

Meeting date: 30/9-2021

Meeting place: City View

Meeting subject: GSNS visit PhD-programme committee at Biology

Attendees:

GSNS: David Lundbek Egholm (DLE), Head of Graduate School of Natural Science (GSNS); Sunitha Satkunam, Biology PhD partner; So-Young Ahn, Faculty advisor, Talent Development; Rikke J. Ljungmann, Advisor

PhD-programme committee, Biology: VIPs: Kurt Thomas Jensen (KTJ) (Chair), Bente Aagaard Lomstein, Mark Bayley, Wolf Eiserhardt, Volker Loeschcke; PhD-students: Ann-Sofie Dam, Solvei Mundbjerg Jensen, Clemence Krystal Marie Rose, Candice Power; Benita Nordentoft Hyldgaard, Education Advisor and PhD-programme secretary at Biology

Observer: Maya Jepsen, Head of Secretariat, Biology

Agenda:

- 1: Round of introduction and purpose of the visit
- 2: PhD education at Biology – specific issues/challenges/concerns
- 3: Review of GSNS, incl. KIP21
- 4: Well-being among PhD students and need for post-corona initiatives
- 5: Recruitment of new PhD students, incl. e.g. diversity, external funding, PhD financing, etc.
- 6: Any other business

Minutes:

1: Round of introduction and purpose of the visit

David presented his role, the aim of the visit and informed about the International review process in Autumn 2021 and the Quality assessment in Spring 2021, *i.e.* time to reflect and review the quality of our PhD education and the Graduate School of Natural Sciences.

2: PhD education at Biology – specific issues/challenges/concerns (incl. KIP21)

- *Too much stress.* Reply from David: GSNS is planning to have “go-to” person at GSNS with focus on wellbeing/stress; Information about stress is available at the GSNS website; GSNS asks if there is a need for a workshop?; David highlight the opportunity of part-time studies, but recognize that it can be problematic to extend the project economically
 - o K Thomas inform about our PhD coach at Biology. The problem is not information about stress symptoms etc., but the ability to detect the stress symptoms in time (before a person get sick).
 - o We also informed about the role of mentors, and the experience that mentors may help in terms of early detection of stress symptoms



- To-do at Biology: Send information about PhD coach to GSNS
- *Supervisors are uncertain regarding handling PhD students who have been on stress sick leave*
- *Too much teaching, this is a major concern both when asking PhD students and VIPs*; Reply from David: The number of working hours spent and registered varies between the programmes. Also differences in the way working obligations are planned and managed. Some PhD students work harder than the 140 hours according to David.
 - To-do at GSNS: David invites Head of departments to a discussion of management of teaching hours: e.g. Amount of teaching hours per confrontation hour, which activities that should yield teaching hours etc.
 - To-do at Biology: Look into whether PhD students at Biology work more than the hours they are appointed
- *Rules regarding teaching exemption*: Only teaching month counts in relation to stay abroad and the subsequent exemption from teaching. At Biology stay abroad is often placed during the summer holiday since this is the growth season for many organisms and several PhD students there miss out on the teaching exemption. Planning and completion of stay abroad is time consuming and should yield a reduction in teaching load. David acknowledged the issue and will review the rules.
 - To-do at GSNS: Review the rules regarding teaching exemption
- *Need for guidelines to course coordinators on matching of expectations before teaching is initiated*. GSNS will look into that.
- *Too many tasks during the PhD project period (compared to other PhD-programmes internationally) – e.g. course demand (ECTS points)*: David informed that he did not get support to reduce it from 30 ECTS to 15 ECTS from the other Graduate Schools at AU, since some were concerned what would be added instead of ECTS points; We have to find better ways to navigate rules and regulations; There will be an increase in flexibility regarding which activities that may count as ECTS, i.e. activities with a clear learning goal. David mentioned that e.g. writing the first scientific paper includes a learning goal and he will look into if it could give ECTS points
 - To-do at GSNS: Review our PhD courses at GSNS; Formulate guidelines/examples with activities that can count as ECTS to increase the transparency across programmes

3: Review of GSNS (incl. KIP21)

NAT scores well in terms of supervision and the quality of the PhD programmes, according to David. The challenges we see in the report should be fixable (e.g. course demand and working hours). GSNS wants to support the developing of independent persons and acknowledge that this can be difficult, since many PhD projects at NAT are

anchored in bigger research projects. David agrees that there is a need for more open PhD calls and funding for that.

4: Well-being among PhD students and need for post-corona initiatives

Extension due to corona: GSNS recommend that PhD students wait until the last period in their PhD project to apply for extension due to corona – this needs to be discussed with the supervisor. All applications received so far have been fully justified and have been approved by GSNS. In some cases, the time lost due to corona needs to be adjusted. 2/3 of the funding for extensions comes from the external projects. The remaining is paid by GSNS or department (money which has been saved during corona). PhD students can also get exemptions regarding the ECTS and the stay abroad. GSNS may do something to support the networking which some PhD students may have missed out on.

Lessons learned during corona - Zoom meetings should still be used and working from home should be acceptable: Reply from David: GSNS encourage that PhD defenses continue to be hybrid (the procedure with people asking for the link will continue to ensure that only invited persons can participate). The PhD student will be asked in each case if they accept the hybrid version or not. Opponents are required to be present physically.

Projects have had to be redefined which means broken dreams and hopes for some PhD students

5: Recruitment of new PhD students, incl. e.g. diversity, external funding, PhD financing, etc.

Gender diversity: KTJ informed that there is a balance regarding gender at Biology.

External funding: David informed that the PhD School is challenged by increasing external funding, but fixed co-funding (i.e. PhD pool) giving an increased competition for co-funding from GSNS. The process now includes the head of departments more in the process of prioritizing applicants. A new model will be decided soon (but not in 2022). The possibility of 100% funding from GSNS will be included in the discussion of the new model to stimulate the freedom of research. David further informed that some major funding bodies are starting to listen regarding issues with overhead and independent research.

6: Any other business

Difficult to find suitable opponents to the PhD defenses: Persons who have published papers with the PhD students or the supervisor/co-supervisor within the past 5 years cannot be opponents at the PhD defense. Reply from David: We need to be strict on this to protect the PhD students. But we look at the possibilities of making exemptions: e.g. if the paper(s) have many authors, it may be accepted; if the researchers have brought separate parts of research (e.g. separate experiments) into the paper, i.e. without being directly involved in the research performed by the supervisor or PhD

student, it can be accepted. GSNS needs to be involved to accept the opponent in these cases.