

# DOMB CASE REPORT 2020/21

Doctoral student grievances at Lund University

The Doctoral Student Ombudsman  
Lund's Doctoral Student Union (LDK)



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**Case Report 2020/21 • Ärenderapport 2020/21**

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## SUMMARY

There were 101 new DOMB cases during the academic year of 2020/2021. While the number of cases almost doubled since last year, the average influx of cases was only slightly higher, as last year's data was collected over a span of seven months instead of twelve. Compared to last year, Administration & information is still the largest case category, and Examination, Admission and Disciplinary measures remain the smallest ones. The categories Equality & work environment and Employment significantly increased in size since last year, but otherwise the proportions between the categories were similar to last year's. The Faculty of Engineering had the largest number of cases in total, and the Faculty of Law the lowest. Seen to the average number of cases per 100 doctoral students, the Faculty of Social Sciences had the highest average of cases, and the Faculty of Medicine the lowest.

There were 60 cases registered as female, 35 as male and 6 cases that were not assigned with a gender. Compared to Ladok data on the general proportions between female and male doctoral students, this means that female doctoral students are still overrepresented in the group that chooses to contact the DOMB. There were 44 cases that were categorized as international, 55 as national and two that were unassigned. Compared to statistics from the Swedish Higher Education Authority on the proportion of doctoral students of Swedish origin and foreign origin respectively at Lund University, it seems like international doctoral students are still somewhat overrepresented in the group that contacts the DOMB.

Some themes from this year's cases are discussed under section 2.2. In the Access to resources category, it is discussed how vulnerable doctoral students are in relation to their supervisor, and how many experience difficulties when wanting to exercise their right to change supervisor. It is also discussed how critical it is that the right admission requirements are in place when recruiting new doctoral students, to make sure that they have the previous knowledge necessary to be able to succeed with their doctoral education. Under Administration & information it is discussed how the administration of individual study plans often seems to be lacking when it comes to doctoral students who were admitted long ago, which can result in difficult situations for the doctoral students. Under Equality & work environment, it is discussed how doctoral students often are hesitant to report cases of victimization or harassment in fear that it will hurt their future career prospects. To skip the introduction and go directly to this year's statistics and discussion, go to page 10.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

As the Doctoral Student Ombudsman (hereafter “the DOMB”), I have been given the task to provide support and advice to doctoral students at Lund University (Hereafter “LU”) who suspect that their educational rights might have been violated. Anonymized data is gathered from the cases that are handled, to report on the problems that doctoral students at LU face. This report presents the data gathered during the academic year of 20/21, based on cases initiated between the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2020 and the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. The purpose is to shed light on recurring problems, to provide a basis for the student unions’ and the university’s continued work to improve third-cycle education at LU.

## 1.1 DEFINITIONS

### 1.1.1 Case

For the purposes of this report, a “case” is defined as when one or more doctoral students run into a problem relating to third cycle studies at LU, and they contact the DOMB because they are in need of some form of help or support in order to handle the problem.<sup>1</sup> It could be, for example, that a doctoral student suspects that the university is not fulfilling its obligations towards them, that they are looking for information about their rights, or that they are feeling harassed, discriminated or victimized. I can help the doctoral student position their problem in the relevant legal framework, and from there we can reason together about an appropriate course of action. If another actor might be a more appropriate support for the doctoral student concerning the issue at hand they are redirected there, e.g., to the labor union or the occupational health services.

In some cases, the issue might be resolved solely through communication between me and the doctoral student. In other cases, it is necessary to involve more actors. In those cases, it is the role of the DOMB to support the doctoral student with legal advice, to facilitate communication with the university, and to ensure that the university abides by the rule of law. The DOMB may also help to appeal university decisions that are possible to appeal, and to help doctoral students to place formal complaints to the National Authority on Higher Education (*Universitetskanslerämbetet*, UKÄ) when they wish to do so. As the DOMB, I have an advisory function, and ultimately it is up to the doctoral student to choose how to approach their problem.

If a doctoral student I already have been in contact during the year with comes back after some time with a different problem, it is registered as a new case. Some cases that were opened during the academic year of 2019/20 have been ongoing into this academic year as well. They have not been registered as new cases as long as they concern the same problem.

The data does not differentiate between cases where doctoral students request information about their rights and cases where doctoral students request practical help in ongoing conflicts or in formal processes, nor does it differentiate between cases depending on whether any rules have objectively been violated. In situations where doctoral students are

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<sup>1</sup> This definition has been made to correspond with the one used by the LUS Studentombud, see Klingspor, Emma, *Studentombudets ärenderapport läsåret 2020/2021*, p. 3.

asking for information about their rights, it might sometimes imply that there is an ongoing conflict, but it is not always obvious. Also, if the doctoral student claims that the university has failed to fulfil its obligations, there is no guarantee that they are right. Cases may be resolved without people having reached consensus about what is objectively right, and without any authority deciding what is right. When a person chooses to turn to the DOMB with a question, that might indicate that they had difficulties finding the answer to the question in another way, which at least suggests that there is a need for more accessible information on the rules concerning a certain topic.

### **1.1.2 Doctoral student**

Most of the cases involve doctoral students currently admitted to LU. Cases might also concern persons who are interested in pursuing doctoral education at LU, persons who have applied for doctoral studies at LU, but have not yet been admitted, persons who have not been formally admitted but still follows the studies as if they were, and persons who are no longer doctoral students but have some problem that relates to the fact that they formerly have been doctoral students at LU. For the purposes of this report, the term “doctoral student” is used to describe all of the above. Furthermore, the definition includes everyone who are pursuing third-cycle studies at LU, including persons who have been admitted to do only a licentiate degree.

### **1.1.3 Gender and nationality**

The cases have been categorized according to gender and nationality. If a certain problem is shown to be more frequently occurring for one particular group of doctoral students, measures can be targeted to benefit that particular group.

The categorization as “national” and “international” has been based on whether the contact with the doctoral student has been in Swedish or English. The gender categorization has been based on my perception of the doctoral students’ gender expression or if their name is typically a men’s or women’s name. In a few cases no categorization has been made, either because the case concerned a group of doctoral students, or because I have not been able to draw any clear conclusion based on the doctoral student’s name or how they are presenting, especially if the only communication has been via email.

Categorizing a person’s gender this way feels outdated, as it is based on assuming people’s gender based on names and presentation. Categorizing a person as “national” or “international” based on their language of preference is also arguably somewhat crude. These methods of categorization are used for practical reasons. The new case handling system<sup>2</sup> which will be tested during the coming year of 2021-2022 might provide doctoral students’ an opportunity to define these things for themselves if we would start using a contact form that doctoral students would get to fill out when contacting the DOMB, but for this report the old way of categorizing is still used.

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<sup>2</sup> Read more about the new case handling system under section 3.1.

## 1.2 LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that the cases are too few and the definitions too vague to give any solid statistical analyses about what problems doctoral students in general at Lund University face. The report accounts for quantitative data based on the cases, and also provides my subjective reflections on problems I have noted when working with the cases.

