Web-based system for individual study plans (ISPs) – A short manual

Introduction to the system

This system is somewhat different from the previous one, even if the basic structure is similar. As before, the plan itself consists of a continuous form with open text fields and fields with pre-defined choices. A new feature is that the whole system uses Lucat for login and identification. This means e.g. that you can only access the plans that you are formally associated with. Individual study plans shall be entered in the diary, and the system has a specific functionality to keep track of registration numbers.

At the Science Faculty, each PhD student shall have a case in the diary where his/her individual study plans (and the follow-up of those) are registered. This case is open during the entire study period and is closed when the education ends (when a degree has been conferred, when the student has resigned or when the resources have been withdrawn). Hence, all versions of the individual study plan for a student should have the same record number, and the ISP system automatically secures that this is the case.

This ISP system is based on the system already in use at LTH, and the basic functionality is the same in the two systems. Details in the forms can be different, though.

The system is web-based and it is found here: http://isp.science.lu.se Login is done using your Lucat-ID and password. Hence, you must be established in Lucat to be able to use the system.

The start page looks slightly different depending on the position (access level) of the logged in user. Figure 1 shows the "full" view of the start page (this complete view is seen only by the system administrator).

Figure 1. The start page of the ISP-system as seen upon login by the system administrator. Normal users get a more restricted view with fewer entrances (blue clickable boxes).

Doctoral students and supervisors will see the basic view of the system, where only the entrances "Individuella studieplaner" (Individual study plans) and "Inställningar" (Settings) are available. It is possible to change language in the system, which will affect also the blue boxes. This first page you see when logging in for the first time will be in Swedish though. E.g. directors of study etc. may get access also to "Översikt" (Overview), where it is possible to retrieve a collection of all students and study plan versions that he/she is associated with.

One or a few persons at each department shall have access to the entrance "Diarienummer" (registration numbers). This function is used solely to associate case numbers with PhD students

in the system. A person with this level of access should also be authorized to set up cases in the diary system DFS.

The entrances "Användaradm" (User admin) and "Grunddata" (Basic settings) are for the system administrator only. The system administrator at the Faculty of Science is Tobias Nilsson at the Faculty Office.

Basic functions of the system

Language
Swedish is the default language for the individual study plan. To shift to an English version, select "Inställningar" and change the "Interface language" setting. This change should be made before an individual study plan is created, otherwise some text in the plan will remain in Swedish.

To create and to manage an individual study plan
Select "Individual study plan" to create a new study plan (figure 2).

Figur 2. The view that meets the user when clicking "Individual study plan"

Initially, the drop-down menu to the left contains only one option; "New PhD student". Selecting "New PhD student" renders an empty form for a new individual study plan (figure 3).

Figure 3. The study plan form (the picture has been cropped, the form is longer and scrollable).

The first thing to do is to enter the name of the PhD student, all supervisors, director of studies, etc. Enter the name in the field and klick the button "Connect to LUCAT id", and then click the arrow button that appears by the name. By doing that, the unique Lucat id is coupled to the plan, and that person can now log into the system and access the plan. (If there are several persons with the same name in Lucat, a list will appear from which the proper person is selected). Only those who have defined roles in the plan will be able to access it. Names can be added later as well, but then only by someone already connected to the plan.

When you later log in to the system, the drop-down menu will contain all study plans you are connected to. A PhD student will always only find his/her own name there, wereas a supervisor will be able to access study plans for all his/her doctoral students. The smaller drop-down menu to the right contains all saved versions of the study plan for the PhD student selected in the left menu. Thus, the entire history of the study plan is available at a glance, and any version can be retrieved (figure 4).

The drop-down menus and save buttons are also available at the bottom of the browser window at all times, no matter where you are in the form. Initially, when the first plan is created for a PhD student, only the button "Save as new version" is present (since there is no existing version to save any changes to). A saved version is tagged with date and time and will be visible in the menu to the right. Once a plan has been created and saved, there will be two buttons: "Save" and "Lock version" (figure 4).

Figure 4. The Individual study plan view as it looks when at least one study plan (associated with the logged in person) has been saved in the system.

If you have made changes to the plan, you must klick "save" to save them. In this way the existing version is updated with the recent changes.

Formal approval and "Lock version"
For the formal approval of the individual study plan, the plan shall be printed and signed. To print you first have to save any changes and then scroll to the beginning of the form and select "Printing". Then click "Print" in the view that appears. When the printed version has been checked and found ready for signing, a department representative should go to the "Individual study plan" view and click "Lock version". This will save the plan in a locked version that no longer can be edited. When a locked version of a plan is opened in the system, there will again be only the "Save as new version"-button available. When a study plan has been approved, the locked version is used as a template for the next version. Adjust the plan as you wish and click "Save as new version". The previously approved and locked version remains unchanged, and a new editable version is created based on the locked version. Both versions can be accessed via the right drop-down menu. In this way, approved and locked versions will stack up in the right menu as the doctoral education progresses.

Functionality in the study plan form
The form itself contains help texts and should be fairly self explanatory. Some parts contain fields intended for e.g. courses taken and progress in the research education. When available fields have been used, new fields will be generated automatically so that more data can be entered. However, you must click "Save" in order for the form to be updated with new fields. The same holds for some calculations that is made automatically in the form, e.g. summation of course credits. When data have been entered, calculations will be updated when the form is saved. An important thing to note is that nothing ever should be written in the field for Registration number! (The first field in the form.) There is a specific functionality for registration numbers in the system. A registration number will appear there as soon as the responsible administrator has set up a case in the diary system and filed the registration number in the ISP system. (Please contact the department administrator handling registrations if a registration number does not appear after some time.)

