

Survey report on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on doctoral students at Lund University

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March 17th, 2021



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Summary

Almost a year has passed since the pandemic hit Sweden and the universities transitioned to an online environment. Everybody has in some way been affected by the situation – both students and teachers. As a doctoral student, you are often both a student and a teacher and hence affected in both roles, as well as in some ways specific to just doctoral students. Doctoral students are important for both research and teaching activities at the university, and they have a right to an education of sufficient quality. Therefore, addressing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research education at Lund University (LU) is very important.

To do so, the student unions at LU which represent doctoral students conducted a survey to investigate how the doctoral students have been affected by the pandemic, and what measures have been taken so far to improve the situation. Additional recommendations of actions for the university to take are provided.

Overall, the results show that most doctoral students have been negatively affected in one way or another. Plans have had to be changed while many have had an increased workload when assisting with undergraduate education. Many are suffering from bad mental health and isolation. This, and many other aspects are brought to light in the report covering the various challenges that doctoral students are facing.

Many of these challenges cause both tangible and intangible delays to doctoral students' research education. With this report, we want to raise awareness regarding these delays and the unique situation of doctoral students, as well as emphasize the importance of maintaining the quality of research education during the pandemic. While some measures can be taken now to decrease the negative effect on research education, it needs to be acknowledged that some challenges faced by doctoral students can only be compensated through prolongation.

Recommendations

Here are the 9 recommendations that the student unions representing doctoral students at LU find the most urgent after assessing the responses to the survey to mitigate the pandemic's adverse consequences for doctoral students. Additional suggestions for the measures that the university can take can be found in the subsections of the Responses section.

1. **Prioritize mental health**

Information needs to be spread about what resources, both proactive and reactive, that are available for doctoral students who have problems with their mental health. Measures need to be taken to de-stigmatize seeking help for one's mental well-being. It should be emphasized that well-being should never be sacrificed for the sake of productivity during the pandemic, as having good mental health is essential in order to be productive in the long term. Prolongation should be granted to doctoral students who are experiencing delays to their doctoral education due to the pandemic's adverse effect on their mental well-being.

2. **Better communication from the university**

The university needs to communicate better with its doctoral students. Information about Covid-19 restrictions and adjustments in the workplace needs to be accessible in English. Targeted information specifically at doctoral students, and addressing their dual role as both students and teachers is called for. It is important to make sure that line managers take responsibility for their doctoral students' work environment and check in with how they are doing and also that the doctoral student is getting sufficient supervision when working remotely.

3. **Ensure the quality of doctoral courses in the online format**

Adapting teaching methods to the online format is important, including collaborative tools and forums for the participants as well as extra material and recorded videos where applicable. Doctoral students must be provided with forums/platforms for study groups that allow interaction between participants.

4. **Prioritize safety**

Some doctoral students have felt pressured to teach on campus and attend events in person even when they did not feel safe doing so. Doctoral students should not be pressured into situations where their safety cannot be guaranteed.

5. **Compensate for all teaching hours**

Doctoral students should be compensated for the teaching that they do, including the extra compensation needed for the transition to online teaching.

6. **Provide platforms for communication and collaboration**

It is necessary to provide formal and informal forums at all levels to enable information transfer, research discussions and social interactions. Make sure all departments/divisions/workgroups have both formal and informal digital meetings.

7. Inform about documenting delays in the ISP and prolongation prospects

Doctoral students must be encouraged to document delays due to Covid-19 in their individual study plans (ISPs). Guidelines at all Faculties should be clear about what reasons will motivate prolongation and what exact documentation a doctoral student needs to provide, and the university needs to follow-up that this is done.

8. Blanket prolongation of 2 months to all doctoral students

All doctoral students have been affected by the pandemic. In many cases it is hard to put a number on exactly how much time one has been delayed when the pandemic has resulted in a loss of productivity due to e.g. a loss of research environment and mental health aspects. To compensate for this in a fair and transparent manner, there should be a blanket prolongation of 2 months to all doctoral students, as is also recommended by SFS¹.

9. Process prolongation applications in a fair, transparent and predictable way

In addition to the blanket prolongation, further prolongation needs to be granted for those who have been affected even further. Delays due to working at home with children needs to be accounted for. Procedures for processing prolongation applications due to Covid-19 need to be fair, transparent and predictable. The university needs to ensure that there is funding for the prolongation that each doctoral student is entitled to according to the guidelines that have been provided, and monitor that this is implemented in all places.

¹Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), "Delays of doctoral education due to the corona pandemic", <https://sfs.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SFS-Delays-of-doctoral-education-due-to-the-corona-pandemic-2021-03-08.pdf>, p. 7

Contents

1	About the survey	5
2	Respondents	5
3	Mental and physical health	8
3.1	Recommendations regarding mental and physical health	9
4	Courses	10
4.1	Recommendations regarding courses	11
5	Teaching	12
5.1	Recommendations regarding teaching	13
6	Research	14
6.1	Recommendations regarding research	16
7	Delays, Documentation and Prolongation	17
7.1	Recommendations regarding delays, documentation and prolongation	21

1. About the survey

This survey was sent to all doctoral students at Lund University and was open for answers during the period from the 10th of December 2020 until the 15th of January 2021. Following the first email, two reminders were also sent. Stricter restrictions were enforced right before 25th of December 2020, and it should be noted that they came after the survey was first sent out and most of the answers were recorded. There were 28 questions in total focusing on five different topics: background of the respondent, courses, teaching, research activities and questions related to prolongation.

The survey was distributed to the registered email addresses of doctoral students from Ladok and there were 579 respondents in total, from all eight Faculties. For the Faculty of Engineering, the survey was also sent to the university work email addresses of doctoral students.

