

The proposed National Research Programme (NRP) is a partnership between the departments of social work at four universities, and constitutes a major effort to enhance knowledge production in applied social welfare research in Sweden. The NRP will be model for applied social services studies, realised as high-quality research, networks linking research and practice, and innovative knowledge dissemination with local authorities and at annual conferences. The NRP will be a research school, offering licentiate degrees for three cohorts of third-cycle students. The NRP partners have considerable experience of running similar programmes in collaboration with local authorities, which will inform the NRP's trajectory, and especially its careful recruitment of candidates who are capable of high-quality research in the limited time offered by a licentiate degree. The NRP will be mindful of the risk that the conflicting rationales of academia versus social work practice might leave students isolated and confused, and similarly that they might see their future being in academia rather than social work practice, with their competence lost to Sweden's social services.

## **Objectives**

Three interlinked objectives will guide the NRP: to produce high-quality research that meets the research needs identified by users and professionals, and which is relevant to the international scholarly community; to create a structure for the long-term expansion of academic expertise integrated in social services, and so make a substantial contribution to systematic knowledge development within the agencies themselves; and to model how best to implement the chain of activities and processes needed to facilitate awareness and the actual use of research findings in client-based social work.

The NRP research topics will be chosen to meet the local authorities' strategic knowledge needs. These will be evaluated to identify focused research problems in fields where knowledge is scarce or uncertain, and has had only limited impact on the development of social work practice thus far. In a review of academic uncertainties in healthcare and social services, the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU 2017) identified social welfare provisions for children, young adults, and the elderly and the workings of the Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS) as two strategic research areas.

The NRP will contribute to the development of methods and models for transdisciplinary research, going beyond the standard interdisciplinary mode of knowledge production. While interdisciplinarity is the integration of various academic disciplines (Willumsen & Skivenes 2005), transdisciplinarity is a fusion of academic interdisciplinary knowledge with the knowledge of stakeholders such as users and professionals (Lawrence 2004). Transdisciplinary contributions involve mutual learning, joint definitions, agreement on the allocation of resources, and sharing data on specific situations (Lawrence 2017).

A licentiate degree requires two years of full-time education or four years of part-time study. The constraints of time mean it is a challenge for licentiate thesis to make an important scholarly contribution in its given field. The challenge will be addressed by ensuring that students collaborate closely with established researchers at the NRP partner universities, where academic expertise will be operationalised to formulate research themes, ensuring they meet all requirements, practical and scholarly. Throughout the research process, students will be supervised by experienced researchers, chosen for their documented skills in formulating research problems, identifying relevant methodologies, conducting collaborative research, and publishing high-quality articles in their chosen fields.

The NRP will offer three thematic cohort programmes, each designed as a motor for knowledge production in applied welfare research. The first two themes have already been decided in the application process—'Social care and support for children and adolescents' and 'Care and services for older people and people with disabilities'—and given the NRP's transdisciplinary character we have chosen to leave the third year's theme open, to be decided in consultation with the programme's stakeholders.

All three programme themes, in addressing mental health issues, will comprise projects signposted by the NRP's potential partners, including collaboration and coordination, innovation, intervention and effects, research implementation, technology and digitalisation, user involvement and user perspectives, globalisation and migration, mental health and wellbeing, and values and ethics. Based on experience and extensive contacts with stakeholders, we have chosen an 'ambassador' model to narrow down projects and select candidates for the programme: over the course of a three-month application process, two experienced researchers from each of the NRP's institutions will visit local authorities to assist stakeholders in formulating projects and identifying possible student candidates, thus ensuring that the NRP's projects meet social services needs while being empirically sound and anchored in existing knowledge. The ambassador model is an innovative approach to transdisciplinary research, and will be fine-tuned over the course of the NRP's existence.

