

DOMB CASE REPORT 2023–2024

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



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Case Report 2023–2024 • Ärenderapport 2023–2024

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Introduction

The task of the Doctoral Student Ombudsman (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 cooperation with Lunds universitets studentkårer (LUS) and Teknologkåren vid Lunds tekniska högskola (TLTH).

The DOMB annually publishes a Case Report, compiling anonymised data from cases handled. The purpose is to shed light on recurring problems and thereby inform ongoing efforts to improve third-cycle education at Lund University.

Statistics in this report for 2023–2024 refer to cases that were initiated between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024. Comments in this report also take into account cases initiated earlier that were still ongoing during the same period.

Staff

The DOMB is one full-time employee. Since April 2022 the position is held by Haro de Grauw. Prior to taking on the role of DOMB at Lund University, Haro had been employed as student and PhD student ombudsman at Uppsala University, and prior to that was a doctoral candidate in neuroscience and women’s health at the same university.

Following a period of parental leave during the spring term of 2023 (see the Case Report 2022–2023 for details), Haro worked full-time throughout the year 2023–2024.

Definitions

Case

For the purposes of this report, a “case” is defined as when one or more doctoral candidates contact the DOMB because they are in need of some form of help or support. For example, a doctoral candidate may suspect that the University is not fulfilling its obligations towards them, or may be looking for information about their rights, or may be feeling harassed, discriminated or victimised. The DOMB can help the doctoral candidate understand their problem in the relevant regulatory framework, and reason together about an appropriate course of action. If another support service is better placed to provide support on the issue at hand, then the doctoral candidate is redirected there, e.g., to the labour union or the Occupational Health Service.

The DOMB assists doctoral candidates in cases that involve Lund University as counterpart to the doctoral candidate. A case may involve contact with other external parties, for example the Social Insurance Agency (*Försäkringskassan*) or the Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*). However, as the DOMB’s mandate is to help doctoral candidates understand and assert their rights within the University, the DOMB does not assist doctoral candidates in pursuing matters where an external party is the main counterpart. For example, helping a doctoral candidate to appeal a decision by the

Migration Agency falls outside the DOMB's mandate; in such situations the DOMB can only provide general guidance and refer the doctoral candidate to other support functions. The DOMB can, however, assist with any aspects of such a case that are internal to the University; for example, obtaining supporting documentation from the University for use in an appeal against the Migration Agency.

Some cases materially consist simply of communication between the doctoral candidate and the DOMB, often by email. In other cases it is necessary to involve other parties, hold meetings, submit documents etc. The DOMB may help to appeal University decisions where this is possible, and may help doctoral candidates to submit complaints, both within the University and to other authorities, for example to the Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslersämbetet*, UKÄ). A "case", thus, may be anything ranging from an exchange of emails between the doctoral candidate and the DOMB, to a series of meetings with University staff culminating in a formal complaint or appeal to external supervisory authorities.

A doctoral candidate who has had previous contact with the DOMB and comes back after some time with a different problem is registered as a new case. When the same doctoral candidate returns after time in relation to the same matter, this is treated as a continuation of a previous case. Cases initiated prior to 1 July 2023 are not visible in the statistics in this report, even though they may have been active during the year 2023–2024.

Doctoral candidate

The DOMB's cases involve "doctoral candidates", meaning anyone accepted onto a programme of education at Lund University that leads to the degree of Licentiate or Doctor. For the purposes of this report, the definition of "doctoral candidates" extends to also include persons who are in the process of enrolling on such a course, or have recently graduated, if their questions relate to doctoral education at Lund University. It furthermore extends to include so-called *skuggdoktorander* (literally: "shadow doctoral candidates"), meaning persons who are not formally enrolled in research-level education, but are effectively carrying out the same activities as properly enrolled doctoral candidates¹.

The services of the DOMB are available to all doctoral candidates, regardless of whether they are employed by the University or not, and regardless of any membership in student unions or other organisations.

A small number of cases concern doctoral candidates registered at other universities, who are in some way attached to or working within Lund University, for example as a visiting student or in the context of an inter-university research school. Whether these fall within the remit of the DOMB is assessed on a case-by-case basis, from a presumption that the DOMB will assist such persons

1 This practice stems from a tradition, in some subject areas, of allowing prospective doctoral candidates to be involved in research in an informal capacity until funding for a doctoral position is secured. Shadow doctoral candidates effectively perform unpaid work in conditions of high vulnerability, and the practice is generally illegal.

UKÄ. *Skuggdoktorander och rättssäkerhet vid antagning till utbildning på forskarnivå*.

<https://gamla.uka.se/download/18.3e823ae017c076400c1799e/1634036246882/rapport-2021-10-12-skuggdoktorander-och-rattssakerhet-vid-antagning-till-utbildning-p%C3%A5-forskarniva.pdf>

unless they can be referred to a different service better placed to support them (for example, an ombudsperson at the university at which they are registered).

Language and gender

In keeping with previous years' reports, cases are categorised by language (Swedish or English) and gender. The purpose of this categorisation is to verify that the service of the DOMB reaches doctoral candidates at the University evenly, regardless of gender and main working language. A further purpose is to identify any patterns in the case data, meaning categories of doctoral candidates disproportionately affected by particular issues.

Gender categorisation is based on the DOMB's subjective perception of the doctoral candidate's name and visible gender expression. In some cases no categorisation is made, either because the case concerned a group of doctoral candidates, or because categorisation was uncertain. A large part of the contact with doctoral candidates occurs via email, and asking a person what pronoun they use or what gender they identify with may not fit naturally into the communication. While this is arguably a simplistic and imperfect data collection process, it has been found to provide useful insights into the DOMB's case work, including trends over time.

