

Operational Plan 2021/2022



Antagen av doktorandsektionensmöte den 17 maj 2021 och gäller till 30 juni 2022.

Enacted by PhD Chapter Meeting on the 17th of May 2021 and shall henceforth be valid until 30th of June 2022 unless amended, replaced or repealed.

Doktorandsektionen vid Tekniska Högskolans Studentkår

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Document History

Version	Description, By	Date
Dr2021-CM-04	Initial drafting of the 2021/2022 operational plan	6th May 2021
Dr2021-CM-04	Completion of the 2021/2022 operational plan	11th May 2021



Nomenclature

KTH: Kungliga tekniska högskolan (The Royal Institute of Technology)

FR: Fakultetsrådet (The faculty council)

US: Universitetsstyrelsen (The university board)

THS: Tekniska högskolans studentkår (KTH student union)

Dr/THS: Doktorandsektionen vid Tekniska Högskolans Studentkår (PhD chapter at KTH)

KS: Kårstyrelsen (The union's board)

KL: Kårledning (The union's management team)

KF: Kårfullmäktige (The union council or the general assembly)

CFU: Chef för utbildningsinflytande (Head of educational affairs)

PAD: Program ansvarig doktorand (PhD student representative for the program)

DrInK: Doktorand Integrerade Klubbmästeriet (Master of ceremonies group)

SFS: Sveriges förenade studentkårer (The Swedish National Union of Students)

SSCO: Stockholms studentkårer centralorganisation (Stockholm's student unions central organisation)

STAD: Stockholm förebygger alkohol- och drogproblem (Stockholm prevention of alcohol and drug problems)



Background

The objectives of the PhD Chapter are to promote more effective and higher quality PhD education and research, promote a stimulating work environment, and improve the general conditions for its members. The PhD Chapter should also work toward fostering greater unity and fellowship among its members.

The operational plan is a document that guides the executive work of the PhD Chapter board of directors throughout the operational year 2021/2022. It is not meant to be exhaustive or restrictive, but rather serves as a starting point for the work of the board, and can be interpreted and revised to suit the needs of circumstances.

The operational plan was created in preparation for the Summer PhD Chapter Meeting on May 17th. The PhD Chapter members' input had been explicitly solicited and used as a springboard in the preparation phase of this operational plan. This includes a questionnaire sent out to all doctoral students, the emails and correspondences we have received over the course of the year which point to numerous long-term and systemic issues that need to be addressed, and feedback from the school councils' presidia. All board members *Gloria Samosir*, *Federico Izzo*, *Deniz Yildiz*, *Jasmin Höglund Hellgren*, *Saiman Ding*, *Inês Lourenço*, and *Sofia Broomé* participated in the development of the operational plan.

Focus Areas for 2021/2022

Educational Advocacy

According to the Swedish Higher Education Act, working to ensure educational quality is a matter of concern for both students and university staff, and students have the right to influence the conditions of their education at their university (HL 1 kap. §4a¹). Given that KTH PhD students belong to the categories of both student and staff, it is particularly paramount for the PhD Chapter to work on quality issues pertaining to third cycle education (i.e. doctoral and licentiate degrees). Effective advocacy requires holistic and coordinated work at all levels that influence university organization, which includes the national, the regional, the university, the school, and the departmental level. Thus, the work of educational advocacy can be organized as follows:

National and Regional -Level Advocacy

The PhD Chapter will seek to maintain fruitful collaboration and exchange of information and good practices with national and regional level organizations. These include the Doctoral Committee of the Swedish National Union of Students (Sv: Sveriges Förenade Studentkårers Doktorandkommittén, SFS-DK), and doctoral

¹ Higher Education Act (Högskolelag)

https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/hogskolelag-19921434_sfs-1992-1434



organizations in the Stockholm region (e.g. *Stockholm PhDs*, a collaboration between the KTH PhD Chapter, KI Doctoral Association, SU Central Doctoral Council, SSE PhD Club, and SöderS Doctoral Council).

