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LUSEM response to the evaluation of the PhD program in Economic History

The PhD program in Economic History underwent an evaluation by an external peer-review panel in early 2019. It was based on the program self-evaluation report and interviews with the program management as well as a selected number of teachers/supervisors and doctoral students at a site visit in February 2019. The results of the evaluation was presented in a report, and based on the suggestions by the panel, the department has outlined a number of measures to further improve the quality of the program. The doctoral students was invited to nominate a member of the peer-review panel as well as to write a response to the self-evaluation report. One of the students at the department was also involved in the self-evaluation report.

Overall, the peer-review panel was enthusiastic about the PhD program in Economic History and pointed to a number of strengths, including a high proportion of students finishing on time, a high level of scientific competence among the graduates, international recruitment of doctoral students through the department's master programs, and a high level of integration of PhD candidates in externally funded research projects, which give students first-hand experience in conducting high-quality research. The peer-review panel also pointed to the caring and supportive work environment as a key strength of the program. The panel found that the goals of the program were fulfilled.

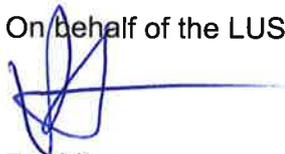
The panel also identified some weaknesses and causes for concern and gave valuable suggestions on how to improve various aspects of the program. They believed that the high degree of external funding could pose risks of limiting the intellectual freedom of the students. It could also make the program vulnerable to changes in the research policy and especially to the new more hostile attitudes to scholarship funding. Moreover, the panel identified the lack of courses in qualitative research methods as a weakness as it limits the scope of the research done by the students. The high degree of internationalization of the program, which was identified as a strong point, could also risk detaching the program from Swedish society and Swedish economic history, according to the panel. Finally, the evaluation report drew attention to a weak balance between research and teaching at the department, which makes it difficult for PhD candidates to get teaching experience during their studies, which, in turn, could lower their prospects on the academic job market.

In their response to the evaluation report, the department management address all these points of concern, and offer several promising solutions and further developments of the program. They have already taken measures to add a mandatory course in qualitative research, starting in the fall of 2019, and are also reviewing the structure of the dissertations as well as the curriculum and design of the course Foundations in Economic History, in response to issues raised by the peer-review team. Their response testifies that they will use the result of the evaluation as an important tool to improve the program, and it also shows that the management of the department is responsive to concerns and open to new ideas from both external reviewers and students at the department. In some cases they offer counterarguments, for example in stressing the important positive aspects for students to participate in external projects, at the same time acknowledging the important balance that has to be struck between the intellectual freedom of the students and the efficiency of the research projects.

The LUSEM management agrees with the judgements made by the department in response to the peer-review panel. The proposed improvements in terms of courses and the pedagogical training of supervisors are important steps to further increase the quality of the program. We also support the measures to further safeguard the intellectual freedom of the PhD students within the framework of high-quality, externally funded, research projects. Apart from the measures proposed by the department we see no reason to demand further changes to the program in Economic History. The department is encouraged to continue its efforts to continuously improve the quality of the program by following the many good suggestions made by the peer-review panel to increase student participation in seminars, prepare them for a post-doc career through career support, training in writing grant applications, etc.

Interviews with teachers at the department led the peer-review panel to raise concerns that the current pedagogical training offered does not fully meet the standards and quality expected by the staff. Most pedagogical training is organized by the School, often through courses given by the Division for Higher Education Development at Lund University. Mandatory training of supervisors is also a part of the "Docent course" organized by LUSEM in collaboration with the Faculty of Social Sciences. In addition to these courses, we are working to develop a program for continued training of supervisors through a seminar series with the goal of promoting exchange of experience and good practice across the School, as well as stimulating discussion and learning about different aspects of doctoral supervision and a good supervisor-student working relationship.

On behalf of the LUSEM management team



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