



RESEARCH EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPMENT 2019 EXPERT PANEL REPORT

Department of Political Science

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Introductory Remarks

Members of the panel for the Department of Political Science are Professor Leif Lewin (Uppsala University, chair); Professor Elisabeth Ivarsflaten (University of Bergen) and Professor Martin Lodge (London School of Economics and Political Science). Prior to the visit, communication between the panel members was conducted via email and telecommunications. Drafts of this panel report have been shared among and contributed to by all members of the panel. Lewin and Ivarsflaten participated in the site visit in Gothenburg in April, whereas Lodge was unable to attend (paternity leave). The panel discussed the conclusions of this report at the end of the site visit and this report reflects the unanimous position of the panel.

The panel work has been an intense and highly stimulating exercise. We are thankful for the support granted by the university throughout the exercise. The background documentation offered substantial information on the changes in the department since the last review exercise. The site visit allowed us to explore a range of issues that arose from our initial reactions to the information provided. The panel understands its role to be that of a 'critical friend', our comments are directed towards encouraging further reflection within the department and between department and university leadership over the coming years.

In general, we are very impressed by the important international work being conducted at the Department of Political Science. The department is clearly outstanding in its international reputation. The 'National Election Study', the 'Quality of Government', and the 'Varieties of Democracy' research programmes are nationally and internationally leading. The past years have seen a process of significant internationalisation; in this respect, the department can be regarded as one of the 'first movers' across Scandinavian universities. Overall, given its distinct profile, the department can be placed among the leading political science departments in Europe.

There are, however, challenges:

- the department is facing the retirement of some of its senior and well-known professors. This will require strategic decisions in terms of recruitment strategy in view of existing research strengths, the potential tension between continued internationalisation and maintaining a strong Sweden-facing focus, and the need to enhance diversity among senior staff.
- the department has a number of formalised and more informal research programmes, and the prioritisation and relationship between these programmes, and between the programmes and the department, could be clarified. Some of the programmes mentioned are world-leading, others appear more loosely formed. During the site visit, the panel was persuaded that the prominent position of the leading programmes is generally accepted by the department and that they are seen as a fruitful contribution to the wider departmental research environment. Nevertheless, the organisation of the research programmes also presents a challenge for the department in terms of equality and diversity considerations.
- The self-evaluation report highlights the international collaborative efforts that the department is contributing to (in part, in leading positions). Less clear is the relationship of the department with other units in the university itself. The site visit made clear that several of the research programmes have initiated and lead significant cross-disciplinary research at the university.
- The report highlights the need to address the resource requirements of existing research infrastructures (and databases). Given the international excellence of these programmes, there needs to be a strategic decision on how such existing infrastructures can be resourced over time. Such issues are not unique to this university and department, but require a long-term

view about strategic priorities and resource commitments. Arguably they are particularly important to this department due to the centrality of research infrastructures and databases in several of the most prominent research programmes.

- The department has established a clear intellectual and international leading profile, based on a vibrant research environment. The investments into high-profile research programmes (such as QoG) are likely to provide long-term reputational effects, especially if these infrastructures continue to be resourced. There are questions about whether the department would want to continue its particular focus, or whether it should consider widening its profile. Political theory/ political philosophy, in particular, could be a valuable complement to the existing offerings.

Report: Observations and Analysis

Section A – Background and Research Standing

A1. Background and A2. Research standing

The department is one of the biggest in the Faculty of Social Sciences, with a budget of around SEK 100 million for research and around SEK 40m for education. In terms of external funding, the department has, over the course of the past few years, been very successful; its income is twice as large as the next department in the faculty. The biggest contributor is the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*, or VR). In 2017, VR granted SEK 36m to the department, the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (*Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*, or RJ) SEK 9m, the EU (framework programme 7 and Horizon 2020) SEK 5m, the Wallenberg Foundation SEK 2.5m and the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte) SEK 3m. The site visit provided further evidence of a department that at all levels is very successful in both initiating and running large externally-funded research projects.

The department is a high-profile, research-oriented department, with a strong visibility in the international scholarly community, in terms of participation in and organisation of international conferences and research networks, and in terms of internationally leading research publications. The department is ‘top-heavy’ with 19 professors (five women and 14 men) and close to 30 lecturers (evenly distributed in gender terms). Four-to-six PhD candidates are accepted every year. The department reported that its PhD candidate placement is successful, with students moving to prominent positions in academia and in the worlds of politics and administration, both nationally and internationally.