## 1.3 CASE CATEGORIZATION

The cases have been categorized into eight categories: Access to resources, Administration and information, Admission, Disciplinary measures, Employment, Equality and work environment, Examination, and Other. The categories are made to correspond with the categories used by the LUS Studentombud and the ones that were used by the previous DOMB, to enable comparisons. Generally, it can also be said that each case category corresponds to certain sections of the law and policies. Last year, the categories “Employment”, and “Other” were added<sup>3</sup>, which is why those categories do not exist in the data from previous years that is used in the comparisons over time. Group complaints are filed as one single case. Several cases involve complex problems that might fit into more than one category. Those cases have been categorized based on which issue seemed most central to the complainant(s).

### Access to resources

According to chapter 7 section 34 of the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance<sup>4</sup> (hereafter “HEO”), the university may not admit a larger number of doctoral students than the number that can be offered supervision and “otherwise acceptable conditions for study”, and whose studies are funded. The scope of the right to supervision and otherwise acceptable conditions for study is specified in section 8 of *Regulations for doctoral education at Lund University*<sup>5</sup>.

This case category includes cases that call into question if the doctoral students are being offered sufficient supervision (either when it comes to scope or quality), or sufficient conditions for study in some other sense. It includes cases where there is a problem with funding, and cases where doctoral students are denied their right to change supervisor according to chapter 6, section 28 of the HEO. Finally, it also includes cases that concern withdrawal and restoration of doctoral students’ resources in accordance with chapter 6 section 30-31 of the HEO.

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<sup>3</sup> For further motivation, see Rantzer, Malin, *DOMB Case Report, 2019/20*, p. 5, available here:

<[https://de4232c2-eec3-4a8d-9e5e-bcb471f290ef.filesusr.com/ugd/0b0fe1\\_166b49361e2748b9af4c0e6d633948c1.pdf](https://de4232c2-eec3-4a8d-9e5e-bcb471f290ef.filesusr.com/ugd/0b0fe1_166b49361e2748b9af4c0e6d633948c1.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> *Högskoleförordningen* (1993:100), a non-official translation is available here:

<<https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Higher-Education-Ordinance/>>.

<sup>5</sup> STYR 2018/652.

## Administration and information

The legal framework for this category is found in the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act<sup>6</sup>, the Higher Education Act<sup>7</sup> (hereafter “HEA”) and the HEO. As a governmental body, Lund University is obliged to follow the rule of law. This includes e.g. that equal cases should be treated equally, and that there should be predictability in the university’s decision making and actions. Also, decisions should be made by the individuals in the functions that have been given mandate to make that type of decisions. Policy documents need to comply with laws and regulations, and university officials on all levels need to take actions in compliance with both the legal framework and the university’s own policy documents. A public authority cannot make exceptions from its own policies, unless the public authority has reserved itself the right to do so in certain cases by a special rule in the policy document.<sup>8</sup>

This category includes e.g., situations where decisions on a department level contradict faculty policies. It can include situations where the rules concerning individual study plans have not been followed. It can include situations when doctoral students have been promised prolongation by e.g., their supervisor, who has later changed their mind. The category also includes questions about doctoral students’ rights related to a doctoral studentship employment, when the answers are primarily found in the laws of higher education and university regulations rather than in labor law and collective agreements. Finally, the category can also include cases concerning doctoral students’ intellectual property rights to their data or research projects.

## Admission

The rules for admission are based on chapter 7 of the Higher Education Ordinance. This category includes questions and problems relating to admission, including potential cases of so-called *skuggdoktorander* (“shadow doctoral students”), meaning situations where persons are pursuing third cycle studies without being formally admitted as doctoral students.

## Disciplinary measures

Students in general can be put through two types of disciplinary procedures:

- If a student cheats, harasses or disrupts, they can be brought before the university disciplinary board, in accordance with chapter 10 of the HEO.
- If there is a risk that a student might harm another person or cause substantial damage to property during the course of their studies and the student suffers from a mental disorder, substance abuse or has been found guilty of a serious crime, the Higher Education Expulsions Board (Högskolans Avskiljandenämnd, HAN) can decide if the student should be expelled.

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<sup>6</sup> Förvaltningslagen (2017:900).

<sup>7</sup> Högskolelagen (1992:1434), a non-official translation is available here: <<https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Swedish-Higher-Education-Act/>>.

<sup>8</sup> DS 1998:43 *Myndigheternas föreskrifter*, s. 54.



These rules apply for doctoral students as well as undergraduates. In addition to that, doctoral students can in their capacity as scientists be suspected of research misconduct or of other deviations from good research practice. Suspected research misconduct is to be reviewed by the National Board for Assessment of Research Misconduct<sup>9</sup> in Stockholm<sup>10</sup>, and other deviations from good research practice are reviewed by Deviations from Good Research Practice Review Board<sup>11</sup> in Lund.<sup>12</sup> This category includes cases that relate to either one of these types of procedures.

### **Employment**

This category consists of problems that have to do with the doctoral student's employment, when the answers are primarily found labor law and collective agreements rather than in the laws for higher education. Typically, these issues are handled by the labor unions, and if the person is a member, I try to redirect them there. However, if the doctoral students are not members of the labor union, I advise them on these issues as well.

### **Equality & work environment**

Issues concerning equality and work environment are generally regulated in the Work Environment Act<sup>13</sup> and the Discrimination Act<sup>14</sup>. Cases in this category might involve e.g., discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, unresolved conflicts that cause negative stress, or physical work environment problems.

### **Examination**

This category includes cases that concern either examination of courses taken within the doctoral education, or examination of the doctoral thesis and defense, regulated in chapter 6, sections 32-35 of the HEO. Rules set down in appendix 2 of the HEO, the "Qualifications ordinance"<sup>15</sup>, can also be relevant, as they state what the doctoral student needs to achieve in order to obtain a licentiate or doctoral degree. Cases in this category might include situations where there is disagreement on what assessment criteria should apply, or about whether the doctoral student fulfils the criteria, or situations where a doctoral student raises concerns about the fairness of a certain aspect of an examination.

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<sup>9</sup> *Nämnden för prövning av oredlighet i forskning.*

<sup>10</sup> *Lag om ansvar för god forskningssed och prövning av oredlighet i forskning* (2019:504), The Act on Responsibility for Good Research Practice.

<sup>11</sup> *Nämnden för utredning av avvikelser från god forskningssed.*

<sup>12</sup> *Guidelines for the processing of matters relating to suspected deviation from good research practice at Lund University* (STYR 2019/855).

<sup>13</sup> *Arbetsmiljölagen* (1977:1160), a non-official translation is available here:

<<https://www.government.se/government-policy/labour-law-and-work-environment/19771160-work-environment-act-arbetsmiljolagen/>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Diskrimineringslagen* (2008:567), a non-official translation is available here:

<<https://www.government.se/information-material/2015/09/discrimination-act-2008567/>>.

