A full-page background image showing two people rock climbing. One person is on the left, silhouetted against a dark rock face, holding onto a rope. The second person is suspended in the air, also silhouetted, holding onto the rope. The background is a vast, hazy landscape of mountains and valleys under a blue sky.

On being supervised, and on supervising doctoral candidates

/SULF:s Doktorandförening

Content

Introduction	2
Good supervision	3
Supervision of theses	5
Reflections from doctoral candidates	9
Reflections from a supervisor	24
Reflections by the SULF association of professors	33
Guidance from SULF	37

Introduction

Supervision of theses can present challenges to both doctoral candidates and supervisors. Effective communication is vital if all parties are to experience this process as rewarding. Both the doctoral candidate and the supervisor may need support in finding their roles in the supervision relationship so the resulting education and research will be as successful as possible.

Many different aspects affect the supervision of theses, however there are also many different opinions on what good supervision is. It is important that doctoral candidates, together with their supervisors, identify their own optimum situation. The purpose of this report is to illustrate these differences by highlighting good, inspiring examples.

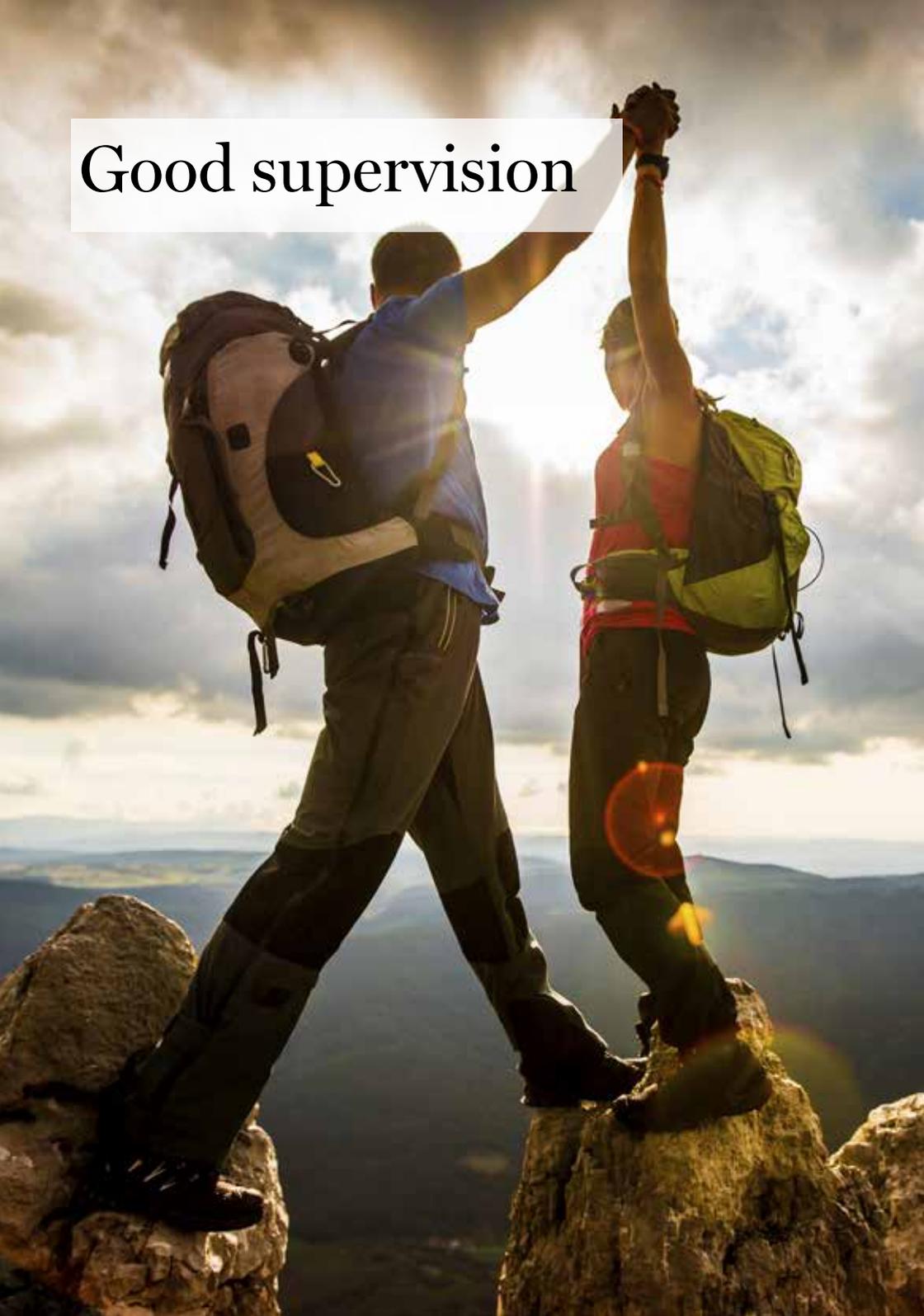
The SULF doctoral candidate association (SDF) has commissioned nine doctoral candidates/recent graduates and four supervisors to reflect on the supervision relationship. We have also asked two representatives of the SULF Association of Professors (SPF) to comment on how they regard this process. We wish to thank everyone who shared their thoughts with us.

We summarise by highlighting the nine points that we consider essential for good thesis supervision. Hopefully these will provide support when the individual doctoral candidate reflects on his/her supervision of thesis relationship, and will act as a basis for discussions between doctoral candidates and supervisors.

Finally there is some advice from SULF on supervision and individual study plans.

Jeanette Lindberg
Chair SDF, 2015

Good supervision



There are many different thoughts and preferences as concerns supervision, both from doctoral candidates and from supervisors. But what is good supervision? How are both parties to achieve as much as possible?

We do not believe in any single universal design for good supervision, however we do believe it is important for everyone to reflect on, and discuss, their own situations.

The points below should not be regarded as carved in stone but will hopefully provide ideas and inspiration for good supervision.

- A professional relationship between supervisor and doctoral candidate.
- Mutual respect for each other's situations and skills.
- Early clarification of expectations by both doctoral candidates and supervisors.
- Recurring discussions and planning of structure and organisation.
- Supervisors showing interest in, and assisting, doctoral candidates' career building if so requested.
- Open dialogue as early as possible to resolve any problems that may arise.
- Supervisors creating the preconditions for valuable contacts and networks, both national and international, in the relevant field of research - and paving the way for future career paths after graduation.
- A continuous dialogue on ethical principles and actions is crucial - if we are not prepared to act in an ethically responsible manner (in all parts of our research operations) we should not be working with research.
- Supervisors motivating and inspiring doctoral candidates to be innovative, to take up new issues and solutions, to think outside the box - research must be enjoyable and creative if it is to succeed!



