



Annual Report of the DOMB December 16, 2016 – December 15, 2017

Summary

The Doctoral Students' Representative (Doktorandombud or DOMB) has been hired directly as a contractor by the board of the Doctoral Students Guild (Doktorandsektionen, DS). The DOMB's communications with doctoral students and all case files are confidential unless the doctoral student says otherwise. The DOMB can advise, suggest or encourage but in any situation the progression of the DOMB's actions is student led. The DOMB is neutral with respect to the rules but the DOMB's job description states that the DOMB is to act solely in the interests of the student. One main task is to support or represent doctoral students in difficult conversations and situations. The DOMB can mediate, intervene directly or act on behalf of a student when requested to do so by the student. More often the DOMB remains in the background.

Within the limits of the required confidentiality, this annual report presents a summary of the DOMB's activities between December 16, 2016 and December 15, 2017 (Year 2) along with comparative data from Year 1. The participation profile over Years 1 and 2 includes students from all departments at Chalmers. Approximately 50% of the students come from Sweden and within the European Union. Approximately 55% of the students are male with 45% being female. The DOMB currently has an on-going annual commitment to between 5% and 7% of the doctoral student population.

Student-related email, student-related preparation and student-related meetings accounted for 70% of the DOMB's time. There was a significant increase in DOMB hours in Year 2 with a time commitment of 35%, up from 25% in Year 1.

Cumulative data from Years 1 and 2 indicate that the primary concern of doctoral students in contact with the DOMB (41%) is that of supervision, i.e., its relationship to the workplace environment, its amount, its quality, who does it and how to go about changing it. The second dominant concern (15%) relates to burnout, return to work and the rehabilitation process. Several recommendations have been made to the Vice President (VP) for graduate education as well as DS, with respect to these issues.

The DOMB attended a number of events and workshops in Year 2. A presentation entitled, "*Vedergällning mot doktorander och eventuellt mot DOMB*" was made at the national DOMB network meeting. The fear of retaliation (vedergällning) from the supervisor or the department if the DOMB's involvement becomes known, is a concern for many doctoral students. In Year 3, in order to better advise doctoral students, the DOMB will attend a basic union course for ombudsmen, i.e., "Facklig grundkurs för ombudsman och förtroendevalda".

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1. Contacting the DOMB

Doctoral students and Chalmers personnel are able to contact the DOMB by email, by mobile phone and in person at a drop-in time or by appointment. Contact information can be found on the Chalmers website^{1 2}. These link to the DS website³. The contact information on the DS website is updated as required including vacation alerts and short-notice changes.

The initial contact is often after hours by email to domb@dokt.chs.chalmers.se⁴. Email is normally acknowledged within a few hours followed by a more complete response within a 24-hour period⁵. Most doctoral students use their Chalmers email address but sometimes a private email address is used. Some students and most Chalmers personnel use the DOMB's Chalmers ID, moyra@chalmers.se. Occasionally, an issue can be resolved by a series of emails. More often a meeting is arranged.

A drop-in time is held on Wednesdays from 12:00 to 13:00 except during holiday periods. In Year 2, meetings were held in Emilia (Kårhuset) which has been pre-booked in the Aptus system⁶. The drop-in time was used more often in Year 2 than in Year 1. The DOMB is able to book additional slots as required in the group rooms.

¹ https://student.portal.chalmers.se/doctoralportal/handbok_sv/Doktorandsektionen/Sidor/default.aspx

² <http://www.chalmers.se/insidan/EN/education-research/doctoral-student/questions-answers>

³ <http://www.dokt.chs.chalmers.se/support-for-phd-students/#DOMB>

⁴ At the request of DS, incoming email is then forwarded to domb.chalmers@gmail.com. The email is then deleted from the chs server.

⁵ A vacation alert is used when slightly longer response times might be needed.

⁶ <http://aptus.chs.chalmers.se/AptusPortal>

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

2. DOMB meetings and corresponding actions

A standard meeting format and intake form have been developed. These have worked well and will be continued. The duration of the first meeting is usually 60 to 90 minutes. The student's concerns are noted and compared to a body of information including the Rules of Procedure, the Collective Agreement and some aspects of Swedish labour law. Possible options for a way forward are discussed.

A number of fairly standard actions arise from a meeting or from an exchange of emails. The student is reassured or has a plan to move forward including contacting the supervisor, division head or other personnel or referred elsewhere such as their trade union, health services or Trygghetsstiftelsen (TSN). Alternatively, with agreement from the student, the DOMB emails, calls or interacts in person with the head or vice head of the department or others at Chalmers, as requested. In these cases the DOMB represents the student or acts as a go-between, with or without the student present as preferred by student⁷.

