



Faculty of Engineering
Faculty Office

Guidelines for doctoral students and supervisors on conflict management and change of supervisor

Creating a positive and secure work environment is an important task at Lund University. The objective, as set out in Lund University's Work Environment Policy for 2014–2017, is to create an environment which is perceived by all employees and students to be stimulating and to foster development. A positive work and study environment is based on cooperation between work environment officers, employees and students. A cornerstone in efforts to achieve a positive work and study environment is to have documented and familiar guidelines and procedures for dealing with any problems that arise. Supervisors and doctoral students often work in close proximity over a long period of time; it is therefore not unusual for differences of opinion or conflicts to arise at some point. This document sets guidelines for preventive work and conflict management and establishes the respective responsibilities of the doctoral student, the supervisor and relevant head of department. The rules and processes governing a change of supervisor are also described.

Preventive work

Naturally, it is preferable to work preventively, thereby avoiding the emergence of conflicts. Important tools in this preventive work are the individual study plan, the staff appraisal and the introduction. These elements help to formulate and clarify the

expectations and demands of the doctoral student, the supervisors and the department. More about this below.

Individual study plan

At the time of admission to third cycle studies, an individual study plan is to be drawn up. The study plan contains of content and implementation of the study programme. The study plan is to describe the research project, the required reading, courses, supervision and other resources that are required for the study programme to be completed effectively within the given timeframe. It is important for the doctoral student and the supervisor to be in agreement about the study plan and for its goals to be realistic.

The individual study plan is to clarify what rights, obligations and expectations there are in the relationship between the faculty, the department, the supervisors and the individual doctoral student. The individual study plan then functions as a support for the doctoral student and the supervisor in the day to day work of a research studies programme.

It is of the utmost importance for both the doctoral student and the supervisor that the individual study plan be updated as the research studies progress; a structured and well-planned study plan can minimise the risk of misunderstandings regarding the project and its intermediary goals, departmental duties and supervision. Many of the problems which arise within third cycle education can be avoided if a functioning individual study plan is in place.

The individual study plan shall, according to the Higher Education Ordinance, be followed up and updated at least once per year. Meetings to update the individual study plan are to be attended by the supervisors, the doctoral student and the head of department or another representative of the department appointed by its head. The updated plan is to be signed by all participants. Finally, the head of department approves the

updated study plan and is responsible for ensuring that it is archived and registered in LADOK.

Staff appraisals

Every year, in addition to the meeting to update the individual study plan, each doctoral student is to have a staff appraisal with the head of department or with a person appointed by the head of department (not the supervisor). The staff appraisal is a very important tool in systematic work environment management, which aims to develop both the doctoral student and the organisation. In cases where the roles of head of department and supervisor coincide, the staff appraisal is to be conducted with another suitable person.

The appraisal is to cover the doctoral student's entire work situation. The manager and the doctoral student are to follow up results and work performance, clarify goals and expectations, discuss development and training needs and the allocation of responsibility. Issues of job satisfaction and work relationships are also to be discussed, as well as issues concerning leadership and supervision.

It is also important that continuous follow-up be done in the period leading up to the next appraisal. The responsibility for follow-up lies with the head of department or with the person appointed by him or her.

LTH introduction

All doctoral students are recommended to take part in LTH's introductory course for doctoral students. This serves to provide information on the structure of research studies at an early stage, and on the rights and obligations of the doctoral student, the supervisor and the University.

Conflict management

A conflict which has arisen between a supervisor and a doctoral student is to be handled swiftly and professionally. Regardless of

their nature, it is important to discuss problems at an early stage. Both the supervisor and the doctoral student are obliged to contribute to finding a solution to the situation which has arisen. It is important to keep discussions factual and constructive.

The head of department, in his or her role as employer/work environment manager, is also to be informed at an early stage and involved with the aim of helping to resolve the difference of opinion. In cases where the head of department has too close a collaboration with one of the parties involved, he or she is to appoint another person to take part in the discussions.

Getting support from a third party with experience of practical procedures and knowledge of conflict management is advisable. At LTH, professional help is available within LTH's human resources division for difficult conversations and conflict management. It is also possible to get support from the person with special responsibility for research studies at the department, or from one of LTH's research programme directors and the Occupational Health Service. As an employee, the doctoral student has the right to summon his or her union representative and can also contact the doctoral student representative who is to provide advice, information and support to individual doctoral students at Lund University.

The appendices contain concrete tips as to what to bear in mind when holding these discussions.

Guidelines

The responsibilities and obligations of the principal supervisor, the doctoral student and the head of department in conflict prevention and conflict management.

The responsibilities and obligations of the principal supervisor in relation to the doctoral student:

- To discuss and clarify the supervisory role with the doctoral student and to discuss and establish the mutual expectations of the doctoral student and the supervisor.

