

# GSA Work Environment Mini-Survey

The board of the Graduate Student Association (GSA)

Doktorandsektionens styrelse

## Introduction

The objective of this survey was to investigate possible sources of workplace stress and/or conflict that may interfere with the working environment of the of doctoral students at Karlstad University. The topic arose from discussions and meetings among doctoral students of the GSA. The GSA board members designed the questionnaire and sent it to all doctoral candidates via the mailing list [dokths@kau.se](mailto:dokths@kau.se) and [dokthnt@lists.kau.se](mailto:dokthnt@lists.kau.se) in November 2018. The survey was open for submission for two weeks, between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of November. In total 30 people responded. A possible reason for the fairly low response count is that a reminder was not sent, as was the case in the two previous mini surveys.

## Questions

1. Which subject are you in? (open question)
2. Do you feel like you can control your own: (6 Likert scale+ I don't know)
  - a. Working schedule?
  - b. PhD-related research?
3. Have you ever felt pressured to do any of the following? (yes-no-n/a)
  - a. Work evenings / weekends
  - b. Work even though you're sick
  - c. Work on something that is not
  - d. related to your PhD research
  - e. Reschedule or give up vacation days
  - f. Comment
4. Do you feel you can influence how your working hours are assigned to research, teaching, departmental duties, etc. ("percentages")? (6 Likert scale+ I don't know)
5. Approximately how many hours do you work per week (on average) with each of the following: (open fields)
  - a. Research
  - b. Teaching
  - c. Other tasks
  - d. Comment
6. Does your actual working hours correspond to your assigned percentages for each type of work? (6 Likert scale+ I don't know)
7. Does your working schedule affect your life outside work in a negative way? (6 Likert scale+ I don't know)
8. Are you generally satisfied with how your research is progressing? (6 Likert scale+ I don't know)
9. Do you feel your physical working environment (office, lab, etc.) is adequate? (6 Likert scale+ I don't know)
  - a. Comment
10. Do you have any other comments regarding your work environment?

## Findings summary

The following subsections contain summaries corresponding to the questions of the previous section.

### Subjects (Q1)

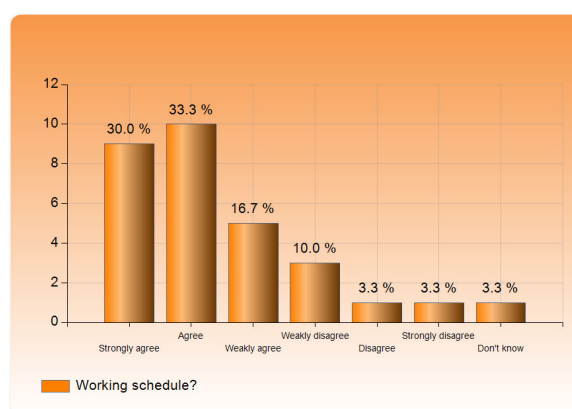
The following list is compiled from the free text responses, duplicates were removed.

- Business Administration
- Computer Science
- Educational studies
- HHS
- History
- Law
- Mathematics
- Media and communication
- Natural sciences
- Nursing
- Pedagogical Studies
- Physics
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Public health science
- Risk- and environmental studies
- Science education
- Sociology
- Working life science
- PhD work and Teaching

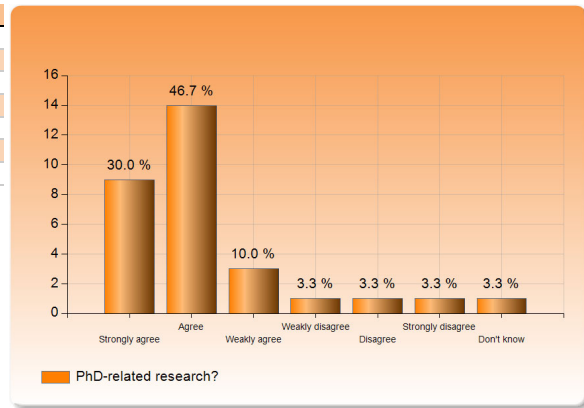
### Control (Q2)

From the 30 responses, 24 responses agreed they “feel” they “can control” their working schedule and 26 their PhD-research. However, there were some who disagreed (5 for working schedule, and 3 for PhD-research) and one “I don’t know”.