Limitations

This report provides a rough quantification of the DOMB's case work, and how this develops year-on-year. Each case is unique, and any attempt at categorisation should be taken as a simplification. The total number of cases is too small to support any robust statistical analyses.

The considerable differences between cases as to their material content and duration (from a quick exchange of emails to processes that last years) mean that any quantitative comparisons by number of cases should not be assumed to accurately reflect the repartition of the DOMB's workload.

Most importantly, case numbers by faculty should not be interpreted as a measure of how commonly a particular issue occurs, or how many doctoral candidates are affected. Some departments proactively inform their doctoral candidates about the DOMB, and encourage doctoral candidates to contact the DOMB when difficulties arise; others do not. Clusters of cases sometimes occur within departments when one doctoral candidate is satisfied with the help received from the DOMB, and then encourages friends and colleagues to likewise seek help. Therefore, a high number of cases in any particular part of the University may simply reflect a greater awareness of, or willingness to involve, the DOMB, as opposed to reflecting a more frequent occurrence of underlying issues.

The value of this report, then, is perhaps primarily to be sought in the qualitative commentary in running text, rather than its quantitative data.

Case categorisation

Cases are sorted into nine categories or as *Other*, as detailed below. This framework for case categorisation, introduced in 2021, was agreed among ombudspersons at several Swedish universities, in the intent that numbers may be compared between universities, and perhaps one day compiled into nationwide statistics.

A case can be in more than one category. For this reason, adding up the number of cases in each category gives a larger sum than the total number of cases. However, multiple categorisation is used restrictively, i.e., only when a case has very substantial elements of more than one category. An example of this would be a case where a doctoral candidate is sexually harassed by their supervisor, ultimately resulting in a change of supervisor; this would be categorised as both an *Equality and work environment* (sexual harassment) and *Supervision* (change of supervisor) case.

Access to resources

The Higher Education Ordinance (*högskoleförordningen*, 1993:100) sets requirements on universities to provide supervision and “other resources”. This is further specified in section 8 of the *Regulations for doctoral education at Lund University*².

This category concerns cases where the doctoral candidate perceives that the University is not providing the necessary resources for successful completion of the PhD. This typically means provision of desk space, computer equipment and access to digital resources, but may also concern provision of laboratory materials and equipment, or travel expenses.

A formal procedure is defined by the Higher Education Ordinance for the withdrawal of supervision and access to resources. This falls into the *Access to resources* case category, but occurs only very rarely in practice.

Administration and information

Cases in this category primarily concern administrative procedures within the University, or helping a doctoral candidate obtain information from the University. Administrative procedures include, for example, the registration of course credits, the updating of the individual study plan (ISP) or the registration of sick leave.

This case category only applies when the focus of the case is the administrative aspect (such as: ensuring that the correct documents are submitted in the proper way). Where the focus of the case is disagreement on the substance of the matter (for example: the content of the ISP) the case would instead be categorised according to the nature of that matter.

Admission

This category includes questions and problems relating to admission, including *skuggdoktorander* (“shadow doctoral candidates”, see above).

2 Until 30 September 2024:
Lund University. *Regulations for doctoral education at Lund University*. STYR 2018/562.
<https://www.staff.lu.se/sites/staff.lu.se/files/2021-10/regulations-for-doctoral-education-lund-university.pdf>

From 1 October 2024:
Lund University. *University-wide Regulatory Framework for Doctoral Education at Lund University*.
STYR 2023/625. <https://www.staff.lu.se/sites/staff.lu.se/files/2024-11/university-wide-regulatory-framework-for-doctoral-education-at-lund-university.pdf>

Disciplinary measures

Disciplinary cases are common for ombudspersons supporting undergraduate students, but much less common in research-level education.

Doctoral candidates suspected of cheating during examination, or disruption of teaching, may be referred to the Vice-Chancellor and Disciplinary Board in the same way as students at Bachelors and Masters level. This is the disciplinary process described in the Higher Education Ordinance, chapter 10.

Likewise, in the same way as Bachelors and Masters students, if there is a risk that a student might harm another person or cause substantial damage to property during the course of their studies, and the student suffers from a mental disorder³, substance abuse or has been found guilty of a serious crime, they may be referred to the Higher Education Expulsions Board (*Högskolans avskiljandenämnd*, HAN), who must then decide if the student should be expelled. Such cases are extremely rare in research-level education.

The *Disciplinary measures* category includes cases that relate to either of the above.

In the same way as other university staff, doctoral candidates may be referred to the National Board for Assessment of Research Misconduct (*Nämnden för prövning av oredlighet i forskning*, NPOF) if there is a suspicion of deviation from good research practice in the form of plagiarism, fabrication or falsification. Such cases are not recorded in *Disciplinary measures*, but in the separate *Research ethics* category (see below).

Employment

This category consists of problems that primarily relate to the doctoral candidate in their capacity as employee, rather than student. This includes questions relating to salary, vacation or other contractual terms of employment; prolongation of employment; sick leave and rehabilitation; or parental leave.

Cases in this category are frequently handled in collaboration with the labour unions, if the doctoral candidate is a member. On employment issues, the labour unions have access to stronger mechanisms for dispute resolution, including labour courts, due to having status of party (*partsställning*) in collective agreements that are binding on the University. The DOMB does not have this status.

Equality and work environment

This category includes all cases relating to (alleged) discrimination, victimisation, harassment, or sexual harassment; physical work environment, organisational and social work environment, or accidents in the workplace.

3 This is based on the provisions of the Higher Education Act (*högskolelagen*), chapter 4, section 6, as implemented in the Ordinance on the expulsion of students from higher education (*förordning, 2007:989, om avskiljande av studenter från högskoleutbildning*). The terms “mental disorder” (*psykisk störning*) and “abuse” (*missbruk*) are quoted here as used in the Higher Education Act. These older terms do not reflect the conceptual frameworks and language accepted in medical science today.