2. Respondents

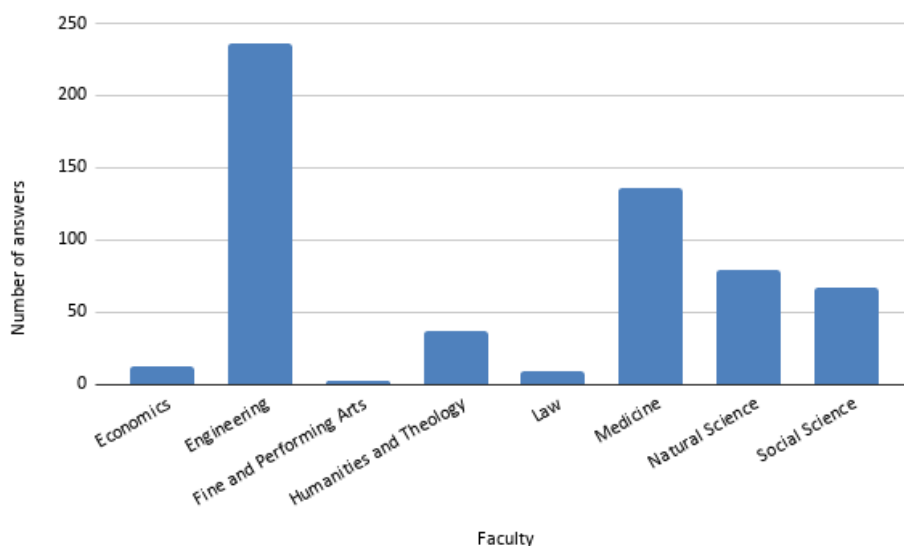


Figure 2.1: Number of answers from each faculty.

In figure 2.1 the number of answers from each faculty can be seen. To be able to calculate the response rate from each faculty, we asked faculty administrators how many doctoral students

they had registered in Ladok for HT20, seen in table 2.1. The number of answers was divided by the number of doctoral students at each faculty, showing the response rate from each faculty in percent in figure 2.2.

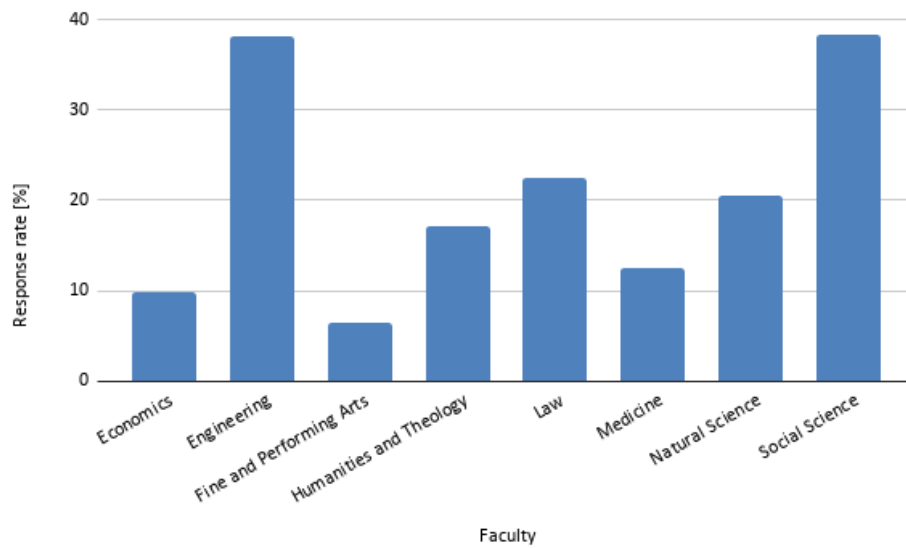


Figure 2.2: Percentage of answers from each faculty.

Faculty	PhD students registered in Ladok HT20
Economics	133
Engineering	619
Fine and Performing Arts	31
Humanities and Theology	215
Law	40
Medicine	1090
Natural Science	385
Social Science	175

Table 2.1: Number of registered doctoral students in Ladok HT20 at each faculty.

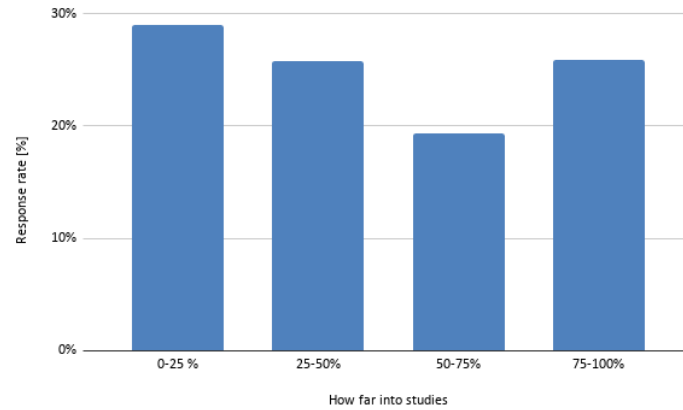


Figure 2.3: Distribution of how far into their studies the respondents are.

Figure 2.3 shows how far the respondents are into their studies. The distribution is quite even, with a somewhat lower number of respondents who are in their third year, and a higher number of respondents in their first year. From the responses, it is seen that the respondents are mostly from Sweden, contributing to 55.4 % of the total responses. Out of the rest of the respondents, 22.8% were from Europe, 20.2 % from the rest of the world, and 1,6 % did not prefer to answer. This seems to be quite representative of how many international doctoral students there are at the university¹, leaning a little towards a higher representation of international respondents.

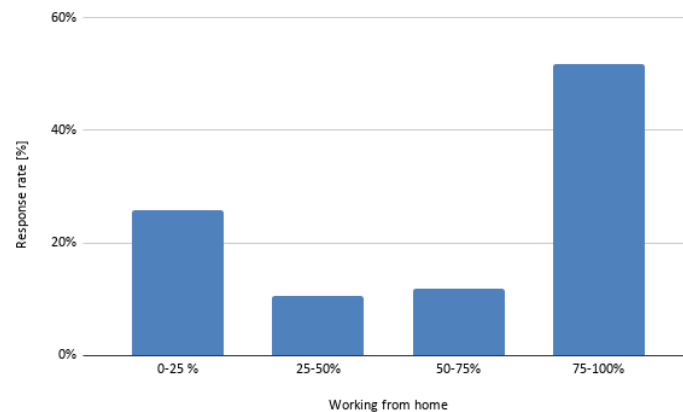


Figure 2.4: The distribution of how much working time was spent at home.