Working schedule?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	9 (30.0%)
Agree	10 (33.3%)
Weakly agree	5 (16.7%)
Weakly disagree	3 (10.0%)
Disagree	1 (3.3%)
Strongly disagree	1 (3.3%)
Don't know	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100.0%)</b>



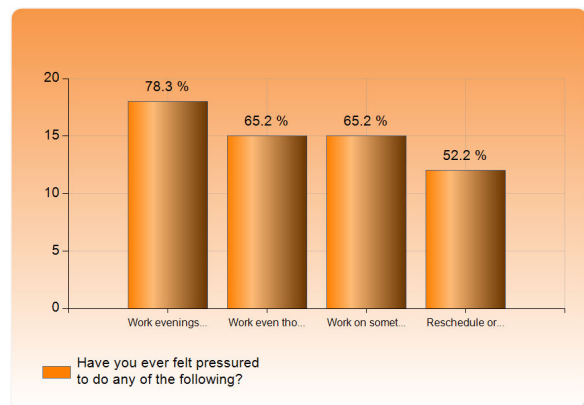
PhD-related research?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	9 (30.0%)
Agree	14 (46.7%)
Weakly agree	3 (10.0%)
Weakly disagree	1 (3.3%)
Disagree	1 (3.3%)
Strongly disagree	1 (3.3%)
Don't know	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100.0%)</b>



### Pressure (Q3)

Most indicated that they feel pressured more or less to work on the instances provided. The comment section included some details where the pressure is either from self, peers, or due to conflicts with teaching duties. Additionally, there were some reservation on commenting and giving out details. 23 participants responded to this question with yes/no, while the rest left it blank. The following graph represent the number of responses per instance (e.g., work evenings/ weekends) for the 23 participants.

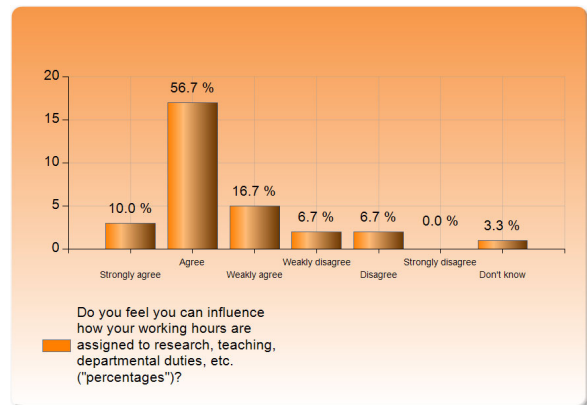
Have you ever felt pressured to do any of the following?	Number of Responses
Work evenings / weekends	18 (78.3%)
Work even though you're sick	15 (65.2%)
Work on something that is not related to your PhD research	15 (65.2%)
Reschedule or give up vacation days	12 (52.2%)



### Distribution of working hours influence (Q4)

Overall, the majority (25 indicated different levels of agreeing) agrees that they “feel” they “can influence how” their “working hours are assigned”.

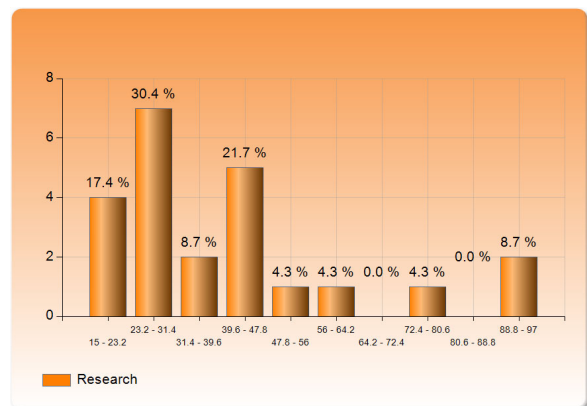
Do you feel you can influence how your working hours are assigned to research, teaching, departmental duties, etc. ("percentages")?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	3 (10.0%)
Agree	17 (56.7%)
Weakly agree	5 (16.7%)
Weakly disagree	2 (6.7%)
Disagree	2 (6.7%)
Strongly disagree	0 (0.0%)
Don't know	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100.0%)</b>