In cases involving (alleged) discrimination, victimisation, harassment or sexual harassment, the service of the DOMB is equally available to doctoral candidates who are victims of such behaviours (discrimination, etc.) by others, or who are themselves accused by others. It is useful to keep in mind that the DOMB does not take sides, and is not responsible for investigating the allegations – that is, determining whether discrimination, harassment etc. have in fact occurred. Rather, the DOMB supports the doctoral candidate in understanding the applicable legal and cultural boundaries, and provides guidance on the mechanisms by which the University investigates these issues and provides support to persons involved.

Examination

This category includes cases that concern either examination of courses, or the final thesis defence. Cases in this category might include situations where there is disagreement on what assessment criteria should apply, or about whether the doctoral student fulfils the criteria, or situations where a doctoral candidate raises concerns about the fairness of a certain aspect of an examination. Cheating during examination sorts under the *Disciplinary measures* category.

Research ethics

Cases in this category typically revolve around publication ethics (authorship), ethical approval, allegations of plagiarism, or ethical questions in relation to specific research methods. Cases may, but do not always, involve an official report and investigation, either within the University, at the National Board for Assessment of Research Misconduct (*Nämnden för prövning av oredlighet i forskning*, NPOF) or at the Ethics Review Appeals Board (*Överklagandenämnden för etikprövning*, ÖNEP).

Cases in this category may involve complaints by the doctoral candidate about others, or conversely complaints by others about the doctoral candidate.

Supervision

This case covers all aspects of supervision, such as: insufficient supervision, excessive supervision, poor relationship with the supervisor, or change of supervisor. Withdrawal of supervision and other resources, pursuant to the procedure described in the Higher Education Ordinance, sorts under *Access to resources* (see above).

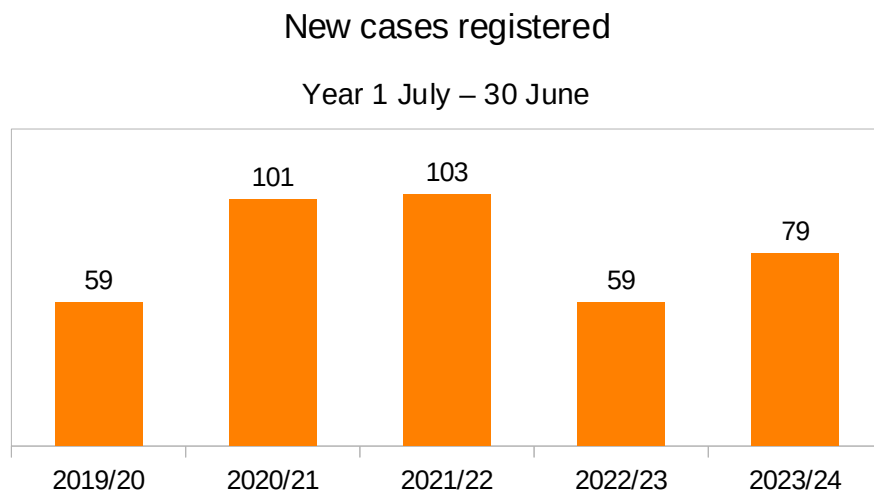
Other

Occasionally, a doctoral candidate might ask the DOMB for advice on an issue that does not directly concern their relationship to the University as student or employee, or does not fit well into any of the above categories. Those cases are categorised as *Other*.

Examples of issues in the *Other* category include questions relating to the social security system, migration law or student unions. The DOMB can only provide general guidance in these cases.

Cases per year

New cases



This year, 79 new cases were registered. This is an increase from 2022–2023, but still lower than the two preceding years.

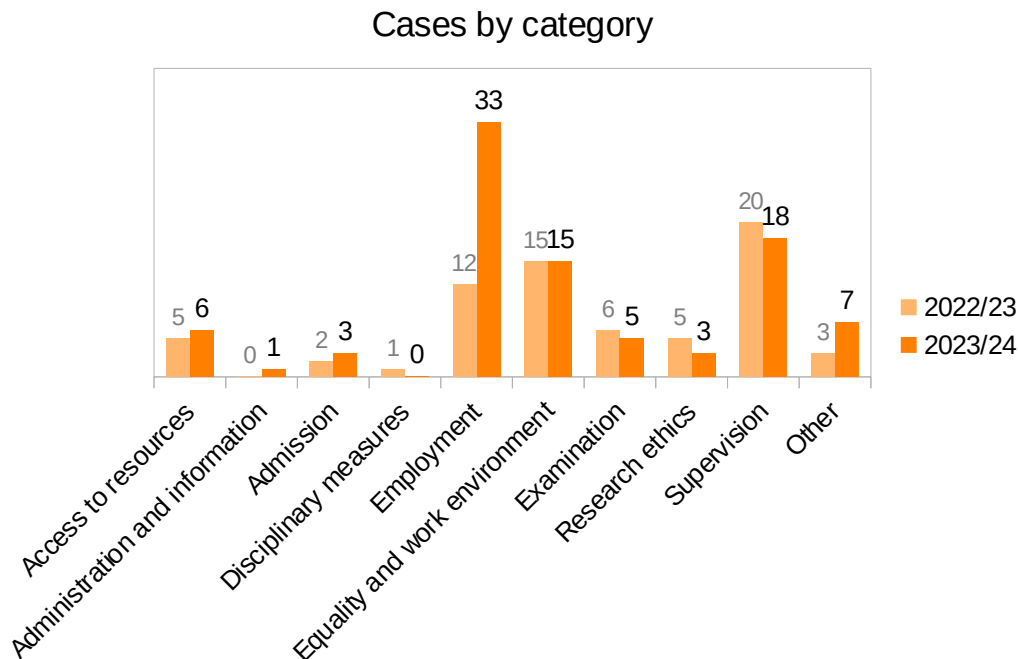
The period 2020–2022 was marked by the covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in an unusually large number of people contacting the DOMB. However, most of these cases concerned sick leave and extension of employment, and were relatively straight-forward to resolve. The year 2022–2023 represented a return to normality after the pandemic.

