



# LUND UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Science

Faculty Board

## Action plan for the prevention of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors at the Faculty of Science

### Introduction

Research studies are highly prioritised within the Faculty of Science and doctoral students are essential to the development of the faculty. The continuous integration of doctoral students into the faculty brings intellectual stimulation and renewal as well as valuable social dynamism to our organisational units. It is therefore natural for the faculty to be sensitive to the interests of doctoral students and to work to ensure their conditions are good. The faculty's ambition is for all doctoral students to feel intellectually stimulated by their research projects and their surroundings, and for all doctoral students to feel so fundamentally secure in their relationship to supervisors and colleagues, as well as to the research and administrative management, that they can challenge their projects and themselves in this environment and develop their full potential.

Doctoral students and supervisors usually work very closely together on research studies projects. This is mostly very rewarding for both parties but close collaboration can also be demanding if frictions arise. In order to develop efforts both to prevent and to manage conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors, the faculty's research programmes board has drawn up the following action plan.

### Goal 1

To implement and follow up the new guidelines for recruitment and selection.

**Measure:** By 18 December 2015 each department is to have submitted a report to the faculty office comprising:

1. Any internal policy documents resulting from the faculty's decision on guidelines.
2. The number of admissions cases dealt with since the procedures were introduced
3. The number of doctoral students admitted with alternative forms of funding since the procedures were introduced
4. Comments from the head of department on how recruitment functions in practice and whether anyone feels that the quality of recruitment work has changed as a result of the new practice.

The faculty office is responsible for compiling the material, which is to be presented to the faculty's research programmes board and to the faculty management.

**Responsibility of:** The departments and the faculty office

## Goal 2

To introduce an organisational structure which enables functional and fair follow-up of individual study plans.

Within the faculty, a procedure is to be introduced entailing the participation of a specially appointed representative of the department in all doctoral student appraisals in connection with follow-up and revision of the individual study plan. This representative is to have a reviewing function in relation to both the doctoral student and the supervisor and is to monitor compliance with the University's undertakings in the research studies project. The representative shall review and follow up the individual study plan on behalf of the department; the head of department then approves the plan on the recommendation of the representative

**Measure:** By 1 December 2015 every department is to have introduced a procedure whereby:

1. A formalised doctoral student appraisal is held before each formal follow-up and revision of the individual study plan.
2. A representative specially appointed by the head of department summons and participates in each such doctoral student appraisal. This person is to be connected to the research studies project in question and therefore able to follow the project's progress. This person is to be a senior member of teaching staff and have good experience of supervising doctoral students.
3. The specially appointed representative reviews the individual study plan on the department's behalf and presents it to the head of department for approval.

The departments are to define how and to what extent these procedures are to be applied to previously admitted doctoral students.

The role of departmental representatives is to be defined in the departments' delegation rules.

The faculty is to ensure that information material is produced to support the departmental representatives in their role.

**Responsibility of:** The departments are responsible for introducing the practice. The faculty's research programmes board is responsible for the information material and for follow-up and evaluation of implementation.

## Goal 3

To introduce a consistent format for doctoral student appraisals in connection with the follow-up and revision of the individual study plan.

**Measure:** By 1 December 2015 each department is to have introduced a practice for doctoral student appraisals whereby:

1. At least one supervisor (the principal supervisor unless special circumstances apply), but as a rule all supervisors, as well as the specially appointed departmental representative and the doctoral student are present.
2. Preparatory material is available before the meeting.
3. Both the doctoral student and the (principal) supervisors have private conversations with the departmental representative in connection with the joint meeting.
4. Special documentation describing the mutual expectations of the doctoral student and the supervisor is reviewed at a first doctoral student appraisal at the time of admission. This documentation is then reviewed once more at a doctoral student appraisal later in the study programme (but within the first half of the study programme).
5. The director of third cycle studies should be present at an initial doctoral student appraisal at the time of admission.
6. The departmental representative should take simple minutes at the meeting, to be signed by the (principal) supervisor and the doctoral student.

