

Annual Report of the DOMB

December 1, 2015 – December 15, 2016

Summary

The Doctoral Students' Representative (Doktorandombud) known as the DOMB, has been hired directly as a contractor by the board of the Doctoral Students (DS) Guild (Doktorandsektionen, DS). In addition to writing an annual report, the main responsibilities of the DOMB¹ include offering regular consultation times as well as appointments; supporting the student in potentially difficult meetings; and providing confidentiality along with confidential case records.

Within the limits of the required confidentiality, this annual report presents a summary of the DOMB's activities between December 1, 2015 and December 15, 2016. This includes: contacting the DOMB by email, in person or by phone; the structure of a meeting; typical issues experienced by the doctoral students; and actions that might arise from a meeting or an email exchange. In addition, some general and specific statistics for the work of the DOMB, as well as a participation profile and case work along with a work breakdown, are presented. Finally a list of other events, meetings and presentations in which the DOMB has participated is provided and final remarks are made.

The participation profile includes students from 15 of the 17 departments at Chalmers. Approximately 50% of the students come from Sweden or the European Union. Approximately 55% to 60% of the students are male with 45% to 40% being female. Student-related email, student-related preparation and student-related meetings account for 70% of the DOMB's time.

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¹ The position of Doktorandombud, as described in the initial job posting, is presented in Appendix 1,

1. Contacting the DOMB

Doctoral students and Chalmers personnel are able to contact the DOMB, if needed, through several means such as by email, in person at a drop-in time and by mobile phone. Contact information can be found in a variety of ways such as a general search of the Chalmers website² or a search on Insidan³. These, in turn, link to the DS website⁴. The contact information on the DS website is updated as required as shown in Appendix 2.

1.1 Email

The email address domb@dokt.chs.chalmers.se is hosted by the Chalmers Student Union. At the request of DS, incoming email is then forwarded to the DOMB's Gmail address, domb.chalmers@gmail.com. The email is then deleted from the server.

The most common first contact is by email to domb@dokt.chs.chalmers.se. Most students use their Chalmers email address but sometimes a private email address is used. Occasionally, an issue can be resolved by a series of emails. More often a meeting is arranged and then held in one of the group rooms in Kårhuset.

In addition, after it was determined that Chalmers personnel were having difficulty contacting the DOMD, a previously used Chalmers ID, moyra@chalmers.se, was reactivated at the request of DS. This has improved communication between the DOMB and other offices at Chalmers. Some students also opt to use the DOMB's Chalmers ID.

1.2 Drop-in group room 1 Kårhuset

The drop-in time on Wednesdays is from 12:00 to 13:00. Group room 1 has been pre-booked in the Aptus system⁵. The DOMB is able to book additional slots as required. Most students email ahead to reserve the drop-in time.

1.3 Phone

The on-call phone (+46 707 939825) hours are on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, from 12:00 to 13:00. These hours are only occasionally used to make contact with the DOMB. More often the phone is used to cancel meetings or ask urgent questions after a first meeting has occurred or by the DOMB to speak to Chalmers personnel. The phone is monitored regularly, including vacation periods.

²https://student.portal.chalmers.se/doctoralportal/handbok_sv/Doktorandsektionen/Sidor/default.aspx

³ <http://www.chalmers.se/insidan/EN/education-research/doctoral-student/questions-answers>

⁴ <http://www.dokt.chs.chalmers.se/support-for-phd-students/#DOMB>

⁵ <http://aptus.chs.chalmers.se/AptusPortal>

1.4 Contact by Chalmers Personnel

Naturally, the DOMB responds when requested by Chalmers personnel, e.g., for a discontinuation meeting. However there has also been contact with the DOMB for other reasons, e.g., performing a study. After discussion with Linnèa Qvirist⁶ (President of the DS board), it was decided that the role of the DOMB is to respond to students first. Additional studies could be carried out through contracts to DS to engage the DOMB for extra hours if, for example, confidential interviews were needed.