- To pay attention to study conditions which could be detrimental to the doctoral student's development and progress and to take measures to rectify them.
- To pay early attention to difficulties and/or conflicts which arise in research studies or in relationships and discuss them with the doctoral student.
- To actively contribute to ensuring that measures are taken if a conflict arises.
- To inform the head of department.
- To involve the head of department where necessary.
- To take continued responsibility for the follow-up of the doctoral student's research studies.
- To continue to take an active part in the follow-up of the individual study plan.
- To follow the agreements set out in the individual study plan.
- To provide the doctoral student with continued advice and support in everyday work.

The responsibilities and obligations of the doctoral student:

- To discuss the mutual expectations of the doctoral student and the supervisor.
- To pay early attention to difficulties and/or conflicts which arise in research studies or in relationships and to discuss them with the supervisor.
- To actively contribute to and take part in the implementation of the measures put in place to resolve the conflict.
- To involve the head of department where necessary.
- To follow the agreements set out in the individual study plan.
- To get support and help from a union representative and/or the doctoral student representative if desired.

The responsibilities and obligations of the head of department:

- To assume overall responsibility for the work environment for all employees at the department, including all doctoral students
- To lead and assign work.
- In case of conflict, to speak with both parties and gather documentation with the aim of putting suitable measures in place to resolve the conflict.
- Where necessary, to obtain support from others such as the human resources division at LTH, the directors of studies for the third cycle and/or the Occupational Health Service.
- To inform the doctoral student that he or she has the right to help from the union or the doctoral student representative.
- To swiftly/promptly appoint a new supervisor if a written request for a change of supervisor is submitted by the doctoral student.
- To ensure that the process concerning the change of supervisor and the measures taken are documented.
- To ensure that the individual study plan is updated and registered in LADOK.
- To have one or several follow-up appraisals with the doctoral student and the new supervisor in order to ensure that everything is working as it should.
- To follow up the situation for the previous supervisor.
- To analyse and learn from the incident in order to avoid a repeat.

Change of supervisor

Experience shows that, in the vast majority of cases, research studies are completed with the supervisory team appointed from the beginning. However, there are a number of situations in which it becomes necessary to appoint a new supervisor.

The Higher Education Ordinance states that “A doctoral student who so requests shall be allowed to change supervisor”. The change of supervisor can take place on the initiative of either the doctoral student or the supervisor, with a written request to the head of the relevant department. No justification need be provided. Changing supervisors can often be associated with a financial dilemma in cases where projects are usually externally funded and linked to a certain supervisor.

The head of department is to appoint a new supervisor. A doctoral student who wishes to change supervisor can provide suggestions as to a new supervisor but does not have the right to demand a certain supervisor. The change of supervisor is to be documented and followed up by the head of department. The matter is to be dealt with swiftly so that the research studies are not delayed and the doctoral student can continue his or her thesis work with the same principal focus as that specified at the time of admission.

Brief description of the process:

1. The doctoral student or the supervisor contacts the head of department for a discussion about the need to change supervisor.
2. A written request for a change of supervisor is submitted to the head of department. No justification is required.
3. The head of department appoints a new supervisor.
4. The head of department documents the change of supervisor in LADOK.
5. The study plan is updated and followed up together with the doctoral student, the new supervisor and the head of department, and entered in LADOK.

A change of supervisor may also take place for a reason other than a request from the doctoral student; for example if the supervisor changes his or her place of work, retires, is put on sick leave or takes authorised leave of absence for a long period. In these cases the head of department decides on suitable measures.

Appendix 1

What to bear in mind during discussions

1. Identify the purpose of the discussion, be concrete about its content.
2. Agree on how long the discussion can take.
3. Hold the discussion in a neutral setting where you will not be disturbed (turn off all mobile phones).
4. Agree on basic principles.
 - a. Do not interrupt one another; let the person speaking finish.
 - b. Make an effort to understand one another; it is not about who is right or wrong – avoid arguing.
 - c. Deal with the issue at hand, rather than attacking the person.
 - d. Be factual and constructive, use only factual information.
5. Avoid verbosity.
6. What can you do to solve the problem? Focus on what you can change.
7. Express yourself in the first person and avoid any second-hand information.
8. Document progress:
 - a. What was the conversation about?
 - b. What agreements were reached?
 - c. Time considerations.
 - d. What decisions were taken?
9. Engage a third party. Although both parties involved may strive to collaborate, it can sometimes be hard to move forward. In that case, involving a third party can be helpful.

Appendix 2

Links

[Conflict management advice \(Staff pages LU\)](#)

[Individual study plans \(ISP login\)](#)

Contact details

[LTH human resources division](#)

[Doctoral student representative](#)

[Occupational Health Service \(Staff pages LU\)](#)