GUDK Operational plan 2018/2019

Work flow
Göteborgs universitets doktorandkommitté, or, The Doctoral Student committee of the University of Gothenburg, hereafter referred to as GUDK, is a committee composed of representatives from all faculties at the University of Gothenburg. In order for GUDK to function accordingly, we need to ensure an active flow of information between GUDK and the faculty doctoral councils. The councils elect GUDK representatives, who in their turn become responsible for spreading relevant information back to the council. GUDK should also stand in close contact with GUS and its presidium.

It is of great importance that PhD student representatives in central boards and committees such as Universitetsstyrelsen (the University board) and Utskottet för utbildning på forskarnivå (the Committee for PhD education) keep in contact with and report to GUDK.

GU på fem års sikt (GU in five years)
The document "Göteborgs universitet på fem års sikt - studenternas prioriteringar"\(^1\) as well as the mid-term follow-up of the same document\(^2\) ought to function as a general document of opinions for GUDK. In this document, valid until 2020, the standpoints and demands relevant for third cycle students and third cycle education have been formulated. Thus, the operational plan for GUDK should reflect the PhD students’ priorities as formulated in "GU på fem års sikt".

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\(^1\) http://gus.gu.se/digitalAssets/1532/1532944_g--teborgs-universitet-p---fem---rs-sikt---studenternas-prioriteringar.pdf
\(^2\) https://gus.gu.se/om_gus/dokument/DownloadAsset.action?contentId=1543713&languageId=10000&assetKey=Studenternas+prioriteringar+-+halvtdsuppfos%C2%BFljning
Continuous questions

Decision processes at the University of Gothenburg
GUDK should monitor decision taking and work for democratic decision taking processes at the University of Gothenburg. This work includes the monitoring of concrete meeting situations when PhD students are represented, but also situations when PhD students are being excluded or when information is kept back from PhD students. GUDK focus especially on how decisions are prepared at GU, centrally as well as on departments and faculties. This work is done in cooperation with GUS.

Cooperation with other PhD student organizations
During the last business year GUDK did not have much contact with the doctoral sections of the trade unions. We do however consider this to be important, especially since GUDK and the trade unions often have similar goals and standpoints. Actions have already been taken to improve the contact with the trade unions, and hopefully we will manage to restore a functioning flow of information. SFS-DK is also at all times invited to GUDK meetings, but last year the SFS-DK representative from GU could only come to one GUDK meeting. We need to make sure that this is improved. If the SFS-DK representative cannot come to the meetings we at least need to get a report.

Doctoral student influence – from department and upwards
GUDK should continue to strive for doctoral representation from all faculties. This academic year, all faculties will be represented in GUDK. However, in the past years finding a representative from the IT-faculty has been very difficult, and this faculty has been without representation in GUDK for several consecutive years. Among the reasons for this is the fact that one of the departments does not have a doctoral board at all, while the other department has a well-functioning doctoral group organized within Chalmers student union. In order to come to terms with this situation GUDK will tour the IT-faculty and try to assist the PhD students in starting up a doctoral board.

For different reasons GUDK is currently unable to provide representation for all positions. For example, out of three positions in Utskottet för utbildning på forskarmivå, only two are filled. Similarly, the third place in Rektors forskningsnämnd is currently filled by an undergard student. The most important reason for this is the demand of the central boards (see International perspective below) for proficiency in Swedish language. However, it is also related to PhD students feeling that they do not have time for student union work – despite the fact that GU has generous terms for prolongation.

GUDK considers it to be crucial that PhD students are not discouraged by supervisors and/or other staff to take on student union duties. Unfortunately, reports about such behavior are rather frequent.
Student influence is regulated by Swedish law, and is an important part of the university’s decision-making process. If departments try to hinder some PhD students to take on student union duties, it means that the university is interfering with student representation – which is against the law. Thus, GUDK strives for spreading correct information about student union work and informing staff (administrators, study directors, supervisors etc.) that student union work is not part of the 20% departmental duties.

In order to increase the visibility of GUDK at departmental and faculty level, and to inform about important issues, we have decided to release a GUDK newsletter once per term during this business year.

**Supervision and PhD student examiners**

The supervisor is likely to be the most important resource a PhD student has. It is therefore vital that the PhD student has a well-functioning relationship with their supervisor. Even if most PhD students are satisfied with their supervisors, this is not always the case. As a PhD student, one has the right to change supervisor without substantial explanation. GUDK considers it to be very important that the right to change supervisor is not compromised.

According to the higher education ordinance, all PhD students should have an internal examiner (doktorandexaminator) assigned. Internal examiner is a rather new function, and last year some PhD students reported either being unaware of who their internal examiner was, or that they did not have one at all.

GUDK will continue to monitor supervision and internal examiners. During 2018/2019, GUDK is doing a doctoral survey together with GUS which hopefully will provide us with new data for assessing the current situation at GU.

**Career guidance**

GUDK is of the opinion that career guidance should be an integrated part of the PhD education. Furthermore, the career guidance should be broad and focus on career opportunities outside of as well as inside academia.

When it comes to gender equality, national statistics show that only slightly more men than women began PhD studies in 2016. At GU, 62% of all PhD students were women in 2013 (GU Annual report 2013). However, the share of women in academia get smaller for every step you take up the career ladder. We hope that the JiGU project might help us to find out the reasons for this. Also GUDK believes that good career guidance and support might encourage more women to stay in academia.

GUDK also finds relevance in continuing to monitor the possibility for international PhD students to get sufficient career guidance.

