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Postgraduate Education at Södertörn University

Development, Challenges and Choices

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*Ai-translated from Swedish to English

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Please note that *Report Doctoral Student Survey 2024* and *Internal responses* are available to read in the other version of this report, published at Medarbetarwebben.

Summary

The report provides an overview of doctoral education at Södertörn University since the institution was granted its own degree-awarding powers in 2010. The report analyses developments over time, identifies key challenges in organisation and funding, and presents possible paths for the future. The focus is not on assessing the quality of doctoral education, but on providing a basis for strategic decisions and long-term development of doctoral education environments.

The work was carried out between November 2024 and May 2025 and was based on extensive dialogues with the Faculty Board, departments, steering groups, the doctoral student council, administrative staff and university management. The basis was supplemented with data from UKÄ evaluations, the Faculty Board's subject evaluations, doctoral student surveys and statistics collected by AVM, HR and the library.

Since 2010, doctoral education has expanded from four to five multidisciplinary doctoral education areas, and the number of doctoral education subjects has doubled from eleven to 21. Several subjects have been added through new degree authorisations and through so-called dual affiliation within Educational Studies (UVS). The university's model and degree authorisations are based on multidisciplinary areas.

Funding is dominated by the Baltic Sea Foundation, which generally accounts for two-thirds of doctoral funding. Other resources come from the university's research grants, external research councils, research schools and collaborative doctoral students. The distribution of doctoral places varies between areas and is partly based on the principle of equal distribution between subjects. Budgets and organisational structures differ between areas, including in terms of courses, directors of studies and administrative support.

The statistics show large variations in volume and gender distribution between subjects. Environmental science, history, political science, MKV and sociology are the most voluminous subjects in terms of the number of doctoral theses, while several subjects are small and more vulnerable. The overall satisfaction of doctoral students has increased over time, according to recurring surveys.

The report identifies four main challenges:

1. **Vulnerable environments** – many subjects are small and dependent on individuals, which affects supervision capacity, course offerings, seminar activities and long-term stability.
2. **Inadequate funding and resource allocation** – steering groups and departments believe that doctoral education is underfunded, while resources are expected to remain unchanged in the coming years. The allocation of doctoral places calls for clearer and more long-term criteria.
3. **Complex organisation** – the interaction between subjects, steering groups, departments, BEEGS, UVS, FN and university management is perceived as unclear, with overlapping processes and varying practices.
4. **Other issues** – such as administrative processes, language issues, career support, dual affiliations and the management of dual research environments (BEEGS subject, UVS subject).

The report presents several options for strengthening the organisation of doctoral education: clarifying the division of responsibilities within the organization, establishing principles for resource allocation and doctoral student allocation, strengthening the coordination of courses and administrative procedures, and reviewing BEEGS and UVS.

Abbreviations

ASP	General syllabus for the third-cycle subject area	General syllabus for the third-cycle subject area
AVM	University Support Services	
BEEGS	Baltic and East European Graduate School	
CBEES	Centre for Baltic and East European Studies	
CPK	Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge	
HLK	Supervisory Board	
HF	Higher Education Ordinance	
HS	Historical Studies (postgraduate education area)	
HSV	Swedish Higher Education Authority	
FFU	Faculty Board Committee for Research and Postgraduate Education	
FN	Faculty Board	
IFF	Internal research resources (Allocation of government research grants)	
HSS	School of History and Contemporary Studies	
IKL	School of Culture and Education	
IPA	School of Police Studies	
ISP	Individual study plan	
ISV	School of Social Sciences	
KKT	Critical and Cultural Theory (postgraduate education area)	
LU	Teacher Education	
MKV	Media and Communication Studies	
MVS	Environmental Studies (postgraduate education area)	
NMT	School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies	
PESO	Politics, Economics and Social Organisation (postgraduate education area)	
SH	Södertörn University	
UKÄ	Swedish Higher Education Authority	
UVS	Studies in the Educational Sciences (postgraduate education area)	
ÖSS	Baltic Sea Foundation	
ÖÖ	ÖÖ relevance: "Baltic Sea and Eastern Europe relevance", i.e. that a doctoral project meets the Baltic Sea Foundation's geographical criteria	

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

According to the university's activity and quality plan for 2024, a review of the university's doctoral education was to be carried out, focusing on organisation and funding since the university was granted its own degree-awarding powers in 2010. The purpose of the review is to (1) describe how doctoral education has developed over time, (2) identify problems and challenges in the organisation and funding of doctoral education, and (3) provide suggestions on how to address these problems and challenges. The aim is not to evaluate the quality of doctoral education, but to identify challenges and courses of action with a focus on issues of organisation and funding. The review covers the entire process, from the allocation of doctoral places and job advertisements to the public defence of doctoral theses.

1.2 How the report can be used

The report should be useful in a variety of ways to everyone involved in doctoral education at the university: doctoral students, supervisors and supervisory committees, research schools and steering groups, as well as administrative staff. It is intended to provide an overview of how doctoral education at Södertörn University came about, how it has developed over time and what challenges it faces today. The report concludes with suggestions and recommendations from the authors. The results and conclusions in the report should also be able to serve as a basis for strategic decisions at management level. Having a strong and vibrant doctoral education programme is also important for the university's efforts to achieve formal university status.

1.3 Implementation of the assignment

On 5 November 2024, the Vice-Chancellor decided to commission Anna Maria Jönsson, Professor of Media and Communication Studies and Vice-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Doctoral Education, and Johan Eriksson, Professor of Political Science and Vice-Chair of the Faculty Board, to be responsible for the review, analysis and proposals for measures.

The review was carried out between November 2024 and May 2025. In the first stage, which lasted until December 2024, views were gathered on what the review should take into account. Such dialogue meetings were held with the Faculty Board, the Vice-Chancellor's Group, the Management Group, steering groups and the Doctoral Student Council. We also gave all subjects at the university the opportunity to highlight what they thought the review should take into account, as well as any problems, challenges and possible proposals for change they had. During this first stage, existing information was also compiled, based on the Faculty Board's subject evaluations, UKÄ evaluations, doctoral student surveys and steering documents. The Faculty Board, AVM, HR and the Library assisted with the collection and compilation of supporting documentation.

In a second phase, from January to early April 2025, further dialogue meetings were held with representatives of units that have different roles in postgraduate education at the university in order to gather views, experiences and suggestions. A total of seventeen dialogue meetings were held, each lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. The report was discussed at the university management's operational planning retreat in May 2025. Later that month, the report was sent out for consultation within the university, before being finalised in autumn 2025, submitted to the vice-chancellor and published.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 describes the development of doctoral education from 2010 to 2024. Chapter 3 identifies problems and challenges with a focus on organisation and funding. Chapter 4 presents a number of options for action and proposals on how to address problems and challenges and how doctoral education can be developed. We would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed statistics and other data, experiences, opinions and suggestions. Special thanks go to the staff at AVM and the university library: your assistance with data and help with finalising the text has been invaluable. We take full responsibility for any remaining errors.

2. Development

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how degree-awarding powers were granted to Södertörn University within the framework of multidisciplinary areas, what is meant by an “area”, how doctoral education has been organised and financed, and how resources have been allocated. The chapter also contains a summary of basic statistics on doctoral education at subject level at Södertörn University.

2.2 Degree-awarding powers at postgraduate level at Södertörn University

Following an application process and review by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (HSV), Södertörn University was granted independent doctoral education rights in 2010 in four multidisciplinary doctoral education areas: Historical Studies (HS); Critical and Cultural Theory (KKT); Environmental Studies (MVS); and Politics, Economics and Social Organisation (PESO). In 2017, the university obtained doctoral education rights for a fifth multidisciplinary area: Educational Studies (UVS). Within the framework of these areas, there are around 20 subjects offering doctoral education (see Table 1). At the same time, the university has the right to grant doctoral education rights for other subjects within each of these areas, and the composition of the areas has thus changed somewhat over the years as more subjects have been added in all areas except Environmental Studies (which, however, includes both social science and natural science-oriented research). Following a national evaluation carried out in 2018-2020, the UKÄ decided that Södertörn University no longer has permission to conduct doctoral education in the subject of economics, on the grounds that the subject was considered to be entirely dependent on other higher education institutions in order to be able to conduct doctoral education (UKÄ 2018b; UKÄ 2020, p. 5).

Table 1: Doctoral education areas and subjects at Södertörn University

<i>Historical studies (HS)</i>	<i>Critical and Cultural Theory (KKT)</i>	<i>Environmental studies (MVS)</i>	<i>Politics, economics and social organisation (PESO)</i>	<i>Studies in the Educational Sciences (UVS)</i>
2010 Archaeology Ethnology History History of Ideas	2010 Philosophy Aesthetics MKV	2010 Environmental science Science	2010 Business Sociology Political science	2017 Swedish Pedagogy
2012 Religion Science	2011 Gender studies 2013 Practical knowledge theory 2014: Art history 2015: Literature Science		2014 Economics* 2019 Social work 2021: Journalism 2025: Public Administration	Dual affiliation subjects: 2021 MKV 2022: The practical Theory of knowledge History Literature Science 2024: History of ideas 2025: Political science <i>During assessment: Religious studies</i>

* The degree authorisation for economics was withdrawn following an evaluation by UKÄ carried out in 2018-2020.

The fact that rights were granted to multidisciplinary areas rather than individual scientific disciplines (subjects) was partly a solution to the problem of small subject environments in several cases, which a larger multidisciplinary environment was considered to be able to compensate for ; partly because university status¹ is required to obtain *general* degree authorisation at the doctoral level. The significance of multidisciplinary areas in relation to subjects is a central theme in this report, which we will return to.

¹ Södertörn University has applied to the government twice, in 2003 and 2006, to become a university. Neither application has been considered.

Postgraduate education was conducted in a number of subjects² at the university college long before it was granted independent rights in 2010, mainly with funding from the Baltic Sea Foundation and SLL. In 2006, the same year that the university applied for university status for the second time, there were around 130 doctoral students at Södertörn University, of whom around 50 were part of the multidisciplinary research school BEEGS³ (Södertörn University, 2006, p. 55). In the natural sciences, SLL contributed 50 million Swedish kronor per year for five years and continued with smaller amounts for several years. These contributions financed, among other things, several doctoral students. This early research training was made possible through cooperation agreements with departments at other universities (primarily Stockholm University, but also to some extent Uppsala University, Örebro University, the Karolinska Institute and Linköping University), which meant that admission, appointment of supervisors and thesis defence were formally handled by the "sponsor institutions". However, most of the doctoral students were employed and worked at Södertörn University. The "sponsor solution" at that time meant that a postgraduate education environment could be created at an early stage and that teachers/researchers at the university could gain experience as supervisors. During this period, the university also participated in a couple of national research schools (for history and entrepreneurship, respectively). We will not go into detail about this early form of doctoral education here, but will instead focus on developments since the university was granted the right to award doctoral degrees in various fields in 2010.

2.3 Criteria for degree authorisation

General criteria for doctoral degree eligibility are set out in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100) and the Government Bill

² Archaeology, ethnology, philosophy, business administration, history, literary studies, media and communication studies, economics, physical geography, natural sciences (organic chemistry, analytical chemistry, biochemistry, structural biochemistry, cell biology, molecular biology, genetics and genomics, microbiology, botanical physiology, zoological physiology, ecology), cultural geography, environmental science, religious studies, rhetoric, sociology, political science, educational science, and development and international cooperation (Södertörn University, 2006, pp. 55, 62-63).

³BEEGS (Baltic and East European Graduate School) was established in 2000 with funding from the Baltic Sea Foundation. BEEGS is an international and multidisciplinary research training environment that brings together all BEEGS doctoral students during their first year of study, where they take a joint course on the Baltic Sea region and Eastern and Central Europe before moving on to their respective subject areas. BEEGS is responsible for an introductory week, organises a doctoral conference, runs the BEEGS course, conducts study trips, seminars and social activities, and has a director of studies to support the doctoral students. BEEGS doctoral students are organisationally part of CBEEES, an area and a subject environment.

See <https://www.sh.se/forskning/forskarutbildning/forskarskolan-beegs>

2008/09:134 *Research with profiling and quality*.⁴ The Higher Education Ordinance sets out the following general criteria:

"Permission to award general degrees at the doctoral level may be granted to higher education institutions other than universities within a field if the education and research at the institution are of such quality and scope that doctoral education in the field can be conducted at a high scientific level and with good educational conditions in general." (HF Chapter 6, Section 5 d)

In addition to these national criteria, Södertörn University has adopted local guidelines for the establishment and discontinuation of doctoral programmes (Södertörn University, 2020). The following local criteria apply to the establishment of doctoral programmes:

- The subject shall have the right to award advanced level degrees.
- The subject shall have at least at least four full-time equivalent permanent doctoral teachers, of whom at least one (1) professor and two (2) senior lecturers.⁵ All must be employed at least 50% in the subject in question. The same person may not be counted in two subjects at the same time.
- There must be documented experience of doctoral supervision among the permanent teachers in the subject.