2. Structure of a typical meeting with the DOMB

Over the last year, a standard meeting format has been developed. This has worked well and will be continued next year. The duration of the first meeting is usually 60 to 90 minutes. The structure of the meeting is presented below.

- Welcome
 - Confidentiality is promised with the exception of harm to self or others.
 - Within this confidence, if there is a potential conflict of interest, alternatives available to the student are discussed.
 - It is made clear that while the DOMB can suggest or guide, it is the student who directs the process and approves any actions.
- Background
 - The student's department, department head, division head, examiner, director of studies, supervisor and co-supervisor(s) are recorded, provided the student agrees to this.
- Nature of the problem
 - The student's concerns are identified through the use of keywords such as who, with what, how long, when and where.
- Discussion
 - The concerns are then compared to a body of knowledge including, but not limited to, the Rules of Procedure, relevant presidential decisions, Swedish employment regulations and the collective agreement.
- A possible approach to the concerns is developed
 - What does the student want and/or need?
 - What can the DOMB do?
 - What can the student do?
 - What next?
 - What are the action items for the DOMB and the student?
- Next steps follow as a result of the above
 - A follow-up email is sent to student if desired.
 - Another meeting can be scheduled.

⁶ In 2015, the DOMB was in touch with Oskar Thulin, especially in the start-up phase, when other issues requiring DS input were raised.



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- Email, a phone call to and/or meeting other parties can be undertaken by the student or the DOMB.

3. Typical issues that might arise in a meeting or through email

A number of fairly regular concerns have been identified. These are listed below. Frequently, students expressed simultaneous concerns in several of these areas.

- Am I (the student) really in the right place (should I stay, quit, change?)
- Bullying, equity, gender or power issues
- Change of supervisor (how, why, ramifications?)
- Co-authorship (how much, too much, not enough?)
- Contract extension (how?)
- Departmental duties (how much, too much, not enough and a lack of consistency across Chalmers)
- Discontinuation (after 1yr or Licentiate)
- Independence as a researcher (when?)
- Individual study plan, ISP (attitude to, signed, not signed, fact or fiction?)
- Industrial PhD arrangements (lack of consistency across Chalmers)
- Insurance (both for non-employed students and employed students)
- Intellectual property concerns
- Non-employed students (scholarships, double-degree, visiting)
- Number of papers required and what types
- Personal issues (family, friends, self, self-confidence)
- Scholarship students (inconsistent approach across Chalmers)
- Stopping after Licentiate (feeling pushed to stop)
- Supervision (comparison to ISP, how much, too much, too little?)
- Vacation pay; payout at end of contract

4. Actions that might arise from a meeting or through email

While no two cases are the same, a number of fairly standard actions have been observed to arise from a meeting or from an exchange of emails. These are listed below.

- The student is reassured or has a plan for a series of next steps.
- The student interacts with the supervisor, division head or other personnel based on the discussion with DOMB. Usually a follow-up meeting or subsequent email exchange occurs.
- The student is referred elsewhere such as a union, health services or Trygghetsstiftelsen (TSN).
- With agreement from student, the DOMB
 - interacts with DS.
 - emails, calls or interacts in person with the prorector, director of studies or department head or others at Chalmers, as requested and agreed to.



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- Mediates or acts as a go-between, with or without the student present as preferred by student, or at the request of the division or department (note the student is not present at a Discontinuation meeting⁷).
- Elevates the concern, usually after a number of interactions, to the Equity coordinator or the VP in charge of graduate education.
- Occasionally no action is taken as the student fears retaliation or worsening of the issue if action is taken. The student is asked to remain in touch.

It should be noted that once the DOMB is interacting with Chalmers personnel or others, there is some associated loss in confidentiality. For this reason, the DOMB and the student discuss, ahead of time, any restrictions on the information that may be relayed during these interactions.

5. General and specific statistics for the work of the DOMB

Within the bounds of confidentiality, a number of general and specific statistics have been assembled for three areas: Participation profile; Case files and difficult cases; and Work breakdown.

