies may be a strategy to recruit top notch teachers and to reach and attract a critical mass of participants. A combination of theoretical lectures and hands-on methodology would probably be of interest.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- Define and implement a strategy for development of new high impact courses.
- Strategy to encourage higher degree of attendance at seminars and joint activities. Board of supervisors setting the good example, thematic presentations, encourage active participation by defining a seminar series as a course with credits if active attendance.
- Formalize implementation of training in academic thinking and work processes in the doctoral students’ education by defined dedicated activities. If not already included in courses, consider seminar groups on e.g historical perspectives on human ethics, modern medicine, and alternative perspectives on the human body. This may also be a faculty resource.
- Consider how externally-employed doctoral students can be more involved in bidirectional transfer of knowledge between companies, university, and fellow in-house doctoral students.

### **Recruitment and admission of new doctoral students**

As mentioned above most doctoral students are recruited either to externally funded defined research projects or to externally funded industry postgraduate schools. The latter in collaboration with external companies where the doctoral student frequently is employed with part time activity during the doctoral studies.

A doctoral student position may be advertized if the external funding guarantee at least 75% of the budget. The remaining 25% will be financed by the department. Open positions in externally funded projects are regularly advertised in international channels and attract international applicants as

well as from the local area with a background from Malmö university. This has so far generated a good mix of nationalities and backgrounds within the doctoral student group. Recent development with more restrictive migration rules has a negative impact on international recruitments. The recruitment process includes assessment of the candidates' qualifications and interviews executed by the supervisors and a doctoral student representative.

Doctoral students have various educational backgrounds in biomedical science, biology, chemistry and technology. MAU is a young university localized geographically close to Lund university (LU) and the department of Biomedicine, LU, located at Skåne University Hospital. BMS thus needs to develop a strong identity and unique profile to attract good candidates. This includes high quality courses and research projects with an international impact and publications in highly ranked international journals.

A good quality masters' program that attracts local, national and international students is a recruitment base for doctoral students. To support local recruitment to the masters' program and possible future doctoral studies, the VIP program in which BMA students from their second year may join a research group and perform research related activities for a limited number of hours per week has been launched. This introduces the BMA students to research as possible career pathway and has increased the number of applicants to the master program. Another perspective is that the clinical laboratories that experience a severe shortness of qualified BMA staff generally do not acknowledge a master's degree as a strong merit.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- Continue to develop collaborations with companies and university networks to attract financial support for externally-employed postgraduate schools from research funding agencies such as the KKS.
- Define and implement a strategy for development of new high impact courses locally and in collaboration with external companies and other universities.
- Promote international collaboration and visits in research groups abroad.

### **Supervisors and examiners**

Supervision of methodology, lab work and project work can be time consuming and the dedicated amount of time for each doctoral student will often exceed the minimum defined in the quality documents and syllabus. The doctoral students are partners in the research teams so there will be a combination of supervision and other project related activities. Assistant supervisors are recruited to add complementary expertise. Depending on the project, external supervisors are recruited, especially in the case of the



externally-employed doctoral students. This may be a challenge depending on the experience and academic background of the company affiliated supervisor.

At BMS all main supervisors are employed by the faculty (appendix in self-evaluation) and associate or full professors (data file “supervisors and examiners BMS”). This guarantee that all doctoral students receive in-house supervision by scientist with extensive academic experience. One out of 10 main supervisors and 9 out of 12 assistant supervisors lack supervisor training (June 2023). The mentoring activities to support less experienced supervisors that is mentioned in the self-evaluation is discussions at the Departmental Board of Supervisors, (SB) meetings.

A risk/challenge with the informal day-to-day side-by-side work in the lab and informal discussions can be that the focus of the supervisor contact is on daily activities in the lab and related work and that the formal role of the supervisors to guide the doctoral student in an academic career and development of a multitude of skills is “forgotten”. From the doctoral students’ point of view difficulties to communicate with the supervisor-s or other issues such as conflicting opinions and lack of support in critical questions may be particularly stressful since the doctoral student is “dedicated” to the externally funded project thereby dependent on the PI/main supervisor.

The department is facing several challenges over the coming years. Firstly, a change-of-generation especially with respect to the senior group. Secondly, to recruit a critical mass of staff to meet the broad repertoire of scientific areas, engagements in doctoral education and ground level educational programs. This highlights the need for strategic career planning for associate senior lecturers and senior lectures to secure a critical number of associate professors and full professors. This also relies on the possibility for younger scientists to be engaged in doctoral student supervision as part of their career planning.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- Initiate measures to meet the need for strategic external recruitments.
- Define and implement active career planning for younger scientist.
- Implement supervisor training in the career plan for current and future supervisors and consider mentors for “young” supervisors.

### **Review and progression**

The available documentation indicates 17 registered doctoral students of which 15 are active and apparently following the plan as outlined in the Individual Study Plans (ISPs). Gender distribution is roughly 50:50. There

are no “drop-outs” registered since 2016 and all 15 active students have an updated ISP. Overall, progression is good.

The newly registered doctoral students are introduced and informed about the expected activities and outcomes, courses, publications, and active communication of their work at seminars and conferences. Compiled information and guidelines are found in the Study Handbook. Upon registration the ISP is formulated and registered within three month after starting the doctoral studies. The Departmental Board of Supervisors (BS) consisting of all supervisors and senior researchers, has an important function and overall responsibility in the review of quality and progression of the doctoral student projects. The criteria follow those described in the Study Handbook. The progress is continuously reviewed at BS meetings twice a year and progression judged based on the outline in the ISP. Half-way through the doctoral project the student presents a mid-term seminar. This is an opportunity for the doctoral student to present and discuss the project outcome so far, research activities, challenges, need for methodological refinements and other aspects of the research work and to receive feed-back and advise. The supervisor is responsible for recruiting one, usually two, independent reviewers with specialized expertise of relevance for the project and more general knowledge of the field respectively. Both progression and quality of the work is assessed. The supervisor submits a written statement assuring that the mid-term seminar has been conducted and the outcome of this and it is reported in Ladok. There is the opportunity to cancel a continuation of the doctoral project and replace the mid-term seminar by a licentiate seminar.

The doctoral students are expected to attend the departmental seminars and monthly research meetings and on a regular basis present and discuss their own work. In addition, BRCB arrange an annual conference where the doctoral students are invited to give oral or poster presentations.

## **Programme/course content**

As defined in the Study Handbook, a minimum of 60 hp courses should be included in the doctoral education. Of those 3 – 5 hp is in teaching in higher education and 5 hp in ethics. Ethical aspects of the projects are also addressed during the mid-term assessment. A majority of courses are in methodology, minimum 26 hp, and subject related courses, minimum 26 hp. The selection of courses is discussed and decided in agreement with the formal examiner. The doctoral students are encouraged to attend courses given at other universities.

An overview of the current statuses of doctoral courses at the faculty (Research education courses HS 2015-2023) reveal a picture of specialized courses apparently run at irregular intervals but also an ongoing work process, incl. BMS, to formulate and introduce new courses but those have not been up and running as yet. A general impression at faculty level is the

course evaluations and follow-up used to be sparse, but this is more recently changed implementing new routines with regular evaluations.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- Consider joint efforts and collaborations with other universities to develop and run courses especially if shortage of resources and attendees.
- Encourage and facilitate for doctoral students to participate in external courses.

### **Assessment and dissertation**

In addition to the BS responsibility for monitoring quality and progression, an independent senior (professor) scientist not involved in the doctoral project or closely related activities pre-review the thesis work prior to the formal dissertation process with the examining committee and opponent. The faculty also apply pre-review by the examining committee. The opponent and committee members should have expertise in different aspects of the doctoral thesis work and no conflict of interest. When applicable the opponent can be international, which requires introduction to “the Swedish way to execute thesis defenses”. There are no indications of problems involved in the assessment of dissertations or the related work processes.

