

Henrik Viberg

Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences

Co-author: Ann Grubbström, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Course for experienced supervisors – A continuous development

It is common that PhD-supervisors must take a course in supervision pedagogy in order to act as the principal supervisor or to be promoted to associate professor in Sweden and internationally there are calls for mandatory training of supervisors (Motshoane and McKenna, 2021; Masuku, 2021). At the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), the course participants have become more and more “junior”, meaning that they enrol in the course soon after getting their doctoral degree, often with very sparse experience of doctoral supervision, which is important for development as a supervisor (Fosslund, T., 2023).

Many higher education institutions signal the importance of continuous supervision education and have supervision guidelines stating the responsibility of principal supervisors to engage in further education on supervision pedagogy. At SLU it is stated: “The principal supervisor is responsible for ensuring that they take part in continued professional development regarding supervision methodology by taking courses offered at

e.g. SLU” (SLU, 2019). The activities provided for PhD-supervisors are often voluntary seminars or workshops, attended by the same core group.

In view of this, a mandatory course for “experienced” supervisors was proposed in 2023. The course is based on flexibility in time, topic and type of activity, in order to be attractive for the often very busy “experienced” supervisors.

The course has to be taken when a principal supervisor admits a new PhD-student and it has been more than five years since taking the basic course in doctoral supervision, or later when it has been more than five years since taking the

“Advanced course in research supervision for experienced supervisors”.

The course consists of three parts: digital quizzes related to formalities, such as rules and regulations, a seminar series (five has to be attended) and a final seminar to summarize the experiences and impressions from the seminars, and discussing an article related to supervision pedagogy.

So how is it going? The course has 58 registered supervisors of which 32 has been actively participating. No one has yet completed both the digital quizzes and participated in five seminars, which is the requisite to take part in the final seminar.

So what do the “experienced” supervisors think? The reactions have been mainly positive, with supervisors signing up even though they do not have to. They especially appreciate the experience exchange between supervisors from different departments, but, as expected, some questioning that the course is mandatory.

What can be done better? There are administrative issues to handle and also problems making sure that supervisors sign up and finish the mandatory course.

References:

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