

DOMB CASE REPORT 2024–2025

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



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Case Report 2024–2025 • Ärenderapport 2024–2025

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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 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 2024–2025 refer to cases that were initiated between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025. 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, Haro worked full-time throughout the year 2024–2025.

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 2024 are not visible in the statistics in this report, even though they may have been active during the year 2024–2025.

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 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.

In this category are 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.

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>

Admission

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

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, and can therefore only engage as a mediator, not escalate a labour dispute.

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.

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.

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

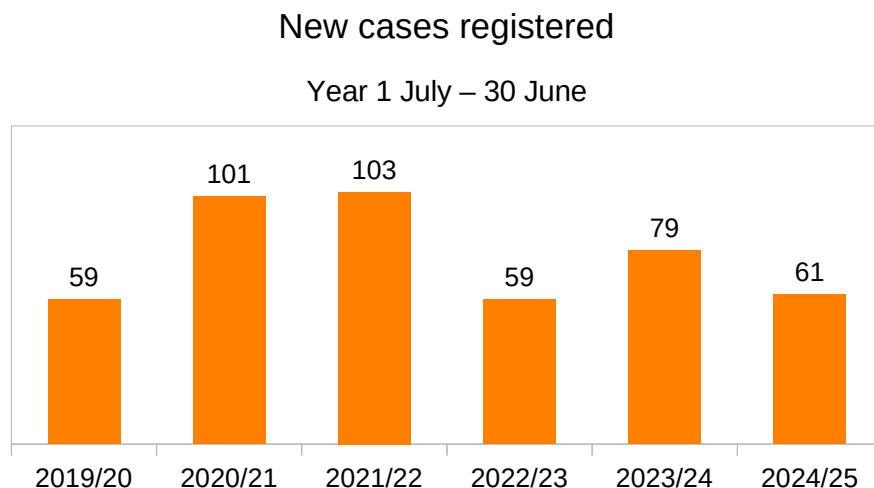
This case covers all aspects of supervision, such as: insufficient supervision, excessive supervision, poor relationship with the supervisor, or change of supervisor. Withdrawal of supervision and other resources, pursuant to the procedure described in the Higher Education Ordinance, sorts under *Access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



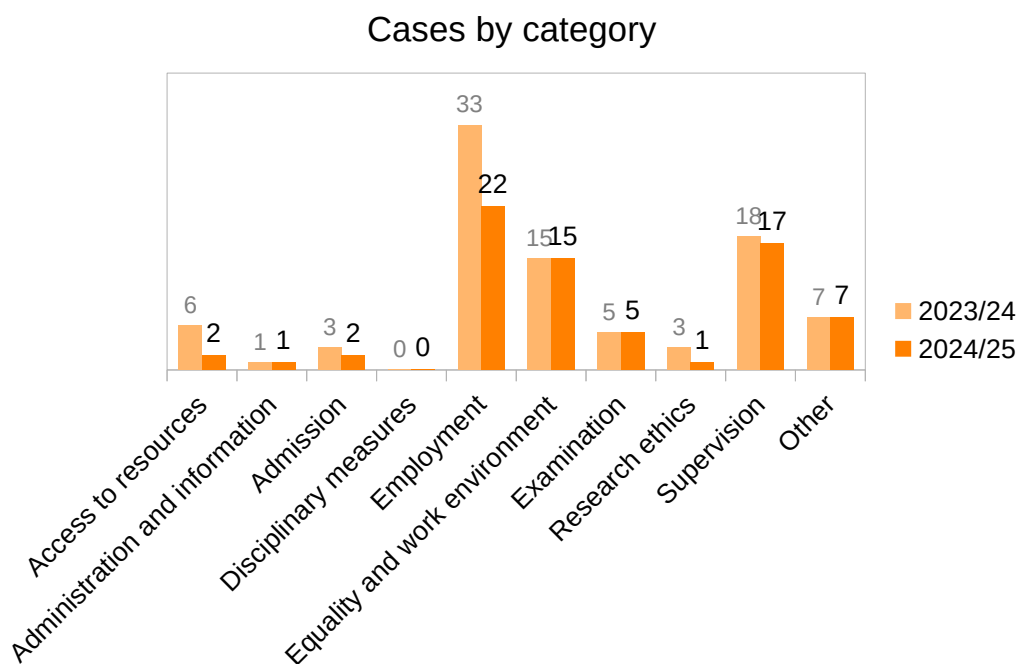
This year, 61 new cases were registered.

