



RESEARCH EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPMENT 2019 EXPERT PANEL REPORT

Department of Historical Studies

Introductory Remarks

Section A – Background and Research Standing

- A1. Background
- A2. Research standing

Section B – Leadership

- B1. Leadership
- B2. Recruitment
- B3. Career structure
- B4. Funding
- B5. Feedback and evaluation

Section C – Complete Academic Environment

- C1. Collaboration
- C2. Relevance and impact on society
- C3. Research-teaching linkages

Section D – Academic Culture

- D1. Academic culture
- D2. Publication
- D3. Facilities and research infrastructure
- D4. Transverse perspectives

Section E – Support

- E1. Internal research support
- E2. Faculty and University-wide support

Section F – Other Matters

- F1. RED10 evaluation
- F2. Other matters

Concluding Recommendations

Introductory Remarks

In preparation for the site visit, the panel followed the suggested work progress plan. All correspondence before and after the Gothenburg visit was via email. The panel chair was in dialogue with the Head of Department (HoD) from early January 2019. The HoD provided the panel with a suggested meeting plan for the visit at an early stage. She was also helpful in clarifying points in the self-evaluation and providing requested departmental strategy documents that were not included in the original material from RED19. All main points in the list of recommendations, and the rationale behind these, were presented to and discussed with the department leadership during the preliminary feedback session on Wednesday 3 April.

It became clear to the panel during the preparatory reading of the self-evaluation report that there is a notable discrepancy between the RED19 guidelines and questions about future strategy and planning on the departmental level on the one hand, and what the department leadership in question sees as its role and mandate on the other. This divergence was better understood during the site visit. The department interviews were helpful in clarifying that there is less room for strategic planning for the medium-term (5-10 years) than the department leadership wishes for. This issue also needs to be addressed on the faculty and university levels. The panel misses a sense of vision and strategies through collegial decision-making processes and working together towards common goals based on shared principles and ideas. These observations are in line with remarks made in the faculty-level report.

Report: Observations and Analysis

Section A – Background and Research Standing

A1. Background

The department seems well consolidated since the reorganisation of the faculty in 2009. The composition of the leadership group reflects the overall organisation of the department, its main constituents and research milieus. The ‘flat’ structure ensures adequate representation of all levels within its three main subjects. Furthermore, the composition facilitates cross-disciplinary collaboration in research as well as teaching, which is key given the importance of teaching. The democratic structure is strengthened by each subject having a chair and spokesperson in the leadership group.

The structure promotes transparency and democratic decision processes. This should ideally transpire to department members outside the leadership group, with regard to knowing who is responsible for what in the leadership group, and thus whom to contact when specific issues or questions arise. The model also secures a leadership with contextual disciplinary understanding, which may be key in coordinating researchers who seek to balance their research time with a whole suite of other tasks, not least teaching and supervision. By being sensitive to the needs of various groups within the department it becomes easier to follow up on day-to-day activities.

The panel notes that the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies (CCHS) has a different organisation model than its host department, which makes it important to clarify the relationship between the

department and centres and other strong research milieus. The panel strongly recommends the development of a plan for the integration of research centres in the department and the alignment of strategies in a long-term perspective, and that formal agreements or charters be outlined. During the evaluation period the CCHS has had a place in the department leadership group. This should also be secured with the new leader of the CCHS.

From the perspective of achieving the aim of more time for high-quality research, the panel highlights two current challenges:

- 1) A high degree of permanent staff is involved in various kinds of administrative and committee work, which might not be compensated sufficiently, thus potentially resulting in coming at the cost of quality research time.
- 2) While roles and responsibilities may be clearly divided internally in the leadership group, it may be more difficult for all department staff outside the leadership to get an overview of responsibilities and decision-making processes. Responsibilities and decisions do not appear as transparent to researchers with less experience of the local university system, such as PhD students, early-career researchers and newly arrived colleagues with a different academic background.

It cannot be overlooked that the issue of quality research time is inseparable from teaching.

The Departmental Council (Institutionsrådet) and *The Working Committee for Research and Doctoral Studies (FOFU)* are of direct relevance to this evaluation, but it is important to include *The Working Committee for Undergraduate and Master's Studies (GRU)* in strategic planning.

