

Minutes from the Programme Council Meeting PHD-IAKH

Time: Tuesday June 23, 10:15-12:00

Present: Sunniva Engh, Hanne Hagtvedt Vik, Julie Lund, Julianne Rustad, Alexandre Simon, Mncedisi Jabulani Siteleki and Ragnar Holst Larsen.

Place: Zoom meeting

Items:

1. Approval of minutes from the last programme council meeting

There were no substantial comments to the minutes from the last meeting, apart from a reminder to have the minutes written shortly after the meeting.

2. Status PhD.-program IAKH:

Sunniva Engh gave a status report on the current situation at the department level. The department of Archaeology, Conservation and History (IAKH) currently have 27 active doctoral candidate, 11 in History, 11 in Archaeology and 5 in Conservation. In the spring semester IAKH have received 3 new doctoral candidates: 1 externally funded PhD in history and 2 externally funded PhDs in Archaeology, while we will at least have two new PhDs in history and two new PhDs in Archaeology next semester. The spring semester has also seen three midway assessment completed, and one disputation was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. IAKH have at least three disputation planned for the autumn semester, but there will potentially be additional disputations since many of our candidates are planning to hand in their dissertations next semester.

Hanne Hagtvedt Lund and Julie Lund pointed out that in the future it would be beneficial for the status report to include the number of students still active in the dissertation seminars. They also asked for an update on when the doctoral candidates are planning to hand in the dissertation (end date).

Engh agreed that these were valid requests, but asked them to wait a little while for that update, since the current situation with COVID-19 resulted in many changes regarding the end dates for our doctoral candidates.

Lund asked about how the future disputations would be conducted, and Engh replied that the plan is a hybrid solution, where part of the committee and candidate would be physically present, while others could be available via Skype/Zoom. The faculty has a sound solution for digital disputations as well, but Lund pointed out that this solution faces some challenges with involvement and natural discussion that would occur in a regular setting.

Follow-up: Ragnar Holst Larsen sends both PhD-leaders an overview over the doctoral candidates end dates at the beginning of each semester, and includes information about who will still need to participate in the thesis seminars in that semester.

3. DialPast – Updates on activities, courses and other relevant items

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dialouges with the Past (DialPast) has decided to postpone all course activities for 2020. The only activity that went as planned was the course “Archaeologies of Dwelling and the Built Environment”, held in Rome in February.

DialPast plans to return to normal in 2021, and all the scheduled courses for 2020 have new dates in 2021. The doctoral candidates who signed up for the workshops on transferable skills will be eligible to attend the courses in 2021, even if they have handed in their dissertation by then.

The administrative coordinator, Julianne Rustad, will be on parental leave until March 2021, and Vibeke Viestad and Sofie Scheen Jahnsen will share Rustads responsibilities for the rest of the year.

DialPast were granted an extension by The Research Council of Norway until the end of 2021 prior to the pandemic, and now DialPast have a new application pending for an additional six months extension.

Professor Lotte Hedeager will end her tenure as head of DialPast at the end of the year, and Professor Christopher Prescott will be the new head of the research school in 2021. The Programme Council briefly discussed the future of DialPast and hoped to hear about potential plans moving forward.

4. The Norwegian Research School in History – activities, courses and other relevant items

Vik gave the council an update on The Norwegian Research School in History (NRSH). The annual course “Methodological and Theoretical Problems in History” was held as normal, just before the lockdown went into effect, but it was marred by many unforeseen challenges. NRSH have wanted to retain all planned activities since the doctoral candidates are in their research fellowship for a limited time and they need research courses. NRSH have moved all courses to a digital platform for the rest of the year, with a possible exception considered to the last session on Dissertation Writing, planned at NTNU at the end of the year. The first session on Dissertation Writing was originally planned alongside The Norwegian History Days at University of Tromsø, but the session was moved to Zoom and completed as an all-digital course. The evaluations from the doctoral candidates have been very positive. The Dissertation Writing sessions are similar to the Archaeology thesis seminars at our department, but in addition, it has a four-hour skills module which focus on particular challenges in the writing process. The

doctoral candidates discuss manuscripts amongst themselves and with teachers, and the workshops are held three times a year, with the next two being held at the University of Bergen and NTNU. NRSB will go ahead with the course “Multi-Voice History: Perspectives from Indigenous and Minority History” and its complementary skills workshop, and these activities will be organized by the University of Tromsø. These events will also be a digital, but the plan is to have a physical component that the participants will have to carry out in their own hometown.