5.1 Participation profile

There has been broad participation of students across Chalmers. When possible, information was gathered in the areas of department, gender and geographic background. For some cases this information is unknown.

It should be noted that the profile is based only on students who contacted the DOMB for assistance. Students who contacted the DOMB for other reasons; e.g., giving a presentation, are not included in the profile.

Fifteen of the 17 departments at Chalmers are represented in the DOMB's case files. Most departments have only one or two cases but four departments stand out with five or more cases.

- Applied Information Technology
- Applied Mechanics
- Architecture
- Biology and Biological Engineering
- Chemistry and Chemical Engineering
- Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Computer Science and Engineering
- Earth and Space Sciences
- Energy and Environment
- Materials and Manufacturing Technology
- Mathematical Sciences
- Microtechnology and Nanoscience
- Physics
- Product and Production Development
- Shipping and Marine Technology
- Signals and Systems
- Technology Management and Economics

Fig. 1 List of Departments

Approximately 70% of doctoral students at Chalmers are male. The case records for the DOMB show 55% to 60% are male students and 45% to 40% are female students.

⁷ Rules of Procedure – Doctoral Programmes, Ref. No 2014-0464, Appendix 1, Guidelines for discontinuation of a student after 1 or 3 years, paragraph 3.

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Doctoral students from Sweden or more broadly within the European Union, represent about 55% of the cases. The remaining 45% have a wide international distribution.

5.2 Case files and difficult cases

Every student who reached out to the DOMB for help or advice, had an issue that was important. Some students tried first to resolve the issue or issues on their own. Unfortunately very few cases have an obvious straight-forward solution.

All cases are covered by confidentiality. Email is stored within the DOMB Gmail and on the DOMB's personal laptop. When necessary, hardcopies of documents are also kept securely. As shown in Fig. 2, there are no identifying marks.

There has been roughly one new case each week with the exceptions of the months of July and December. A number of unresolved cases from the previous DOMB (and acting DOMB) remain open. There has been considerable progress on several of these.

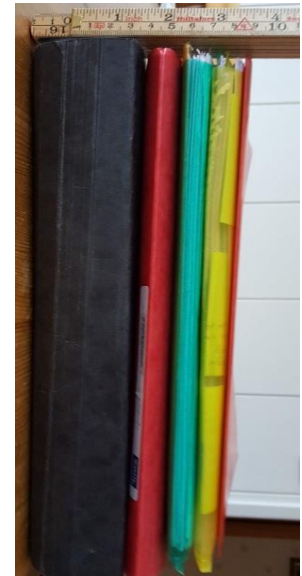


Fig. 2 Confidential case files

Some cases are particularly difficult or challenging. These cases typically involve multiple complex emails, multiple meetings (in person, by phone or by Skype) and direct and often multiple involvements with departments and/or other support on campus such as the Equity officer, Feelgood and the student's trade union.

About 40% to 50% of the cases dealt with in the last year have been classified as difficult. Five of these have been elevated to the vice president (VP) with responsibility for graduate education. Three have been largely resolved; two remain active. It should be noted that once the file has been elevated, the student knows that the case will be discussed by Chalmers personnel. It has been observed that these cases have been handled with sensitivity by the personnel involved.

Several recommendations have been made to the current VP and to DS with respect to the more difficult cases to improve the situation for those who follow.

5.3 Work breakdown for December 1, 2015 to December 15, 2016

Apart from the scheduled on-call and drop-in hours and booked meetings, contact with the DOMB, especially by email, is typically after-hours and irregular. An email is normally acknowledged within a few hours followed by a more complete response within a 24-hour period. A vacation alert is used when slightly longer response times might be needed.

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To provide a work breakdown, the activities of the DOMB have been divided into six areas: general preparation (GP); student-related preparation (SP); general meetings (GM); student-related meetings (SM); general email (GE); student-related email (SE); and events, formal meetings or presentations (EV).