Qualitatively, in comparison to previous years, the casework of 2023–2024 consisted of more complex cases, taking longer to resolve. The DOMB’s subjective assessment is that the case workload for 2023–2024 was considerably greater than either of the preceding years, to the point that upholding a reasonable standard of service was challenging at times.

One clear factor in the increasing complexity of casework is the economic pressure faced by many departments and faculties, after high inflation and a rapid increase in rent rates for office space. As a result, even in the face of complex situations and genuine need, many departments have become extremely restrictive about providing any additional support, even temporary, that costs money. Examples of this are: an own office, a (co-)supervisor based at a different department, access to materials or infrastructure, participation in additional courses or courses offered by other universities, or prolongation of employment. It is clear that the lack of available funding at department level is greatly restricting Heads of Department’s and Directors of Studies’ ability to intervene in support of doctoral candidates who are struggling, often through no fault of their own.

Cases by category

Overview



The most commonly occurring case categories are *Employment* (33 cases), *Supervision* (18), and *Equality and work environment* (15).

The profile by case categories is overall similar to 2022–2023, except for clear increases in the *Employment* and *Other* categories. These are discussed further below.

Access to resources

Three of these six cases concerned issues with access to work space, materials and equipment. Such issues had become very common during the covid-19 pandemic, but were less frequent last year, post-pandemic.

The remainder of these cases focused either on issues with external funding, or withdrawal of resources in the sense of the Higher Education Ordinance.

Administration and information

The single case in this category concerned information about courses, and administrative procedures around admission to these.

As a general observation, doctoral candidates tend to contact the DOMB only as a last resort, after having exhausted the help resources available within their departments. Despite efforts, some doctoral candidates appear to experience contacting the DOMB as a rather drastic escalation, and

there is a clear reluctance to approach the DOMB over minor practical questions. As a result, the case rate in this category is not representative of the frequency of administrative problems in doctoral education. It is evident across the DOMB's case work that in many departments there is a disconcerting lack of clarity about administrative routines, and much confusion over whom to contact about what.

Admission

It is likely that a majority of (prospective) doctoral candidates are unaware of the DOMB at the admission stage of doctoral education, therefore such cases are quite rare. Questions about admission related mainly to crediting of previous studies (*tillgodoräknande*) and switching between different doctoral programmes.

The selection process in admission to doctoral education is notoriously opaque, particularly when selection is carried out at the research group (rather than department) level. This has been the subject of an inquiry and report⁴ by the University's internal auditors (*internrevisionen*). The DOMB was interviewed as part of that inquiry.

Disciplinary measures

There were no cases in this category this year. Last year's single case involved suspicions of cheating during examination (*vilseledande vid bedömning av studieprestation*) in the sense of the Higher Education Ordinance, chapter 10.

Employment

The incidence of cases concerning employment decreased last year following the end of the pandemic, but increased sharply again this year.

Seven of these cases concerned extension of employment. There continue to be considerable inconsistencies between and within departments in how the relevant regulations are interpreted and applied. The overall pattern is that granting of extension has become more restrictive across the university. Concerningly, this includes a more restrictive approach even to extension of employment on qualified grounds such as sick leave, parental leave or assignments as student representative. There have also been situations in which the department expressed uncertainty about contract renewals even prior to the exhaustion of the ordinary four year employment time (five years with departmental duties). This appears to be caused not by any change of policy, but rather by economic pressures, sometimes at department level but more often at research group level. This is a disconcerting development, as these situations cause unnecessary uncertainty and anxiety for doctoral candidates, especially those who do not have a permanent right of residence in Sweden.

Ten cases concerned sick leave and/or rehabilitation after illness, a sharp increase from last year's two. Absent any indications of a drastic increase in sick leave incidence for doctoral candidates, it would appear that this increase reflects greater awareness of the DOMB as a support resource. The

4 Lund University. *Granskning av antagningsprocessen till utbildning på forskarnivå*. STYR 2023/819. Available via <https://www.lu.se/lucat/group/v1000912>.

role of the DOMB here is not to provide health advice or care (doctoral candidates are instead referred to the Occupational Health Service), but to assist the doctoral candidate in study-related aspects of illness and rehabilitation, such as any changes to the individual study plan. Most of these cases concern mental rather than physical health, often in the context of poor supervision or an ongoing conflict.

Five cases consisted of providing advice in relation to termination (usually voluntary) of employment as a doctoral candidate.

The remaining eleven employment-related cases concerned terms and conditions of employment, in various ways, including salaries, vacation and other contractual terms. Last year there were only two cases of this kind. The increase in questions relating to employment terms may relate to the general increase in cost of living. Doctoral candidates arriving in Sweden from other countries often report a sense of disillusionment at their employment terms, once confronted with the cost of living in this country, particularly the cost of housing in and around Lund.

Equality and work environment

Similarly to past years, just over half of the cases in this category concerned organisational and social work environment problems. The remainder concerned discrimination (four cases) or victimisation/harassment, including sexual harassment (three cases). The latter categories are defined by the doctoral candidate's subjective experience, not by any formal finding that discrimination etc. has demonstrably occurred. While the case numbers are too small to draw any definitive conclusions, discrimination allegations appear to most commonly refer to either gender, or ethnic or national origin as a discrimination ground.