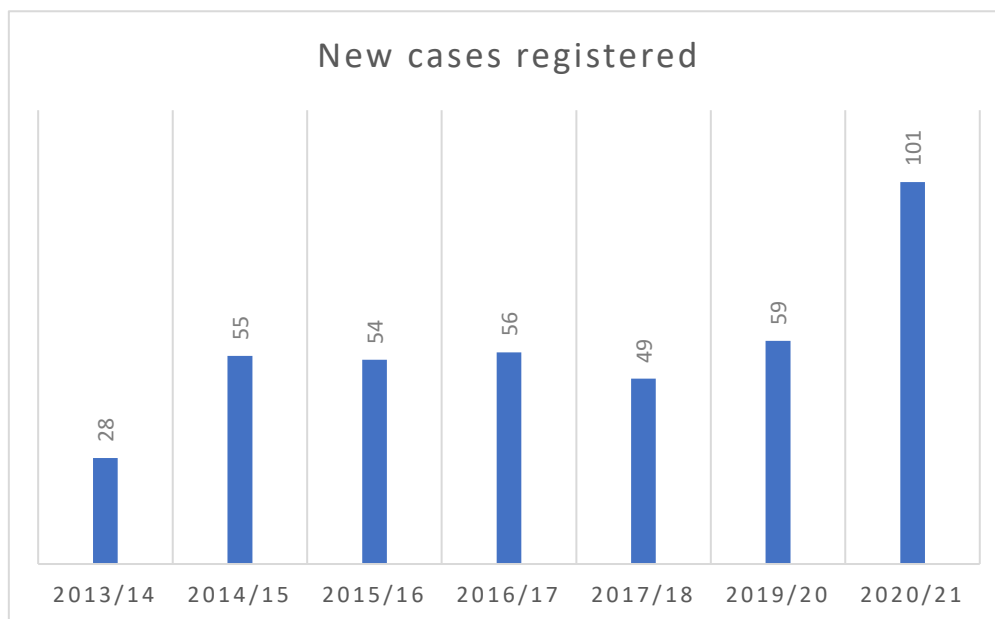
<sup>15</sup> *Examensordningen.*

**Other**

Occasionally, a doctoral student might ask the DOMB for advice on an issue that does not directly concern their relationship to the university as students or employees. Those cases fall within this category. The most common type of issues is doctoral students who seek information or advice about the Swedish system of social benefits. It can also be e.g., migration issues or questions about labor unions and unemployment benefits. For more complicated issues within these areas, the doctoral students are redirected to people with more expertise in those areas. If the questions are more general in nature, I try to assist them, for example if international doctoral students need help orienting themselves in the Swedish welfare system and state bureaucracy.

## 2 CASE STATISTICS

### 2.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW



This year, 101 new cases were registered. When looking at the data spanning over several years, there are a few things that should be taken into account. For the years up until 2017/18, there was another DOMB, whose definition of what qualified as a “case” was somewhat narrower than the one that has been used since 2019/20.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the academic year of 2018/19 is left out of the graphs. As the DOMB post was vacant for large parts of that year no data was passed on and no case report was written.

Since I have been responsible for the reporting for the last two years, the comparability in the data should be better in relation to last year than to the previous years. The data from the academic year of 2019/20 was gathered between the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 until the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, not for the whole year, as I did not start working until November. In other words, for 2019/20 there were 59 cases for 218 days. If we use that year’s average influx of new cases for a full year, it would correspond to 99 cases. Compared to this year’s 101 cases, there has not been a dramatic increase, even though it looks like that in the graph. All in all, we can conclude that the influx of new cases has not changed much since last year.

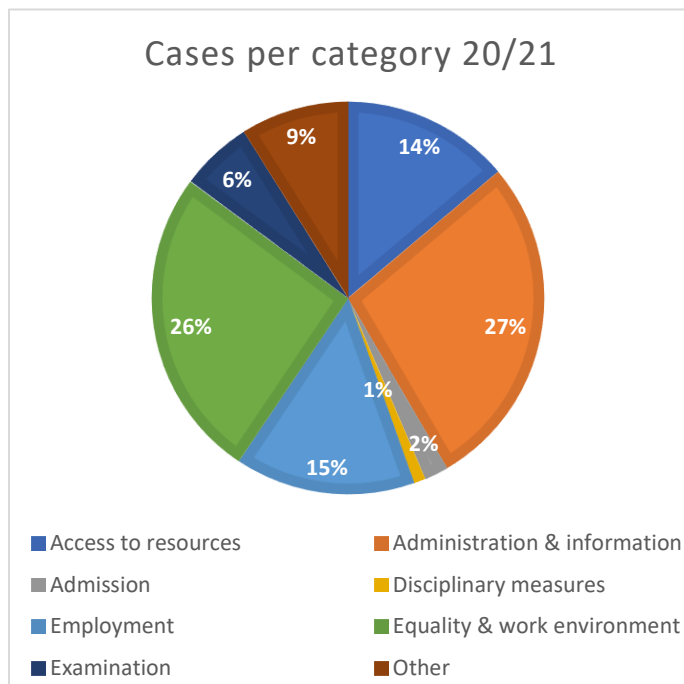
It is also clear that the difference from the years before I started is significant. While the number of complaints from doctoral students might have increased somewhat since 2018, it seems more reasonable to assume that the dramatic difference can be attributed to differences between my way of categorizing cases compared to the previous DOMB. Also, while the problems that I am contacted for has sometimes related to the Covid-19 pandemic since it started, the pandemic does not seem to have had a significant impact on how many doctoral students contact the DOMB.

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion on this, see last year’s report: Rantzer, pp. 3-4.