During the pandemic, most doctoral students preliminary work from home, which can be seen in figure 2.4. This survey was sent out before the more strict restrictions that were enforced on

¹The Swedish Higher Education Authority UKÄ has not yet presented their statistics for 2020. But in the fall of 2019 the proportions at Lund University were 67% Swedish doctoral students and 33% “doctoral students of foreign origin”, meaning 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 Sweden and had immigrated less than two years before starting their PhD studies. See UKÄ, Statistikdatabas: Högskolan i siffror, ”Utbildning på forskarnivå”, <https://www.uka.se/statistik--analys/statistikdatabas-hogskolan-i-siffror/beskrivningar-av-statistiken-i-databasen-hogskolan-i-siffror/utbildning-pa-forskarniva.html>; “Antal utländska doktorander HT2019”, <https://www.uka.se/statistik--analys/statistikdatabas-hogskolan-i-siffror/statistikomrade.html?statq=https://statistik-api.uka.se/api/totals/48> ; “Antal doktorander HT2019”, <https://www.uka.se/statistik--analys/statistikdatabas-hogskolan-i-siffror/statistikomrade.html?statq=https://statistik-api.uka.se/api/totals/46>.

the week of the 25th of December. As a result of this, it is likely even more doctoral students are working from home now.

3. Mental and physical health

When asked how their social work environment and mental health had been affected by the pandemic, it was very clear that most of the doctoral students had been affected negatively in one way or another. Listed from most common to not as common, the most common answers were:

- Missing out on the daily social interactions, networking and traveling
- More monotone and sedentary work with less creativity, inspiration, motivation and productivity
- Stress, depression and anxiety,
- Worry derived from the Covid-19 situation and uncertainty relating to prolongation.

Several also mentioned that they experience ergonomic problems due to deficiencies in their physical work environment when working from home, or that they lack space to have a proper home office. Students living with young children also mentioned the struggles of getting things done while working from home. Others expressed appreciation that they had received support for office equipment.

Most free-text answers mentioned the lack of daily social interactions. A lot of doctoral students feel isolated, feel tired of Zoom and missing small chats at the coffee machine. It is clear that the students living alone are most affected by working from home regarding social interactions. It is also clear that different Faculties, departments and working groups handle this very differently. Some doctoral students mention there being no or very few digital fikas or similar events, while some mention there is a lot, which helps the situation. Some first year doctoral students expressed concern that they have difficulty getting to know their colleagues and getting information.

Many international students (the greater part of the 44.6% international respondents, see section 2) have been very affected since some have been stuck in other countries, the communication from the university and the Swedish government has not always been in English, and many live alone in Sweden without knowing the country. This has been stressful and has caused anxiety and less productivity for those students.

From the answers, it was evident that many doctoral students are feeling stressed for several reasons. Quite many mention the difficulty to separate home life from work life, making them work late hours and weekends. A few are stressed that they will not be compensated for the increased teaching workload that the pandemic has entailed. Many students have a hard time being productive while staying at home. Simple things take longer since it is not as easy to ask for help while working from home as at the office. This also causes stress. A couple of doctoral students worry that they will not get prolongation for the lack of productivity, stress and isolation during the pandemic, ironically resulting in additional stress. Some doctoral students even say that they have been thinking of dropping out of their education.

Several respondents mentioned having mental health problems like depression and anxiety. Quite a few say they have received help dealing with it, but some of the doctoral students say

that they have not. Some worry that they will not be able to get prolongation due to mental health problems. There might also be a lack of answers regarding mental health issues, since those struggling the most might not have the energy to fill out the survey. Some respondents mentioned that they had found workshops from Occupational Health Services for departments very useful.

Several respondents express concern that Lund University does not take enough measures to ensure the safety of its employees. One respondent wrote that the person had felt forced to go to the office, which made the respondent feel uneasy.

Many feel a sense of loss of contact with the university, since no information has been targeted to doctoral students specifically.

Some doctoral students have not been affected much and a few even think their mental health and social work environment have improved. The reasons mentioned were that they do not live alone and therefore get social contact anyway, they do not have to commute and therefore save a lot of time so they can get more things done in a day and that they do not get interrupted in their work while working from home.

3.1 Recommendations regarding mental and physical health

1. Information needs to be spread about what resources, both proactive and reactive, that are available for doctoral students who have problems with their mental health. Measures need to be taken to de-stigmatize seeking help for one's mental well-being. It should be emphasized that well-being should never be sacrificed for the sake of productivity during the pandemic, as having good mental health is essential in order to be productive in the long term. Prolongation should be granted to doctoral students who are experiencing delays to their doctoral education due to the pandemic's adverse effect on their mental well-being.
2. The university needs to communicate better with its doctoral students. Information about Covid-19 restrictions and adjustments in the workplace needs to be accessible in English. Targeted information specifically at doctoral students, and addressing their dual role as both students and teachers is called for. It is important to make sure that line managers take responsibility for their doctoral students' work environment and check in with how they are doing and also that the doctoral student is getting sufficient supervision when working remotely.
3. Managers need to take responsibility for doctoral students' work environment, ensuring that everyone has a proper office space. It is not acceptable that many express that they are working at home while sharing space with small children, or that their home office is not ergonomic. Doctoral students should be given access to proper office equipment for their home office, such as ergonomic chairs and computer screens. If needed, make it possible for those who need it the most to have priority in accessing and working from the office, or provide external office spaces.
4. Besides regular email updates, encourage Faculties to hold a monthly meeting for all doctoral students to update them on the current regulations and best practices during the pandemic.
5. A generic translation service for all Faculties from the central administration for translating official documents in Swedish to English.

4. Courses

As part of a doctoral education, it is required to take a certain number of courses. Since the courses had to be moved to an online format, we wanted to examine if this had any negative consequences. The first question was “To what degree were your courses affected in a negative way by the pandemic?” and the answer can be seen in figure 4.1.

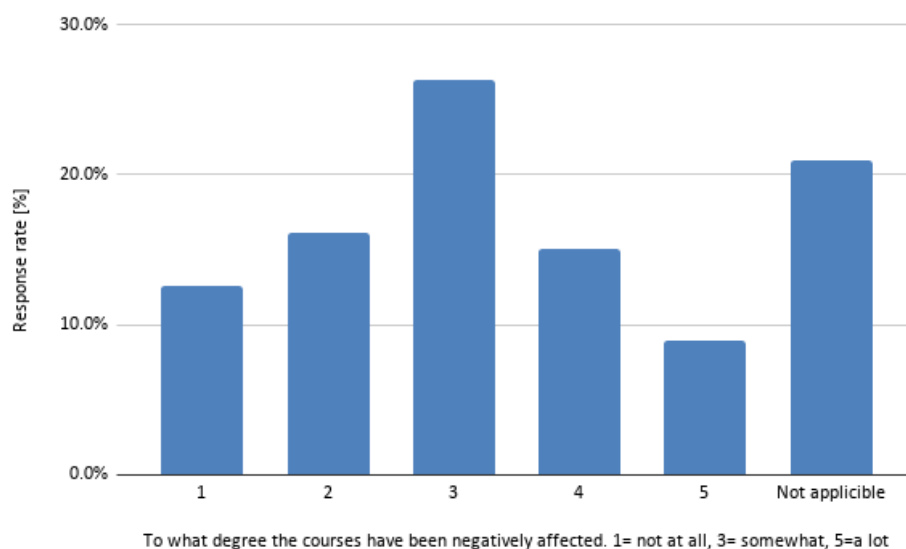


Figure 4.1: To what degree were your courses affected in a negative way by the pandemic