According to the documentation, the department is organised around six major research programmes (discussed here in a different order to the one put forward in the document):

1. **The Swedish National Elections Studies Programme (SNES)** is a world-leading programme, established in 1954 by Professor Jörgen Westerståhl. It provides one of the most

long-standing time series on political behaviour data in the world (only outdone by the US). The importance and impact of this programme on political science, Swedish opinion-shapers, and the wider publication cannot be exaggerated. It led to a reorientation of Swedish political science, it put the department in the front line of international research, it established the foundation for the methodological education of generations of political scientists in Gothenburg in particular, and Sweden more generally, and it has had a tremendous impact in the media and therefore has shaped the way in which Swedish citizens understand politics. With the SOM Institute, run in close collaboration with the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, the research on political opinion in Sweden has been simultaneously deepened and made more accessible. The big challenge for such a well-established and long-term programme is renewal. So far, the programme has succeeded in this respect. The initial focus was on individual voters. Subsequently, the analysis was broadened to include the functioning of representative democracy and the political system more generally. Recently, an interesting ‘marriage’ has taken place between the original election studies of SNES and elements of good government (see below). In addition, the programme has recently produced a comprehensive analysis of a (50-year) electoral history of Sweden. A separate challenge for the programme is the cost and management of the large data bank.

2. **The Quality of Government institute (QoG).** One of the outstanding contributions to international scholarship has been the Quality of Government institute, established by Bo Rothstein and Sören Holmberg. The object of QoG was to investigate how good government can be created and maintained. This initiative has also provided innovation in that it combines quantitative analysis with political theories of trust and social capital. QoG-researchers have published extensively, supported 10 PhD-dissertations, managed a successful visiting fellows programme and built a large data bank that is widely used in international publications.
3. **The Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem)** was created in 2014 as a large-scale international project, which in addition to 17 staff members from the department includes an international team consisting of five principal investigators, 164 project managers, 30 regional managers, 170 country coordinators and research assistants, and 3,000 country experts. This means that V-Dem is one of the largest social science data collection programmes ever, with no fewer than 70,000 downloads of data from the programme and 195,000 unique users of the programme’s online resources. The overall object is to study democratisation in the world. In addition, the programme coordinates many smaller specific programmes related to democracy, democratisation and autocratisation.
4. **The Centre for Collective Action Research (CeCAR)** is an interdisciplinary research centre, funded by the Vice-Chancellor and hosted by the department. The overarching question concerns the conditions under which successful large-scale collective action can and does occur. Research on small-scale collective action holds that users often overcome the collective action problem by setting up self-governed regulatory systems. Larger groups seldom cooperate voluntarily without coercion. CeCAR then studies the design and policy measures that are simultaneously effective and considered legitimate. Its activity includes both postdocs and PhD candidates, in addition to about 20 senior scholars from not only the social sciences, but also from medicine and natural sciences.

5. **The Centre for European Research at the University of Gothenburg (CERGU)** was established in the mid-1990s to promote multidisciplinary research on issues relating to Europe, and includes scholars from the three faculties of Business/Economics/Law, Social Sciences and Arts. It was recognised as a Jean Monnet European Centre for Excellence in 1998. The programme contains a diversity of activities, ranging from Tuesday morning breakfast meetings to public events through seminars and international conferences. The recruitment of Associate Professor Lisbeth Aggestam from the University of Bath has been very important for CERGU, as has the recruitment of Jonathan Polk (as postdoctoral researcher, now Associate Professor).
6. **The Programme on Government and Local Development (GLD)** is a research programme initially established by Professor Ellen Lust formerly at Yale University. Programme Director Lust was – according to the department’s report – successfully persuaded to move to Gothenburg. Its focus is local government in effort to promote human welfare globally. A new measurement has been developed, the Local Government Performance Index (LGPI), which has been utilised in a large number of national surveys. This programme consists of 12 full-time staff and cooperates with universities in Norway and Malawi.