**International perspective**

GUDK should monitor and problematize the possibilities and preconditions for international PhD students to complete the PhD education. GUDK should actively try to influence the university to minimize any obstacles for international PhD students. For example,
mandatory courses should be offered in English if PhD students who do not speak Swedish have been admitted to the PhD education. Furthermore, international PhD students should get sufficient information about the education and also about their rights and obligations. Important policy documents should be available in Swedish as well as in English.

Finally, according to Swedish statistics 41% of the PhD students who commenced studies in 2017 were international. We consider it to be very important that also these students have the right to engage in student union work and represent the PhD student community in central boards and groups. The international students have different experiences and could contribute with valuable perspectives for the university. Therefore, GUDK should work towards convincing the university to have a more inclusive language policy, in which English is emphasized as a natural meeting language if international staff is present. Furthermore, we consider it to be important that the university actively supports international PhD students who would like to learn Swedish.

GUDK should also continue to monitor the situation for sandwich doctorals, who are in an especially vulnerable situation with lower salary and worse conditions.

PhD courses and FUBAS
The work with creating a common platform for PhD courses has been going on for a couple of years. FUBAS aims at making it easier for PhD students to survey the wide range of PhD courses available at GU, but will also handle the creation and revision of syllabi, course information and admission. We are now getting closer to the planned system launch, but there are still some practical issues that need to be solved in order to make FUBAS a useful tool for all faculties. GUDK considers it to be important that the PhD students are not forgotten in this process. FUBAS should not only be an administrative tool for those responsible for creating courses, but also for the end users; the PhD students. We currently have two PhD student representatives in the FUBAS group, who regularly report to GUDK and ask for feedback when needed.
Focus Questions 2018/2019
The following questions will be in focus during the business year 2018/2019. In addition to these issues, GUDK will monitor and follow up more urgent matters that might occur throughout the year.

Doctoral survey
During 2017/2018 GUDK started to prepare a doctoral survey focusing on scientific practice, and a final draft of the survey was discussed at Utskottet för utbildning på forskarnivå in May 2018. It has recently come to our attention that GUS is also planning to do a doctoral survey this term. We have therefore decided to cooperate with GUS and add our questions to their more general survey. However, a version of the GUDK-survey will be sent to vice deans and vice heads of departments (viceprefekter för utbildning på forskarnivå) in order to triangulate the quantitative results of the doctoral survey with qualitative data available at departments and faculties. Work related to the survey will continue throughout the year.

Work environment and stress
Doctoral students in general, and especially female PhD students, have higher levels of stress-related sick leave than other academic staff. In order to come to terms with this, GUDK strives for minimizing any unnecessary stress factors that might occur during the PhD education.

Two already known such factors can be mentioned. First, some PhD students report being forced to teach, and also being forced to teach subjects that they do not feel confident teaching. GUDK is of the opinion that teaching should be a possibility but never a demand. This is something GUDK should gather more information about and keep monitoring. Secondly, many PhD students find it difficult – if not altogether impossible – to rest during, evenings, weekends and vacations, which tells us that the working hours provided are not enough to fill the expectations of the education. As employed PhD students we are granted vacation by law. However, this vacation does not result in prolongation, which means that the actual time one gets as a PhD student is about 3.5 years, plus vacation. The fact that our time ticks down even when we have official vacation is counterproductive when it comes to granting a good working environment. GUDK wants to initiate a debate regarding vacation and PhD students and the possibilities for making vacation a ground for prolongation.

The salary ladder – individual interpretations of rules
GUDK strives for uniformity regarding how rules are interpreted at the university. We have a clear salary ladder that creates a fair and transparent system for all PhD students. When the rules for doctoral education were revised, GUDK wanted the university to take a stand and make the salary ladder time-based, since this was considered to be the most reasonable criteria. However, this was rejected by the university, and both the doctoral rules and the trade union agreement state that the salary ladder is based on achievement rather than time. However, GUDK has learnt that the salary ladder is interpreted
differently at different departments and faculties. It appears as if PhD students who have reached the 80% achievement level before actually having reached 80% of the time, have difficulties getting the 80% raise – even if the supervisor confirms the raise. This is something GUDK will monitor during 2018/2019 via our network of faculty representatives.

**Pedagogical courses**

Two important issues need to be monitored in relation to the pedagogical courses. Firstly, it came to our attention that some supervisors discourage their PhD students from taking courses in high school pedagogics, saying that they were employed to write a thesis rather than merit themselves as teachers. GUDK is firmly against this. GUDK is firmly against this: Being a PhD student involves a lot more than just writing a thesis, and competence in high school pedagogics might be important for the future career and also for the possibility to teach during the PhD education. Secondly, it is very difficult to get a place at the PIL courses and those are required in order to teach. HPE101 in English seems to be the most problematic one.

**Bad economy and a decreasing amount of PhD students**

Many faculties experience difficult times, which unfortunately might affect the admission of new PhD students. It is important to remember that a decrease of the intake of PhD students will have long-term effects on the research environment, since approximately one third of all research in Sweden is conducted by PhD students. GUDK should monitor how this is handled at department and faculty level, and try to remind university as well as faculty leadership of the long term effects of not hiring new PhD students.

In connection to this, the stipend-debate has again resurfaced. There are people who think that re-instating stipends is a good way to solve the financial problems. GUDK is firmly against stipends since it creates inequalities within the PhD community. The trade unions and the student unions have fought for a long time to develop the supporting structures we have today, and the employment of PhD students from day one. Therefore, GUDK will continue to monitor this question closely during 2018/2019, and will start a debate with the aspiration to influence donors to sponsor a model of a four-year PhD position rather than the traditional stipend.

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