Similarly to last year, doctoral candidates describe the processes for reporting discrimination etc. as difficult to access or understand, and express very low confidence in the objectiveness and sincerity of investigations⁵. There is a clear perception that senior members of staff are often more invested in keeping friendly relations with other seniors in the department, than in the well-being of doctoral candidates. This means that influential members of staff appear to get away with behaviour that would nowadays be considered unacceptable in most workplaces.

Examination

Most cases in the *Examination* category concerned course requirements, in contrast to previous years' focus on thesis submission and defence.

Several doctoral candidates from the Faculty of Medicine, as individuals or as student representatives on behalf of groups, express dissatisfaction with the newly introduced "research school" package of compulsory courses. The rigid schedule of these courses is incompatible with part-time study, and poses serious challenges for those combining doctoral education with parenthood. This is further discussed below, in the section on the Faculty of Medicine.

5 This is corroborated by a report by the University's internal auditors, to which the DOMB contributed.

Lund University. *Granskning av universitetets hantering av kränkningar och trakasserier*. STYR 2024/2248. Available via <https://www.lu.se/lucat/group/v1000912>.

Research ethics

All three cases in this category this year concerned complaints by doctoral candidates about others, most often their supervisors (as opposed to complaints by others about doctoral candidates).

The recurring theme is publication ethics, specifically (co-)authorship on scientific publications. It is apparent that in at least some environments it is still quite common for doctoral candidates to receive instructions from their supervisors to include additional names as co-authors on publications, of persons not involved in the research. There are also reports of doctoral candidates being told that they require their supervisor's permission to publish anything, even material that is entirely the doctoral candidate's own work; this is evidently inconsistent with the constitutionally protected freedom of research.

Supervision

Although not the most numerous category this year, cases concerning supervision continue to represent, subjectively, the largest share of the DOMB's workload, as these often require a continued dialogue over time before issues subside.

The most frequent complaint, out of 18 cases in this category, is inadequate supervision in quantity or quality. This is experienced as a lack of interest from the supervisor, or insufficient frequency of supervision meetings. Conversely, some doctoral candidates describe excessive supervision, experienced as harassment, micro-management or bullying. Some doctoral candidates report that supervisors expect them to work substantially more than what can be contractually expected for full-time work, for example working seven days a week, or late into the evening each day.

Five cases this year involved a change of supervisor. The DOMB routinely informs doctoral candidates that changing supervisors is a right enshrined in the Higher Education Ordinance, but also routinely advises doctoral candidates that requesting a change of supervisor should only be considered as a last resort, after all attempts at compromise and mediation have failed.

The DOMB has noted in previous years' case reports, yet it bears repeating, that changing supervisors is particularly challenging for doctoral candidates funded by external research grants. This situation is not improving. Departments are often unwilling, or claim to be unable, to effect a change of supervisor in such cases, as there is no funding available to continue employing the doctoral candidate without the supervisor's consent. This is a question that needs to be resolved at a structural level, by empowering department leaders to exercise responsibility for doctoral education in their departments, even when funding is external and supervisors are uncooperative. Simply put, this means that the funding assigned to the doctoral candidate must remain allocated to that doctoral candidate even after a change of supervisor, even when the funding originates from a grant held personally by the supervisor. When denying a change of supervisor on the basis of funding issues, the University is failing to comply with legal requirements under the Higher Education Ordinance.

A more general reflection on the question of supervision is that doctoral candidates continue to be unreasonably dependent on the benevolence of their supervisors. Working conditions are sometimes dramatically different from one research group to the next, even within the same department. This indicates that the University continues to grant supervisors a very high degree of autonomy in dispensing doctoral education. The DOMB regularly has to remind doctoral candidates – and

supervisors – that a doctoral candidate is a student and employee of Lund University, not a personal assistant to the supervisor.

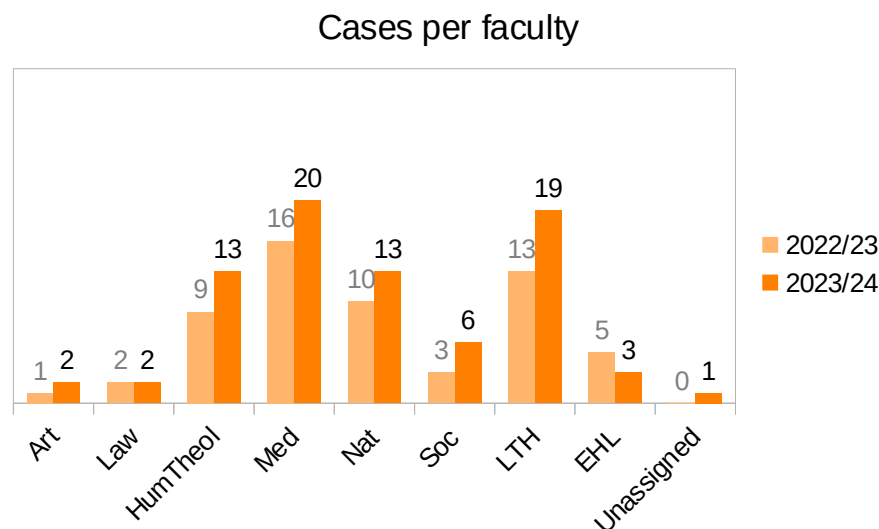
Other

Three cases in the *Other* category concerned obstacles to participation in student representation, for example in the form of supervisors or Directors of Studies advising doctoral candidates against taking on an assignment in a student union, or on one of the University's many boards or committees. To give the benefit of doubt, one of these cases could be interpreted as advice given with good intentions (to avoid exposure to additional stress and distraction, in an already challenging situation), yet displaying a disconcerting lack of cultural sensitivity: a doctoral candidate from a more autocratic country would reasonably interpret such "advice" as a thinly veiled threat that union engagement will be met with retribution. The other two cases, on the other hand, involved open hostility from University staff to student union engagement. At risk of stating the obvious: such behaviour by staff is harmful to the doctoral candidate, severely detrimental to the University, and patently illegal.

