

LDK Activity Plan

for the Academic Year 2022-23



Lunds doktorandkår (LDK)
Lund Doctoral Student Union

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According to article 1 of the Statutes of Lund Doctoral Student Union/Lunds doktorandkår (henceforth LDK) shall:

“work to monitor and contribute to the development of third cycle education at Lund University”.

In the light of this purpose, the following activity plan has been drafted for the academic year 2022-23. It is subdivided into three sections: *top priority*, for the most important and/or issues to tackle in the new year; *ongoing*, for issues where progress has been made but further monitoring is needed, as well as some highlighted important aspects of LDK’s basic functions; and *optional*, suggestions for additional topics to be treated if time, energy and opportunity allows. The amount of high-priority items is rather conservative, since we anticipate that several unforeseen but important issues will arise during the year, like the Aliens’ Act did this year.

I. Top Priority.

§ 1. Address the Aliens Act (*utlänningslagen*)

The sudden law change during the summer of 2021 has had immense negative effects on doctoral students from outside the EU. LDK has, along with other organisations, written debate articles, organised protests, and otherwise worked towards an amendment to the law or its implementation so that it is not incompatible with the careers of doctoral students and recent graduates. Until this happens, there is much more to do, and LDK should keep playing a leading role in Lund.

§ 2. Address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic has had a profound impact on life and work at the University. This includes severe negative effects on doctoral students such as isolation and



lost opportunities to carry out research. Since the doctoral students who were the most affected are nearing the end of their studies, the issue of fair compensation and mitigation of those problems is becoming urgent.

LDK shall follow through the 9 main recommendations from the *Survey report on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on doctoral students at Lund University*. In particular, LDK shall continue to open and follow through discussions with the central and faculty administrations for granting fair and transparent prolongation to doctoral students. Despite efforts by LDK and other bodies, there seems to be little hope for a 2-month blanket prolongation (recommendation 8 above). Nevertheless, LDK can and should make a final push to make COVID prolongation as broadly and equally and predictably available as possible, especially in cases where faculties have made earlier promises that they are not sure to keep.

§3. Address mental health among doctoral students

This is connected to many other points in this plan, but it should be clarified that this topic is one of the primary concerns for LDK, not a side topic. LDK shall continue to investigate ways of improving the mental health of doctoral students, including the following:

- Forming and maintaining a committee dedicated to improving how mental health problems related to doctoral studies are prevented and treated at the University.
- Supporting communication and social events among doctoral students across faculties. Doctoral students typically take part in less social life than undergraduates, despite all the benefits of recreation and networking. Social activities should be encouraged at various levels and scopes. Besides supporting the activities organised by the councils at department and faculty levels by providing funds and sharing ideas between councils, LDK should do its own part by organising cross-faculty activities, so that doctoral student communities, which are often quite small, can meet more people from a broader range of backgrounds. Such activities can range from simple picnics to entire balls and banquets – the specifics will need to be determined, but something should happen at the initiative of LDK.

II. Ongoing

§ 4. Support the DOMB

LDK shall help the Doctoral Student Ombudsman to fulfil the DOMB Activity Plan 2022-23.

§ 5. Support the councils

LDK shall support its councils and help them with issues that might come up at their faculties.



§ 6. **Maintain good relationships with LUS and TLTH**

LDK's relationship with LUS and TLTH has occasionally been strained, but recently there has been very good agreement. This is partly due to good communication and mutual transparency. It is of utmost importance that this good relationship is maintained, in particular due to our joint management of the DOMB. The goal is that *all* doctoral students, while not represented by a single union, should be represented by a cohesive collaboration with a unified voice in important matters. Relevant practices of LDK include:

- Always inviting TLTH/DOKT to the weekly presidium meetings, LDK Board and GA meetings, and co-opting them when they have the ability to attend. Also LUS should be welcomed if something is of direct relevance to them.
- Taking all important DOMB decisions together, and ensuring that the involvement of the DOMB in LDK and TLTH is balanced.
- Maintaining and strengthening OK-DK, which makes the discussion of doctoral issues more useful and convenient for all parties.
- Fostering good personal relationships between the unions, and inviting each other to – or co-organising – social events.
- Participating in a limited number of selected meetings with LUA, SFS-DK and SFS. This will give LDK the opportunity to maintain good relationships with other unions within LUS (through LUA-meetings) and with (Ph.D-)students representatives on a national level (SFS-DK and SFS respectively).

§ 7. **Internationalisation (and other obstacles)**

This is a perennial major issue for LDK to deal with. Progress is slowly being made, but much further work is needed before the situation becomes satisfactory. During the academic year 2022-23, the following are the most relevant points:

- *English translation of university documents.*
Improve translation service at the university and make it a part of regular workflow to send important documents and meeting protocols to translation. At the very least, English summaries of all relevant documents should be provided. Such summaries can be prepared quickly so that the basics of the information reaches non-Swedish speakers without the delay of translation, and require very little resources to produce. Summaries can be made university policy without most of the practical and ideological issues normally raised by those who oppose the inclusion of English in university governance. Documents with lasting importance, such as rules and regulations, should still be translated in full and made available as soon as practical.
- *Swedish courses.*

Establish good courses in Swedish available during working hours. There is a need for fair and uniform access to this across faculties.