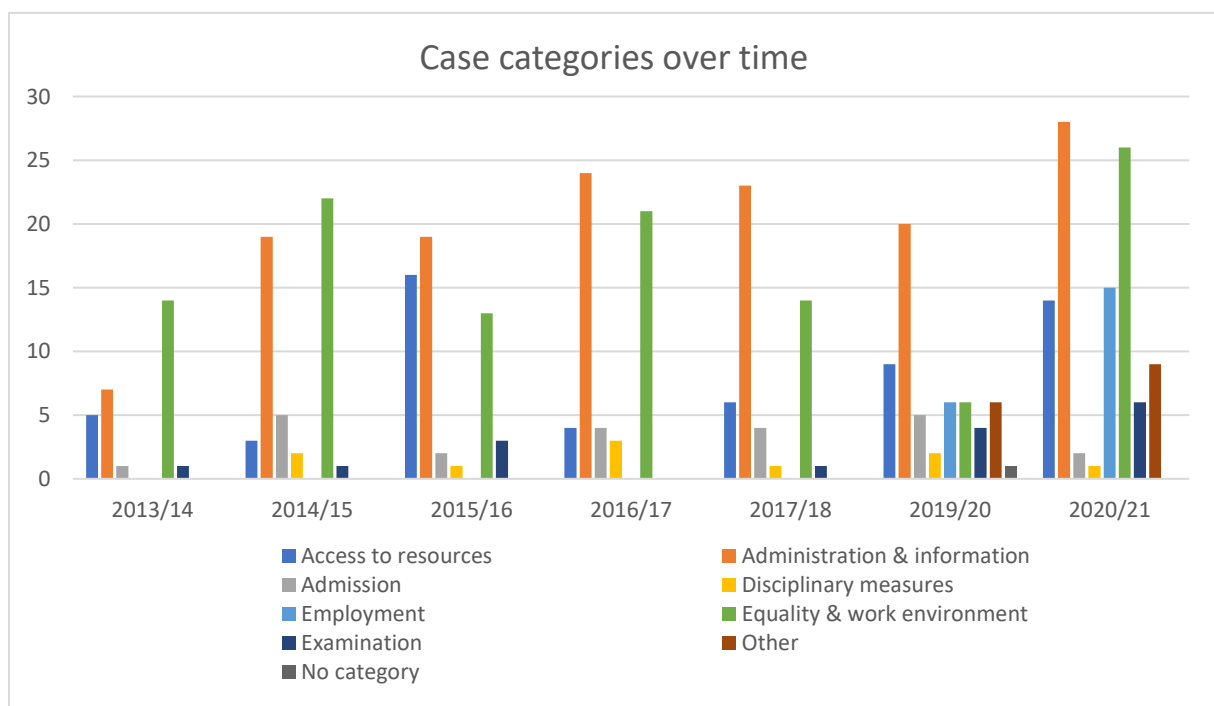
## 2.2 THE CASE CATEGORIES

### 2.2.1 Overview



Category	Cases
Access to resources	14
Administration & information	28
Admission	2
Disciplinary measures	1
Employment	15
Equality & work environment	26
Examination	6
Other	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>

Administration & information was with 28 cases the largest category, as it was last year as well. This year it was closely followed by Equality & work environment which had 26 cases this year, which is a very big increase from last year’s 6. The Employment category was third biggest with 15 cases, which also is a significant increase from last year’s 6. Access to resources was the fourth largest category, and was more consistent with last year’s number of cases. The



four smallest categories were Other, Examination, Admission and Disciplinary measures. This was the same last year.

Over time we can see that Administration and information has been one of the biggest categories consistently. Disciplinary measures, Admission and Examination are on a consistent low level. Access to resources had a drop between 2015/16 and 2016/17 but seems to be on the rise since. We can also see that while Equality & work environment was on a low level last year, it has historically been a big category, so perhaps last year's decrease should be seen as more of an exception to the norm than this year's increase.

### 2.2.2 Access to Resources

There were 14 cases reported in this category, making it the fourth largest category. Most cases were related to supervisors, for example that supervisors did not have sufficient subject competence in the doctoral students' particular fields, or that the doctoral students felt that they did not receive sufficient supervision in terms of quality and/or quantity. Doctoral students are very dependent on their supervisors, and whether the relationship is working out can make or break their education. Many of those who expressed that they were not getting enough support or instructions from their supervisor had tried to bring up the problems several times but without result. It is also still<sup>17</sup> difficult for doctoral students in research groups and/or with externally financed projects to practice their right to change supervisor. A doctoral student who requests it has a right to change supervisor<sup>18</sup>, and the university should plan for doctoral positions so that this right is practically possible to exercise. Otherwise, it is a right that only exists on paper.

There were also cases that concerned what rights to resources doctoral students have after their employment has ended. According to the HEO, doctoral students are entitled to supervision during their studies unless the vice-chancellor has decided to remove their entitlement to supervision and other study resources.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, LU's undertakings include supplying the doctoral student with "a desk, access to a computer, telephone, university email address and the other resources required for the doctoral student to complete his or her third-cycle studies".<sup>20</sup> Nowhere in the HEO or in the *Regulations for doctoral education at Lund University* is the right to resources limited to the employment time. In other words, doctoral students have a right to study resources throughout their education, including after the end of their employment, unless the vice-chancellor has decided to remove their right to resources according to chapter 6 section 30 of the HEO.

Another important issue that was actualized in this category was how important it is that the university at the time of admission make sure that the candidates have all the background knowledge that will be necessary in order for the doctoral student to be able to succeed with their PhD within the allotted time. If it turns out at a later point that a doctoral student lacks sufficient background knowledge when it comes to a competence that is necessary in order to

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<sup>17</sup> See Rantzer, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> HEO chapter 6 section 28.

<sup>19</sup> HEO chapter 6 sections 28 and 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Regulations for doctoral education at Lund University*, STYR 2018/562, section 8.2.

be able to complete the PhD, there might not be enough time or resources in order for the doctoral student to be able to attain that particular knowledge or competence, and then also to complete the rest of the PhD on time. In the end the doctoral student then pays the price for the university's failure to put the right admission requirements in place.

### **2.2.3 Administration & information**

This category was the largest, with its 28 cases. It includes many cases where doctoral students requested information. Some of the more common questions concerned e.g., what possibilities there are for doctoral students to take a leave of absence, and whether that could motivate prolongation, what rights doctoral students have in situations when they request a change of supervisor, and what the general terms of employment for a doctoral studentship are. There were also several questions about intellectual property rights and how much independence doctoral students can expect to have in relation to their supervisors or research groups.

There were several cases that revealed irregularities in the application of the rules for granting prolongation, and one case that concerned other irregularities in administration. On top of that, there were also several cases that specifically concerned the right to prolongation when doctoral students had been unable to execute tasks in their ISPs due to circumstances connected to the Covid-19 pandemic. There were also cases where persons in positions of power had conflicts of interest in relation to the decisions they were taking, and cases that concerned stipend doctoral students' struggle to access equal rights to employed doctoral students.

This year there were several cases that concerned persons who had been admitted to research education many years ago, and who either had been working on their dissertations on and off, or taken a break for many years and had then come back to the university in hopes of finally finishing their doctoral degrees. A common theme in those cases was that those doctoral students had no individual study plans, and it was not clear what general syllabus would be used to assess their accomplishments. The university has an obligation to draw up an individual study plan for every doctoral student, and to make sure it is reviewed regularly and amended to the extent required.<sup>21</sup> This obligation is tied to their admission as doctoral students, and continues to exist until they graduate or give up their admission by their own will. All departments should make sure that these obligations are fulfilled for all doctoral students, regardless of whether they are employed or not. Not informing doctoral students who were admitted long ago about the requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to graduate today can put them in a very tough situation when they show up one day with a finished dissertation thinking that they will get a degree.

### **2.2.4 Admission**

There were two cases in this category, making it the second to smallest category. Both of them concerned persons who were considering pursuing third cycle studies. One of them wanted

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<sup>21</sup> HEO chapter 6 section 29.

information about the admission criteria for research studies. The other one had been informed of a position that was maybe going to open up, where the setup sounded questionable, both with regards to the HEO and the *Admission rules for doctoral education at Lund University*<sup>22</sup>.

### **2.2.5 Disciplinary measures**

There was only one case in the Disciplinary measures category this year, making it the smallest category. Due to confidentiality reasons, I will not elaborate on the case.

### **2.2.6 Employment**

There were 15 cases in the Employment category, making it the third largest category. It included, for example, cases concerning salary raise stages, questions about vacation days and salary deductions, questions about working hours, parental leave, rules for resigning, and questions about whether it is possible to resign from an external employment but still finish the doctoral studies. The issue of not being compensated for overtime teaching hours assigned to doctoral students due to the transition to digital teaching and examination during the Covid-19 pandemic was brought up. There were also cases concerning compensation for unused vacation days when leaving the doctoral studentship employment earlier than planned, and problems that occurred when doctoral students wanted to negotiate a higher salary. One case was referred to the doctoral student's labor union.