In addition to these six programmes, the department features a number of further initiatives. These include, for example, initiatives exploring ‘good losers’ in representative democracy, gender and diplomacy, and the political effects of pregnancy and childbirth. The department claims to have explicitly decided not to have a gender-specific programme. Instead, it aims to integrate a gender perspective across all fields of study in the department.

In sum, the department has been very successful in establishing internationally recognised and leading research programmes. The department has also developed strategies to ensure continuity on the one hand, and scope for new initiatives on the other. The long-term financing of the well-established research infrastructures and large databases at the centre of many of these initiatives remains a major challenge.

As noted already, the department enjoys a very high standing in the international political science community, with arguably three programmes enjoying particular international and national prominence (national election study, QoG and V-Dem). This esteem is indicated by publications in leading international publications, editorial board memberships, conference attendances and attempts at ‘poaching’ by other international universities.

The department has the ambition to be internationally-leading by offering a broad orientation in political science. The General Research Seminar seeks to bring together the different research interests of the department in a collegial way. The department appears – from the documentation and experience of the panel members – to operate on collegial and supportive terms, offering a supportive environment for research innovation. The department has distinct strengths, but also some gaps in its coverage, for example, in political theory/philosophy. The review panel recommends the department to consider broadening its profile, also in view of supporting the training of early-career researchers and the teaching of graduate and undergraduate students.

Section B – Leadership

B1. Leadership

B1.1 Department leadership

The success of the department in terms of leading indicators suggests that the management of the department seems to be working. However, the material provided does not fully engage with the notion of ‘leadership’, highlighting instead the importance of ‘collegiality’. Indeed, the material provided highlights the importance of senior individuals in the department for ensuring the collaborative development of different research programmes. To compensate for the absence of traditional collegial decision-making structures (see below), the department has established a number of advisory committees. This structure seems to be working well, although it does not allow for the same degree of student input as structures with an elected board (*institutionsstyrelse*).

B1.2 Faculty/University level leadership

The University of Gothenburg is governed by a system of line management rather than collegiality, (see, for example, Shirin Ahlbäck Öberg & Elin Sundberg: ‘*Vad har hänt med det kollegiala styret?*’ in Linda Wedin & Josef Pallas (eds): *Det ostyrda universitetet? Perspektiv på styrning, autonomi och reform av svenska lärosäten*. Stockholm: Makadam förlag 2017). There seems to be a supportive acceptance at the university level of the ways in which the department has created advisory committees. Nevertheless, there are two problems. One is that there is a risk of limited accountability as there is no Senate to hold leaders to account. In addition, there are also limitations to student input in a line management system in contrast to a more collegial system of decision-making. How the overall relationship between department and other parts of the university is understood and managed is central to long-term development of the department. Such questions, however, go beyond the scope of this review as they touch on issues for the RED19 evaluation of the faculty/university level. Nevertheless, the relationship has an impact on how different parts of the department understand the role of leadership.

In the context of this exercise, the relationship between the ‘centre’ of the university and the department needs to develop agreement on a range of issues. Not unlike other institutions, there is a question regarding overheads. As some funding bodies do not provide for overheads, these have to be covered by the department itself, which means that success is effectively ‘punished’ in terms of impact on departmental finances. Furthermore, the report mentions concerns about ‘research time’ for staff. A clear commitment by the university to support research by all (tenured and non-tenured) staff seems important for supporting collegiality.

Second, there is an issue about organising recruitment (see below) in view of the pending retirement of some leading professors. The issue of ‘flexible recruitment’ is mentioned and there seems to be some scope for flexibility regarding salaries. During the site visit, members of the department told us that, for them, guaranteed research time is particularly important. The panel shares this view.

B2. Recruitment and B3. Career structure

The previous RED exercise recommended internationalisation. It is in this area that the department has made some very strong progress. Internationalisation has been particularly prominent in the recruitment to the PhD programme and at postdoctoral levels. The key criterion for recruitment has been ‘quality’ rather than mere ‘good fit’ with specific research programme interests.

The self-evaluation report suggests that the department is experiencing constraints in international recruitment, not just in terms of salary but in terms of overall ‘package’ (research time). The department seems keen to develop strategies to address some of these constraints. The university should be interested in supporting research by all its staff and it seems surprising that the university is not in a position to offer research time to early-career staff (as is the case in comparator institutions). Questions about international recruitment at senior and more junior levels are critical for the coming years, and the department’s self-evaluation has limited information on how future recruitment will be organised.