In addition, it is stated that the subject must have a scientific profile that corresponds to the postgraduate education area, that the subject contributes to knowledge development within the area and, together with other subjects within the area, constitutes a "credible scientific whole where the parts support the whole and each other". The application must address the research environment and higher seminars, supervisory experience, research within the subject, doctoral students' influence, international orientation, collaboration, doctoral courses, quality assurance and general syllabus for the third-cycle subject area. At Södertörn University, a doctoral programme subject may be discontinued on the following grounds, among others:

- The subject has too few admitted and active doctoral students
- The subject lacks supervisory competence

⁴ See also UKÄ's publication *Guidance for applying for permission to award degrees* (2023).

⁵ These criteria can be compared with other higher education institutions: Malmö University requires at least two professors and three senior lecturers; Karlstad University requires at least two professors and two senior lecturers; Linnaeus University requires at least two professors and one senior lecturer; Mid Sweden University requires at least one professor and one senior lecturer. The larger universities do not appear to have such precise requirements – and at Uppsala University, for example, doctoral programmes are "normally" only organised within subjects that already have the right to award doctoral degrees.

- The subject has not addressed significant shortcomings that emerged in connection with an evaluation
- The area needs to be reorganised
- The subject should be removed from the range of doctoral programmes
- A new doctoral programme subject has been established that includes or replaces a previously established subject.

What is an area?

This is how UKÄ defines “area”:

"A field can be described as a defined area of knowledge. The area may comprise one or more subjects for third-cycle education (postgraduate education subjects). In its application, the higher education institution specifies how the area is to be defined and which subject or subjects the third-cycle degree is to be awarded in (third-cycle education) and which will initially be offered within the area. What an area for degree authorisation may cover will therefore vary from case to case. It does not need to coincide with an area for a master's degree that already exists at the higher education institution." (UKÄ, 2023, p. 31)

When Södertörn University applied for and was granted doctoral education rights in 2010, these applied to the four multidisciplinary areas listed above. The right to award doctoral degrees () was granted for 11 subjects, but the degree-awarding rights for each subject were and still are linked to the multidisciplinary area to which they belong.

The significance of the area is discussed in more detail below.

Decisions on doctoral degree rights

In its decision on the area of Critical and Cultural Theory, the HSV stated that this would give Södertörn University “a range that is unique in Sweden” and that even though three different subjects were included in the area application, the area appeared to be a “coherent unit” (HSV, 2010c, p. 3). It was noted that before the hearing, there was some uncertainty about the organisation, but that this uncertainty had been dispelled when it was clarified that the Faculty Board would have overall responsibility for quality assurance in doctoral education.

The decision for the field of Historical Studies stated that the field is "well-integrated, with extensive and well-developed collaboration across subject boundaries, which enables synergy effects to be achieved" and that the field's boundaries are "functional" (HSV, 2010d, p. 3). The Faculty Board's overall an response was also mentioned in this decision, while HSV noted that there was

some uncertainty as to how the university management would “concretely and formally” monitor how the Faculty Board “fulfils its postgraduate education responsibilities” and that this needed to be clarified.⁶

The decision for the area of Environmental Science stated that the area “definitely forms part of the university’s profile” and that the delimitation of the area is “reasonable” (HSV, 2010b, p. 3). HSV noted that, as defined in the application, the field of environmental science requires “strong social science expertise” and “good integration” of social and natural sciences (HSV, 2010b, p. 3), which has been achieved within MVS. The relationship to the university’s social science environment within PESO was particularly emphasised. It should be noted, however, that MVS includes both social science and natural science-oriented research. As with the field of historical studies, the importance of “documented procedures” in the form of “organisation and decision-making processes” for handling quality issues was also emphasised, which subsequently fell within the Faculty Board’s area of responsibility.

The decision for the area of Politics, Economics and Social Organisation (PESO) stated that the subjects included “have developed in interaction with each other and have a non-insignificant commonality in terms of both problems and theory and method. This makes them a reasonable and appropriate area for degree-awarding powers, even without the theoretical superstructure developed in the application” (HSV, 2010a, p. 3). In the decision on Educational Studies (UVS) – the fifth area added in 2017 – it was stated that the area’s “scope and delimitation [...] are well chosen. The requirements for research-based teacher education make the area particularly important, both at Södertörn University and nationally.” Initially, pedagogy and Swedish were included in UVS, which has since been expanded to seven subjects⁷ and will soon be expanded to nine (political science and religious studies).

Postgraduate education at Södertörn University is currently conducted within five areas, which, with one exception, cover several different subjects (5–7). *Critical and Cultural Theory* (KKT), which is based at the Department of Culture and Learning, will comprise seven subjects in 2025 (aesthetics, philosophy, gender studies, art history, literary studies, media and communication studies, and the theory of practical knowledge). The field of *Historical Studies* (HS) is based at the Department of History and Contemporary Studies and consists of five different subjects

⁶ The Faculty Board’s mandate and responsibilities have since been clarified and updated in the rules of procedure and delegation.

⁷ In addition to Pedagogy and Swedish, it now includes media and communication studies, literary studies, practical knowledge theory, history and history of ideas. In spring 2025, political science will join UVS. Studies of Religions is under review.

(archaeology, ethnology, history, history of ideas, Studies of Religions). The School of Social Sciences offers *PESO* (Politics, Economics and Social Organisation) with five subjects (business administration, journalism, public administration, sociology, political science). The field of *Environmental Studies* (MVS) is located at the School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies and includes the multidisciplinary subject area of environmental science. This is the only area that does not currently include several subjects. The field of *Educational Studies* (UVS) is the most recent addition to the university and is unique in that it initially included two subjects (Swedish and pedagogy) that are considered central to teacher training and are not included in any other research area. Since 2021, subjects that already belong to another research area can be dual-affiliated to UVS. A double affiliation application must be reviewed by external experts and decided upon by the Faculty Board, according to established guidelines. A dual affiliation means that a subject that has degree-awarding powers in another area also has the right to examine doctoral students within UVS. The first subject to be dual-affiliated with UVS was media and communication studies (2021).

2.4 Current organisation of doctoral education

Within the framework of the five multidisciplinary areas that have degree-awarding powers at doctoral level, the number of subjects has grown from eleven to 21 (see Table 1), i.e. almost doubling from 2010 to 2024. However, growth has varied between areas: HS has grown from four to five subjects, KKT from three to seven, PESO from three to six and UVS from two to eight. Since 2010, MVS has been a single, albeit multidisciplinary, subject.

At *subject level*, the supervisory committee (HLK) plays an important role in the organisation and monitoring of doctoral education. Although the supervisory committees are still advisory bodies without formal decision-making power, they have a real influence on admissions, the appointment and replacement of supervisors, organising subject-specific courses, following up on ASPs and ISPs, preparing public defences, appointing preliminary reviewers for theses, keeping up to date with research ethics regulations, and assessing whether a doctoral student should be advised to defend their thesis or not (Södertörn University, 2023, p. 12).

The way in which HLK is organised differs between subjects at the university in

several respects, including participation and representation, who convenes convener/chair, meeting frequency, procedures for appointing supervisors, and monitoring doctoral students' performance. According to the document Rules of Procedure for Departments, Teacher Education and CBEES, doctoral students have the right to be represented in HLK, and over time this is being complied with by more and more subjects.

At subject level, there are also subject councils and department heads responsible for parts of doctoral education, particularly with regard to employment and working environment issues.

The university's rules of procedure for departments, teacher education and CBEES specify a division between collegial organisation and line organisation, with subject councils, departmental boards and steering groups belonging to the former and heads of department and department heads to the latter (Södertörn University, 2023). The rules of procedure stipulate that there must be a steering group for each postgraduate education area.

At *the area level*, the five multidisciplinary steering groups are responsible for formally appointing assessment groups for admission, approving assessment groups' proposals for admission and ranking, appointing supervisors, approving the head of department's proposals for examiners and grading committees, following up on ASP and ISP, and organising area-specific doctoral courses.⁸ The steering groups are led by a chair and have representatives for each research subject. The number of directors of studies varies between areas (see Table 2). The directors of studies have an informal university-wide network for collaboration, which is currently coordinated by the director of studies for BEEGS. The chairs of the steering groups also participate regularly in meetings with the Faculty Board's Committee for Research and Doctoral Education (FFU).

In summary, the five steering groups differ in at least six ways (see Table 2), in addition to differences in funding (see Table 3).

⁸ The departments also play important roles in doctoral education, partly through the head of department's overall managerial and work environment responsibilities, and partly through the departmental boards, which "together with the head of department shall work to promote quality in the department's research, education and collaboration activities" (Södertörn University, 2023, p. 1). The head of department is also responsible for the allocation of internal research funds, such as IFF and grants to steering groups.

Table 2: Differences between doctoral education areas

	HS	MVS	KKT	PESO	UVS
Subjects	5	1	7	6	8
Allocation of BEEGS doctoral students (every other year)	4-5	4	7	7	0
Deans	1	1	7	1	0 ⁹
Points for thesis	180	180	180	165	180
Compulsory area courses (number of credits)*	15	15	10	37.5	15
Mandate	Postgraduate education	Postgraduate education	Postgraduate education	Research <i>and</i> postgraduate education **	Postgraduate education

*Doctoral students within HS, KKT, PESO and UVS also take a course in scientific theory (7.5 credits). In addition, the so-called BEEGS course (7.5 credits) is compulsory for all BEEGS doctoral students. Furthermore, each subject has a varying number of subject-specific compulsory courses.

** ISV has delegated responsibility for both research and postgraduate education issues to PESO. For example, PESO organises ISV's research day and seminars on topics such as publishing and research applications.

Environmental Studies stand out in that they are both an area and *formally* a single subject discipline (which, in practice, however, includes both social science and natural science-oriented doctoral education), unlike other areas where the number of subjects ranges from five to eight. Critical and Cultural Theory stands out in that it has one director of studies per subject, unlike the others, which have one director of studies for the entire field, and only 10 credits of compulsory courses common to the field.

PESO stands out by having the most compulsory area-wide courses, totalling 37.5 credits. PESO also differs from the others in that the doctoral thesis comprises 165 credits, unlike the others, which have 180 credits.

⁹ Since 2023, UVS has had a research coordinator instead of a director of studies.

¹⁰ The PESO courses are: Advanced Qualitative Methods; Advanced Quantitative Research Methods; the theory course Organizations and Institutions; and Research Design (all courses comprise 7.5 credits each). The fact that PESO developed a relatively large number of joint courses, in particular the introduction of the theory course Organizations and Institutions, should be seen in the light of the following statements in the HSV's decision on degree-awarding powers: "The common area for the disciplines is one of the university's profile areas, and the approach presented in the application provides exciting starting points for doctoral education. However, this potential is not exploited in the planned joint doctoral courses; these should apply scientific theory and research methods, not the common substance in the area" (HSV, 2010a, p. 3). HSV also wrote that it is "desirable that the cross-disciplinary research theme is visible not only in the form of joint seminars but also in the course offerings." (HSV, 2010a, p. 4)

Since its inception in 2010, the significance of the areas has developed in different ways within Södertörn University, although all five areas have a steering group that coordinates and decides on certain aspects of doctoral education. For example, the steering groups play a role in the admission of doctoral students, even though formal decisions are made by the university-wide Faculty Board. The chairs of the steering groups also regularly participate in meetings with the Faculty Board's Committee for Research and Doctoral Education (FFU). In addition, the directors of studies in the steering groups have created an informal network for information sharing and coordination.

The national guidelines are general in nature and do not provide any concrete answers regarding, for example, joint courses within the field, but it is clear that the field should constitute a joint *scientific environment* and not be solely of *an administrative nature*. The UKÄ states that “the degree authorisation and thus the assessment applies to the field as a whole, including the individual postgraduate education subjects that fall within the field” (UKÄ, 2023, p. 32). An essential basis for assessment is that “the field constitutes a credible scientific/artistic whole, where the parts support the whole and each other”, and that research within the field “is of such quality and scope that doctoral education can be conducted at a high scientific level throughout the field” (UKÄ, 2023, p. 33). In this context, it should be noted that the HSV's decision to grant doctoral education rights for the field of Historical Studies already states that “the criteria for the selection of compulsory courses” are “unclear and should be clarified” (HSV, 2010d, p. 5).