## Research environment

The four university departments of social work, with their focus on applied welfare research and their complementary research traditions and expertise, will be a high-quality research environment for the licentiate students. The large, established departments in Lund and Gothenburg have long experience of running PhD programmes and collaborating with social services agencies, while Malmö and Linnaeus have extensive experience running licentiate programmes in collaboration with local authorities, companies, and social interest groups. All four departments have high-profile research groups with national and international collaborations, and each offers specialist research environments, led by professors and structured around full graduate seminars, on child and family welfare research (for example, Lund's *Child and Family Welfare Research Group* and the *Child Rights Institute*, Gothenburg's research group *Parenting, Children and Youth in Modern Family Cultures*, and Linnaeus' *RISCY Research on Interventions Support for Children*) and on disability, ageing, and eldercare (for example, Gothenburg's *Care, Autonomy And Participation*, Lund's *Care for the Elderly—Conditions and Everyday Realities*, and Linnaeus' research group *Elderly and Disability*). The NRP's students will benefit not only from the work of the individual research environments on these themes, but also from the well-established collaborations between the departments. Gothenburg and Malmö, for example, have a long-standing collaboration through the European network on fatherhood research and the major EU-funded project *Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace: Young adults negotiating the work–family boundary*, while Lund and Malmö have long collaborated on taught courses and seminars on all levels, from BAs and MAs to PhDs, and have an established joint project in the field of ageing and eldercare.

Currently, the four departments together have almost 100 PhD students, of whom 20 are part-time (50%) students funded and employed outside the university. Similarly, the NRP's research environment comprises nearly 30 professors, over 40 docents, and 60 lecturers with the experience, competence and training to supervise PhD candidates.

The interdisciplinary nature of NRP's research environment is evident in its broad, holistic approach, ensuring that social work as an academic discipline is truly interdisciplinary: the four departments bring together all levels of research (micro, meso, and macro) and researchers with a variety of backgrounds (from social work, sociology, social anthropology, and ethnology to psychology, criminology, and occupational therapy). Moreover, the NRP's research environment will automatically include representatives of other faculties, including law, technology, medicine, and the humanities. Thus the NRP will ensure a structured move into transdisciplinarity, capitalising on both its existing strong interdisciplinarity and the established relations with social work practice.

The key factor will be our sustained working relationship with social service professionals. All four departments have experience of running licentiate programmes for students financed and employed by social welfare agencies, while the departments at Linnaeus and Malmö have been running licentiate programmes specifically for social services professionals: Linnaeus

has admitted 14 social services professionals for licentiate and doctoral degrees since its programme started in 2003, while Malmö has admitted 15 since its *Licentiate Programme for Health, Caring and Welfare* started in 2012. All the existing programmes were designed to meet long-term needs for postgraduate staff in social service organisations.

Evaluations of the existing programmes and subsequent experience show that the PhD programmes bring universities and professional organisations together and facilitate the exchange of knowledge (Malmö University 2013; Salonen 2005). The development and relevance of practice-based research outside academia increases exponentially when more professionals have first-hand experience of conducting research. There are also new career opportunities for professionals as well as for graduates (Salonen 2005), a fact supported by the evaluations of other similar programmes for professionals (Huzell 2013; Riksdagens utbildningsutskott 2016). However, challenges remain, which can be grouped into four areas:

(1) Admissions. There is unlikely to be an overabundance of candidates who meet the admissions requirements and have the necessary skills to succeed. The employer's role as a gatekeeper can be problematic when identifying candidates, hence the need for open dialogue and repeat visits by the NRP ambassadors to local authorities to ensure that professionals who are best able to benefit from the research education apply.

(2) Quality. The research produced must be of both high scholarly quality and high relevance to the social services. Experience shows that extensive discussions about objectives and the alignment of the research projects is needed early in the recruitment process, and must involve the employers, prospective students, and NRP representatives.