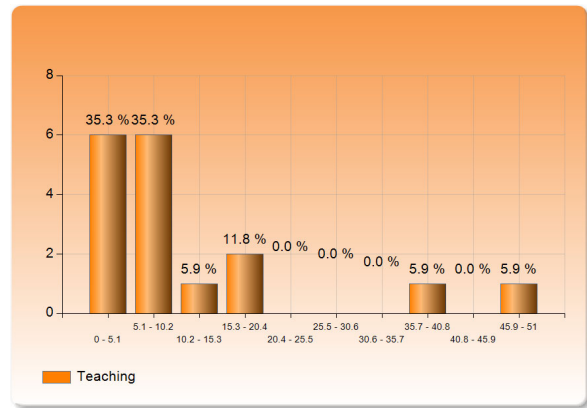
## Hours spent on research, teaching, and other tasks. (Q5)

There were several no-responses to this question excluding 0 hours (7 no responses for research hours, 13 for teaching, and 12 for other tasks). Additionally, in the comment section many indicated that it was difficult to estimate the time allocated to specific areas in a week due to periods of many hours of teaching and others of intense research. Some indicated that they are not working full time, and one stated that they gave the numbers in percentage. Q5 should have been phrased differently by accounting for the different forms of employment of the people admitted to research education at KAU which result in varying ratios of departmental assignments (including teaching) and research. Additionally, instead of asking for weekly distribution of work tasks, we could have projected the estimate on a larger timeframe, e. g. a semester, by using percentage values.

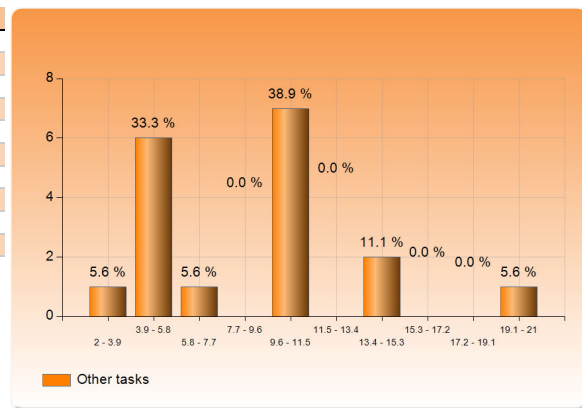
Research	Number of Responses
15 - 23.2	4 (17.4%)
23.2 - 31.4	7 (30.4%)
31.4 - 39.6	2 (8.7%)
39.6 - 47.8	5 (21.7%)
47.8 - 56	1 (4.3%)
56 - 64.2	1 (4.3%)
64.2 - 72.4	0 (0.0%)
72.4 - 80.6	1 (4.3%)
80.6 - 88.8	0 (0.0%)
88.8 - 97	2 (8.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 (100.0%)</b>



Teaching	Number of Responses
0 - 5.1	6 (35.3%)
5.1 - 10.2	6 (35.3%)
10.2 - 15.3	1 (5.9%)
15.3 - 20.4	2 (11.8%)
20.4 - 25.5	0 (0.0%)
25.5 - 30.6	0 (0.0%)
30.6 - 35.7	0 (0.0%)
35.7 - 40.8	1 (5.9%)
40.8 - 45.9	0 (0.0%)
45.9 - 51	1 (5.9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 (100.0%)</b>