The panel recommends that strategic planning for the medium-term (5-10 years) be implemented at regular intervals, and that such planning be conceived more broadly than is currently the case. To refrain from top-down research plans is a wise strategy, but priorities and strategic decisions have to be made. Specifically, the department needs a strategy that includes a plan for recruitment and visions for its future research profile. This offers the opportunity to formulate precisely how and why future positions and research directions fit into the envisioned profile of the department and its affiliated research centres, groups and networks.

A2. Research standing

The self-evaluation report provides a very good overview of the department's research profiles, for the evaluation period and the current status. Organised into the three main subjects *History*, *Archaeology* and *Classical Archaeology and Ancient History*, the report clearly outlines the wide range of research topics within the department, thereby also illustrating the wide range of publication practices and expectations. The self-evaluation makes clear just how diverse, interdisciplinary and engaged in public outreach the department is as a whole. Significantly, the report overview offers support to the department's decision *not* to follow the main recommendation of the RED10 report, which was to narrow the number of research areas. Instead, the department has chosen to hold on to its organic bottom-up approach to research development.

In addition to the three subjects, the department includes four research centres and infrastructures. These are the *Biographical Lexicon for Swedish Women (SKBL)*, the *Committee for Medieval Studies*, the *Centre for Critical Heritage Studies (CCHS)* and *The Swedish Archive for Rock Art Research (SHFA)*.

The CCHS is a national and international success story, and its continued existence as an interdisciplinary hub for critical heritage studies, in whatever form and size, should be taken into account in the department's long-term planning ([see pt. A1 above](#)).

History displays a diverse range of research interests, naturally anchored in Swedish history and sources, but by no means limited in terms of geographic and thematical scope or approach. There is a clear focus on social history and gender issues. There is relatively less focus on large projects, and more emphasis on individualised critical reflection, often published as a single-authored monograph in Swedish or in English.

The Medieval History research group is strong within *History*. Within *Archaeology* and *Classical Archaeology and Ancient History*, the Bronze Age Group is particularly strong. The group has an interdisciplinary scope and has been a driving force in the global 'third science revolution' within archaeology in the last two decades. Examples include the Archaeology and Genetics project and the distinguished position of Rock Art research. The focus on the Neolithic is also strong, and the international profile of the department is clear in its long-term engagement in Latin America. Within *Classical Archaeology and Ancient History* most researchers are active in more than one research area. Prominent examples of research initiatives include the *ARACHNE* network and fieldwork in Cyprus and Thessaly.

From an international perspective, the listed projects and research groups are well above average. The strongest parts of the Bronze Age milieu are world-leading. Importantly, the *research quality* is also high for several of the more individual single-author projects within the three subjects, including those published in Swedish, but their *international visibility* remains on an average level. There are few indications in the self-evaluation and the publication data provided that any of the research at the department is significantly below average.

As already indicated, a main challenge with regards to evaluating the current research standing is the absence of strategies and plans for the department as a whole. Interviews during the site visit made it clear that such aspirations and plans certainly do exist, even though they still need to be clearly articulated, and the general impression is that they are relevant and convincing. However, such planning seems to be less systematic and indeed largely 'privatized' into being a matter for the individual researcher, project, research group and research centre.

Section B – Leadership

B1. Leadership

B1.1 Department leadership

Strengths

- A democratic leadership model that is interdisciplinary and sensitive to the needs of individual researchers within different subjects and fields, their advantages and challenges. Challenges and tensions may be identified and handled at an early stage.

- The decentralised structure and relative independence from the faculty level provides the opportunity for local freedom to plan and to act accordingly.
- The annual employee review is taken seriously. This is a valuable arena for dialogue and follow-up of all academic staff members.

Weaknesses

- A reluctance to strategise and prioritise for the medium- and long-term. A clear vision or strategy for renewal and priority beyond the short-term (2-3 years) is absent.
- A reluctance to better integrate strong research environments such as the CCHS, and thus consolidate these within the department in terms of organisation and scientific output.

Recommendations

- A medium- to long-term vision and plan for strengthening the research profile, organisational coherence and visibility of the department. This should include a strategy for how to further develop existing strong research environments, and how to kindle and support new research initiatives.

B1.2 Faculty/University level leadership

Strengths

- The decentralised structure allows for more research decisions to be made locally.
- The communication between the department leadership group and the Faculty Dean and Vice-Dean.