Supervision of these

Supervision of theses is central to a doctoral programme. The Higher Education Ordinance stipulates that each doctoral candidate must have at least two supervisors, one of whom is to be appointed lead supervisor. There are no further central regulations that govern supervisor duties or responsibilities, nor any that cover the scope and content of the supervision itself. However, there are local regulations and recommendations at each university or college.

When it comes to defining the supervision of theses, the Swedish National Encyclopaedia states that the *supervisor is used as support for maintaining and further developing professional skills and supervision can be regarded as a way of introducing a prospective colleague into professional practice.*

A general definition of supervision is *help from someone who already has education/experience in an area, to someone who is still learning or moving into the area via targeted direct*

instructions, information, reflection and/or feedback.

It is thus the supervisors who guide the doctoral candidates through the thesis with the goal of them becoming independent researchers. Supervisors bear responsibility for their doctoral candidates' education and future. Poor supervision of thesis may crush a research career.

The need for support may change over the period of the doctoral studies, so the relationship must change accordingly.

In general it can be said that supervision of theses for doctoral candidates should include:

- Support in the selection and formulation of the thesis subject.
- Support in the selection and application of research methods.
- Continuous review and feedback on manuscript and related materials.
- Support in selection of graduate courses.
- Acting as a sounding board

for selection of literature, projects, field studies, etc.

- Acting as a role model regarding research ethics and good research practices.
- Helping to establish contact networks in academia.
- Discussions on career after graduation.
- Support and training on how to write research grant applications.

Supervisors are also responsible for providing feedback, support and assistance if the thesis does not develop as planned.

These supervision discussions may therefore be challenging for both doctoral candidates and supervisors, and it is important to build up a relationship of trust in order to handle this.

Supervision may necessarily vary depending on factors such as thesis subject, doctoral candidate and supervisors. The fact that supervision can be adapted to the individuals involved as well as to the needs of the scientific work setting is a definite

strength that is worth preserving.

However, in principle, it can be stated that there is always great benefit to both sides from preparing discussions well. How often these discussions are held and using which structure is up to doctoral candidates and supervisors to determine together. Similarly work should be structured and planned both in the long and short term, so that all parties involved can gain as much as possible from the process.

The individual study plan is a vital document in the supervision process. Here all undertakings by the doctoral candidate and the university must be documented. It is essential that all changes are promptly documented in these individual study plans.

The Doctorandspegeln survey shows that supervision of thesis works well for most doctoral candidates. However many feel that they are not maintaining

an effective dialogue with their supervisors.

For example, around 60% of the doctoral candidates stated that they have discussed future plans with their supervisor to a limited extent only and nearly 30% say they have not received adequate supervision of thesis. Nearly one in five women and one in ten men among doctoral candidates report that they found themselves in a dependent relationship with their supervisors which felt awkward.

Doctoral candidates and supervisors need to check the progress of the thesis projects on a regular basis. However, how the supervision works and other environmental factors also have impact.

This report provides reflections on the supervision of thesis relationship by doctoral candidates/recent graduates and supervisors. Similar reflections on your own situation are encouraged, both on an individual and a group basis.

Reflections from doctoral candidates





**Technical Science,
fourth year as
doctoral candidate**

What is most important to you in your relationship with your supervisor?

Personally, I think that commitment, openness and accessibility are important characteristics for a supervisor. As a doctoral candidate, it is important to know that your supervisor cares and thinks that what you are doing is important.

The relationship between supervisors and doctoral candidates must be open and honest. In a situation where much of your dialogue includes evaluation, feedback and criticism of your work, it is vital that you know you can speak up when you think something is not OK. Of course this applies in both directions.

Accessibility is also very important especially when you are

a new doctoral candidate and need a lot of guidance. In my case, this was solved by us scheduling supervision meetings every two weeks. Prior to each meeting, I prepared a memo on what had been done since last time and what needed to be discussed. After the meetings, a summary of what was discussed and what should be done for the next meeting was produced.

One standing item on the agenda was any problems or obstacles linked to transparency in my relationship with my supervisor.

However, I think this is very dependent on the student and it is important that a supervisor is able to detect what types of needs the doctoral candidate in question has when it comes to supervision of thesis. The way my doctoral studies are structured may certainly not suit everyone. For me, though, it works very well.

What would an ideal supervision of thesis situation look like?

In an ideal situation, your supervisor would possess the above-mentioned characteristics and the personal chemistry between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor would work well.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

I feel that conflicts and difficult situations are best resolved by talking about them directly with the person concerned.

My experience is that problems are usually pretty easy to solve if you grasp the nettle as soon as possible and are open about what you think. This, of course, requires that the supervisor in question is receptive but I do think that this is the first action you should take to resolve the situation. If this does not work, perhaps seek support and help from any suitable external person.



Economics, third year as doctoral candidate

What is most important to you in your relationship with your supervisor?

I think the most important thing is that the person concerned has the right skills to guide you forward. On my part, I had a supervisor with a technical background, which has been both difficult and challenging as different disciplines have different views both on what research is and how it should be written up. I often feel that I am not learning how things are actually done in my discipline and my supervisors do not have the right skills to critically examine my work.

It is also vital that supervisors show interest in, and commitment to, what they are doing. Also, I think it is important that supervisors understand that all doctoral candidates do not work in exactly the same

way. Just as the manager of a company needs to lead and deal with employees who have different needs for support and encouragement, supervisors must consider the needs of the different doctoral candidates in the doctoral process. Some need more support in the beginning or during different parts of the process, while others like to be able to work independently. However, independence is not necessarily a sign that supervisors should not support doctoral candidates and work to help them move forward.

It is also essential to understand that this is an educational programme i.e. that doctoral candidates are there to learn, not grope around in the dark on their own. You do learn, of course, but I feel that the road is perceived as increasingly bumpy, lonely and confusing if this is the case.

What would an ideal supervision of thesis situation look like?

Regular meetings at certain in-

tervals. This reduces the risk of getting stuck or bogged down. I think many doctoral candidates rarely meet their supervisors. Frequently, contact is only made when they are experiencing problems. I think it would be nice to have contact (perhaps every two weeks) to minimise the risk of getting stuck.

It also strengthens your self-confidence if you can get together and talk about something other than problems. Make lists of things to be done for the next meeting together.