(3) Collaboration with employers. In our experience, any long-term collaboration between the university departments and the employers is wholly reliant on having a stable structure that is adaptable to organisational and political changes. Comprehensive agreements on potential contingencies and full contracts between all the parties concerned are of great importance—over the years, both Linnaeus and Malmö have developed robust contracts, for example. Students must be guaranteed independence from their employers in terms of their research, and thus conflicts of loyalty that might affect the project must be addressed from the very first. There is also the fact that many candidates in existing programmes struggle to combine work and research, and feel stuck in the classic part-time trap of not performing well in any area. In addition to a close, constructive dialogue about the students' workload, the NRP's thematic approach and organisation will help foster a sense of community among its students, facilitating an identity as professional licentiate candidates with particular expertise.

(4) Implementation of new knowledge. Employee turnover is relatively high in local authority social services, so it is not always easy to maintain continuous mutual contact with employers. To avoid this hampering the dissemination and implementation of new knowledge, each student's progression and career must be planned collaboratively by all parties. Frequent seminars in the workplace will help gradually implement new knowledge and increase involvement in the student's research. The modes of dissemination and implementation—the responsibility of the ambassadors and the students' academic supervisors—will be designed to reflect the specific character of each research question, calling perhaps for workshops and training modules in specific methods.

### **Programme description**

A total of thirty licentiate candidates will be admitted—three cohorts of ten, distributed in groups of two or three among the NRP university departments. The programme will be carefully designed to encourage each cohort's sense of community, building it around the NRP themes. The geographic location of the universities is an advantage, as it will enable students to easily take taught courses in groups of ten.

A licentiate degree consists of 120 ECTS credits (equivalent to 2 years of full-time study), which in the social sciences is commonly 30–37.5 ECTS credits in taught courses and a dissertation of 82.5–90 ECTS credits. The NRP programme will have one syllabus for all four

collaborating universities (see attached document). The course package will be 37.5 ECTS, comprising five taught courses of 7.5 ECTS credits each, which together will enhance the licentiate students' methodological and theoretical understanding and skills, as follows:

- (1) Introduction to applied welfare research in social work (including science of knowledge, research ethics, and theories of implementation).
- (2) Quantitative methods (statistical analysis and meta-analysis).
- (3) Qualitative methods (qualitative interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis).
- (4) The theory and specific research on the chosen subject.
- (5) Generic competences and skills.

The first three courses will be mandatory for all NRP students. The courses on methods and methodology will be organised thematically, meaning that the course literature and exercises for the first cohort will have direct bearing on social care and support for children and adolescents, and so on. It will be unique to the NRP that method courses will relate to specific fields of research, making them will be as relevant as possible to students. The mandatory courses will be collaborative, with each led by two lecturers from different NRP universities; each will be administered by one of the two universities responsible for the NRP's coordination, and will have a fixed budget for teaching and travelling. If appropriate to the students' needs, the fourth course on subject-specific theory and literature will be offered by the National Research School of Social Work (RSSW) in order to expand the NRP students' networks at other universities. The fifth course is a mandatory package of exercises that will develop the student's generic competences and skills set down in the NRP syllabus, to include (i) a two-day course in systematic reviews provided by the Swedish Agency for Health Technology and Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU), (ii) presentations at national and international conferences, (iii) communication of research within the organisation where the student is employed, (iv) workshops on academic writing, and (v) active participation in seminars at the student's university department. Taught courses will be held in the first year of study. To promote a sense of community and encourage networking, the cohorts will come together for a series of two-day course retreats—an established model for courses provided by the RSSW.

The student's dissertation, to be written in Swedish, may be either a monograph or a thesis by publication. For a licentiate degree, a thesis by publication would typically consist of two articles and an introduction. The NRP's objectives are to produce both skilled researchers who will continue to work for Sweden's local authorities and high-quality research, despite the time limitations of a licentiate degree course. For this reason, the NRP's preferred form will be the thesis by publication, with the introduction to present either a systematic review or a scoping review. The active contribution of the students' academic supervisors as co-researchers and co-authors of the articles will be crucial to the students' success in the short time at their disposal. Following established procedure at all the university departments, dissertations will be presented at a minimum of three graduate seminars—a planning seminar, a middle seminar and a final seminar—before being defended in a final examination (see the NRP syllabus).

## Organisation

The universities of Malmö and Lund are the lead applicants and will be the two host universities which administer the programme. The two other partner universities, Gothenburg and Linnaeus, will work closely with the host universities. The University of Gothenburg will have a specific administrative link to Malmö University, and Linnaeus University to Lund University. These connections will also help in facilitating the financial transactions within the programme.

The NRP will be led by two **directors and PhD studies coordinators**, one at each at the host universities of Lund and Malmö, and two **PhD studies coordinators**, one each at the universities of Gothenburg and Linnaeus. The directors are full professors and will be funded 30 per cent of full-time by the NRP, while the coordinators at Gothenburg and Linnaeus will be

funded 10 per cent of full-time. All four will work closely together in planning and organising the programme, while the main responsibility of the directors will be to administrate the NRP. The four will comprise the steering group where the structure of the programme will be organised. A student representative and a representative of the practice advisory board will also be included in the steering group.

The **steering group**, which will meet four times a year, will be responsible for the planning and realisation of admissions and all courses, conferences, seminars, and administrative meetings (see the section on National coordination, below). It will agree upon the division of the budget and the workload. It will organise separate annual meetings with the two NRP advisory boards, the scientific advisory board and the practice advisory board.

The **scientific advisory board** will consist of four prominent scholars with expertise in relevant areas to offer support in an interdisciplinary perspective. Three scholars with competence in applied welfare research have already been recruited: Professor Helena Blomberg-Kroll of the University of Helsinki, Professor Lars Hansson of Lund University, and Professor Terje Ogden of the University of Oslo. Their role will be to provide advice and to act as 'critical friends' in the development of the NRP. The scientific advisory board will meet with the steering group once a year to review the NRP's progress with its three objectives. Members of the scientific advisory board will also be invited as discussants at the NRP's annual conferences and retreats.

The **practice advisory board** will be made up of representatives from Swedish social services and user organisations, appointed from the Association of Directors of Social Welfare Services (FSS), the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), the two leading trades unions (Akademikerförbundet SSR and Vision), and national user organisations. The practice advisory board will be continuously involved in the development of strategies to recruit licentiate students from among social services professionals, and will also be active in planning the implementation of the new knowledge in social services organisations, conferences for the social services sector, and specific seminars and events together with the licentiate students outside academia. It will meet the steering group twice a year to provide advice and act as a critical friend in the NRP's development, with one of those meetings to be held in conjunction with the NRP's annual conference. The practical advisory board's interdisciplinarity and hands-on knowledge, complemented by local representatives, will provide the NRP's transdisciplinary platform.

To handle the programme practicalities, a full-time **project administrator** will be employed. The position will be held at Lund University and Malmö University, with 50 per cent of full-time at each. The project administrator will support the steering group in its work, manage internal and external communications—spreading information about the programme, organising admissions, arranging meetings and conferences, etc.—and play an active part in the NRP's core activities, such as the dissemination of results and writing reports and articles. The administrator will also manage the NRP's interactive web platform where joint material, calendar etc. will be accessible for all participants. The students' administration will be handled by their home universities within the framework of their standard graduate programmes.

In order to facilitate the recruitment to the programme, each of the four universities will employ researchers, or **ambassadors**, to assist interested local authorities in framing interesting research questions and to identify prospective candidates (see next section). The researchers will be funded as ambassadors at in total 20 per cent of full-time at each university.

## Operation of the programme

**Admissions:** The NRP's programme will be announced on all the platforms normally used for postgraduate vacancies by the four universities. Additionally, it will be announced through the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), the Association of Directors of Social Welfare Services (FSS), and the two major trades unions, Akademikerförbundet SSR and Vision.

In order to find suitable candidates and facilitate research projects useful to Sweden's social services, two researchers at each university will have part-time assignments as ambassadors. Their task will be to visit a number of local authority social services and with them develop ideas into research projects, while at the same time assisting in the identification of candidates, and later contributing to the social services' implementation and use of the new knowledge. Another important task will be to raise awareness of the NRP programme among MA students, as well as encourage MA studies among social services practitioners, both to increase the number of possible applicants and to share knowledge of the collaboration as such. In a subsequent phase of the programme, the ambassadors will also support local authority social services in planning the students' further professional development in the workplace.