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. From the year 2022–2023 onwards, case numbers have been similar to pre-pandemic levels.

Qualitatively, the DOMB’s subjective assessment is that cases have become more complex and more difficult to resolve, ever since the inflation peak of 2023 put increasing economic pressure on departments and faculties within the University. 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* (22 cases), *Supervision* (17), and *Equality and work environment* (15). The profile by case categories is overall similar to previous years.

Access to resources

The two cases in this category concerned issues with access to funding for both salary and other expenses (work space, materials and equipment). Cases strictly relating to extension of employment are in the *Employment* category.

Administration and information

The single case in this category concerned orientation about which persons to contact within the University in various situations.

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. 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 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 admission-related cases are quite rare.

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. Last year, this was 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. The most recent case, in 2022–2023, involved suspicions of cheating during examination (*vilseledande vid bedömning av studieprestation*) in the sense of the Higher Education Ordinance, chapter 10. This sort of case is much more common for the Student Ombuds, at Bachelors and Masters level.

Employment

Six of these cases concerned extension of employment. It is well known that there are considerable discrepancies between faculties and between departments in how the relevant regulations are interpreted and applied. A recurring concern this year has been that prolongation for teaching assignments very often does not match the actual time required. As many departments have faced budget difficulties, some requiring to make compulsory redundancies, it appears that more teaching assignments are being passed down to doctoral candidates. This sometimes includes giving a doctoral candidate inappropriate levels of responsibility, such as for course design or for examination. While some doctoral candidates will gratefully take these assignments as a token of the trust placed in them by their departments, there are evident risks to the quality and integrity of the teaching process, when responsibilities are passed down to persons with little or no paedagogical training or prior teaching experience.

Six cases concerned sick leave and/or rehabilitation after illness. The 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. When that is the case, going through the rigid and formalistic procedures of the rehabilitation process is in itself challenging for doctoral candidates. The DOMB generally advises to separate, as much as possible, the rehabilitation process (which focuses on health, involves the line manager and often the Occupational Health Service, and often starts while the candidate is still on sick leave) from the “academic” planning of the PhD (which focuses on supervision and the individual study plan, involves the supervisor and Director of Studies, and often cannot be initiated until after the doctoral candidate has returned to work).

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

The remaining ten cases variously focused on employment conditions, vacation or leave of absence, external (non-LU) employment, and termination of employment.

Equality and work environment

Similarly to past years, most of the cases in this category concerned either discrimination and harassment (seven cases) or organisational and social work environment problems (six). Two of the latter involved language barriers, such as a refusal by senior colleagues to engage in English with doctoral candidates who do not speak Swedish.

Cases concerning victimisation/harassment, including sexual harassment (seven cases), are defined by the doctoral candidate's subjective experience, not by any formal finding that discrimination etc. has demonstrably occurred. Notable this year was a cluster of sexual harassment cases; otherwise, discrimination allegations appear to most commonly refer to either ethnic or national origin as a discrimination ground, though the case numbers are too small to draw any definitive conclusions.

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

Cases in the *Examination* category nearly all focused on the final PhD degree examination, not on course components.

One known issue is that some faculties or departments are leveraging “final seminars” as an informal pre-examination, on the basis of which a decision is made whether or not to allow the thesis defence to go ahead. This effectively creates an unregulated and subjective additional examination moment, not adequately described in the syllabus⁶, but often intentionally designed to reduce the the actual thesis defence to a ceremonial occasion.

Another common problem is difficulty meeting publication requirements, such as having at least two first-author articles published, when this is prevented by circumstances outside either the University's or the doctoral candidate's control. Examples of this are when journals are exceptionally slow to make a decision on publication, or when exceedingly ambitious journals are chosen to meet the supervisor's aspirations rather than the doctoral candidate's needs. This creates a situation where the actual examination of the doctoral candidate's work is, in effect, “outsourced” to

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>.

6 The Higher Education Authority (UKÄ). *Rättssäker examination*. <https://www.uka.se/download/18.16cf0f8c1849df46622152/1669103146069/Vagledning-2020-01-16-rattssaker-examination.pdf>

journal editors and peer reviewers – meaning, to persons outside the University. The risk is that not all doctoral candidates will be judged by the same standard, or that events outside the University's control may unduly delay or prevent an examination from taking place at all.