The distribution of hours for the period Dec. 1, 2015 to Dec. 15, 2016 is shown in Fig. 3. As might be expected, student-related preparation, student-related email and student-related meetings have accounted for roughly 70% of the work over the year. The total number of DOMB hours was 420, amounting to about a 25% commitment over the time period⁸. This is slightly over the 20% indicated in the original job posting.

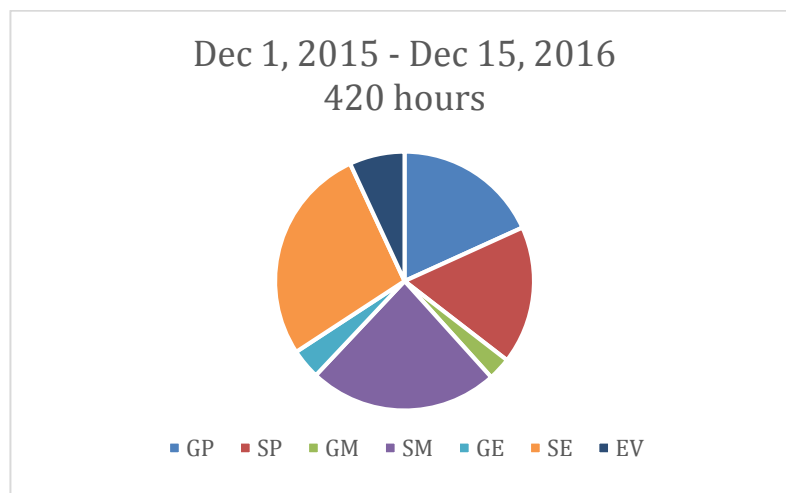


Fig. 3 DOMB work breakdown

6. Events, meetings and presentations

Although it is not one of the main responsibilities of the DOMB, participation in formal meetings and events is one of the regular activities. These are helpful in raising the visibility of the DOMB within the student and national communities. The following nine activities occurred during the reporting period.

- Two PhD Satisfaction Lunches (Signals and Systems, Chemistry and Chemical Engineering)
- Two PhD Introduction Day presentations
- One Departmental Council presentation (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
- One FUN meeting (Forskarutbildningsnämnden) presentation
- One Meet the Directors of Study presentation
- One Meet the DS Board presentation

⁸ Based on 1700 working hours per year and disregarding the two-week overlap as there was very little work in December 2015.

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- One National DOMB Network Meeting
This was attended by 12 of 17 DOMBs and held at the Lindholmen campus. It was co-organized with Gothenburg University. Costs were shared by the two universities. In Chalmers' case, funding came from the VP to cover the room rental. Fig. 4 shows the DOMBs at Lindholmen. The programme is attached in Appendix 3.
- Panel Moderator for *Attractive Academia*, a study initiated by Women in Science (WiSE) at Signals and Systems.



Fig. 4 National DOMB Network Meeting, Lindholmen Campus

7. Remarks

- Everyone connects for a reason. Confidentiality is essential.
- Email seems to be the preferred way to connect initially.
- Meeting in person is very helpful. A follow-up summary email is appreciated although some decline.
- Some students fear retaliation if the DOMB becomes directly involved or if the supervisor is aware that the DOMB have been contacted.
- Recommendations have been made to the VP and to DS with respect to some of the more difficult cases.
- Formal events, meetings and presentations introduce the DOMB to the broader community and allow the DOMB to learn about related and relevant activities.
- DS has indicated that the DOMB should respond first to student concerns. DS has also expressed an interest in refining the job description for the DOMB.