Slightly more than 20% said that the question was not applicable to them, possibly due to them already finishing their courses or just not planning to take any during this time. For those whom the question applied to, the answers were centered around the middle, yielding a mean of 2.9. Approximately 25% of the respondents gave an answer above 3, meaning that they have been more than affected up quite significantly.

Further on, the effect on courses was investigated based on free-text answers from the respondents, asking how the courses were affected. The most common answer was that they had not been very affected and that it had been working quite well. However, the positive and neutral responses or the negative ones seemed to mainly depend on whether the teacher has or has not adapted the content to the digital environment. One example mentioned as a good way to adapt to the online format was when there are interactive activities and discussions in, e.g. breakout rooms.

The most common negative effects that the pandemic has had on the respondents' courses were:

- Difficulties in having spontaneous interactions and discussions, both with teachers and other doctoral students
- More monotonous and less efficient, especially if courses are not properly adapted to online format

- Cancelled or postponed courses

Elaborating on these, the most common effect is that there are less spontaneous interactions and that the discussions are generally not as good. It is harder to ask questions and there is less contact with the teacher. More interactive parts like seminars and exercise sessions have not been working as well in the digital format. Course work was described as more monotonous and doctoral students are missing studying together and find it harder to do group work, especially when no collaborative tools are provided. A special concern in this matter was the course in Swedish for university staff, where the interactivity is of especially high importance for the learning process.

In addition to the above, many respondents mentioned that they feel that it is hard to stay focused and motivated and that online coursework is not as efficient. Respondents mentioned that it is particularly difficult when there are too few breaks, when the scheduled lecture time is very long, and again, when it is not adapted to the online format. Respondents also mentioned that the online format makes it more difficult for the teachers to know if the students are following what they are saying.

A big concern for many respondents was related to courses that have been cancelled or postponed. The two groups for whom this is especially problematic are 1) doctoral students in the beginning of their education, who usually plan for courses as they need a background before starting their research, and who usually find it harder to replan as research and other projects have not been started, and 2) doctoral students at the end of their education where they might have lost the opportunity to ever take the course.

There are positive aspects of taking online courses which should be considered when planning for the future. Some examples mentioned were: the possibility to take courses at other universities, no travelling and commuting, more flexibility and easier to plan to do things in your own pace, more extra material provided, and activity occurring in course forums.

In general there were not many answers related to problems regarding information and problems of achieving the learning outcomes; however, some examples were given when the learning outcomes concerned practical things like lab and field visits. Technical issues were also only mentioned a few times. Some described difficulties with examination in cases where it was hard to make a good home exam and where the examination included oral communication.

4.1 Recommendations regarding courses

1. Adapting teaching methods to the online format is important, including collaborative tools and forums for the participants as well as extra material and recorded videos where applicable. Doctoral students must be provided with forums/platforms for study groups that allow interaction between participants.
2. A consequence analysis must be made before cancelling/postponing courses.
3. Teaching methods need to be adapted to the online format and collaborative tools should be provided.
4. Recorded videos and extra material should be provided when it is possible.
5. Forums and platforms for study groups and interactions between participants need to be provided.

5. Teaching

Many doctoral students are involved in teaching. For those who have been teaching during the pandemic, changes of plans have naturally had to be made. The respondents were asked “To what degree was your teaching affected in a negative way by the pandemic?” and the answer can be seen in figure 5.1.

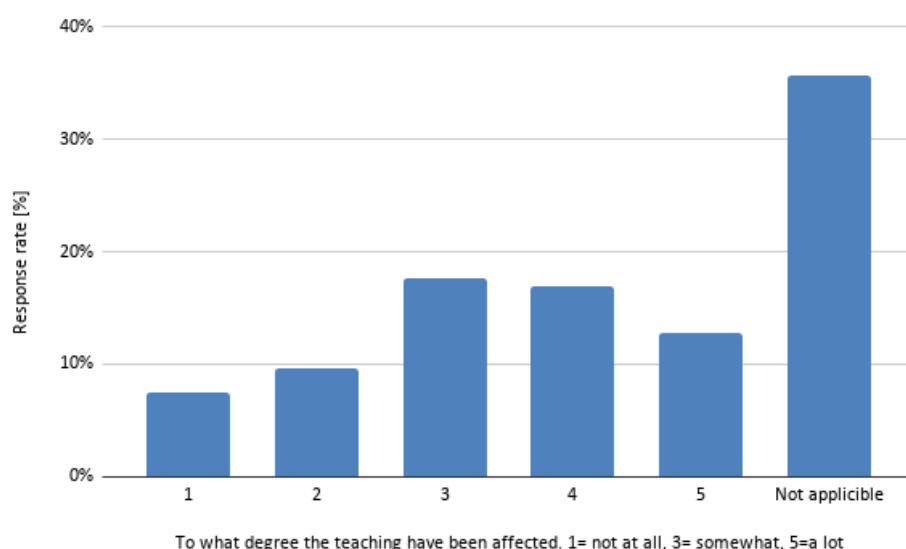


Figure 5.1: To what degree were your teaching been negatively affected by the pandemic?

More than 1/3 of the respondents said that the question was not applicable to them. It could be either due to that teaching is not a part of their task at all, or just not during the pandemic. For those whom the question was applicable to, the answers were centered around the middle, yielding a mean of 3.3, however leaning a bit more towards the higher numbers. More than 1/3 of the respondents gave an answer above 3, meaning that they have been between more than to a lot affected.