Sometimes the DOMB elevates the concern, usually after a number of interactions, to the Equity coordinator or the VP in charge of graduate education. 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 doctoral student discuss, ahead of time, any restrictions on the information that may be relayed during these interactions.

For a large percentage of the doctoral students, no direct action is taken by the DOMB as the student fears retaliation or worsening of the issue if action is taken or if it is known that the DOMB is involved. In these cases, the DOMB remains in the background and the student remains in touch. This aspect is troubling and was the motivation for a presentation entitled, "*Vedergällning mot doktorander och eventuellt mot DOMB*" to the Swedish DOMB network meeting, in Luleå in September 2017.

In some departments an intervention by the DOMB by phone, email or in person is welcomed. In others, it is less so. In Year 2 the DOMB noted a number of occasions in which Chalmers personnel did not respond to emails sent from the DOMB's Chalmers ID even when a specific request was made and even after

⁷ Note the student is not usually present at a Discontinuation meeting. The DOMB is invited by the department in this case.

reminders. Unfortunately a number of doctoral students have experienced the same thing.

3. DOMB Statistics

Within the bounds of confidentiality, a number of general and specific statistics have been assembled for participation profile, work breakdown, the DOMB's time commitment and the dominant reasons for contacting the DOMB.

3.1 Participation profile

Doctoral students from all departments are represented in the DOMB's case files from Years 1 and 2. It should be noted that the profile is based only on doctoral students who have contacted the DOMB for assistance and excludes those who contacted the DOMB for other reasons, e.g., giving a presentation. In Year 2, the DOMB had, on average, just over one new case each week (52 weeks). This is an uptick from Year 1 which had less than 1 new case per week.

About 40% of the cases from Year 1 remain open in Year 2 and some remain very active. This means the DOMB has an on-going commitment to between 5 and 7% of the Chalmers population of about 1140 active PhD students⁸. As a point of comparison, the number of cases seen in Years 1 and 2 is approaching half the number of cases seen by the previous DOMB in his nearly 10 years as the DOMB.

Approximately 70% of doctoral students at Chalmers are male. The case records for the DOMB show that about 55% are male students and 45% are female students. Doctoral students from Sweden and within the European Union, represent about 55% of the cases. The remaining 45% have a wide international distribution⁹.

3.2 Work breakdown for December 16, 2015 to December 15, 2017

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). Figure 1 shows the distribution of hours for Years 1 and 2. Both years have a similar work breakdown in terms of the DOMB activities with student-related preparation, student-related email and student-related meetings amounting to about 70% of the work in both years. Figure 1 also shows that the total number of DOMB hours in Year 2 was 589, amounting to a 35% time commitment in Year 2¹⁰. This is a

⁸ On a percentage basis fewer industrial PhD students have made contact with the DOMB.

⁹ In some cases information on gender and origin is unknown (anonymous or not reported).

¹⁰ Based on 1700 working hours per year.

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substantial increase from the Year 1 commitment of 25%. During three-month period from September 16 to December 15, 2017, the time commitment was about 75%.

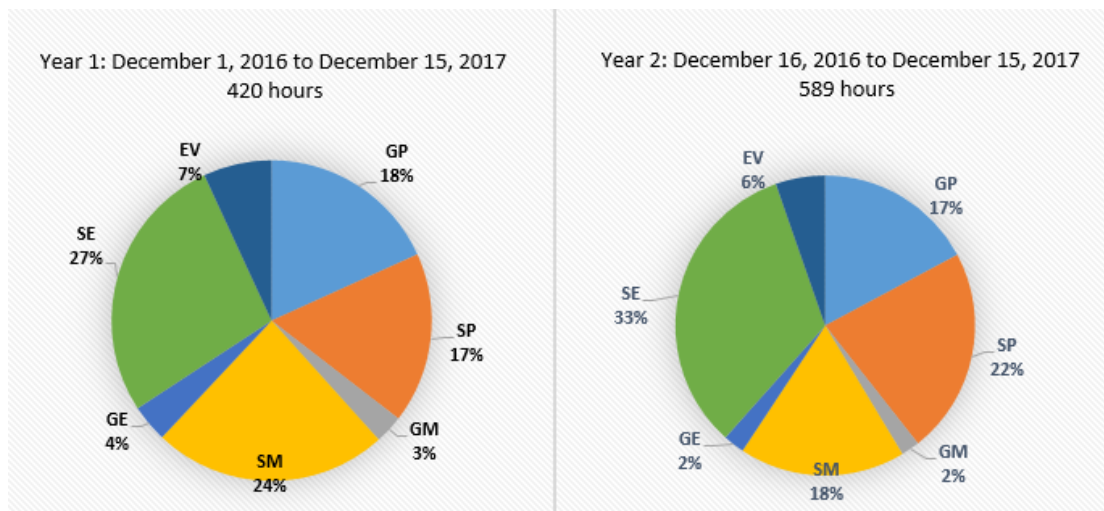


Figure 1. DOMB Work Breakdown in Year 1 (left) and Year 2 (right)