### **2.2.7 Equality & work environment**

With its 26 cases, the Equality & work environment category was the second to largest category. The category also included one group case, so if the group had been counted as individuals, this category would have been the largest category. The last time this category was bigger than the Administration & information category was in the report from 2014/2015. I will not be able to account for all of the cases included in this category, but I can name some examples and themes.

Most of the cases concerned organizational and social work environment problems. There were several cases where doctoral students felt victimized or bullied by other persons in their work environment, and wanted advice about the reporting process. This past activity year it became apparent that many doctoral students find the current framework for reporting victimization difficult to approach. Employees who feel they have been subjected to victimization or harassment can choose to report the incident to their closest manager. Then, the manager is obliged to start an investigation to assess whether victimization or harassment has taken place. If it is found that victimization or harassment has occurred, the manager must take measures to stop and prevent any recurrence of the situation as soon as possible, and must also follow up on the measures to make sure that they have been effective.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> STYR 2017/409.

<sup>23</sup> For more information about this, see e.g. <<https://www.staff.lu.se/employment/work-environment-and-health/victimisation-and-harassment#Victimisation>> and <[https://www.hr-webben.lu.se/sites/hr-webben.lu.se/files/managing\\_victimisation\\_hr-web.pdf](https://www.hr-webben.lu.se/sites/hr-webben.lu.se/files/managing_victimisation_hr-web.pdf)>.

It is possible to report victimization or harassment anonymously. But in order for a manager to be able to take disciplinary measures against a single employee, it needs to be established in an investigation that victimization or harassment has occurred. If someone files an anonymous report, an investigation cannot be done, as the accused person needs to know what they have been accused of, so they are able to give their version of what has happened. If an anonymous report is made, the manager can only take general preventive measures to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the workplace in the future, not any disciplinary measures directed at a particular employee. When it comes to harassment, the Discrimination Act forbids that a person who reports someone else or participates in an investigation is subjected to reprisals.<sup>24</sup> It became apparent in discussions with doctoral students during the last activity year, that they felt frustrated about the framework, and many felt that reporting senior colleagues non-anonymously was not an option for them, as they were too afraid it would hurt their future careers within their fields. The discussion called into question what the prohibition of reprisals actually is worth if you are working in a narrow research field and your relationships to senior colleagues can be important for the rest of your career.

Another common theme in this category was that there were 11 cases where doctoral students were having work environment problems related to their supervisors. Some felt their supervisors were acting aggressively, unprofessionally, and even sometimes in manipulative or threatening ways. Some experienced stress because they felt that the expectations on them were too unclear, and when they requested guidance from their supervisor, they did not receive it. Some cases were related to rehabilitation processes, where either the doctoral students were on sick leave due to problems with their supervisors, or they were on sick leave for something else, and a conflict arose because they did not feel that their supervisors and/or heads of departments were taking proper responsibility for their rehabilitation.

There were also several cases where doctoral students wanted support during their rehab processes, and also doctoral students who were complaining about their managers or their supervisors not handling their rehabilitation processes properly.

Finally, while most of the cases concerned work environment, there were also a few cases that were more oriented towards equality and discrimination issues. Some examples of the themes in those cases were discrimination under the Parental Leave Act<sup>25</sup>, questions about pedagogical support, and whether you can have a right to do a PhD part time if you have a disability that compromises your work capacity.

### **2.2.8 Examination**

There were six cases in the Examination category. Most of them concerned either questions about the graduation requirements, or there was a conflict between the doctoral students and their supervisor and/or department about whether they were ready to defend their theses.

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<sup>24</sup> *Diskrimineringslag* (2008:567), sections 18-19. An unofficial translation is available here: <https://www.do.se/other-languages/english/discrimination-act/#2>

<sup>25</sup> *Föräldraledighetslag* (1995:584)



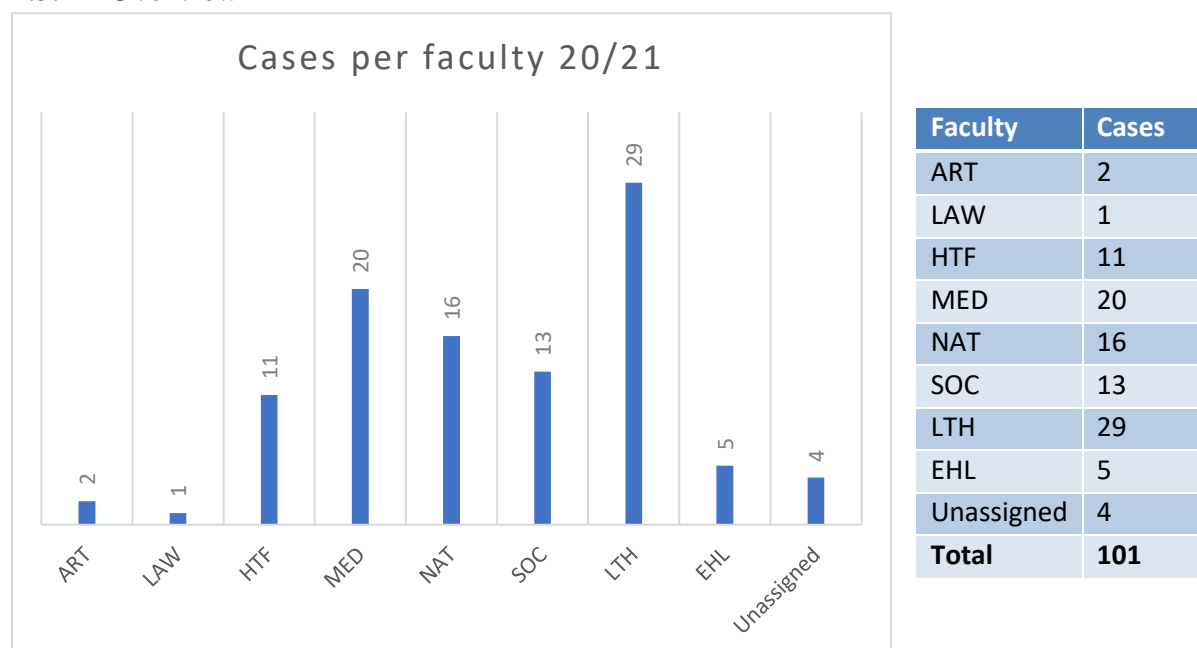
There were also questions on the theme of fair examination, particularly relating to examination language, and alternative forms of examination due to doctoral students' illness.