Weaknesses

- An absence of demand for recruitment planning and guidance from the faculty level.
- The decentralised structure may prevent the faculty level from effectively intervening in departments when needed. Less opportunity for the faculty to be the outside voice in departmental conflicts or tensions.
- The decentralised structure may entail an absence of strategic support and coordination provided by the faculty or university levels, in order for departments to be competitive in attracting external funds and projects.

Recommendations

- Medium-term strategy documents should be required from each department at regular intervals, followed by clear guidelines from the faculty level, and subject to a common set of responsibilities. This will facilitate the coordination of research efforts and the placement of department-level planning within a wider scope and time frame.

B2. Recruitment

Strengths

- The department in general has a high standing, internationally as well as nationally.
- A high degree of continuity in strong research milieus and groups. Once recruited, staff members have a clear tendency to stay at the university for an extended period of time.

Weaknesses

- The absence of a clear recruitment plan for the medium-term, in order to guide future hiring of permanent and contract staff.
- A high degree of internal recruitment. Hiring and promotion processes are found to be less transparent by junior staff members and early-career researchers.
- It is challenging to recruit permanent staff beyond Sweden because of undergraduate teaching and ensuing language requirements.

Recommendations

- A strategic recruitment plan for the medium-term (5-10 years) that functions as a proactive tool to address key questions: What kind of positions will be advertised after each retirement? A 'replacement' in a similar position, or a new type of position grounded in novel teaching and/or research requirements? And, how should the department approach current challenges to improving inequality and gender imbalances, to increasing internationalisation and to improving recruitment from minority backgrounds?

B3. Career structure

Three issues are emphasised as key to career structure: 1) access to quality research time, 2) allocation of teaching and 3) hiring and promotion processes. Regarding the third point, the faculty is recommended to develop a clear and concrete policy for the balance between promotions and open calls, and one in which open calls should be used much more than they are at the moment.

Strengths

- The opportunity to apply for research funds for a month's research leave.
- The annual research funds allocated to each academic staff member.
- Opportunities given to teachers to improve pedagogical qualifications.
- The leadership's encouragement towards relevant candidates in applying for promotions, and their provision of feedback and practical assistance.

Weaknesses

- Maintaining groups of staff with only 10% and 20% research time may in practice inhibit individuals from these groups from moving up the promotion ladder. The panel notes a worrying asymmetry with regards to research time, which risks a deepening of the sense of division into 'A' and 'B' researchers – with the 'A group' comprising permanent staff members who are relatively more privileged, and who have sufficient quality research time and funds to write and develop new projects; and the 'B group' consisting of lecturers with 10% research time, and non-permanent staff on contracts, who feel relatively more stuck in day-to-day teaching and routines (having, nonetheless, deep knowledge of the everyday workings of the department).

- A high degree of internal recruitment, largely due to the heavy dependence on teaching of undergraduate courses in Swedish, carries the potential for unnecessary divides between ‘locals’ on the one hand, and ‘newcomers’ or ‘outsiders’ on the other.
- A lack of transparency in hiring and promotion processes. Early-career researchers in particular find such processes not to be sufficiently open and clear.
- A lack of transparency and consistency in planning and allocation of teaching, especially for early-career researchers.
- Mentorship and guidance for early-career researchers are mostly informal and found to be unevenly distributed.
- A likely effect of the persistent gender imbalance is that the pushing of quality research time outside of working hours has a particularly negative effect on women.

Recommendations

- The panel supports the recommendation to the faculty for considering systems for allocating research time among permanent staff that are conducive to preventing a division into A and B researchers, and recommends that the department signal its position and take an active role in this regard.
- Planning and management of the academic year that is as transparent as possible. A practical suggestion is to implement a ‘year wheel’, so that teaching can be rotated and allocated, scheduled, and planned at an early stage for each semester.
- Consider implementation of block teaching, e.g. by dividing each semester in two or three blocks, in order to allow for foreseeable periods of quality research time.
- Strive for transparency in all hiring and promotion processes. In line with the recommendation to the faculty level, the department is encouraged to have a clear policy for the balance between promotions and open calls, and to ensure that open calls are used when possible.
- Develop an internal mentorship programme for early-career researchers and for new colleagues from other academic backgrounds, taking equal opportunities and gender equality into account.

