

# SULF Doctoral Candidate Association – Opinion Document

## Introduction

SDF is the SULF national section for doctoral candidates. SDF conducts advocacy as concerns employment conditions for this group of students in Sweden.

The basis of SULF and SDF activities in this field is Vision 2030. Vision 2030 provides a long-term, clear vision that combines professional, education and research policy issues with employment condition issues. This vision clarifies the SULF positions to politicians and decision makers, universities and the general public. The vision describes a future ideal position for universities in 2030 and is entitled *In the service of humanity - higher education and research for a sustainable future*. It consists of three subheadings: Free Search for New Knowledge, Education for the Future, and Critical Power in Society.

Vision 2030 forms the basis of the SULF operational focus. The operational focus determines the priority areas for the three-year congress period and is adopted by Congress, the union's highest democratic body. The SULF and SDF annual plans of operation define and prioritise the parts of the SULF Management Report that will be at the centre of operations during the year in order to facilitate the Board's work aimed at achieving overall goals. Prioritised areas during the 2016-2018 congress period are:

- Employment conditions and career paths
- Teaching
- Professional influence

The SULF doctoral candidate association shares the SULF vision for higher education and research for a sustainable future. The purpose of the SDF Opinion Document is to compile the SULF and SDF positions on what is considered to be good employment conditions for doctoral students in practice and what SDF wishes to accomplish with its work, based on the SULF operational focus. The document is therefore divided into the same subheadings as SULF Operational Focus 2016-2018. The SDF Opinion Document is addressed to SULF and SDF representatives at national and local levels, as well as to all those interested in SULF views as concerns doctoral candidates.

The SULF doctoral student association's Opinion Document will be adopted at the SULF SDF AGM and will be revised in advance of each congress period in accordance with current operational focus.

## Employment conditions and career paths

Doctoral candidates are responsible for extensive contributions at universities and colleges, in research and in education. After completing their doctoral studies, newly-graduated post docs must be able to conduct independent research. This is one of the reasons that Swedish doctoral studies are the equivalent of four years of funded full-time studies. Both the thesis element and the course element contribute to the aim. Doctoral studies must be covered by employment security systems and must offer a competitive salary.

### Financing

By offering fair and equal employment conditions, well-qualified individuals will be attracted to applying for a doctoral degree course, which in turn benefits Swedish research. As there are still doctoral candidates funded by scholarships, not all of this group enjoy access to the benefits offered by the tax-funded employment security system. If these are scholarships in connection with international cooperation, the university departments themselves must be responsible for ensuring parity with employed doctoral candidates as regards both salary and access to the social security system.

The university bears financial responsibility for the entire doctoral studies period if the person has been admitted to postgraduate studies with a doctorate as a final goal. In many cases this financial responsibility is circumvented by the fact that admission initially only takes place for a licentiate degree, and is then possibly prolonged. If the goal of postgraduate education is a doctorate then the appointment must cover the entire period from employment start date.

The salary for doctoral candidates is often too low in relation to other labour markets. Doctoral studies are, however, a qualification and a higher salary can be expected after graduation. In terms of a lifelong income, the financial conditions for doctoral studies may not be so low as to make the studies not financially worth the time spent on them.

Salaries for doctoral candidates in employed positions are usually governed by salary level ladders where the levels are regulated based on performance or employment period. A salary ladder based on effective study time is to be preferred.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- All doctoral candidates must be employed throughout their doctoral studies.
- All doctoral candidates will be entitled to residence-based and work-based benefits.
- Grants or scholarship as forms of financing must be abolished by Swedish universities.
- Scholarships established from international cooperation and funds may form the basis of doctoral employment, but Swedish universities must guarantee salary and conditions comparable to those enjoyed by doctoral candidates with employed positions.
- Financial conditions during doctoral studies may not adversely affect lifelong income.
- The entry level salary must be the equivalent of other qualified professions.
- Salary setting based on effective study time is preferable to salary levels based on performance
- Licentiate admission is permitted only if a licentiate degree is the goal.

## Working environment and health

Important prerequisites for successful research studies include a good physical and psychosocial work environment which partly concerns access to infrastructure such as office space, computers and any other equipment required. However, the working environment for doctoral students also requires that the departments work systematically to prevent different types of stress-related sick leave, discrimination or harassment. Follow-up of doctoral candidates' work environment should be carried out via their individual study plans or employee planning dialogues.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- No form of harassment or discrimination may occur.
- Doctoral candidates' physical and psychosocial work environment must be monitored regularly.
- Periods of sick leave must form grounds for the prolongation of the doctoral candidate's period of study.