Lund pointed out that the reason DialPast had postponed all their activity was due to the international aspect of the research school, where all the course activities is held abroad, and many of the courses have elements that are difficult to replicate online.

Engh stressed that it was important to remember that in this situation we have to be very aware of the challenges for our doctoral candidates, the lack of a joint social and academic situation could make it feel like a lonely endeavor.

The programme council then discussed ways to improve the information flow regarding relevant courses for our doctoral candidates, and also how to better attract external candidates to our courses.

Follow-up: Engh will talk to her colleagues in the PhD-network about ways to disseminate communication about relevant PhD-courses.

5. Educational component: Thesis seminar’s and obligatory attendance (attachment 1)

Sunniva asked the PhD leaders to give a short presentation of their model for the thesis seminars.

The original premise for the discussion was a suggestion by Vik to extend the period of mandatory attendance for the thesis seminars. Vik wanted to ensure the quality of the seminars by making sure both new and experienced doctoral candidates benefited from each other, and this also ensured that everyone got more feedback on their manuscripts. Experience with group supervision on the master level clearly indicated that the participation of students at all stages of their projects was essential for the learning output for students at the beginning of their projects and also those at the end. By limiting the PhD-seminars to the two first semesters, we are reducing the overall benefit for everyone. The history seminar has run as a series of reading seminars focused on theory/methods, manuscript workshops and skills workshops. It has been difficult to attract students after their second year, especially in the manuscript workshops, even though the workload has been small for each of the modules. Vik also noted that with a smaller PhD group it would be essential to make sure everyone attended these seminars.

Lund commented that Archaeology had experienced this type of fluctuations before, when a large group of doctoral candidates suddenly were reduced to seven people. But since Archaeology has 1 day workshops were everyone comments on the texts presented this fluctuation didn’t change the structure. Lund also stressed that quite a few doctoral

candidates decided to participate in the seminars since they benefit from it themselves. Archaeology has three seminars per semester with 2-7 papers, feedback on strategy where the goal is to make them comment on a broader spread, making general reading feel relevant for all and build their academic argumentation. Lund said that everyone hands in paper each semester. Most doctoral candidates do not participate in the last six month of their research fellowship, but most of them participate in their fifth semester. Many of these would have to catch-up on seminars missed in the first two year period. Lund said that this model naturally is more time consuming than the history model, and they fulfill the requirements and then some.

Vik said that she had focused on the regulations set by IAKH, where it states that the requirements is to present their text three times and comment on a colleague's text three times. When asked the doctoral candidates about changing the structure to a whole day workshop, but they preferred to keep going with the model they have now with 8-10 shorter seminars each year. Usually there are 1-2 texts presented in the seminars, and additional activities are text reading and external lectures. The attendance is not at a satisfactory level, the thesis seminars that revolves around the student's text suffers from it. She said she would rethink the structure to resemble the model used for Archaeology/Conservation, but that the current rules of only commenting three times does not go well with that model. Her experience from both MA-supervision and NRSH that the advanced and the novice benefit from each other, and she felt that that current structure was not a good solution for anyone and that important learning goals would be better met with a longer period for participation in the seminars..