BEEGS doctoral students spend their first year at CBEES, a multidisciplinary environment with researchers, its own seminar series, an annual international conference and publications. BEEGS organises an introductory week for newly admitted doctoral students. BEEGS also organises a doctoral conference and offers a compulsory multidisciplinary doctoral course on the Baltic Sea and Eastern European region. In addition, BEEGS organises activities such as seminars, film evenings and study trips, and conducts supplementary follow-ups on the doctoral students' education. After their first year at BEEGS, doctoral students physically move to their subject environments. However, BEEGS doctoral students are expected to participate in both their subject and BEEGS environments from day one.

In addition, as mentioned above, there are a number of externally funded research schools, which primarily function as research environments but also, to a certain extent, organise

doctoral courses. The research schools have no formal responsibility for the implementation of doctoral education, but provide resources in the form of funding and networks.

At the *university* level, the Faculty Board (FN) is responsible for monitoring the quality of all education and research at the university. Since 2022, the FN has introduced a system for quality assessment at subject level, in which all parts of the university's activities (undergraduate education, advanced education, doctoral education and research) are evaluated with the help of external experts. The FN also makes decisions on guidelines for doctoral education, the establishment of doctoral courses, the admission of doctoral students, and the defence of doctoral theses. The FN also has the task of "proposing principles for the development of the university's doctoral education and for the allocation of doctoral places". Work on developing such principles is ongoing within the FN and is expected to be completed in 2026. Decisions on the allocation of doctoral places per area are made by the university management/vice-chancellor.

2.5 Current funding and resource allocation

Postgraduate education at Södertörn University is currently funded in five main ways:

- Funding from the Baltic Sea Foundation (BEEGS)
- The university's research grants (primarily UVS)
- Project funding from external financiers (including ÖSS)
- Research schools with funds from external financiers
- External partners (collaborative doctoral students)

In April 2025, nearly two-thirds of the university's doctoral students (80 out of 137) were funded by ÖSS, and of these, a majority (72) were BEEGS doctoral students, while the rest (eight) were part of ÖSS projects.¹¹ Just over 20 per cent are funded by the university's research grants (mainly within UVS), while approximately 15 per cent are funded by project grants (including national research schools). Project doctoral students are mainly funded by the Swedish Research Council, but some are also funded by Formas, Forte, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Wallenberg Foundations and Horizon Europe. There are differences between areas and subjects in terms of the distribution of funding forms for doctoral students (see Table 3).

¹¹ Table 3 only shows figures valid up to 31 December 2024.

Table 3: Funding forms for doctoral students, 2024

	BEEGS	ÖSS- Project	Fo grants	Project	Assistant Professor	Collaboration/own employment	Vice- chancellor r funds
HSS number//%	15	1	2/8	6	1	1/4	-
Archaeology	4	-	1	-	-	1	-
Ethnology	4	-	1	3	-	-	-
History	3	-	-	-	1	-	-
History of ideas	2	-	-	2	-	-	-
Religious Studies	3	1	-	1	-	-	-
KKT number//%	18/49	3/8	5/14	9/24	-	2/5	-
DPKT	3	2	-	2	-	2	-
Aesthetics	2	-	1	-	-	-	-
Philosophy	4	1	-	-	-	-	-
Gender	3	-	1	4	-	-	-
Art history	2	-	-	2	-	-	-
Literary studies	1	-	2	-	-	-	-
MKV	4	-	1	1	-	-	-
MVS number//%	19/73	3/11	2	2/8	-	-	-
PESO number//%	22/78	1/4	2	1/4	-	2/7	-
Business	6	-	1	-	-	1	-
Journalism	3						
Social work	4	1	-	-	-	1	-
Sociology	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political science	3	-	1	1	-	-	-
Economics	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
UVS number//%	1/5	1/5	17/71	3/13	-	1/5	1
DPKT	-	-	1	-	-	1	-
History	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Literary studies	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
MKV	-	-	1	3	-	-	-
Pedagogy	1	1	8	-	-	-	-
Swedish	-	-	6	1	-	-	-
Total number//%	72/53	8/6	28/21	21/15	1/0.5	6/4	1/0.5

¹² Projects are from external financiers other than ÖSS. Most are doctoral students in research schools financed by VR, but funds from Forte, Formas, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Wallenberg Foundations and Horizon Europe are also included.

Decisions on the overall allocation of resources for the university are made by the vice-chancellor, who allocates funds from the university's research grants for UVS doctoral students, a dissertation fund and a post to support the administration of doctoral education. This fund is allocated to the departments. In addition to this, most of the university's doctoral students are funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation.

To date, UVS has been allocated two to three doctoral places per year, financed through the university's research grants. Originally, Swedish and pedagogy were included, which meant that these subjects received an even and continuous allocation of doctoral students. As more and more subjects have been dual-affiliated¹³ to UVS, the consequence is that not all subjects can receive a doctoral student position, at least not annually.

The allocation of doctoral positions within BEEGS, funded by ÖSS, is decided at the vice-chancellor level. The areas have been allocated BEEGS doctoral students every two years according to the following distribution, depending on the annual allocation for this purpose from ÖSS: HS four-five, MVS four-five, PESO seven- e eight and KKT seven-eight.

Within the steering groups, BEEGS doctoral places have generally been distributed evenly between subjects, regardless of the size of the subjects, throughput or other quality aspects. Particularly within KKT and PESO, where the number of subjects has grown without a corresponding increase in the allocation of BEEGS doctoral positions, the consequence is that certain subjects occasionally do not receive any doctoral students (or only receive one doctoral student every other year). Within KKT, doctoral places are distributed evenly between the constituent subjects, so when the number of places does not coincide with the number of subjects, previous distribution is taken into account so that there are an equal number of places for each subject over time. Within PESO, the principle is that all subjects receive one doctoral student, and any places in excess of this are usually allocated by lottery.

Environmental Science chose a different model early on, as its doctoral programme covers a single subject, while the distribution principle has been to distribute places evenly between natural science and social science doctoral students. Within Historical Studies, places are distributed evenly between subjects. If there are more or fewer places than subjects included in the area, a lottery will be held. For the years in which it has been allocated two doctoral places, UVS has allocated one to a single-affiliated subject (Swedish or pedagogy, which is awarded every other year) and one to a double-affiliated subject.

¹³ Currently, the following seven subjects are included in UVS: Swedish, pedagogy, media and communication studies, literary studies, practical knowledge theory, history and history of ideas. Political science will join UVS in spring 2025 and religious studies is under review.

All five postgraduate education areas are allocated a basic grant, which in 2025 is SEK 600,000, to administer postgraduate education. In addition, the departments make a withdrawal from internal research resources (the so-called IFF) at the head of department and/or subject level to run courses, finance directors of studies, etc. A widespread perception (especially within KKT and PESO) is that the postgraduate education areas are underfunded – which we will return to in the next chapter.

PESO's budget for 2025 is approximately 1.4 million for doctoral education, i.e. 800,000 above the base amount. Most of these funds go to salaries: for the director of studies (25 per cent), administrator, participation in the steering group (10 per cent to the chair of the steering group)¹⁴ and doctoral student participation (2.5 per cent). The rest of the budget is allocated to operations (e.g. workshops and writing weeks) and courses (in 2024, 120 clock hours were allocated to each of two compulsory courses).

NMT and MVS have allocated a total of 1.5 million for doctoral education, which means that 900,000 is allocated from the department's IFF. Most of this goes to salaries for the steering group and the chair of the steering group, and since 2025, 30 per cent has gone to the director of studies. Otherwise, the budget covers a workshop and doctoral students' expenses, but nothing for courses. However, in 2024, approximately 50,000 Swedish kronor was budgeted for a course.

For KKT, the department has planned a total budget of 2.5 million for 2025, of which approximately 400,000 will be taken from unspent funds and 1.5 million has been allocated from the department's IFF. Within KKT, funds have been budgeted for the chair of the steering group (20 per cent), doctoral student representatives and seven directors of studies, who will each receive 10 per cent (with the exception of two Baltic Sea professors, who will receive 0 and 5 per cent, respectively). KKT is also the area that allocates the most funds for administration. Another large budget item relates to courses. The KKT budget includes funds for two compulsory area courses and one course in each subject. Funds are also allocated for an internal conference, a writing group, 60 per cent and final seminar opponents, and various social activities.

¹⁴ In 2025, the PESO steering group will have two Baltic Sea professors, one of whom will receive 0 per cent remuneration and the person who holds the chair will receive 10 per cent.

Within UVS, the 600,000 allocated to the area is used to compensate the steering group chair (10 per cent), research coordinator (10 per cent) and assessment groups.

Historical studies allocate 880,000 in addition to the 600,000 allocated directly by the vice-chancellor, of which 80,000 goes to finance the director of studies for the area. In addition, compensation has been budgeted for participation in the steering group, courses, doctoral seminars and other joint meetings.

There are therefore some differences between the various postgraduate education areas in terms of what is included in the budget for postgraduate education. This includes compensation for directors of studies, participation in steering groups and administration, but also, in some cases, courses, joint conferences, seminars, compensation for opponents, etc.

Table 4: Distribution of internal funds for doctoral education in 2025

	HS	KKT	PESO	MVS	UVS
Rector's funds	600,000	600,000	600	600,000	600,000
IFF	880,000	1,500,000	800,000	900,000	-
MK	-	400,000	-	-	-
Total	1,480,000	2,500,000	1,400,000	1,500,000	600,000
Number of substances	5	7	6	1	7
Salaries (excluding courses)	527,000	1,500,000	985,000	1,100,000	600,000
Operations ¹⁶	285,000	326,000	150,000	400,000	
Courses ¹⁸	170,000	720,000	255,000	(50,000) ²¹	XX ²²
Assessment groups					
Director(s) of studies	40	55/0 10% [9] ²³	25	30	-
Steering group chair	15	20	10	10	10
Steering group members	2	(-)	0–2.5%	5	
Administrative staff*	5	140	30	20	Na
Research coordinator	-	-	-	-	10

¹⁵ In 2024, approximately 1.1 million was allocated to IFF, i.e. a total of 1.7 million.

¹⁶ This includes activities such as internal conferences, workshops, doctoral student coffee breaks, writing groups, etc.

¹⁷ Of this, 350,000 consists of extra expense funds that doctoral students can apply for.

¹⁸ Only KKT has subject-specific courses in its budget.

¹⁹ Two compulsory area courses (124 and 50 clock hours respectively) and one subject course each (64 clock hours for each) for the seven subjects included.

²⁰ Two compulsory courses comprising 7.5 credits. In 2024, 120 clock hours were allocated to each of the courses.

²¹ The figure refers to 2024, as no courses will be offered in 2025.

²² Teaching in the area's only course: UVS introductory course (7.5 credits) is paid for by the subjects. The research coordinator is the course coordinator and gives the introduction.

²³ One ÖSS professor receives 0% and another 5%. The remaining 10% gives a total of 55%.

²⁴ One ÖSS professor.

²⁵ The current chair receives 10% and performs the remainder within the scope of their ÖSS professorship. Previously, the chair received 20%.

²⁶ The directors of studies sit on the steering group and receive their remuneration in connection with their assignment as directors of studies. Doctoral student representatives receive 3.5% (two people).

²⁷ An ÖSS professor receives 0% and others 2.5%. Doctoral student representatives also receive 2.5% (five people).

Comment: The figures apply to 2025 and, naturally, the budgets will be higher for areas that admit doctoral students and therefore have more courses, etc. MK = Authority capital.

* An estimate from the respective department and administrator. It should be noted that the tasks included here differ between areas.

