

RECRUITING DOCTORAL STUDENTS

RECOMMENDATIONS & TIPS



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL RECRUITMENT

At Umeå University, all doctoral positions must be advertised to ensure competitive recruitment of doctoral students. Umeå University has admission regulations for doctoral studies at Umeå University (Admission regulations for doctoral education at Umeå University, FS 1.1-859-17), which the faculty must comply with. Recruitment of a doctoral student is primarily recruitment for an education. This means that the process and regulations differ slightly from the recruitment of other personnel. Selecting the right candidate is important, and so the Faculty of Science and Technology has prepared this guide to provide assistance and support for successful recruitment of doctoral students at the departments.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS CONSISTS OF:

1. PREPARATIONS

Formulate an advertisement, appoint a recruitment group, etc.

2. ADVERTISING

Advertise the position for at least three weeks.

3. REVIEW AND SELECTION

Review all applications and select the most suitable candidates for interviews. References may be asked for prior to the interview, but most commonly this is done afterwards.

4. INTERVIEWS

Conduct interviews with the most promising candidates. It is good practice to use two rounds of interviews, a quick one to prepare a shortlist, followed by more intense interviews with a small number of applicants.

5. PLANNING & COMPILATION OF INDIVIDUAL STUDY PLAN

Here, the future doctoral student and supervisor work together to formulate the (first version of) the overall research plan.

6. DECISION

The head of department makes a decision on admission for doctoral studies.



ADVERTISING

Before announcing an open position, the head of department (or a responsible person as per delegation of authority) must approve commencement of recruitment for the position.

The advertisement must be worded so that it is clear and inviting. It must clearly describe the required qualifications and any additional ones that are desirable. The list of qualifications should in particular include measurable qualifications in order to facilitate selection. The wording of the advertisement must be objectively defensible in order to avoid every conceivable form of discrimination. All advertisements must have a reference number and be published in Varbi.

■ HOW TO ADVERTISE A DOCTORAL POSITION:

- Doctoral positions must be advertised via Varbi, the university's recruitment system.
- The vacancy is furthermore advertised in appropriate media, the minimum requirement being Umeå University's website and Platsbanken.
- Remember to advertise for an appropriate time and that the application period must be at least three weeks.
- The advertisement must be available in Swedish, and should usually also be available in English.
- The advertisement draft must be approved by the head of department and sent to the faculty office.
- After review at faculty level, the departmental administrator can set up the advertisement and publish it.
- The list of requirements must not be modified or extended once the announcement has been approved by the faculty office.

■ INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WELL-QUALIFIED APPLICANTS BY:

- Advertising in student magazines, e.g. Lundagård (<http://lundagard.se>).
- Faculty-specific advertisements (gather together in groups, across departments).
- Advertise in English.
- Distribute via student unions.
- Use subject-specific mailing lists.
- Distribute the advertisement via personal networks.
- Use social media.

■ THE ADVERTISEMENT SHOULD CONTAIN:

- A brief description of the department.
- A brief description of the project in question.

- Primary duties, in brief.
- Entry requirements for doctoral studies, see general study plans for the subject.
- Necessary qualifications (mandatory requirements).
- Other desirable qualifications (useful requirements).
- Specify what documents are to be included in the application (letter of intent, CV, approved degree project, substantiated copies of degree certificates, publications if any, contact information for references, etc.).
- Further details, contact details for the head of department, supervisor et al.
- Trade union information.
- Application procedure and deadline for applications.
- If the doctoral student shall be involved in teaching, this should ideally be specified in the advertisement.

■ EXAMPLES OF SKILLS, ABILITIES, AND TRAITS THAT MAY BE REQUESTED:

- **Personal**; e.g. independence, performance and quality oriented, flexible, endurance, personal maturity, integrity, initiative taking, self-motivated, stable, energetic, determined, clear, management skills, strategic.
- **Social**; e.g. interpersonal skills, empathy, persuasiveness, communication skills, relationship building, loyalty, service-oriented, appreciating and understanding cultural differences and backgrounds.
- **Intellectual**; e.g. judgement, analytical mind, creativity, structured.
- Any **specialist knowledge** required for the project in question.



KEEP IN MIND THAT:

- The requirements for the doctoral student position and their wording must avoid discrimination. Make sure not to put individuals of specific ethnicity, gender, age, or with disabilities at a disadvantage.
- Use simple, clear language in the advertisement, avoid abbreviations.
- The requirements indicated as mandatory in the requirements specification must be measurable, i.e. it must be possible to evaluate the level of knowledge and expertise.
- The requirements specification must be objective and based on formal requirements.