### **Continuing professional development and future career**

Roughly 50% of the doctoral students are externally-employed doctoral students affiliated to companies. They often have a professional background from industry or other non-academic workplaces prior to their doctoral studies. The other doctoral students have a mixed international background more focused on academic studies thus in general not the same hands-on experience from a non-academic professional career. But since the projects often include collaborations with companies, these students will have good opportunities to establish company contact networks. BRCB is an excellent platform for networking between the academy and companies.

In addition to obligatory pedagogic course(s), a recent course initiative is mentioned to introduce the doctoral students to teaching at bachelor and master courses with focus on laboratory training. This will give an introduction and experience of hands-on teaching and supervision and a step towards “an identity” as a teacher. A transition that may be a challenge.

A vital skill for a successful academic research career is to attract external funding. Introduction to the work process and writing of grant applications is important already at doctoral student level. This should preferably also include ethical approval applications when applicable.

**Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- Formalize routines to ensure that all doctoral students will participate in the planning and writing of grant applications as part of their training. Preferably included in the ISP.
- Mentorship for new teachers.
- Involve industrial supervisors and doctoral students in seminars about project management, career planning and their own experiences.
- Consider previous externally-employed doctoral students as mentors for newly recruited.

## **4. Doctoral education subject: Care Science**

### **Introduction**

According to the self-evaluation and the interviews, the academic subject Care Science (CS) is based in the Department of Care Science. CS is multidisciplinary subject that uses a diversity of theories and methods for studying problems, processes, and interventions related to equal health and the prevention of ill-health. It has focus on the different phases in a lifespan and on how to ameliorate suffering and manage life when living with functional impairment, or long-term illness, and physical and mental ill-health.

The subject of CS includes research on organization of nursing work, the conditions, processes, and results of nursing education, as well as the need for knowledge and knowledge transfer within and into organizations for health and medical care. CS takes some advantage of its location and is engaged in community-based research and collaborate with the surrounding society, including the municipality of Malmö, for instance, regarding less privileged neighbourhoods. At the moment the subject is re-organising from six to three research groups/themes: Promoting Health Equity – ProHeq; ProSenior, with a focus on register studies, interventions and implementation of evidence-based care for older people; and Research Informed Development of Higher Education – RIDHE. The subject has an intention of absorbing all staff more or less into these research groups/themes.

The department is a so-called complete-coherent environment with educational obligations on all levels: bachelor, advanced and doctoral level. CS has the linkage between lower levels of education and research, and also to some degree as a strong and integrated international academic environment, where the department has collaboration with international universities and supervisor. Both dimensions are highlighted as central by Malmö university (Ref.no. LED 1.3-2016/460 and LED 1.2-2017/299).

### **Working environment**

At the time when the factual dossier and the self-evaluation were authored, the subject care science had 21 doctoral students, of which three were men (14%) and 18 women (86%). These numbers are a rather good reflection of the gender inequality that exists on bachelor-, advanced and specialised level among registered nurses in Sweden. The staffing among doctoral students also includes two international doctoral students. There is a wide age-variation between 36 and 61 years of age.

All doctoral students are offered a formal co-worker dialogue every spring semester, annually. Regarding the physical working environment all the doctoral

students' offices are located at the campus and at the second floor with proximity to each other. The self-evaluation points at this factor as contributing to an easy access to the supervisors as well as flexibility and spontaneous meetings and discussions among the doctoral students.

In relation to the psychological working environment, there several doctoral students do 50 per cent research and teach 50 per cent of their full-time positions (50/50 positions). In the self-evaluation it is described how this combination of work elements and high burden of teaching can be stressful for the doctoral students. Some of the doctoral students hold positions as registered nurses in clinical settings, and a doctoral student position in parallel. One of the doctoral students is selected by the doctoral students' team to be a head mentor, and together with the assistant head of research and research education organise one day off-campus. This is done twice a year, which might add to a positive psychological working environment. This is a good way to integrate even the two international and externally-financed doctoral students.

The opportunity to impact and engage in collegial work is also an important aspect of the working environment. The doctoral students are guaranteed formal influence, because they are represented in formal meetings with the departmental Board of Supervisors. The doctoral students have also initiated monthly meetings to discuss current matters, questions, or concerns and needs of further support in relation to the research education. If relevant, questions are addressed to the assistant head for research.

In connection with, and following, the pandemic, both the seminar leader and the doctoral students noticed that there was less activity and interaction in seminars even though students attended digitally. Together they decided to prioritise physical attendance, but it still seems to be a concern.

The physical lay-out of offices with proximity to supervisors and other doctoral students is a strength as it stimulates academic reasoning outside the scheduled seminars, and potentially fosters a vibrant environment.

In relation to the working environment, the combination of teaching and simultaneous doctoral studies both may benefit the doctoral students' further academic careers, because they will have some teaching experiences when they finalise the thesis, and therefore an advantage when applying for permanent positions. On the other hand, high workload of teaching, where the teaching obligations require a more immediate response and focus from the doctoral students with combined positions, adds to the work pressure expressed by the doctoral students.

An identified weakness, also pointed out by the CS, is the lacking physical attendance in seminars for national doctoral students. This is due to the seminars being academic cornerstones, where approaches and mindsets evolve, based on structured feedback with regard to manuscripts, and methodological discussions.

Even if the national situation is more or less the same, the lack of gender equality is considered a weakness. It is possibly a reflection of a larger structural dimension, and therefore difficult to handle and manage isolated at a local level for the department.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider establishing joint agreements on attendance and engagement to a specified level or in mandatory events, which could address the challenge of too low physical attendance.
- Encourage the department leadership together with the research leaders to further look into how to further balance the pros and cons and ease the burden of teaching in some periods.

### **Doctoral studies as a part of the University**

The doctoral studies are regulated in CS's General Syllabus (GS), and when the doctoral student's project plan is accepted, a personalized Individual Study Plan (ISP) is established. The ISP is a direct reflection of the content in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100). The total amount of credit for the doctoral degree is 240 credits, where the Doctoral thesis accounts for 180 credits, and the total course credits accounts 60 credits, of which 26 credits must be on methodological matters. The equivalent for the licentiate total degree is 120 credits, divided with 90 credits for the thesis, plus 30 credits for the courses.

The department arranges different academic seminars with the objective of facilitating critical and collegial discussions on doctoral students' work. This includes activities such as reviewing manuscripts, project plans, and grant applications. The department hosts three Higher Seminars each semester, which are open to all staff members. The content of these seminars focuses on methodological, philosophical, and ethical issues. This is arranged by one of the professors.

According to the documents, it is understood that the group of doctoral students themselves select one peer that together with the assistant head are responsible for putting the doctoral seminar scheme together. This organisation works for all the doctoral seminars besides from the project plan seminars, where there is no formal review. The learning outcomes of the seminars are being able to provide feedback constructively, and to achieve skills and efficacy in scientific argumentation. The seminars, thereby, offer a good arena to practice these critical skills that are directly link the university.

It is a strength that care science's division of course credits is aligned with most other caring/nursing science subjects nationally. Further, CS arranges different kind of seminars as this provides diversity in the doctoral students' education, also supporting their progression.

It is a potential weakness that it is up to the doctoral students to choose reviewers for the project plan among themselves. Even to co-work together with the assistant head to organize the other doctoral seminars with review of manuscripts and so on, can be questionable as this is considered a leadership task. The doctoral students may not be the most suited to have the overview of competencies, and the individual doctoral students' workload.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Shaping an even clearer structure on how and when the doctoral student seminars should be arranged and the selection of/matching of peers. By moving the responsibility to the seniors, this could take away some responsibility from the doctoral students.
- Consider making the deputy head of department exclusively responsible for the doctoral students' seminars.