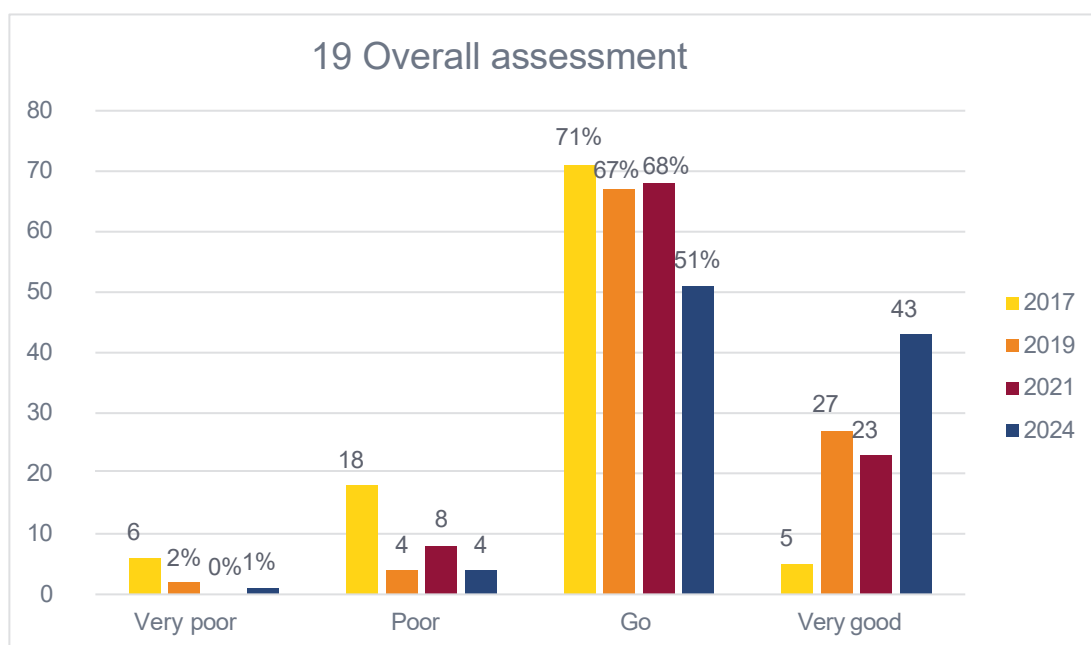
We note that several areas have compensation for doctoral student representatives in their budgets, even though there is separate funding for this. In 2025, the Vice-Chancellor allocated a total of 600,000 for this purpose. However, the Vice-Chancellor's funds are intended for representatives from the Doctoral Student Council, and some areas (e.g. PESO) have chosen to include additional doctoral student representatives who are then compensated with these funds. The areas have different numbers of doctoral student representatives and the remuneration varies slightly. KKT has two doctoral student representatives who are remunerated at 3.5 per cent, PESO has five representatives who are remunerated at 2.5 per cent, HS has three regular doctoral student representatives on the steering group and no deputies. In terms of compensation, they receive four hours per meeting for a few years. MVS has one representative and one deputy, where the representative is compensated at three per cent and the deputy at one per cent. UVS has one ph e doctoral student representative who is compensated at 16 hours per semester.

Resources are also allocated to the administrative support that each steering group and postgraduate education area has in the form of one or more administrators. However, the scope and form of support varies between areas, with KKT standing out with 140 per cent administrative support, while other areas range between approximately 20–50 per cent of full-time employment. Those who work with administrative support for doctoral education at the departments have partly different tasks and responsibilities, but according to the information we have received from them, the heads of department and the steering group chairs, their work includes acting as secretaries in steering groups, administering Ladok, arranging doctoral thesis defences, archiving and registering doctoral student matters, planning and arranging workshops and conferences, etc. It should be noted that in addition to this administrative support at the departments, two people at AVM work full-time with doctoral education issues, and administrative support is also provided by both the HR and Finance departments (among others).

2.6 How has it gone, 2010–2024?

Both internal and external evaluations show that the university's doctoral education is generally of high quality. Interviews and doctoral student surveys (SH 2025) show that doctoral students are generally satisfied with their education and working situation, although they also point to several challenges and areas for improvement. The perception that doctoral students are satisfied has also been reinforced over time (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Overall assessment of doctoral education²⁸



To provide an overview of how doctoral education in the university's various subjects has developed over time, we have compiled basic statistics in Table 5. This shows clear differences between subjects, particularly in terms of the number of doctoral students and doctoral theses examined. With 25 theses, Environmental Studies is the subject that has had the most public defences during the period 2010–2024. At the School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies (NMT), to which Environmental Studies belongs, there were previously a few other subjects that have now been discontinued (e.g. biology and chemistry). If these natural and life science subjects are included, NMT reaches just under 40 doctoral theses examined for the period 2010–2024.

History is also a relatively large subject, with a total of 23 doctoral theses examined between 2010 and 2024. This is followed by political science with 21 theses (including two licentiate theses), media and communication studies with 16, and sociology with 13. Other postgraduate education subjects have fewer doctoral theses.

²⁸ Survey question: "What overall assessment would you give your doctoral education so far?"
Source: Doctoral student survey 2024, Question 19, Figure 49 (SH 2025, p. 39).

dissertations (see Table 5). Subjects that have recently been granted degree-awarding powers, journalism (2021) and public administration (2025), have, for obvious reasons, not yet had any public defences.

Researchers at the university have also successfully applied for external funding to start new research schools in collaboration with other higher education institutions. For example, in 2021, media and communication studies started a research school with funding from the Swedish Research Council, focusing on digital media, school and physical activity. In 2022, the Swedish Research Council decided to fund 10 new research schools in the humanities and social sciences, five of which include Södertörn University.²⁹ These five new research schools temporarily changed the distribution between doctoral students funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation (primarily through BEEGS) and other funders, as around half of those admitted belonged to BEEGS in 2023. In 2024, BEEGS once again accounted for the largest cohort of new admissions, with 18 doctoral students (eight of whom went to PESO, five to MVS, three to HS and two to KKT). In addition, two doctoral students have been admitted to UVS.

The number of active doctoral students at the university was 139 (of whom 68 per cent were women) on 31 December 2024, and of these, five were admitted at other higher education institutions. At the corresponding point in time in 2022, the total number of doctoral students was 112.

²⁹ The five research schools that were added in 2022 are: (1) The Future of Democracy: Cultural Analyses of Illiberal Populism in Times of Crisis; (2) Gender, Humanities and Digital Culture; (3) Research School in Political History of Ideas; (4) The Transformation of Reading and Source Criticism in Digital Cultures; (5) Research School in Islamic Studies.

Table 5: Statistics on doctoral education by area and subject, 2010-2024³⁰

<i>Research areas and subjects</i>	<i>Degree award. (year)</i>	<i>Doctoral students admitted students</i>	<i>Doctoral theses.*</i>	<i>Degree SH/ other**</i>	<i>Doctoral degrees K/M (%)</i>	<i>Super visor K/M (%)</i>	<i>Full-time equivalent lents</i>	<i>Prof/ doc (2024)</i>
HS	2010	84	53	30/23	65/35	32/68	8.5	10/21
Archaeology	2010	11	4	2	50/50	0/100	1.84	1
History	2010	30	23	10/13	54/46	36/64	11.74	3
Ethnology	2010	17	10	5/5	80/20	60/40	10.61	2/6
History of ideas	2010	9	6	5	83/17	33/67	7.38	4
Religious Studies	2012	17	10	5/5	60/40	33/67	11.09	4/3
KKT	2010	96	51	40/11	54/66	56/44	9.8	25/31
CPK	2013	15	5	4/1	40/60	40/60	9.89	2
Aesthetics	2010	10	7	7	57/43	43/57	6.25	2
Philosophy	2010	16	10	8	30/70	60/40	11.90	4
Gender studies	2011	12	4	4	75/25	100/0	9.64	3/4
Art	2014	7	4	3/1	50/50	50/50	6.61	5
Literary studies	2015	10	6	3	67/33	67/33	6.56	2
MKV	2010	26	16	11/5	80/20	42/38	17.69	7
MVS	2010	45	32	21/11	68/32	36/64	20.93	8
PESO***	2010	80	42	28/14	42/58	30/70	13.55	24/38
Business Administration	2010	17	7	7	43/57	29/71	22.78	7
Journalism	2021	5	0	0	Na	Na	8.75	1/5
Economics	2014	7	4	2/2	50/50	25/75	6.53	3/6
Social work	2019	7	1	1	0	0	17.44	2
Sociology	2010	19	13	6/7	69/31	54/46	12.37	6
Political science	2010	25	17	12/5	47/53	41/59	13.43	5
UVS****	2017	28	4	4	83/17	67/33	Na	Na
CPK	2022	2	0	0	100/0	100/0	Na	Na
History	2022	1	0	0	100/0	100/0	Na	Na
History of ideas	2023	1	0	0	Na	Na	Na	Na
Literary studies	2022	1	0	0	0/100	100	Na	Na
MKV	2021	4	0	0	100/0	50/50	Na	Na
Pedagogy	2018	10	2	1	78/22	55/45	9.12	3/4
Swedish	2018	9	7	3/4	86/14	83/17	17.54	2/8
Other substances*****	Na	30	23	0	57/43	35	Na	Na
TOTAL	Na	363	205	123/82	53	36/64	Na	78/121

*Number of theses approved 2010-2024, including those written by doctoral students admitted before 2010.

**Number of theses examined by SH and theses written by doctoral students placed at (and funded by) SH but where the degree was awarded at other higher education institutions (2010-2024).

***The table applies to developments up to 31 December 2024, but it should be noted that public Administration was granted degree-awarding powers in spring 2025.

****The table applies to developments up to 31 December 2024, but it should be noted that Political Science was dual-affiliated with UVS in autumn 2025.

Other subjects/environments are those in which theses have been produced but which do not have their own degree-awarding powers or are not included in an area with degree-awarding powers, or which have subsequently been discontinued.

³⁰ The data is based on annual compilations from the departments and the library, as well as annual reports. There may be some uncertainty in the statistics, partly because changes may have occurred at subject level that have not been captured in the departments' compilations.

as separate subjects: biology (5), CBEES (1), chemistry (2), life sciences (3), molecular biology (2), media technology (3), rhetoric (4), and the Institute of Contemporary History (3).

The statistics shown in Table 5 should be of interest to individual subjects, steering groups and other actors who are involved in various ways in postgraduate education. We would like to highlight two aspects where there are major differences between subjects: volume and gender.

Volume differences

The differences in volume between subjects are clear, with environmental science standing out with 45 admissions (and 23 doctoral degrees) for the period 2010–2024, a figure that is largely explained by the fact that environmental science is the only subject in its field.

History, with a total of 30 doctoral students admitted (of whom 23 have completed their doctorates), is largely explained by the fact that, in addition to internal admissions, the subject has also had 17 doctoral students who have graduated from other higher education institutions. Other differences in volume require a more detailed analysis (e.g. of how successful different subjects have been in obtaining external funding for doctoral positions), but we have not been able to carry out such an analysis.

A measure of success is that admitted doctoral students complete their education on schedule and that their theses are approved at a public defence. However, we do not have the data needed to calculate throughput, as this requires information about when doctoral students were admitted, whether there have been any interruptions or dropouts³¹, and how long³² it took each doctoral student to reach the public defence. Subjects (and areas) with a smaller proportion of completed theses may need to conduct further analysis of the causes and consequences. If it turns out that admitted doctoral students have not completed their studies (due to exceeding the study period, dropouts, study interruptions or other reasons), this should be investigated.

³¹ This may, *for example*, be due to the doctoral student changing workplace, funding running out (e.g. if the project has overrun), parental leave, illness, death or work environment problems (e.g. conflict with supervisor). We do not have the type of data needed to clarify throughput and its causes.

³² For 2024, the gross study time for the university's doctoral graduates was 5.5 years, which is shorter than the average in recent years and compared to the national average of 6 years (Annual Report for Södertörn University, 2024).

Gender differences

As shown in Table 5, there are several types of gender differences between research subjects at universities. Some subjects have a large majority of female doctoral students but a predominance of male principal supervisors (e.g. history of ideas). In other subjects, there is a majority of women among both supervisors and doctoral students (e.g. gender studies). Other subjects have an even gender distribution among doctoral students but an uneven gender distribution among principal supervisors (e.g. archaeology, business administration and environmental science, with a majority of male principal supervisors). Some subjects have an even gender distribution among both doctoral students and principal supervisors (e.g. sociology). There are explanations for the gender differences in doctoral education, including national and international development patterns, aspects that are again beyond the scope of this report. Based on a general desire to achieve gender-equal work environments, the statistics should nevertheless be of interest, for example in recruitment efforts.

3 Challenges

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses challenges relating to doctoral education at Södertörn University. The summary is based partly on previous evaluations and doctoral student surveys, and partly on the discussions we have held with representatives of the university's various stakeholders and organisational units (steering groups, subjects, study director networks, the library, the doctoral student council, the Faculty Board, AVM, heads of department and university management).

A general observation is that there is a high level of commitment to postgraduate education at the university, and our dialogues and submitted documentation have provided us with a large number of views and experiences, albeit relatively few concrete proposals. There is broad consensus on the main challenges: vulnerable environments, inadequate funding and resource allocation, complex organisation, and a number of other issues (doctoral student admissions, coordination, administrative procedures, career support, and language issues). At the same time, we have identified conflicts of interest and differing views on what works well and what works less well – particularly when it comes to resource allocation, the relationship between subjects and areas, and issues relating to dual research environments (BEEGS and UVS).