### 2.2.9 Other

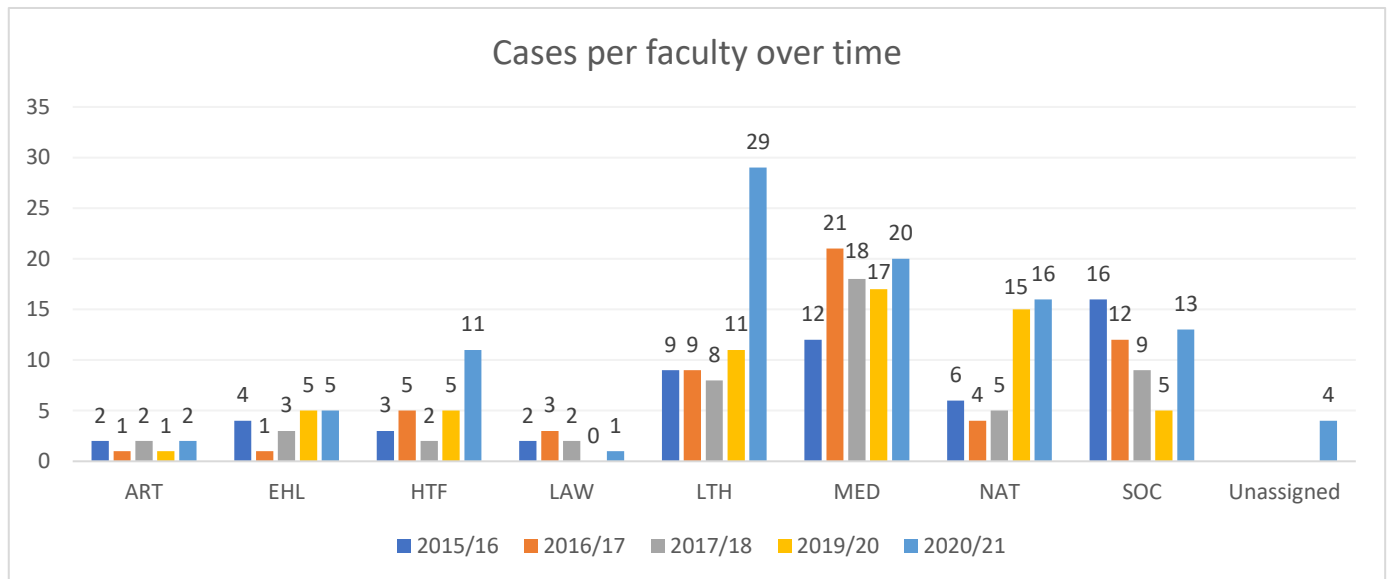
The Other category had nine cases in total. Four concerned questions about labor unions and unemployment benefit. There were also questions related to e.g., migration law and applying for sick leave from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, *Försäkringskassan*.

## 2.3 THE FACULTIES

### 2.3.1 Overview



This year, the Faculty of Engineering (LTH) had the largest number of cases by far, followed by the Faculty of Medicine (MED), the Faculty of Science (NAT), the Faculty of Social Sciences (SOC), and the Joint Faculties of Humanities & Theology (HTF). At the bottom we have LUSEM School of Economics (EHL), and the Faculties of Law (LAW) and Fine and Performing Arts (ART). There were also four cases that were not assigned to a faculty. The reason for that was that three cases concerned persons who were not yet admitted to doctoral education at LU, and one case concerned a former doctoral student at LU, where the person's former faculty affiliation never came up in the discussion.



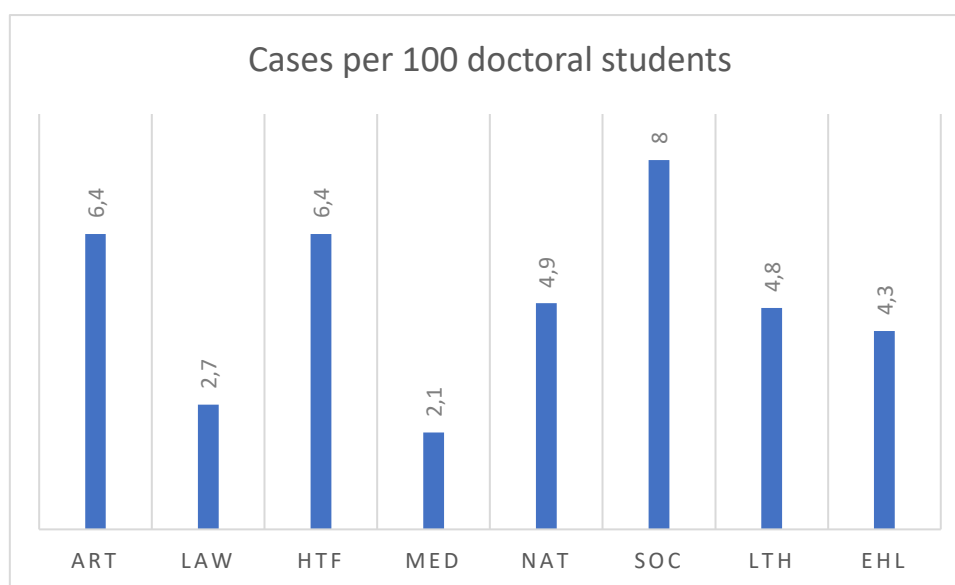
In the diagram showing the number of cases per faculty over time, we can see that the number of cases at the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology, the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Social Sciences have more than doubled since last year. Here we should again keep in mind that last year's data was only based on roughly seven months instead of 12, so the increase is not as dramatic as it seems, even though there is an increase of cases for those faculties since last year, especially for the Faculty of Engineering. For the faculties where the number is roughly the same as last year, such as LUSEM School of Economics and Management, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Science, we should for the same reason interpret that as a slight decrease of cases since last year. Last year, there were no cases from the Faculty of Law, but this year there was one. If we compare over time, we can see that both the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts are on a consistent low level, which to a large degree probably can be attributed to the fact that those faculties have few doctoral students compared to the other faculties.

If we instead look at the number of cases per 100 doctoral students, we get an image of how many DOMB cases there were in proportion to how many active doctoral students there were at each faculty. This provides a fairer depiction of how common it is for the doctoral students at each faculty to contact the DOMB for counselling. It should be noted that there was one group complaint that was registered as one case, even though several doctoral students were complaining, so the total average should be a little bit higher.

The numbers for how many active doctoral students there were during 2020/21 are averages based on Ladok data for the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021 respectively, that I received on request from a system manager at the Student Records Office. The Ladok numbers should correspond roughly to how many doctoral students who are currently active, which makes that number more relevant to use compared to the number of doctoral students who are admitted at the moment, as there is a large number of inactive doctoral students. Note that the Ladok numbers of course do not account for any so-called *skuggdoktorander* "shadow doctoral

students”, meaning persons who might be pursuing doctoral education without being formally admitted as doctoral students.<sup>26</sup>

Faculty	Average no of doctoral students fall 2020 / spring 2021	Cases	Cases per 100 doctoral students
ART	31	2	6,4
LAW	36,5	1	2,7
HTF	171,5	11	6,4
MED	943,5	20	2,1
NAT	324	16	4,9
SOC	160,5	13	8
LTH	602,5	29	4,8
EHL	115,5	5	4,3
Unassigned		4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2385</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>4,2</b>



The Faculty of Social Sciences had the highest average of cases per 100 doctoral students, followed by the Faculties of Humanities and Theology and the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts. The Faculty of Science, LTH and LUSEM were in the middle, and the Faculty of Law and Faculty of Medicine had the lowest averages. It is not totally clear how the numbers should be interpreted - a high average might indicate that a faculty has more doctoral students who

<sup>26</sup> To read more about the prevalence of shadow doctoral students, see the recent report from UKÄ: *Skuggdoktorander och rättssäkerhet vid antagning till utbildning på forskarnivå*, available here: <https://www.uka.se/publikationer--beslut/publikationer--beslut/rapporter/rapporter/2021-10-12-skuggdoktorander-och-rattssakerhet-vid-antagning-till-utbildning-pa-forskarniva.html>.

have problems in their education, or it might also indicate that the faculty's doctoral students are to a higher degree informed about the DOMB's existence. One factor in why the average is low at the Faculty of Medicine could for example be that many of their doctoral students are pursuing doctoral studies within the scope of an employment outside of the university, and that group might not be as easy to reach with information about the DOMB compared to doctoral students employed at the university. There might also be other explanations to why some faculties have higher or lower averages than others.