### **Recruitment and admission of new doctoral students**

The enrolment of doctoral candidates is a strategic and financial decision, discussed by the departmental Research Committee (*Forskningsberedningen*). According to the self-evaluation and the interviews, the recruitment and admission of new doctoral students are based on a transparent process. The doctoral educational positions are announced publicly and often related to a pre-decided project. The positions are admitted in competition, and the doctoral student applicants attach a preliminary project plan in their application. This is jointly examined by at least two senior researchers and one doctoral student representative. If the applicants have the sufficient and required qualifications, they are invited to a position interview, where they also formally present the project and discussion methodology. In this step a ranking list is established, and a recommendation is put forward to the Board of Research and Doctoral Education. The formal decision for admittance is a matter for the Dean.

The amount of doctoral student positions is partly depended on success in external funding and partly on the internal research funding from Malmö University, destined to the department. There is a good description of the content of written agreement that is made by the two parties, between the university and the external partner, on the finances, and responsibilities, when externally-employed doctoral students are accepted. It is not fully clear how long CS has come at this moment in time in the process of integrating a test of English in the recruitment process. To further address the aspects of securing quality and integrity aspects in relation to AI, adding a working-test on-site, could be added.

It is a strength that the recruitment is open and the positions searchable in competition as this ideally leads to the most skilled applicant getting the position.



The department would benefit from clarifications on how the process unfolds when admitting new doctoral students from nearby universities.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- To enhance the quality of the recruitment process even further, SC should consider adding some kind of on-site working-test for the applicants, independently on the way of funding, that have been invited to position interview. Such a measure might be experienced as equalizing among doctoral students, and it could secure integrity and further ensure quality.

### **Supervisors and examiners**

At the department of CS, the supervision is typically organized in teams with three to five supervisors for each doctoral student, where the main supervisor takes on a bigger responsibility. The supervision is concentrated on relatively few staff, according to appendix III of the self-evaluation. Professor Elisabeth Carlson, for instance, has five main supervision tasks, and one supervision task, which can contribute to a heavy workload. CS has also identified a need for a larger engagement from the more junior colleagues, both in order to ease the workload of the seniors, but also to support career development and academic advancement for the more inexperienced teachers. Some doctoral students' projects are partly financed by other universities. Here, the external partners also involved, leading to CS engaging some external supervisors.

The mixed supervisor teams are also a potential way of ensuring quality as external partners add to the total field of competencies, which is supportive for the doctoral students' educations. It is common with meetings including all supervisors approximately three times per semester. From the self-evaluation and the interviews, it became obvious that switches in supervisor constellation seldom occur. But sometimes it happens because of retirement, or due to a planned switch where a co-supervisor becomes an associate professor, and when this is always planned beforehand and transparent. A long time ago a doctoral student asked for a changed supervisor team. There is also unclear if this is due to conflict or not. There are some conflicts, but there does not seem to be a culture of interchanging supervisors.

The examiners are discussed and decided on by the Board of Supervisors when the doctoral student has been admitted for the position. Their main task of the role is to ensure that all learning outcomes are achieved, and an introduction is held by the Vice Dean for new examiners, to discuss what the role entails.

During the interviews, the subject pointed at the fact that by always having the quality for the doctoral students on the agenda for discussions and planning regarding what requirements can be expected, this assures highest quality. One concrete example is that they have arranged a joint workshop with both doctoral

students and supervisor, where the doctoral students described their perceptions of good qualities in a supervisor. In the next step they asked the group of supervisors the same question, and then compared the outcomes.

The code of conduct is also important to promote academic generosity. This will also be discussed in CS, but it is a little unclear how the external supervisors are involved in sharing these.

We share the subject's own assessment that the workshop form is good way to discuss potential delicate matters in relation to supervision. There are several arguments that this is a strength as it provides possibilities to shift perspectives and linked learning.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Enhancing CS's the on-going work with both sides of the supervision's parties in workshop form by for instance, adding "new" energy if they also include external facilitators.

### **Review and progression**

To focus the progression for each doctoral student, the CS conducts revision of the ISP yearly, where needs and reasons for adjustment are discussed and decided on in collaboration between the doctoral student and her/his supervisor team. Further, it is reflected upon in a smaller group within the Board of Supervisors to ensure that the doctoral student's progress is in line with the regulations stipulated in Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100). The ISP should follow the university guide for handling deviations (Dnr. LED 2020/482).

The doctoral students with 50/50 positions are working a long period of time (8 years) completing the thesis. The progression was problematized during the interviews, and it depended on the project and amount of teaching. In some cases, it could be difficult to adequately balance these two entities, as the teaching tasks were experienced as taking too much time, and time from the research part. Most of the doctoral students who are late in submitting do so more related to personal issues (such as sick leave) than the project failure or supervisor's issues.

During the time from 2011 (i.e., seven years before getting the university status), until 2022, 32 doctoral students have been admitted, and five have not finalized their thesis, according to the factual dossier "MAU executive office and the central registration" that calculated studies to have ended if *no registered activity within the last two semesters is considered*.

From the interviews, it became clear that one of the doctoral students on her own initiative shifted to another subject as her project had a better fit with "Health and Society". The assessment group are provided with data on the progression, five

examples of ISP, based on dossier documents, the self-evaluation, and the interview. It is possible to see a good rate of progression in Care Science.

The documents provided are indirect indicators that the Department of Care Science and the subject is a well-functioning research environment, even if some may feel a “pressure” to finalize within the stipulated timeframe.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Address the experienced “pressure”. This could be done, for instance, by involving external experts as discussion partners.

### **Programme/course content**

At the university level, the subject has responsibility for three open searchable doctoral courses, and for one specific non-mandatory course related to care science. There is also an on-going work where CS will change the previous way of offering courses, described as *ad hoc* mode, according to the self-evaluation. The course in Research Ethics (4 credits), organized by CS, is mandatory for the doctoral students in the subject. According to the self-evaluation and the study handbook, CS has limited the total to 60 credits, and 180 credits accounts for the dissertation. Hereof, the doctoral students must include 3 - 5 credits of pedagogical training into the total package.

It is very good that CS considers abandoning the *ad hoc* way in favor of a more conscious way of constructing the mandatory doctoral course package for the doctoral students. On the downside, it is a weakness that doctoral studies in the academic subject of Care Science does not demand a mandatory course in Care Science or equivalent as this is the core/essence and foundation of Care Science.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Continue working on creating/sharing more courses, alone or in cooperation with the external partners and other universities.
- Integrate the course in care science into the mandatory doctoral course package.

### **Assessment and dissertation**

According to the general syllabus, GS, for doctoral education in care science, all theses are pre-reviewed before accepted for defense (p 6 in 2022-12-14 dnr UTB 2022/551). From the Study Handbook it becomes clear that CS differs from the other subjects in the faculty. They have decided that the final review before applying for permission to defense should be conducted by an appointed examining committee. This committee has three weeks to decide if the review/compilation

holds sufficient quality, and if positively assessed, the doctoral student can formally apply for defense.

It is a strength that there is a pre-review taking place before applying for permission to defend the thesis, as this gives some indication of the quality of the thesis. Though it is a little unclear if it is solely external academics that are engaged in the committee, and further the way they are selected, and if they also are the committee at the defense?

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Clarify the information on the process in connection with the preparation for dissertation, in order to remove as much uncertainty as possible for the students and for others.

### **Continuing development and future career**

In the self-evaluation, CS highlights the on-going challenge in relation to staff recruitment and staff maintenance. Registered nurses, assistant professors, associate professors, and professors in care science/nursing are highly attractive in the labour market. In the near proximity to Malmö University, there are also several other academic entities with similar staffing conditions. This in combination with the fact that some staff are approaching the age of retirement at CS. The doctoral students can easily be “absorbed” into the existing environment as teachers with good possibilities of academic advancement, after their dissertation. It is also an advantage that the department is a complete environment as the academic carrier can unfold on all levels of education in future for the doctoral students.