## The Individual Study Plan

Doctoral candidates must, together with their supervisors, draw up individual study plans containing commitments and obligations for both the candidate and the university, as well as a timetable for the programme. Together, doctoral candidates and supervisors will follow up the individual study plan on an annual basis and make any changes necessary.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- Each research student must, in line with university regulations, establish an individual study plan.
- The individual study plan must be followed up on an annual basis.

## The supervisor's role

The supervisor's role is to guide doctoral candidates through their thesis work. As there are no regulations that stipulate the supervisor's duties or responsibilities, this may vary between supervisors, faculties and higher education institutions.

Thus, it is the responsibility of the university to draw up guidelines for the role of the supervisor, the supervision to be carried out and its scope. It is appropriate that the university's common guidelines be supplemented with guidelines at faculty level.

### **SDF considers that:**

- In addition to academic and pedagogical skills, supervisors must have undergone a supervisor training programme.
- Supervisors should continuously attend seminars designed for supervisors and reflect on their role as supervisors.
- A supervisor must not have too many doctoral candidates. It must be possible to ensure good quality in the supervision process.

## Career planning during doctoral studies

The general and specific skills and abilities that doctoral candidates develop during their educational programmes pave the way to good career opportunities.

Doctoral candidates who would like help are offered support such as career counselling or marketing strategies for the unique skills their doctoral degree implies. In order to increase employability after graduation, doctoral candidates must be allowed and encouraged to include languages other than their native languages in their individual study plans. This includes, but is not limited to, academic writing in English and Swedish as a second language. Courses in Swedish must also be free for doctoral candidates.

Society's demands for increased knowledge development and skills mean that cooperation between business and education is important. Good collaboration between companies, organizations and academic institutions creates the preconditions for growth. In order to meet future demands, both nationally and internationally, high-quality education and research that can contribute to creating added value, growth and knowledge development is essential. Doctoral candidates and postdocs can enable society to take part in the latest research and companies and organizations to gain the opportunity to run development projects together with higher education institutions, which stimulates product and service development.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- Higher education institutions must broaden career opportunities after graduation.
- Career planning opportunities must be offered during doctoral studies.
- Doctoral candidates must be given opportunities to interact with business.

## Career after graduation

In order to create growth in the successful young scientist group, there must be attractive and secure career paths within the academic world. The number of graduates must be adjusted in relation to demand from the labour market. All postdoctoral positions must be employed positions, for postdocs coming into the Swedish system and for Swedish postdocs leaving for work abroad. Foreign researchers who wish to stay in Sweden after graduation must have reasonable opportunities to do so on the same grounds as other incoming workforce members.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- There should be more postdoctoral posts at the universities in Sweden/ within the academic world. Qualification appointments must entitle the holder to permanent employment
- Foreign doctoral candidates who have been carrying out doctoral studies in Sweden for at least four years must be entitled to a permanent residence permit.
- The time period a foreign doctoral student has been carrying out postgraduate education must be valid as the basic qualification for citizenship, regardless of the original intention to stay in Sweden.

## **Follow-up of graduates**

Follow-up of graduates' careers is necessary in order to find out how many continue in the academic world, in business or other activities. Statistics should be presented by subject, department, faculty and university as well as being made public. This follow-up may also offer an opportunity for graduates to provide information that had been too sensitive during doctoral studies, for example how satisfied they were with their education or their supervision.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- Follow-up should be reported 1, 5 and 10 years after graduation by e.g. the Swedish Higher Education Authority.

## Teaching

Teaching of and by doctoral candidates must be conducted at a high level of scientific or artistic quality, where teaching skills are valued as highly as scientific competence. One prerequisite for high-quality education is that doctoral candidates and teaching researchers enjoy secure employment conditions.

### Courses at doctoral level

The courses that research studies include must provide skills that are useful for thesis work and for preparation for future careers. The quality of doctoral studies courses must be high. When courses that cover the doctoral candidate's needs are not available at their own university, it should be possible to take them at other higher education institutions, in Sweden or abroad. Accessibility - easily identifying and applying for courses outside the candidate's own university - must be simplified. Likewise, higher education institutions need to allocate more resources for these courses and to monitor their quality.

The Bologna Process means that the learning objectives of an educational programme must be stated in the course description and that these goals are also related to the assessment bases used for examination. In order to demonstrate the high quality of Swedish research education, learning goals and assessment bases must also be established for them. Consequently, a Swedish thesis may be compared with a foreign thesis, despite the absence of grade levels in the Swedish system. This would also be helpful for examiners and thesis opponents from non-Scandinavian countries.