### **2.3.2 Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts (ART)**

There were two cases from the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts. The faculty had 31 active doctoral students both in the fall and the spring. In total, the faculty had an average of 6,4 cases per 100 doctoral students, which was the second to highest average. Both of the cases were in the category of Equality & work environment.

### **2.3.3 Faculty of Law (LAW)**

At the Faculty of Law, there was one case. The faculty had 36 active doctoral students in the fall and 37 in the spring, so their average number of cases per 100 doctoral students was 2,7. It was the second to lowest average. The case was in the category Access to resources.

### **2.3.4 Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology (HTF)**

There were 11 cases at the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology. The faculties had 181 active doctoral students in the fall and 162 in the spring. Their average was 6,4 cases per 100 doctoral students, which is the second to highest average, the same as the average of Fine and Performing Arts. There were six cases in Administration & information category, two in Employment, one in Equality & work environment, one in Examination, and one case in Other.

### **2.3.5 Faculty of Medicine (MED)**

This year, the Faculty of Medicine had 982 active doctoral students in the fall and 905 in the spring. It is the faculty with the largest number of doctoral students, and also with the lowest average of cases, with 2,1 cases per 100 doctoral students. There were 20 cases in total. Seven of the cases were in the Access to resources category, three in Administration & information, two in Employment, four in Equality & work environment, two in Examination, and two in the Other category.

### **2.3.6 Faculty of Science (NAT)**

There were 16 cases at the Faculty of Science. The faculty had 338 active doctoral students in the fall and 310 in the spring. Its average was 4,9 cases per 100 doctoral students, which was the third highest average. Two cases were in the Access to resources category, five in Administration & information, one in Admission, one in Disciplinary measures, six in Equality and work environment and one in Other.

### **2.3.7 Faculty of Social Sciences (SOC)**

The Faculty of Social Sciences had 168 active doctoral students in the fall and 153 in the spring. With its average of 8 cases per 100 doctoral students, the faculty had the highest average this year. There were 13 cases in total. There was one case in the Access to resources category, three in Administration & information, three in Employment, and six in Equality and work environment.

### **2.3.8 Faculty of Engineering (LTH)**

At the Faculty of Engineering, there were 29 cases. The faculty had 613 active doctoral students in the fall and 592 in the spring, giving it an average of 4,8 cases per 100 doctoral students, which is slightly above the total average. Three cases were in the Access to Resources category, eight in Administration & information, eight in Employment, six in Equality & work environment, two in Examination, and two in Other.

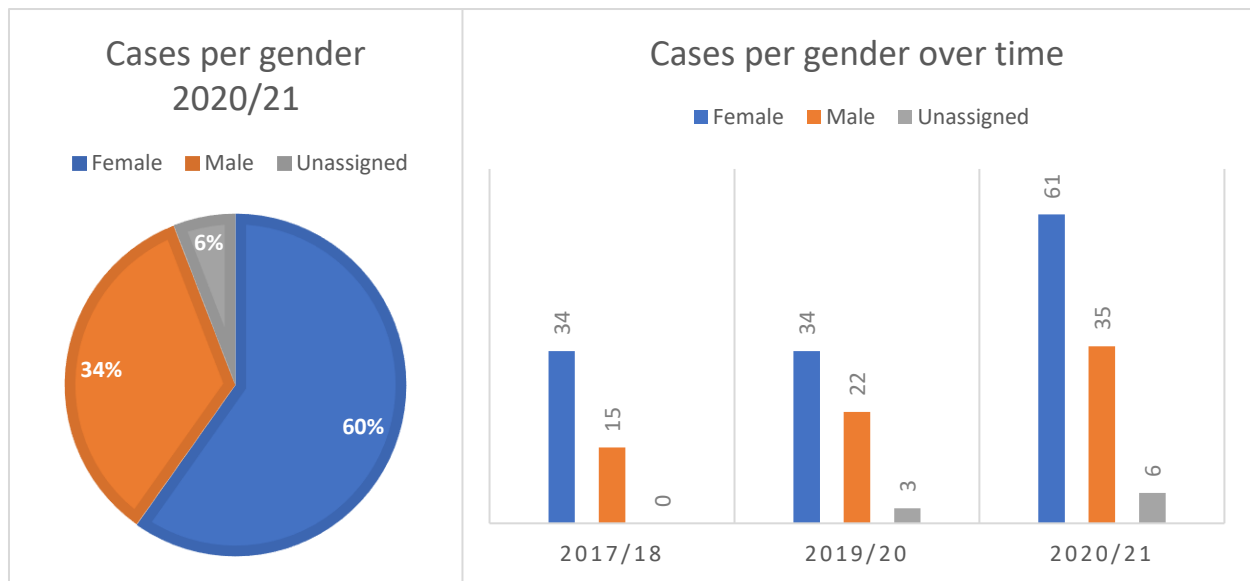
### **2.3.9 LUSEM School of Economics and Management (EHL)**

At LUSEM School of Economics and Management, there were five cases. The faculty had 119 active doctoral students in the fall and 112 in the spring, and its average was 4,3 cases per 100 doctoral students, which is very close to the total average. Three cases were in the Administration & information category, one was in Examination, and one was in Other.

### **2.3.10 Cases not assigned to a faculty**

Four cases were not assigned to a faculty, and the reason was that neither of them concerned persons who were currently doctoral students at Lund University. They were either persons who were interested in pursuing doctoral studies at Lund University, or persons who were former doctoral students where it was unclear what faculty they had been at. One case was in the Admission category, one case was in the Equality and work environment category, and two were in the Other category.