Furthermore, the effect on teaching was investigated based on free-text answers from the respondents, asking about what challenges the doctoral students had been facing in this matter. The most common problems that were brought up were:

- Communication and spontaneous interaction is more difficult in the online format
- Increased workload to run courses in the online format
- Difficulties running labs in a safe way
- Doctoral students fearing for their health when being forced to teach on campus
- Lack of guidance about how to do online teaching

As just stated, the most common answer was that it is harder to communicate and explain in the online format, especially when it concerns calculations. It is also difficult when you do not actually see the students or when they are not even showing up.

The second most common answer related to the increased workload required for course preparation and that it has been more time consuming to run courses. More specific examples in this matter that were mentioned were: recording lectures, restructuring the course, coming up with new material, changing assignments and manuals, having to run sessions multiple times because smaller groups were required and putting in extra time for answering more questions over emails.

A concern related to Faculties that have a lot of labs is that there has been an even higher increase of workload since every lab has to run many more times due to the smaller groups. Issues were also reported regarding inconvenience with face masks, difficulties in ensuring a safe environment and sometimes to get the students to respect the guidelines. Some respondents also reported fear for their own health when having to teach on campus. When labs were moved online instead, several comments remarked that the experience and reports were in general worse. However, there were also examples of labs which could benefit from the online format. There were not that many technical issues reported, but there was a lack of guidance on how to do online teaching, such as what pedagogical tools to use, how to make videos, and how to create engaging classes online.

5.1 Recommendations regarding teaching

1. Some doctoral students have felt pressured to teach on campus and attend events in person even when they did not feel safe doing so. Doctoral students should not be pressured into situations where their safety cannot be guaranteed.
2. Doctoral students should be compensated for the teaching that they do, including the extra compensation needed for the transition to online teaching.
3. Courses and support for how to do good online teaching need to be provided.
4. Support for making videos and pedagogical tools to use for online teaching should be provided, including information about privacy issues.

6. Research

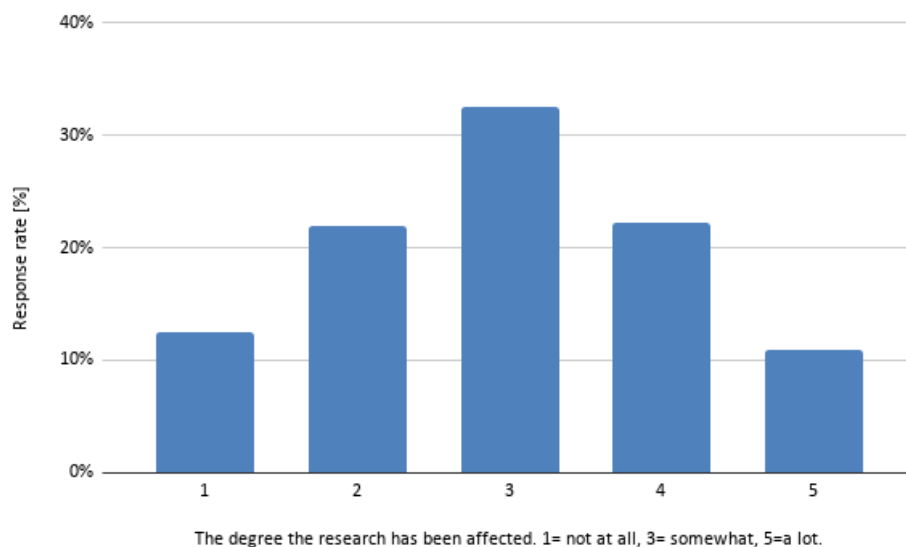


Figure 6.1: Percentage of respondents whose research has been affected by the pandemic.

86% of doctoral students think that their research has been negatively affected by the pandemic, as can be seen in figure 6.1. 50% of respondents report that they have modified their research projects due to the pandemic (figure 6.4). 80% of the respondents say that the contact with their supervisor(s) has been negatively affected, as shown in figure 6.3.

The most common challenges reported by the respondents concerning the pandemic's effects on their research are spread over three broad groups:

- Challenges related to the research environment
- Technical challenges
- Faculty-specific challenges

These are discussed separately below.

As for the **research environment challenges**, many reported that the loss of natural contact with one's colleagues outside of one's immediate research group resulted in a less engaging environment for research. Isolation is one of the two greatest challenges in this respect. Respondents describe how online solutions like Zoom meetings have been adopted, but the loss of the engaging atmosphere with discussions with colleagues outside of the immediate working group has had a negative impact on research activities in several cases. There is less exchange of ideas among different research groups. Many feel isolated in their research work due to less supervision and feedback from supervisor(s) and/or their research group. In a few cases, increased online meetings with supervisor(s) have led to the feeling of being watched to produce rapid deliverables for their research projects.

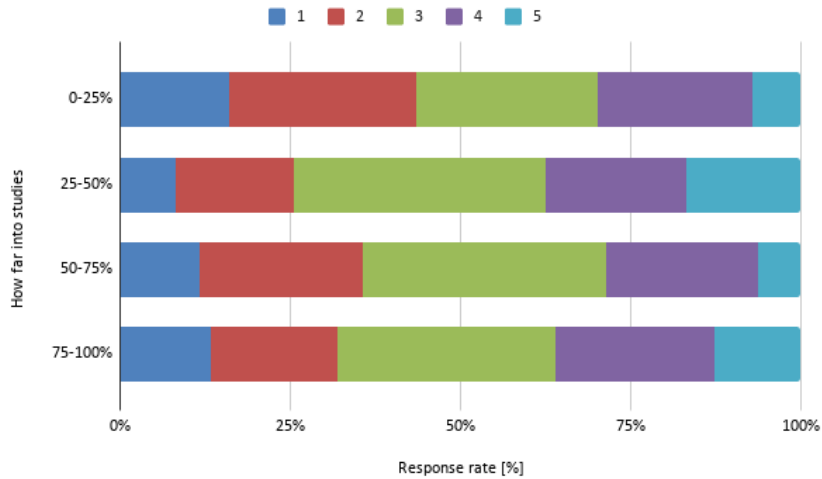


Figure 6.2: Doctoral students estimate how much their research has been affected in a negative way by the pandemic, differentiated by where they are in their education.

Furthermore, the respondents described many **technical challenges** regarding conducting research during the pandemic. The second of the two greatest concerns for the respondents' research was the loss in time to produce substantial research output. Field trips have been cancelled due to travel restrictions, visits of international collaborators and vice versa have been cancelled. For experimental and field-work related research, doctoral students have reported difficulty in collecting research data due to restricted or lack of access to experimental/lab-based data. Travel restrictions have also been a significant obstacle. In some cases, it has led to a change of research project. In other cases there have been efforts to perform the same project via online collaboration. Respondents also report a lack of proper coordination in lab functioning - at both intra- and inter-division/department levels.

