

Summary assessor statement

Physics, Uppsala University - Educational evaluation at postgraduate level

December 18, 2020

Members of the assessment panel:

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The assessment panel was appointed in December 2019 and the final statement was delivered on December 18th 2020. The assessment is based primarily on the self-evaluation report from IFA (received on May 7, 2020) and on interviews conducted during a site visit in Uppsala (October 7-8, 2020). Several additional relevant documents, e.g. PhD students Self-evaluation report, PhD students Questionnaire, Guidelines for postgraduate studies, General study plan, various subject curricula, and the Individual Study Plan (ISP) template, have been included in the review work.

Strengths

The PhD education at the Department of Physics and Astronomy (IFA) is integrated in a high-level international research environment and it is well provided with qualified supervisors. There is also a professional education administration at the department.

There is a plethora of good educational, training, and follow-up practices at IFA. The department explicitly aims at enhancing and developing the quality of the PhD education.

PhD students generally have a positive perception of their education, and they are pleased with the quality and the international character of their research environment.

Areas of development

Organizational structure and educational goals

- The organizational structure at the department as a whole is not fully visible and there is a lack of coherence and consistency in the organizational structure of the PhD education,

in recruitment processes, and in follow-up processes. There are also examples of transparency deficits within the organization.

- Information structures and communication practices can be further developed.
- The gender and equal opportunities work can be developed to become more systematic and active. The role of the Equal opportunity group is not clear.
- The dimension of future career preparation, especially for careers outside academia, is underdeveloped.

Postgraduate education environment

- PhD students are in many ways heavily dependent on individual supervisors.
- The PhD student environment varies between research groups.
- Some of the educational goals are not made explicit in the education process. There is a need to translate them into understandable and applicable terms, and to clarify how they should be trained and examined.
- The average net study time is 4.8 years, i.e. 20 per cent longer than the stipulated 4 years.
- There are uneven prolongation practices.
- Negative stress is a significant problem among PhD students.

The role of the supervisors

- The role of the supervisors is not clearly described and there are indications of different views among supervisors on the supervisor role.
- Supervisor training can be strengthened.

Recommendations for improvement

The department should aim for a more coherent and transparent PhD education structure:

- Consider merging the education into a single programme, or at least a reduced number of programmes. This can and should be done with due respect for the need of variation and flexibility, considering the specific conditions for various sub-disciplines. This work should involve the admission process, ISP practices, follow-up structures, course requirements, and routines for salary increase.
- Develop the guideline document for PhD education and make a clear distinction between fundamental common regulations and optional recommendations.
- Develop better routines and channels for information.
- It is important that systematic and enforceable measures be taken to handle the long net study times.
- Develop clear routines for handling possible problems during the PhD education.

The department should aim for a more coherent translation of educational goals:

- Educational goals should be identified and translated into understandable and applicable terms. It is necessary to identify how training addresses these goals and how they are examined, and it is important to inform about this.

- The department should promote common routines for the ISP and encourage the use of the ISP as a planning and follow-up instrument.

The department should aim for increasing communication and student well-being:

- The equal opportunities work needs to be more systemized and active.
- Information for new and continuing PhD students should be extended and easily available.
- Review the routines for staff appraisals (*'medarbetarsamtal'*).
- Take measures to work systematically and actively against negative stress.
- Ensure a transparent and even system for teaching assignment compensation.