

SULF:s kongress 2024

Fair work assignments for PhD candidates

According to the Higher Education Ordinance (*högskoleförordningen*), PhD candidates are employed primarily for the purpose of their own studies ("*Den som är anställd som doktorand ska främst ägna sig åt sin egen utbildning*"). This is not always what happens in practice.

Doctoral candidates routinely perform both teaching and research duties, and this is a natural part of training to become an independent researcher. When higher education institutions are expected to deliver more results with less funding, however, PhD candidates are simply the cheapest form of labour available to cover necessary teaching and research tasks. The work assignments of a PhD candidate are then defined not by the learning needs of the candidate, but by their department's research and teaching needs.

Unfair work assignments negatively affect the well-being of PhD candidates, are not compatible with the requirements of the Higher Education Ordinance, and at worst can constitute a form of exploitation. In proportion to other staff categories, PhD candidates are more likely to have an international background; for this group, exploitation is exacerbated by the uncertainty of migration status, which means many suffer in silence rather than report unfair situations.

When departments are able to fulfil their teaching mandates using PhD candidates, they are less inclined to initiate recruitment of permanent teaching staff. PhD candidates are not always offered adequate teacher training before being given teaching assignments, and in many cases the allocated employment time for teaching duties does not reflect the actual amount of work.

A further unfair discrepancy in workload is the enormous variation in course credit load for PhD candidates, when comparing between different institutions and departments. Some read as little as 30 credits, which leaves 3½ years of work time for the thesis; others have as much as 150 credits of courses, which leaves only 1½ years for the thesis. This is not counterbalanced by meaningful differences in thesis requirements.

In summary, discrepancies in the work assignments of PhD candidates pose a threat to the well-being of the candidate, to the quality of teaching, and to the long-term employment of staff at more senior levels.

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

- that SULF shall continue to work to ensure that doctoral candidates are primarily employed for their own learning, and not as low-cost teaching or research staff;
- that SULF shall push for teacher training courses to be offered to doctoral candidates, during the early stages of their PhD and in any case before they are assigned teaching duties;
- that SULF, acting directly and/or through negotiation platforms such as Saco-s, shall monitor the assignment of teaching and research duties to doctoral candidates, to ensure that any work assignments that are not necessary for doctoral education are properly compensated, on the basis of actual working time, as departmental duty, and that this is recorded in the individual study plan;
- that SULF shall address the concern that the taught course requirements for a doctoral degree vary from 30 to at least 150 credits, while this is not counterbalanced by any meaningful difference in thesis requirements.

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 ska fortsätta sitt arbete för att säkerställa att doktorander främst är anställda för eget lärande, och inte som billig arbetskraft till undervisning eller forskning;
- att SULF ska verka för att doktorander erbjuds högskolepedagogisk utbildning, tidigt i forskarutbildningen och i varje fall innan de tilldelas undervisningsuppgifter;
- att SULF, inom den egna verksamheten och/eller genom förhandlingsorganisationer såsom Saco-s, ska bevaka tilldelningen av undervisnings- och forskningsuppgifter till doktorander, i syfte att säkerställa att alla arbetsuppgifter som inte hör till forskarutbildningen betraktas som institutionstjänstgöring och kompenseras enligt faktisk tidsåtgång, samt att detta dokumenteras i den individuella studieplanen;
- att SULF ska lyfta frågan om att kraven på deltagande i kurser under en forskarutbildning varierar från 30 till 150 högskolepoäng eller mer, utan att detta balanseras av någon meningsfull skillnad i de kraven som ställs på doktorsavhandlingen.

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