Then I believe that supervisors should be more involved at the beginning of the doctoral process. Ensure that the doctoral candidate develops a good, thorough research plan. Help to co-author, encourage attendance at seminars and guide/help the doctoral candidate in the right direction early in the process. If supervisors do this, doctoral candidates will have greater opportunities to complete in time and work independently later in on their program-

mes. I believe that the more time supervisors give doctoral candidates at the beginning, the less time they will need by the end.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

Regular meetings also provide the opportunity to solve problems along the way so that the situation does not become too awkward.

However, I believe that honest communication is the best. That you turn to your supervisor with the perceived problem. In my case, however, this has not worked out particularly well. I have communicated with both my head of division and my supervisor to say that I need more support but have not received the support I feel that I need. This has resulted, unfortunately, in me taking out my licentiate and no longer being a doctoral candidate. So I have no good answer to this question.



**Geography,
third year as
doctoral candidate**

What is most important to you in your relationship with your supervisor?

Not being micromanaged, and receiving support to explore the topic I am working on. I would not like to be stood over and criticised for every wrong move, or “that’s not the way I would do it!” I cannot do everything exactly the same, but I can learn from suggestions. Mostly I am on my own, but I know if I need help I can ask.

I know my supervisor has my back and would not let people gossip about me, or participate in gossip, and that is important to me. I would not stay in a relationship with ANYONE who did not respect my personal integrity, so it is not acceptable in the workplace either.

What is most important in the supervision relationship?

Good communications are essential. Honesty about expectations, and not sitting on issues until they become huge problems. I am having difficulties with my project that are not related to my supervisor and I know she is concerned, together we are trying to establish a plan for me to finish on time regardless of not having all the data. Adjusting the parameters and having a Plan B that is not a “failure” keeps expectations realistic, and stress levels lower for both of us! Meet the real goal!

What would an ideal supervision of thesis situation look like?

As far as the actual meetings are concerned, I would say that they should be open and without negative feelings going in. I prefer to update my supervisor and then discuss what is working, and where the problems are.

I try to have my data organised and show what I am working on and what I need assistance

with. We don't always agree and sometimes she has to remind me that I can't do EVERYTHING. It is good to have someone who is supportive but can help set limits too.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

Try to not let a situation become so sensitive that it stops you from being able to work. You are both people, and (most) people want to have a successfully-completed PhD project.

Keep an eye on the big picture and try to see if the situation is actually a major problem or not. There is good support at SU if you need an outside ear, and I really can't say enough good things about having a mentor to use as a sounding board.

Your doctoral studies mean basically entering into a relationship with someone who helps you and should transition from a “parent” role to a more “equal” role. There are going to be some issues, probably on both sides.

If you can agree to respect the other person and their opinions, and realise it's OK to disagree, you will be much more successful!



**Epidemiology,
three years
since graduation**

What is most important to you in your relationship with your supervisor?

For me in my relationship with my supervisor it is important (from both sides): to be transparent, to be open to new ideas, to be open to learning new things, to be able to discuss things, to understand each other's situation, to respect private life, to respect legislation and ethics, to be honest, to treat each other equally.

What is most important in the supervision relationship?

To follow things/projects/work up, to have well-structured

supervision (regular discussions), to try to solve problems that might come up together, to balance the workload, to be flexible and understandable

What would an ideal supervision of thesis situation look like?

Ideal supervision is where both the supervisor and doctoral candidate can talk about projects or problems or life with understanding, openness and transparency. The supervisor does not need to know everything and nor does the candidate, so the relationship should be transparent and honest, with support and teaching and simply accepting that you do not know everything and other people might have that knowledge.

Also, the supervisor should identify the student's abilities in advance before starting a project so that the student can handle it and really contribute knowledge based on his/her previous experience and education. A realistic, well-structured study plan is also crucial, I

think, for successful supervision of a doctoral project.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

As I said before, there should be openness, transparency, understanding, support and honesty, from both sides. If something feels problematic, both parties should be able to talk about it and try to solve it.

Two examples: my child becomes ill and I have to go home. My supervisor should understand that this is just part of life and allow me go home to take care of him and if there is a good relationship I should be able to openly go and tell that I have to go home and he/she should understand that. Well, this simply does not happen sometimes and instead you gets answers like “But you have to work, can’t your partner go and pick up your child?”.

Another example: my project means travelling to an African country where I have never been

before, and collecting samples which also implies ethical permission, carrying heavy baggage, travelling around in isolated towns. I realise this and suggest travelling with someone else in order to get support and help which will, in the end, contribute to higher-quality fieldwork, as well as for safety reasons (don’t want to get robbed or raped).

In a normal situation, the supervisor should see this in advance and try to plan the fieldwork with several others involved. I could at least point out that an additional person is necessary and that I could find them. If there is openness this discussion should be smooth and end up in a solution.

In some cases where the relationship is not the best, supervisors just say “You have to go alone, you should have thought about this before becoming a doctoral candidate”.



**Geography,
second year as
doctoral
candidate**

What is most important to you in your relationship with your supervisor?

Getting support, feedback, comments, guidance, and recommendations. The relationship is open, i.e. you can say almost anything. Honesty. You feel that it's okay to show your efforts in whatever part of the process they are at and that you still receive constructive criticism.

What is most important in the supervision relationship?

Agree on responsibilities early on and decide who is responsible for what. Supervisors must tell doctoral candidates that they are valuable resources that the candidates must manage properly. Doctoral candidates must know what they want from their supervisors.

What would an ideal supervision of thesis situation look like?

A dedicated supervisor who has the time to read your work, who comments and who is knowledgeable in your field.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

That depends on the seriousness of the situation. If it is serious, it can be solved by means of discussions in the Doctoral Candidate Council and by the parties talking to the postgraduate education director or supervisor collegiate.

If the conflict/situation persists, I think the Doctoral Candidate Council should contact the union. If this turns out to be a common situation, discussing it in the Council can help doctoral candidates and they can get tips from colleagues on how to deal with the issue



**Linguistics,
fourth year as
doctoral
candidate**

My relationship with my supervisors is good and we have met quite often. Usually this is in the form of personal meetings where we sit down for one to two hours to discuss the texts I have written or, for example, theoretical problems I am wrestling with.

It's hard to pick out one thing that is absolutely the most important thing for me in terms of this relationship, but I can mention a few things that I really appreciate.

The first is that I feel safe showing my ignorance to my supervisor, I am able to ask stupid questions and actually honestly able to ask for help in certain areas. I do not need to keep face with my supervisor, I can actually converse with her on equal terms, without having to feel at a disadvantage because I do not

have as much experience.