As the goals of doctoral studies differ from the learning objectives of the one and two-year master's degrees, these programmes must also occupy a special position in relationship to the master's courses. This is also the primary reason why courses on master's level only in exceptional cases and only at the student's own request may be credited within the framework of doctoral studies.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- Courses at the doctoral level must be pursued on a scientific or artistic basis and maintain a high educational level.
- The range, accessibility and qualifications for research courses are to be evaluated on a regular basis.
- Doctoral studies and course plans must include clear, established learning objectives and assessment bases.
- Master's degree courses may only be credited to doctoral studies in exceptional cases.

### Teaching during doctoral studies

Teaching and supervision of students are included in many post-doctoral positions. Consequently, it is important that the opportunity be given to develop these skills during doctoral studies. Doctoral candidates must be offered the opportunity to teach because teaching is part of the work of many researchers. Likewise, it is important to be able to communicate research to students and others in and outside the teaching environment (e.g.

media). In addition, teaching experience is often a necessity for a career within the academic world consequently the opportunities and competitiveness of the researcher's career within and outside Sweden are developed and strengthened.

If the researcher so wishes, the opportunity to teach at the undergraduate and/ or advanced level will be given within the framework of doctoral studies. It is also important that opportunities to participate in courses in university teaching are available, so that teaching is conducted at a good educational level. SDF believes that higher education institutions should utilise the skills of doctoral candidates in education, regardless of their Swedish language skills.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- Doctoral candidates who wish to do so should be given the opportunity to teach at first or second level.
- Doctoral candidates who wish to do so must be given the opportunity to participate in university teaching courses.

## Professional influence

A gender-equal academic world with socio-economic variability among students and academic staff provides the preconditions for doctoral candidates and researchers to think freely and thereby contribute to social development. In order for doctoral candidates and researchers to be able to think freely, an environment free of ideological and political pressure is required.

## Recruitment and admission

The university's composition of doctoral candidates must reflect its surrounding community. Legally secure admission procedures ensure the excellence of research, which benefits the student, the university and society.

External advertisement of doctoral candidate positions must occur in the required time frame and admissions must be based on scientific or artistic grounds and merit. At the time of admission other relevant qualifications should also be assessed, qualifications such as research projects, teaching and professional experience. Applicants' opportunities to take full advantage of doctoral studies are of great importance for admission.

Participating in research projects before admission to doctoral studies is one method of gaining qualifications. However, this should not be a form of acting as a "shadow doctor", that is that the individual is deliberately utilised to perform tasks that should be included in an upcoming doctoral project before being accepted as a doctoral candidate. This increases the risk that the doctoral position will be tailored to a specific person prior to the job advertisement and so open competition is eliminated. Systematically utilising students by first employing them on a project basis, on a scholarship and/or utilising prospective doctoral candidates without pay in projects, then choosing whether admission will take place or not, creates an insecure student life. "Shadow doctoral candidates" should not serve as a risk minimiser for employers.

### **SULF and SDF consider that:**

- Admission to postgraduate education must be legally secure, open and competitive.
- All admissions, regardless of the form of financing, to be dealt with and resolved in a collegiate joint committee with doctoral candidate representation.
- Admissions in which doctoral candidate placements have been determined in advance are unacceptable
- Systematic utilisation of shadow doctoral candidates is incorrect and unsecure.
- Probationary employment of doctoral candidates is detrimental to the individual and the university.
- Foreign research students to be granted a residence permits for their entire doctoral candidate period.

## Equal terms for all doctoral candidates

All doctoral candidates must be provided with the same conditions, regardless of nationality, function type, age or gender. All doctoral candidates must be given the opportunity to



complete their postgraduate studies on the basis of their own situation. A common regulatory framework covering all doctoral candidates admitted to Swedish institutions of higher education is vital for a secure and rewarding research education.

In order to provide non-Swedish-speaking doctoral candidates with the same prerequisites for completing their doctoral studies, it is essential that all relevant information be available in English. This information must be an equivalent and complete translation, and not merely a summary. It must also be possible to communicate in English at the various professional institutions and higher education institutions and there must be English-speaking employees who have the opportunity to participate.

**SULF and SDF consider that:**

- All doctoral candidates to be subject to the same general rules and conditions.
- Information and communications related to doctoral studies must be available and at a similar standard in both Swedish and English.