■ FORM A RECRUITMENT GROUP

Form a recruitment group along with the formulation of the advertisement. This group should comprise at least three people, such as:

- Subject-specific professor/examiner or another experienced supervisor
- Future supervisor
- Director of studies for doctoral studies
- Personnel administrator
- Person with specific subject expertise or not linked with the project
- Equal opportunities representative
- Doctoral student



SELECTION & RANKING

The first selection and ranking operation can be carried out by the entire recruitment group. Assess whether applicants meet the requirements and entry requirements at an early stage.

An initial selection should be made from the applicants who meet the basic entry requirements for doctoral studies, i.e. candidates who have been awarded a second-cycle degree, completed course requirements of at least 240 credits – of which at least 60 credits are at second-cycle level – or who have otherwise acquired equivalent knowledge in accordance with the Higher Education Ordinance, Chap. 7(39), and who meet the specific entry requirements for the subject as detailed in the general study plan.

According to the Higher Education Ordinance, Chap. 7(41), selection from among qualified applicants must take into account their ability to benefit from the studies.

Check to make sure that theses and publications listed by the candidates are available. Recall that they may be run through Urkund.

An overall assessment is made of applicants' qualifications and suitability.

■ DECISION ON WHICH CANDIDATES TO INTERVIEW

Working on the basis of the ranking, decisions are made on which candidates are to be called to interview. It is preferable to call **at least three candidates** to interview. If there are many applicants, a larger number of people will be called to attend an initial interview. After that, candidates interviewed will be ranked again and those best qualified for the position will be called to a second, more thorough interview.

■ PORTFOLIO IN ORDER TO TEST KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITIES

Using some form of portfolio prior to the final interview is a useful instrument for testing the candidates' knowledge and abilities. For example, it is possible to ask applicants to **write a scientific abstract** of a selected appropriate scientific article. It is important for tasks and instructions to be standardised in order to create equivalent conditions for all candidates by means of written information, time frames allocated and suchlike.

Candidates may be asked to write a brief abstract of what the publication is about, what research challenges the applicant considers to exist within the field in question, and to **formulate one or two research questions** on the subject themselves. This task is submitted by a specific deadline and then discussed during the interview.

The applicant may be encouraged to write the abstract in English in order to **test language skills**. Alternatively, the candidate must verbally describe a relevant article that has been sent to the candidate three to four hours prior to interview, for example. Many variations are possible, such as asking candidates to think about a specific research question and to present their thoughts during the interview within a given time frame.



INTERVIEWS

The purpose of interviews is to work on the basis of the requirements in the advertisement to create relevant, comparable information in order to provide a basis for assessment. An interview also provides an opportunity to pass on a positive impression of Umeå University.

PREPARE THE INTERVIEW CAREFULLY

- Interviews can be held with **candidates on site** at face-to-face meetings, or using Skype, for example.
- All candidates must be **treated the same** during the interviews. The supervisor should preferably lead the interviews. The recruitment group will attend the interview. The group should be made up of no more than three to four people, including the principal supervisor. Clarify the distribution of roles in the recruitment group so that questions are divided up among the interviewers prior to the interview. Each member of the group should have different perspectives.
- Carefully prepare the structure of the interview and the interview questions. The questions must be **open, brief, straight and simple**. Avoid leading, duplicate, ambiguous or discriminatory questions. Interview questions relating to skills should be based on **self-perceived experiences** where the applicant is asked to talk about a situation in which a specific skill is illustrated, i.e. interview questions that also measure and relate to the behaviour and action of an individual in various work situations.



- The interview should take the form of an open dialogue with questions beginning with: How, What, In what way, Explain, Why, How would you describe, etc.
- Remember to make an appropriate selection of questions, and that you do not need to ask all questions if there is a risk of the interview taking too much time.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW STRUCTURE:

■ INTRODUCTION:

Welcome the candidate and introduce the interview participants, then provide a brief description of the structure of and time frame for the interview.

■ PRESENTATION:

Brief presentation of Umeå University and the relevant department and research team. Describe Umeå University, the activities in the tasks.

■ APPLICANT'S BACKGROUND:

Ask the applicant to introduce him/herself in brief and to describe his/her educational background, subject area and interests.

■ NARROW DOWN SKILLS:

Check relevant theoretical subject knowledge and other skills requested in the advertisement, e.g. language skills, IT skills, etc. Ask the person to describe his/her work experience, degree project, motivation to become a doctoral student and plans for the future.

■ OPPORTUNITY FOR QUESTIONS:

Give the applicant the opportunity to ask questions.

■ CONCLUSION:

Conclude by describing the schedule for the ongoing process and indicate when you are expecting recruitment to be complete and you will be able to submit notification of a decision. Finish off by thanking the candidate for attending the interview.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

■ WHO ARE YOU?

Tell us a bit about yourself!

How would you describe yourself?

What are your positive qualities/strong sides?

