

Lund University – Department of Economic History

Leadership

The overarching research strategy of the Department is to be *open and inclusive*, and it is anchored in three key concepts: *relevance*, *internationalisation*, and building *research infrastructure*. The Department leadership has sought to let a thousand flowers bloom. The result is a very productive, creative, and diverse research portfolio.

The Department performs well on the two standard measures of research productivity – external grant funding and publications. The Department has been very successful in obtaining external grants (SEK 260 million from 2014-2018). Most impressive, this success has been very broad-based with 23 different scholars being awarded grants of more than SEK 2 million. The Department has also had great success in securing grants for post-docs. The publication record is equally impressive. The number of publications doubled over the period 2014 to 2018. The list of journals is notable for its breadth. Only about two-thirds of the papers were published in journals classified within the disciplines of economic history, economics, history or demography. This is a direct result of the open and inclusive approach of the Department. Scholars are encouraged to pursue their intellectual interests even if those fall outside the traditional boundaries of economic history.

The merger of the Centre for Economic Demography (CED) into the Department since 2018 has further contributed to the unusually broad research scope of the group, as the Demography group brings with it a number of deep ties to research (and researchers) grounded in disciplines outside of the School of Economics and Management, most importantly public health and medicine. One concern though is that the placement of the CED in the Economic History Department will lead to a narrowing of the research and scholars affiliated with the CED. Although economic historians made up the largest group within the CED before the merger, most of the associated scholars are not economic historians.

Although the department compares favorably with its peers in terms of the overall number of publications, it has a smaller share of publications in the top economic history journals. This in part reflects the diversity of research in the department. For many of the department's scholars, the top economic history journals would not be the appropriate targets. This

diversity makes it difficult to define what is a "quality" publication. The department leadership should develop a flexible quality assessment process that accounts for the diversity of research within the department. The goal should be to encourage researchers, particularly junior researchers, to aim for the high-impact journals most appropriate for their research agenda.

The Department's open and inclusive strategy has allowed it to recruit a diverse group of scholars. The Department has doubled in size since the last evaluation in 2014. This rapid expansion has allowed for the disproportionate recruitment of scholars who have traditionally been more marginal in academic research, and especially in economic history. The overall academic staff are 42% female, as well as hailing from dozens of countries beyond Sweden and northern Europe. Both the gender balance and the internationalization of the staff reflect the serious commitment over the last review period to recruitment strategies that are open and inclusive. In particular, the willingness to include a very broad range of research topics under the umbrella of the Department's mission opens a space for hiring more broadly too.

The growth in the Department size has had many positive effects, but it also poses some challenges. Two threats seem most critical: 1) limited availability of outside funding to support further expansion of PhD, postdoctoral, and tenure-line research allocations in the absence of projected growth in student enrollments that would require higher teaching allocations; and 2) limited capacity of senior research staff and tenured professors to mentor an increasingly disproportionate number of junior researchers. Indeed, to this second point, several senior faculty indicated that it was difficult to even know who was in the Department given both the turnover of junior researchers and the large number of them at any one time.

Strengths:

- Research strategy of being open and inclusive has led to dynamic and diverse research environment.
- Department has been able to recruit and retain a diverse and impressively productive group of scholars, who clearly enjoy working in such a vibrant environment.
- Department has been extremely successful in obtaining external grants.
- Department has a strong publication record, both in terms of numbers and breadth.

Weaknesses

- Success in obtaining external grants has led to a large Department size; this size would not be sustainable if there was a change in the funding environment.
- Due to size of staff and constraints on teaching, postdocs and graduate students have limited opportunities to teach.
- Postdocs and graduate students have unclear and uncertain paths to permanent employment. Department will not be able to offer all postdocs permanent positions.
- Recent (2 years) merger with CED still in early stages, not clear whether it will lead to narrowing of the mission of the Centre.
- The department has been able to place the majority of their candidates at good universities mostly in Sweden and Europe although very few are placed at the top universities in economic history. Moreover, one third have been recruited locally at Lund University. This may be not a bad thing since it reflects an active research environment in the Department, but it may also reflect a weakness since the candidates are not viewed as attractive at the top economic history universities in Europe.

Strength and weakness?

- Department may need to reconsider its identity and place within Lund. It is more than just an economic history department. Should that fact be acknowledged openly, or even celebrated?

