

Fair salaries for doctoral students at Karolinska Institutet

Ahead of this year's salary negotiations, the Doctoral Students' Association (DSA) asks Karolinska Institutet (KI) to make doctoral salaries a priority. KI pays its doctoral students less than comparable Swedish universities, and KI's own external review has asked it to reconsider salary levels. Our survey last year showed that doctoral students share this concern [8]. As their elected representatives, we will continue to advocate for fair salaries, and we ask KI to:

- 1. Raise all doctoral salary ladders** from 2026-10-01 by at least 1,200 SEK/month on every step. This is no less than KI's own increase on the starting step last year, and more than the 1,000 SEK already agreed at Uppsala and Umeå for the same date [3, 4, 7].
- 2. Give the ladder for doctoral students without a medical or dental degree ("first ladder") a larger increase: at least 2,000 SEK/month on every step**, bringing the starting salary to 34,100 SEK (the level Umeå University pays from 2026-10-01).
- 3. Agree a binding plan for 2027 to steepen the first ladder's progression**, so that the final step reaches the level of KTH, Uppsala and Umeå (currently 37,500–38,500 SEK, and rising).

1. KI pays less than comparable universities

Salary ladders for doctoral students without a medical degree, valid from 2025-10-01 (SEK per month, full-time):

University	Start	Final step	Rise over PhD	Total, 4 years*	KI shortfall
Karolinska Institutet [1]	32,100	34,700	+2,600	1,604,400	–
KTH Royal Inst. of Technology [2]	33,700	38,500	+4,800	1,723,200	–118,800
Umeå University (medical faculty) [4]	33,100	38,100	+5,000	1,703,100	–98,700
Uppsala University (medical faculty) [3]	33,000	37,500	+4,500	1,661,600	–57,200

*Full-time, 48 months, with steps reached at the normal times stated in each agreement (Uppsala: 80% after 38 months; Umeå: 195 credits ≈ month 40). From 2026-10-01, KTH moves to a time-based progression under a new local agreement; new amounts are not yet published.

Over a four-year PhD, a KI doctoral student earns 57,000–119,000 SEK less than a peer at Uppsala, Umeå or KTH.

- The gap is largest at the end.** KI's ladder rises by only 2,600 SEK over the whole PhD, against 4,500–5,000 SEK elsewhere. In their final year, KI doctoral students earn **2,800–3,800 SEK less per month**.
- KI's ladder is getting flatter every year.** Since 2022, the later steps have received smaller increases than the starting step (last year +1,200 SEK at the start but only +1,000 SEK on the final step). The total rise over a PhD has fallen from 3,200 SEK in 2022 to 2,600 SEK in 2025 [7]. This is why the gap with other universities is widest in the final year.

- **The gap is about to grow.** Uppsala and Umeå have already agreed ladders from 2026-10-01 that start at 34,000 and 34,100 SEK and end at 38,500 and 39,200 SEK [3, 4]. A standard increase at KI would leave KI last again.
- The gap is not limited to the first ladder: Umeå's single ladder for all doctoral students ends at 38,100 SEK, above the final step of KI's ladder for doctoral students **with** a medical degree (37,400 SEK) [1, 4].

2. KI's external review and the European picture

The external review panel's report, *An external review of Karolinska Institutet's doctoral education 2025*, made salaries one of its formal recommendations [5]:

"Reconsider doctoral student salary levels. Competitive and adequate salary levels are essential for ensuring a sustainable and healthy work environment for doctoral students and should be recognised as a critical component of high-quality doctoral education. The current salaries at KI are comparatively low relative to other medical faculties in Sweden, which risks undermining both the attractiveness of the doctoral programmes and causes irritation amongst doctoral students."

KI competes for doctoral candidates internationally, and Eurodoc's 2024–2025 review of doctoral remuneration [6] shows how far behind Sweden is. KI's first-ladder starting salary (385,200 SEK a year, about €34,250 at the report's exchange rate) is below the gross starting salary of doctoral candidates in **Denmark (€58,014), Germany (€55,557), Belgium (€50,800), Norway (€49,728), Switzerland (€49,675), Austria (€44,580) and Luxembourg (€44,400)**. Danish doctoral candidates start on roughly 69% more. These are gross figures not adjusted for tax or living costs, but they show the market KI recruits in.