B4. Funding

The panel acknowledges that the economic challenges the department currently faces must be seen in a broader context, within the faculty and university as a whole, and for the entire Arts and Humanities sector in Sweden.

Strengths

- A highly valuable knowledge base consisting of individuals, research groups and at least one research centre that have been successful in acquiring external funding.

Weaknesses

- Decreased revenues owing to falling student numbers.
- A recent decrease in performance-based research funding, not only in actual funds but also in percentage relative to the other departments in the Faculty of Arts.

- The *Matthew Effect* (more funding to those who already have a lot of funding) may create hindrances for multi-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary work.
- An absence of a clear strategy for the PhD programme. Specifically, the department should develop a strategy for meeting the effects of a) the lack of PhD recruitment, and b) the frequent extensions of PhD projects beyond the 4-year limit, both of which are likely to create a bottleneck effect.

Recommendations

- Consider an internal reward system for committing time to writing external grant applications. For example, by offering teaching reduction or teaching-free blocks while writing an application.
- Formalise application processes for external funding. Promote continuity through a mentorship programme and group activities, and avoid the vulnerability of knowledge and know-how becoming too individualised.
- A long-term programme for career planning and project development for candidates who may compete for international funds, such as the ERC.
- Signal clearly to the faculty that the department would support a solution where the faculty co-funds mainly externally-funded PhD students, in order to get more PhD students into the system.

B5. Feedback and evaluation

Strengths

- The individual follow-up of academic staff members' research performance is integrated into the yearly conversation with the Head of Department.
- The voluntary model encourages and rewards initiative and engagement.

Weaknesses

- Leaving feedback and evaluation to voluntarism and in seminars only is vulnerable, since it depends on staff members' commitment to attend. Site interviews revealed that seminar attendance was unevenly distributed among permanent and senior staff.
- The voluntary and organic bottom-up model makes it easier to avoid binding commitments.

Recommendations

- While keeping the voluntary basis, the department should also consider ways of thinking of feedback and evaluation beyond seminars and more as a long-term process.
- Consider a system where senior staff have formal roles as mentors for younger staff members planning applications for promotion, and offer guidance for less experienced academic staff or offer welcoming mentorship for recently arrived staff.

Section C – Complete Academic Environment

C1. Collaboration

C1.1 Collaboration and networks within the University of Gothenburg, with other Swedish universities, and internationally

Strengths

- The department hosts several interdisciplinary projects. Some of these include internal interdisciplinary collaboration, such as research on the Bronze Age, the History of Textiles, Medieval Studies and Cultural Heritage Studies. Several projects are externally funded.

Weaknesses

- No formal medium- or long-term strategy for the department's relationships with external and semi-external research centres, groups and milieus.

Recommendations

- Include a strategy for the department's role in future collaboration with key research networks and centres such as the CCHS in the suggested medium-term visions (see pt. [A1](#) and [B1.1](#)).

C1.2 Collaboration with external stakeholders

Strengths

- Within the department's current activities there is a huge potential for expansion of pre-existing collaborations with external stakeholders. Examples include (but are not limited to) the Heritage Academy, the Antiques Museum and *Medborgareskolan*, collaboration on non-invasive documentation technologies and visualisation, and projects aimed at co-production of knowledge with disadvantaged groups in the Global South.

Weaknesses

- There is a notable absence of a coherent, medium-term strategy and set of visions behind the many praiseworthy engagements with external stakeholders.

Recommendations

- Include stakeholder communication and interaction in a medium-term strategy (5-10 years) for the department as a whole. A strategy towards common goals based on shared principles and ideas.

C2. Relevance and impact on society

C2.1 Management and support

The panel refers to the faculty report (pt. C2) on this point.

C2.2 Research relevance and impact on society

The panel refers to pt. [C1.2](#) for recommendations on this point, and to the faculty report (pt. C2).

C3. Research-teaching linkages

C3.1 Undergraduate and master's education

Strengths

- Most researchers and their projects are well integrated into teaching.
- The motivation for contributing to teaching among early-career researchers is generally very high.

Weaknesses

- The available teaching resources, especially among early-career researchers, seem somewhat underexplored.