Another important thing that I value very much is that my supervisor makes me feel that she has time for me. I never hear that she is stressed out, I'm asking too much, etc. but I always experience a willingness from my supervisor's side. She shows sincere interest in my thesis and can be just as lyrical as I am at an exciting insight.

In some situations I feel that the relationship between me and my supervisor is very close to the ideal, at least I think that other doctoral candidates, who have not had the same luck, can perceive it as so. Myself, I must also say that I am very pleased with my situation. The ideal supervision of thesis situation is, in my opinion, when the supervisor and doctoral candidate maintain an open discussion, that there is generosity of spirit and it becomes a proper dialogue.

The supervisor must be familiar with the subject of the thesis and give good advice but also

ask critical questions that can get doctoral candidates to think and solve problems on their own. Doctoral candidates then feel that they are being taken seriously and appreciated as an important asset to academia, in spite of their lack of research experience.

I have rarely felt frustrated in my relationship with my supervisor, but just a couple of times there have been minor problems. For example, I went through a period when my supervisor cancelled our meetings at short notice several times in a row, partly because of double bookings. I took this up with her and it immediately became much better. I find it best to be honest and take up things that I feel are problematic; that way I don't have to walk around feeling frustrated. In the same way, I have been open and honest if I have not really achieved my best. A couple of times lately I felt a bit stressed out about everything that has to be written into the thesis and this stress was expressed in the form of a

general frustration that made me less tolerant and I got angry over trifles.

I may have sounded a bit ungrateful and grumpy during supervision meetings when I was criticised for some of my ideas, even though I really know my supervisor has good intentions and just wants to improve my thesis. In these situations I have apologised at the end of the meeting for appearing miserable or depressed and explained that I am very grateful, but I also stressed and therefore a bit more sensitive than usual. This has been received very well by my supervisor.

What is most important to you



**Biomedicine,
first year as
doctoral
candidate**

in your relationship with your supervisor?

Mutual respect for each other and each other's knowledge in order to be able to discuss the project together, and that both are involved in the planning on how to proceed with the research.

What is most important in the supervision relationship?

That the supervisor is responsive and available for discussion and provides advice on how to proceed with the research. It is important not to get stuck at certain points.

What would an ideal supervision of thesis situation look like?

Supervisors must be available. They must possess good knowledge of the research field in order to be able to give the proper advice and support in all parts

of the research project (application for ethical approval, planning of studies, applications for funds for research/travel, writing of articles, teaching, etc.). If the supervisors themselves do not possess sufficient knowledge in the relevant field of research, it is important that they can propose contacts in order to be able to get help.

It is vital for candidates to be able to trust their supervisors and their supervisors' skills in order to be able to learn from them. Supervisors must be responsive and able to discuss the research and allow doctoral candidates to take more and more responsibility for their own work. It is not fruitful if supervisors dictate all the preconditions and do not allow doctoral candidates to help shape their own research.

Supervisors should be able to provide feedback on doctoral candidates' work so they know if they are on the right track. Supervisors must encourage doctoral candidates and also

push them to undertake various projects, go to conferences, create their own networks and teach. Supervisors must also ensure that doctoral candidates do not get too much to do and overload their work situation.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

It is important to dare to take up issues with your supervisor, for example if you feel that your workload is too heavy. Most situations can be resolved by communicating with each other and listening to each other's views on the issue.

You need to take the time to sit down and discuss it. It's very important to respect one another, that you are honest in your communications and listen to the other party. If you still cannot come to an agreement, it may help to bring in an independent person who can help to mediate.

What is most important to you



Technical Science

in your relationship with your supervisor?

You should be able to rely on your supervisor. The relationship should not be perceived as manipulative. Supervisors must listen and respect candidates as human beings. Tips and advice should be either transparent in their intention, or focus on the success of the doctoral candidates and their research i.e. not thinking too strategically, about what is good in the long term for the department, financiers, supervisor, etc. without stating this clearly.

Otherwise, it's good if supervisors show interest in research in general and in the project, research ideas, results, etc. in particular.

It is best if supervisors think more about the quality of their supervisory role, and not allow

their managerial role and its quantity thinking impact too much.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

Awkward is a fuzzy concept. I tend to think like this: is this situation something I have to endure, or shall I attempt to change it? How much energy do these two options cost? Sometimes you don't know, but a preliminary assessment can be made.

If you decide to change the situation, proceed as described below - you can also get help with endurance strategies from the list below. First step - check with colleagues, friends, and acquaintances. Next step - talk to the manager at the appropriate level. Next step - contact your union. If you cannot get help locally, check with your central union or check with the doctoral candidate representative on how they view the situation.

What is most important to you



**Social sciences,
fifth year as
doctoral
candidate**

in your relationship with your supervisor?

Reliability, competence, mutual trust, openness and honesty about your strengths and weaknesses (i.e. like every other love or friendship relationship).

As a doctoral candidate I want a supervisor who can give me good advice, both on issues that concern doctoral studies as such (for example, the latest tips on writing articles; ways to deal with reviewer comments; theoretical and practical knowledge of value before, during and after the implementation of studies; and to act as a sounding board and guide through the process of being a newly-employed doctoral candidate in terms of courses, teaching and research) and in matters concerning the period after graduation (for example suggestions and possible career paths, help in writing research applications, etc.).

What would an ideal super-

vision of thesis situation look like?

Generosity of spirit! Doctoral candidates should not be afraid to ask their supervisors about anything, however trivial it may seem. Supervisors should listen to doctoral candidates with respect, even in cases when their opinions and thoughts differ from the supervisor's own ideas. It should be possible to conduct a constructive dialogue between both parties, where they listen to each other, and are inspired by each other's (sometimes) different ideas and thus become wiser together.

If a situation feels a little awkward, how is it best resolved? Please give an example!

Difficult to answer generally. It probably depends a lot on the source of the problem. Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult to find good solutions, as certain academics are very hung up on prestige.