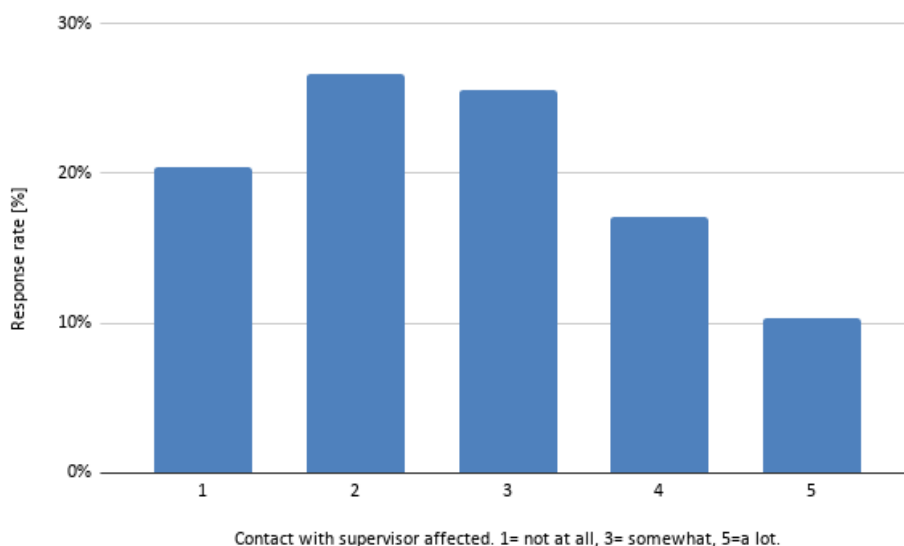


Figure 6.3: Percentage of respondents showing how their contact with supervisor(s) has been affected by the pandemic.

Finally, there are some **faculty specific concerns**. Doctoral students in medicine have shifted to clinical duties, giving them less time for research, and some have changed their research

projects to study Covid-19 while abandoning the projects that were underway.

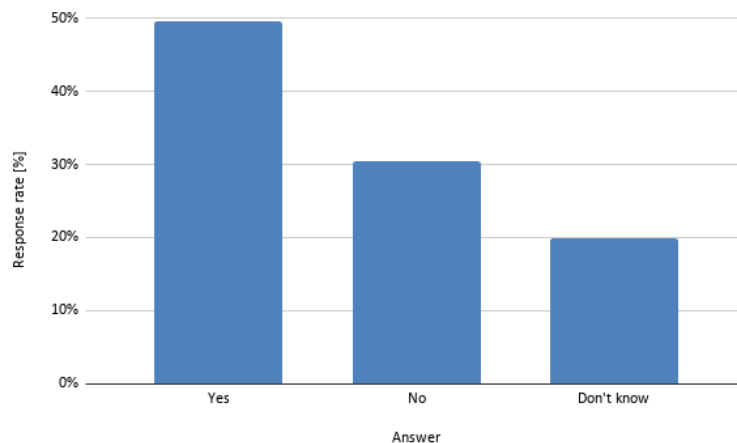


Figure 6.4: Percentage of respondents who have altered their research plan due to the pandemic.

Feedback on resources already provided by the university

The respondents were asked: “Which resources and support from the university have been useful for adapting your research to new circumstances?” Zoom, LU Box, Canvas, VPN and Mentimeter are examples of resources that have been appreciated by the respondents.

6.1 Recommendations regarding research

1. Provide formal and informal forums at all levels to enable information transfer, research discussions and social interactions. Make sure all departments/divisions/workgroups have both formal and informal digital meetings.
2. Adopt the frequency of supervision meetings to compensate for the lack of informal contacts when working from home.
3. Present doctoral students to networks and collaborations inside and outside of their research group.
4. Connect doctoral students through e.g. writing groups, journal clubs, problem solving sessions, or similar for the specific field.
5. Ensure that supervisors provide support to doctoral students in updating their research plans to new circumstances.
6. Provide clear procedures for coordination of labs and equipments.
7. Collaborate nationally to make digital source material from libraries available to all universities (for example, tidningar.kb.se).
8. Regulate digital defence fees so that they are within a reasonable price bracket. Provide guidelines to ensure that all charges are covered by the department/faculty.
9. Enable remote defences for candidates stranded abroad. Such examples can be found in some other universities.
10. Faster IT support from LDC or other external professional IT services.

11. Procure corporate plans for Slack.
12. Guidelines in how to conduct clinical projects under Covid-19 restrictions would be useful for doctoral students at the Medical Faculty.
13. Access to national health guidelines and directives to conduct cross-border research in English.
14. Starting a yearly doctoral student day for all doctoral students at the Faculties or centrally, where the administration would meet the doctoral students and resources available to doctoral students would be presented, in conjunction with an information desk for doctoral students at LU.

7. Delays, Documentation and Prolongation

This section gives an overview of the delays doctoral students at LU are experiencing in their research education, what steps they have taken to document delays and to apply for prolongation, and what obstacles doctoral students are experiencing in that process.

Overview of pandemic related delays

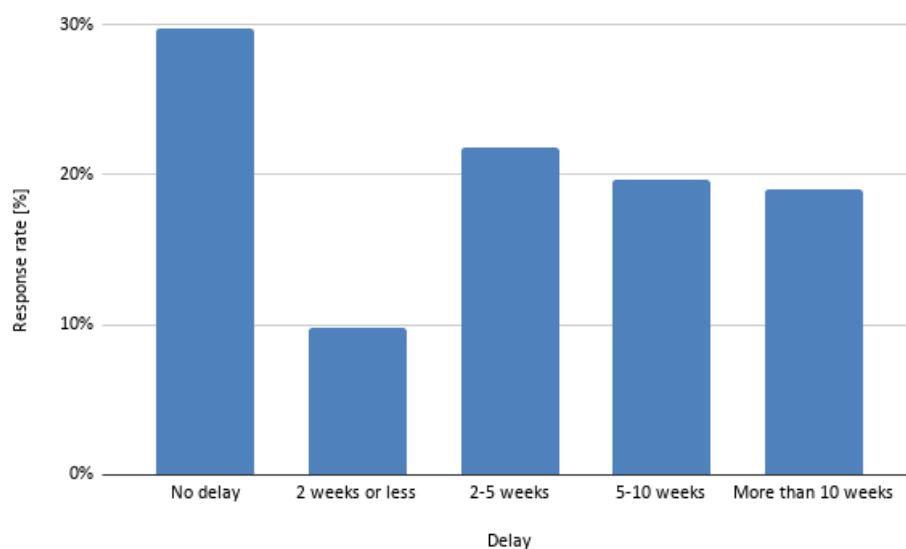


Figure 7.1: Doctoral students estimate their pandemic related delays

As displayed in figure 7.1, 70% of the respondents think their research studies have been delayed by the pandemic. In that group there is a big variance of how long the delay is. 19% have been delayed more than 10 weeks. Roughly 30% do not think they will be delayed by the pandemic.