The contents of the individual study plan

The first section of the form contains Lucat-connected fields for different persons/ functions. Use the fields that are applicable (e.g. not all departments have scientific mentors). However, per December 1 2015 all study plans should have a "Representative of the department" in accordance with the action plan for the doctoral education (STYR 2015/164) that was approved by the Faculty board in the Spring 2015.

Resources
This is an important section from a regulative perspective. The Higher Education Ordinance states that the individual study plan shall contain "the undertakings made by the doctoral student and the higher education institution". One central undertaking made by the university is to supply all the resources needed to carry out the research education as defined by the general curriculum and by the individual study plan. Such resources can be e.g. access to equipment to a sufficient extent and at times when the PhD student can use it, access to supervision, access to courses or other relevant introduction/instructions to methods and equipment that the student is supposed to use, and access to facilities and research material (e.g. organisms, samples, reference materials, field sites and travels to such sites). From the individual study plan it must be deducible that it has been possible for the student to carry out the educational project as specified in the study plan.

Latest doctoral student progress meeting
Here it should be stated who took part in the formal progress meeting and when this meeting was held. The Higher Education Ordinance states that "The individual study plan shall be reviewed regularly and amended by the higher education institution to the extent required after consultation with the doctoral student and his or her supervisors".
This review is the purpose of the meeting and it must be documented. This documentation can be made in the plan document itself or in a separate meeting protocol, or as a combination of both.

Evaluation and planning
This section contains e.g. fields for evaluation and planning of the research project. Each partial project of the thesis work can be documented separately, so that the plan gives an overview of the definition, the progress and the planning of each part of research project and how those parts fit in the bigger picture. The documentation in this section may constitute part of the study plan review, but it is important to realize that "review" in the context of the Higher Education Act has a broader meaning (see "Review of the individual study plan" below).

Activities (to meet the educational goals)
This is also an important section from a regulatory perspective. Through the research education, the student shall meet the educational goals. Thus, the educational project must be constituted in such a way that those goals are met upon completion of the project. The purpose of this section of the study plan form is to make each involved party (the student, the supervisors and the department) contemplate on how and to what extent the planned activities contribute to the fulfilment of the goals. And also to identify educational goals that may need more attention to be met in a reasonable way.

Review of the individual study plan
Both the student and the supervisors are expected to be active in the planning of the educational project and in the writing of the individual study plan, but it is the department that formally confirms the plan through an authoritative decision. It is important to keep in mind that the aim of the plan is fulfilment of the educational goals so that the education can be completed within four years or within the agreed time (in case of prolongations). If a plan continuously pushes deadlines forward, this means that the Department has accepted that those tasks take longer and longer to accomplish. Obviously, a plan must be revised if things take longer than initially thought, if things don't work out the expected way, or if the project simply changes direction somewhat, but it must be clear from the review of the study plan if the student is following the plan en route to completion of the educational goals within the set time or not. In the latter case it must also be clear wether the deviation from the plan is due to shortcomings on behalf of the student. There are only four effective years to complete the education and if some activities or tasks take considerably longer than initially planned, reasonably then some other parts of the planning must suffer from that. If a point is reached where a discussion about withdrawal of the educational resources is motivated, it must be possible to conclude from the plans and the protocols that the actual results increasingly deviates from agreed deliverables and from the expected progression towards the educational goals. Also, the plan should not be revised with the sole focus on completion of the research project, in such a way that the educational goals are compromised. According to the Higher Education Ordinance, it is not the completion of a research project but realisation of the educational goals that renders a degree!

Registration numbers
The system has a separate function for registration numbers to make sure that plans do not end up with multiple numbers, or without numbers. As mentioned previously only a few administrators will have access to this function, and only they will see the "Diarienummer" entrance in the system. A registration number must be connected to each admitted PhD student in the system, and this is done in the function "Diarienummer" (figure 5), once a case has been created in DFS (the diary system). Note that individual study plans shall be registered in the STUD series (under 3.5.9), even though the example given in figures 5 and 6 shows "U".

Figure 5. The view in the system function "Diarienummer".

Click the + symbol in the upper left corner of the table to add a new PhD student to the table (figure 6).

Figure 6. The interface where registration numbers are connected to PhD students in the system.

Enter the name of the PhD student in the field that appears and connect the entry to the Lucat-ID of the student by clicking "Search", and then click the arrow button that appears (if there are multiple entries in Lucat with the same name, a list will appear where the correct person can be selected). Then enter the registration number of the case for that particular student (that has previously been filed in DFS) in the field "Diarienr". Finally, click the green check mark to save. (This table with students and registration numbers will eventually contain all PhD students at the faculty, in alphabetical order.)

When an individual study plan is created in the system (by a supervisor, a PhD student or by anyone else) and a Lucat connection is established for the name of the student, the registration number will automatically show up in the form. That number will then be present in all plans carrying the name of that particular student.

Note that record-keeping of individual study plans also means that the plans shall be archived in the diary in paper form when the case has been closed. Preferably, all signed individual study plans therefore should be kept by the/those person(s) that handle(s) the diary at the department. If there is need for signed study plans among research groups or sections, it is likely better to have copies rather than originals distributed.

Export to Ladok

It is possible to export an approved plan to Ladok in its entirety. To do that, an administrator should log into the system and select Individual Study Plan" and then "LADOK export". Once there, click "Mark", copy the text and paste it into Ladok (this is done using function SA92 in Ladok). At the Science faculty, it is not mandatory to file the entire plan in Ladok. The requirement is that each approved plan shall be noted in Ladok with registration number and date of approval.