The remaining four cases in the *Other* category concerned matters outside the DOMB's mandate, including migration-related questions.

Case statistics and patterns per faculty

Overview



The case profile by faculties is broadly similar to 2022–2023; the overall increase in cases spreads proportionally across the University. Yearly variability in case numbers at the smaller faculties should be taken as random fluctuations not indicative of any pattern or change.

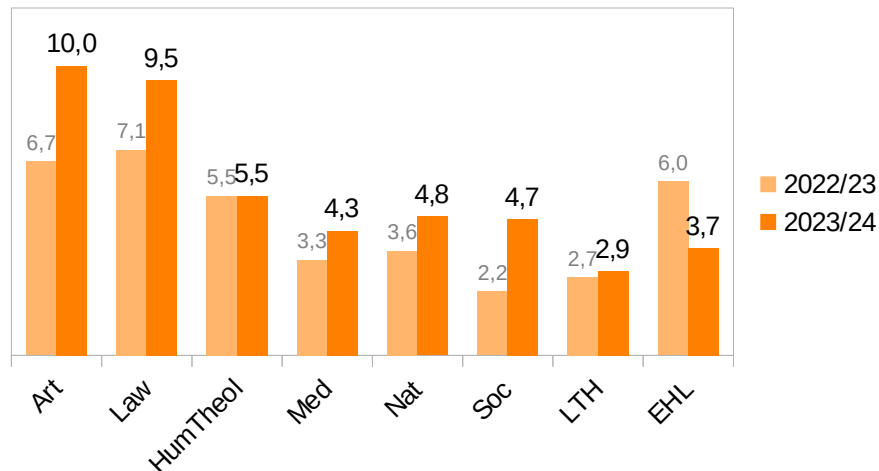
As noted in the introduction, case rates by faculty should not be interpreted as a measure of how well or how poorly doctoral education is functioning. Some departments and faculties proactively inform their doctoral candidates about the DOMB, and encourage doctoral candidates to contact the DOMB when difficulties arise⁶; others do not. A high number of cases in any particular part of the University may simply reflect a greater awareness of, or willingness to involve, the DOMB, as opposed to reflecting a more frequent occurrence of underlying issues.

The following graph shows case numbers in proportion to number of candidates. This is based on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) persons active in doctoral education during the year 2023, as quoted in the University's annual report⁷. Cases per 100 FTE can be thought of as a measure of how likely a doctoral candidate in that faculty is to come into contact with the DOMB at some point during their doctoral education.

⁶ This is greatly appreciated by the DOMB, and in most cases contributes to resolving problems in a way that is also appreciated by department staff.

⁷ Lund University. *Årsredovisning 2023*. STYR 2023/2800. <https://www.ekonomiwebben.lu.se/sites/ekonomiwebben.lu.se/files/2024-03/lunds-universitets-arsredovisning-2023-tillganglig.pdf>

Cases by faculty per 100 candidates (FTE)



Case rates are broadly similar across the University, and similar to last year. The Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Faculty of Law, and LUSEM School of Economics and Management (EHL) each have fewer than 100 FTE doctoral candidates and fewer than ten cases during the year, so their case rates should not be considered more extreme than those at the other faculties.

In view of the challenges relating to external funding, it is perhaps surprising that the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Engineering (LTH) do not have more cases. Doctoral candidates in these faculties appear to be less well informed of the DOMB. This could be because they are more scattered across different campus environments, or more likely to not be employed by the University, which makes these doctoral candidates more difficult to reach with information.

Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts

Costs increasing faster than revenues is a University-wide issue, but the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts seems to be disproportionately affected, not least because external research funding opportunities for this field are almost non-existent. The result is a gradually decreasing intake of doctoral candidates. As some doctoral candidates are based away from campus by the nature of their artistic work, the PhD community at the Faculty's premises in Malmö now looks likely to collapse after upcoming thesis defences. For doctoral education in the Fine and Performing Arts to remain viable, the University may need to allocate strategic funding from central resources, to offset the lack external research funding.

Faculty of Law

The two cases here suggest no particular patterns or problems.

Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology

An increasing proportion of doctoral candidates at the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology are funded through "research schools", which in this context refers to external funding for the simultaneous recruitment of a cluster of doctoral candidates within a specific topic, often as a

network spread over different universities. Research schools are generally designed with the expectation that these doctoral candidates will participate in group activities and courses that are tailored to the research school, and not accessible to other doctoral candidates. At several departments, this has resulted in tensions between research school leaders (i.e., those who secured the funding) and department leaders. In some cases, Heads of Department and Directors of Studies – who hold the responsibility for work environment and education, respectively, for all doctoral candidates in their department, irrespective of funding through a research school – have allowed substantial deviations from the applicable doctoral education syllabus (*allmän studieplan*), and declined to intervene or assume any responsibility for these doctoral candidates, even when substantial conflicts or supervision shortcomings emerged. Decisions are instead made by “research school boards” that have no statutory basis whatsoever. This lack of agency on part of departmental leaders should be a matter of grave concern, and the occurrence of these events at different departments suggests a need for clarification from the faculty level.

Another issue that persists in some pockets of the Faculty is the rejection of the University’s language policy⁸, in the sense of refusing to allow the use of English, under the cover of creatively flawed interpretations of the Language Act (*språklagen*). Contrary to such interpretations, the Language Act neither prevents the use of English in any aspect of doctoral education or student representation, nor diminishes the University’s responsibility to communicate with each doctoral candidate in a language that that person understands⁹.