We would also like to emphasise that although we highlight identified problems and challenges in this chapter, this does not contradict the general picture of a well-functioning doctoral education at Södertörn University – as evidenced by evaluations, doctoral student surveys and our conversations with staff.

3.2 Vulnerable environments

The fact that several of the university's subjects are relatively small and therefore generally more vulnerable was already highlighted in the decision-making documentation when degree-awarding powers were granted in 2010. For this reason, multidisciplinary areas were considered to be of great importance in order to achieve the critical mass that was deemed necessary. In the decision on degree-awarding powers for the field of Critical and Cultural Theory, the benchmark of 15 doctoral students was set for a functioning postgraduate education environment (HSV, 2010c, p. 4), which can be compared with the Swedish Research Council's requirement of at least 9 doctoral students in the humanities.

During 2017–2020, UKÄ evaluated four of the university's doctoral programmes: art history, history, literary studies and economics.³³ For all of these subject areas, it was noted that one challenge is their relative small size: few doctoral students and limited resources, which means vulnerability and a risk of quality deficiencies and the environment becoming heavily dependent on individuals. During 2020–2022, the Swedish Higher Education Authority also conducted its own evaluations of ten subjects with doctoral programmes³⁴ and at the same time took note of the evaluations conducted by the UKÄ. In the Swedish Higher Education Authority's summary of the UKÄ's and its own evaluations, the small and vulnerable environments were highlighted as the first observation (SH 2022). In subjects with very few researchers, in some cases only two or three permanent researchers, it is a tough challenge to create a well-functioning environment with lively research seminars and a functioning supervisory committee.³⁵ Even with a dozen or so researchers with doctoral degrees, an environment can be considered relatively small and vulnerable, which is the case for most of the university's subjects with the right to award doctoral degrees. In such cases, the importance of larger contexts (multidisciplinary areas, national research schools and international contexts) increases. The problem with small and vulnerable environments therefore concerns both the resources for admitting doctoral students and the distribution of doctoral places, as well as the vitality of the surrounding research environment and the formal supervisory competence available.

3.3 Inadequate funding and resource allocation

Allocation of places

The question of how doctoral places are allocated at the university is linked to the section above on vulnerable environments, but since the issue of allocation is raised by many as a central problem, it requires a separate discussion. This is also an issue where different environments differ somewhat in terms of the

³³ Art history, history and literary studies all received an overall rating of High quality. Economics, on the other hand, as mentioned above, received an overall rating of Poor quality, which, even after consideration of the action report, led to the withdrawal of degree-awarding powers (UKÄ 2020).

³⁴ The following subjects were evaluated in this round: archaeology, ethnology, business administration, history of ideas, environmental science, education, religious studies, sociology, Swedish, and political science.

³⁵ In the evaluation of archaeology, it was noted that at the time (2020), the subject consisted of only 4–5 researchers (of whom only one was a tenured professor and one a tenured senior lecturer). Unsurprisingly, the evaluators concluded that “the subject’s greatest challenge concerns resources and critical mass, both in terms of the number of senior researchers and the number of doctoral students” (p. 3). It should also be noted that archaeology currently does not meet the university’s requirements of at least four full-time equivalents (it has just under two) and at least two associate professors (the subject has one associate professor and one professor) – see Table 5. It was also noted that the subject of history of ideas currently had only three doctoral students, which was assessed as “a small and vulnerable postgraduate education environment” (p. 2)

changes they wish to see. Most indications are that the resources for postgraduate education at the university will remain fairly constant at the current level for the next four years. The number of places that can be allocated each year from the state grant and funds from the Baltic Sea Foundation will therefore continue to be significantly fewer than the subjects that have or wish to obtain the right to examine doctoral students.

The question of the allocation of places concerns a) allocation to areas, and b) allocation to subjects/environments within areas. Decisions on allocation to areas are made by the Vice-Chancellor, while decisions on allocation within areas are made by the respective area steering group. As a rule, the steering groups apply a principle of fairness whereby all subjects must receive at least one doctoral student in each round; otherwise, a lottery is usually held. It is common for a new research subject to receive two places in the first round. A more detailed description of how the various areas operate is provided in Chapter 2.

Many are calling for a more long-term approach and clearer criteria for allocation at both university and subject area level. It should be noted that although the vice-chancellor/university management formally decides on the allocation of doctoral places, the vice-chancellor has delegated responsibility for developing principles for allocation to the Faculty Board – a task that is ongoing at the time of writing. Larger subjects often express the view that the allocation system for doctoral students should better reflect the size, needs and capacity of the subjects. Another view that is put forward is that the allocation of doctoral places should be strategic decisions based on quality considerations (e.g. how well the subject has handled doctoral students in terms of timely completion of their theses). This issue is closely linked to the complex organisation and the role of the postgraduate education areas (see below).

Funding

All heads of department and steering groups believe that the postgraduate education areas are underfunded in the sense that the 600,000 Swedish kronor allocated by the Vice-Chancellor to the departments for conducting postgraduate education does not cover all the costs involved. The remaining funds are taken from the departments' IFF. The budgets of the postgraduate education areas show that there are some differences between the items included, e.g. with regard to courses and administration (see Table 4). The differences in budgets/costs are also related to how each area is organised in terms of the number of compulsory courses, number of directors of studies, activities for doctoral students, etc. One view expressed by KKT and PESO is

that it is also unsatisfactory that the steering groups receive the same funding regardless of the size of the areas.

Opinions differ when it comes to the funding of the course offerings within UVS. IKL/KKT, for example, believes that it is reasonable for the courses in that area to be covered by Teacher Education in the same way that other departments fund courses in their own areas. Teacher Education, on the other hand, believes that it is reasonable for institutions with dual affiliations to bear that part of the costs.

Since the university's research grants are not expected to increase significantly, an increase in compensation to the postgraduate education areas from the current 600,000 would in practice mean a reduction in IFF, which in a way would be a zero-sum game for the institutions. The advantage of taking a portion from the institutions' IFF is that it may be beneficial for the areas/institutions to have the freedom to organise and budget for postgraduate education according to their own circumstances.

3.4 Complex organisation

General comments on complexity

Virtually all of the supporting documentation (evaluations and dialogue discussions) raises the issue that the organisation of doctoral education is complex. It should be noted that this was already apparent in the HSV's decision-making reasoning when the university was granted the right to award doctoral degrees in 2010. For example, in the decision-making reasoning for PESO, it was noted that the organisation was unnecessarily complex, with too many levels and an unclear division of responsibilities (HSV 2010a, p. 3). However, views on which relationships are most problematic and unclear differ somewhat, but the relationship between subjects on the one hand and BEEGS and doctoral education areas and their steering groups on the other is a recurring theme.

The fact that doctoral students belong to two or, in some cases, even more environments is identified as a source of concern, as there are too many environments to relate to and this can have a divisive effect on doctoral students. In the UN's summary of the many subject evaluations, the "organisational structure of postgraduate education" is highlighted as a particular point, noting that it involves many different levels (subjects, steering groups, departments, BEEGS, dual affiliation to UVS, other research schools and the Faculty Board). On the one hand, it is noted that this organisational complexity

can mean many points of contact, which can be positive, especially for doctoral students whose subject environments are small. On the other hand, it is observed that the complex organisation is perceived as difficult to understand, with occasionally unclear roles.

Several subject evaluations highlight positive aspects of complexity, such as the fact that the “extended environment” with research schools and decision-making bodies is seen as a “wealth” and that the organisation is “rational and flexible” (religious studies), that it is a strength that “doctoral students initially get to interact with doctoral students from other subjects” (business administration), that doctoral students have good access to “several research training environments” (history of ideas), that the organisation has a “transparent division of responsibilities” (sociology) and that assessors “have not been able to note any significant problems in the relations between HLK, PESO and the Faculty Board” (political science). In our discussions with the steering groups, positive assessments were also made of the procedures and guidelines for doctoral education. Examples of more negative perceptions of the organisation are that it appears “somewhat overloaded and unnecessarily complicated” (sociology), “cumbersome” (political science), and that it can “contribute to pressure and division” (religious studies), for example with regard to expectations of doctoral student representation in various bodies, participation in various seminar series, etc.

Furthermore, some of UKÄ's assessment groups for subject evaluations have pointed out the complex organisation of doctoral education at SH. In the assessment of the subject of art history (2017), it is noted that the relationship between the subject and the area (read: steering group) is characterised by a “complicated structure” which can lead to “misunderstandings” and “unclear division of responsibilities” (UKÄ 2017, p. 46). Similar formulations are that relations between organisational units “have not functioned optimally” and that “the picture presented is somewhat unclear” (UKÄ 2017, pp. 47, 54). The relationship between subject environments and BEEGS is also highlighted as something that involves “cultural differences” (UKÄ 2017, p. 46), where the language issue becomes central as BEEGS is an entirely English-speaking environment, while certain humanities subject environments in particular are Swedish-speaking (UKÄ 2018a, p. 109), which is also reflected in the language in which the theses are written (see Table 5). The UKÄ's assessment group for history also highlights that the organisational complexity at SH does not only apply to doctoral education but appears to be a general problem that also affects teachers and researchers (UKÄ 2018a, p. 114).

Areas with few joint courses and a lack of clearly *joint* scientific activities may be at risk, as UKÄ emphasises that areas should be based on a common scientific foundation and not merely have an administrative function. On the other hand, both the UN and the external evaluators of political science have noted that PESO, among others, has a comparatively large scope of compulsory interdisciplinary courses (see Table 2), all of which are at introductory doctoral level. To date (spring 2025), UKÄ

has only evaluated subjects, not subject areas. Some of UKÄ's subject evaluations also emphasise the subject's ability to stand on its own two feet, rather than being dependent on a context outside the subject.³⁶ The picture of the importance of the field is thus somewhat fragmented, and it is also clear that views on the role of the field differ between different environments at the university.

Similar criticism of an overly complex organisation for doctoral education emerged in several of the dialogues we had with steering groups and other actors within higher education. Comments have been made that “no one is responsible for the whole”, that the organisation is “rigidly operated” and, above all, that the division of roles between subjects and areas is considered unclear, making it difficult to know who is responsible for what within doctoral education. The network of directors of studies stated that doctoral students are sometimes sent back and forth between different people and units without receiving proper answers to their questions – someone must take overall responsibility, either at subject or area level. At the same time, it has been noted that administrative support for doctoral education is in most cases completely lacking at subject level.

It has been pointed out that responsibility is unclear when it comes to doctoral students' social situation – including visa issues, housing and the like – something that has been raised by the Director of Studies Network, the UN, several steering groups, doctoral students and AVM. At times, it has been unclear who is responsible for newly arrived foreign doctoral students in particular – HR, the Director of Studies for BEEGS, the Director of Studies for an area, or the subject? The Director of Studies for BEEGS has received much praise for his study-related social support in surveys, conversations and evaluations. However, it has also been pointed out that it is not reasonable for BEEGS to provide study-related social support, including an introductory week, for doctoral students who do not belong to BEEGS. The need for a clearer division of responsibilities and coordination has been highlighted. It has also been suggested that both directors of studies and the steering groups' administrators for doctoral education sometimes express frustration that their mandates and tasks are unclear – which is also related to the fact that procedures differ between areas.

The creation of a network for the university's directors of studies is generally considered to be very important, both for the exchange of experience and for the coordination of, for example, introductions and social activities. A similar network is also in the pipeline for the departments' administrators for doctoral education, which is also considered important for the exchange of experience and coordination. At the same time, it should be noted that "networks" have

³⁶ See, for example, UKÄ's evaluation of economics (UKÄ 2018b, 2020).

unclear mandates – decision-making power remains with other bodies (department heads, steering groups, faculty boards and vice-chancellors).

Could it be that the perception of unclear roles and that issues and individuals “fall between the cracks” is primarily due to the fact that formal decision-making power in some cases is too far removed from the environment in which doctoral education is conducted? This is a view that has been expressed by PESO, HS and FN, among others. We will return to what delegation might look like in this case, and whether delegation would remedy the problems, in Chapter 4. It is also relevant that the doctoral student surveys have shown persistent experiences of negative stress. In 2021, 64% responded that they experienced this to a high or very high degree. In the 2024 survey, 54% responded that they experienced negative stress to a high or very high degree. Experiences of a complex and unclear organisation, as evident in other documentation, may be at least one contributing factor to perceived stress.

Regardless of how the complexity of the organisation is managed, it is clear that the division of responsibilities between levels and units needs to be clarified and/or communicated better, especially the relation between subjects and areas, as this is where the right to award degrees lies. It is worth repeating that an area should not only have an administrative role but must also constitute an integrated scientific environment.

