Salary revision 2026

Fair salaries for doctoral students at Karolinska Institutet

Ahead of this year's salary negotiations, the Doctoral Students' Association (DSA) asks the trade unions to make doctoral salaries a priority. KI has the lowest starting salary, final step and four-year total of the six Swedish medical faculties we compared: over a four-year PhD, a non-medical KI doctoral student earns up to 197,000 SEK less than at Gothenburg, Lund, Umeå, Uppsala or Linköping [1, 3, 4, 9–11]. KI's own external review has concluded that "the current salaries at KI are comparatively low relative to other medical faculties in Sweden" [5]. Our survey last year showed that doctoral students share this concern [8]. As their elected representatives, we ask the unions to seek the following from KI:

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).

Note: We have done our best to check every figure against its source, but errors may remain. If you spot one, please let us know and we will correct it.

1. KI pays less than comparable universities

Medical faculties – 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**	**–**
University of Gothenburg (Sahlgrenska) [9]	34,300	43,250	+8,950	1,801,000	–196,600
Lund University (medical faculty) [10]	34,200	37,700	+3,500	1,737,600	–133,200
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
Linköping University (medical faculty) [11]	32,700	34,800	+2,100	1,615,500	–11,100

*Full-time, 48 months, with steps reached at the normal times stated in each agreement (Uppsala and Gothenburg: 80% after 38 months; Umeå: 195 credits ≈ month 40; Lund: research school completed after month 12 and half-time review at month 24; Linköping: 30% after month 14 and 60% after month 29).

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Over a four-year PhD, a non-medical KI doctoral student earns **up to 197,000 SEK** less than at the other medical faculties. KI has the lowest starting salary, final step and four-year total of all six.

- **The gap is largest at the end.** KI's ladder rises by only 2,600 SEK over the whole PhD, against 3,500–8,950 SEK at Gothenburg, Lund, Umeå and Uppsala. In their final year, KI non medical doctoral students earn **2,800–8,550 SEK less per month than at these four**.
- **The gap is growing.** KI's ladder gets flatter every year: the total rise over a PhD fell from 3,200 SEK in 2022 to 2,600 SEK in 2025 [7]. Meanwhile, 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. Over a four-year PhD, a doctoral student with a medical degree earns 139,000–304,000 SEK less at KI than at Uppsala, Lund or Gothenburg. 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, 3, 4, 9, 10].

Stockholm universities – KI recruits in the same labour and housing market as KTH and Stockholm University (SEK per month, full-time, from 2025-10-01):

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
Stockholm University [12]	31,600	34,700	+3,100	1,571,600	+32,800

*Full-time, 48 months (Stockholm University: 50% after 24 months and 80% after 38 months). KTH and Stockholm University have one ladder for all doctoral students. From 2026-10-01, KTH moves to a time-based progression under a new local agreement; new amounts are not yet published.

- **KTH pays more at every step:** 1,600 SEK more at the start, 3,800 SEK more at the end and 118,800 SEK more over a four-year PhD [2] and **KI barely keeps pace with Stockholm University.**

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 also lags behind the international market it recruits from. Its first-ladder starting salary (about €34,250 a year) is below the gross starting salary of doctoral candidates in **Denmark (€58,014), Belgium (€50,800), Norway (€49,728), Austria (€44,580) and Luxembourg (€44,400)**, according to Eurodoc's 2024–2025 review (gross figures, not adjusted for tax or living costs) [6].

3. Why the first ladder needs the larger increase

- **It is furthest behind the universities with a single ladder.** 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, 3,400–3,800 SEK lower at the end and lower over a full PhD. KI's medical-degree ladder, by contrast, already matches or exceeds them over four years (1,734,000 SEK, against 1,723,200 at KTH and 1,703,100 at Umeå) [1, 2, 4].
- **Stockholm's living costs hit the first ladder hardest.** New doctoral students cannot get a first-hand rental: the average queue time in the City of Stockholm was 12.4 years in 2025 [13]. Student and KI housing are no quick alternative: at SSSB a corridor room takes several months of queue days and an apartment can take years [15], while KI Housing does not guarantee accommodation and limits contracts to one year, with at most nine months' extension [16]. Many therefore rent second-hand: at the median rent of about 300 SEK per m² [14], a 30 m² one-room flat costs around 9,000 SEK a month, more than a quarter of the first-ladder starting salary before tax. Prices have also risen sharply: consumer prices in September 2026 were about 26% higher than the 2020 average, and between 2022 and 2025 the final step of KI's first ladder rose by 9.5%, barely more than prices (9.1%) [7, 17]. Rent and prices are the same whatever degree a doctoral student holds, so they take the largest share of the lowest salary. This is why we consider the first ladder the most in need of an increase.
- **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

DSA

Use of AI: This report was prepared by the Doctoral Students' Association with the assistance of Claude (Anthropic), which was used for drafting, editing and checking calculations. The arguments, proposals and final content were decided and verified by the DSA.

Sources

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[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
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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)**
Starting salary	33 100 kr
Year 2 or at least 60 credits	34 000 kr
Year 3 or at least 120 credits	37 000 kr
At least 195 credits or retroactive	38 100 kr

University of Gothenburg (Sahlgrenska Academy): Total first ladder: 1 801 000 SEK

Conditions (from 2025-10-01)	**Doctoral student in basic medical science**	**With medical/dental degree**	**Licensed physician/dentist**
Starting salary	34 300 kr	40 700 kr	44 800 kr
50% of requirements	38 950 kr	42 500 kr	46 000 kr
80% of requirements	43 250 kr	46 600 kr	49 800 kr
100% / doctoral degree	43 250 kr	46 600 kr	49 800 kr

Other doctoral students at Sahlgrenska Academy: 33 000 / 37 600 / 39 300 / 39 300 kr. Total assumes 50% at month 24 and 80% at month 38.

Lund University (Faculty of Medicine): Total first ladder: 1 737 600 SEK

Conditions (from 2025-10-01)	**Doctoral student**	**With medical degree**

Lowest starting salary	34 200 kr	37 500 kr
After completed research school in medical science	35 200 kr	38 500 kr
After half-time review	37 700 kr	41 000 kr

Applies to doctoral students who started on or after 1 August 2023. Licensed physicians start at a minimum of 42 300 kr and specialists at 46 200 kr. Total assumes research school completed after month 12 and half-time review at month 24.