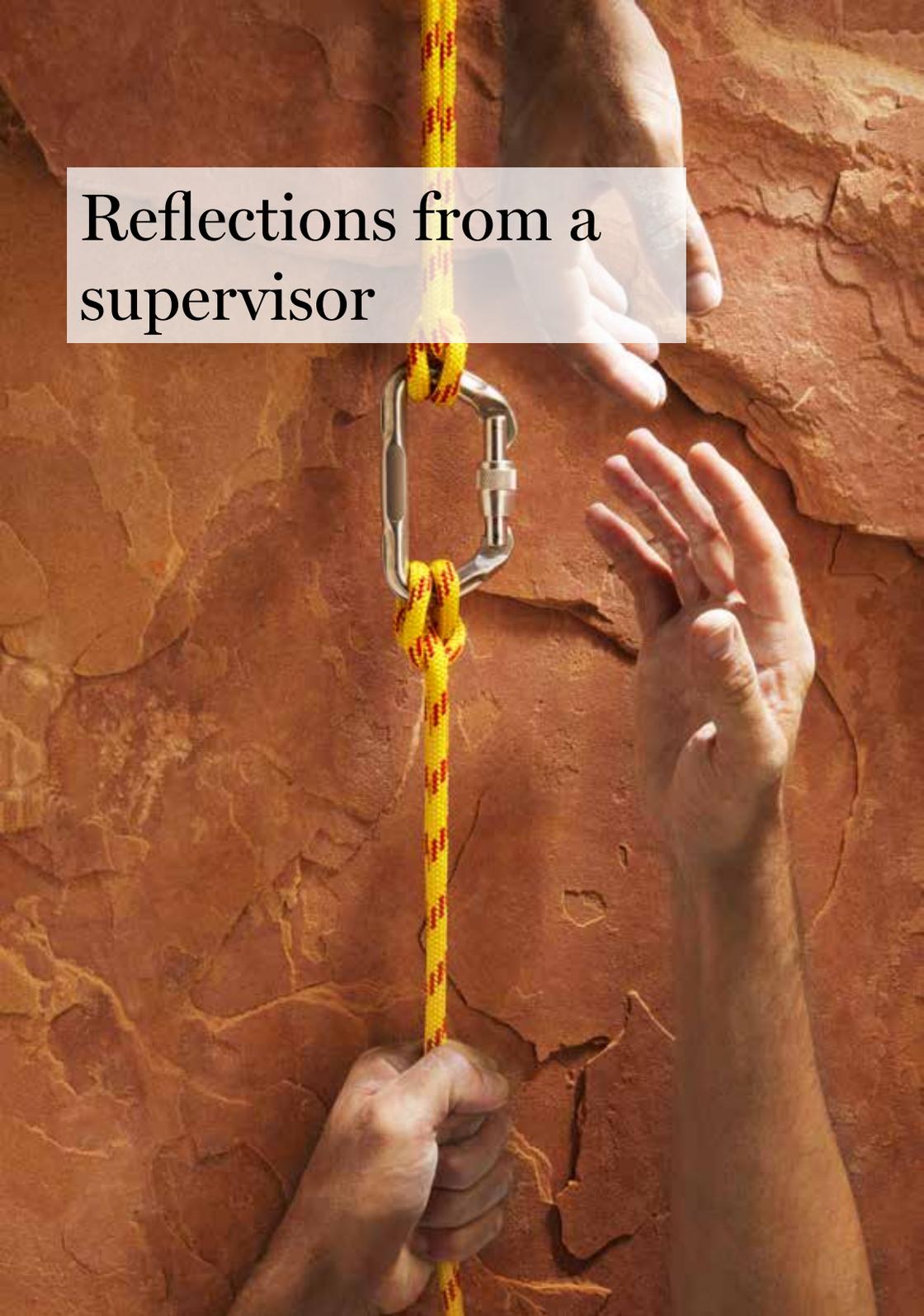
Once at the beginning of my time as a doctoral candidate, I pointed out an alternative way

to analyse the data to one of my supervisors (a renowned professor). Instead of being delighted about this new input, which later proved to be important, the individual in question became very offended and totally dismissed my suggestion in an extremely sarcastic tone and then chose to ignore me for a month.

In another case, I was promised a position in a group of authors for a study for which I had been collecting data and developing the questionnaire that was used for data collection. I then find out that, unfortunately, I was not allowed to join because another of the department's professors had taken my place.

As a doctoral candidate, you are hugely dependent on your supervisor, but it is sometimes difficult and problematic to do what feels to be the right thing, such as changing supervisor, submitting a negative report on them etc.

Reflections from a supervisor





Pedagogical operations, now four doctoral candidates, previously nine doctoral candidates

has been planned at an earlier meeting and that has arrived as agreed in advance of the supervision meeting. The doctoral candidate is happy and inspired at the end of the meeting.

What is most important in your role as supervisor?

To ensure that the doctoral candidates believe in their own ability to make a contribution and that they build up an independent position within their academic profession.

What is most important in this supervisor/doctoral candidate relationship?

Mutual confidence.

What is the ideal supervision situation?

The lead and assistant supervisors complement each other in terms of knowledge and supervise jointly. There is a cordial, supportive atmosphere, mutual confidence in each other. Via the supervision of thesis, a dialogue is undertaken that breeds new ideas from creative interaction. There is a text to discuss, the content and nature of which

If a supervision situation is problematic, how are the problems best solved? Give practical examples.

I cannot see that there would be a general answer to this question, it depends on what the problem is. However, I can give an example of a difficult situation and how I tried to solve it in the best possible way.

I was the lead supervisor for a candidate (with a licentiate degree as objective) whose assistant supervisor became ill. He was away long-term so I was the only supervisor for the first year. Then, a new assistant supervisor was appointed. As the requirements for a licentiate thesis are fairly punishing and include the publishing, printing and licentiate examination in the same way as for a doctorate at the university, time is short and very tight

for licentiate candidates to meet educational demands within the stipulated time period, in this case two and a half years. The licentiate candidate worked outside the university one day a week which was an added load relative to the normal situation.

The new assistant supervisor took what I experienced as a less supporting role and behaved in a manner that made the candidate uncertain and it was also difficult for me to advise when the assistant supervisor was there. The assistant supervisor also took meetings on his own. After these meets the candidate was often discouraged and it took a lot of time and energy trying to get the candidate back on track and willing to see opportunities and to regain the joy of the working on his thesis.

I also understood that the candidate did not want to criticise or expose the new supervisor as he took the blame and felt it was due to his lack of capacity. This particular candidate had quite a poor educational foundation

and his self-confidence was not strong, consequently he was specially in need of good supervision.

Since it was difficult to immediately understand and see the patterns that were linked to the new supervisor, it took several months before it was clear what the situation was, and time was getting short.

It was not possible to speak absolutely frankly to the assistant supervisor for reasons that are hard to explain here. I tried, however, to get the person to understand that the candidate needed a lot of backing and encouragement and also spoke about how difficult it is to receive a lot of critical comments and the importance of being constructive.

