

SULF:s kongress 2024

Attractive and equitable salaries for PhD candidates

Competitive salaries for PhD candidates are crucial for attracting and retaining talent. At some universities, starting salaries for PhD candidates fall below Migrationsverket's threshold for a decent salary. In several fields, such as law and engineering, it is already very difficult to recruit Swedish PhD candidates, as they can readily access better salaries elsewhere. Offering competitive salaries could help attract and retain the most talented applicants to doctoral education, ensuring research excellence and academic diversity.

Salaries for PhD candidates usually follow an incremental ladder that is based on progression from admission to thesis defence. There are considerable arbitrary inconsistencies in how progression is assessed. Moreover, this system results in an economic penalty for sick leave or parental leave. A fairer financial trajectory for PhD candidates can be secured through salary ladders based on employment time rather than academic progress. Some higher education institutions have already implemented this, for example Karolinska Institutet.

Salary differences between faculties or academic disciplines are experienced as unfair, especially in multidisciplinary projects. This type of salary differentiation makes it possible for universities to attract applicants in higher-paying fields, while at the same time keeping salaries down elsewhere. As a trade union, we should take the stance that salary is based on what you do, not who you are or what other options you have. Therefore, salaries for doctoral education should be uniform across academic disciplines.

Lastly, an indirect way to increase net PhD salaries could be through targeted tax relief. Sweden already implements an "expert tax relief" to attract certain foreign experts. In a similar fashion, we should explore the possibility of a doctoral studies tax relief, regardless of nationality. This would increase the net salary (money in hand) received by PhD candidates, without increasing the cost to the university.

The SULF Doctoral Candidate Association therefore submits that the Congress decide:

- that SULF takes the view that doctoral candidate salary ladders should be based on employment time, and not on percentage completion of doctoral education;

- that SULF shall advocate for uniform salary levels across faculties and academic disciplines for PhD candidates employed at the same university;
- that SULF shall explore the possibility of arguing for tax relief, similar to the "expert" tax relief (skattelättnader för utländska experter), for all PhD candidates regardless of nationality, including Swedish and other EU nationals, as a way of increasing net income without increasing the cost to universities;
- that SULF, through direct action and/or through negotiation platforms such as Saco-s, should campaign for competitive and attractive salary levels for PhD candidates, at a minimum meeting Migrationsverket's threshold for a "good income".

We wrote this motion in English, which is the main working language of the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association. Below is our proposal for decision in Swedish.

SULF:s doktorandförening hemställer därför:

- att SULF anser att lönestegen för doktorander ska baseras på anställningstid, och inte på avklarade procent av forskarutbildningen;
- att SULF ska verka för att samma lönestege ska gälla, inom ett och samma lärosäte, för alla doktorander oavsett ämnesområde eller fakultetsanknytning;
- att SULF ska undersöka möjligheten att föreslå skattelättnader för doktorandanställda, oavsett nationalitet, inklusive svenska och andra EU-medborgare, på ett sätt som liknar de redan existerande skattelättnader för utländska experter; detta som ett sätt att höja nettoinkomsten för doktorander utan att kostnaden för lärosätet ökar;
- att SULF, inom den egna verksamheten och/eller genom förhandlingsorganisationer såsom Saco-s, ska driva krav på konkurrenskraftiga och attraktiva löner för doktorander, som i varje fall inte ska understiga Migrationsverkets gräns för en "god försörjning".

Motionen undertecknas för SULF:s doktorandförenings styrelse av:
Mohamed Al-Sabri, Chairperson