Collegial culture

It should be said at the outset that the broad collegiality of the Department was evident in every aspect of the review process, from initial documentation and in each of the interview panels. We heard generally positive reports about the climate of collaboration, encouragement, and openness to diverse areas of research interest and points of view from every level of the academic hierarchy. We were also impressed with the gender balance and increasingly international orientation of the Department.

A repeated theme of the meeting with the junior staff was the flexibility they enjoyed in pursuing areas of research of particular interest to them. They engage in research collaborations with a wide range of scholars from within the Department, from other programs at Lund University, across Swedish universities, and also around the world. The diversity of funding agencies to which they have successfully applied and the broad range of publication venues are both testament to this flexibility. There is very much a sense of 'let

1000 flowers bloom' that is core to what the junior staff in particular expressed as critical to their enthusiasm for working in Economic History at Lund. Obviously, the limited opportunities for advancement at Lund itself is an issue of concern to them, especially because they find the working environment so collegial and conducive to their academic productivity.

In general, the academic staff at every level, but particularly the junior scholars, benefit from the embeddedness of the university in the larger social structures of Swedish life. These make the precarious positions of the postdocs much less challenging than they might be otherwise. Nonetheless, some of the postdocs questioned the Department's strategy to have so many young scholars in what are only temporary positions. They also noted that although they sensed the senior faculty wanted to advise and mentor them, the senior faculty have little knowledge of the employment opportunities outside of academia.

The large number of young scholars on short-term appointments also poses other threats to collegiality. As noted above, one senior scholar expressed it being difficult to get to know all of the new scholars in the Department. A number of the senior faculty also commented on the decline in attendance at the weekly department seminars on Wednesdays. The sense was that as the Department size grew, many faculty did not think that their attendance was necessary at those seminars, nor would the absence of any one person be noticed. Nonetheless, the collective effect has been to lower the sense of collegial expectations across the group as a whole.

No one raised any issues of concern about integrity or a failure for the Department to behave ethically. This may be a failure of reporting (perhaps especially in the Zoom world where this might be more difficult). Nonetheless, it was striking given the more typical prevalence of such concerns in almost every work environment.

Strengths:

- Dynamic research environment that supports broad range of scholars and projects and fosters cross-pollination of ideas and methods.
- Junior researchers and doctoral students feel supported in pursuing their research interests and encouraged to attend and present at international conferences.

Weaknesses:

- Rapid growth in Department size may limit the interactions among different groups of scholars and, in particular, limit the mentoring of junior scholars.
- Constant pressure to obtain external funding (for themselves, or to support juniors whom they are mentoring) causing stress for at least some senior faculty.

Quality ecosystem

The department has a broad teaching portfolio including a recently launched undergraduate program taught in English. The doctoral program is very strong and is well-integrated into the research agenda of the Department. Many of the postdocs and junior faculty received their doctorates from the Department. The senior faculty of the Department see this as a strength as it allows them to recruit strong doctoral students from Sweden and elsewhere and has contributed to the diversity of their research staff.

Department faculty are also engaged in a wide range of external research collaborations and in public engagement. This relates directly to the department's emphasis on relevance, internationalisation, and building research infrastructure.

Strengths:

- Department has a significant presence in the University, the profession, and the public sphere.
- Department is internationally recognized for its productive environment, and is considered a highly desirable place for economic historians and historical demographers to visit, either in its lecture series or as visiting scholars.
- Years of prodigious research effort has resulted in the compilation of a number of widely used databases that are managed within the Department, a resource of great scholarly and public utility.

Weaknesses:

- The rapid growth of the Department is showing signs of stress for both senior faculty who must manage it, and junior research staff whose place in the system is not secure.
- The aforementioned large database infrastructure must be maintained, requiring both steady funding and knowledgeable personnel. This is a high fixed cost to the Department, but one for which funding is harder to secure than for new projects.

Recommendations:

- The Department needs to assess critically its optimal size. This conversation needs to involve all members of the department from the doctoral students to the full professors. Careful consideration must be given to the costs and benefits of expanding the Department further, or perhaps even to reducing its size in the future.
- The Department should evaluate critically how the merger with the CED has affected the research environment. Has it fostered more or less collaboration with faculty outside the CED? How has the merger affected the faculty from outside the Economic History Department who are associated with the CED? Are they still as engaged with the CED? Have the joint grant applications increased or decreased?
- The Department might usefully make an assessment of its current resource allocation to the maintenance and personnel support associated with the use of its publically-accessible databases with an eye toward developing a long-run strategic plan for that support into the future.