In addition to these conversations, I steered the supervision of theses so that I had more frequent contact with the candidate and suggested a clearer separation of the various supervision tasks between me and the

assistant supervisor in a way that also allowed his skills to be utilised.

The result, as I understood it, was that the candidate got more out of the supervision and as there were far fewer personal meetings with the assistant supervisor and the negative effects of their encounters decreased. My discussion with the supervisor also gave some effect.

One consequence of the situation was that I, as lead supervisor, did not have the support of being in a team of two which would have been desirable and it became more difficult to have an assistant supervisor than to be without. However the candidate did, in summary, profit from the situation.



General linguistics, now six doctoral candidates, previously 25 doctoral candidates

What is most important in your role as supervisor?

To ensure that doctoral candidates keep up their enthusiasm for their research.

What is most important in this supervisor/doctoral candidate relationship?

Just that - supervision of thesis. The doctoral candidate is the one who is getting an education and writing the thesis. The supervisor's task is to be an extremely competent guide and supporter, but not to take over from the doctoral candidate.

What is the ideal supervision situation?

When both (or all) of them sit down to solve a common problem, then understand what the problem is about and then are able to distinguish a way of moving forward.

If a supervision situation is problematic, how are the problems best solved? Give practical examples.

Through consultation between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor. It is important that doctoral candidates know their rights (for example the opportunity to change supervisor) and operate in an environment where it is self-evident that they can use them.

It is also important that there is support from the Doctoral Candidate Council and supervisory collegiate and the institution has well-functioning occupational health services which can provide coaching or counselling when necessary.



Care and Treatment Sciences, previously approx. 20 doctoral candidates

What is most important in your role as supervisor?

Support and encourage, but do not take over. Get doctoral candidates to think scientifically - not only do what must be done. Ensure that doctoral candidates gradually increase their independence but do not run ahead too fast and waste time on things that are unproductive.

What is most important in this supervisor/doctoral candidate relationship?

Mutual confidence. Giving criticism in a positive manner even if the message is tough. Keeping your word and keeping deadlines - doing what you promised - both sides!

What is the ideal supervision situation?

A personal relationship but not in the private sphere. Important not to become "friends" with

doctoral candidates. Do not take on a position as supervisor if the candidate is an old friend.

If a supervision situation is problematic, how are the problems best solved? Give practical examples.

Through dialogue, that is self-evident. Preferably together with a third person if they cannot arrive at a solution on their own. Important to refer to formal structure - both parties have rights and obligations.

Important to lay prestige to one side. If a problem cannot be solved, this may be cause to change supervisor. I have twice transferred doctoral candidates to other supervisors with good results (both graduated).



Chemistry, now six doctoral candidates, previously six plus assistant supervisor for up to ten

What is most important in your role as supervisor?

That doctoral candidates achieve results they are satisfied with.

What is most important in this supervisor/doctoral candidate relationship?

Mutual confidence.

What is the ideal supervision situation?

That the supervisors and doctoral candidates succeed in building up confidence in each other and that the doctoral candidates succeed in their tasks.

If a supervision situation is problematic, how are the problems best solved? Give practical examples.

Depends on what. Purely scientific problems are solved, for example, by breaking down the task into sub-steps and/or more directly helping the doctoral

candidate with the most difficult parts.

Other difficult problems are taken up for discussion. If this does not help, ask a mentor or another outsider to help. I have not experienced this situation.



Immunology, no doctoral candidates now, previously two as lead supervisor

What is most important in your role as supervisor?

Create the preconditions for my doctoral candidates to get the best possible education, and that we enjoy our work together.

What is most important in this supervisor/doctoral candidate relationship?

Mutual respect for each other but that we both know our roles and that we work well together and can enjoy the research.

What is the ideal supervision situation?

That doctoral candidates and supervisors maintain a live dialogue and are both able to give and take criticism.

We work closely together within our area, which means we must be able to talk to each other, both on matters pertaining to our work but also in the private

sphere as this will affect our joint efforts.

If a supervision situation is problematic, how are the problems best solved? Give practical examples.

The important thing is that we talk to each other and do not keep back negative things. The quicker we can sort out any problems, the sooner we can move forward, but the key words are dialogue, dialogue and dialogue!

Reflections by the SULF association of professors



Research and doctoral studies have grown significantly in both volume and importance in recent decades - the numbers of doctoral candidates increasing as the importance of having a PhD grows.

As a result, the approach to doctoral programmes has changed: from being regarded as a set of skills that the individual doctoral candidates should acquire themselves to modern doctoral studies which are considerably more structured.

Doctoral candidates must have two supervisors (or more), the supervisor must complete specialist training, doctoral studies are usually led by a dean of post-graduate studies. The admission of a doctoral candidate is today a far-reaching commitment that ties up significant resources and creates considerable expectations over a long period of time.

Doctoral studies must be good quality and successful, as concerns each individual thesis project and also in activities in ge-

neral. At the same time doctoral studies are still - and will likely always be - characterised by the fact that they are an elite activity. You have to do something new, something original and be able to demonstrate and convey this successfully. The meeting between these two forces - structure and originality - is our greatest, common challenge, equally important to doctoral candidates and supervisors.

Consequently it is vital to talk about how we are "doing doctoral studies", its various elements and stages. This report covers a part of the doctoral studies programme, perhaps its most complex element, namely the supervision of theses. In the supervision of theses, responsibilities and independence meet - accountability from the university side and also independence, which is the very purpose of the doctoral programme. Supervision of theses that is dedicated solely to control will stifle independence. Supervision of theses that is dedicated solely to independence risks becoming

unsystematic and discretionary. We need everyone - supervisors, doctoral candidates and society at large - to find ways to supervise theses that can achieve the goals of accountability, independence and tenacity at the same time.

We have come a long way but, judging from what is described in this report, supervision of theses still varies greatly. There is a common understanding of what supervision of theses should be - support in the development of originality and solidity in the role of researcher - but practice differs. Sweden and Swedish doctoral studies show a very great flexibility in the perception of what a thesis project is, and how it should be supervised.

Some thesis projects are joint projects, where the supervisor and doctoral candidate work side by side in a kind of daily workplace. Other doctoral projects are carried out by the doctoral candidate and the supervisor acts as a flexible resource.

Again some are something in between - where there are thematic groups but a looser relationship between supervisors and doctoral candidates.