In its internationalisation strategy, the department has been very successful and this has contributed to its excellent international reputation. At the same time, the report notes potential issues that arise from internationalisation, namely latent tensions between international and ‘domestic’ orientations in research, which also has potential implications for future grant income and visibility to domestic audiences.

Input during the visit also made clear that internationally recruited postdoctoral fellows and permanent faculty would benefit from more in-depth introduction to the Swedish university system and high-quality language training. These are issues that will likely arise at all university departments that are successful in international recruitment, and so it may be an issue that could benefit from being addressed centrally by the university, in the form of international faculty introduction courses or seminars or the like.

B4. Funding

As already mentioned, the department has been very successful in receiving grant income from a variety of sources. This success has been sustained over a period of years. At the same time, it would be good to receive more information about the ratio of successful applications in the context of total number of applications, and how these ratios vary across members of the department.

B5. Feedback and evaluation

The panel has not separately addressed this question.

Section C – Complete Academic Environment

C1. Collaboration

Collaboration, especially in terms of international and national activities, appears to be very strong, both in the worlds of research and practice. The V-Dem programme, the flagship in this respect, is, as mentioned, probably the world's largest research collaboration in political science. However, interdisciplinary collaboration is excellent across all research programmes. Engagement with other stakeholders is also well-established and includes high-profile organisations, such as IDEA, Transparency International and the World Bank, as well as national councils and funds.

C2. Relevance and impact on society

The department has established a number of pathways to ensure relevance and impact on society. It undertakes a range of activities to directly and indirectly engage with society. Direct activities include Policy Dialogue Days and conferences involving international organisations. There is also evidence of departmental interest in debating the ongoing relevance of the discipline and potential implications in terms of 'integrity'. One interesting initiative is to engage with non-academic speakers through the General Research Seminar. The material also raises issues about the potential trade-off between internationalisation and domestic impact.

The department's documentation includes a discussion about potential risks of being 'too close' to relevant stakeholders. The department seems to be well-aware of potential tensions and the need to maintain a distance. Such risks might be more prevalent where departments are located in national capitals, but the discussion highlights attention being paid to potential biases in the ways in which pathways to impact are being embarked on. Such potential tensions are not unique to the department, but are probably particularly acute for a department of political science. The department seems well aware of this problem and, as far as we can see, handles these issues with considerable skill and judgment.

C3. Research-teaching linkages

There is a strong commitment towards research-led teaching. This includes the commitment that all professors are to contribute at least 20% of their time to teaching. There is no information as to whether students are engaged (consulted) in the development of the teaching provision, and whether students or the department have views as to potential gaps in the teaching provision due to the specific focus of the department. The department should consider the possibility of broadening its teaching portfolio so as to ensure that its students receive education across all fields of political science.

One aspect of the research-led teaching is a parallel commitment towards ensuring a 'practical' orientation in the teaching programmes, including specific forms of assessment and lectures by alumni.

Section D – Academic Culture

D1. Academic culture

The department's documentation points to a very vibrant and collegial research culture that individual panel members' experiences with the department also confirm. There is an institutional commitment towards sharing research interests across the department, as indicated by the bi-weekly General Research Seminar. Participation in the General Research Seminar is impressive; there are also a number of well-attended specialist research seminars as well. This indicates a very active research environment. The department might even consider if there are perhaps too many seminars, luncheon meetings, and workshops, and whether some of the specialist seminars could be coordinated better or even merged. Workload management, as exercised through departmental and research programme leadership, and as perceived by different staff (faculty and administrative services), is critical for supporting a good academic culture.

The department has mechanisms in place to reinforce research ethics. There is no report of identified research misconduct or unacceptable practices.

D2. Publication

D2.1 Publication strategy

The output from the department in terms of books and articles in leading university and other presses and international peer-review journals is very satisfactory.

D2.2 Analysis of bibliometric data

The documentation provided highlights the strong research output profile of the department over the past few years. At the same time, the way in which the documentation was provided does not offer a particularly good insight into the overall publication profile across members of staff and across types of journal. This might be a result of the review requirements (and the department's reaction to these instructions). The panel views the overall publication record of the department as impressive.