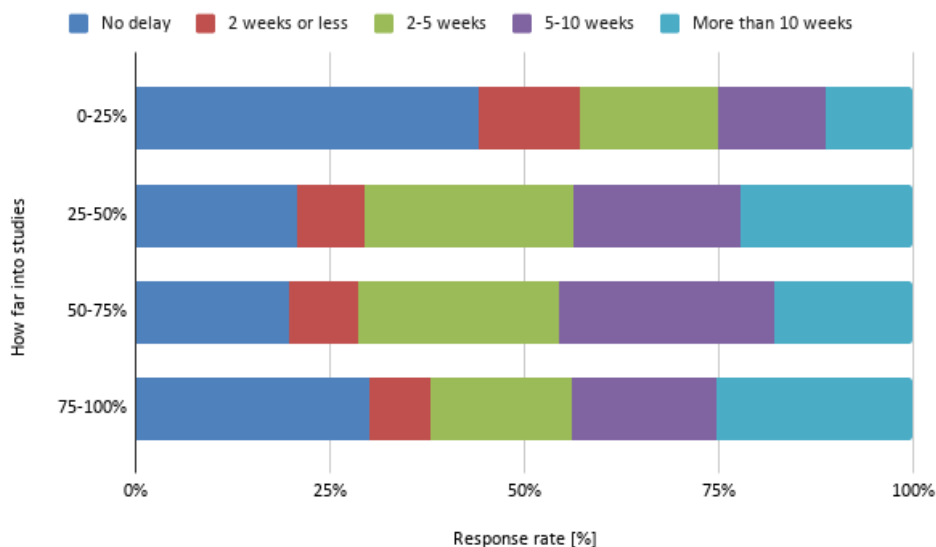


Figure 7.2: Doctoral students estimated delays, differentiated by where they are in their education.

There is a big variance in scope of delays regardless of what stage doctoral students are at in their studies (see figure 7.2). However, 44% of first year doctoral students say they are not delayed, compared to around 20% among those in their second and third years, and 30% among those in their last year. Being more than 10 weeks delayed is most common among the doctoral students who are in their last year of studies. Among them, 25% are delayed with more than 10 weeks, compared to 17% of respondents in their third year, 22% of respondents in their second year, and 11% of respondents in their first year. It should however be taken into account that it can be more difficult to know if you have been delayed if you are still at the beginning of your doctoral studies.

Documenting delays in the ISP

In May 2020, the central Research Education Board sent a PM to the Faculties, informing them that delays related to the pandemic can count as "special reasons" ("särskilda skäl") and can thus motivate a prolongation of a doctoral student's research studies according to chapter 5 section 7 of the Higher Education Ordinance (Högskoleförordningen, 1993:100). The PM said that an individual assessment should be made for each case, that prolongation should be documented in the ISP, that the main supervisor has a responsibility to discuss any measures with the doctoral student, and that it should first be considered whether the doctoral student's commitments in the ISP could be rescheduled to mitigate the delay¹.

After that, different steps have been taken at different Faculties and at different departments when it comes to clarifying whether doctoral students can expect prolongation for their pandemic-related delays, and what documentation they would need to provide in order to receive it. First of all, we wanted to find out to what degree doctoral students have been informed by their departments that they should document in their ISP if their doctoral studies have been delayed by the pandemic. The answers are shown in figure 7.3.

47% said they have been informed by their department that they should document if their studies have been delayed by the pandemic in their ISPs (see figure 7.3). 35% said they have not been informed, and 18% said they do not know. In the free text answers, some doctoral

¹Förlängning av doktoranders anställning med anledning av covid-19 som ett "särskilt skäl" (STYR 2020/1001).

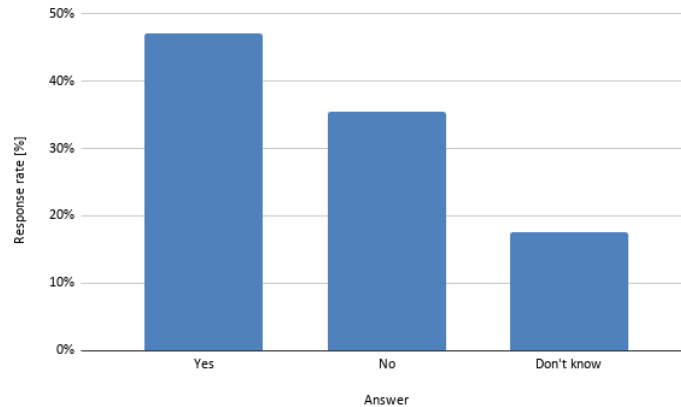


Figure 7.3: Doctoral students’ reception of information from departments that delays related to the pandemic should be documented in the ISP.

students said that they had heard about it from other sources, such as other doctoral students or student union events. Some said that the survey was the first time they heard about it. 112 respondents (roughly 28% of those who say they have been delayed) said in free text answers that they have documented in their ISPs how the pandemic has affected their research studies. Others said they were planning to do it, either awaiting their next ISP update process, or wanting to wait to see how long the delay would be. Among those who had documented delays in their ISPs, there seemed to be big variations regarding detail. Some had written just a short note or adjusted their time plan, while some had written extensively about every way that they have been affected.

Aside from describing if and how they had documented their delays, the respondents raised concerns on the theme of documenting delays. The most common concerns that were raised were:

- It is very difficult to quantify some of the ways that the pandemic has affected research education.
- Even though some are not delayed, the pandemic has still resulted in a research education of lower quality.
- Frustration concerning the lack of transparency and fairness in how the university is handling prolongation for doctoral students delayed by the pandemic.