Research ethics

This year only a single case strictly concerned research ethics (last year: three). Nonetheless, questions relating to authorship commonly arise on the side of other matters, particularly when a doctoral candidate does not have a good relationship with their supervisor,

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

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 17 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.

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.

At risk of repeating from previous years' case reports, in many parts of the University, routines for changing supervisors are lacking or are inconsistently applied. This particularly penalises doctoral candidates funded by external research grants. The situation is not improving. When denying or unduly delaying a change of supervisor on the basis of funding issues, the University is failing to comply with legal requirements under the Higher Education Ordinance.

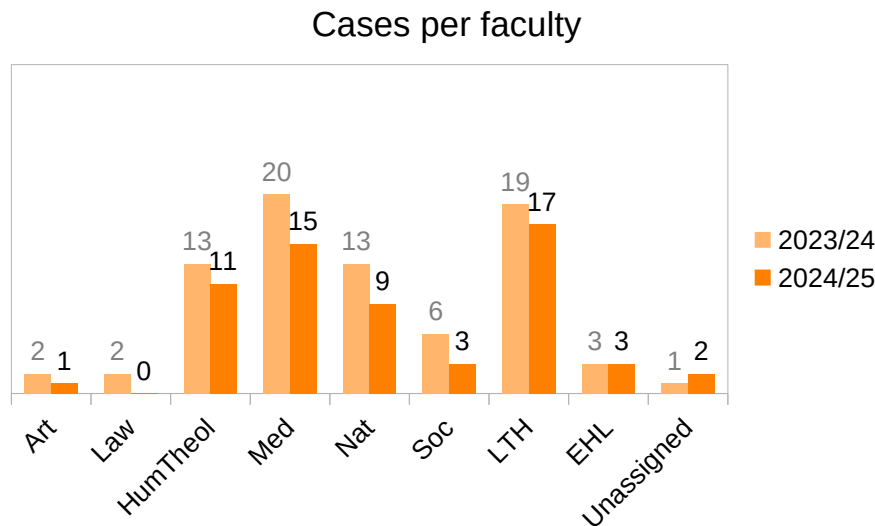
A more general reflection on the question of supervision is that doctoral candidates continue to be unreasonably dependent on the benevolence of their supervisors. Working conditions are sometimes dramatically different from one research group to the next, even within the same department. This indicates 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

Cases in the *Other* category mainly concerned migration-related questions (outside the DOMB's mandate).

Case statistics and patterns per faculty

Overview

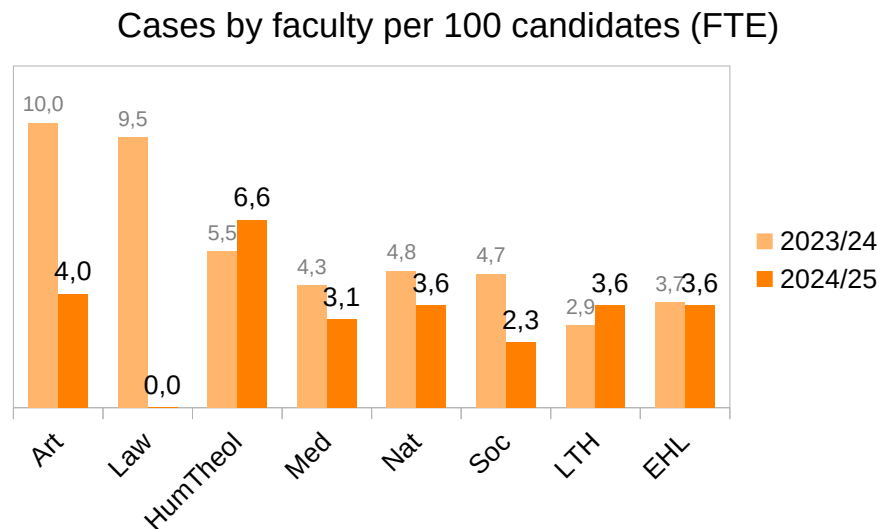


The case profile by faculties is broadly similar to 2023–2024. Yearly variability in case numbers at the smaller faculties should be taken as random fluctuations not indicative of any pattern or change.