**Responsibility of:** The departments. The faculty's research programmes board is to follow up and evaluate implementation.

#### **Goal 4**

To develop information material on the legal framework and application for the departments and doctoral students.

**Measure:** By summer 2015, information material is to have been compiled which can contribute to clarifying the regulatory background for research studies and provide examples of how to manage cases and relevant positions on matters from bodies such as the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) and the Higher Education Appeals Board.

**Responsibility of:** Faculty office, with the support of the University's legal services office.

#### **Goal 5**

To draw up guidelines for the correct management of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors.

**Measure:** By October 2015 there is to be a document which:

1. Defines roles and decision-making procedures in cases of conflict.
2. Defines the conditions for the various types of decisions which may be relevant in cases of conflict.
3. Defines the possibilities for reconsideration or review of decisions.

**Responsibility of:** Faculty office, with the support of the departments and the University's legal services office.

#### **Goal 6**

To implement management of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors in accordance with the rule of law.

**Measure:** By 2016, guidelines according to Goal 5 are to be implemented at all departments at the faculty.

**Responsibility:** Departments.

This action plan was approved by the faculty board after a presentation by Tobias Nilsson and a consultation with the faculty's presiding committee. The material was previously submitted for consultation to the faculty's departments or equivalents as well as to the Council of Science Doctoral Students and the doctoral student representative.

*The signed and formally valid document is in Swedish. This is a translation only.*

Olov Sterner  
Dean

Tobias Nilsson  
Scientific officer



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### **Comments and background information on the goals in the action plan**

#### **Goal 1**

*To implement and follow up the new guidelines for recruitment and selection*

##### **Background**

Well-conducted recruitment, where care is taken to ensure the successful candidate for a research studies place really has the knowledge and other prerequisites for completing the programme, is a basic measure to prevent conflicts in third cycle studies. New procedures for selection and admissions to research studies in the faculty have recently been approved (STYR 2014/731). It is essential that these procedures are followed up in order to clarify whether the changes lead to better and more thorough recruitment processes and also whether staff feel that the guidelines work from an administrative perspective.

#### **Goal 2**

*To introduce an organisational structure which enables functional and fair follow-up of individual study plans*

##### **Background**

It is essential for the prevention of conflicts in research studies that the management of individual study plans should function in such a way as to pick up any differences of opinion on the content and structure of the study programme at an early stage. The Higher Education Ordinance states that the individual study plan is to contain the undertakings of the University and the doctoral student as well as a timetable for the student's study programme. It also states that the plan is to be followed up on a regular basis and modified as necessary by the higher education institution after consultation with the doctoral student and his or her supervisors. LU's own regulations for third cycle education (LS 2012/718) prescribe in greater detail what is to be included in the individual study plan and state that the plan is to be followed up and formally approved at least once per year.

It is essential that the individual study plan does not merely become an individual concern of the doctoral student and his or her supervisors. The science subjects are organised in such a way that, in actual practice, the principal supervisor takes on the undertakings defined in the Higher Education Ordinance as those of the higher education institution, even though the formal responsibility rests with the

department and its head. This circumstance can make it difficult, not only for the doctoral student but also for the department, if the supervisor is the one to prepare the study plan for approval by the head of department, who then has no real opportunity to review the plan independently but in practice approves it on the recommendation of the supervisor. In such cases, it is also doubtful that the higher education institution can be said to have consulted *with the doctoral student and the supervisor* as prescribed by the Higher Education Ordinance.

Before the follow-up and approval of the individual study plan, the doctoral student is to have the opportunity to discuss the plan with a representative of the higher education institution who is not his or her supervisor. In a very small department, the head of department may be able to manage this, but in larger departments the head is often too far removed from the individual research studies projects to be able to meaningfully follow up the undertakings of the doctoral student and the University and to assess the progress of the research studies project without relying completely on statements from the supervisor.