The short time frame for the recruitment of the first cohort will present a particular challenge, as a decision from the grant agency is expected in October 2018 and the programme will start in 2019. The NRP's transdisciplinary character requires an admissions process in which students must be able to negotiate the content of their projects. We are thus in a preparatory dialogue with representatives from local authority social services in order to facilitate this. The parallel process of recruitment and project design is described both in the earlier section on the NRP's objectives and in the NRP syllabus and recruitment plan (attached). Even so, it is not realistic to expect candidates to begin before September 2019.

The candidates will be admitted to the NRP by one of the four partner universities, where they will have access to a workplace and research environment, and will follow the NRP's syllabus, which is the same for all institutions. There will be new students at all four universities in each round of admissions. The decision as to which university the student will attend will be taken by the steering group in consultation with the student and employer, and will take into account the practicalities, the available academic supervisors for the specific project, and which research environment is best suited to the student's needs.

Each student, as well as being a professional social worker employed by a local authority and working in social services, must meet the general and specific requirements set down in the NRP syllabus and specified in the Swedish Higher Education Act. According to Statistics Sweden (SCB), in the last ten years approximately 1,000 people have completed one- or two-year MA degrees in social work, thus qualifying them for third-cycle studies. Many of them do not work for local authorities, and only a fraction of those who do are likely to be interested in participating in the NRP initiative. Apart from those with Swedish MA degrees in social work, there can be candidates with equivalent qualifications from other educational backgrounds who may be eligible.

The NRP will be a *national* research school, albeit located geographically in the southern part of Sweden. Distances between the four universities are short: 15 minutes by train between Malmö and Lund, and only 2 hours to Gothenburg and Växjö (Linnaeus University). While the NRP is open to candidates from all 290 local authorities in Sweden, the majority will probably be recruited from local authorities that are geographically close to the four universities. It is also among those local authorities that contact and collaboration will be established. The possibility for face-to-face meetings, seminars, and courses will be beneficial for the sense of community, as well as the broader collaboration between researchers, students, and employers. That said, it is important to emphasise that the NRP will not exclude participants from other parts of the country, although the challenges that might pose for the student will be weighed into its decision.

**Supervision:** Each student will follow the NRP syllabus at their home university, be part of the group of doctoral and licentiate students there, and participate in graduate seminars and research groups at their university. They will have two fully qualified academic supervisors (a lead supervisor and an assistant supervisor), who will be closely involved in the student's research and will guide them through each specific branch of knowledge, the appropriate scholarly methods, and so on. All the supervisors will meet annually to discuss supportive strategies in order to work proactively with the challenges their supervisees can be expected to face when combining study with local authority employment. The supervisors will have the

same number of teaching hours as for full-time licentiates (meaning twice as many hours as for a standard part-time licentiate) in order to have time for these greater responsibilities and for the continuous dialogue with the NRP PhD studies coordinators, who will be monitoring progress. Every year the programme will hold a three-day internal conference for the students at which they will be expected to present their ideas, their work progression, and preliminary results, and where their research will be discussed by the other students, the group of academic supervisors and senior researchers, and the members of the scientific advisory board.

**Dissemination:** The NRP will serve as a model and hub for the development of transdisciplinary applied welfare research in Sweden, with immediate ties to the wider academic community. To realise this objective, the NRP will arrange an annual national conference where students and their academic supervisors will present on-going and completed studies. Responsibility for hosting the conference will alternate between the four partner universities. As the aim is to disseminate knowledge widely and the conference will be open for the social services and user organisations, while the NRP's practice advisory board will of course be present. The first conferences will also host international keynote speakers to further inspire the new and prospective participants, while later conferences will focus on the dissemination of the programme's findings.

