

Motion: Disallow inclusion of intermediary, pre-dissertation examination system in Doctoral Programs/ Subject Study-Programs



*Submitted for consideration to the PhD Chapter Meeting
The PhD chapter at KTH/ Doktorandsektionen vid Tekniska Högskolans Studentkår*



Introduction

§1. The Swedish laws entitle students to exert influence over the courses and study programmes at higher education institutions (Sec 4a of Chapter 1)¹. THS is the student union of KTH. It appoints student union representatives at different boards of KTH where courses and study programmes are discussed (Sec. 7)². Through the PM for Impact-Work³, THS has delegated the PhD Chapter to appoint representatives to boards/forums where doctoral issues are discussed. The representatives appointed by the PhD Chapter in these central forums are entitled to a prolongation to the doctoral-studies time through the relevant laws (see chapter 5)⁴ and the KTH Rector's decision⁵. The rector has delegated THS to use up to two full time doctoral student positions for these representations. This costs KTH roughly around 2Mn SEK.

§2. KTH's central boards are composed of student representatives, faculty representatives, trade union representatives and external representatives. Among these the trade union representatives (e.g. SACO-S, ST, SULF etc.) do not have voting rights whereas the student representatives have voting rights. Any objection of student representatives, like any other present in the meeting, is entitled to be minuted in these forums irrespective of the decision.

§2.a. The position taken by any doctoral student representative on a doctoral education question, is indeed the position of the PhD Chapter and also the position of the students. The PhD Chapter's top decision-making body is the PhD Chapter meeting, all decisions taken in the PhD Chapter meeting are bound to be implemented by the PhD Chapter board and representatives appointed by them (see 3.6.c)⁶.

Aim of this motion

§3. This motion deals on a purely student-union charter that is to influence the study programs.

§4. This motion aims to establish education policy of the PhD chapter on doctoral programs that is ***to disallow inclusion of intermediary, pre-dissertation examination system in Doctoral Programs/ Subject Study-Programs***

§4.a. If this motion is passed by this chapter meeting, then the demand laid in the motion shall become the position of the PhD chapter, and thereby the position of the doctoral student representatives appointed by the Chapter at various forums of KTH.

§5. The final decision on an educational policy is of course based on the decisions of the KTH forums, but due to the presence of student representatives (upto 3 in total) in all the relevant forums, any decision made by these forums about

¹ <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Swedish-Higher-Education-Act/>

² <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/ordinance-on-students-unions-2009769/>

³ PM för Påverkansarbete <https://cdn.thskth.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/pm-fr-pverkansarbete.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Higher-Education-Ordinance/#chapter5>

⁵ <https://www.dr.kth.se/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/03/DnrV-2016-0451.pdf>

⁶ https://www.dr.kth.se/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/12/Dr2019-CM-01_0003-Statutes.pdf



doctoral student study programs should ideally be in reflection to the position of the doctoral student representatives. If not, the doctoral student representatives are entitled to get the meeting to minute the disagreements and raise it subsequently.

Adverse effects of including intermediary examination in doctoral programs

§6. The education and examination of doctoral students is governed with respect to the general/subject study programme. The general/subject study programme *is applicable to all doctoral students irrespective of the status* meaning industrial, scholarship, fellowship, fully employed, part-time etc. These doctoral programs derive the examination requirements from the Qualifications Ordinance described in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)⁷ which is a national law of Sweden and states the qualifications requirements of doctoral education. KTH has several doctoral programs and subject programs.

Case against general examinations

§7. In the 2021 book titled, “The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education” published by Johns Hopkins University Press, two experts on graduate education Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch make a case against general intermediary examinations. The book boldly argues that “*the typical (general) exam forms more of a time-consuming barricade before the dissertation than a bridge to it*”. The book also reports that many graduate programs in the US universities have now begun to substitute the intermediary general examination system with an informal professional portfolio. These could contain: a CV, all seminar papers, any published works, and a 15-20 page professional essay explaining why the student selected his major field. Further, the book documents evidence and new proposals which suggest universities moving away from general intermediary examinations. In fact, in the book a suggestion to decrease doctoral time includes streamlining or removing pre-dissertation (intermediary) examinations.

Becomes a norm for Industrial PhD Students

§8. KTH has plans to double the number of industrial PhD Students.⁸ It must be stressed that appearing for 2-3 intermediary pre-dissertation examinations would be highly detrimental for the industrial PhD students. Further, it must also be noted that the PhD chapter has a mandate to represent all doctoral students irrespective of the status: industrial, scholarship fellowship, fully employed, part-time etc. or even the ones without the union membership⁹. Hence, any policy that the PhD chapter advocates must have a commitment to all doctoral students.

Unhealthy work-environment related consequences

⁷ <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Higher-Education-Ordinance/>

⁸ <https://intra.kth.se/eecs/aktuellt-pa-eecs/nyheter/mot-sonja-berlijn-ny-skolchef-pa-eecs-1.1038231>

⁹ Section 8

<https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/ordinance-on-students-unions-2009769/>



§9. It is a common folklore that doctoral students cannot be asked to drop-out from higher education institutes in Sweden. In this section, the motion exerciser explains that inclusion of intermediary, pre-dissertation examination criteria in the doctoral could lead to new mechanisms to terminate doctoral students. Thus leading to an unhealthy work environment among doctoral students.

§10. To understand this issue, the readers must first examine why it is hard to terminate a doctoral student in the context of current laws. The relevant law which deals with the termination of doctoral students is in Section 30 of Chapter 6 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)¹⁰.