Many expressed that they were concerned about how difficult it is to quantify or “prove” the effects that the pandemic has had on their research education, such as working in a less efficient work environment, lack of motivation, deteriorating mental health and delayed communication with supervisors and other colleagues. Many respondents saw this as an argument in favor of a blanket extension for everyone.

Furthermore, several of those who did not consider themselves delayed pointed out that while they would be able to finish on time, they would finish with less research output than they would have if there had not been a pandemic. In the final question asking if the respondents had any “other concerns” that the rest of the survey had not brought up, several expressed concerns that the pandemic might have hurt their career prospects because of lack of contact with the broader research community. In other words, even those who have not had to postpone their defences are still experiencing negative effects on the quality of their research education. Several expressed frustration about the lack of transparency and fairness in how the university is handling cases concerning doctoral students affected by the pandemic, and that they do not

know what criteria or documentation will be required to qualify for an extension. Many are frustrated that they have not received instructions about how they should document their delay in their ISP. Several thought that documenting delays in the ISP did not matter as they did not think it would lead to them receiving extensions in the end anyway. Several expressed that it was stressful for them that they could not apply for an extension until the end of their studies, and now they do not know how much time they have left. Some first year doctoral students expressed concern about how it is difficult to know if you have been delayed or negatively affected by the pandemic if you have nothing to compare it with.

The respondents were asked how they had been received when they wanted to document delays in the ISP. Many respondents expressed that their supervisors and departments had been supportive. A small number said neither their supervisor(s) nor their department were supportive. Several said that their supervisors had been supportive, while their departments were sceptical about granting extensions. One respondent wrote that while the supervisor had been positive, the department had questioned it, asking who the doctoral student thought should pay for the prolongation. Another respondent wrote that while their supervisor agreed that the project had been delayed and that there had been too little supervision, and the department director agreed, the general message had still been that prolongation would be difficult and should not be counted on.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked: “If you have documented a delay of your PhD studies caused by the pandemic in your ISP, what have you documented as causes to the delay?” The most common answer by far was that people had documented problems with performing experiments and collecting data. A large number of respondents also documented restricted travel, delayed or cancelled fieldwork, cancelled or postponed conferences, limited access to labs, and that they had needed to spend time on re-planning their PhD projects to work in the new circumstances. Several had documented cancelled courses, extra time spent on teaching and delays in deliveries of materials and equipment. Some respondents had documented less tangible reasons for their delays such as working in a less suitable work environment, mental health problems and delayed communication with colleagues and supervisors. A few documented the lack of clinical samples or delays in publication processes as reasons for their delays. Some less common reasons for delays (2 respondents mentioned each) that people had put in their ISPs were cancelled interviews, cancelled stays abroad, working from home with small children, less available supervisors, and that the pandemic has had an adverse effect on the quantity and quality of the collected data. Several respondents expressed that there were things that they would have wanted to put in the ISP that they had not put in, such as stress, depression, lack of motivation and lower productivity and slower communication with colleagues due to working from home. Concerning these points, there seems to be confusion about whether they can motivate prolongation, and thus whether there is any point in documenting them in the ISP.

Compensation for extra teaching hours

One point of concern from LDK’s survey in the spring of 2020 was that doctoral students experienced an added workload due to the transition to digital teaching². Doctoral students at LTH also experienced a higher teaching load during the spring due to the effects of Covid-19³. Since then, JDR has informed LDK that doctoral students who taught at the Faculty of Law during the spring all received 30 clock hours compensation for the capacity building that the transition required. Therefore, we wanted to follow up on this. The respondents were asked: “If you have spent extra hours on teaching due to the transition to online teaching, did you receive any compensation so far? If so, how much?” 48 respondents said in their free text answers that

²Lund’s Doctoral Student Union, “Analysis of consequences due to the Covid-19 pandemic”, May 15 2020, section 4.4.

³The Doctoral Student Guild within TLTH, “Effects of Covid-19 pandemic on doctoral students’ situation”.

they had received compensation. In that group, there seemed to be a significant variation in how much compensation respondents had received. One wrote that they had received enough, another said they had been compensated for approximately 80% of the extra hours, and a third said they had been compensated for approximately 10%.

It varies between departments that how teaching generally is compensated. At some departments you report the hours you have spent, while at others you receive a lump sum of hours for each course that you teach. Some respondents answered that they just reported hours like they normally do, and now they reported more hours. Therefore, this issue seems smaller for those doctoral students who report their hours rather than the ones who receive lump sums of hours as compensation. Others have been told to document extra hours, but at the same time given the message that it is unlikely they will be compensated. One respondent wrote that their department had told them to put a minimal effort into adapting courses to an online format. The respondent expressed concern about the adverse effect this was having on the quality of teaching, as what works well in person does not necessarily work well online.

Another recurring theme was that several respondents said they had not been compensated, but instead had been assigned hours to overlook students to make sure they did not cheat on exams. This they had to do during teaching hours that were normally scheduled for course administration or skills development. For those doctoral students, not only were they not compensated for the extra time spent on adaptation to the online format, but they actually were assigned more tasks without being offered more time to perform them.

7.1 Recommendations regarding delays, documentation and prolongation

1. Doctoral students must be encouraged to document delays due to Covid-19 in their individual study plans (ISPs). Guidelines at all Faculties should be clear about what reasons will motivate prolongation and what exact documentation a doctoral student needs to provide. How specific should the documentation in the ISP be? What section should it be put under? Ideally, the information could provide examples of what an application should look like. The university needs to follow-up that all doctoral students have received this information.
2. All doctoral students have been affected by the pandemic. In many cases it is hard to put a number on exactly how much time one has been delayed when the pandemic has resulted in a loss of productivity due to e.g. a loss of research environment and mental health aspects. To compensate for this in a fair and transparent manner, there should be a blanket prolongation of 2 months to all doctoral students, as is also recommended by SFS⁴.
3. In addition to the blanket prolongation, further prolongation needs to be granted for those who have been affected even further. Delays due to working at home with children needs to be accounted for. Procedures for processing prolongation applications due to Covid-19 need to be fair, transparent and predictable. The university needs to ensure that there is funding for the prolongation that each doctoral student is entitled to according to the guidelines that have been provided, and monitor that this is implemented in all places.

⁴Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), see note 1, p. 7.