The starting point in the Higher Education Ordinance is that the supervisor is attached to the doctoral student's research studies project as a resource for the doctoral student in the realisation of the project. The principal supervisor is not expected to "own" the project or to be a stakeholder in it, nor indeed to be dependent to any extent on its outcome. In our activities, however, the doctoral student will often join existing projects or at least more or less defined research issues for which the principal supervisor has garnered support from external funders. The department has a responsibility towards the doctoral student for the resources that in practice are controlled and managed by the supervisor. It is therefore essential that the (principal) supervisor and the representative of the department regularly check that they are on the same page regarding the research studies project, its framework, conditions and progress.

Considering that the size and organisational structure vary greatly between the departments or equivalents at the faculty, this can be organised in various ways, with a small unit perhaps choosing one person whereas larger departments will need several people for the role of departmental representatives. The current subject representative or head of division could be considered for this delegation but other solutions are possible.

Taking the construction at the Department of Biology as an example, they have had a system in place for some time with what they refer to as examiners. Each doctoral student has a supervisory committee including an examiner as well as the supervisors. The head of department appoints a number of senior members of teaching staff to be part of a pool from which examiners can be assigned to each research studies project. Thus an examiner is appointed in connection with the admission of the doctoral student. The examiner is entrusted by the head of department with managing certain matters which were traditionally managed by the subject representative (or equivalent), and with functioning as the representative of the head of department ("the higher education institution") in the formal doctoral student appraisals which always precede the formal follow-up and revision of the individual study plan.

This system has been in place for a few years and the experiences of the Department of Biology have been good. The faculty sees this as excellent practice

which should be spread to the other departments. The Department of Biology's document "The role and responsibility of the examiner" is attached for inspiration.

The departmental representative for an individual research studies project does not need to be an expert in the narrow research field of the project, but must be capable of basic understanding of the research project's design and of evaluating the undertakings of the supervisor and the doctoral student as compared to the individual study plan and the governing regulations. Depending on how the system is designed, it is possible to include the mandatory staff appraisal in the individual discussion between the departmental representative and the doctoral student.

The group made up of the departmental representatives within a larger department will have an overview of research studies at the department. It is therefore also hoped that the departments will make the most of these networks to develop their research studies programmes. It has emerged that there is not much available in the way of networks for supervisors or forums for discussions and exchange of experiences on supervision. It is hoped that this system, besides contributing to a more fair and effective follow-up of the individual study plans, will also generate regular opportunities for supervisors to reflect on supervision and related issues.

### **Goal 3**

*To introduce a consistent format for doctoral student appraisals in connection with the follow-up and revision of the individual study plan*

#### **Background**

In order to ensure a basic consistency in the follow-up of the doctoral students' research studies projects, it is desirable that the follow-up appraisals adhere to a similar basic structure for all doctoral students, regardless of departmental affiliation. Doctoral student appraisals in connection with the follow-up and revision of the individual study plan should be formalised and certain basic elements should be included.

One condition for a constructive and structured meeting is that the participants are prepared and have thought through what has been achieved so far, how they intend to plan henceforth and what they think about the working methods and framework for the activity. Some kind of preparatory material or instructions should therefore be available before the meeting. This can of course be designed in various ways; one possible example from the Department of Biology is attached.

Taking minutes of the meeting means that the event is documented and that there is a record of any agreements or positions taken which do not necessarily feature in the individual study plan. Such minutes can most probably be kept very brief in most cases. In case of conflict or differences of opinion, more detailed documentation may, however, be necessary. Experience shows that it is beneficial in such cases to have an established procedure for documentation. An example from the Department of Biology is attached.

## **Goal 4**

*To develop information material on the legal framework and application for the departments and doctoral students.*

### **Background**

Uncertainty has been expressed from various sources concerning the legal aspects of third cycle studies. What demands are doctoral students entitled to make on the department and vice versa? What decisions *can* the department take and what decisions *must* be taken? A greater awareness of these issues both in management in the departments and in individual supervisors is expected to contribute to increased security in the exercise of public authority.

## **Goals 5 and 6**

*To draw up guidelines for the correct management of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors and To implement management of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors in accordance with the rule of law.*

### **Background**

LU's regulations for third cycle education explicitly state that the faculty is to establish procedures for the management of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors.