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# DOMB ACTIVITY PLAN 2025–2026

The Doctoral Student Ombuds  
Lund's Doctoral Student Union (LDK) in collaboration with TLTH and LUS



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**Activity Plan 2025–2026**

The Activity Plan is an internal document for use by LDK, TLTH and LUS.

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## Summary

The task of the Doctoral Student Ombuds is to provide advice to doctoral candidates at Lund University about their rights within the University, and support those who suspect that those rights might have been violated.

The majority of the DOMB's work consists of assisting individual doctoral candidates. This also includes the related administrative duties, such as ensuring compliance with data protection regulations. The DOMB reports on casework by compiling and presenting an annual Case Report.

The DOMB works actively to increase visibility within the University, to ensure that both doctoral candidates and other staff are aware of the DOMB's role and mandate. This includes meeting with relevant stakeholders, participating in welcome days, arranging seminars and participating in teacher training. The DOMB also regularly offers to visit LDK's faculty-level doctoral councils and TLTH's doctoral student guild (Dokt), aiming to visit each of these at least once per year.

Last year (2024–2025), the DOMB established an online presence at asktheombuds.se, trialled recording information videos, and produced a leaflet with information about the DOMB and other support services available to doctoral candidates. The year also saw an update of the DOMB's IT infrastructure, including a change of case management platform from AM System to Zammad, which both improved productivity and reduced costs.

Building upon that work, specific priorities for this year include:

- Developing asktheombuds.se as an online information resource for doctoral candidates;
- Recording information videos on relevant topics;
- Establishing routines for disseminating the information leaflet;
- Evaluating the structure and content of the annual Case Report to determine whether this can be developed further;
- Decommissioning the AM System case management platform.

Casework is always prioritised over other activities, which means that the items listed above are carried out when this is reasonably possible in the DOMB's schedule without detriment to the service provided to individual doctoral candidates seeking help.

During 2025–2026 the DOMB shall be rebranded from *Doctoral Student Ombudsman / Doktorandombudsmannen* to *Doctoral Student Ombuds / Doktorandombudet*. This removes a male gender connotation, and matches the style generally used by similar functions elsewhere, including the *Studentombud* at Lund University and ombuds at other universities in Sweden and Europe.

# Introduction

The task of the Doctoral Student Ombuds (hereafter “the DOMB”) is to provide advice to doctoral candidates at Lund University (hereafter “the University”) about their rights within the University, and support those who suspect that those rights might have been violated. The DOMB is funded by the University, but employed by the Lund Doctoral Student Union (Lunds doktorandkår, LDK) in co-operation with Lunds universitets studentkårer (LUS) and Teknologkåren vid Lunds tekniska högskola (TLTH).

This Activity Plan is an internal planning document for LDK, TLTH and LUS about the activities of the DOMB during the coming academic year, from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

## Employment

Haro de Grauw has been employed full-time as DOMB since the spring of 2022. The expectation is that Haro will continue to be employed full-time as DOMB in 2025–2026.

Haro is expecting a child in August 2025, and has indicated he may take some parental leave from approximately April 2026 onwards. This means a substitute may need to be hired for part of 2026.

## Definitions

For a description of the DOMB’s mandate, particularly the definitions of what constitutes a “case” and a “doctoral candidate”, see the relevant section in the latest Case Report, which also includes an overview of typical case categories and a general description of how these are handled.

# Casework

## Assisting doctoral candidates

The majority of the DOMB's work consists of assisting individual doctoral candidates.

Cases are typically initiated by email contact. Some cases consist of questions that can be answered directly by email. If the matter is more complicated, the doctoral candidate is offered a meeting, which can be in person or via Zoom at their choice. Following this initial meeting, the doctoral candidate can receive further support in the forms and to the extent that is necessary. Examples of this are: email communication with University staff, assisting the candidate in writing a complaint or appeal, or joining the candidate for a meeting with a head of department.

The duration of handling a case can vary from a few days to years, depending on the nature of the matter. Long-running cases typically involve either supervision difficulties that remain unresolved over time, or supporting doctoral candidates with their rights when on sick leave.

For more details on case work, see the DOMB's most recent Case Report.

## Documentation and handling of personal data

Documentation relating to case work is kept in a case management software called Zammad. Personal identifiers, such as names and email addresses, are removed from case files after a case has been closed or dormant (inactive) for more than a year. Anonymous case information, such as categorisation and faculty, is preserved for statistical purposes.

The Zammad software platform was implemented in 2025, replacing the previous platform, AM System. This has been found to improve productivity and reduce costs.

Case records prior to 2025 are still stored on AM System. During the year 2025–2026 the DOMB shall extract relevant records for migration to Zammad, then decommission AM System.

## Response times and workload

The workload of the DOMB is inherently variable over the year. During 2023–2024 it emerged that upholding quick response times during workload peaks represents a challenge. This was addressed in 2024–2025 by revising workflow routines, and has benefited from a transition to the Zammad case management platform.

During 2025–2026 the DOMB shall continue to work closely with elected officials at LDK and TLTH to improve the responsiveness and availability of the DOMB service, even at times of peak workload, while also preserving a sustainable work environment for the DOMB.

## Reporting

The DOMB's case work is reported primarily through the compilation of the annual Case Report. This is done during and after the summer, for the preceding year. The report is submitted to the University's Research Education Board (*Forskarutbildningsnämnden*, FUN).

The Case Report has had the same structure and content since 2019. During 2025–2026, the DOMB shall evaluate this format to determine whether it can be developed further.

In addition to the report, the DOMB keeps LDK and TLTH informed of ongoing case work through meetings with the elected representatives. Such meetings are held once every two weeks, or as requested from time to time by the elected representatives.

## Information activities

The DOMB strives to spread information about doctoral candidates' rights and responsibilities, and awareness of the DOMB's existence and purpose – both among doctoral candidates and other University staff. In this regard, three challenges have been identified:

- Information about doctoral candidates' rights and responsibilities is generally scarce, difficult to find, and not symmetrically available in Swedish and English.
- Not all doctoral candidates at the University are aware of the DOMB. Surveys and case statistics suggest that awareness of the DOMB is uneven across the University; some faculties and departments actively inform about the DOMB, others do not.
- Some members of teaching staff view the DOMB with suspicion, or even hostility. Some appear to assume that the DOMB will unconditionally assist any doctoral candidate, even when their complaint is manifestly unfounded or unreasonable; some consider the involvement of the DOMB a serious escalation. These assumptions show a lack of understanding for the role of the DOMB, and are detrimental to the effectiveness of the DOMB's work.

For these reasons, in order to fulfill the DOMB's mandate, it is necessary to work proactively to spread information and raise awareness of the DOMB. This work continues in the same fashion as in previous years, as detailed below. Specific focus areas this year are the dissemination of the new information leaflets and the development of the DOMB website (see below).

Casework is always prioritised over information activities, meaning that the activities described in this section are carried out when this is reasonably possible in the DOMB's schedule without detriment to the service provided to individual doctoral candidates seeking help.

## Information to doctoral candidates

### Welcome days

The University's faculties organise "welcome days" or "PhD Days" for doctoral candidates. The content and format of such days varies between faculties. In some cases it is compulsory as part of an introduction course, in other cases it is a voluntary activity organised by the doctoral candidates themselves. Some departments recruit their PhD candidates to start as a cohort at the start of term, which allows for an effective information day right at the start of the PhD. Most departments however recruit PhD candidates on a rolling basis throughout the year, resulting in "PhD Days" that are broader in scope.

Most faculties routinely invite the DOMB to give a brief presentation at their welcome day or PhD Day. This is an efficient way to reach many PhD candidates, early in their PhD education. A downside is that the amount of information received by new PhD candidates at these times can be quite overwhelming, so there is a risk of getting lost in the noise.



Similarly to previous years, the DOMB is available to give such presentations. The DOMB does not take initiative to organise this, but participates when possible if invited by the faculties.

## Seminars

The DOMB is available to give brief seminars on issues within the DOMB's mandate, open to any interested doctoral candidate. These are organised by the student unions, either centrally or through representatives at the faculty level. The DOMB does not take initiative to organise seminars: doctoral representatives within LDK and TLTH are aware that the DOMB is available as a resource, and can request a seminar.

A seminar on the Individual Study Plan (ISP) has been recurrently offered in recent years, and a seminar on the Aliens Act was offered in the past. New topics may be tailored as necessary at the request of student unions.

## Information to University staff

Opportunities to inform University staff about the work of the DOMB most often arise in the form of invitations to give presentations either at various board or committee meetings within the University, or in the context of supervision training (teacher training courses). The DOMB is also occasionally invited to informal or structured meetings with University staff members working at various levels to improve doctoral education.

## Teacher training

Anyone who wishes to become a supervisor for PhD candidates at Lund University is expected to have academic teacher training (*högskolepedagogisk utbildning*). Various such courses are offered within the University. The DOMB contributes to such courses when invited by the organisers.

In recent years, the DOMB has participated in teacher training courses organised by the Faculty of Medicine, and those organised by the Division for Higher Education Development (*Avdelningen för högskolepedagogisk utveckling*, AHU). This takes the form of an interactive presentation, during which the DOMB's role and mandate are explained, and course participants are invited to discuss what could go wrong in the supervision of a doctoral candidate, how to prevent, and how to manage such situations.

From the DOMB's perspective, contributing to teacher training has two objectives. One is to ensure that new supervisors have an understanding of the DOMB's role – particularly, that they understand the DOMB as an independent and objective mediator, rather than as an investigative or litigative threat. The other is to encourage supervisors to reflect on what they can do to prevent or manage conflict situations, in hope that this improves the quality of supervision and reduces the need for mediation by the DOMB in future.

## Other meetings with University staff

The DOMB is generally available to meet with other members of University staff who work in various capacities to improve doctoral education. See the latest Activity Report for examples of such meetings and how they add value to the work of the DOMB.

The DOMB strives to maintain communication with trade union representatives in Saco-S and ST, about how the trade unions and the DOMB can work together to assist doctoral candidates. It is not uncommon for doctoral candidates to contact both their trade union and the DOMB when difficulties arise, and we sometimes sit in the same meetings in our casework, so it is important to have a good shared understanding of how our functions interact and overlap.

## **Dissemination of information leaflets**

A PhD survey carried out in 2023–2024 by LDK in collaboration with TLTH showed that doctoral candidates' awareness of the DOMB could be improved, but awareness of other support resources (notably the Occupational Health Service) was even lower. To address this, in 2024–2025 an information leaflet was produced, that informs not only about the DOMB, but also about the Occupational Health Service, the trade unions, the student unions and the University Chaplains.

During 2025–2026 the DOMB shall establish routines for dissemination of these information leaflets. The faculty-level doctoral student councils are a natural avenue for this, but this should be supplemented by other channels. An alternative to consider is proactively mailing the leaflet to newly admitted doctoral candidates, perhaps in combination with information about joining student unions and trade unions.

## **Online presence and information videos**

Information about the rights and obligations of doctoral candidates is sparse. During 2024–2025 the DOMB successfully trialled recording information videos, and registered a website at [asktheombuds.se](http://asktheombuds.se). At the time of drafting this Activity Plan, the website is technically operational, but has no content yet. The DOMB has not previously had any stand-alone online presence: information about the DOMB has been available through the websites of LDK and TLTH/Dokt, as well as some pages of the Lund University website.