Otherwise, the 13 cases here represent a reasonable cross-section of the DOMB’s case work.

Faculty of Medicine

Similarly to past years, the Faculty of Medicine’s 20 cases accounted for a substantial share of the qualitatively more severe cases in the *Supervision* category; for a discussion of the research education culture at the Faculty of Medicine, see last year’s case report.

As introduced above, several cases relate to the introduction of a new compulsory course package (confusingly called a “research school”, giving that expression a different meaning here than in most other contexts). This consists of a set of courses that could previously be taken at various times during the year and at different stages of the doctoral programme, at each doctoral candidate’s

8 Lund University. *Lund University Language Policy*. LS 2011/2260.
<https://www.staff.lu.se/sites/staff.lu.se/files/lund-university-language-policy.pdf>

9 The Language Act requires that each person in Sweden be *given the opportunity* to learn and use Swedish. It does not, however, *require* any individual to do so, even in the context of a public authority, except in very specific situations (for example: when a court issues a verdict). In other words, the University may not prevent anyone from using Swedish, but is by no means required by the Language Act to prevent the use of other languages. In various situations the University has an obligation under the Administrative Procedure Act (*förvaltningslagen*) to provide translation services so that each individual may be able to exercise their rights.

The Language Act (*språklagen*, 2009:600) can be accessed in English translation here:
<https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/36dc86bb939c4bc79eb44417b0852b40/spraklag-pa-engelska/>

An authoritative interpretation of the Language Act is provided by the Language Council of Sweden (*Språkrådet*). *Språkrådet. Språkrådets uttolkning av språklagen (2009:600)*.
<https://www.isof.se/download/18.1e4309991774c3fe50bce367/1613462934784/Uttolkning-spraklagen-2010.pdf>

convenience. Instead, the course package is now rigidly scheduled and must be taken as a unit. Several course components are described as compulsory to attend, yet not listed in the course syllabus as part of the examination¹⁰. Failure to attend compulsory components, even on justified grounds (such as illness or participation in student representation¹¹), can result in the doctoral candidate being required to retake the entire course package. The schedule for the course package is incompatible with part-time studies, and poses a challenge to doctoral candidates who have children. Each of these aspects can violate University policies or applicable law to some extent.

A unique challenge in the Faculty of Medicine in the handling of cases relating to illness and rehabilitation is the insistence by the Faculty that the supervisor or research group leader is the doctoral candidate's "employer" (*arbetsgivare*). This is incorrect: the employer is Lund University, and responsibility for the employee as such lies with the Head of Department, on delegation from the person ultimately responsible, namely the Vice-Chancellor. One practical effect of the Faculty's approach is that rehabilitation processes after illness are managed by the supervisor; this is inappropriate, especially given the number of cases in which poor supervision or a conflict with the supervisor is part of what caused the illness in the first place. At other faculties, rehabilitation processes are handled by the Head of Department or Head of Division, unless the same person is also the supervisor, in which case a deputy or substitute handles the rehabilitation process – this is the correct approach.

Faculty of Science

The 13 cases here represent a reasonable cross-section of the DOMB's case work, with no particular patterns to report.

Faculty of Social Sciences

The six cases here represent a reasonable cross-section of the DOMB's case work, with no particular patterns to report.

Faculty of Engineering (LTH)

Most cases at LTH relate to supervision and work environment issues, including some cases of long-term sick leave and rehabilitation. Resolution of supervision issues is often complicated by a reluctance from Heads of Department and Directors of Studies to intervene in the education and working conditions of doctoral candidates funded externally, i.e., by research grants or industry collaborations controlled by the supervisor. Regardless of funding circumstances, the Head of

10 For a discussion of course components with compulsory attendance, see: The Higher Education Authority (UKÄ). *Rättssäker examination*. Page 68. <https://www.uka.se/download/18.16cf0f8c1849df46622152/1669103146069/Vagledning-2020-01-16-rattssaker-examination.pdf>

11 This appears to be at odds with University policy. Compare: Lund University. *Policy och föreskrifter för studentinflytande vid Lunds universitet*. LS 2011/762. 4 §. <https://www.medarbetarwebben.lu.se/sites/medarbetarwebben.lu.se/files/2021-07/policy-och-foreskrifter-for-studentinflytande-vid-lunds-universitet.pdf>

Department and Director of Studies should be empowered to intervene when and as necessary, including by reallocating funds.

There is considerable variation between departments in the manner of handling any problems that arise in the course of doctoral education. Some are excellent in this regard; this appears to depend strongly on the skill and willingness of individuals in key roles.

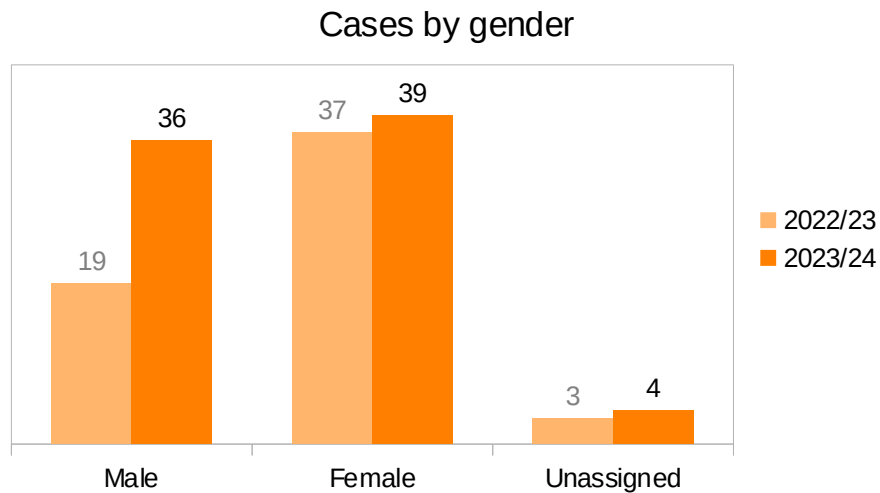
Due to the large proportion of doctoral candidates recruited from abroad, cases at LTH often include elements of cultural misunderstanding or miscommunication. Most staff appear to be well aware of these challenges, and make sincere efforts to prevent or resolve such situations.