Mncedisi Jabulani Siteleki said that the consensus in the PhD-group for Archaeology/Conservation was a strong disagreement about extending the mandatory period for the whole research fellowship. He said that most doctoral candidates will have to attend the seminars beyond the first two year, since they will need to catch up on missed seminars anyway. Siteleki said that their current model for thesis seminars was so work intensive that an extension seemed unreasonable. He also stated that the doctoral candidates craved diversity in the seminars with more focus on skills for writing and structure, and not just reading and commenting on each other's text. He argued that more varied seminars would encourage people to attend in the last year. There was also a need for different moderators, and said it would be beneficial to have a moderator with a background in conservation on some of the seminars. Siteleki was not opposed to look at a solution were the mandatory attendance was 2,5 years, but anything beyond that would be impossible.

Lund responded to the request for more varied seminars, but that this aspect had suffered from a lack of funding and the fact that she had to stay away for a period, but that both these issues now was resolved. The challenge with inviting conservationist was in some sense a lack of comfort regarding the content part of the seminars, and that the pool of potential academics in Scandinavia was quite small. Julie also pointed out that she would love to have more of the staff at IAKH involved in the seminars, but that she was rewarded 50 hours per semester for organizing them, and there were no additional hours to grant the academic staff, something Vik agreed with.

Alexandre Simon-Ekeland had received similar feedback from the doctoral candidates in history, there was less resistance against a possible solution with 2,5 years mandatory attendance. They saw Hanne's arguments as reasonable, but the notion of a mandatory attendance for the whole research fellowship did not seem fruitful, and would only intensify the anticipation of stress. When asked by Vik about a possible change in structure for the seminars, Simon-Ekeland was not sure if they already could see the results from the changes Vik had implemented, and he personally liked discussions in smaller groups. Vik understood this position, but as the seminars had run for a year and a half with the combination of manuscript workshops, reading and skills seminars, and a year with a new model for commenting manuscripts, she maintained the need for a change.

The programme council then discussed if there were possible structural and/or cultural differences in the academic groups.

In light of the discussion, Vik suggested they looked in a different direction, and instead of focusing on mandatory attendance instead revised the requirements for presenting manuscripts and commenting on texts. The programme council agreed that this sounded like a possible solution, one where the students would have to present a minimum of four times during their research fellowship: one oral presentation and three manuscripts. Vik suggested they remove the current requirement for commenting on texts and make it mandatory to comment in each seminar.

Sunniva concluded the discussion, and stressed the need for urgency in getting this change implemented for the new doctoral candidates arriving in the autumn semester.

Follow-up: Larsen writes a draft of the new requirements and then circulated amongst the representatives in the programme council. Engh, Vik, Lund and Larsen will then have a meeting about the changes, so and make sure they are implemented before September 1, 2020.

6. Supervisor seminar IAKH 2020 – Discussion on possible topics for the next supervisor seminar

Due to a time constraint, Engh asked the programme council to send suggestions for topics to her per email. The supervisor seminar is scheduled for September 8, 2020.

7. Open Items

Siteleki had three items for discussion. The first item was about the educational component, and he asked Sunniva if the pandemic would allow a more flexible approach to the allocation of credits, since a lot of the activities has been cancelled. Sunniva replied that she would follow up each request individually about the allocation of credits.

The second items concerned the application process for possible extensions related to the pandemic. Sunniva told the programme council that the head of the department, Tor Egil Førland, was in charge of the application process and that the department sends the applications to HF's hiring committee for final assessment. IAKH has prioritized the doctoral candidates who were close to their end date, but will soon be able to open up the process.

Follow-up: Engh will send out the relevant information to the doctoral candidates when IAKH are ready to process extension applications more broadly.

The final item was a suggestion from Siteleki to use a platform for sharing information about the programme council amongst the doctoral candidates, and Larsen suggested they could use MS Teams. The programme council agreed that this platform was for the doctoral candidates to share information and questions that could be raised in the meetings.

Follow-up: Siteleki and Simon-Ekeland create MS Teams for their respective group, with links to the minutes from the meeting and additional information as they see fit. If they need any assistance with the creating the room they can ask Larsen for help.

Oslo, July 9, 2020

Sunniva Engh, Head of research
Ragnar Holst Larsen, PhD-coordinator