Dual environments: BEEGS and UVS

Belonging to dual environments, specifically BEEGS and UVS, deserves special attention, something that is highlighted in virtually all of the supporting documentation. The UN's summary of previous subject evaluations states that BEEGS fulfils an important social function where doctoral students get to know each other across subject boundaries, and that BEEGS provides good social and practical support for studies.

The doctoral student surveys show that a clear majority of BEEGS doctoral students are satisfied both with their first year at BEEGS and, more generally, with belonging to two environments – positive attitudes that have also strengthened over time. In 2024, 83% of respondents stated that it had been good or very good to be

³⁷ There are certain differences in the responses depending on which institutions the doctoral students belong to – figures that should, however, be interpreted with caution given both internal and external non-response (25–41% of those who participated in the survey did not respond to these questions). Respondents affiliated with PESO in the 2024 survey are most satisfied with being at BEEGS in their first year (69%), followed by MVS (57%), KKT (53%) and HS (38%). Those who show the greatest dissatisfaction with being at BEEGS in their first year belong to HS (23%), followed by MVS (14%), PESO (13%) and KKT (6%).

placed at BEEGS during their first year – an increase from 60% in 2019.³⁸ The responses should be interpreted with great caution, partly because the response rate is low, and partly because it is largely doctoral students who are at the beginning of their education who have responded. First-year doctoral students only have experience of being in the BEEGS environment and therefore have nothing to compare with, as they have not yet made a physical move. Analyses of doctoral students at different stages of their education carried out by FN point to a more complex picture (SH 2022).

In general, the proportion of doctoral students who think it is positive to belong to both a subject environment and BEEGS has increased, from 76% in 2021 to 94% in 2024, although there are some differences depending on the area of study.³⁹

Positive reviews of CBEES/BEEGS as a research and doctoral education environment are also evident in the evaluation conducted in spring 2025 at the initiative of the UN. The external evaluators consider BEEGS to be a highly effective environment for doctoral education (Faculty Board, 2025, p. 7). The assessors further consider that the initial physical placement of doctoral students at BEEGS should be retained, but at the same time believe that a more flexible solution should be introduced, whereby the stay can be shortened or extended, depending on “needs within certain subjects” and whether there is relevant supervisory competence within CBEES/BEEGS. The assessors make special mention of doctoral students with a natural science focus, whose stay may need to be shorter than one year. The assessors also note, as has been mentioned in other documentation, that BEEGS fulfils a social function for the doctoral student community.

At the same time, critical views on dual affiliations have emerged in our documentation and discussions, particularly from a couple of the university’s larger subject areas (especially from representatives of environmental science and MKV). These critical voices argue, among other things, that BEEGS is not considered to provide the scientific training that doctoral students need, that the Baltic Sea perspective should be guaranteed through the subjects (especially subjects with Baltic Sea professors) and that it is difficult to see any point in separating BEEGS doctoral students from other doctoral students within a subject (unlike doctoral students who are affiliated with both UVS and another research programme). It is also perceived as confusing that doctoral students who belong to BEEGS

³⁸ Survey question: “As a member of BEEGS, how do you feel about the following? Being affiliated with both BEEGS and another postgraduate education environment.” Source: Doctoral Student Survey 2024, Question 18, Figure 45, p. 37.

³⁹ According to the 2024 Doctoral Student Survey, doctoral students at PESO are the most satisfied (63%), followed by MVS (57%), KKT (53%) and HS 46%.

⁴⁰ This is also a request that has been raised in our discussions with the MVS steering group, which considers a six-month stay at BEEGS to be sufficient. Similar proposals have been received from representatives of MKV.

have two different directors of studies to turn to. The fact that doctoral students are split between BEEGS and the subject environment is perceived as detrimental to identity and quality within the subject. Also relevant here is the more general criticism of an unnecessarily complex organisation with unclear roles that has emerged in the UN's subject evaluations and in our discussions in this review.

The dual affiliation of doctoral students within UVS is also an issue that has been raised in several of our discussions within the university. Essentially, two critical views have emerged: (1) that there will be increased competition for doctoral places within UVS, as already noted in the section on funding and resource allocation, and (2) that the environment within UVS risks becoming fragmented as more subjects become dual-affiliated. When we visited the UVS research day in November 2024, it was suggested that increased subject breadth could be a strength, for example in terms of supervisor competence, but that this also raises the question of what UVS actually means as a scientific field. However, representatives of UVS said that the sense of belonging to UVS has grown over time as more subjects have become dual-affiliated. The overall picture is nevertheless that there is concern about how UVS as a field will develop as more subjects become dual-affiliated, while no concrete proposals for solutions have been put forward (other than limiting the number of members in the steering group).

Representatives of UVS have also highlighted administrative and financial coordination problems with other subjects and areas, which we will return to later in this chapter.⁴¹The Director of Studies Network also stated that dual affiliation to UVS entails a particular complexity due to a “different organisation” compared to other areas.

3.4 Other

Assessment and admission of doctoral students

Doctoral student admission is not only a matter of resource allocation, as discussed above, but also of assessment and admission procedures. Several steering groups, in particular HS, KKT and PESO, have criticised what is perceived as an unnecessarily complicated process for the admission of doctoral students, especially BEEGS doctoral students. That CBEES appoints a representative to participate in the assessment of

⁴¹ A specific issue raised by representatives of the library concerns how dual affiliation should be reflected in doctoral theses. At present, there are no clear guidelines for this.

The ÖÖ relevance in the applications is considered to be an unnecessarily bureaucratic and conflict-creating construct. The Baltic Sea Foundation's mainly geographical criteria are not considered particularly difficult to interpret by most authorities. It is questioned why employment at CBEES in particular is considered to give interpretative priority, and at the same time why certain people who do not belong to CBEES have been entrusted with the task of assessment.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that in some cases the CBEES representative has exceeded their mandate and engaged in subject-specific interpretations that fall outside the scope of Baltic Sea relevance. At the same time, it should be noted, as the UN has noted in its decision protocols, that certain subjects and steering groups have occasionally ranked applicants at the top who they themselves consider to have weak or non-existent ÖÖ relevance. There is clearly a need to clarify both what is meant by ÖÖ relevance and where the prerogative of interpretation should lie. We will return to these issues in Chapter 4, where a couple of alternative solutions are presented.

Some environments, primarily the IPA, raise the issue of the admission and conditions for doctoral students with previous professional experience, often employment in the police authority and external funding, but who cannot be admitted as collaborative doctoral students. The university should develop a routine for handling this type of doctoral student.

Subjects without doctoral education rights

Another difficulty that has been highlighted is the limited opportunity for subjects that do not currently belong to an existing postgraduate education area but which meet the requirements to be a postgraduate education subject to be included and obtain postgraduate education rights. The problem is linked to both funding – the more subjects within an area, the fewer places per subject – and organisation – the fact that the areas are so closely linked to institutions means that subjects can end up in areas that are less suitable for them than they would be if they were considered solely in terms of research focus. The possibility of applying for additional areas has been raised as an alternative, but this has not led to any action. Even though it is not an automatic right for all subjects to become postgraduate education subjects, it should be possible for subjects that meet the requirements and where the university considers it strategically desirable to be included in a relevant area.

Coordination and communication

A recurring point in our documentation is that there is no university-wide coordination function for doctoral education issues, either academic or administrative. For example, it is pointed out that it is difficult to get answers to questions regarding doctoral students and doctoral education and that people are referred between different parts of the university. A common view is that no one seems to “own” the issues. The current director of studies for BEEGS is perceived to have taken informal overall responsibility and, among other things, initiated the joint director of studies network. This forum and the work that the BEEGS director of studies does for all doctoral students is highlighted as positive by many, and there is a desire for this role to be formalised and clarified in terms of the relationship between BEEGS and other doctoral students. There is consensus that an introductory week for doctoral students is beneficial and should be continued, but that responsibility for this should be clarified and redistributed. BEEGS cannot take responsibility for doctoral students who do not belong to BEEGS.

One view expressed by several parties in this context is that, even though it is described in the Rules of Procedure for Departments, Teacher Education and CBEES, the role of the director of studies needs to be clarified and streamlined. There are particularly divided opinions on the fact that, unlike the others, KKT has chosen a model with one director of studies per subject. KKT sees great advantages in the proximity that results from each subject having its own director of studies, while several other bodies feel that this makes it more difficult to communicate collectively with KKT.

The need for better communication between different bodies involved in admissions (e.g. AVM and departments) and thesis defence (e.g. the Library and departments) is also highlighted as an area for development. From the library's perspective, for example, it is felt that certain supervisors and supervisory committees do not take sufficient account of the guidelines that exist regarding timetables, etc. In order to produce theses on time, it is necessary to be informed well in advance of any delays in the doctoral students work.

There is also a need for support in terms of career planning, as pointed out by the Doctoral Student Council, among others. Although some efforts are being made at subject and area level, these do not appear to be coordinated and are often ad hoc.

Career planning needs to be taken into account more explicitly in the planning of courses, ISP programmes, departmental service, and the special workshops and training opportunities organised at the university.

The language issue

The language issue is identified as a problem area in both previous evaluations and in the documentation we have for this review, and it is raised by doctoral students and senior staff as well as by the administration and academia (and does not only apply to doctoral students). The main problem is that English- and Swedish-speaking doctoral students are given partly different conditions and that it is not clearly communicated to potential applicants which working language applies in the environment. The issue is also linked to the fact that support for international doctoral students (and other international employees) is perceived as inadequate at the university.

It is clear that the official language is Swedish, but there are still areas where information and communication in English could be improved. For example, the dialogues highlight that there is a lack of information in English in Retendo, Agresso, etc., which means that information is missed or makes things more complicated than they should be. BEEGS, the Director of Studies Network and the Doctoral Student Council believe that it is a problem that courses in Swedish for international doctoral students are not guaranteed to be offered regularly and have, for example, been cancelled on occasion due to staff shortages. There is a strong desire for this support to be guaranteed.

4 Choices

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss different ways of dealing with the problems and challenges identified in previous chapters. We present different courses of action and discuss their advantages and disadvantages, particularly when it comes to vulnerable environments, resource allocation and the complex organisation. By highlighting courses of action rather than unilaterally recommending a particular solution, we provide a more reflective and, in our opinion, more useful basis for decision-making. However, on some more specific issues, we do recommend specific solutions, particularly with regard to doctoral student admissions, coordination functions and the language issue. We realise that there are more alternatives than those we highlight here and that in many cases it is possible/desirable to combine several alternatives for certain problem areas. We are also aware that there are certainly more advantages and disadvantages to our proposed alternatives than those we have identified, and that other conclusions can be drawn from our analysis of the supporting data.

4.2 How do we create strong environments?

The goal of creating strong environments for research and doctoral education is addressed in the university's Development Plan for 2020–2024/2025–2026, which emphasises, among other things, that a “culture of quality based on collegiality and core academic values” should be “further developed” and that the proportion of teachers with permanent employment should be increased.

Building strong environments is not just a matter of funding and resource allocation (which will be discussed in the next section), but also of strategies for recruitment, profiling, research collaboration and the broader question of how to create a creative environment. The university's guidelines for establishing and discontinuing doctoral programmes state that the right to award degrees requires a functioning research environment within

⁴² <https://www.sh.se/om-oss/strategier-och-ekonomi/utvecklingsplan-2020-2024?query=utvecklingsplan>

the subject with ongoing research and active participation in higher seminars, and that the subject has at least four full-time equivalent permanent researchers, including at least one professor and two associate professors.

All our documentation shows that most of the university's research subjects are relatively small and vulnerable, often with only a handful of doctoral students and relatively few professors and senior lecturers. In some cases, doctoral students experience loneliness, and in some subjects, the research environment is heavily dependent on one or two leading figures and temporary external contributions. It should be emphasised that a large environment is not necessarily the same thing as a strong environment, but it is clear that environments that are too small are not good for either quality or the working environment.

In light of the challenges identified and the various proposals we have taken on board in discussions, three main options for strengthening doctoral education environments can be identified: a) provide support to vulnerable environments, b) close down vulnerable environments, c) integrate small environments into larger contexts. Obviously, these choices should be made in relation to the university's overall strategic choices and directions in terms of subjects and profiles.