During 2025–2026 the DOMB should develop [asktheombuds.se](http://asktheombuds.se) as an information resource. This can take the form of articles and information videos addressing recurring questions or common scenarios, such as supervisor conflicts, authorship disputes or sick leave.

## Rebranding

The DOMB, instituted in the 1970s as *Doktorandombudsmannen*, was the first support function of its kind for doctoral candidates in Sweden. Similar positions have since been created at nearly all other Swedish universities, and comparable mechanisms have emerged in other countries.

As part of the general transition away from gender-coded professional and institutional titles, the word *ombudsman* (in English and Swedish) has increasingly come to be replaced by *ombuds* (English; ‘ombuds’ is both singular and plural) and *ombud* (Swedish). This is reflected in the titles of international networks, such as: Sveriges Enade Ombud, the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education and the International Ombuds Association. These are also now the prevailing forms in relevant professional literature, for example: *The Importance Of Ombuds Work* (Paul Herfs, 2004).

In Swedish, the word *ombudsman* may carry a connotation of a supervisory authority or complaints instance, as in *Diskrimineringsombudsmannen* or *Riksdagens ombudsmän* (*Justitieombudsmannen*). The word *ombud* is used to describe a spokesperson or delegate in certain formal settings, such as the general meetings of large federal organisations (*kongressombud*). Nevertheless, dictionary definitions of *ombud* and *ombudsman* are equivalent, and the network Sveriges Enade Ombud considers the terms to be synonymous.

In English, the word *ombudsman* originally appeared as a loanword from Swedish, in reference to Riksdagens ombudsmän. *Ombuds* and *ombudsperson* later emerged as gender-neutral variations, with *ombuds* having now established itself as the most widely accepted form, as in the examples cited above.

It is therefore proposed that in the course of 2025–2026 the DOMB shall be rebranded from *Doctoral Student Ombudsman* / *Doktorandombudsmannen* to *Doctoral Student Ombuds* / *Doktorandombudet*. The short form DOMB will remain in use and is unaffected by this change. The rebranding will involve updating electronic and printed materials.

## Interaction with student unions

The DOMB routinely interacts with the presidium of LDK and with the person in charge of education questions (*huvudansvarig för utbildningsfrågor*) at TLTH in the course of day-to-day management of the DOMB.

In addition to this interaction in the respective roles as employee and employer, the DOMB strives to be in regular contact with elected student union representatives to exchange information. Keeping student union representatives apprised of current issues and recurring themes in the DOMB's casework ensures that these questions can be addressed in the work of the student unions. Conversely, student union representatives have an inside view of the University's internal policy-making processes; advance information about new decisions, and the background to these, is valuable to the DOMB in handling new cases that arise as a result of policy changes.

An important delimitation in the DOMB's mandate is that the DOMB does not hold views on policy questions: that is for the student unions. Vice versa, the DOMB operates under a duty of confidentiality and on a basis of objective and equal treatment, which entails that student union representatives cannot be involved in the handling of individual DOMB cases, or set any agenda or priorities for the DOMB's casework. Provided that these delimitations are respected, a regular exchange of information is mutually beneficial.

The DOMB attends LDK meetings when time permits, and regularly meets with the person in charge of education questions at TLTH. The DOMB is also available to meet with LUS officials and attend meetings of OK, the chairpersons' conference of LUS, when requested to do so.

## Doctoral student councils

The DOMB visits meetings of the faculty-level doctoral student councils when appropriate. Such meetings are typically prompted by a pattern of cases suggesting there is a broader problem at a faculty, or by requests from a council to discuss a specific issue.

Meetings with doctoral student councils have been experienced in the past as very valuable by both sides. Beyond the particular question that prompts contact, these meetings have been opportunities for the DOMB to learn about the inner workings of each faculty and the current issues of concern to PhD candidates there, and opportunities for doctoral candidates to ask the DOMB some quick questions in an informal group setting.

Similarly to last year, the DOMB strives to visit the doctoral student councils, including Dokt (the doctoral student guild of TLTH), at least once each this year.