3.3 Reasons for contacting the DOMB

All students who reached out to the DOMB had issues that were important. Some students tried first to resolve the issue or issues on their own. While some issues are straight forward, many are 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 other support such as the other ombudsmen, the Equity officer, Feelgood and the doctoral student's trade union.

Concerns regularly expressed during Years 1 and 2 included:

- Am I (the student) really in the right place (should I stay, quit, change)
- Bullying, equity, gender or power issues
- Co-authorship (how much, too much, not enough)
- Contract extension (how, who decides)
- Collective Agreement (interpretation, förtroende/in trust hours)
- Departmental duties (how much, too much, not enough and a lack of consistency between divisions and across Chalmers)
- Discontinuation (after 1 or 3 years, procedure for, hinted threat of discontinuation)
- Feelgood (referral to and advice from, how many confidential visits)
- Independence as a researcher (when)

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- Individual study plan or ISP (annual follow-up, attitudes to, signed, not signed, fact or fiction)
- Industrial PhD arrangements (lack of consistency across Chalmers, uncertainty with respect to arrangements between Chalmers and the other party)
- Insurance (both for non-employed students and employed students)
- Intellectual property, ethics
- Non-employed students (scholarships, double-degree, affiliated, visiting, access to Feelgood)
- Number of papers (how many required, what types, role of examiner)
- Performance appraisal (should be with a different person than supervisor)
- Personal issues (family, friends, self, self-confidence)
- Projects (fine red thread, too many, changing after Licentiate, challenges with limited ability to publish project material)
- Resigning (how to do it, feeling pushed to resign after Licentiate)
- Return to work after illness (high demands, need for detailed rehabilitation plan)
- Rules of Procedure (interpretation, what applies)
- Scholarship, affiliated students and visiting PhD
- Supervision (comparison to ISP, how much, too much, too little, how to change supervisor, workplace environment as a function of the supervisor(s))
- Vacation pay (payout at end of contract, inconsistent approach to this across Chalmers)
- Workplace environment (feeling pressure, problems within division or department, sense of exclusion, roles/overlapping roles of one or more of the supervisor, examiner and line manager)

With consolidation of data from Years 1 and 2, sufficient confidentiality can be assured to allow a breakdown of the concerns of the doctoral students in terms of the principal reason for contacting the DOMB. It should be remembered that most students have multiple reasons for contact, e.g., an individual reporting burnout may have supervision issues and vice versa.

Figure 2 shows that the dominant first concern (41%) relates to supervision, e.g., its relationship to the workplace environment, its amount, its quality and how to go about changing it. The second dominant concern (15%) relates to burnout, return to work and the rehabilitation process. The third area of concern (12%) includes problems with payout of unused vacation days and other concerns relating to the collective agreement and individual contracts. A number of additional areas of concern are included.

