



GUIDELINES

Reg. no.
U 2021/682
Replaces V2015/1614

Date 2021-09-01

Research Education Board

Mutual ethical guidelines for the relationship between supervisors and research students at LTH

Purpose and application

Student surveys at LTH indicate that conflicts related to supervision are relatively rare at the Faculty of Engineering (LTH). However, to counteract troublesome conflicts, for all parties involved and for the LTH organization, these ethical guidelines for doctoral supervision at LTH can be consulted. The guidelines are generally just that – guidelines – and not bylaws, and they are here divided into a range of recommendations A-H. They reflect the faculty's position with regard to supervision relationships in research studies, and aim to provide support for LTH's doctoral students, teaching staff and managers.

The guidelines should:

- Promote ethically sound supervision within departments and research groups
- Identify and prevent sources of conflict at an early stage
- Serve as a guide for constructive resolutions of conflicts
- Guide third party mediators (Head of Department/Division, Director of studies, doctoral student representatives, etc) so that they can suggest suitable solutions when mediating.

LTH's ethical guidelines are mutual and intended for both supervisors and doctoral students, with a certain emphasis on the actions of the supervisor. The ethical guidelines are adapted to the local research study environments at LTH, but to some extent they relate to a wider range of legislation and guidelines, such as:

- The Higher Education Ordinance (Högskoleförordningen)
- The Swedish Discrimination Act (Diskrimineringslagen)
- The Swedish Penal Code with regards to bribery (Strafflagen)
- Ethical Issues at Lund University – notes for guidance
- Guide regarding Discrimination, Harassment, and Victimization for Students at LTH
- European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA)

These regulations and guidelines briefly concern research studies, but they do not explicitly address the unique relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors. For instance, Ethical Issues at Lund University (2005) deals with ethics between researchers, without addressing the particular doctoral student–supervisor relationship within research or research studies. Further, ethical guidelines below were drawn up as a proactive tool complementary to LTH Guidelines for doctoral students and supervisors on conflict management and change of supervisor (U2016/633) which treats the formal right in Sweden to change doctoral supervisor in the LTH context.

Themes A–H frame key principles for appropriate supervisor – student relationships and behaviors at LTH

Theme A: The supervision process

- Each doctoral student should receive a minimum of 4 hours of active supervision per month, to support the progression of the work.
- The doctoral student should prioritize the planned work and must inform the supervisor of any difficulties that may lead to necessary changes in the work.
- Normally, supervisors have different roles and fields of expertise within a supervision team. The principal supervisor is responsible for the involvement of all co-supervisors in the supervision of the student.
- The doctoral student and the supervisors should jointly plan the work and how it is documented in the individual study plan. The

student updates the contents of the Individual Study Plan (ISP) accordingly before all involved confirm approval of the ISP.

- In case of significant changes in study and research conditions, the ISP should be updated immediately, or otherwise at least annually. The ISP must be consistent with the framework provided in the Syllabus (Allmän studieplan, ASP) for the research studies subject discipline.

Theme B: Mutual respect for personal and academic integrity

- The supervisor and the doctoral student must show mutual respect for each other's academic integrity and roles. This means that supervisors may not force their preference on doctoral students when there are viable equally valid alternative scientific approaches.
- Doctoral students should openly discuss any need they have for additional supervision or advice with their supervisors, i.e., not bypass their formal supervisors.
- The supervisor and the doctoral student must use a language that promotes respect and personal integrity of both parties. Discrimination based on gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, or age, are prohibited under the Swedish Discrimination Act.
- The supervisor and the doctoral student are mutually obliged to take complaints of inappropriate use of language and discrimination seriously. If such objections do not promptly result in improved work- and study conditions, the Head of Department/Division or the Director of studies of the discipline must be contacted immediately.

Theme C: Trust and confidence

- Advice regarding the student's private life generally falls outside the role of the supervisor. However, in cases where a personal crisis influences the student's work and studies, the supervisor should act and remain in contact with the troubled student. In such circumstances the supervisor is expected to volunteer information

that may be helpful and support the student's situation (for instance how to contact Occupational Health at LU). Although the supervisor must use discretion when handling private information, the Head of Department/Division must be informed of any serious conditions that influence the students work capacity and well-being.