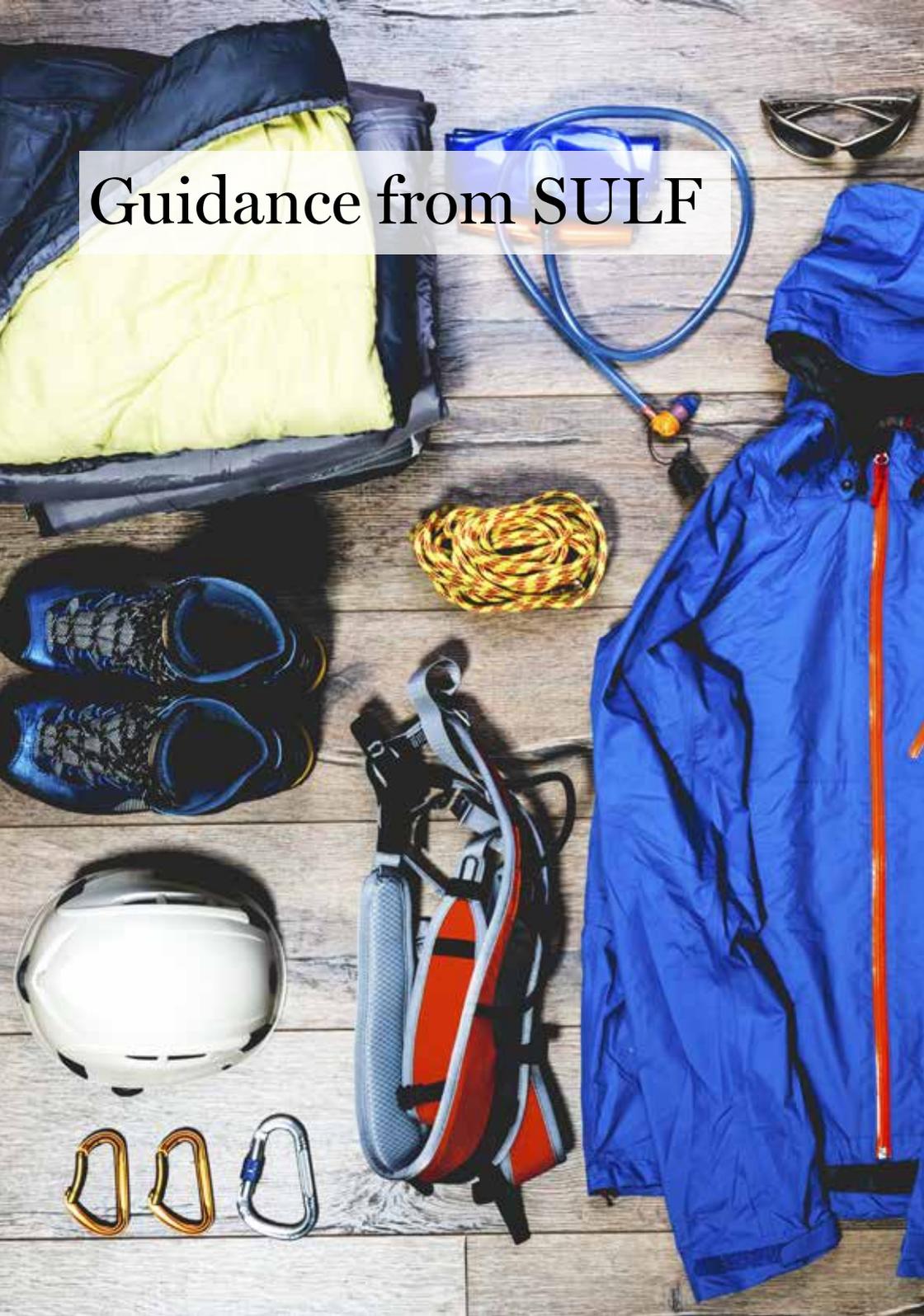
Probably a more systematic form for how doctoral candidates are to work is necessary, also concerning the nature of their relationship with their supervisors. As it is now, considerable latitude is allowed within which situation-specific solutions, variation between universities/university colleges, influence from the funding situation, networks around the supervisor, faculty affiliation, institution (or equivalent) size and resource wealth all combine.

This variation is specious and not fully effective. Supervisors could be interested in expanding responsibility for supervision of theses - for example, by working with the type of thesis committees that exist in the US and UK, or graduate schools of the Danish or Dutch models.

This may also concern separating funding responsibility and supervision of thesis responsibility so that doctoral studies are no longer funded by supervisor projects/external funding, but by the universities' basic allocations. Both of these changes would reduce pressure on the supervisor, broaden responsibility for doctoral candidate projects and create a safer and more secure funding situation around them.

Another assumed effect would be that doctoral thesis projects would be less "top-down" and controlled by already-formulated issues and mission statements, thus creating space for more innovative experiments and solutions within the framework of the thesis.

Guidance from SULF



The Higher Education Ordinance provides entitlement to supervision during doctoral studies. Universities have an obligation to appoint at least two supervisors, one of which must be lead supervisor.

Scientifically active researchers

All supervisors, but especially lead supervisors, must be scientifically active researchers. Their knowledge and contacts are important instruments to be used for candidate education.

Assistant supervisor

In addition to lead supervisors, universities must appoint one or more assistant supervisors. These may be located in the home department but may also work at other departments or universities. Depending on the expertise necessary for the thesis topic, assistant supervisors at overseas universities may also be appointed.

In addition to the supervisor and assistant supervisor, other resources may be necessary in

order to complete the thesis. Colleagues on the doctoral programme, and others too, may form a source of support and help.

The tasks of the supervisor

There are no ordinances that stipulate the tasks or responsibilities of supervisors. The content of the role varies between different people and faculties. Generally, however, it can be said that supervision of doctoral candidates should include:

- Support in the selection and formulation of thesis topic.
- Continuous review and feedback on manuscript/related material.
- Support in the selection of graduate courses.
- Acting as a sounding board for literature/projects /field studies /etc.
- Acting as a source of ethical standards and good research methods.
- Helping to establish relevant contacts in the academic world.

Supervision may also include help in participating in academic conferences (inside and outside Sweden), information on where to apply for funding and lots more.

Different traditions and styles of supervision

In the 2000s, it became increasingly common for universities to require new supervisors to undergo relevant training before being assigned candidates at doctoral level.

The objective of this supervisor training is to create a common base for supervisors, but with or without training it is difficult to ignore the fact that supervisors have different supervision styles. Similarly, there are long traditions concerning thesis work and supervision within certain subject areas/faculties.

Whatever your faculty tradition or supervisor's style, supervision must be implemented in a professional manner that provides good support for thesis work.