The positive development of the salary level among registered clinically active nurses may be a concern for the future career choices, as the academia is not always economically able to match the development.

In the self-evaluation, there are references to CS’s research strategy that intend to work to increase the numbers of intervention studies moving towards translational research, and they also want to increase collaboration and commissioned research with different external stakeholders to keep contributing to a more sustainable and equal society through research-based knowledge. The department already has well-established collaborations with several external stakeholders, for instance Department of Health at Blekinge Institute of Technology, and it could work even more strategic to impose these collaborations.

Given the high quest and need for staff, the Department of Care Science holds good possibilities to secure a continuing development and a further academic future career for the doctoral students. This we consider a strength.

The outlined strategy reflects international tendencies with request of more intervention research. It is a strength that the research and the teaching in nursing is a matter of high relevance for society, as there is a constant request for more registered nurses.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

The negative effect of salary level among registered clinically active nurses could partly be addressed by:

- Increasing collaboration with stakeholders, and a more joint understanding of the labour marked as one with support of flexible job constructions. CS wants to have even more collaboration with stakeholders.

The Department of Caring Science could take even more advantage of its location:

- Jointly develop strategies with both the municipality of Malmö, and the university hospital. Besides, CS could consider strengthening the collaboration with the nearby universities to reach a long-term stability in the staffing situation.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Overall, the subject's current re-organising into or prioritising of ProHeq, ProSenior, and RIDHE, is considered wise as they are coherent with societal and growing challenges. The strategic assemblance around these relevant groups/themes may give rise to even more attractivity to external funding as well as junior and senior researchers.

The Department of Care Science is a complete environment, and the subject is a well-functioning research environment that supports the doctoral students, even if some of them have a negative pressure to finalize within the stipulated timeframe. We conclude that the subject has had a satisfying progression.

The Department works consciously with the staffing situation as it is a concern due to the teaching workload, and the relatively few associate professors, and professors where even some of them are going to retire in a nearer perspective.

The Department of Care Science could take even more advantage of its location and existing collaborations, and the high societal relevance.

### **Suggested action points**

- CS could consider strengthening the collaboration with the nearby universities to reach a long-term stability in the staffing situation, and even in the longer-term they may consider co-establishing a doctoral school in care science/nursing science.

- CS should consider jointly develop strategies with both the municipality of Malmö, and the university hospital to secure long-term bilateral financial support for a number of doctoral students.
- In the longer-term CS could consider developing an even stronger and integrated international academic environment.

## **5. Doctoral education subject: Subject Health and Society**

### **Introduction**

Health and Society at Malmö University is clearly an interdisciplinary subject but as a subject, this is not so well established at other Swedish universities. There is some resemblance with Linköping University, which had a department entitled “Department of Health and Society” established in the late 1990s. This was an interdisciplinary department, not a subject, with a mix of different subjects including occupational medicine, general practice, social medicine, physiotherapy, caring science, health economics, and health philosophy. Possibly these Linköping experiences inspired the Malmö University College to implement this concept at the time. At Malmö University, a pragmatic solution was made initially to be able to award doctoral degrees within the subject of Health and Society, although the doctoral students were attached to other subjects within the faculty, but still working as doctoral students in a subject called Health and Society.

It seems to have been difficult to create a sense of unity among the doctoral students as the research area can be described as imprecise and vague in its scope. The fact that the doctoral students were placed in different departments led to difficulties in creating a sense of belonging to the same group. In 2016 around twenty doctoral students were active in the doctoral program, a majority of them had their academic background in Criminology. This led to the start of a new doctoral program in Criminology and consequently, a major part of these doctoral students moved to the new program. This rendered nine doctoral students and several senior researchers to leave the subject of Health and Society and move to the new Criminology program. When the Criminology department created its own doctoral education subject, the research subject of Health and Society was somewhat withering. The dean of the faculty initiated a discussion to restart the subject of Health and Society. The subject was then awarded faculty support for a restart in 2020. The faculty decided to support the remaining researchers and doctoral students in Health and Society to facilitate the growth of the research environment. The faculty supported the environment in various ways: For example, through funding of two new doctoral positions and encouragement to build new courses. These funds from the faculty were meant to be initial funds with the prospect of later becoming a self-sustaining subject. However, there is a major challenge to in a short time be more independent in relation to the faculty.

### **Working environment**

Academic organizations must have a “critical mass” of students and teachers to create an academic environment. The subject of Health and Society is a fairly small subject at Malmö University and also in comparison to other similar subjects at other Swedish universities. The lack of a gathered campus has had a negative impact on the endeavor to achieve an academic environment. A problem in recent

years at many universities is the lack of everyday presence of students and teachers at the institutions. This has become more noticeable since the COVID-19 pandemic. This is possibly also a reflection of changes in working life with more flexibility, but it has a negative impact on the daily academic environment. The university is still struggling to get people back to the workplace. Some measures have been implemented. The aim is to have IRL attendance (not Zoom), which is positive.

In the self-evaluation, it was stated that ongoing and planned research projects need to involve both society and health in some aspect. This definition of the subject is extensive and could include a broad range of research questions and disciplines. This wide definition makes it difficult to achieve scientific depth. Very few researchers have such a broad scientific competence. There is a risk that this approach could lead to rather superficial research. The interdisciplinary approach is a main strength in the subject and could attract doctoral students from different disciplines and geographical areas. However, the interdisciplinary approach does not mean that the traditional disciplines are wiped out. The teachers report that they are all very interdisciplinary and open. One of the foundations is that the teachers and doctoral students know that they come from different disciplines.

Recent year's focus has been on the consolidation of the Health and Society group. Although different disciplinary backgrounds and research platforms will soon start for a common goal to create something together, according to the teacher's group. The teachers have tried to identify fields and new networks. The researchers have their own international networks they can bring to the table too. For some years there has been a close connection to the interdisciplinary research Centre for Sexology and Sexuality Studies (CSS) with many collaborations within the subject area.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- The number of qualified senior researchers in social sciences, epidemiology, and public health needs to be strengthened.
- Initiatives to build up new research platforms are important ways to apply for funding for PhDs in the future.

### **Doctoral studies as a part of the University**

The city of Malmö is vibrant with many social challenges which makes it attractive for students. Also, the research attracts, such as social problems of a big city although being a medium-sized city. Perhaps the organization is easier to visualize, more personal with a small but creative environment, and closeness to faculty management might also attract. The two major campuses Niagara and Malmö University Hospital are very attractive for both staff and students although they are geographically separated.



Health as a concept is multidimensional from micro (cell) to macro (society). The different subjects at the faculty all fit in a concept of health from very different perspectives. Much clearer on a faculty level regarding the variety of research topics. For small research departments, it is crucial to build collaborations. The staff works continuously to build solid collaborative relationships across subjects within the faculty. Good examples of this are the research platforms between departments within the faculty, where doctoral students might be connected in the future.

Malmö University has always had a strong local connection with Malmö Community and the Region of Skåne. With the closeness to Lund University, one could ask why many doctoral students apply and choose Malmö University instead of the traditions and well-established Lund University. One answer could be that Malmö is smaller and it's well-organized, and it's open to changes and new ways of thinking.

Malmö University has an ambition of being an international university with an international approach, but only a few examples are apparent where international research collaborations are found within the subject of Health and Society. The ambition to often speak English among the staff and the PhD students does not mean that the faculty is international. A problem that could cause confusion is the title of the subject Health and Society vs. the Faculty Health and Society. This is more apparent from an external point of view. The Use of an abbreviation HoS for the subject has been initiated to avoid confusion.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- The subject Health and Society could modify its name to avoid confusion about what is the subject and what is the department.
- An appropriate concept could be “Public Health” which is an internationally well-known and established concept. Such a renaming of the subject could also be beneficial for the doctoral students.