Central-Level Advocacy

The PhD Chapter will continue to actively participate in KTH central bodies where issues pertaining to third cycle education can be taken up. The Chapter will likewise continue to cooperate with the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) regarding educational quality at the university level. Key initiatives or ongoing issues that the board can pursue at the central level include:

1. Advocate for allocation of sufficient resources for courses at the third cycle level.
2. Advocate for allocation of sufficient resources for supervision of doctoral students. According to the 2020 PhD Chapter doctoral student survey report², the experience of supervision quality for doctoral students varies widely across different schools and departments at KTH. In order to systematically ensure the quality of supervision, it is important that adequate supervision resources are secured, including designating sufficient time to supervise PhD students and providing training focused on developing supervision skills.
3. Advocate for Swedish language courses tailored to the needs of doctoral students.
4. Launch the **Supervisor of the Year Award** for 2021 to continue highlighting good examples of supervision in third cycle education.

School-Level Advocacy

The PhD Chapter board will continue to support the school councils with pursuing issues pertaining to third cycle education. Numerous PADs and school councils have successfully used the PhD Chapter doctoral student survey report, published in 2020, to draw attention to and work on matters pertinent to their particular school or program. This prior experience can be drawn on to help other student representatives who may likewise wish to take up specific issues.

Department and Program -Level Advocacy

The PhD Chapter will continue to advocate for and follow up on the inclusion of doctoral student representatives in the departmental executive groups (Sv: ledningsgrupper) and in the doctoral program councils (Sv: programråd).

Work Environment

Work environment³ is strictly speaking an employment matter. However, the close entanglement between what constitutes a good work environment and a good study environment, as well as the blurry line between the student status and employee status of PhD students, poses extra challenges for the doctoral students' situation. Some of

² Doctoral Student Survey - Results and Recommendations

https://www.dr.kth.se/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/06/Report_on_Survey_Results.pdf

³ Work environment act (Arbetsmiljölagen)

https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/arbetsmiljolag-19771160_sfs-1977-1160



these challenges have been highlighted in a 2021 report titled *Hur mår doktoranden?*⁴ (Eng: *How healthy are our doctoral students?*⁵) published by ST and SFS based on a national survey conducted by Statistics Sweden (Sv: Statistiska centralbyrån, SCB). Throughout the operational year 2020/2021, several issues arose that pointed to a demand in improving the work environment for doctoral students and a necessity to collaborate with relevant bodies (e.g. labor unions such as Saco-S and ST and their representatives at KTH) that can support the PhD Chapter Board's efforts in this area. Key issues that the future board can work on in collaboration with the labor unions include:

1. Advocating for more consistent implementation of the workplace collaboration agreements (Sv: samverkansavtal)⁶ across all parts of KTH. This includes ensuring that invitations to the annual professional development talks between employees and their nearest manager (Sv: medarbetarsamtal)⁷ —which is distinct from the doctoral student's supervisor—are extended to all KTH employees, which **includes** PhD students. At the moment, numerous departments in KTH systematically exclude PhD students from being able to participate in these professional development dialogues, as they appear to operate under the erroneous assumption that the PhD student's supervisor is the sole figure responsible for talking to PhD students about career development. Fulfillment of the workplace collaboration agreements also entails implementation of monthly workplace meetings (Sv: Arbetsplatsträff, or APTs), which are intended as an open forum where issues and problems related to the work environment can be raised and where colleagues (including PhD students) and management can engage in fruitful dialogue.⁸
2. Advocating for central guidelines on departmental duties. According to the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance, PhD students can work with education, research, artistic research, and administration for up to 20% of full-time work (HF 5 kap. §2⁹). However, the types of assignments that fall under departmental duties and the way that they are accounted for differ widely among departments and divisions across KTH, at times risking that PhD students undertake departmental duties in excess of the maximum allowed 20% of their total time without being correspondingly compensated or are assigned inappropriate tasks. Establishing central guidelines can help to disambiguate the situation and mitigate potential exploitation of PhD students' labor.
3. Advocating for clarification on the distinct roles and responsibilities of the PhD student supervisor vs. the workplace manager. Oftentimes, tasks that formally fall within the purview of the line manager become in practice undertaken by the supervisor, whose responsibilities to the doctoral student are pedagogical.
4. Collect and aggregate information from the PhD students in relation to their employment conditions, which may include e.g. departmental duties staffing and accounting, salary agreement, workload, and