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 arise⁷; 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.

⁷ This is greatly appreciated by the DOMB, and often contributes to resolving problems in a way that is also beneficial to department staff. All of the larger faculties, except Medicine, routinely invite the DOMB to introduce himself at a welcome day or introduction course for new PhD candidates.

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 2024, as quoted in the University's annual report⁸. 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.



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

Under considerable economic pressure, the Faculty appears to be doing everything possible to keep its postgraduate education programme viable. Some doctoral candidates are based away from campus by the nature of their artistic work, and as a result, the PhD community at the Faculty's premises in Malmö has appeared, at various times, to be at risk of extinction. To secure a future for doctoral education in the Fine and Performing Arts, the University may need to strengthen strategic funding from central resources, to offset the scarcity of external research funding in these subjects.

⁸ Lund University. *Årsredovisning 2024*. STYR 2025/286. <https://www.lu.se/sites/www.lu.se/files/2025-02/Lunds-universitets-arsredovisning-2024.pdf>

Faculty of Law

No new cases arose in the Faculty of Law this year (last year: two).

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”, typically meaning external funding for the simultaneous recruitment of a cluster of doctoral candidates within a specific topic, often as a network spread over different universities. At several departments, this resulted in tensions between research school and department leaders, as discussed in last year’s Case Report. These matters are the subject of ongoing discussion, and situations are still evolving.

New for this year has been a cluster of reports concerning discrimination and harassment, particularly sexual harassment. Some of these have given rise to formal investigations, and received some attention in news media⁹.

Otherwise, the 11 cases here represent a reasonable cross-section of the DOMB’s case work.

Faculty of Medicine

Similarly to previous years, the Faculty of Medicine’s 15 cases accounted for a substantial share of the qualitatively more severe cases in the *Supervision* category, as well as some of the more complex cases involving rehabilitation after long-term (mental) illness.

When a doctoral candidate requests a change of supervisor, some departments have taken the approach of expecting that the doctoral candidate themselves shall identify a new supervisor, and that this person shall agree to cover, with their own research grants, the cost of the doctoral candidate’s salary for the remainder of the PhD. Research group leaders are not usually holding millions of kronor in unallocated funding, making this an evidently unrealistic proposition. In effect, it equates to suggesting that the doctoral candidate might reapply for admission to doctoral studies when new positions are advertised. This approach does not fulfil the requirements of the Higher Education Ordinance. Instead, the department should appoint a new supervisor without delay, and make any necessary internal fund transfers to ensure that the doctoral position remains fully funded.

A further challenge at 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

9 Universitetslärares. *Utredning konstaterar sexuella trakasserier vid Lunds universitet*.
<https://universitetslararen.se/2026/02/05/utredning-konstaterar-sexuella-trakasserier-vid-lunds-universitet/>

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

Faculty of Social Sciences

The three cases here suggest no particular patterns or problems.

Faculty of Engineering (LTH)

Similar to previous years, most cases at LTH relate to supervision and work environment issues, including some cases of long-term sick leave and rehabilitation.

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.

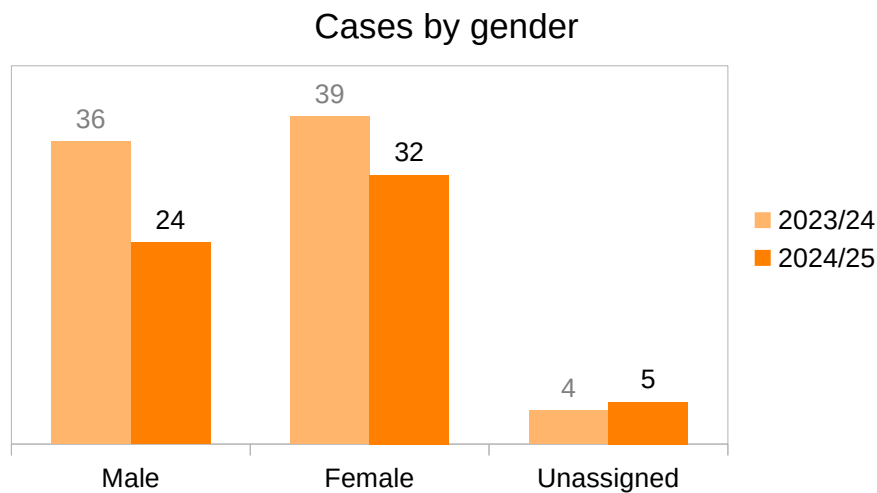
Due to the large proportion of doctoral candidates recruited from abroad, cases at LTH often include elements of cultural misunderstanding or miscommunication. Most staff appear to be well aware of these challenges, and make sincere efforts to prevent or resolve such situations.