➤ *English, bi-lingual, or flexible-language meetings.*

Language flexibility in meetings (that is, the ability to switch meeting language should a member not speak Swedish) is crucial for the large cohort of international doctoral students. Without it, many doctoral students lack possibilities of acting as doctoral representatives, and the doctoral union councils risk getting skewed to only a section of the doctoral student body. At the same time, a flexible approach to meeting language allows international doctoral students to practice their Swedish by reading documents and participating in discussions. Therefore, LDK shall continue to work towards a broader acceptance of speaking English at formal meetings at the university, while at the same time encouraging doctoral students to make use of the opportunity to learn Swedish.

➤ *Other support.*

Many doctoral students have to work in LaTeX for their scientific output given traditions in their field. However, the templates from Media-Tryck and other templates provided by the university do not support this writing environment, so doctoral students writing in LaTeX can not get help for the layout of their thesis and also need to figure out for themselves how to apply the university template when doing posters, presentations and other outputs benefitting from using the official university layout. There are good home-made solutions being circulated among doctoral students; these can probably with relatively little effort be cleaned up and distributed as official.

§ 7. **Supervisor education**

The central level research education board (FUN) has on its activity plan to investigate and hopefully improve the education given to supervisors of PhD students. LDK shall take an active role in this work as improvements in this field would lead to a quality improvement of our education. Specifically, LDK shall:

- keep reminding FUN about this topic and ensure it remains on the agenda,
- carry out the recommendations arrived at by the *arbetsgrupp* on supervisor education, and
- Propose solutions and improvements if needed.

§ 8. **Transparent and predictable prolongation of doctoral employment due to doctoral council roles**

All doctoral students should, if they so wish, be able to take part in the work of LDK and its councils, regardless of their employment situation. LDK shall therefore:

- improve the information to doctoral students regarding prolongation after commitments and other LDK related commissions of trust,



- work to improve the knowledge among the faculties and supervisors about student union work,
- ensure that the guidelines for prolongation properly reflects the workload,
- work for a predictable and transparent prolongation infrastructure, and
- work to ensure that all doctoral students can get a yearly prolongation report, so that they do not have to wait till the very end of their education to discover exactly how much prolongation that will be awarded.

III. Optional

§ 9. Doctoral students' rights and career planning

It is unclear what rights and obligations PhD students have, and even their supervisors are often unaware of this. There is a need for a comprehensive compilation of these laws, regulations and policies. LDK should therefore:

- Work on establishing and distributing a list of doctoral student rights and obligations, so that new students know what they can demand and should supply. Such a list has been created by SFS but is not fully in place at the universities.
- Strive for having a clearer academic career path for the doctoral students, as currently it can be discouraging. In particular there is a gender issue that needs to be solved.
- Keep an eye on the HR excellence program to see in what ways it can help with this overall topic.
- Strive towards greater payment equality between the faculties. This is primarily a labour union issue, but LDK can certainly be in touch.

§ 10. Canvas as an information platform

Starting in 2019-20, there have been efforts to create a general Canvas page for doctoral students, which can be used as a repository for information, how-to's, FAQ's, and as a place to make announcements. Some pages in this spirit exist, but are not as universal and widespread as was originally intended. LDK should evaluate the usefulness of these pages and strive to consolidate them and ensure new doctoral students are made aware of them. This can be coordinated with TLTH, so that it covers all doctoral students.

§ 11. Sustainable LDK Presidium workload

Working in the LDK Presidium includes a lot of tasks, which is sometimes difficult to fit inside the intended 25% workload (most student unions are run by full-time sabbatical students). The Presidium should evaluate what works and what doesn't, what can be dropped and what can be made more efficient. This is of particular concern for the Director of External Affairs, who takes part in many time-consuming activities outside LDK which require Swedish skills. It is also



important to remember that some LDK tasks are best delegated to committees formed by the Board.

§ 12. Strengthen the collaboration between the councils and their corresponding undergraduate student unions

Most doctoral councils are rather small and often struggle to fill all positions and perform all tasks they strive to do. Undergraduate student unions are typically larger and more capable. At the same time, doctoral and undergraduate students usually have a common view on many issues, and both groups benefit from a unified voice against other powers such as faculty leaderships. This is particularly important when a limited number of student representatives are allowed in a certain context, so that a single person may have to represent both groups. Besides this, there are many practical and social benefits of a close collaboration. LDK and its councils should therefore strive towards closer and stronger faculty-level relationships with the student unions. Good examples include the LUNA-NDR relationship at the Faculty of Science, as well as the role played by Dokt under TLTH.

§ 13. Consider the postdocs

The situation of postdocs is often quite similar to that of doctoral students, often more so than that of undergraduates. However, postdocs do not have a student union or something equivalent, and due to their short-term contracts they are usually not particularly involved in labour unions and do not hold positions of power within the university. LDK does not formally represent postdocs, but should look into cases where we have a common cause, both for the benefit of the postdocs and to add more weight behind the voice of the doctoral students.

§ 14. Address the recruitment, quality assurance and circumstances surrounding termination of resources of doctoral students

The faculties occasionally bring up issues surrounding the termination of resources for doctoral students who are not able to perform as expected, which in bad cases is rather painful for all parties involved. Such situations are often caused by the hiring of doctoral students who are not fully qualified for the job (in turn often caused by the unwillingness of the supervisor to go without a student and redo the recruitment process in case no fully qualified candidate applies), and are exacerbated by poor handling and follow-up of ISP's. Besides being underqualified, the student is typically not at fault. LDK should look into how the faculty routines can be improved to avoid such situations, while stressing that it is the responsibility of the faculty – not the student, that the protection against unfair termination should not be weakened for the sake of making justified cases easier, and that other measures such as change of supervisor exist and are preferred.