

SULF Association of Doctoral Candidates Management Report 2024-2025

The Board of the SULF Association of Doctoral Candidates present the following Management Report for mandate period 24/25 (up to 24th April 2025).

The Board

During the year the Board has consisted of:

Konstantin Golpayegani
Chair since April 2023

Mid Sweden University

Miaoxin Gong
Vice chair since April 2023

Lund University

Haro de Grauw

Lund University

Jonathan Wiskandt

Stockholm University

Aimee Miles

Uppsala University

Linda Eriksson

Örebro University

Joel Martinsson

Linnaeus University

Mohamed Al-Sabri

Uppsala University

Isabel Velazques Garcia, *resigned*

Linköping University

Nomination Committee:

Paulina Rajkowska
Daniel Hedbom
Sigrid Berglund
Arash Jouybari

Introduction

Each year, the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association (the Association) centres its work around a theme chosen at the Annual General Meeting. For the mandate period of 2023-2024, the focus was on creating on working groups on different topics such as (1) PhD Starter Kit, (2) Migration, (3) Harassment report, (4) Individual Study Plan, and (5) PhD Course.

This Management Report presents an overview of the year of activities, and it is structured according to four operational objectives of the Association, namely board operations, membership activities, recruitment, as well as advocacy and opinion building. This is followed with a brief financial overview.

Board operations

Board meetings and training of board members

This year's board consisted of 5 returning members, and 4 new members. During the mandate period 1 of board members resigned on their own requests. During the 2023-2024 mandate period, the board held and 7 board meetings. It was recommended that the meetings be held in-person and if possible, hybrid. However, there was also an agreement that the meeting be held together with our university visits (herein contact days). In that regard, we have managed to meet up several times due to the contact days. Meetings focused on ongoing work planning and setting the agenda for regular events such as contact day and the SULF Congress.

Individual Study Plan

Numerous doctoral candidates encounter challenges with their individual study plans, often due to ambiguity regarding who is responsible for completing and understanding them. Additionally, many are unaware of the significant impact these plans can have on their educational journey. These plans, crucial for guiding doctoral candidates through their studies, are governed by the Higher Education Ordinance and university regulations. Despite their importance, they are sometimes undervalued and inadequately utilized in practice.

However, it is worthwhile to be mentioned that the Executive Board of SULF was mainly in charge of this working group therefore the Vice Chair, Miaoxin from the doctoral candidate association was working mostly on it. The Executive Board of SULF worked on this issue through focus group, comprising doctoral students, where it became evident that existing individual study plans lack clear structure, leading to confusion. Enhancing both the formality and structure of these documents, along with improving their implementation, is imperative. The discussion further delved into identifying and sharing best practices for effective individual study plans.

PhD Starter Kit

The aim of this document is to offer a concise summary of the rights afforded to you as a doctoral candidate and significant considerations regarding PhD studies in Sweden. It is divided into two sections for clarity. The initial part addresses various facets of the doctoral

candidate's working environment, including rules, regulations, and the rights of doctoral candidates. The subsequent section focuses on life beyond the workplace. Particularly beneficial for newcomers to Sweden, this section aids in navigating the occasionally intricate bureaucracy of the government.

Migration

The working group regarding migration issues was inspired from the previous board as in the summer of 2021, a sudden shift in migration legislation significantly impacted doctoral candidates, prompting urgent action. The Association from the last period engaged with the issue, joining forces with SULF, SFS, TCO, and ST in a collaborative effort. Together, they crafted a petition to the government, garnering nearly five thousand signatures, and submitted written statements supported by various stakeholders, including Svensk Näringsliv and The Royal Swedish Academy of Science. Throughout this year, the association has been engaged in the process of gathering and collating materials from the previous year's activities. This comprehensive effort extends to compiling statistics and data to meticulously study the effects of the significant changes implemented in 2021.

This ongoing project represents a crucial undertaking for the association, serving as a vital foundation for understanding the impact of past actions and decisions. By documenting and analyzing the outcomes of previous initiatives, the association aims to glean valuable insights into the efficacy of various strategies and policies. By carefully documenting and archiving materials from past activities, the association lays the groundwork for future boards to build upon, ensuring a transition of knowledge and momentum.

Looking ahead, the association hopes that the next year's board will continue and build upon this important project.

Harassment Report

The prevalence of threats and harassment directed towards researchers and educators within Swedish academic institutions has persisted over a prolonged period, posing significant challenges to the integrity of both research endeavors and educational endeavors.