- Supervisors should not burden the students with their own private problems but must inform the student and the Head of Department/Division in cases where such problems may affect the supervision.
- Doctoral students may not offer, and the supervisor may not accept compensation for the supervision in addition to what has been agreed with the department and faculty. Such compensation can create bias and may fall under the provisions on bribery in the Swedish Penal Code.
- Research studies at LTH should focus entirely on those tasks that are defined in the ISP of the student (research project, course work and departmental duties).

Theme D: Parallel relationships

- The supervisor and the doctoral student should maintain a professionally helpful relationship and avoid mutual private relationships that may cause the parties to become biased, thus creating potential conflicts of interest in the workplace. If a private relationship evolves, however, it is the responsibility of the supervisor and the doctoral student to promptly initiate a change of supervisor.
- Legitimate parallel relationships based on relevant professional roles (business partners, joint patents, etc.) must be documented in the ISP as early as possible, in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest later during the research studies. Aspects of ownership of research outcomes need to be clearly established early on.

Theme E: Academic conduct

- In cases of co-publications by the doctoral student and the supervisor within a joint research project, the principles of co-

authorship and the order of authors should be established at an early stage of the research process, in accordance with the European Code for Research Integrity (ALLEA 2017).

- The supervisor and the doctoral student should abide by the norms of their particular research discipline community with regard to co-authorship principles. As always, authorship is solely granted based on substantive contributions to the publication (ALLEA 2017).
- If a supervisor wishes to include the research results of a doctoral student in his or her individual publications or public presentations, he or she must obtain consent from the student. In such a case, references to the doctoral student's contributions must be explicit, in accordance with sound research practice (ALLEA 2017).

Theme F: Participation in an externally funded research project

- Most doctoral students at LTH are externally funded. It is the responsibility of the doctoral student to stay within the overall aim and the timeframes of the research project. The right to change supervisors is established in the Higher Education Ordinance, but this does not equal a right to change research focus.
- Research project leaders and supervisors should not remove a student from the research project or resources except as a last resort. If such changes turn out inevitable, it is the strict obligation of the department to minimize and compensate any disturbance of the student's work progress and research plan.
- It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that administrative work does not take precedence and prevents the academic work of the doctoral student.
- The doctoral student must respect the fact that research results may need to be kept confidential before publication, provided that such boundary conditions have been established early on in the ISP. Confidentiality may however not prevent the doctoral student from publishing and defending the doctoral thesis within the four-year timeframe of the education program.
- It is the responsibility of the supervisor and the department to ensure that the total amount of funding of a doctoral student covers

all parts of his or her research studies (research project, courses, active participation in conferences, etc.).

Theme G: In case of conflict

- If a supervisor and a doctoral student fail to agree on the details, the content and the updating of the ISP, this must be documented in the ISP, and a third-party mediator must be involved in order to resolve the situation.
- Also, if the supervisor or the doctoral student find the relationship seriously deficient, they must immediately involve a neutral third party to solve the problem (Head of Department/Division or Director of doctoral studies). To address severe conflicts, LTH provides Guidelines for doctoral students and supervisors on conflict management and change of supervisor (U2016/633).
- In cases where the student has requested a change of supervisor (cf. Ordinance of Higher Education), the Head of Department is obliged to form a new supervision team that supports the progress of student's ongoing research project. The right to change supervisor is not mutual, which means that a supervisor should normally not abandon a supervised student unless all other possibilities are exhausted.

Theme H: Knowledge of these ethical guidelines

- LTH must inform new doctoral students of the ethical guidelines as soon as the doctoral students are admitted to research studies (the ethical guidelines are addressed in the compulsory introductory course for new doctoral students during the first study year).
- Upon signing the first version of the ISP, the principal supervisor and the doctoral student confirm that they understand the content and meaning of the ethical guidelines. It is the principal supervisor's responsibility to ensure that assistant supervisors are aware of these ethical guidelines.