The report contains an appendix which underlines that some of the faculty at the department are very highly cited. This is, as the report argues, a good measure of scholarly impact and yet another indicator suggesting that the department performs at the highest levels.

The report also makes an important point that it is necessary to recognise publications in thematic or general science journals. We were very surprised to learn that publications in one of the top three general science journals (Science, Nature, and PNAS) were not considered towards the formal publication metrics as used by the university/faculty. If this is correct, the university should improve its policy on dealing with publications in general science or thematic journals that cut across boundaries.

In general, the visit at the department confirmed that there is a healthy and vibrant publication culture and that, as would be expected, there are differing opinions about indicators of scientific performance and measuring publications. This panel would submit that if seeking to quantify the number of

publications, it is important to use a multitude of metrics, including various points systems and citation indices. It is our impression that regardless of how you cut it, this department performs very well and that there are signs that a good performance has become even better. The documentation provided does not, however, allow any stringent analysis of these matters.

D3. Facilities and research infrastructure

As noted already, the department hosts a range of key research infrastructures of benefit not just to the department and university, but to the wider academic community. There is a concern about the resource implications of managing and maintaining these infrastructures, which needs to be resolved in cooperation with the university.

D4. Transverse perspectives

D4.1 Equal opportunities and gender equality

The documentation highlights a continuing issue in terms of gender equality, especially at the senior levels of the department. Recruitment at the junior levels only in part addresses the existing lack of gender equality. The department's approach towards gender equality seems to be that the existing imbalance will be addressed over time, given the presence of many more female staff at earlier stages of their career. However, the panel questions this approach and recommends that the department take a more pro-active strategy towards diversity and equality across all areas of departmental staffing.

D4.2 Internationalisation

Since the RED10 exercise, the department has very successfully responded to the call for more internationalisation, in terms of research profile, outward-facing activities, such as publications and conference participation, and inward-facing in terms of recruitment and research culture. The department is already well-connected and highly regarded in the discipline. The self-evaluation highlights potential risks and tensions associated with 'too much' internationalisation, namely a concern with reduced engagement with the Swedish audience. Given the likely changes following the retirement of some senior professors, the department may have to consider more extensively how to continue its strong impact on Swedish public debate. In turn, the review panel also encountered criticism by non-domestic PhD students that seminars were characterised by 'too much Swedishness', especially the General Research Seminar.

Section E – Support

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

The department expresses great satisfaction with the ‘outstanding’ nature of the internal administrative service and calls for a continuation of such support levels. The documentation calls for a more formalised university approach towards international recruitment exercises and this is something that the university may wish to consider.

Section F – Other Matters

F1. RED10 evaluation

There is considerable evidence that the department has responded to the suggestions expressed in the RED10 exercise:

- International collaboration has increased dramatically, in particular through V-Dem and QoG programmes.
- The in- and outflow of international postdoctoral and doctoral researchers has increased.
- The department can show a record of promoting more interdisciplinary research, especially through CeCAR and CERGU.
- The record of publication appears to have strengthened.
- The number of PhD candidates has increased as well.

However, the gender imbalance still exists.

F2. Other matters

(None).

Concluding Recommendations

The quality of research at the Department of Political Science is excellent and the department is recommended to go on very much as it has done over the last few years. There are, however, a number of issues that the department should address:

1. Consider whether the department wishes to broaden its portfolio in research and teaching, especially whether it may want to extend its coverage into the area of political theory/political philosophy;
2. Explore whether it is possible to advance, within the given line management structure, the enhancement of accountability and student influence;
3. Explore ways in which the faculty and the university take responsibility for the cost of larger databases and other aspects of established research infrastructures;
4. Carefully balance the potential tensions arising from internationalisation and continued domestic relevance across established and early-career researchers. This includes paying more attention to how internationally recruited junior and senior faculty are introduced to and incorporated into all aspects of academic life, including those that require knowledge of the Swedish language;
5. Continue to recruit the best PhD candidates, regardless of their 'fit' with existing research programmes;
6. Support all teaching staff in the pursuit of their research by granting research time. This may involve agreement with the wider university management;
7. Develop a more strategic and pro-active approach towards facilitating better gender equality.