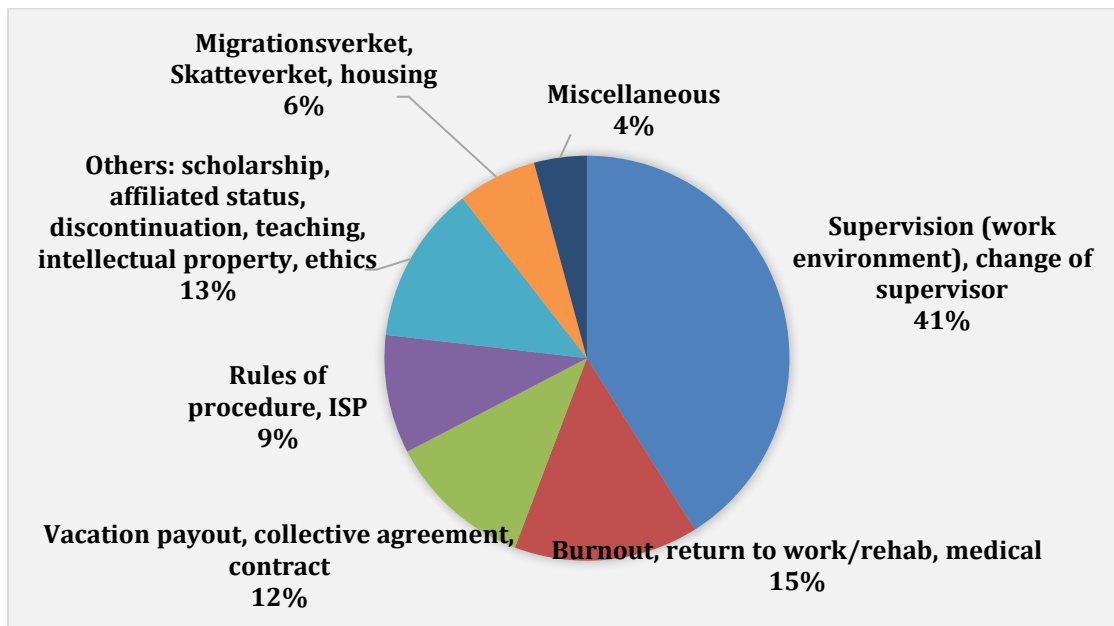


Figure 2. Distribution of Principal Concern in Years 1 and 2

Recommendations have been made to the VP responsible for graduate education and to DS with respect to some of the more challenging problems and cases. In particular, in Year 2, attention was drawn to the requirements for initiating and achieving a change in supervisor and the inconsistent approach across Chalmers to vacation payout at the end of the PhD contract.

A number of cases in Years 1 and 2 required specific knowledge of labour law and the corresponding need to seek advice from other ombudsmen. The DOMB will receive support from DS to attend a basic union course for ombudsmen, i.e., "Facklig grundkurs för ombudsman och förtroendevalda"¹¹ in April 2018. The knowledge gained will be particularly relevant to those doctoral students who have not joined a trade union and find themselves in a situation in which advice or support from a trade union would be helpful. In addition, it will allow the DOMB to more quickly advise a doctoral student to seek advice from the relevant trade union if the student is already a member.

4. Events, meetings and presentations

Preparation for, and participation in, workshops, formal meetings and events accounted for about 7% of the DOMB's time (Figure 1). Through these the DOMB is able to participate in, contribute to and learn from, activities within Chalmers and nationally and to raise the visibility of the DOMB to the doctoral student population and others. The seven events for Year 2 are listed below.

¹¹ (<http://ifju.se/course/facklig-grundkurs-for-ombudsman-och-fortroendevalda>) Kursen är helt inriktad på frågeställningar relevanta för ombudsmän och förtroendevalda som företrädare medlemmar och ger rådgivning.

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- April 25th - **The DOMB and a Perspective of the PhD Work Environment**, presented to the Lederskaputvecklings Grupp, Chalmers
- May 3rd - **PhD Introduction Day**, Chalmers
- April 28th – **Interview** by Per-Olof Eliasson, Universitets Läraren concerning the now-resolved case of an underpaid scholarship student¹², Gothenburg
- October 24th - **Workshop on Research Misconduct**, Chalmers
- October 26th - **Workshop on the DAM-Projekt** (Doktorandsarbetsmiljö)
- September 26 & 27th - **Doktorandombudsträff**, Luleå Technical University, including the presentation of "*Vedergällning mot doktorander och eventuellt mot DOMB*", Luleå Technical University, Luleå.
- November 8th, **PhD Introduction Day**, Chalmers

5. Remarks

- There was a substantial increase in the number of DOMB hours in Year 2, representing a 35% time commitment.
- In both Years 1 and 2, approximately 70% of the DOMB's time was connected to student-related preparation, student-related meetings and student-related email.
- Issues related to supervision and burnout together accounted for 56% of the principal reasons for contacting the DOMB.
- The DOMB has an on-going annual commitment to between 5% and 7% of the doctoral student population.
- A significant number of doctoral students are concerned about retaliation from their supervisor or department if the DOMB intervenes in the situation or is even known to have been consulted. This concern was the basis of a presentation, "*Vedergällning mot doktorander och eventuellt mot DOMB*", national DOMB Network Meeting, at Luleå Technical University, in September 2017.
- Recommendations have been made to the VP and to DS with respect to the approach to changing supervisor as well as inconsistencies in vacation payout at the end of the PhD contract.
- The DOMB will attend a basic union course for ombudsmen, i.e., "Facklig grundkurs för ombudsman och förtroendevalda" in 2018.



Moyra McDill, Chalmers Doktorandombud (DOMB), December 21, 2017

¹² Per-Olof Eliasson, "*Underbetald doktorand fick rätt mot Chalmers Doktoranden Xin Luo fick under doktorandtiden på Chalmers för låg ersättning. Efter disputationen krävde och fick han 180 000 kronor retroaktivt*", Universitets Läraren, May 11, 2017 .