- Work Environment: The consequential nature of threats and harassment fosters an atmosphere of toxicity within academic environments. Researchers and educators find themselves grappling with heightened levels of anxiety and apprehension, which effects their ability to engage fully in their work. This toxic environment hampers collaboration and teamwork, hindering the collective progress of academic pursuits.
- Job Security: The specter of threats and harassment casts a shadow over the job security of researchers and educators, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability. Fear of reprisal or retaliation may deter individuals from speaking out or seeking assistance, perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and silence. This insecurity undermines the ability of academic professionals to fulfill their roles effectively and contribute meaningfully to their respective fields.
- Academic Freedom: The imposition of threats and harassment directly encroaches upon the fundamental principles of academic freedom, which are indispensable for the pursuit of knowledge and the exploration of diverse perspectives. Researchers and educators may find themselves constrained by fear, compelled to censor their work or avoid contentious topics to evade conflict. This compromises the integrity and autonomy of academic inquiry, impeding intellectual progress and innovation.

Ph.D. Course

Prospective PhD students are often told that doctoral education is tuition-free at state-funded universities in Sweden, regardless of citizenship. However, an investigation by the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association Board found that charging course fees to PhD students is more common than advertised. The practice varies between universities, lacks transparency, and creates financial burdens, especially for non-EU/EEA students. Despite regulations stating PhD education should be free, loopholes allow universities to impose hidden fees, undermining the notion of free education in Sweden.

Handover to the 2024-2025 Board

The Association plans to perform a self-evaluation of how the Association has operated during the past year in connection to the last board meeting, to see how the Association's work can be

improved for the coming year. The chairperson is working on updating the internal chair handover document, based on experiences from the past year.

Membership activities

Doctoral Candidate Contact Day

SULF Doctoral Candidate Association organizes enriching Contact Days tailored for doctoral candidates keen on engaging with our association's work and for nationwide participation. This event, conducted entirely in English, will serve as a platform for networking, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing among doctoral candidates across various disciplines.

The theme of the Contact Day will depend on the days and the location where we hold it. For example, our contact day at Uppsala University focused on academic freedom and this location was chosen as a relatively central location that everyone can travel to. Through insightful discussions, interactive workshops, and engaging presentations, participants will delve into key issues impacting doctoral candidates and explore strategies for collective advocacy and empowerment within academic circles.

To ensure widespread participation, the Contact Day will be promoted extensively to our members and communicated to all local associations affiliated with the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association. Through targeted marketing campaigns, email newsletters, and social media announcements, we aim to reach doctoral candidates from diverse backgrounds and research fields, fostering a vibrant and inclusive community of scholars.

Participants can anticipate a dynamic agenda featuring keynote speeches from esteemed scholars, and panel discussions with experienced advocates focused on specific areas of interest. Additionally, opportunities for networking and informal discussions will be woven throughout the day, enabling attendees to forge meaningful connections and exchange ideas with like-minded peers.

By convening doctoral candidates from across Sweden and beyond, the Contact Day aims to catalyze collaborative efforts, amplify diverse voices, and drive positive change within academic communities.

Newsletters to members

As well as during 2021/2022, newsletters were sent out during the period 2023/2024, to all members with registered email addresses. The newsletters were written in English and consisted of information about the work on the board, upcoming events, and surveys.

SULF day

The SULF Day, is usually scheduled for October 6th or 7th and serves as an opportunity for board members to actively engage in local activities and share their involvement on Facebook. The content and focus of this day will be determined by the board members, aligning with the overarching theme of the year. Unfortunately, this year's association has not participated in SULF day due to the conflicting tasks that overlapped.

As advocates for doctoral candidates, board members are encouraged to immerse themselves in local initiatives, whether it be participating in workshops, attending seminars, or collaborating with academic institutions. By actively participating in these activities, board members not only contribute to the advancement of the association's mission but also foster meaningful connections within their respective communities.

Furthermore, board members are urged to document their participation in these local activities and share their experiences on Facebook. Through engaging posts, photos, and updates, board members can provide insights into the impact of their involvement and inspire others to get involved as well.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association will be held on April 24th, and will be a hybrid event to allow the opportunity to those who are unable to travel. In addition to the association officials, representatives of the Nominations Committee and SULF board members will be present.

Facebook

All membership activities have been mentioned on the Association's Facebook page. The Association's Facebook page has also been updated with relevant news articles, and promotion of interesting events.