Recommendations

- Consider types of teaching that facilitate more research integration and active use of ongoing projects. Examples include group/task-oriented teaching, case studies and experiments.
- Develop a medium-term strategy and guidelines for the department's integration of research teaching, including explicit expectations for future research projects to have an educational profile, where and when this is possible.

C3.2 Doctoral education

Strengths

- The department has an open, inclusive and attractive research profile.
- The department leadership is well aware of the financial and structural challenges, and is proactively seeking solutions.
- All PhD students are required to present their work at least once a year, and to actively participate in discussions at each other's seminars.

Weaknesses

- The recruitment of PhD candidates has stagnated.
- More PhD candidates should finish on time, within four years, than is currently the case.
- An absence of long-term planning and ambitions for the PhD programme.

- The foreseeability for the individual PhD student can be improved. Students experience an absence of milestones and express a wish for a midway evaluation and more career guidance in the final stages.
- Absence of a common knowledge base for the PhD students, a common set of practical guidelines for the procedures involved in the PhD work.
- Uneven attendance and acknowledgement of the importance of PhD seminars among PhD supervisors. The attendance of senior staff members at PhD seminars is generally too low, sometimes resulting in students being left to comment on each other's work without senior staff present.
- The PhD students report that there is too much variation between supervisors in terms of time and energy spent on supervision.
- The PhD coordinator role is unclear to the students.
- Assigning teaching to PhD students is found by several to be unfair and ad hoc.

Recommendations

- Develop a long-term plan and set of ambitions for the PhD programme.
- Introduce a 'welcoming package' for new PhD students, including an introductory seminar and a set of guidelines, expectations and an overview of available resources.
- A formalised midway evaluation.
- Develop a set of general guidelines for the PhD seminars, including the expectations of PhD supervisors and other senior staff.
- Introduce measures to minimise variation in the amount of supervision, and develop a set of transparent guidelines for the role of PhD supervisor.
- Strive for continuity in the coordination of the PhD programme.
- Work towards the best possible transparency and foreseeability in the allocation of teaching responsibilities for PhD students.

Section D – Academic Culture

D1. Academic culture

Strengths

- A certain degree of integration of early-career researchers (postdocs and PhDs).
- The social integration of new staff members is generally good.

Weaknesses

- Several early-career researchers feel less included.
- The self-evaluation says little about how to reward creativity and ambition.
- The promotion and hiring processes appear unclear to early-career researchers.
- The use of externally funded staff in teaching appears ad hoc.

Recommendations

- Social integration, especially of temporarily employed staff members coming from different academic traditions, should be a high priority. A plan for integration could, for example, include ways to make more use of the expertise of successful externally funded researchers in developing new funding applications.
- Increase the transparency and clarity of promotion and hiring processes.
- Assign mentors to younger staff and a welcoming contact person for newly arrived colleagues.
- Consider measures to increase transparency and foreseeability for the planning of teaching (see recommendations for pt. [B3](#)), especially for early-career researchers.

D2. Publication

D2.1 Publication strategy

Strengths

- The department shows great concern with duly registering its publications, and a publication strategy – demonstrated not least by their launching of monographic series – is a distinct feature of the research centres.

Weaknesses

- However, a unified publication strategy seems not to be characteristic of the department.
- Perhaps too many unranked publications.

Recommendations

- An equal opportunities analysis that results in a medium-term strategy in line with the strategy for the department as a whole. The analysis should seek to understand in detail why there is a consistent pattern of men outperforming women. The strategy should take into account that the current distribution of research time among academic staff most likely contributes to gender asymmetry.
- An open access publishing strategy.
- Consider supporting initiatives such as writing seminars, e.g. ‘shut up and write’.

D2.2 Analysis of bibliometric data

Strengths

- The monograph series initiated by the research centres enjoys international acclaim and is commended.

Weaknesses

- Too few peer-reviewed articles in international journals on Level 2.

- The bibliometric statistics show imbalances as regards the ratio of ranked to unranked publications and as regards the performance of female and male staff.

Recommendations

- Consider including in the overall strategy the goals of a) increasing the number of ranked publications and b) establishing a balance in the scholarly production of men and women.
- Consider measures to encourage relatively more ‘risky’ submissions to high-ranking journals over ‘safe’ edited volumes chapters. An example is organised mentorship, where less experienced researchers can get feedback and evaluation from experienced colleagues (see also recommendation for pt. [B5](#)).