LUSEM School of Economics and Management (EHL)

The three cases here suggest no particular patterns or problems.

Representativeness of casework

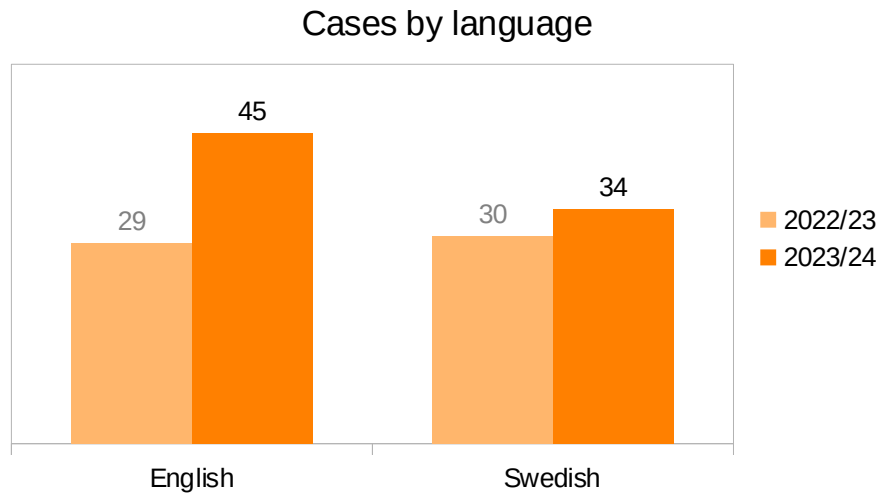
Gender



According to the University's annual report, in the calendar year 2023 the University's 1 636 FTE active doctoral candidates had a 49:51 gender distribution (women:men). The distribution across faculties remains heavily uneven, e.g. 39:61 at the Faculty of Engineering versus 60:40 at the Faculty of Social Sciences and 77:23 at the Faculty of Law.

The gender breakdown in the DOMB casework has evened out in comparison to last year. The DOMB case numbers are not large enough to support any robust analyses, but the gender distribution of cases appears roughly even across faculties in relation to the gender repartition of doctoral candidate populations, and across case categories.

Language



Somewhat more cases were handled in English than in Swedish. There are no readily available statistics on the use of language across the doctoral candidate population, and many speak both languages. It seems reasonable to expect that non-Swedish-speaking doctoral candidates are more likely to contact the DOMB, since they are generally less familiar with rules and regulations in Sweden, and less able to find such information by themselves.

The pattern of cases by faculty and by case category is broadly similar for the two languages.

Looking ahead: conclusions and recommendations

The single greatest issue in doctoral education at Lund University today is the failure to take collegiate responsibility for doctoral education at the department level. Doctoral candidates continue to be unreasonably dependent on the benevolence of their supervisors, especially (but not only) when funded by external grants. Research schools have shown an inclination to establish their own management structures, sometimes without any statutory foundation or mandate. It is important, then, to reiterate the Head of Department's responsibility for employment, work environment and rehabilitation processes, and the Director of Studies' responsibility for the planning and execution of doctoral education, including supervision. These responsibilities can only be borne if the same persons are empowered to take action, which includes having access to economic resources that may be used to resolve any problems, when appropriate.

The University's internal auditors this year expressed criticism on how allegations of victimisation and harassment are handled by the University¹²; their findings are in line with impressions from the DOMB's casework. The report makes several recommendations, which the DOMB supports. These findings and recommendations should be a starting point for a broader discussion on how the University's internal culture requires to evolve to eradicate these behaviours.

Closely related to the above issues is the question of long-term sick leave among doctoral candidates, often for mental health reasons that clearly relate to supervision or to the organisational work environment. Lund's Doctoral Student Union (LDK) published a very informative booklet on wellbeing during doctoral studies, intended primarily as an information and self-help resource for doctoral candidates themselves¹³. A continuation of this project by LDK seeks to create a new role of Wellbeing and Career Coach; this would complement the DOMB's service on rights and regulations, and supplement the Occupational Health Service by providing a service that reaches doctoral candidates before they reach the threshold of seeking medical help.

Issues that endure, despite efforts at improvement, include the use of language as a tool for exclusion, and conflicts about authorship ethics. An emerging trend is hostility by University staff members to doctoral candidates' engagement in student representation activities; this is severely problematic, and student unions will expect the University to intervene swiftly when this occurs.

Based on the increasing number, complexity and duration of individual cases, there is a strong argument to expand the DOMB service from one to two full-time staff. Several other universities employ a full-time doctoral student ombudsman despite having less than half the number of active doctoral candidates at Lund University. An increase in staffing level would enable a considerable improvement in the quality and punctuality of the DOMB service.

12 Lund University. *Granskning av universitetets hantering av kränkningar och trakasserier*. STYR 2024/2248. Available via <https://www.lu.se/lucat/group/v1000912>.

13 Laura Cox. *Wellbeing: tools to thrive during your PhD*. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OkK8IBJ-l_k8CU3mZXhwEzMQL5-l8y7M