Local Visits

The Doctoral Candidate Association of 2023/2024 conducted several local visits; Uppsala University, Linnaeus University in Växjö, Marie Cederschiöld högskola, Umeå University, Luleå University, Karlstad University, and Mid Sweden University. Below you can see the dates and activities at different locations. The board made a strategic decision to target small and medium-sized universities with a relatively low presence of SULF members. The objective of these meetings was to enhance awareness of both SULF and the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association, while also spreading information about current events and initiatives. Despite the modest turnout at these meetings, the discussions proved to be highly enriching, with participants valuing the opportunity to engage with union representatives who empathized with their individual challenges.

Sep/2023	Zoom Presentation	Mittuniversitetet (Sundsvall)
Oct/2023	Presentation	Marie Cederschiöld högskola
Nov/2023	Seminar and Board Meeting	Luleå University
Feb/2024	Contact Day	Uppsala University
Mar/2024	Seminar	Mittuniversitetet (Östersund)
Mar/2024	Seminar and Board Meeting	Linnaeus University (Växjö)

Based on the positive outcomes observed, the board recommends maintaining and expanding this format in the future. Additionally, they plan to document the insights gained from the two visits conducted, thereby facilitating continuous improvement and refinement of outreach strategies.

Advocacy and opinion-building

Since the previous Annual General Meeting, the Association aimed to champion the interests of doctoral candidates in Sweden by crafting debate articles, participating in events, and producing official reports, as well as submitting motions to the congress. While some of these endeavours were not realized, the Association did manage to submit a few motions to the congress.

Outreach

The Association has been an active participant in the Interunion collaboration on the ISP and on the Aliens Act. It included a great number of events and meetings. The Association also worked actively in spreading the information on the topic through printed media, online publishing, and social media.

Saco Student Council

Vice Chair Miaoxin has initiated discussions with Saco Student Council, engaging with Vice Chair Colin Andersson and Chair Titus Fridell. The primary focus of these discussions was the upcoming Saco Congress and the possibility of securing representation on the Saco Congress board.

SFS-DK

Throughout this mandate period, the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association maintained a continuous partnership with SFS-DK (the Swedish Federation of Doctoral Candidates and Doctoral Students). Our collaborative efforts primarily centered on examining the impact of the Aliens Act on doctoral education in Sweden.

SULF

During this mandate period, Konstantin, the chair of the Doctoral Candidate Association, and Linda, the board member has actively contributed to the federal board and has been involved in various discussions. Herein to mention that, Linda was the representative to the central board from the doctoral candidate association.

Finances

The operational year of the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association starts in April/May after the AGM and lasts until April/May of the next year. SULF’s financial year starts January 1st and ends on the last of December. This means that the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association operational plan is financed by two different budgets. This operational year used parts of the budgets for 2023 and 2024. The period from April until December 2023 were financed by the 2023 budget and the period from January – May by the 2024 budget.

However, in the plan of operations document that the chair of the Doctoral Candidate Association prepared, the total budget for 2023/24 was 290 000 SEK. This included costs for member activities, Recruitment, Board and Advocacy and Opinion Building. Below the table can be seen.

Area	Activity	Cost	Comments
Member Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact Day • Annual General Meeting • SULF-day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 000 • 25 000 • 5 000 <p>Total: 90 000</p>	
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Recruitment (x2) • Informational materials • Valberedning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 000 • 2 500 • 7 500 <p>Total: 25 000</p>	Assuming 2 visits to local organizations

<p>Board</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Meetings in person • Board training and retreat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 000 • 75 000 <p>Total: 175 000</p>	
<p>Advocacy and Opinion Building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saco Studentråd • Dialogmöte • Marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 000 • 10 000 • 10 000 <p>Totalt: 25 000</p>	
		<p>Total: 290 000</p>	

Few words from the board

Back in April 2024, the new board was appointed with some high aims and ambition. It has been an interesting year with many activities and challenges. This association board has created working groups focusing on different topics as opposed to the previous board. However, this past year has been filled with unexpected challenges and intense experiences that none of us could have foreseen. Personal challenges that deeply affected some of our members were encountered, leading to resignations and impacting our progress throughout the mandate period. We are grateful for the time our colleagues dedicated to our cause and proud that they prioritized their well-being. With this, we would like to forward the torch to the next board to pursue the unfilled issues.

While we had hoped for more freedom in planning, time seemed to slip away quickly, and we found ourselves learning and adapting as we went along.

Amidst these difficult times, the support and solidarity we received from SULF, and our members have been invaluable. Looking ahead, four of our remaining nine board members hope to continue their union work, while the others are stepping down, including one resignation. We eagerly anticipate meeting the incoming board and are excited to see how they will continue the organization's legacy of making a positive impact.

The departing Board would hereby like to thank the membership for their confidence during their period of service.