D3. Facilities and research infrastructure

The department appears to have access to the facilities and research infrastructure needed for day-to-day work processes. In some cases, these facilities and infrastructures are affiliated to other departments and centres within, as well as outside, the University of Gothenburg.

D4. Transverse perspectives

D4.1 Equal opportunities and gender equality

The department’s equal opportunities representative is highly engaged and is clear on the employment of a broad and inclusive definition of equal opportunities.

The panel recommends that the department work with the faculty level towards a wider definition of ‘productivity’ in research output (see also comments in pt. D2 in the faculty report). Also, the panel refers to comments and specific recommendations in pt. [B3](#) (career structure) and [D1](#) (academic culture) in this report for measures that relate directly or indirectly to improving equal opportunities and gender equality.

D4.2 Internationalisation

The panel notes that the department has been committed to improving internationalisation since RED10, with concrete and measurable results (see also pt. [F1](#) below).

Recommendations

- Provide information about research mobility and encourage staff members to apply to schemes such as COST or Erasmus Plus exchange programmes.
- Consider international mobility as a requirement for granting the ‘research month’, in cases where this will clearly benefit the researcher.
- Consider having a plan for international mobility as a requirement for acceptance on PhD programmes, e.g. a minimum of one semester abroad.

Section E – Support

E1. Internal research support

Relevant comments and specific recommendations on internal research support are found under pt. [B3](#) (career structure), [B5](#) (feedback and evaluation) and [C3](#) (research-teaching linkages).

E2. Faculty and University-wide support

The panel notes that the department leadership is satisfied with the current meeting frequency with the faculty level and follow-up from the Grants and Innovations Office, although some weaknesses are observed (see pt. [B1.2](#) above). The panel refers to the faculty level report for further comments and recommendations.

Section F – Other Matters

F1. RED10 evaluation

The department worked actively with the implementation of recommendations from the RED10 report. An example is the response overview and action plan, which the panel received from the current HoD on request. This plan had four interlinked strategies for developing and strengthening an international research environment, and had a total budget of SEK 1.8 million. With one exception, the recommendations in the RED10 report have been followed up, with visible and measurable results. In RED10 the department was criticised for having too many research areas, and the recommendation was to narrow the number of research areas and focus on those that were regarded as having the greatest potential for international recognition. The department has taken an active stance not to follow this advice. The main reason for this is that it does not sufficiently take into account the importance of the university's economic model and its reliance on student numbers and the importance of teaching. The department sees the breadth of research as a strength and indeed necessary for teaching. However, while RED10 has initiated an active strategic plan for internationalisation, mobility and publication, there has not been such a strategy developed for the research profile of the department, nor a recruitment strategy.

F2. Other matters

None.

Concluding Recommendations

1. A medium-term (5-10 years) strategy for further development of research and the department's publication profile. The panel strongly recommends that this includes an approach for the integration of CCHS and for the department's involvement in future centres, groups and research environments (see pt. [A1](#) and [B1](#)).
2. A medium-term (5-10 years) recruitment strategy that seeks to balance replacement after upcoming retirements with the need for renewal and new priorities (see pt. [B2](#)).
3. A strategic long-term vision for further development of academic culture, in order to prevent the deepening of a divide into A and B researchers (see pt. [B3](#)).
4. Time planning and management of the academic year, to make teaching as foreseeable as possible for all teaching staff (see pt. [B3](#)).
5. Consider measures to organise the individual teaching semester into segments, such as block teaching. This would make it easier to free up parts of the semester for carrying out research.
6. To strive for transparency and predictability in allocation of teaching and other departmental roles and responsibilities (see pt. [B3](#) and [C3.1](#)).
7. To strive for transparency in hiring processes and promotions (see pt. [B3](#)).
8. To formalise a mentorship programme for early-career researchers and new staff members. This should also be a measure against inequality and gender imbalance (see pt. [B3](#) and [B5](#)).
9. To formalise knowledge-sharing and measures for integration of less permanent staff. One way forward is to build on the immense strength and success in applying for external funds, and to further develop this, including externally funded researchers as far as possible. The panel suggests a long-term programme for career planning and project development for candidates who may compete for international funds, such as the ERC (see pt. [B5](#)).
10. Consider concrete adjustments to the PhD programme (see pt. [C3.2](#)).