What are your negative qualities/weak sides?

What does success mean to you?

Have you encountered adversity? If so, what did you do and what experience did you gain from that?

Can you give us an example of a problem that you have resolved?

What are you most proud of?

Can you tell us about something really good that you have done?

Which of your personal qualities do you think provide useful qualification for this employment?

Name a field in which your skills for this doctoral studentship are not especially strong.

In which fields would you like to develop?

Why are you applying for a doctoral studentship?

What are your professional ambitions? Professional targets?
What is important to you?
What is your strongest driving force?
What motivates you?
How do you think others would describe you?

■ DOCTORAL STUDIES?

Why do you want to become a doctoral student?
What is what you think is exciting with a doctoral education?
What is the most important thing you want to learn during the training?
What makes you curious, motivates you, inspires you so much that you want to spend five years of your life on a doctoral education?

■ EDUCATION/TRAINING/CHOICE OF PROFESSION/ PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Describe your present/previous work/studies. How do/did you enjoy that?
What do you think you have been successful/less successful at in your previous work/studies?
Can you describe the most important experience you gained?
Of your previous experience, what do you think could be useful in a doctoral studentship?

■ STRESS, CONFLICT OCH COOPERATION?

Can you describe a situation in which you were under stress? How did you resolve the situation?
How do you react when faced with new tasks? What do you do to deal with them?
How do you react when a task does not go the way you planned?
Describe a situation in which you received criticism. How did you react?
Describe a conflict situation in which you were involved. How was the conflict resolved?
Describe a situation in which you were forced to work with a person with whom you found it difficult to work. How did you handle this?
Do you prefer working alone, or as part of a team?
What is your role in a team? What do you contribute to a team?

■ STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS?

What qualities are you most appreciated for?
Is there anything that has slowed down your development?
What makes you angry/sad/irritated/upset/happy?
How do you think your manager would describe your work, and why?
You said you like coming into contact with people. Tell us more about that.

■ WHY YOU?

Why should we employ you?
Is there anything you would like to add that we have not asked you about?

For more inspiration, see:

<https://projekt.aurora.umu.se/projekt/chefshandboken/Sidor/Rekrytering.aspx>



REFERENCES & SUGGESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

■ ASSESSMENT MATRIX:

An assessment matrix may be very helpful to help you choose who is to be offered the doctoral studentship. All members of the recruitment group fill in the matrix individually with no prior discussion. The matrix specifies what knowledge, skills and attitudes are deemed necessary for the doctoral studentship. For example, grade (on a scale of 1 to 3) how well the applicant meets the competence requirements and the extent to which he/she has the preferred skills.

■ REFERENCES:

Taking up references is an important part of the process and must be viewed as an important complement to other information. The purpose is to acquire supplementary information about the applicant and verify the details submitted by the applicant. Another purpose is to discover new aspects of the applicant and address any queries so that the overall impression is as complete as possible.

Taking up references by telephone is recommended.

For more support and a selection of questions, see Guide for taking references:
<https://projekt.aurora.umu.se/projekt/chefshandboken/Sidor/Rekrytering.aspx>



DECISION ON EMPLOYMENT & ADMISSION

The work of the recruitment group is concluded by **selecting a candidate** for the position. The recruitment group submits its **suggestion to the head of department**. A **description** of the entire admission process and a basis for the decision must be provided.

Notify the doctoral student of **maintenance and terms** at an early stage so that the future doctoral student is aware of the **conditions** applicable throughout the entire doctoral course. Also provide information on the **faculty's handbook** for doctoral courses and study programmes. The head of department makes decisions on the **admission and employment** of doctoral students. Take care to ensure that applicants meet the entry requirements.



THE CASE IS ARCHIVED

■ LIST OF WHAT IS TO BE ARCHIVED:

- Equipment documentation (requirements specification, finance, etc.)
- The advertisement
- Applications inc. enclosures
- Who was offered the doctoral studentship. Any withdrawal of applications.
- The decision data
- Any other correspondence
- Any notes on the appointment

Decisions on admission to doctoral studies are **archived at the department**. The director of studies and doctoral studies administrator or the person to whom this task is delegated is responsible for archiving at the department. The head of department holds overall responsibility but may have delegated this task.



More information and support relating to recruitment (in Swedish) can be found at:

<https://projekt.aurora.umu.se/projekt/chefshandboken/Sidor/Rekrytering.aspx>

If you have more suggestions and tips on how to improve recruitment, please send an email to susanne.vikstrom@umu.se.

Bibliography:

The Swedish Public Employment Service, <http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/For-arbetsgivare/Rekryteringsguide.html>

Recruitment of doctoral students, Lund University, Faculty of Science, Lund University of Technology, Ragnhild Möller, MediaTryck 2015



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