



## Starter Kit for Doctoral Candidates

/The SULF Association of Doctoral Candidates

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# Starter Kit for Doctoral candidates

## Congratulations on becoming a doctoral candidate!

This document is intended to provide a brief overview of your rights as a doctoral candidate and important issues related to PhD studies in Sweden. This document is divided into two parts. The first part covers aspects of the doctoral candidate working environment, (rules, regulations, rights of doctoral candidates etc.) and the second part looks at life outside the workplace. This second part will be especially helpful to people who are new to living in Sweden and will need to navigate the government's occasionally confusing bureaucracy.

The Board of the SULF Association of Doctoral Candidates,

April 2019



## Working environment

### Admission to PhD Studies and Contracts

In Sweden, doctoral candidates are typically admitted into four-year programs for PhD studies (or five-year PhD programs that include additional departmental duties, such as teaching). The initial appointment may be for no longer than one year. An appointment may be renewed for no more than two years at a time. All regulations regarding the doctoral candidate contracts can be found in Chapter 5 of the Higher Education Ordinance, (högskoleförordningen).

### Financing

In most cases, doctoral candidates in Sweden are, employed and have a salary. Remember that salaries should increase in accordance with collective agreements, (kollektivavtal), and other local policies. Check your university website for the relevant information or contact your administration office for details about the salary system.

Some doctoral candidates receive their income from

a scholarship. Having a scholarship is not the same as being employed, because these doctoral candidates



work under different rules. For example, scholarship recipients do not earn pensions and they are not covered by collective agreements.

### Supervision

According to the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance, (högskoleförordningen), all doctoral candidates have the right to two supervisors, with one of these having the role of principal supervisor. All doctoral candidates are entitled to change supervisor(s) if they wish, (see Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 28). The number of hours of supervision may be regulated by your university, so check your university's policies in this regard.

### **Individual study plans (ISPs)**

All doctoral candidates at Swedish universities are required to have an individual study plan (ISP), which is a binding document and "is to contain the undertakings made by the doctoral candidate and the higher education institution and a timetable for the doctoral candidate's study programme." (See Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 29). The ISP should be reviewed regularly and amended by the higher education institution to the extent required after consultation with the doctoral candidate and his or her supervisors.

### **Trade unions in Sweden**

In Sweden, working conditions are regulated to a greater extent through collective agreements than by legislation. These agreements are negotiated by unions and employers. Therefore approximately 70 % of all Swedish employees are members of a union, and these numbers are even higher for state employees. Unions are open to all, regardless of nationality or type of employment. Union

membership can facilitate access to many kinds of assistance (e.g. information related to doctoral studies and legal assistance).

### **Special legislation for higher education institutes**

The working conditions and terms of employment at Swedish universities are regulated by legislation to some extent. Högskoleförordningen, (The Swedish Higher Education Ordinance), is one important law governing Swedish universities. However, local conditions are also regulated by collective agreements, (kollektivavtal), at national and local levels. These are negotiated by unions and employers. Please read your local and central agreement to find out what regulations/terms and conditions apply in your case.

### **Sick leave**

It is important to report sick leave. Typically, this is done through PRIMULA or a similar HR system. The first day of sick leave is unpaid. As an employee, you will receive sick pay, (approximately 80% of your salary, 90 % if on long-term sick leave), for further days that you report sick. If you are employed

as a doctoral candidate, your contract should be extended for any days missed due to sickness. In cases where your sick leave lasts for longer than 7 calendar days, you will need a doctor's note. After 14 calendar days, you will need to report this to the Social Insurance Agency, (Försäkringskassan).

As a doctoral candidate, (employed as a 'doktorand'), your employer should extend your employment if you have been on sick leave so that you are granted a total of 4 years of PhD studies. Talk to your union if you would like to find out more. It is important to note that in order to receive any benefits through the Social Insurance Agency, (Försäkringskassan), you must be registered in their systems, and this process can take several months. It is therefore advisable that new residents in Sweden register with the Social Insurance Agency as soon as they have a personal ID number, (personnummer), issued by the Tax Agency, (Skatteverket). For more information, visit the Social Insurance Agency website, [www.fk.se](http://www.fk.se).

## **Parental leave**

Parental leave benefits are complex. If you are planning to have a child or apply for parental leave, even if you already have a child, you should contact your union, the HR department at your university and the Social Insurance Agency, (Försäkringskassan), to ask about your specific case. SULF offers a parental leave manual to members, and you can find this when you login at [www.sulf.se](http://www.sulf.se). For more information, see [www.fk.se](http://www.fk.se).

## Practical information for international students

### Personal ID number

Everyone that intends to stay in Sweden for at least one year should apply to the Tax Agency, (Skatteverket), for a personal ID number, (personnummer). When you have received your personal ID number, you are entitled to subsidised health care, can get a mobile sim card and phone number, open a bank account and much more. Unfortunately, everyday life in Sweden can be very difficult without these things so it is extremely important to obtain a Swedish personal ID number as soon as possible. Visit the Tax Agency's website for information on how to apply.