### **Recruitment and admission of new doctoral students**

During a five-year period 2005-2010, Health and Society admitted 18 new doctoral students. At the time of the self-evaluation of the subject Health and Society, there were only 5 doctoral students admitted to the third-cycle education, but later the number increased with additional doctoral students financed by the faculty, so now there is up to 9 doctoral students.

Health and Society research seminars were initiated to be restarted in 2021. However, there is no seminar series exclusively for doctoral students in Health and Society. The PhD students all undergo review at a half-time seminar and a final seminar, in which they present their own work. According to the self-evaluation

report, they may attend more general seminars at their home departments, in which they can present manuscripts and get feedback.

A potential problem is the national and international status of a PhD degree in a subject entitled Health and Society. Where will the graduated PhDs work after their degree? What happens in the long run? Where could they find employment? Some of them might stay in the department and thereby increase their academic strength in certain research areas. They might write grants together with their supervisor to continue. However, applying for national research funds is highly competitive, especially when it comes to excellent funds and the chance of getting such funds should not be overestimated.

But what is the actual value in national or international competition with an interdisciplinary doctoral degree in Health and Society? So far, this potential identity problem might not have been so obvious since most PhDs are specialized in some way. Some might move on to other universities. There is a potential post-doc career in health care, local communities, or private companies like the pharmaceutical industry, according to reports from the supervisors.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- The lack of regular research seminars directed to the doctoral students in the field of Health and Society is a weakness although there are potentials to offer other available seminars within the Faculty.

### **Supervisors and examiners**

The teachers at Health and Society, as a research group, report that they are trying to find their own platform and welcome the doctoral students into this. Hopefully, the doctoral students feel that their identity is Health and Society whatever their home department.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Teachers and doctoral students in Health and Society are all affiliated with different departments which might be negative for creating an academic environment with its own identity.

### **Review and progression**

A basic quality assurance lies in that there is a continuous peer review of the thesis progress based on the mandatory doctoral seminars plan, half-time, and final seminars. In the seminars, a review is made of both the progression and the quality of the work performed. During the board meetings of Health and Society, the members discuss the ISPs of the doctoral students. This is the moment in which the progression among the doctoral students is discussed. With newly admitted doctoral students, there are plans to have introductory seminars in which the

doctoral students have an opportunity to discuss their research plans, according to the self-report.

A general strength in Health and Society's doctoral education is the freedom to choose the direction of their thesis since the research field of Health and Society is broad. Students whose projects won't fit in narrower disciplines can fit in here. This might be a positive factor that attracts doctoral student applicants to come to Malmö University and Health and Society. Simultaneously this approach could be an impediment to gaining a more excellent and focused scientific environment and thereby also gaining research funds. The small size of the subject and thereby closeness between the doctoral students and the supervisors could be a strength in their education.

The doctoral students are offered a "doctoral backpack" including a total sum of 50.000 SEK. This is unique for Malmö University and seems to be a very good initiative and really an asset for the doctoral students. They can use their backpack to assist with different types of research costs like participating in conferences, research trips, fieldwork, and investing in literature.

## **Programme/course content**

Since the recent restart of Health and Society, a discussion has emerged about what courses are already there to meet the needs of the doctoral students, and what kind of courses would be relevant to them. The self-evaluation report gives an example that the course "Quantitative Research Methods" was created in response to an identified gap. That course along with the course "Qualitative Research Methodology for Health and the Social Sciences" now covers a broad spectrum of methodologies within the research subject. The course "Introduction to the Research Field Health and Society" was developed in a collaborative process including all the Health and Society researchers. A challenge for Health and Society is that they need to compete with other research subjects about funding for courses. Concurrently, the subject has good support from the faculty, which makes efforts to support the restart of the subject also in terms of creating opportunities for the Health and Society doctoral program to thrive. The support from the faculty regarding course development also builds on the actuality that the Health and Society research field is so broad that doctoral students from all departments can benefit from taking these courses.

According to the self-evaluation report, the subject plans to investigate the requirements for a graduate school and funding opportunities, both to increase the number of doctoral students in Health and Society and to facilitate a research environment in which a sense of shared identity can be promoted.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider if there could be a set of common basic courses for all PhD students for example in both quantitative and qualitative scientific methodology as well as public health, epidemiology and statistics.
- Being connected to national research schools could be beneficial and the path forward to achieve a stronger research education environment.

### **Ongoing development work**

The recent restart of the subject was positive; however, it also included many challenges. With the recent restart and the faculty's financial support, it was possible to employ additional doctoral students. This has given the subject of Health and Society new strength and also hope for at least the near future. Noticeable is that the financial support for this faculty support is limited in time. Although all doctoral students are financed until their PhD degree, there is a clear intention that already around 2025 these new doctoral students should be externally financed and self-sustaining. A major challenge is that in less than 2 years be more independent in relation to the faculty with respect to directed funding. The work process to identify projects, internationalization, and apply for external funding is ongoing. Scheduled meetings to identify projects and write grant proposals have started. A question is if these applications should be narrow and focused or more broad. There is also a risk of importing the “old way of thinking”, it might be safer to make a clean start. The “old” doctoral students felt that Criminology was a substantial part of the subject, but now when they are gone there are not so many doctoral students left in the subject. There is frankly a small number of doctoral students in the subject.

### **Assessment of dissertation**

The progress of a dissertation is guided by the Study Handbook on doctoral education and the process is discussed in Department of Health and Society board meetings. The guidelines applied are inspired by guidelines from the Department of Social Work including that at least two supervisors should be appointed: one of them in the role of main supervisor. Further, the main supervisor should be at least an associate professor (*docent*) and be employed at the faculty (this does not apply to the other supervisors).

A factor of importance is the available competencies among the teachers within the subject. However, these competencies could be broader for many reasons, among others as supervisors for newly recruited doctoral students and also to broaden the basis for research applications. Doctoral student's evaluation especially points out the lack of quantitative research competencies which could be epidemiology, statistics, and public health.

## **Continuing professional development and future career**

A good initiative is that the staff are looking for opportunities to find funding to participate in a graduate school. Some of the doctoral students in the subject are attached to the subject of Sexuality and sexual health and they are planning a new PhD course together with 3-4 countries in Europe about sexuality and sexual health as a multidisciplinary workshop. It seems somewhat problematical that the doctoral students after finishing they do not have access to a complete educational environment for future teaching.

## **Summary and conclusions**

The nomenclature confusion of what is the 'Health and Society' subject and what is the Health and Society Faculty might negatively affect the external understanding, as well as the forthcoming recruitment of doctoral students and teachers. The subject needs some research flagships, more outstanding research that sticks out. It could be important to be seen and present research at different international conferences but also to be seen in the media.

Malmö University is a new and a quite small university, that calls for collaboration with other universities. The question is why deeper collaborations have not been developed with the closest universities geographically (e.g., Lund University and Växjö (Linnaeus University)). That could have been quite natural in regard to increasing the scientific competencies, participating in research projects, and offering doctoral student courses. The subject of Health and Society needs more competencies in quantitative methods and research, now it seems like there is an overload of qualitative researchers and methods. Health and Society is a vulnerable scientific community with a limited number of doctoral students and few lectures, but the staff seems hopeful for the future.

The official expectation for the future of Malmö University could help to find research fields that are updated on today's problems in health and society. Here you could have a local community-based approach, but also an international approach. For upcoming research, the faculty needs to invest in data material. For example, there are health care data available in the Skåne County Council, based on medical records for all inhabitants covering healthcare visits in primary and hospital care for years. These databases could be a goldmine for interdisciplinary research.