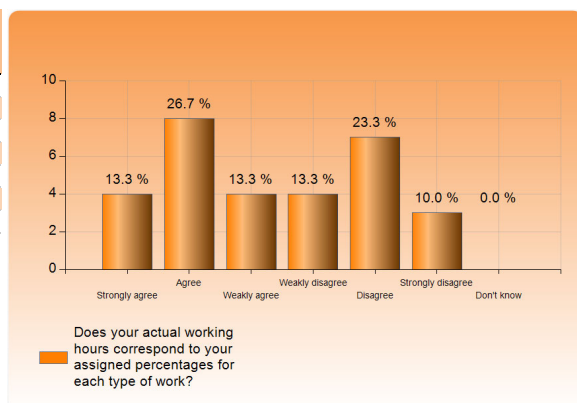
Other tasks	Number of Responses
2 - 3.9	1 (5.6%)
3.9 - 5.8	6 (33.3%)
5.8 - 7.7	1 (5.6%)
7.7 - 9.6	0 (0.0%)
9.6 - 11.5	7 (38.9%)
11.5 - 13.4	0 (0.0%)
13.4 - 15.3	2 (11.1%)
15.3 - 17.2	0 (0.0%)
17.2 - 19.1	0 (0.0%)
19.1 - 21	1 (5.6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>18 (100.0%)</b>



## Working hours vs. percentages assigned (Q6)

Almost 50% of the respondents answered they work more than the percentages assigned to them (14 respondents have indicated different levels of disagreement). The question asked generally “for each type of work”. The qualitative answers strongly indicate that teaching is the major problem area in this regard as it takes more time than doctoral student gets assigned for.

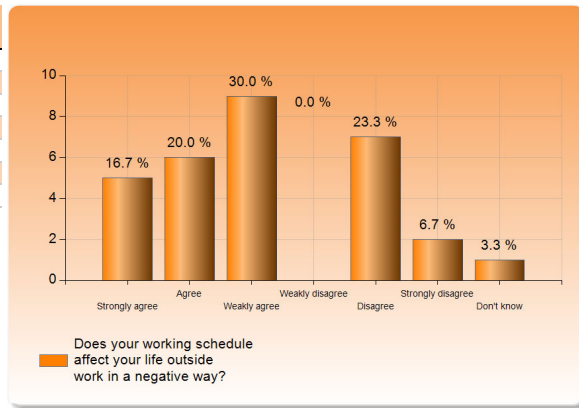
Does your actual working hours correspond to your assigned percentages for each type of work?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	4 (13.3%)
Agree	8 (26.7%)
Weakly agree	4 (13.3%)
Weakly disagree	4 (13.3%)
Disagree	7 (23.3%)
Strongly disagree	3 (10.0%)
Don't know	0 (0.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>



## Negative impact on life outside work (Q7)

Two thirds (66,7%) of the respondents “agree” that their work affects their life outside work in a negative way. We did not provide a follow up with comments to this question.

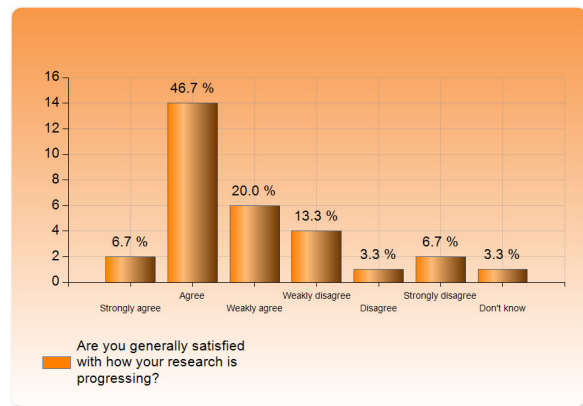
Does your working schedule affect your life outside work in a negative way?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	5 (16.7%)
Agree	6 (20.0%)
Weakly agree	9 (30.0%)
Weakly disagree	0 (0.0%)
Disagree	7 (23.3%)
Strongly disagree	2 (6.7%)
Don't know	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100.0%)</b>



## Research progress satisfaction (Q8)

Even though a majority of doctoral students have stated that teaching and other departmental tasks take more time than they are assigned for (see Q5 and Q6), only seven (23,3%) responded with different levels of “disagree”. By correlating the results of Q3, Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q8, one could make the assumption that doctoral students work on weekends, evenings, and even when they are sick (see Q3) in order to make up time that should have been used for research but which they have lost by working more hours on departmental tasks (including teaching) than are accounted for. This work overload affects negatively the work-life balance (see Q7) of doctoral students at KAU.

