

Letter re: upcoming salary negotiations for doctoral students at Stockholm University

Dear union representatives,

We at Stockholm University's central doctoral council (centrala doktorandrådet; CDR) are writing to relay the concerns of our faculty councils regarding doctoral wages. PhD students at Stockholm University (SU) receive some of the lowest salaries among PhD students in all of Sweden, and the upcoming salary negotiations give us an opportunity to share our concerns as a student body.

The pay ladders at comparable institutions (e.g., Gothenburg University [GU], Uppsala University [UU]) demonstrate that SU salaries are insufficient throughout a doctoral student's career (see table below). The current salary differences result in SU PhD students making between 3.5-9.2% less than their UU counterparts and 4.6-6% less than GU PhD students – and that's before considering cost-of-living differences between cities. Per price aggregation site numbeo¹, PhD students at GU can expect to pay 26.3% less than SU students for a rental apartment in the city center. At Mittuniversitet, where starting doctoral salaries are 6.67% higher than at SU, rental costs are 68% lower than in Stockholm, local transport costs 30% lower, and average costs for food staples 15% lower.

The current situation constitutes an unfair treatment and devaluation of our work as PhD students at SU and disrespects the principle of equal pay for equal work. Even if a pay equal to that of comparable institutions were given, the much higher cost of living in Stockholm would still result in the overall living standard of an SU PhD student at being lower than that of their colleagues at other Swedish universities.

According to representatives from our science faculty council (NFR), there have historically been two justifications for the low salaries at SU:

- 1) SU does not have a medical science faculty
- 2) People still want to work at SU despite low salaries

Regarding the first point, several other universities that lack a medical science faculty still have higher PhD student salaries than SU (SLU, Mittuniversitet and Linnéuniversitet). Furthermore, without integrating the monthly bonus for students who already have an MD, the base salary for PhD students at medical universities is still higher than at SU. This line of argumentation also undermines the efforts taken by the University leadership at SU to be seen as an integral part of the Stockholm Trio (SU, KI and KTH).

Concerning the second point, recent inflation has caused our already low salaries to be completely non-competitive. Since the last salary negotiations, consumer prices have risen by

¹ numbeo.com
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more than 17%². The cumulative inflation is expected to reach 20% in October 2023. During that same period, based on the last agreement, our PhD student salaries have increased by a meager 3-3.5% (depending on one's spot on the salary ladder). Natural scientists outside of academia saw their wages grow at an average of just under 4% last year³. We fear that these differences will cause us to lose an unprecedented number of researchers to other jobs in the industry or the service sectors.

With the above in mind, and as representatives of the PhD student body at SU, we now call upon the employment unions (ST, SACO, SULF, and others) involved in the upcoming salary negotiations to take concerted action to

- 1) *Tackle the systemic devaluation and underpayment of SU's PhD students by raising salary levels to at least the average salary levels at comparable institutions*
- 2) *Install an appropriate compensation for vastly increased costs of living due to recent inflation. Considering the real-world differences between Stockholm and other cities in prices for accommodation, food, and transport, this compensation needs to be significant.*

We at CDR are also open to an in-person meeting to discuss these issues further and to further develop our relationship with the employment unions representing our members. Please let us know if this is something that would be of interest to you.

With kind regards,

**The Board of CDR
Stockholm University**

Kanwal Tariq
Chair of CDR
Member of SULF

Alexandre Adler
Vice chair of CDR
Member of SULF

Hanna Dort
Representative from the Science Faculty Council
Member of SULF & Naturvetarna

² SCB, Konsumentprisindex

³ Naturvetare krossar löneligan, Dagens Industri, 2023-01-25
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	SU	Södertörns Högskola	KI (utan MD bonus)	UU	GU	SLU	Linnaeus (From 1/2023)	Umeå	Mitt- universitetet	KTH
Starting salary	28 000	28 200	28 500	29 000	29 300	29 400	29 450	29 000	30 000	30 800
50% salary ladder	29 900	30 100	31 200	31 700	31 300	31 400	31 550	32 600	32 500	33 800
80% salary ladder	31 400	31 800	75%:31 700	34 300	33 300	75%:32 900	33 200	33 600	75%: 34200	35 100
100% salary ladder			>33 200		negotiable	34 400				

Table 1: Doctoral student salaries at select Swedish universities in late 2022, ranked by starting salary. Universities located in Stockholm are highlighted in blue.