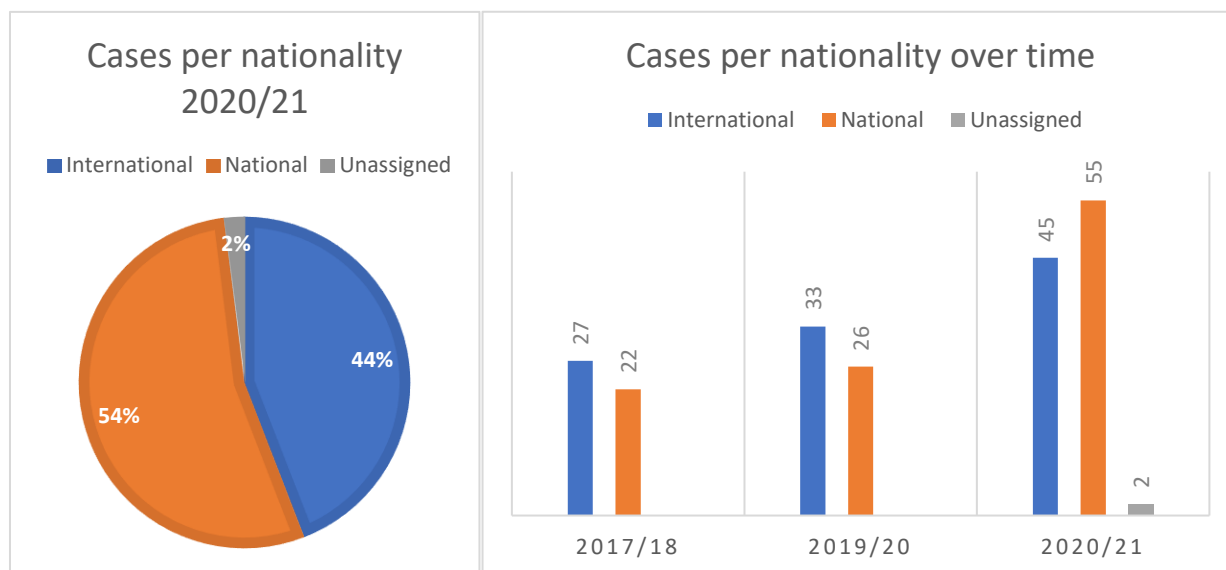
## 2.4 GENDER



Of the 101 cases in total, 60 were registered as female, 35 registered as male, and six cases were not assigned any gender. Out of the unassigned cases, one concerned a group of doctoral students, and five were uncategorized because I was unable to draw any conclusions from their names or the way they were presenting themselves, and we only had contact via email or text messages.

According to the Ladok data I have received from a system manager at the Student Records Office, there was an average of 1216,5 female active doctoral students during the two semesters of 2020/2021, and 1168,5 male active doctoral students. This means that in the population of active doctoral students during the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021, 51% were female and 49% were male. It is quite a remarkable difference between those percentages and the percentages of the group that chose to contact the DOMB, where 60% were female and only 34 percent were male. Even if all the unassigned cases would all be male, females would still be overrepresented in the group that chooses to contact the DOMB. This has also been the case previous years. It is not possible to draw any certain conclusions about whether this means that women have more problems, or if they are more likely to ask for help, or if there is any other reason. As for the distribution of the case categories, cases in the Admission category were only categorized as female. Otherwise, there was not anything in the distribution that stood out significantly.

## 2.5 NATIONALITY



Of the total of 101 cases, 44 cases were categorized as international, 55 as national and two cases were unassigned. One of the unassigned cases concerned a group of doctoral students including doctoral students of both Swedish and other origins. The other unassigned case concerned a person who contacted me through another person, so I could not draw any conclusions about the nationality of the person the issue concerned based on the language I was contacted in. This means that 44% were categorized as international, 54% as national and 2% were unassigned.

The Ladok data I received from the Student Records Office did not include any registry of doctoral students' origin, but we can compare this data with statistics provided by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) about how many doctoral students of Swedish and foreign origin<sup>27</sup> LU had for the fall of 2020. According to those numbers, the proportion for the total number of doctoral students was 33% international and 67% national.<sup>28</sup> This is the first year that I have a record of where the number of national cases exceeds the number of international cases, which is hopeful as the proportions of DOMB cases are becoming more similar to the proportions of national and international doctoral students at LU. However, it seems that international doctoral students are still a little overrepresented in the group that chooses to contact the DOMB. It might mean that international doctoral students have more problems than

<sup>27</sup> The term "doctoral students of foreign origin" was defined as doctoral students who either had been granted a residence permit less than two years before starting their PhD studies, or who had been born outside of Sweden and had immigrated less than two years before starting their PhD studies, see UKÄ, "Utbildning på forskarnivå", <<https://www.uka.se/statistik--analys/hogskolan-i-siffror/statistik/beskrivningar-av-statistiken-i-databasen-hogskolan-i-siffror/utbildning-pa-forskarniva.html>>, accessed 21-08-25.

<sup>28</sup> There were 809 doctoral students of foreign origin at LU for the fall of 2020, and there were 2464 doctoral students in total. See UKÄ, "Statistikdatabas: Höskolan i siffror, anpassad export", <<https://statistik-wwww.uka.se/export/>>, accessed 21-08-25.

doctoral students of Swedish origin, or that they for some reason are more likely to turn to the DOMB for assistance.

As for case category distribution, doctoral students communicating in Swedish have more cases in the categories Administration & information (18 national versus 10 international) and Employment (13 national versus 2 international), while doctoral students communicating in English had more cases in the Other category (9 international versus 0 national). It makes sense that international students would have more cases in the Other category, as those cases often concern questions about Swedish social insurances, migration issues and the differences between student unions and labor unions.



### 3 LOOKING AHEAD

#### 3.1 THE NEW CASE HANDLING SYSTEM

During 2020/2021, I was part of a group of student ombudsmen from six different institutions for higher education in Sweden who designed a case handling system for student ombudsmen. It was finished in the winter, and I received access to it in the spring. For 2021/22 it will be used, and at the beginning of the following year it will be evaluated whether I will continue to use it. Within the new case handling system there is a case categorization system that is different from the one used up until now. This means that next year's report will have cases categorized differently, which will affect the comparability with previous reports' data.

#### 3.2 EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Last year I predicted that there would be more cases this year related to the Covid-19 pandemic. While the general influx of cases did not change much, there have been several cases where the pandemic played a more or less central role. A concrete example was the four cases that concerned applying for extensions due to that the doctoral students had not been able to execute parts of their ISPs due to the pandemic. While it currently looks like things are going back to normal in terms of being able to work in the workplace and that Swedish society is opening up again, it is likely that the prolongation-related cases will continue to come in, as doctoral students at most of the faculties at LU do not apply for prolongation until at the end of their studies.

#### 3.3 THE NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR PERMANENT RESIDENCE PERMITS

On the 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021 the Aliens Act<sup>29</sup> and the Aliens Ordinance<sup>30</sup> were amended, changing the requirements for doctoral students from the outside of EU/EEA who want to apply for permanent residence permits. The amendments include a requirement that the applicant should be able to support themselves for "a certain duration of time".<sup>31</sup> The Swedish Migration Agency interprets this phrase to mean that the applicant needs to show that they will be able to support themselves through a permanent employment, or a fixed-time employment for at least 18 months looking forward from the time a decision is taken in the case.<sup>32</sup> Since doctoral students cannot apply for a permanent residence permit until after four years, and since a doctoral employment normally lasts for four years plus time for teaching and other prolongation, exceptionally few would be able to get a contract for more than 18 months after four years. This has caused a lot of anxiety in the doctoral community at the start of the activity year of 2021/2022, and I think it is likely that a significant amount of DOMB resources will need to be spent on counselling doctoral students in migration law during the coming activity year.

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<sup>29</sup> *Utlänningslag* 2005:716

<sup>30</sup> *Utlänningsförordning* 2006:97

<sup>31</sup> See the Aliens Act, chapter 5 section 7 and the Aliens Ordinance, chapter 4 section 4d

<sup>32</sup> The Migration Agency legal directive, *Särskilda krav för att beviljas permanent uppehållstillstånd* (RS/084/2021).

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