# Professional development and networking

One peculiarity of the job of doctoral student ombuds is that there are only a handful of these in Sweden, and as a result there is no clear pathway for professional development. There is no training available that is tailored to ombudspersons in higher education. Instead, the two main avenues for professional development are:

- Courses and conferences around topics that are of interest to the DOMB, but designed for a broader audience (often: persons working in higher education);
- Exchange of experience with the ombudspersons at other universities.

The DOMB requires to have up-to-date knowledge on topics including: student rights, labour rights, administrative law, work environment, discrimination, equal opportunities, and higher education management. Relevant skills development areas for the DOMB include: empathetic listening, conflict mediation, supporting persons experiencing mental health difficulties, and handling aggressive or destructive behaviour (*rättshaveristiskt beteende*).

As last year, the DOMB is not planning to take any courses this year. The DOMB however participates in the two most relevant recurring conferences, also attended in previous years: the UKÄ conference on legal certainty in higher education (*Rättssäkerhet i högre utbildning*) and the SEO conference of ombudspersons in higher education. (UKÄ is the Higher Education Authority, *Universitetskanslersämbetet*). The DOMB may also participate in the annual Nordic and European ombuds conferences (see below), subject to available time and funding.

The DOMB additionally expects to have opportunities for development in the context of trade union assignments (see below).

## Networks for ombuds in higher education

### Sveriges Enade Ombud (SEO)

The main forum for ombudspersons in higher education in Sweden is the network Sveriges Enade Ombud (SEO). This network consists of approximately 34 persons working at 23 universities or higher education institutions. There is additionally an informal network at the Nordic level, and a European organisation, the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE).

The SEO network organises an annual three-day conference for professional development and networking, which is attended every year by the DOMB. In 2024 the conference was hosted in Lund by the DOMB and the Student Ombuds at LUS.

### International networks

The Nordic network for ombudspersons in higher education organises annual two-day meetings, and the European network (ENOHE) an annual conference typically lasting three days. The DOMB is invited to both, and participates when this is possible within the constraints of available time and funding. Active participation in SEO, the Swedish network, is prioritised over the Nordic and

European networks, due to increasing costs with increasing geographical scope. This prioritisation takes into account that Haro gets considerable exposure to comparative international information on higher education through his trade union assignments (see below).

## **Contact with the Student Ombuds**

Within Lund University, the DOMB has regular meetings with the Student Ombuds (*Studentombudet*) employed at LUS. This is to discuss current developments in Lund University and any patterns or emerging issues seen in the respective casework.

## **The UKÄ conference on legal certainty**

The Higher Education Authority organises a yearly conference on legal certainty in higher education (*Rättssäkerhet i högre utbildning*). This involves presentations about recent decisions and ongoing investigations by UKÄ in its role as supervisory authority for the higher education sector.

Speakers at these conferences include members of UKÄ's legal team and external experts. These are useful contacts for the DOMB. In particular, UKÄ's legal staff are the same persons who investigate any complaints to UKÄ made in the course of the DOMB's casework. It has proven very valuable to have these informal lines of communication, and insight into how UKÄ operates.

## **SULF**

Haro is a member of SULF, the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers (*Sveriges universitetslärare och forskare*), and holds several elected positions within that organisation. This is not a part of the DOMB's work assignment. Rather, Haro's involvement in SULF stems from his right as an employee to join a trade union and participate in its activities.

While this is not technically part of Haro's professional development, these assignments offer access to excellent development and networking opportunities, at no cost to the DOMB budget.

At the time of drafting this Activity Plan, Haro holds the positions of third vice-chair (*tredje vice ordförande*) of SULF, vice-chair of the board of the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association and member of the Executive Board of SULF. Haro's participation in these boards is an ongoing source of up-to-date information about current issues in higher education. The involvement in the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association specifically relates to questions regarding doctoral education.