Closer collaboration with the subject of Criminology also fits quite well with the development of research platforms in this direction. This is also of national interest since the social and cultural challenges in Malmö are right on target for research in the field of health and society.

The interdisciplinarity approach is the main strength of the subject of Health and Society, but an academic organisation needs a critical mass to flourish. What are the prospects of flourishing and what are the prospects of withering away? The subject of Health and Society is still at a crossroads for the future and is thus vulnerable and for the future, primarily considering the prospect for the doctoral

students. The subject of Health and Society is not established in other academic environments. Instead, the concept of Public Health is equivalent and more common at universities. For the doctoral students, using the subject Health and Society has a questionable walkability. Instead, a PhD degree in Public Health is well-established. Presently, no strong and sustainable scientific environment with a clear identity also in an external academic context including external funding and collaborations, is apparent for these students and the supply of courses is scarce. Although the faculty has allocated extra funds for new doctoral students, an unsecured future is coming if this should also be based on expectations of external research funds.

**Suggestions for quality improvements:**

- To strengthen the survival chance of the subject Health and Society in longer terms, the subject could be more clearly incorporated with the Department of Social Work.
- To gain a sufficient academic environment and form a platform the subject could be re-labeled from “Health and Society” to “Public Health”.
- For small research departments, it is crucial to establish collaborations. The closeness to Lund University and Linneaus University could be a good opportunity to initiate collaborations with respect to research courses, research platforms, and research projects.
- To initiate research projects and research platforms of high community relevance taking advantage of the special socio-economic and socio-cultural environment in Malmö and to build up access to local and regional databases covering health and social conditions in the community.

## 6. Doctoral education subject: Social Work

### Introduction

Department of Social Work (ISA) started doctoral education in Social Work in 2007. Research is conducted in areas such as children/young people/family, disability and rehabilitation, social psychiatry, abuse and dependence, structural and ecosocial inequality, and in two of the university's research centers, the Center for Sexology and Sexuality Studies (CSS) and the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM). ISA is the host department for CSS, and many researchers and doctoral students in Social Work are active in research within this center. The Forte-funded Graduate School for Professionals in Social Services (FYS) and doctoral studentships in externally funded research projects are also an essential part of the research environment at the department.

### Working environment

The research environment has a high and scientifically broad competence in Social Work with five professors, two associate professors, and eight senior lecturers with associate professor competence. In addition, around 25 senior lecturers and lecturers work in the subject. In June 2023, there were 22 doctoral students in Social Work, of whom 13 were accepted for doctoral degrees and nine for licentiate degrees. Of the doctoral students admitted to the doctoral education, ten have their funding mainly through faculty funds. Everything points to the fact that the overall scientific competence in the subject corresponds well to the supervision needs of admitted doctoral students.

The Departmental Board of Supervisors in Social Work and the deputy head of the department are responsible for the department's research and doctoral education. The board includes, besides the chair and vice chair (deputy head), all professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, others with supervisory duties, and a doctoral student representative (approx. 40 people). Their task is to prepare and decide on matters relating to doctoral education. Doctoral students are organized in a doctoral student group, with representatives in forums that impact doctoral education.

A SWOT analysis in 2022 shows that a good and permissive atmosphere and a clear structure characterize the work environment. However, the self-evaluation and interviews with doctoral students show an organizational vagueness regarding certain routines, rights, and obligations. For example, there are different expectations of the role and function of seminars, the Study Handbook, and the individual study plan (ISP) in doctoral education. Interviews and SWOT analysis also show that the administrative and operational support, including library services, is well-organized.

The researchers at the department have different disciplinary backgrounds, which brings different perspectives into Social Work as a scientific discipline. The open

and continuous discussion about the research's position, direction, and mission, even if this may involve various epistemological and methodological contradictions, shows a dynamic and reflective academic environment. The reflective environment is also confirmed by how the self-evaluation is democratically and collegially processed in various forums and how the merits and challenges of the research environment are openly discussed in the texts and interviews.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Clarify and communicate rights, obligations, and routines in doctoral education (for example, in terms of application of the Study Handbook, the individual study plan, and expectations for seminar participation).

### **Doctoral studies as a part of the University**

The participation of doctoral students in various meetings, seminars, and conferences and engagement in teaching and administrative tasks contributes to doctoral education becoming an integrated part of the research and educational environment. The assignment as main supervisor is always given to internally employed, so conditions are set for regular contact between doctoral students and supervisors. In exceptional cases, the assignment as supervisor has continued after a supervisor has received a position at another university. However, doctoral students who lack a closer connection to the environment and refrain from participating actively in the subject's activities risk ending up in a solitary position with their supervisors.

The department is a multidisciplinary environment with supervisors from different academic backgrounds and doctoral students in two subjects: Social Work and Health and Society. A strength of the broad research environment is that the doctoral students become familiar with various scientific perspectives. A challenge is that doctoral students may face conflicting expectations in their practical research work (e.g., publication traditions) and that the anchoring in the subject is weakened if supervisors and doctoral students have a subject background other than Social Work. The subject's publication policy serves as guidance for publications in social work, and much points to the fact that anchoring and positioning within the subject are handled through dialogue and discussions in seminars and other forums.

Malmö University and the subject of Social Work have a strong local connection to the city of Malmö, Region Skåne, some NGOs, and companies. Established and deepened collaboration with the surrounding society is a strength for both the research and educational environment. All doctoral students are encouraged to engage in dialogue with practitioners in various activities outside the university. For the FYS licentiates and the operational doctoral students, collaboration with the surrounding society is well-integrated as they work practically outside the



university in parallel with their studies. Collaborative activities for all doctoral students are documented in ISP and contribute to achieving learning goals. In the self-evaluation, however, attention is drawn to the need for an in-depth discussion in the college about how the department's research and doctoral education, theoretically and practically, can be relevant to the professional field of social work.

The need for an internationalization strategy is highlighted as a developmental area. According to the self-evaluation, such a strategy could include principles for international recruitment of doctoral students, comparative research, increased international publication, researchers' and doctoral students' representation at conferences, and participation in various research networks. Other areas raised in the self-evaluation about the subject development in the long term concern the announcement of doctoral positions and the range of courses. These two areas will be further commented on in the following text.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider how doctoral students with little connection to the department can become more involved in the research environment.
- Continue discussing the research relevance for the professional practice in social work in seminars and other relevant forums.
- Consider the need and content of an internationalization strategy.

### **Recruitment and admission of new doctoral students**

After preparation in necessary forums, the head of department makes the formal decision on the announcement of doctoral student positions. So far, no specific focus has been used when announcing internally funded doctoral student positions, but advertising doctoral positions in relation to existing research environments is highlighted to strengthen doctoral education.

The process for selecting and admitting doctoral students follows a predetermined procedure established by the Departmental Board of Supervisors (Dnr. LED 2022/1078). A process that aligns with the transparency requirements in regulations and frameworks at the university and faculty level. The dean makes a formal decision on the admission of a doctoral student and the appointment of the main supervisor after the decisions have been prepared in the Departmental Board of Supervisors and Faculty Board of Research and Doctoral Education (FFN). The admission of operational doctoral students and doctoral students/licentiate students in FYS is made in competition and follows the ordinary admission rules and criteria. A lack of internationalization strategy and language barriers have contributed to the subject's limited international recruitment. The self-evaluation emphasizes that increasing international comparative research would be a way forward to the international admission of doctoral students.

Under supervision, doctoral students, in most cases, design their dissertation projects based on their interests. The motivation that one's interest entails should not be underestimated, but starting a research project within an established environment has many research strategic but also practical advantages. There is vital research within two of the university's research centers and in some more or less cohesive environments. Targeted calls, within and outside of Sweden, for doctoral positions within established research environments would likely benefit both the doctoral education and the research environments.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider the conditions for announcing doctoral student positions, nationally and internationally, within existing research centers or other strategic research projects.