- a) *Support vulnerable environments.* This can be said to be the current approach at Södertörn University, where the number of doctoral programmes has roughly doubled during the period 2010–2024, despite the fact that resource allocation has not increased to the same extent. The advantages are that it provides opportunities for new subjects to get started and grow over time, and that it increases pluralism in the university's doctoral education. The disadvantages, as already mentioned, are that many subjects become vulnerable, that doctoral students and researchers experience loneliness and a high degree of dependence on individuals, and that there is a risk of quality deficiencies in supervision and research courses when the necessary expertise is not always available.
- b) *Close vulnerable environments.* The advantages of this proposal are that it frees up resources that can be concentrated in, for example, thematic initiatives, economies of scale can be achieved in areas such as administration, vulnerabilities in small subjects are reduced, the risk of loneliness for doctoral students and researchers is reduced, and the conditions for long-term initiatives are improved. The disadvantages include the fact that a closure process creates conflict and, at least in the short term, does not save costs, that valuable expertise is lost, and that scientific pluralism at the university is reduced.
- c) *Integrate vulnerable environments into larger contexts.* This method was used when the subject and field of environmental science was formed, based on a number of previously existing subjects focused on natural and social sciences. Similar discussions have been held within higher education in the context of other subjects and fields, but no concrete initiatives have been taken in this direction. Similar to closure, the advantages of integration are that the risks

associated with small environments are reduced and the conditions for long-term investments are strengthened. Unlike the outright closure of small research environments, integration does not necessarily weaken scientific pluralism, but can, in the best case scenario, lead to more coordinated pluralism as opposed to many small “islands”. Disadvantages include the risk that small but successful subjects may be “swallowed up” and lose their position within larger environments, and that competition for resources will not necessarily disappear but will shift downwards and inwards within the organisation.

The three alternatives are not necessarily incompatible – it is conceivable that different solutions could be chosen within different areas of postgraduate education. Regardless of which path is chosen, however, we would like to emphasise that subject environments must continuously meet the basic requirements for a functioning research environment. This should be followed up in the UN's evaluations. We consider the requirement of at least one professor and two senior lecturers to be minimal. We therefore *propose* that the requirement for degree-awarding powers at doctoral level be increased to two professors and three senior lecturers.

It is also unacceptable for doctoral students to risk being completely alone in their subject. To counteract such risks, continuous analysis is required within subjects and areas of throughput, the quality of the research environment, competencies and forecasts (regarding, among other things, retirements and recruitment). We also propose that the Faculty Board explicitly include this in its regular evaluations.

A particular dilemma concerns subjects that meet the formal criteria for doctoral education and are seeking degree-awarding powers but do not yet have them – an issue that has become topical for Media Technology and Police Science, for example.

If a subject cannot stand on its own, the alternative is to apply to be included in an existing postgraduate education area or, together with other subjects, to apply for a new area. One possible approach is to conduct a financial analysis before deciding on the rights of subjects that meet all the criteria for obtaining degree-awarding powers at doctoral level: *will there be sufficient resources to finance a new doctoral programme without affecting other subjects?*

⁴³ This requirement corresponds to that applied at Malmö University, for example. Linnaeus University and Karlstad University also require at least two professors. See also the account in Chapter 2 on formal requirements for degree-awarding powers.

and/or do you want to reprioritise resources? Thus, if a subject meets all quality criteria *and* secures long-term funding for doctoral education through external means, degree-awarding powers should be granted. However, the university may choose a path where resources and rights are separated in a different way than today, in which case the question of rights becomes more of a strategic issue.

Our recommendation is that the university management, together with the Faculty Board and the heads of department, take a strategic approach to the question of how our subject and area environments should be developed. Virtually all environments strive to offer programmes at all levels, but is this really reasonable and desirable?

4.3 How can resource allocation be optimised?

In our previous description and discussion of funding and resource allocation, it emerged, among other things, that both conditions and allocation principles differ somewhat between areas. We have identified two general ways of managing resource allocation (i.e. of IFF funds and BEEGS doctoral positions): allocating resources evenly between areas and subjects, or concentrating resources on specific initiatives.

- a) *Distribute evenly.* This is the principle that has guided Södertörn University to date, particularly with regard to the allocation of BEEGS doctoral positions. The principle has been applied at both university and area level. The advantages are that the principle can be perceived as a form of fairness – that all scientific areas receive an equal share of the available resources. Another advantage is that the principle facilitates planning within subjects and areas. Disadvantages include the fact that the allocation to subjects has decreased in most areas because the number of research subjects has increased significantly without a corresponding increase in resources. Another disadvantage is that the principle is not necessarily perceived as fair, as different areas have different volumes and results (in terms of, for example, the number of subjects, professors, senior lecturers, publications, citations and externally funded research projects).

- b) *Concentrate resources*. This method is allied with the idea of rewarding "excellence" and is often highlighted as a success factor in achieving excellence. The question is how and to what extent resources should be concentrated. The advantages are that a concentration of greater resources enables a long-term perspective, makes it easier to attract strong researchers to the environment and, ultimately, creates opportunities to generate knowledge and research results that have a significant impact on science and society. Another advantage is that it creates larger doctoral student groups. The disadvantages are that concentration risks internal conflicts that impair the working climate and quality of research, that colleagues abandon environments that lose out in the allocation of resources, and that there will be at least short-term transition costs. There are no set principles for how and to what extent resources should be concentrated, but we recommend that some form of quality measure should be decisive.⁴⁴In any case, the concentration of resources should be the result of strategic considerations at management level, in which case parameters other than existing excellence may also be taken into account.

To move forward in this discussion, we believe that a distinction should be made between distribution at the university level and at *the departmental level*. We propose the following:

- *At the university level*, the distribution of resources between areas should not automatically be the same for all, but should be based on strategic considerations and take *quality measures* into account. We do not have an answer as to exactly what these measures or indices should be based on, but as previously proposed by PESO, among others, they could include the number of professors and senior lecturers (which relates to criteria for degree-awarding powers), scientific publications and citations, and external research projects.
- *At the subject level*, the allocation of resources to subjects should not automatically be the same for all (or "randomly distributed"), but should rather be based on a recurring analysis of each subject's *results* and *conditions* for doctoral education (including throughput and forecasts for the coming years), as well as opening up the possibility for *strategic initiatives* (e.g. for platforms, research centres

⁴⁴ Strategic profiling is another method, but this too must be based on clear quality measures and, moreover, be built on initiatives "from below" rather than from university management. As is well known, Södertörn University has established profiles – which, in addition to Baltic Sea/Eastern European research, are reflected in the five multidisciplinary platforms created within the university (on threatened democracy, digitalisation, memory studies, sustainability issues and social pluralism, see <https://www.sh.se/forskning/forskningsplattformar>).

or large-scale projects).⁴⁵

Another possibility is that the university's central allocation does not go through areas but is made directly to subjects or other environments, such as platforms, centres or large projects. The Baltic Sea Foundation's report on the Professors Programme at the university suggests that a doctoral position could be linked to each professorship. This is in line with the work currently underway in dialogue between the university and the foundation to introduce a form of support for strong research environments. If the Baltic Sea Foundation wishes to finance environments with doctoral positions, this will be another way of pooling resources. However, these environments do not necessarily have to be based on the existing Baltic Sea Programme.

Another possibility is to organise doctoral education around internal research schools consisting of a number of subjects that are appointed following an internal call for applications and are valid for four years, after which a new call for applications is issued. These calls should have different themes from year to year, and the research schools may vary in size.⁴⁶ Such a solution gives greater strategic decision-making power at university level, while at the same time weakening the areas. The question is whether, and if so how, collegial influence and scientific expertise will be incorporated into such centralised decision-making.

4.4 How can the organisation be made clear and effective?

There is no denying that the university's organisation of doctoral education is perceived as complex. At the same time, our study has shown that there are both positive and negative perceptions of this complexity, particularly when it comes to the relationship between subjects and areas and the dual affiliation to BEEGS and UVS.⁴⁷ In our opinion, it is particularly worrying that many people perceive roles and responsibilities to be unclear. We present here three main alternatives for how the organisation and governance can be clarified: a) strengthen the subject level, b) strengthen areas and steering groups, c) provide organisational freedom of choice. A fourth alternative would be to leave everything as it is now, but that would be to leave problems and challenges unaddressed.

⁴⁵ This proposal is based on a discussion held within the UN.

⁴⁶ The Swedish Research Council, for example, has a minimum requirement of nine doctoral students for its research schools in the humanities.

⁴⁷ The issue of BEEGS and UVS is dealt with separately in the next section.

- a) *Strengthen the subject level.* This has already been done in part within KKT, where each subject has its own director of studies for doctoral education. It should be noted that these directors of studies are generally professors. Strengthening the subject level could be achieved by giving the supervisory committees decision-making power when it comes to the appointment of assessment groups and supervisors (a review of the university's various delegation arrangements is needed), and by allocating administrative resources to the subject for doctoral education. Disadvantages include the loss of economies of scale and the need for increased resource allocation, not least for research administration. Another disadvantage is that the ability to take responsibility for effective, high-quality doctoral education may vary between subjects (as evaluations have shown), and that the quality would suffer if the areas' support and resources were weakened. There may also be significant differences between subjects, which doctoral students often highlight as a perceived problem. If the subjects are strengthened at the expense of the areas, this could possibly entail a risk of the degree-awarding powers being called into question in the event that the areas are subjected to an external evaluation.
- b) *Strengthen the areas.* This could mean, for example, increased delegation of responsibility from the UN to steering groups with regard to decisions on the admission of doctoral students and decisions on research courses. However, it can hardly mean a centralisation of power from the subjects to the steering groups, as the subjects' decision-making power is already weak. However, KKT could possibly transition from one director of studies per subject to one for the entire area. *Advantages* of strengthening the areas and their steering groups would include shorter and faster decision-making processes, greater influence on decisions by the scientific expertise available within the area (an important part of "collegial governance"), and the ability to exploit economies of scale, particularly in terms of administrative resources. Another advantage is that strengthened areas are conducive to deepening the scientific community, which can be crucial in the event of an external evaluation of areas. However, there is very little to suggest that UKÄ intends to evaluate entire areas. *Disadvantages* include that some, especially larger subject environments, may perceive strengthened areas as an unnecessary "overcoat", that the subject is mature and strong enough to make most decisions about doctoral education on its own. Another disadvantage may be the risk that certain strong subjects may gain significant informal influence at the subject area level to the detriment of other subjects, for example in terms of the allocation of doctoral positions.

- c) *Provide organisational freedom of choice.* To a certain extent, freedom of choice has already been realised, as the areas are in practice organised and financed in partly different ways (see Chapter 2, where these differences are described). It should be noted, however, that the differences that exist are not based on a clear strategy of allowing areas to "do as they please", but rather appear to have developed incrementally, without any overarching concept behind them. The advantages of organisational freedom of choice are that it allows greater consideration to be given to differences in preferences and conditions between areas, including the number and size of subjects, whether the environment is Swedish- or English-speaking, and that it increases the opportunity to offer in-depth rather than introductory (university-wide) courses. Disadvantages include the fact that if the conditions for doctoral students increasingly differ between areas and subjects, this may be perceived as unfair. Another disadvantage is that it may become more difficult to monitor quality and compliance with university-wide guidelines.

Regardless of which solution is chosen, it must be reiterated that areas are not only administrative units but also constitute – or should constitute – scientific communities. What the latter entails may vary, but it should include joint courses, research projects, seminars and conferences. Simply pointing out that the subjects are related is not enough – some form of continuous joint scientific activities is needed to legitimise the degree programmes that are linked to the area.

At the same time, the relationship between subjects and steering groups must be clarified – something that may require a revision of the university's working and delegation arrangements. The subjects are and remain the core of doctoral education – this is where the main responsibility for quality and implementation must lie – but at the same time, the areas' responsibilities need to be clarified, as an administrative and scientific complement. Further investigation is needed here, involving several relevant actors, including the UN and the steering groups. One proposal is also to review the composition of the steering groups and how they are appointed.