⁴“*Hur mår doktoranden?*” ST and SFS survey report (Swedish)

https://st.org/sites/default/files/attachment/rapport_-_hur_mar_doktoranden_ny.pdf

⁵“*How healthy are our doctoral students?*” ST and SFS survey report (English)

https://st.org/sites/default/files/attachment/rapport_-_doktoranden_eng.pdf

⁶ <https://intra.kth.se/anstallning/personalsamverkan/samverkan-for-utveckling-vid-kth-1.83299>

⁷ https://intra.kth.se/polopoly_fs/1.801536.1600419281!/bilaga-3-samverkan-mellan-chef-och-enskild-medarbetare.pdf

⁸ https://intra.kth.se/polopoly_fs/1.801533.1600173320!/bilaga-2-genomforande-av-arbetsplatstraffar.pdf

⁹ Higher Education Ordinance (Högskoleförordning)

https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/hogskoleforordning-1993100_sfs-1993-100



vacations. The collective information can be used to raise significant issues to the relevant channels, e.g. KTH line management and labor unions.

Social Environment

A healthy social environment is a prerequisite for a healthy work-life balance for PhD students. The often demanding, open-ended, and independent nature of PhD studies can make the work quite an isolating experience for many students. This can be exacerbated by the fact that more than 50% of PhD students at KTH come from an international background, and may be particularly removed from a social community when they first relocate to Sweden for the specific purpose of undertaking their doctoral education. During the operational year 2020/2021, the PhD Chapter successfully lobbied to receive an annual budget of SEK 1.000.000 from KTH to support its activities. In order to foster a supportive and vibrant social environment for doctoral students, the PhD Chapter can seek to undertake a variety of social initiatives, which may include:

1. Organizing regular reception events for new students.
2. Organizing social mingles for doctoral students, such as pub nights, board game nights, hikes, sport events, etc.
3. Supporting and financing social initiatives undertaken by school councils and coordinating with them in order to avoid “event fatigue” and overlap.
4. Support resuming the use of the Meetup platform, where any KTH doctoral student can organize their own get-togethers and events.
5. Continued collaboration with KTH Relocation to sync activities and reach out to newly admitted international doctoral students.
6. A PhD Chapter birthday event, e.g. a party or a barbecue open to all PhD students.

Career Development

PhD students have a multitude of career options both within and outside academia, though the range of options is not necessarily visible to everyone. The PhD Chapter can support the career development for doctoral students by:

1. Collaborating with THS Armada for integrating and highlighting PhD-related career opportunities and opening dialogues with relevant companies.
2. Organizing alumni events (e.g. seminar series), where KTH alumni from different sectors are invited to speak about their career trajectories after their PhD, e.g. of the transition from the PhD studies to private or publicly-owned companies.
3. Advocating for all PhD students to be given the opportunity to participate in annual professional development talks (Sv: medarbetarsamtal) with their nearest manager (a role distinct from the PhD student's supervisor) (see also: Section on [Work Environment](#), item 1).



Organizational Support

The PhD Chapter's ability to operate effectively hinges on a robust organizational framework at all levels of student governance. It is therefore imperative that the PhD Chapter works to strengthen organizational stability by continuously re-evaluating and improving its own processes, by developing guidelines and routines that facilitate the work of KTH doctoral student representation at large, and by maintaining harmonious and fruitful relationships with all parts that comprise the doctoral student governance system (among others, PADs, school councils, and THS). With that in mind, the PhD Chapter Board can take up the followings during 2021/2022:

1. Providing continued support for PADs and school councils to ensure synergy between the student representation work undertaken at the central and local levels. The Council Coordinator can continue to be the main contact point between school councils and the PhD Chapter Board.
2. Facilitate connection between the different school councils by e.g. continuing to coordinate regular meetings between the school council chairs.
3. Continued collaboration between the PhD Chapter Board and THS Councils and THS Management, which includes the THS president, THS Heads of Educational Affairs, and THS Head of Student Welfare.
4. Coordinating regular meetings as part of the "*PhD student representation seminar series*", which provides a forum for PhD student representatives to meet and talk with people who work with different aspects of student organization.
5. Revising the PhD Chapter statutes to make them more clear and internally consistent, more in line with Skatteverket's guidelines for statutes of non-profit organizations, and more relevant to present concerns and conditions.
6. Follow up on the policies around time compensation for commission of trust positions. The central workgroup finished drafting their guidelines in Spring 2021, based on which all schools will be tasked to create their own routines. The PhD Chapter Board can work to ensure that doctoral student representatives are involved in creating the school-level routines and that the routines themselves are sound and quickly implemented, ideally before VT22.
7. Develop a strategy and routines around the use of the newly granted annual PhD Chapter activity budget of SEK 1.000.000. This money is meant to be used to enhance the doctoral student experience at KTH, with particular focus in areas related to JML, reception events for new students, and student influence and quality of education. School councils will be encouraged to appoint a school-level event manager and ideas for initiatives from the school councils will be solicited.
8. Create an up-to-date information repository for doctoral issues.
9. Revamp the PhD Chapter website to have a more user-friendly interface and modern aesthetic.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusiveness

While work focused on equality, diversity, and inclusiveness warrants its own category, it should be noted that these values should be embodied by all PhD Chapter Board operations. In a 2019 evaluation by UKÄ, KTH's quality



assurance processes with regard to gender equality was assessed as unsatisfactory.¹⁰ UKÄ tasked KTH to come up with measures to address this area by March 2022. In 2021, KTH has issued a self-evaluation of its work regarding broadening recruitment (Sv: breddad rekrytering) and broadening participation (Sv: breddat deltagande), where a general lack of strategy and clear goals in these areas were highlighted, especially with respect to the third cycle level. In 2021/2022, the PhD Chapter Board can thus work to ensure that KTH strengthens its frameworks concerning equality, diversity, and inclusiveness, especially where they concern PhD students. This entails matters of gender equality as well as other underrepresented or vulnerable groups whose experiences at KTH may be undermined by structural barriers. To that end, the PhD Chapter Board can seek to:

1. Strengthen collaboration with the WOP (Women's PhD Candidates at KTH) Committee and support and finance its various initiatives, e.g. networking events, social or cultural outings, and workshops.
2. Strengthen collaboration with labor unions (e.g. Saco-S and ST) to foster widespread awareness of employees' rights, especially among international PhD students who are encumbered by additional bureaucratic hurdles and may be less knowledgeable about the Swedish workplace system than their local counterparts.
3. Strengthen collaboration with the KTH Equality Office.
4. Strengthen collaboration with THS initiatives in areas related to JML.

Impact of COVID-19

As various short-term and long-term consequences of COVID-19 are likely to unravel over the coming year, the PhD Chapter needs to proactively work to map out possible impacts and ways to handle them. A report published by SFS-DK in March 2021 has highlighted a wide range of ways in which the pandemic has negatively impacted doctoral education.¹¹ As a start, the PhD Chapter Board can anticipate working with the following issues:

1. Follow up on the KTH framework for the extension of doctoral studies and employment due to COVID-19-related delays, advocate for more generous application and clearer rules, and provide support when problematic cases arise.
2. Follow up on doctoral students' experiences of transitioning to a new work environment where a return to campus can be expected, after more than a year where working from home full time has become the norm for many people.

¹⁰ <https://www.kth.se/social/files/5e74c04be8d6dd8d204c51a1/beslut-kth-411-00484-1820031-200317.pdf>

¹¹ <https://sfs.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SFS-Delays-of-doctoral-education-due-to-the-corona-pandemic-2021-03-08.pdf>