### **Supervisors and examiners**

The Departmental Board of Supervisors has established procedures for appointing main supervisors. The starting point is the doctoral student's wishes (with some advice) and access to supervisor competence. Each doctoral student must have at least two supervisors. The main supervisorship is suggested by the Departmental Board of Supervisors and decided by the Dean. Other supervisors are appointed by the chairman of the Departmental Board of Supervisors (Study Handbook, p.14). The project manager is generally nominated as the main supervisor for externally funded projects.

The examiner's role is to ensure that all learning outcomes are achieved. In practice, the examiner is involved in the choices of courses, checks the ISP, and writes an examiner's report before requesting a dissertation. By all accounts, there is an established and functioning collaboration between examiners and supervisors.

During the years, (2018–2022) the Department of Social Work has carried out a comparatively large number of supervisor changes – many of them (according to the department's self-evaluation) due to conflicts (seven out of nine). The majority of these have been in externally funded projects (five out of seven). Conflicts and changes of working relationships between doctoral students and supervisors have different foundations and take different forms. Usually, it involves different expectations, how criticism and feedback are conveyed, and different views of knowledge. Changes of supervisor can also reflect shifts in academic needs. The Departmental Board of Supervisor does not perceive supervisor changes as necessarily bad or problematic. Instead, in its members' view, it signals adherence to doctoral students' perspectives and rights and can lead to positive development. The deputy head of the department is the one who supports the doctoral student to raise their concern with the supervisor/the supervisors. Even centrally located management at the university offers support to navigate disagreements that have arisen.

In addition to mandatory supervisor training, exchanging experience and knowledge in the Departmental Board of Supervisors is essential in the supervisors' competence development. However, the self-evaluation shows that it is sometimes tricky to have conversations about perceived pedagogical and conflict-filled challenges in supervision in this group. To facilitate discussions that might be sensitive, the supervisors organize discussions around ISP in small groups and have introduced research education meetings for doctoral students and supervisors around particular themes (e.g., supervision). But still, in the interviews, requests are made for continuing education opportunities at both faculty and university levels.

Conflicts and supervisor changes are not uncommon in academic settings and nothing significant for this subject. What is crucial is how these matters are handled, i.e., that there is a culture that takes these issues seriously, and that the doctoral student's need for support is ensured. Divisions of responsibilities and routines established at the department suggest that systems are in place to handle such situations. It is commendable that the subject's dialogue tool for doctoral students and supervisors has been incorporated into the faculty's Study Handbook, even if its use is still noted as being limited. The stated need for continuing education for supervisors on pedagogical and relational challenges in the supervisor role also demonstrates a culture that takes these issues seriously.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- To avoid misunderstandings leading to conflicts, consider how expectations and conditions can be communicated to doctoral students upon admission and continuing in doctoral education.
- Communicate the need for continued supervisor training to those responsible for these issues at the university.

### **Review and progression**

Since 2014, 21 students have been examined from the doctoral program in Social Work, of which 16 obtained doctorate degrees and five obtained licentiate degrees. In 2023, five doctoral degrees and two licentiate degrees are planned. Five operational and externally funded doctoral students have interrupted their doctoral studies in the last five years. Overall, this shows a satisfactory completion in the doctoral education, which indicates high quality in supervision and that resources and conditions are available for doctoral students to complete their studies.

The basic structure to ensure high progression lies in the continuous peer review and the mandatory doctoral seminars plan, half-time, and final seminars, which constitute control stations and follow the regulations in the Study Handbook. The seminars review both the progression and the quality of the work performed and pursue the form of a dissertation. In the half-time and final seminar, an external

commentator (at least an associate professor) is regularly supplemented with an internal commentator. In the final seminars, the external commentator is expected to write a statement that will later be attached to the request for a dissertation. Before the defense, a collegial reading ("green reading") of the work takes place.

After the pandemic, the subject is still struggling to get people back to the workplace. Therefore, doctoral students and senior researchers are encouraged to attend seminars and to do this through physical presence at the workplace (not Zoom). Interviews with supervisors also reveal that the seminars are one of the most critical challenges for establishing a stable and inclusive academic environment. The challenges concern the need for different seminars (for example, method, article, or analysis) and to strengthen participation and creativity in the subject's seminar culture. As previously mentioned, doctoral students experience unclear expectations regarding the seminars, underlining the need for more precise guidelines for which requirements are placed on seminar participation.

The Individual Study Plan is essential in monitoring goal achievement and is revised at least once a year. Doctoral students and supervisors revise the academic content before a peer review in the supervisor's reading groups, where all learning outcomes are considered. The examiner finally reviews the revisions made. Deviations from the ISP follow the university guide for handling deviations. However, interviews with the doctoral students reveal some ambiguities regarding the ISP and that the application may vary between supervisors

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Continue the work to strengthen creativity and participation in the subject's seminar through various forms of seminars and requirements for participation.
- Clarify for the doctoral students what expectations exist regarding presence at the workplace and participation in various seminars. For example, it could be suggested that the doctoral students come to the office at least x days/month and attend specific meetings. Consider whether seminar participation can provide course credit.
- Clarify and ensure the procedures for the management of the ISP.

### **Programme/course content**

Doctoral education is regulated by ten learning outcomes, achieved through a doctoral thesis, 180 hp, course credits, 60 hp, and several added activities. The equivalent for the licentiate degree is thesis, 90 hp, and courses, 30 hp. The thesis and course credits distribution align with corresponding doctoral educations in Sweden.

The general syllabus regulates which courses should be included in the degree. Doctoral students can access courses on the department, faculty, and university level and courses from the National Graduate School in Social Work and other universities. Malmö University and FYS offer courses in both qualitative and quantitative methods, and sometimes, the National Graduate School in Social Work gives method courses. However, offering doctoral students access to relevant courses, for example, in quantitative methods with a predictable regularity, is challenging. Discussions about the department's competence and capacity to offer courses in collaboration with other departments and universities are ongoing.

Important learning objectives relate to internationalization, ethics, and equality. International research experience is an essential part of doctoral education in Social Work. Doctoral students are invited to various international activities and expected to present some of their research at an international conference. The need for an internationalization strategy to secure the learning objectives in this area has previously been discussed on page 5.

All doctoral students must take a compulsory course on ethical research issues. The doctoral students further deepen their ethical knowledge and reflections in the thesis work through the ethics application, supervision, seminars, and other doctoral student meetings. The self-evaluation draws attention to the need for a systematic follow-up of ethical issues in the ISP and as a mandatory element to be discussed at seminars.

Equality is sought when recruiting doctoral students and in various assignments related to doctoral education. A third of the doctoral students are men, which, to some extent, corresponds to the gender distribution in undergraduate education. The doctoral students have access to courses in gender, and gender perspectives, both as theory and/or as empirical categories, are present in several thesis projects. The competence in gender studies is generally high in The Departmental Board of Supervisors.

### **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider mapping the doctoral students' need for courses in the short and long term and how the subjects' courses can complement other available courses within and outside the university.
- Doctoral students' prior knowledge and knowledge needs may vary in different subjects. Consider if a preparatory course, for example, in quantitative methods, can provide doctoral students with better conditions to assimilate the university and faculty joint courses.

### **Assessment and dissertation**

In the defense, a high level of subject competence is sought in the composition of the assessment board, as well as specific competence in the thesis area in the

person appointed as an opponent. The examining committee always includes both men and women. Opponents can be recruited internationally, but where applicable, great demands are placed on how established routines for the defense are communicated to the person assigned the task.