4.5 Proposal regarding BEEGS and UVS

It has already been noted that doctoral students' dual affiliation to BEEGS and UVS increases complexity, with several directors of studies, administrators and steering groups to deal with. We have also noted that there are both positive and negative attitudes towards and experiences of doctoral students' "dual affiliation". Here we present a number of options for action for both of these environments, as well as various advantages and disadvantages. For example, we see the following possible paths for BEEGS:

- a) *Retain the current organisation.* This includes the BEEGS doctoral students' first year at CBEES, the compulsory BEEGS course, the BEEGS director of studies, and the international and multidisciplinary environment that CBEES/BEEGS represents. *The advantage* is that the current organisation and research environment is highly appreciated by many doctoral students and also by individual subjects and steering groups, perhaps primarily smaller or medium-sized subjects. Another advantage is that this model is clear to the Baltic Sea Foundation, which funds these doctoral students. *The disadvantages* include the fact that the unclear division of responsibilities between subjects, steering groups and BEEGS thus remains, and that certain subjects continue to feel that their doctoral students "lose" a year before they enter the subject environment that is more important to them.
- b) *Make the BEEGS connection flexible.* This could mean, for example, that BEEGS doctoral students are given the opportunity to spend a shorter or longer period at CBEES via the subject HLK, i.e. not necessarily the 12 months that currently apply. This is a proposal put forward by the external evaluators of CBEES/BEEGS and is also supported by the steering group for environmental science (which recommends a 6-month stay at CBEES) and, not least, by the doctoral student council. Another option is to make it entirely optional whether doctoral students are placed at CBEES or directly in the subject area. *The advantages* of such solutions include increased freedom of action for departments and faster integration of doctoral students into the subject environments where they will defend their theses. *The disadvantages* are that the number of doctoral students in the CBEES environment will probably be significantly lower than today, which may impair the social environment's function and its multidisciplinary profile. At the same time, this may reduce the importance of CBEES as a university-wide environment in terms of seminar attendance. The question is also what consequences this may have for maintaining the relevance of the Baltic Sea and Eastern Europe in doctoral projects.
- c) *Reallocate roles from BEEGS to CBEES and steering groups/subjects.*

This solution would mean that CBEES would remain a research environment with seminars, conferences, publishing activities and that the introductory "Baltic Sea course" would still be offered. CBEES would also continue to offer various social activities, such as film screenings and study trips. However, doctoral students would not be physically located at CBEES, and the current duties of the director of studies at BEEGS would be transferred to other units, such as steering groups or a central study support function for *all* doctoral students at the university. *Advantages* include that the mission within CBEES can thus focus more on shaping the research environment, while avoiding the administrative responsibility for doctoral students. Other advantages are similar to those of the option with increased freedom of choice – doctoral students funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation would not be separated from other doctoral students, and doctoral students would be assigned their subject area early on, within which they would defend their thesis. *The disadvantage* is that the phasing out of BEEGS would, at least initially, probably meet with some resistance from BEEGS and possibly other stakeholders.

Our own proposal for BEEGS:

We recommend flexibility regarding physical location at CBEES. Increased flexibility satisfies both those who want a longer stay at CBEES and those who prefer a shorter time in this environment – a proposal put forward by the external evaluation of CBEES/BEEGS and also presented by the Doctoral Council and the Environmental Science department. A more far-reaching possibility is, as mentioned, to make it optional for subjects to allow their doctoral students to sit at BEEGS or to be physically placed in the subject environment from the outset. The scientific and social activities related to "Baltic Sea research", including doctoral conferences and seminars, as well as the so-called "Baltic Sea course", should continue and could possibly be handled by CBEES. This proposal would strengthen the subject environment, which is crucial for the quality of doctoral education, as it is within a scientific discipline and not within BEEGS that doctoral students defend their theses. At the same time, the advantages offered by CBEES/BEEGS as an international multidisciplinary environment remain.

In addition, we propose that the study administration at BEEGS be divided between a central support function at the university (see below) and the subject or area level. This would relieve the burden on BEEGS and reduce the risk of doctoral students seeking help "falling between the cracks". Our view is that, although the work done within BEEGS is appreciated and works well, it is confusing and unnecessary to have a formal organisation for this, whose responsibilities could be shared between a university-wide function and the areas/subjects. The central study support function that we propose below may be

needed for *all* international doctoral students, not just those funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation.

As regards UVS, we see four possible ways forward:

- a) *Allow continued dual affiliation.* The advantages of this are that all subjects would then have the same opportunity for dual affiliation, and that UVS would develop into a broader, multidisciplinary environment. The disadvantages are obvious: the chance for subjects to get a dual-affiliated doctoral student decreases with each new affiliated subject; UVS as a research environment risks becoming fragmented with an unclear identity; the administrative burden increases as more subjects are affiliated, and the steering group risks becoming too large.
- b) *Freeze the dual affiliation.* The advantages are that it allows for forward planning for subjects and UVS, and that UVS can more easily consolidate its environment compared to if dual affiliations continue. The disadvantages are that it will be perceived as very unfair by subjects that are UVS-relevant but not dual-affiliated, and that the UVS environment will continue to be perceived as fragmented.
- c) *Double affiliation is phased out – UVS becomes its own area/subject.* The solution is essentially the same as that chosen by Environmental Science when this area/subject was formed in 2010. The advantage of this solution is that UVS can define a coherent scientific profile in a much clearer way than is possible through double affiliations. One disadvantage is that it is not certain whether the conditions exist for UVS to constitute a research and education area “on its own” without relying on several other disciplines. Another disadvantage is that such a reorganisation would be fraught with conflict and would probably entail a complicated transition period lasting several years, to the detriment of

the doctoral students who already have dual affiliations.

- d) *Dual affiliation is being reconsidered.* This solution means that dual affiliation as a model remains, but that current dual affiliations are being reconsidered and new, stricter criteria are being introduced. One *advantage* would be that UVS would have the opportunity to clarify its research profile instead of, as is currently the case, being influenced by each new subject that is affiliated. Another advantage would be that dual affiliation could be made more strategic, for example based on invitation rather than application. *The disadvantage* is a likely conflict-ridden and messy process, as well as the fact that there is no guarantee that a re-evaluated dual affiliation will lead to a stronger or more integrated environment.

We have not yet reached a concrete position on UVS, except that we are opposed to continuing as we are now, with a constant expansion of dual affiliations. We hope that our analysis will be helpful for further discussion, regardless of the solution that is ultimately chosen.

- Criteria for assessing ÖÖ relevance are clarified through both internal dialogue and continued dialogue with the Baltic Sea Foundation.
- Assessment of ÖÖ relevance is delegated to the subject assessment groups.

Such delegation would strengthen collegial governance in the assessment process, but also places high demands on each subject to take the Baltic Sea Foundation's criteria seriously and, for example, not to top-rank applicants who the assessors themselves consider to have weak Baltic Sea relevance. The generally high quality of applicants for a BEEGS doctoral position does not trump Baltic Sea relevance.

The employment and funding model is another issue surrounding doctoral admissions that has been identified as problematic, particularly by the IPA, which does not have the authority to award doctoral degrees. If a person with a police degree is to be admitted as a doctoral student, it must be within one of the five existing research areas at SH.

Our guidelines state that when it comes to salaries for those employed as doctoral students at the university, the doctoral salary scale applies, while those with other types of employment who are permitted to pursue postgraduate education at a minimum of 50% capacity may be offered a different salary. This may be no less than the doctoral salary scale (Admission Regulations 2.3.3). It should therefore be possible to employ these individuals as, for example, lecturers in police training and admit them

into doctoral education in a suitable subject as long as they meet the requirements of the ASP for the specified subject. Another difficulty that is partly regulated in HF (Chapter 7, Section 36) and raised by IPA is the requirement that funding for all four years must be secured for the entire programme (i.e. all four years). One proposal is to approve certificates of responsibility for funding for a number of years in advance instead of advance payment of the entire amount. According to the university's admission regulations, a doctoral student can be admitted if it is assessed that funding can be secured for the entire programme. It should therefore already be possible to have a funding plan where not all funds need to be in place at the time of admission.

4.6 Proposals regarding coordination, language and administration

Coordination function

The need for a coordination function for study administration issues has been highlighted in several of the discussions we have held at the university.

The network of directors of studies, chaired by the BEEGS director of studies, already plays an important role in sharing information and experiences, but it is currently only an informal and advisory association. One specific issue concerns how BEEGS has assisted foreign students with contacts with authorities and various practical matters (e.g. regarding visas, personal identification numbers, accommodation, banking, insurance and the like). This support is invaluable, but it is not reasonable for BEEGS to take on all of this, especially as they only have doctoral students in their environment during the first year. The same applies to the introductory week organised by BEEGS, which is well organised and highly appreciated, but in which not only BEEGS doctoral students but also other doctoral students participate. Against this background, we *propose* that:

- a university-wide support and coordination function be established with specific responsibility for practical issues relating to doctoral students

Such a function could be led by a coordinator, who is also the convener of the Director of Studies Network. Consideration should also be given to formalising this network into a more permanent group (e.g. Council for Doctoral Student Issues). Other study administrative support should be handled at the steering group or subject level. It is crucial that doctoral students are not sent back and forth between units where no one takes responsibility for handling their problems. This may

also require that the role of the director of studies in the various areas be clarified with guidelines, as well as strengthened coordination with the staff who work with doctoral education issues in the joint administration.

The language issue

The language issue can be divided into two parts – firstly, the need for a common language for in-depth scientific discourse, and secondly, the need to include all employees, regardless of their native language, in all information flows. We understand that certain subjects, particularly in the humanities, express a need to conduct scientific discourse in Swedish and to publish texts written in this language. However, maintaining a Swedish-speaking environment is essentially impossible if the subject recruits doctoral students internationally who do not speak Swedish. Offering courses in the Swedish language is insufficient, as it takes time to learn the language and, above all, to be able to participate on equal terms in academic discourse in Swedish. Non-Swedish-speaking doctoral students and colleagues have expressed that they often feel excluded in environments where Swedish is spoken but where it is not explicitly stated that Swedish is the language of communication. There are basically only two solutions: either recruit only Swedish-speaking doctoral students, *or* adopt English for both scientific discussions and internal communication. In any case, if a good knowledge of Swedish is expected, this must be stated in the advertisements for doctoral positions. For other subjects, where conversations or texts in Swedish are not considered necessary for maintaining scientific quality, the only solution is to switch completely to communication in English.

After all, it is very important that the Swedish language course is offered regularly, and we believe that it should be formalised as part of the infrastructure of doctoral education in such a way that the Vice-Chancellor assigns the subject of Swedish to conduct this training twice a year and that the funding for this is included in the planning conditions.

Information on the staff web about various systems, etc. must be available in both Swedish and English. One initiative that has been taken is to update the content and create a clear structure on the "doctoral student page" on the staff web. This page is available in both Swedish and English.

We propose that the university's language policy be reviewed and clarified with regard to education and research.

Administrative procedures, etc.

The supporting documents contain a number of proposals concerning various administrative procedures and systems that may seem marginal in this context but are perceived as important and in need of improvement and change. We therefore propose the following:

- Make it possible to enter schedules for doctoral education in Timeedit
- Gather information about all doctoral courses offered in one place, including external courses, summer schools, etc.
- Create contact lists for active doctoral students and alumni (in compliance with GDPR)
- Produce information in English regarding central systems such as Agresso and Retendo
- Ensure that doctoral students' employment is handled in the same way in the different areas/subjects
- Facilitate the planning of thesis defences and publication of theses through improved communication between subjects/steering groups and the library
- Develop guidelines for doctoral students' institutional service

A general comment is that certain ambiguities and perceived problems may be a matter of communication and information rather than the guidelines themselves being unclear.

4.7 Concluding comment

The responses to the consultation show a significant level of engagement within our university on issues relating to doctoral education. The report has clearly served its intended purpose – to stimulate internal discussion on the organisation and funding of doctoral education. The responses also show which issues and proposals enjoy relatively strong support and which issues are subject to differing opinions.

The proposal for a coordinated, university-wide support function for doctoral students receives strong support. This largely involves gathering information and support on practical issues, especially for doctoral students who are in the early and final stages of their doctoral education.

There is also strong support for quality aspects being taken into account in how doctoral positions are allocated within higher education. However, opinions are divided on how this should be done and what quality actually means.

According to the Delegation Order, the Faculty Board has a mandate to develop proposals on this issue, which is currently underway.

Furthermore, there is a widespread view that the university needs a language policy that takes into account the need for an inclusive subject environment – in terms of social cohesion, information flow and scientific discourse.

As far as UVS is concerned, there is a general perception that the current model of dual affiliation is not sustainable in the long term. Further investigation is needed in this area.

When it comes to BEEGS, opinions differ both between and within different bodies. It should be noted, however, that the Doctoral Council supports the report's proposal for flexible placement at BEEGS/CBEES. As with UVS, there is a continuing need for investigation into reform.

The question of what constitutes a strong or weak postgraduate education environment has provoked a great deal of reaction – all of which points to the fact that numerically small environments are not necessarily weak in terms of research.

In conclusion, we hope that knowledge about development, challenges and awareness of possible choices for our doctoral education is now better than before. We also hope that everyone involved – at all levels – is better equipped to make wise and collegially anchored decisions that strengthen the quality of doctoral education. Of utmost importance, as emphasised by most of the consultation bodies, is to increase efforts to achieve a significant increase in the number of doctoral positions.

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