



LUND UNIVERSITY  
Faculty of Social Sciences

Faculty Board

## **Procedures for preventing and managing conflicts between supervisors and doctoral students at the Faculty of Social Sciences**

### *Introduction*

Lund University's Regulations for Third Cycle Education (13 June 2013, reg. no LS 2012/718) state that each faculty is to decide on an action plan to prevent and manage conflicts between supervisors and doctoral students. At the Faculty of Social Sciences, the following procedures have been developed to prevent and manage conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors. The procedures act as a support for both doctoral students and supervisors at the faculty.

### **Preventing conflicts**

As a basic condition for preventing conflicts within third cycle education, the relationship between the doctoral student and the supervisor should be characterised by openness and mutual respect. All those in a supervisory position are to have undergone training in the supervision of research students (or equivalent). The supervision training aims to ensure that supervisors develop in their role and increase their chances of fulfilling their supervisory assignment with greater confidence and expertise. Another important aspect is a well-conducted recruitment process where care is taken to ensure that those admitted to third cycle studies have the knowledge and other prerequisites to successfully complete the study programme. In order to prevent conflicts, the following shall apply:

- At the time of admission to third cycle studies, the admissions committee is to make it clear what the programme entails and what expectations are placed on the admitted doctoral student.
- The head of department is to appoint a supervisor after careful consideration of various aspects of significance to the doctoral student and the department. This process includes a dialogue with the doctoral student.
- At the time of the introductory meeting at the department, the director of third cycle studies, one or more representatives of the supervisory team and the doctoral students' group and the administrator responsible are to provide information on the doctoral student's rights and obligations in relation to supervision and to the supervisor.
- The faculty's introductory day for newly admitted doctoral students is to include information and discussion on the supervisory relationship.
- The individual study plan is an important tool in conflict prevention. The plan is to include the undertakings of the doctoral student and the

University, preferably clearly defined as the rights, obligations and expectations included in the relationship between the department, the supervisor and the individual doctoral student. Thus the plan is to function as a support for both the doctoral student and the supervisor in the ongoing research studies. The study plan is to be followed up annually, and it is of utmost importance that the challenges faced by the doctoral student are continuously highlighted, discussed and evaluated. The supervisor, together with the doctoral student, is to actively work on continuous follow-up and revision of the individual study plan.

- At the annual appraisal, the discussion is to cover achieved goals as well as the doctoral student's expectations, demands and developmental needs. If necessary, a plan of measures to be taken is to be drawn up. The discussion is to cover the doctoral student's entire work situation.
- Within the supervisory team, there should be regular discussion of potential conflicts on matters of principle and how conflicts can be prevented.
- The head of department and/or director of third cycle studies should be informed of potential issues of contention at an early stage, before these result in actual conflict.

### **Managing conflicts**

A conflict which has arisen between a doctoral student and a supervisor is to be handled promptly and professionally. Regardless of its nature, it is very important to discuss the problem *at an early stage*. Both the doctoral student and the supervisor have an obligation to contribute to finding a solution to the situation. It is essential that conflict resolution be based on respect for those involved. Confidentiality must be observed and the doctoral student's position as the weaker party in this context should be taken into account.

If a conflict arises between a doctoral student and a supervisor, the following procedures are to apply:

- The supervisor and the doctoral student are to raise any problems in discussions between them. They are to reach agreement on a plan of action for the resolution of the conflict.
- If the conflict cannot be resolved in discussions between the supervisor and the doctoral student, the head of department (or equivalent, e.g. the assistant head of department or another person with responsibility for third cycle studies) is to be contacted immediately. Both the doctoral student and the supervisor can contact the head of department (or equivalent). An action plan for the resolution of the conflict is to be drawn up. If the supervisor is also the head of department, the pro-dean can be contacted directly.
- If the head of department (or equivalent) does not succeed in contributing to the resolution of the conflict, the pro-dean responsible for research studies at the faculty is to be contacted. The doctoral student, the supervisor or the head of department can request the involvement of the pro-dean.

Pursuant to the Higher Education Ordinance (Chapter 6 Section 28), a doctoral student who has requested a change of supervisor is entitled to it. A change of supervisor can also be justified by factors relating to the supervisor's situation. The decision on a change of supervisor is to be taken promptly so that the doctoral student's study programme can proceed without delay.

If the problem or the conflict concerns labour law or falls under the Discrimination Act, the head of department is to be contacted. As support in such cases or if the conflict management requires professional input, resources are available at the University both for the doctoral student and for the department, in the form of the faculty's HR support, the Occupational Health Service, employee organisations (for labour law issues), the doctoral students' union and the doctoral student ombudsmen (for students' rights issues). In serious cases the conflict can be raised by the faculty to the University Legal Services office, as a last resort.

As a doctoral student, you have the *right* to bring your union representative/safety representative to meetings to which you are summoned by your employer.