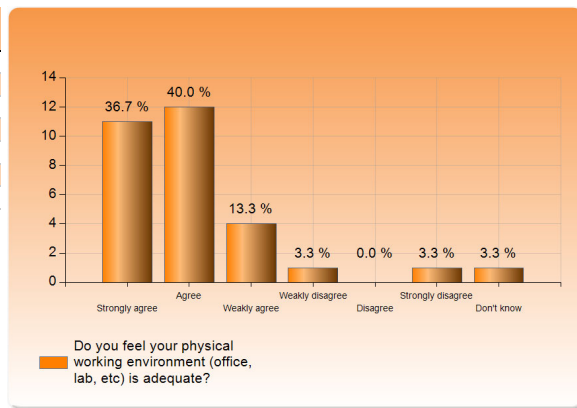
Are you generally satisfied with how your research is progressing?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	2 (6.7%)
Agree	14 (46.7%)
Weakly agree	6 (20.0%)
Weakly disagree	4 (13.3%)
Disagree	1 (3.3%)
Strongly disagree	2 (6.7%)
Don't know	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100.0%)</b>



## Physical working environment (Q9)

Generally, there were positive responses, however few indicated some physical environment issues such as the thin walls, heating/cooling deficiencies (where they had to purchase their own supplements), and disliking sharing an office and resulting to working from home instead.

Do you feel your physical working environment (office, lab, etc) is adequate?	Number of Responses
Strongly agree	11 (36.7%)
Agree	12 (40.0%)
Weakly agree	4 (13.3%)
Weakly disagree	1 (3.3%)
Disagree	0 (0.0%)
Strongly disagree	1 (3.3%)
Don't know	1 (3.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100.0%)</b>



## Further comments on working environment (Q10)

Poor social working atmosphere, where conflicts causes one to work from home to avoid awkward situations was brought up in the comments section. Lack of teamwork in the research-working environment was indicated as negative influence of the working environment. Finally, teaching was mentioned again in the scope of being short of staff, which eventually affects their working environment.

## Conclusions

Overall, the responses indicated that doctoral students at KAU are placed under work pressure. This has a negative impact on their lives regarding the PhD working environment. One main issue highlighted was teaching and the hours assigned not corresponding to the amount of work given. The following action points (APs) target each of the results and corresponding questions (Q1-9):

- ❖ **AP1 (Q1):** Regarding the question about the subjects that PhD students are in, there has been comments outside the survey where participants indicated their reluctance in stating their subject, due to anonymity and the high risk of them being re-identified. Therefore, we compiled a list of the data subjects that were mentioned, and didn't link responses to the subjects. In future surveys, we will use department clusters instead of subjects.
- ❖ **AP2 (Q2, Q3, Q4, Q8):** Regarding control, pressure, working hours, and research progress satisfaction, the GSA will investigate further possible issues in the "PhD Fikas" organized with PhD Ombud Anna Öhman.
- ❖ **AP3 (Q3, Q6, Q9, Q10):** Since teaching issues has been brought up in many instances throughout the comments, the GSA will organize a PhD lunch seminar "Teaching as PhD".
- ❖ **AP4 (Q7, Q9, Q10):** The GSA will contact and notify HR, since issues with physical environment and impact of life outside work (possibly stress and health) falls under their area of expertise. Additionally the GSA will make information regarding the skyddsombud (safety officer) per department available on the website.