

Regulations for scholarships with repayment requirements

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Description:

Students who are admitted to postgraduate programmes sometimes have a financing plan which includes scholarships that may entail repayment requirements for the recipient. The purpose of these regulations is to clarify when this type of scholarships may be used and when not.

Disclaimer: In case of a discrepancy between the Swedish and the English versions, the Swedish version will prevail.

Background

The Board of the Faculty of Science decided on 2010-12-02 not to allow the admittance of doctoral students if the financing plan contains scholarships which may entail repayment requirements for the recipient. It has been suggested that this should be made into a regulation for the whole of Stockholm University. After hearing the Deputy Vice Presidents as well as the Office of Science and the Humanities Faculty Office, it can be noted that that such a decision has clear support. It has been suggested that the decision could also include post docs with scholarship funding.

At a national level, the question of scholarships with repayment conditions has previously been discussed. In February 2015, the Board of the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) asked Kerstin Tham, then pro vice-chancellor at Karolinska Institutet, to identify some circumstances concerning the funding of doctoral students, such as scholarships with repayment demands. Kerstin Tham presented her report to the SUHF Board in September 2015, and it was a point on the agenda of the SUHF General Assembly in October the same year. In the minutes of the General Assembly, we read the following: *“Kerstin Tham presented her assignment to identify demands for repayment and return to the home country for internationally funded doctoral students, including her own recommendations. The General Assembly decided to postpone the matter until the Research Career Inquiry (U2015:05) has presented its proposals. The report writer will submit a report of the inquiry to the government by 31 March 2016.”* The Research Career Inquiry does refer to the SUHF report; however, on the matter of scholarships with conditions, the inquiry only recommends that higher education institutions with scholarship holders shall have access to the scholarship agreements. Furthermore, these institutions shall have common guidelines on how to deal with such demands. Since then, the issue has not been raised within SUHF.

Position statement

In her report, Tham makes a distinction between demands with bearing on the responsibility of the university, i.e. education and examination, on one hand, and, on the other hand, demands made on the scholarship holder and which are regulated in a contract/agreement with the funder.

The report therefore recommends that institutions of higher education should not accept applicants who have a scholarship agreement with conditions which affect the study conditions of the doctoral student negatively compared to the conditions of other doctoral students at the university, or which infringe on the right of the university to decide how to carry out education and examination. This in turn means that the following demands from a funder will not be accepted:

- Repayment demands if the doctoral student does not achieve the qualitative targets of the exam and can therefore not obtain their degree.

- Demands put on the university or the supervisor to report to the funder on the planning, contents and implementation of the training of the individual doctoral student.

In accordance with the report, institutions of higher education are recommended to accept the following demands from a funder, where it is primarily a matter for the individual to determine whether the demands, including possible sanctions such as repayment in case of breach of contract, are reasonable:

- Demands to return to the country of origin after graduation.
- Demands to work at the home department or equivalent upon return after graduation.

The discussions and recommendations made in Kerstin Tham's report can also serve as a basis for a decision at Stockholm University. This would entail a somewhat more restrictive formulation of the decision than what was previously decided by the Board of the Faculty of Science.

Limiting the use of similar scholarships for post docs has also been considered. However, since such scholarships are not for training and examination it is difficult to argue in favour of such restrictions. The conditions pertaining to post doc scholarships should be a matter for the individual to judge; therefore, no such limitations are made by the university.

Decision

The President has decided not to allow the admittance of doctoral students if the finance plan contains demands for:

- repayment if the doctoral student does not achieve the qualitative targets of the exam and can therefore not obtain their degree, or
- the university or the supervisor to report to the funder on the planning, contents and implementation of the training of the individual doctoral student.