§10.a. *What does the law say about reasons when the resources on doctoral students are removed?* The law states that 'If a doctoral student substantially neglects his or her undertakings in the individual study plan, the vice-chancellor shall decide that the doctoral student is no longer entitled to supervision and other study resources.' (Section 30 of Chapter 6 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)).

Why is it hard (impossible) to establish §10.a? The ISP is a very **individual document**. Suppose, some tasks were not completed, like say, publishing xyz paper, or completing xyz experiments, there are many reasons which could prevent that. Hence, it is very hard to prove that a doctoral student has *substantially neglected* the undertakings in the ISP.

§10.b. *Suppose, someone does attempt to decide to establish "substantial neglect" on the doctoral students part, who has to do it according to the law?* The law states that 'Before such a decision is made, the doctoral student and the supervisors shall be given an opportunity to make representations. The case shall be considered on the basis of their reports and any other records available. The assessment shall take into account whether the higher education institution has fulfilled its own undertakings in the individual study plan.' (Section 30 of Chapter 6 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100))

Why is it hard (impossible) for §10.b to succeed against the doctoral student? The process involves only two parties: the doctoral student and his supervisors. So, it is up to the supervisor(s) to be able to prove that substantial neglect was undertaken by the doctoral student. *This in itself is contradictory*. Why? Because of the nature of the relationship. A doctoral student can always in his representation claim conflict as a reason.

§11. Imagine, doctoral programs had well-defined criteria enlisted in them for intermediary, pre-dissertation examination. Then the ISPs could only be made to contain: ***Fulfil the intermediary, pre-dissertation examinations listed in the doctoral program.***

§12. In the new system, the supervisor or a group of supervisors during the representation for the termination process, will present the fact that the doctoral student was examined by an examination process listed in the doctoral program (a legally binding document), established by KTH's top educational forums. Failing those examinations more than once, could

¹⁰ <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Higher-Education-Ordinance/>



become reasons to establish a “substantial neglect”. This would become an indefensible criterion for doctoral students during the termination process.

Timing of the Motion

§13. On 23rd February 2021 a trade union motion titled “*Mot en lönestege för doktorander för likabehandling, som undviker systematiska och administrativa problem i prestationsutvärdering samt blandningen av ledningsansvar och utbildningsansvar. Saco-S bör driva attraktiva anställningsvillkor för doktorander*” was sent to KTH’s SACO-S local trade union for consideration in the annual general meeting. This motion hitherto is referred to as *the trade union motion*. It demanded:

1. The doctoral students' salary criteria must primarily be time-based, and
2. Secondary, through criteria established in the individual study plan (ISP), provided that there are established examination criteria for evaluating the progression of the doctoral studies. ***This examination system must be defined in the corresponding program description and subject / general study plan.*** The criterion the doctoral student meets must first apply.

§14. Any trade union member is free to exercise any kind of motions in the appropriate trade union forum. It is indeed their right as trade union members. It must, though, be pointed out that the trade union motion also demanded the (intermediary) examination system be defined in the corresponding program description and subject/study plan. Currently, the salary ladder for doctoral students has three intermediate ladders: 30%, 50% and 80%. If the trade union motion is to be implemented, it would mean adding three intermediate or pre-dissertation examinations in the general study-plans. The purview of representation on such a demand, as established before, lies centrally on the doctoral student representatives due to their voting rights in the central forums deciding the general study plans and the corresponding Swedish laws on influence of education (Sec 4a of Chapter 1). From email correspondence with the PhD Chapter Board, the board and the chapter’s presidium unit, through the vice-chairperson clarified that the trade union motion was not endorsed by the PhD Chapter.

§14.a. The trade union motion was also signed by the PhD Chapter Chairperson using her student representative title. The PhD chapter is mandated to appoint doctoral student representatives at KTH’s forum where subject study plans are discussed and decided. Hence, it could be misrepresented that it is the PhD chapter’s position that the intermediary, pre-dissertation examination system should be introduced in the doctoral programs. Therefore, at this point, it is utmost important to clarify the position of the PhD Chapter towards the introduction of (intermediary) examination system in the doctoral programs. This is precisely the reason for submitting this motion at this time. And, what could be a better venue than the top decision-making body of the PhD chapter, the Chapter Meeting.

§15. It must be placed on record that this motion exerciser is not against the issues raised in the trade union motion. The issue raised in the trade union motion has been longing for attention and rectification. This motion purely deals with the matters of the student union concerning the roles of student union representatives that are to be able to influence the courses and study programmes.



§16. **There could be many ways other than including intermediary examination criteria in the doctoral programs to achieve fair and transparent appraisals of employed doctoral students.** The motion exerciser describe one of them. Today, each manager (e.g. division heads, administrative heads etc.), if requested, is liable to have a conversation with trade union members for salary discussions in the presence of trade union representatives. This is hard to achieve for all doctoral students, since they are high in numbers. **But instead, a *Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs)* could be negotiated with each division by the local trade unions depending on the field of work of the division.** Such SOPs must not contain any examination but instead a list of checkboxes. It could become an automatic route to give doctoral students appraisals if they complete the requirements before the corresponding time.

§17. The mechanism listed in §16 could be an alternative to editing the doctoral programs by including intermediate, pre-dissertation examinations and thus avoiding the adverse effects listed in this motion. *There could be other ideas as well.* But the intermediate pre-dissertation examination system in the doctoral programs must be disallowed.

Suggestions

To₁, Disallow inclusion of intermediary, pre-dissertation examination system in Doctoral Programs/ Subject Study-Programs.

Mohit Daga

PhD Chapter Member

Stockholm, 1st March 2021