

Evaluation report

Lund University School of Economics and Management

Department: Informatics	PhD programme: Informatics	Date: December 8, 2020
Members of the peer-review panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bendik Bygstad, Oslo University• Johan Klaesson, Jönköping University• Virpi Kristiina Tuunainen, Aalto Business School <p>We conducted four digital sessions on November 12th 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professor and Head of Department• 5 PhD supervisors• 2 PhD students• Faculty managers		

1. Area, Environment and Resources

1.1. Subject of the program

The subject is Informatics.

At Lund University School of Economics and Management this is defined as “... a social science and interdisciplinary subject that, through the use of theoretical and empirical tools, analyzes and studies the design, implementation and effects of information systems. Informatics focuses on the digital transformation of society and human activities.”

The department is in transition, strengthening its research staff and reorienting its research focus.

1. Area, Environment and Resources

1.2. Staff: quantity, competence and management

The department currently has three active doctoral students, on 5 year contracts. The professor and associate professor act as main supervisors, while two senior lecturers act as assistant supervisors. Each PhD student will have three supervisors. In case of problems the Head of Department deals with possible change of supervisor.

There are three high-profile visiting professors, one of which is in the process of entering a full-time position.

1. Area Environment and Resources

1.3. Research studies environment

Admission to the third-cycle programme takes place once a year. An applicant is eligible to be admitted to the third-cycle programme in informatics if he or she meets the general admission requirements, and has completed at least 90 credits in informatics, and an independent project worth at least 30 credits, of which 15 credits are in informatics.

Department of Informatics is a member of the Swedish Research School of Management and IT (MIT). The research school offers partial funding, and four mandatory courses each year to ensure that each doctoral student achieves base level knowledge both in management and informatics/information systems.

The doctoral student is to present his or her thesis project at three mandatory seminars. Quality assurance of the PhD program is conducted at school and department levels.

1. Area Environment and Resources

1.4. Summary evaluation

The academic and infrastructural resources are sufficient for the PhD program. The MIT research school works well for PhD students and staff, and provides a network for both. The PhD program has a good structure and quality assurance is conducted.

Looking forward:

- In order to grow and have more PhD candidates, the department needs more external funding.
- The extensive industry network of the department might be used as a resource for the PhD program

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.1. Achieving objectives – knowledge and understanding

The overall design and implementation and examination ensures that when the student graduates from the program broad knowledge and understanding both in their research subject and research methods.

The completion of the goals concerning knowledge and understanding are achieved through the offered course package, individual supervision and internal seminars. These internal seminars take place approximately three times per semester where doctoral students present their work and receive feedback.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.2. Achieving objectives – competence and skills

The important skill to be able to present and convey results from own research is developed through participating in national and international high ranked conferences.

In connection with these conferences there is often the possibility to participate in doctoral student consortia. This gives the opportunity to learn from leading scholars in the field as well as observe how fellow doctoral students tackle similar challenges.

The doctoral students work on their own research projects. The support in developing writing skills can take the form of co-authorship with supervisors.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.3. Achieving objectives – judgement and approach

After graduating from the doctoral program, the students are expected to possess intellectual autonomy, disciplinary rectitude and be able to assess research ethics.

Also, they should have demonstrated insights in possibilities and limitations of research and its use in society in a responsible way.

These objectives are supported by ethics courses, courses dealing with seminars and thesis work. Also, the objectives are supported by participating in the process of producing scientific knowledge through participating in conferences, peer review processes, publication work and the production of a thesis.

2. Design, implementation and outcomes

2.4. Summary evaluation

The general program syllabus states that the program will provide the student with in-depth knowledge of the subject, an in-depth training in research methodology and good insights into the problems that occur in research and its practical application.

To ensure that the learning outcomes are addressed and achieved the program is designed so that each element contributes to fulfilling these. To make it explicit matrices have been created to highlight through which courses and activities each and every learning outcome is introduced and examined.

The individual study plan (ISP) is an important tool for making clear the structure of each individual student's plan, financing and progression. The plan is set up jointly by the student, the supervisors and department head. The ISP is to be approved by the head of the department and reviewed at least annually.

3. Working life perspective

The programme is primarily educating academics, even though historically some PhD graduates have chosen a career in business (of the 23 PhDs since 2000, 17 work in academia and 3 in industry).

The program prepares the students for working life in academia with 20% teaching obligation and pedagogical courses. There is no formal career support in place at the moment, but guidance in this is also considered to be a task of the supervisor(s). The department is planning to implement something more formal when the number of doctoral students increases.

4. Doctoral student perspective

Both doctoral students have been assigned with three supervisors. The supervisors are all expected to take training for supervision (but it's not entirely clear from the self-evaluation if all of those now serving as supervisors have already done that). The students' wishes about supervisor(s) are catered to as much as possible, and they have unconditional right to change their designated supervisor. Supervision includes both formal, regular meetings as well as informal meetings at need.

Doctoral students get the same services and support as other staff at the department (presumably including things like occupational health care?).

Based on our discussion with the current two students (both first year students), the department seems to have succeeded in welcoming the new students and offering them courses and supervisory arrangements that the students are very satisfied with.

5. Gender equality perspective

The department has succeeded reasonably well in gender balance, both with the staff and the students. Of the 7 different professor positions (professor, associate professor, visiting professor, adjunct professor) (excluding emerita/emeritus professors) 3 are women, while of the 5 senior lecturers only 1 is female. Both of the two new PhD students are female.

Equality issues are clearly taken seriously at the department, and a lot of effort is put into balancing the gender and diversity gaps.

The 3 high profile visiting professors who are all female can be expected to serve as positive role models.

6. Sustainability perspective

At the moment, there is a master's level course in sustainability and IT, but not at doctoral level. As two of the faculty members have prior experience in supervising PhD students and developing PhD level courses in the area of green information technology, there is readiness to develop such a course, possibly to be offered to doctoral students also at other departments. However, evidently there are no concrete plans at the moment to do so, nor any information about potential demand for such a course.

7. Other comments

8. Summary evaluation and recommendations

Building on the interdisciplinary perspective

The six departments at Lund University School of Economics and Management offer an opportunity for interdisciplinary research and PhD supervision in the digitalisation field. This could also increase the capacity to submit high-quality applications for external funding.

Widening the research focus

The department could consider widening its research focus, which is now primarily in a niche area of eHealth. Here the department could build on the above mentioned interdisciplinary collaboration to expand also to more mainstream areas of the discipline. In addition, this should be considered when recruiting new faculty. In fact, widening the research focus of the department would likely attract a wider pool of applicants to new faculty as well as PhD student positions. The visiting professors and the new full time professor will in all likelihood be helpful in this.

Increasing the size of the Department's PhD student body

It would be beneficial for the Department's PhD program to have regular admission of 2-3 new students each year, which would eventually translate into a PhD student body of 10 - 15 students at all times (each student 5 years). Even though a lot of synergies particularly in coursework are gained from collaborating with the Swedish Research School of Management and IT (MIT), a local cohort of PhD students would strengthen the research culture, efforts and output of the PhD students, as well as the whole department. We do understand that this would require new sources of funding, but we also believe that addressing the above to recommendations would be helpful also in here.