Mutual ethical guidelines for the relationship between supervisors and doctoral students at LTH

Purpose and application
Conflicts related to supervision are relatively rare at the Faculty of Engineering (LTH), but they do occur. They are often deeply troublesome and require a lot of resources for all parties involved, and for the LTH organisation. The more a conflict escalates, the greater are the consequences and difficulties. The present ethical guidelines for research studies at LTH are generally just that – guidelines – and not binding regulations, and they are divided into more or less strong recommendations. They reflect the faculty’s position with regard to supervision relationships in research studies, and aim to provide support for LTH’s doctoral students, teaching staff and managers by:

• at an early stage identifying and avoiding reoccurring sources of conflict;
• serving as a guide for constructive conflict resolution;
• guiding third party mediators (head of department, director of studies, doctoral student representatives, etc.) in their analyses of the causes of conflicts so that they can suggest suitable solutions when mediating.

The guidelines were partly inspired by the ethical guidelines for research studies at the University of Oslo, Norway. LTH’s ethical guidelines are mutual and intended for both supervisors and doctoral students, with a certain emphasis on the actions of the supervisor. The ethical guidelines are adapted to the research studies environment at LTH, but to some extent involve both national legislation and local guidelines, such as

• The Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance
• The Swedish Discrimination Act
• The Swedish Penal Code with regard to bribery (Chapter 17§7 and Chapter 20§2)
• Ethical Issues at Lund University (2005)
• Guide regarding Discrimination, Harassment, and Victimisation for Students at LTH (2013)

These regulations and guidelines briefly touch on and partly concern research studies, but they do not explicitly address the relationship between doctoral
students and supervisors. For instance, Ethical Issues at Lund University (2005) deals with the ethics between researchers, without addressing the doctoral student–supervisor relationship within research or research studies. The ethical guidelines were drawn up on the basis of the LTH Guidelines for doctoral students and supervisors on conflict management and change of supervisor.

Below you will find themes A–H containing the basic principles for appropriate supervisor–doctoral student relationships and behaviours.

**Theme A: The supervision process**

- The supervisor is to set aside time for supervision to discuss how the doctoral student’s work is to be structured. A minimum of 4 hours per month has been decided.
- The doctoral student’s work and studies are to be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis.
- The doctoral student is to prioritise the planned work and is responsible for informing his or her supervisor of difficulties and necessary changes in the work.
- The doctoral student and the supervisor are to jointly plan and document the work in the individual study plan. This is to be updated immediately in case of significant changes in the conditions, or at least annually. The individual study plan is to be consistent with the framework provided in the general syllabus for the research studies subject.

**Theme B: Mutual respect for personal and academic integrity**

- The supervisor and the doctoral student are to show mutual respect for each other’s academic integrity and roles. This means that
  - a supervisor should not force their own values on doctoral students when there are alternative scientific approaches.
  - a doctoral student should discuss with their supervisor any need they have for additional external supervision.
- The supervisor and the doctoral student are to use a language that promotes the right to respect and personal integrity of both parties. Discrimination based on gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation and age are prohibited under the Swedish Discrimination Act.
- The supervisor and the doctoral student are mutually obliged to take complaints about inappropriate use of language and discrimination seriously. If such objections do not promptly result in an improved working environment, the head of department/division or the director of studies is to be contacted immediately.

**Theme C: Dual relationships**

- The supervisor and the doctoral student should maintain a professionally helpful relationship, and avoid personal relationships that may cause the parties to become biased, thus creating a conflict of interest in the workplace. If a personal relationship does develop, however, it is the
responsibility of the supervisor and the doctoral student to promptly initiate a change of supervisor.

- Dual relationships based on relevant professional roles (business partners, joint patents, etc.) are to be documented by the department already from the start to avoid conflicts of interest later during the research studies programme. This could include clearly establishing the ownership of valuable research results.

**Theme D: Trust and confidence**

- Advice with regard to the doctoral student’s personal life generally falls outside the role of the supervisor. However, the supervisor is expected to support the doctoral student by finding help if needed (e.g. with the Occupational Health Service or another appropriate unit). The supervisor must use discretion when handling personal information about the doctoral student.
- The supervisor should avoid sharing personal problems with the doctoral student, but should inform the student and the department of how such problems may affect the supervision.

**Theme E: Academic conduct**

- In cases of co-publications by the doctoral student and the supervisor within a joint research project, the principles of co-authorship and the order of authors should be established at an early stage of the research process.
- The supervisor and the doctoral student are to abide by the norms of their particular research discipline with regard to co-authorship and the order of authors, that is, base the authorship on the actual contributions to the publication.
- If a supervisor wishes to include the research results of a doctoral student in his or her individual publications, he or she must obtain consent from the doctoral student in good time. In such a case, references to the doctoral student’s contributions are to be made explicit, in accordance with good research practice.

**Theme F: Gifts and compensations**

- Doctoral students may not offer and the supervisor may not accept compensation for the supervision in addition to what has been agreed with the department and faculty. Such compensation can create bias and fall under the provisions on bribery in the Swedish Penal Code (Chapter 17 Section 7 and Chapter 20 Section 2).
- The supervisor and the department may not employ the doctoral student for work outside of what has been agreed in the individual study plan (research project, course work and departmental duties).
Theme G: Participation in an externally funded research project

- Most doctoral students at LTH are externally funded. It is the responsibility of the doctoral student to stay within the aim, scientific framework and timeframes of the research project. The right to change supervisors is established in the Higher Education Ordinance, but this does not mean a right to change research focus.
- It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that project administration does not take precedence and prevent the academic work of the doctoral student.
- The doctoral student must respect the fact that research results may need to be kept confidential before publication, provided that such boundary conditions have been established early on in the individual study plan. Confidentiality may not prevent the doctoral student from publishing and defending his or her doctoral thesis within the four years of study.
- It is the responsibility of the supervisor and department to ensure that the total amount of funding of a doctoral student covers all parts of his or her research studies (research project, courses, participation at conferences, etc.).

Theme H: In case of conflict

- If a supervisor and a doctoral student fail to agree on the content of the individual study plan, this is to be noted in the study plan immediately, after which a third party (see below) is to be involved.
- If the supervisor or the doctoral student finds the relationship seriously deficient, they must immediately involve a third party to solve the problem (head of department/division or director of studies). To address conflicts, LTH provides Guidelines for doctoral students and supervisors on conflict management and change of supervisor.

Theme I: Knowledge of the ethical guidelines

- LTH is to inform new doctoral students of the ethical guidelines as soon as they are admitted to research studies.
- When signing the first version of the individual study plan, the principal supervisor and doctoral student confirm that they have understood the content and meaning of the ethical guidelines.
- It is the principal supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that the assistant supervisor has read and understood the ethical guidelines. The ethical guidelines will be included in the next update of the LTH study handbook for research studies.