## **Continuing development and future career**

Career planning for a continued academic career or a career outside academia mainly occurs in discussions between the doctoral student and the supervisors. The career planning for FYS licentiates is done in close dialogue with the licentiate student's employers to utilize the competence when the doctoral education is completed. The deputy head of the department also raises the issue of career planning within the academia in dialog with doctoral students.

In addition, doctoral students get opportunities to prepare for a career in academia through teaching, corresponding to 20 percent of the working time. For non-Swedish-speaking doctoral students, teaching opportunities are limited, which can affect these doctoral students' opportunities for a continued teaching or research career in Sweden. Therefore, the self-evaluation highlights the importance of creating equal conditions for career development for all doctoral students.

To increase doctoral students' competence in higher education pedagogy, the department has initiated a workshop, and a course in higher education pedagogy (minimum three and maximum five credits) is included in the general study plan. The licentiates within FYS and the Graduate School for professionals in social services receive a separate pedagogical education focusing on communicating science to practice.

As noted in the introductory chapter of this report, at universities in Sweden there are divided opinions on whether higher education pedagogy should be included as a course element in doctoral education. In one of the learning objectives of the Higher Education Ordinance, it is emphasized that the doctoral student must demonstrate the ability to present and discuss research with authority in dialogue with the scientific community and society in general. This ability includes requirements for pedagogical competence. The probability that the doctoral student will have a continued career in academia for those with dissertations in the subject is very high since the job market is outstanding. Out of 24 people who took a licentiate or doctorate graduation in 2012–2022 at the Department of Social Work, most continued their career in academia or R&D activities, which shows that courses in higher education pedagogy are essential to successful career development for doctoral students in Social Work.

## **Suggestions for quality improvements**

- Consider strategies for how doctoral students should be given equal opportunities for teaching and continued academic careers. Can some

course elements in the first cycle courses be given in English? Can favorable conditions for attending language courses in Swedish be offered to non-Swedish-speaking doctoral students?

## 7. Summary and conclusions

### Summary and conclusion

- In conclusion, the Faculty of Health and Society has developed a portfolio of doctoral education subjects that covers a wide range of disciplines and methodologies. From its early days as Malmö högskola, through to the present Malmö University, it has developed a solid foundation for doctoral education, and currently hosts the largest number of doctoral students in the university. The faculty and its departments have succeeded in developing well-formed routines for the formal aspects of doctoral education, as well as producing graduates with a good grounding in their subjects.
- We are impressed by the energy and conscientiousness of the university personnel that we met, and also with the reflections about strengths and weaknesses that the self-evaluations contained. Our overall impression is that doctoral education in the faculty has been a priority, that the faculty's doctoral education programs allow doctoral students to meet the intended learning outcomes set out in the Higher Education Ordinance. The university takes seriously the task of formalizing and fulfilling its legal obligations as a Swedish state authority and educational establishment. There are well-developed quality assurance regimes in place and specialized scientific knowledge available. Doctoral education forms part of the 'complete environment' of education and research that the university's *Strategy 2025* calls for.
- As in any environment, there are of course various areas that could be further developed or improved. In many cases, the departments and the faculty are aware of these themselves, as demonstrated in the self-evaluations and in the interviews we held. In particular, the need to strengthen, develop or redesign the cross-disciplinary Health and Society subject is a matter that we see as a high priority. It was also notable that, despite the strong codification of norms and routines, doctoral students highlighted concerns that the routines and regulations are not always something that they are aware of in their daily working life. We therefore commend that greater awareness is spread amongst supervisors, doctoral students and those responsible for doctoral education at all levels about their rights, responsibilities and obligations under Swedish and University-level regulations, and the connections between the mandated intended learning outcomes and their education and research.
- Based on the guidelines for the evaluation, our remit was not to assess whether the subjects should continue to have examination rights or fulfil the requirements of the Higher Education Ordinance (our general assessment is that they do, even if there are some routines that could be improved further). Rather, it was 'to give new perspectives and recommendations regarding the development of doctoral education, and



partly to cast light on how well the University's quality assurance system ensures a high quality of education'. As such, in making suggestions for improvement, we highlight various areas of potential development or inspiration that our perspective from outside the faculty has highlighted. These are derived via our reading of the self-evaluations, interviews and other documentation supplied, as well as knowledge of other educational environments and Swedish and international doctoral education. These recommendations are offered by way of constructive suggestion for further discussion, and it is for the subjects and the faculty to decide how best to implement them.

- In addition to the recommendations already made in the different chapters (summarized again below for ease of reference), we note a several overarching issues that may be worth addressing. During our work with this evaluation, we have identified a structure with a central steering processes at the faculty level but also many examples of decentralized steering at the departmental level. This might be a consequence of the variation in academic traditions between the subjects and constitutes a challenge at faculty level, but also a risk if it counteracts communication and collaboration between the departments e.g., doctoral courses. We are positive to the outspoken ambition to develop more interdisciplinary research approaches and activities including doctoral student projects. This will increase the competitiveness on a national and international level, particularly if it includes involvement of external societal partners and stakeholders. This could also support professional training and career planning for the doctoral students.
- When it comes to representation of doctoral students, our impression is that in most examples of steering groups and executive working groups at the departments and faculty, the doctoral students have one representative. This is common but suboptimal, and puts a lot of pressure on the shoulders of the individual and an imbalance with respect to representation and group dynamics. It is important that the doctoral students are well represented and actively participate in the work processes and reference groups, and that this is properly remunerated. (When it comes to future review processes, especially those with focus on doctoral education, we suggest that interviews could be conducted with groups of doctoral students from each subject, rather than as a collective group.)
- Finally, Swedish universities and SUHF are important actors in the work process to implement the 2030 Agenda in higher education (<https://suhf.se/app/uploads/2022/03/SUHF-Manifesto-The-future-starts-now-Revised-2021.pdf>). Higher education shall “promote sustainable development to assure for present and future generations a sound and healthy environment, economic and social welfare, and justice” (<https://www.government.se/government-policy/the-global-goals-and-the-2030-Agenda-for-sustainable-development/>). This represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The educational programs and research

outcomes at the faculty have a direct societal impact on many aspects addressed by the 2030 Agenda and our suggestion is to highlight, define and integrate the 2030 Agenda in the doctoral education. This can involve educational activities, dedicated courses, activities and goals defined in course syllabus, steering documents, and building of a competence platform with focus on sustainability.

## **Suggested key action points for the Faculty of Health and Society**

- Ensure that there are formal routines for dissemination of information at departmental and faculty level, independent of physical workplace location.
- Facilitate greater familiarity with the Study Handbook and its functions and contents. Work with doctoral students and supervisors to ensure that the difference between faculty-level and departmental functions are fully understood.
- Consider offering continuing education for supervisors and doctoral students as part of their career planning, as well as connecting more experienced supervisors with less experienced colleagues to act as mentors.
- Develop a greater degree of cross-departmental doctoral contact, to ensure that there is a faculty as well as departmental sense of doctoral community.
- Consider the need for a more developed strategy for departmental, faculty and university joint courses. In particular, doctoral students' prior knowledge and knowledge needs may vary in different subjects.
- Consider if a preparatory course in quantitative methods can provide doctoral students with better conditions to assimilate the university and faculty joint courses.
- Make more use of the ISP process as a pedagogical and planning tool. External employers (where applicable) should also be involved in this process, for the holistic planning of doctoral students' workloads, research and teaching plans, as well as reflection on ethical issues.
- Consider strategies for how doctoral students should be given equal opportunities for teaching and continued academic careers.
- Consider establishing joint agreements on attendance and engagement in a specified level or mandatory such, could address the challenge with too low physical attendance that impedes upon the effective functioning of the research community.
- Develop the subject of Health and Society to ensure that it meets the university's goal of maintaining high quality and ensuring that doctoral students can meet the examination goals.