LUSEM School of Economics and Management (EHL)

The three cases here suggest no particular patterns or problems.

Representativeness of casework

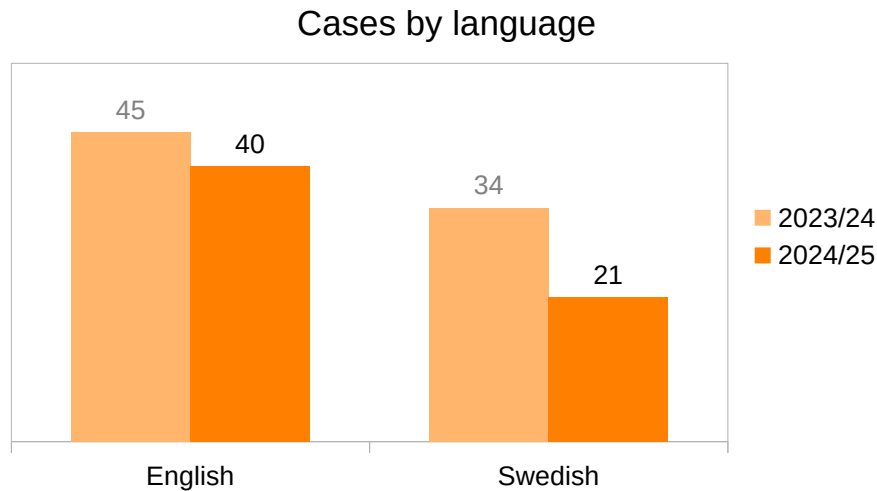
Gender



According to the University's annual report, in the calendar year 2024 the University's 1 625 FTE active doctoral candidates had a 49:51 gender distribution (women:men). The distribution across faculties remains heavily uneven, e.g. 35:65 at the Faculty of Engineering versus 63:37 at the Faculty of Social Sciences and 72:28 at the Faculty of Law.

The gender breakdown in the DOMB casework is similar 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. The distribution across case categories is likewise even, except for a cluster of sexual harassment reports from female doctoral candidates.

Language



As in previous years, 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

Doctoral education at Lund University is under evident economic pressure, even in subject areas where access to funding was not previously a concern. This has exacerbated some already known vulnerabilities, not least the institutional reluctance to intervene in externally funded research units.

Difficulties in managing changes of supervisor, and failures to appropriately address work environment issues, suggest that some departments have enrolled more doctoral candidates than they are able to support. Economic planning for doctoral education should take into account not only the candidate's salary but also the costs for supervision, equipment, materials, office space etc., including reasonable margins to deal with unforeseen situations. Where resources are not sufficient, no new doctoral candidates should be enrolled until the economic conditions allow. Indeed, to their credit, some parts of the University have temporarily frozen or reduced their intake of new doctoral candidates, until economic imbalances are addressed.

One emerging trend is the over-reliance on doctoral candidates to fulfil teaching assignments beyond their paedagogical training. The absence of a fair and consistent standard for the calculation of teaching time means that doctoral candidates often receive compensation, in the form of extension of their doctoral employment, for much less than the time effectively spent on teaching assignments. Combined with the low salary cost (in comparison to other staff categories), this creates an obvious temptation for departments to push more senior teaching responsibilities to doctoral candidates. These assignments are often readily accepted by the candidates themselves, due to the value of teaching experience for future career advancement, but the risks to the quality and integrity of the teaching process should encourage restraint.

Recurring issues, despite efforts at improvement, include discrimination and harassment, the use of language as a tool for exclusion, and conflicts about authorship ethics. In that light, it is worth reiterating the importance of a robust culture of collegiate responsibility for doctoral education at the department level. This includes the responsibility for employment, work environment and rehabilitation processes, through the Head of Department as line manager, and the responsibility for the educational content of the doctoral programme, including supervision, through the Director of Studies.

Based on demand, and on the increasing 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 ombuds 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.