Supervision

Depending on the thesis topic, the supervisor and many other factors, supervision may differ considerably between students. There is great benefit in regular (how often is determined by the candidate and the supervisor), well-prepared (from both sides) meetings.

Both the doctoral candidate and the supervisors need to check off the development of the thesis project. This not only concerns the thesis but also how well the supervision is working and the factors affecting the situation, for example the balance between the time devoted to teaching and to research.

The work should be structured in both the long and the short term and all important changes documented in the individual study plan. In certain cases clearly-stated targets to be checked at the next supervision session are appropriate.

It is the supervisor's task to guide the candidate through the

thesis. This also means that it is the supervisor's responsibility to provide feedback but also support and help if the thesis schedule is slipping. Supervision meetings can sometimes be challenging both for doctoral candidates and supervisors and it is important to build a relationship characterised as much as possible by mutual confidence in order to achieve this.

The relationship

The relationship between supervisor and doctoral candidate is often intense and it is vital that it be founded on trust. It is essential to maintain the relationship on a professional basis. If an emotional relationship between doctoral candidate and supervisor develops, a change of supervisor is recommended. If this does not occur and the relationship ends, there is a risk that major problems will occur for the doctoral candidate.

Sexual harassment is never acceptable and should never occur within the framework of the supervisor/doctoral candidate

relationship. If you experience sexual harassment, contact SULF, your departmental HR section or the health and safety representative.

Right to change supervisor

Doctoral candidates are entitled to change supervisor. There may be different reasons for wanting to change supervisors during a doctoral programme. There are, for example, changes in response the reorientation of the thesis as well as due to cooperation problems between supervisors and doctoral candidates.

This may sometimes cause practical problems, but the department or university is obliged to provide another supervisor.

If cooperation issues mean the candidate wishes to change supervisor, we recommend a serious discussion with the relevant supervisor. If this meeting does not result in constructive proposals for change, discuss the situation with the department head or the Director of Postgraduate Education.

Doctoral candidate colleagues as well as SULF or local Saco-S associations can provide support and offer a sounding board in these situations. It is always possible to call the SULF Membership Helpline.

Supervisor retires

Sometimes a supervisor retires before as a doctoral candidate has completed his/her course of study. In such cases the university has an obligation to arrange a new supervisor.

Supervision withdrawn

If doctoral candidates neglect their agreed undertakings to, as is set out in the Ordinance, a "significant" degree, the department may take a decision that they are no longer entitled to supervision and other resources. Universities do take such decisions, but not very often.

According to the Ordinance, the President/Vice-Chancellor of the university takes such exclusion decisions, but universities may delegate this task to, for example, faculty boards.

Before a decision on exclusion from supervision is taken, candidates are given the opportunity to express their views. Similarly, the relevant supervisor is also given the opportunity to be heard. An examination will then be carried out based on these reports and any other evidence available. Whether the department has fulfilled its own commitments according to the individual study plan must also be taken into consideration. The decision must be written and reasoned.

Resources may not be withdrawn for the period the person is employed as a doctoral candidate or receives a study grant.

Appeal of decision to withdraw supervision

If the university takes a decision to withdraw resources for a candidate's education, he/she is entitled, upon application to the President/Vice-Chancellor of the university to regain supervision and other resources. In order to achieve this, the candidate must prove that he/she can

fulfil the remaining commitments within the individual study plan, for example by showing what the Ordinance describes as "additional study results of considerable quality and scale"

Individual study plan

The individual study plan is the documentation of doctoral studies that the candidate and supervisor establish jointly. It is the framework against which performance is measured. It commits all parties but also protect the rights of the doctoral candidate.

University obligations

According to the Higher Education Ordinance, the university has an obligation to ensure that an individual study plan is established for each doctoral candidate. This is then confirmed by the university after consultations with the doctoral candidate and supervisor.

Content

The individual study plan is both a schedule of research studies and a description of

the commitments made by the candidate and the university for the study period. It must also include information on other requirements for studies to be conducted effectively.

The schedule should specify the courses the doctoral candidates are to undertake and preliminary dates for planned manuscripts of articles and the thesis topic. It is natural that the schedule is more detailed for the immediate future than for the later years. As concerns the undertakings of the university, routines for supervision should be documented i.e. that candidate and supervisor meet every other week.

Commitments otherwise might involve attending seminars or conferences relevant to the subject or participation in a research project. It is reasonable that the university agrees to provide doctoral candidates with a workplace and reasonable studying conditions in other respects.

Regular monitoring

The individual study plan should be followed up. If the situation changes, for example a candidate teaches more than planned, is ill or goes on parental leave or other circumstances occur, this must be documented and the individual study plan adjusted. If this is not done, the university will be unable to see reasons for, say, the delay of thesis work, and it may then suspect negligence.

The university will follow up the individual study plan on a regular basis which in many departments means annually. During follow-up the doctoral candidate and supervisor will provide information on how the doctoral studies are progressing. The university can then, when required, make the necessary changes in individual study plan.

Before changes are made, the doctoral candidate and supervisor are given the opportunity to be heard.

Universities vary as to who makes decisions on the individual study plan. For more information on how this takes place at your university, please contact your supervisor or our local representatives.

Doctoral candidates and supervisors should certify in writing that they have read and agreed the individual study plan and any changes made to it.

Circumstances that affect doctoral studies

There are many circumstances that could affect candidates' ability to complete their studies to plan. Too much teaching, ancillary activities, positive or negative events in the private sphere as well as setbacks in the thesis, working environment problems and supervision issues are just some of the circumstances that may have a negative impact on educational progress.

It is important to be mindful and deal with problems early if studies are affected. Contact your supervisor, department

head or SULF early on for advice and support.

Not all circumstances that occur provide entitlement to extension of research time. The Higher Education Ordinance allows for the possibility of extended studies in special circumstances.

Examples of these special circumstances include sick and parental leave, military service or election to a position in unions or student organisations. There are also other circumstances that may be included in this group but there are no guarantees.

The individual study plan - your protection

If doctoral candidates neglect their agreed undertakings to, as set out in the Ordinance, a "significant" degree the department may decide that they are no longer entitled to supervision and other resources. Consequently, it is essential that the individual study plan is kept accurate and up-to-date.

Advice and support from SULF

As a member of SULF, we offer you advice and support on issues such as employment terms, working hours, research programmes, parental matters, holidays, pay and salary dialogues.

The SULF helpline 08-505 836 00 puts you in direct contact with the Association's officers if you have any questions or need advice.