### ID card

After receiving your personal ID number, you can apply for an ID card, (identitetskort), from the Swedish Tax Agency, (Skatteverket). The ID card can be used as proof of your age and identity at places such as pharmacies, banks or shops. This ID is not free of charge and is also not compulsory, but it has become common for banks to require this in addition to a visa

and personal ID number before allowing non-Swedish citizens to open a bank account. For more information, please see the Tax Agency's web site, [www.skatteverket.se](http://www.skatteverket.se).

### Housing

Housing is often scarce in Swedish cities. Blocket.se is the largest online housing market in Sweden and can be used to find accommodation. However, due to the high demand for housing, scams are increasingly common and it is always important to exercise caution when making online transactions. It is not advisable to make any payment before you have signed a contract and personally visited the apartment that you are planning to rent. Every city has local companies that provide student housing, which can vary significantly in price. All Swedish universities have an international student office, and you should contact them if you would like additional information regarding local housing.

### Banking

In recent years, Sweden has become a largely cashless society where it can be difficult

to make purchases without a Swedish bank card or Swedish mobile banking application, (of which the most common is SWISH). It is therefore important to open a Swedish bank account as soon as possible so that you can receive your salary and make day-to-day purchases. In order to open a Swedish bank account, however, most banks require that applicants first purchase an ID card from the Swedish Tax Agency, (Skatteverket), in addition to providing copies of their passport, residence visa and employment contract. Unfortunately, it will likely take at least several weeks to obtain all these documents after you have moved to Sweden.

### **Local transportation**

Public transport in Sweden is widely available. Buses, trains, trams and the underground in Stockholm provide a convenient and relatively inexpensive way to get around. Passes are usually valid for unlimited travel on the local network and as a doctoral candidate you are entitled to purchase a student ticket as long as you have a valid student ID/ Mecenat card.

### **Residence permits**

If you have been a doctoral candidate with a residence permit for research studies for at least 4 years during the last 7 years and you are planning to stay in Sweden, you can be granted a permanent residence permit. Time with other employment can also be counted. For more information, see the Swedish Migration Agency website, [www.migrationsverket.se](http://www.migrationsverket.se).

### **Insurance**

As an employed doctoral candidate, you are insured by your university, but you may want to purchase additional forms of insurance. A-kassas are the unemployment insurance funds that normally provide unemployment compensation to their members who lose their jobs. In order to be able to receive unemployment compensation, you need to be a member of an A-kassa and to have paid a small monthly fee for at least 12 months before the end of your employment. You cannot receive compensation from the A-kassa before you have handed in your thesis to be printed, even if you have run out





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of funding. This is because you are regarded as an active student in this situation and not a job seeker. If you are a member of the union, contact the local union representatives at your university if you are in this situation. For more information, see the AEA website.

### **Trade unions in Sweden**

In Sweden, working conditions are regulated to a greater extent through collective agreements than by legislation. These agreements are negotiated by unions and employers. Therefore, approximately 70 % of all Swedish employees are members of a union, (the rate is even higher for state employees). Unions are free organizations and open to all, regardless of nationality or type of employment. Membership of a union together with membership of an unemployment insurance

fund, (for example AEA), means you are well insured.

### **SULF**

SSULF, the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers, is the union and professional organisation with the most members in academia. We focus on university issues and are experts on the regulations in this field. SULF is a non-politically, non-religiously affiliated union. SULF has local boards at most universities and a national office. As a member you can always receive information and support whenever you need it. We know the special regulations that apply to academia, and social insurance systems and residence permit rules for our members working at universities. SULF's income insurance in case of unemployment is included in your membership fee. Please note that you have to have been a member of both SULF and the unemployment insurance fund for at least 12 months before becoming unemployed in order to be eligible for the income insurance. The unemployment benefit + the income insurance gives you up to 80 % of your previous income if you become

unemployed. Find out more about SULF at [sulf.se/en/phdcandidate/](http://sulf.se/en/phdcandidate/)

## Healthcare

If you need medical attention, but not in a medical emergency, you should first visit your local healthcare centre, (Vårdcentral). You need to register with a specific healthcare centre before you can use it. If you only need medical advice, you can call 1177 to speak with a nurse or go to the website [1177.se](http://1177.se). All universities are required to have an occupational healthcare provider. This is a private company that provides a limited number of healthcare services. Check with your department's administration to find out who provides occupational healthcare at your workplace and how you can access it.

## Some Swedish authorities

- The Swedish Migration Agency, (Migrationsverket), makes decisions on residence permits.
- The Tax Agency, (Skatteverket), issues personal ID numbers and handles tax related matters.
- The Social Insurance Agency, (Försäkringskassan), is responsible for social welfare services (e.g. parental leave benefits, sickness benefits and child allowances).
- Emergencies & SOS numbers  
In case of emergency: Dial 112 to contact the police, fire department or medical services. Emergency calls are free.





The SULF Association of Doctoral Candidates (SDF) is SULF's doctoral candidate section. SDF has around 3 300 members and is one of the most rapidly-growing sections within SULF.

The Association organises doctoral candidate days, information days for researchers, and training inputs workshops and much more etc. SULF's doctoral candidate section has its own Board, which monitors safeguards and promotes the interests of doctoral candidates within the organisation.

SDF issues a regular newsletter to all its members. To find out more about SDF, please see [www.sulf.se/SDF](http://www.sulf.se/SDF).