3. Why the first ladder needs the larger increase

- **It is furthest behind.** Several Swedish universities, including KTH and Umeå, pay all doctoral students on one ladder. Measured against those ladders, KI's first ladder is 1,000–1,600 SEK lower at the start and 3,400–3,800 SEK lower at the end.
- **It covers the doctoral students KI recruits most widely:** everyone without a medical or dental degree, including biomedical scientists, engineers, nurses, public-health researchers and many international recruits. Its starting salary is what decides whether KI is competitive for these candidates.
- **Same doctorate, same work.** All KI doctoral students meet the same requirements for the same degree, and all live with Stockholm's housing and cost of living. The premium for a medical degree recognises a prior qualification. It should not be paid for by holding the first ladder down.
- **More clinical PhD students should come from more clinical positions, not lower pay for everyone else.**

If KI wants more clinical doctoral students and to improve its clinical research, it should hire more of them and protect their research time, as the review recommends [5]. **It should not keep the salaries of non-medical doctoral students considerably lower.**

The review warns that "the only concern that might become a serious threat for KI is the increasing number of doctoral students" with full-time clinical appointments and no guaranteed research time. It also found that theses by doctoral students employed full-time by KI more often led to high-

impact publications, and it asks KI to protect the balance between the two types of doctorates [5]. A low first ladder works against that balance.

Conclusion

KI's doctoral education is internationally recognised, but its salaries are not competitive. KI's external review and European reviews have said so, and comparable universities have already set higher ladders for 2026. We ask the unions to seek a general increase of at least 1,200 SEK/month, a first-ladder increase of at least 2,000 SEK/month, and a binding 2027 plan to bring the first ladder's progression in line with KTH, Uppsala and Umeå.

On behalf of,
The Doctoral Students' Association

Sources

- [1] Karolinska Institutet, Doctoral student salary ladder valid from 1 October 2025. staff.ki.se/media/568/download
- [2] KTH, Doktorandstegen (amounts from 2025-10-01). intra.kth.se/anstallning/anstallningsvillkor/lon/doktorandstegen-1.572915
- [3] Uppsala University, Lokalt kollektivavtal om löner för doktorander 2025-10-01 samt 2026-10-01 (UFV-PA 2025/3244, Bilaga 1). uu.se
- [4] Umeå University, Doktorandavtal 2025-10-01 – 2026-10-01. umu.se (lokala kollektivavtal)
- [5] The Review Panel's Report: An external review of Karolinska Institutet's doctoral education 2025, pp. 6, 8–9. medarbetare.ki.se/media/172367/download
- [6] Eurodoc, Remuneration of Doctoral Candidates across Europe 2024–2025, section 7. eurodoc.net. Euro amounts are gross annual starting remuneration; SEK converted at the report's rate (Wise, 13 Sept 2026).
- [7] Karolinska Institutet doctoral salary ladders 2022–2025 (valid from 1 October each year), compiled by the DSA from KI's published ladders.
- [8] <https://www.phdsa.se/ki-phd-job-and-salary-satisfaction-survey-2025/>

Additional info:

Comparison with other universities

[KTH](#): Total: 1 723 200 SEK

Conditions	Salary (from 2025-10-01)
Month 1-12	33 700 kr
Month 13-24	34 700 kr
Month 25-36	36 700 kr
Month from 37	38 500 kr

[Uppsala University](#): Total first ladder: 1 661 600 SEK

Conditions (from 2025-10-01)	Ladder for Doctoral Student*	Ladder for Doctoral Student with medical degree*	Ladder for Doctoral Student with medical license to practice*
Starting salary	33 000 kr	37 400 kr	39 400 kr
Year 2	33 500 kr	37 900 kr	39 900 kr
Year 3	34 400 kr	38 800 kr	40 800 kr
50%	34 900 kr	39 300 kr	41 300 kr
80%	37 500 kr	41 900 kr	43 900 kr

[KI:](#) Total first ladder: 1 604 400 SEK

Conditions (from 2025-10-01)	Without medical degree	With medical degree/dental degree2	Medical doctor with Swedish license to practice/ Dentist with Swedish license to practice and 2 years of practice after medical school
Month 1-12	32 100 SEK	34 800 SEK	37 200 SEK
Month 13-24	32 600 SEK	35 300 SEK	37 700 SEK
Month 25-36	34 300 SEK	37 000 SEK	39 400 SEK
Month from 37	34 700 SEK	37 400 SEK	39 800 SEK

[Umeå University:](#) Total: 1 703 100 SEK

Conditions	Salary (from 2025-10-01)
Step 1	33 100 kr
Step 2	34 000 kr
Step 3	37 000 kr
Step 4	38 100 kr

[Stockholm University:](#) Total: 1 574 400 SEK

Conditions	Salary (from 2025-10-01)
Starting salary	31 600 kr
When 50% of the requirements for the doctoral degree has been achieved	33 300 kr
When 80% of the requirements for the doctoral degree has been achieved	34 700 kr