The NRP's students will also be expected to present their research at a minimum of one international conference. The thematic organisation of the cohorts will make it possible to propose sessions and panel debates for conferences. Furthermore, apart from their scholarly publications, students will be supported in writing short summaries of their studies and findings in formats accessible to other social services professionals and users. Research produced by the NRP will be published as printed reports and online. Articles in scholarly journal will be published as open access. A newsletter from the NRP will be sent out twice every year.

## Significance

The proposed NRP will respond to urgent needs in social work practice. There is often a lack of specific knowledge about the needs and characteristics of the population in need of support, and indeed a lack of general knowledge about the effect of the actions taken by social services. Interventions and support measures are thus often based on superficial assumptions, unsubstantiated by research, and with little or no evaluation or follow-up. This makes decision-making at both the individual and the (local) policy level an intuitive enterprise, in which solutions are tried one after the other on a trial and error basis (Forkby et al. 2016; Van de Luitgaarden 2009). In the absence of knowledge, the sector tends to adopt isomorphic strategies, using models and approaches in vogue at any given moment (Czarniawska 2005). From the perspective of service users, knowledge of outcomes and effects is of the utmost importance, but so are the issues of participation, and how as users their voices could play a far greater part not only in individual decision-making, but also on an aggregated level as representative elements in strategic planning (Willumsen & Skivenes 2005). Traditionally the links between academic research and social work organisations have been weak; there is a need for greater knowledge of the narrow issues and for broader infrastructural innovations (Bergmark & Lundström 2008).

Through its transdisciplinary character, the NRP will make a strategic contribution in the area of knowledge-based practice in social services. In its implementation, the NRP will draw on research on dissemination and knowledge utilisation. Research content, the availability of research for practitioners, its relevance to real world problems, and the use of different modes of dissemination are all crucial factors (Alexanderson 2006). However, most important of all will be 'sustained interactivity', realised as social ties between academia and its partner organisations and professionals (which here means social workers and service users) (Hutchinson & Huberman 1994). To enable such interactivity, the NRP's research projects will be created in collaboration between the students, their academic supervisors, social services representatives, and the NRP ambassadors.

In time the NRP aims to become a model for the strategic implementation of transdisciplinary collaboration and communication about social work challenges and needs. For that reason it will invoke the intentions and ideas formulated in such concepts as Triple Helix (Etzkowitz 2002) and Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons 1994). The NRP will respond to perennial issues and needs, such as structural follow-ups of social work measures, and identify and address significant frontline questions that arise in the interaction between practitioners, service users, and researchers.

### **National coordination**

Four universities—Lund, Malmö, Linnaeus, and Gothenburg—will be the NRP partners. The universities of Lund and Malmö are responsible for the application and the programme's coordination and reporting. The PhD studies coordinators, responsible not only for the coordination and monitoring of the programme, but also the quality and resilience of the development initiatives with the NRP's external partners, are as follows.

At Lund University the NRP director and PhD studies coordinator will be Professor **Kerstin Svensson** of the School of Social Work. Her expertise lies in the performance of social work and its organisations and professions, researched in close contact with practice. She has been head of Lund University's School of Social Work (2009–2014), chair of FORSA Sweden (2006–2010), and a coordinator in the Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health COST Action (2012–16), and co-founded the Child Rights Institute at Lund University.

At Malmö University the NRP director and PhD studies coordinator will be Professor **Lars Plantin** of the Department of Social Work. His main area of expertise is family sociology, with a special focus on parenting and fatherhood. He has published numerous books and articles on parents, children, and families over the last two decades. In recent years he has been Director of PhD studies at the Faculty of Health and Society and is currently faculty Vice-Dean with special responsibility for PhD studies.

At Linnaeus University the NRP PhD studies coordinator will be Professor **Torbjörn Forkby** of the Department of Social Work. His research focuses on social work and prevention practices for young people. He has extensive experience of actively addressing research–practice ties after at least ten years engagement in a local authority R&D unit (Gothenburg Region's FoU i Väst) addressing social services, and from his work in associations for research and practice in social work.