Moyra McDill
Chalmers Doktorandombud (DOMB), December 21, 2016



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Appendix 1: Description of the position of Doktorandombud, fall 2015⁹

Doktorandombudsman (DOMB) is to assist and help individual PhD students at Chalmers with problems that may arise concerning all aspects of doctoral research and employment. DOMB is hired directly as a contractor by the DS board and should not be bound to other duties which may affect the main responsibilities as DOMB. This means, for example, that DOMB should preferably not be affiliated by Chalmers other than through DS. The workload typically is around 20% of a full-time employment but that can vary depending on the demand for the DOMB's services. DS is looking for someone who has excellent social and communication skills. Someone who is understanding and empathetic. The candidate should be unbiased and solely act to protect the interest of the PhD student. The candidate should also be able to support PhD students in potentially difficult conversations, and thus should be able to display authority. The candidate is furthermore trusted with keeping absolute confidentiality between the DOMB and her/his clients.

- The main responsibilities of the DOMB are to
 - Offer regular consultation times at the DOMB office.
 - Offer consultation by appointment.
 - Be available to support the student in potentially difficult meetings.
 - Be bound to absolute confidentiality and keep confidential case records.
 - Write a yearly report on the DOMB's work.
- Qualifications
 - Excellent communication skills, both written and oral, in English and Swedish
 - Experience with working conditions at Swedish Universities
- Merits
 - Experience in supervision, especially PhD student supervision.
 - Teaching experience at university level.
 - PhD or a similar experience in research (preferably within engineering or natural sciences)
 - Experience of working at Chalmers but no current affiliation with Chalmers
 - Experience in student representation or counselling

⁹Chalmers Doctoral Student Guild seeks a new Doktorandombudsman (DOMB), <https://web103reachmee.com> etc. Oct. 21, 2015

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Appendix 2: Contact information from DS website

<http://www.dokt.chs.chalmers.se/support-for-phd-students/>

Doktorandombudet (DOMB)

The doctoral students' representative, or DOMB, helps individual PhD students with problems that may arise in the course of their research or employment. The DOMB is employed directly by the DS board and is therefore independent, unbound and neutral. Strict DOMB-student confidentiality is provided. Therefore, if you have any problems related to your PhD education, tiny or huge, contact the DOMB for individual help.

Contact Moyra by:

Email: domb@dokt.chs.chalmers.se

OR

Drop-in to student union building (Kårhuset) between **12:00 – 13:00** on **Wednesdays** in **Group Room 1** (Other meeting times can be arranged. There is no drop-in during holiday periods.)

OR

Call Moyra on **Tuesdays, Wednesdays** and **Thursdays** between **12:00 and 13:00**.

Last regular drop-in for 2016 is on December 14.
Regular drop-in will resume on January 18, 2017.

Email is the best way to reach the DOMB during this period. Please allow a longer response time. domb@dokt.chs.chalmers.se
The **phone** will be monitored regularly throughout this period. Please also send a follow-up email and allow a longer response time.

Phone number: +46 707 839825 (Messages may also be left on voicemail.)

Moyra McDill



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Appendix 3: Programme, National Network Meeting, May 12, 2016

Program doktorandombudsträff i Göteborg 12/5 2016

Rum Vinga – 3:e v
Sjöfart och marin teknik
Hörselgången 4
Lindholmen Campus
Chalmers



Fika serveras från kl 09:00 fram till kl 10:30 i Vinga

10:00-10:30 Presentationsrunda

10:30-12:00 Forskningsfusk - Föreläsning av Kristina Ullgren, universitetsjurist vid Göteborgs universitet

12:30 Lunch på L's Resto
Navet, Lindholmenspirén 5



13:45-14:30 Diskussionsfråga - Avsluta studier med licentiat trots antagning till doktorsexamen

14:30-14:45 Fika

14:45-16:00 Diskussionsfråga - Studiesituation för doktorander med funktionsnedsättning

Vägbeskrivning: Se Lindholmen Campus

<http://www.chalmers.se/en/about-chalmers/premises-and-campus/Pages/find-your-way-to-chalmers.aspx> och länk <http://www.vasttrafik.se>

Lindholmen interactive map <http://maps.chalmers.se/#c5d6ba21-7336-49f7-aef7-b161fcc91ad>

Lindholmen printable map <http://www.chalmers.se/en/about-chalmers/premises-and-campus/Pages/campus-maps.aspx>

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