At the University of Gothenburg the NRP PhD studies coordinator will be Professor **Kristian Daneback** of the Department of Social Work. His primary research interests are how digitalisation and the Internet influence everyday life and social work practice, areas where he has published extensively for over fifteen years. Currently he is the deputy head of department at the University of Gothenburg with specific responsibility for research and PhD studies, a position he has held for four years.

During the application process, the four universities have initiated discussions with the social service departments and social welfare directors of several local authorities, with the Association of Directors of Social Welfare Services (FSS), and representatives from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and its regional collaboration to promote knowledge-based social services (RSS). These contacts, which have established there is a real interest in the NRP, have also raised such considerations as the organisation of the research school, admissions, student progression, and the dissemination of results.

### **International and other national collaborations**

Many of the NRP's international and national collaborations will enlarge on the four universities departments' established research networks and departmental partnerships. However, to ensure that the NRP's courses are relevant to its licentiate students, specific collaborations will be established with the National Research School in Social Work (RSSW). The RSSW, a network of fourteen Swedish universities, initiates and coordinates graduate courses in social



work. The RSSW is connected to the national network of universities that offer PhD studies in social work, and its management rotates through the universities with each hosting the network for a period of three years—the current host is Linköping University until 2020. The departments of social work at Linnaeus and Gothenburg universities have both been the hosts of the RSSW in the past (RSSW 2018). About 25 lecturers at NRP's four partner universities have experience of arranging courses or giving seminars at the national research school. In conjunction with the RSSW the Nordic–Baltic Doctoral Network in Social Work organises annual summer schools, which will be an additional resource for the NRP licentiate students.

Building on department members' established contacts, collaborations will also be set with the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU). The SBU will be used as a sounding board when developing research projects, and representatives of the SBU will participate in both the taught courses and graduate seminars on systematic and scoping reviews of research. Contact is also established with the UK based organisation Research in Practice, who has kindly agreed to receive NRP-students for visits.

The licentiate students will present their research at a minimum of one international conference, and will be expected to participate in networks and interest groups relevant to their research topics. The choice of conferences and networks will be facilitated by their academic supervisors, who are already part of the national and international research community. More general meetings that cover all areas of social work research are the Nordic FORSA conference every second year and the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA) annual conference. The organisations for university departments and schools of social work have biannual European and international conferences. Further, conferences of interest for many social work scholars are hosted by international sociology organisations and others.

Apart from the standard collaboration with the doctoral student unions that is a natural part of the Swedish education system, the NRP will also support and collaborate with the recently founded association of part-time doctoral students employed in local authorities.

### **Ethical considerations**

The academic objective of the NRP is to produce high-quality research that corresponds to the research needs identified by social service professionals and users in Swedish local authority social services, and is relevant to the international scholarly community. Ethical issues regarding each individual NRP project will be thoroughly discussed at the planning stage of each project and will be on-going throughout the research process—ethical issues are delicate and are rarely settled once and for all. During student admissions, when potential themes and projects are discussed, the ethical aspects will be reviewed. Projects that require formal ethical vetting will be sent to a regional ethical review board for consideration, in accordance with Sweden's Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460). Research ethics will be an essential part of the NRP's mandatory course in applied welfare research in social work. Licentiate students will be required to present their complete research records and to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of how to handle informed consent and any possible repercussions of their study. Since complete research records cannot always be presented at the beginning of a study, and neither is it possible for students to provide information about the possible results and effects of their study at that stage, once the project is up and running the ethical dilemmas and considerations will be discussed at the graduate seminars when they present their research, in accordance with the established procedures of the university departments concerned.

Since all the licentiate students, being social work professionals, will be employed by local authorities and working in social services, it may be necessary to discuss strategies for how to handle dual or conflicting roles and the regulation of data collection. In research projects conducted by social workers, the object of the study is likely to be social services users, and the research participants may be drawn from socially stigmatised groups. Thus they will constitute vulnerable subject populations, and must be treated as such in the research.

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