

Inequality in distribution of offices for PhD candidates and HYVÄT's solutions

Doctoral education is one of the university's core functions. Thus, the university should guarantee all doctoral candidates the best possible conditions for doing doctoral studies. Offering doctoral candidates office space is one crucial component of good working conditions. However, the university's practice of distributing workspaces to doctoral candidates varies significantly between doctoral programmes and faculties that make different, and sometimes contradictory, guidelines for the distribution of workspaces. This leaves doctoral candidates in very different situations depending on their discipline. The employed ones get a working space (including computer, printing rights, etc.) as a part of their contract, but the principles for when grantees and those who are non-funded can get a workspace are inconsistent - often these groups are excluded from all possibilities of applying for a workspace.

We would like to highlight the university's responsibility to provide all doctoral candidates with *equal possibilities* to pursue their doctoral studies and complete their dissertation. The University of Helsinki's strategic aims are to become an attractive environment for international students and researchers, and to promote an open organisational culture, but the university's actual policies of allocating workspaces are contradictory to these aims. Not offering all doctoral candidates office spaces according to equal and transparent practices directly hampers doctoral candidates' chances of timely graduation.

In order to improve the current situation we propose that:

1. Practices for distributing office space should be standardized throughout the university, and clear rules of how the workspaces are distributed should be openly available for everyone.
2. Working spaces should be free of charge. Doctoral candidates are often working on limited and short-term funding, and asking them to pay for coming to work cannot be justified.
3. Source of funding as a strict criterion for working space should be abandoned because it creates several hierarchies of doctoral candidates: 1) the employed, who have office spaces, 2) grantees who sometimes do and sometimes do not have office spaces, and 3) the unfunded who are left without any support. Working spaces should be allocated to any doctoral candidate in need.
4. Doctoral candidates are a significant part of their disciplinary research communities/groups and this should be acknowledged in practice by integrating them into the office spaces of their research disciplines or groups. HYVÄT's recent survey for doctoral candidates showed that 47% of all doctoral candidates do not feel integrated into the research community. This did not vary much between doctoral schools, but correlated strongly with not having a workspace at the university. (HYVÄT survey report, pages 3, 15, 17–18)
5. Doctoral candidates significantly contribute to the research that is carried out at the university: the scientific community benefits from the research output of doctoral candidates and the university gains prestige as well as financial support for the completed doctoral degrees. Hence, it should be in the university's interest to provide an attractive working environment for doctoral candidates.

Office space in connection to the relevant discipline or research group is crucial:

- 1) The key is to allocate workspace to the doctoral candidates ***in connection to the relevant discipline or research group***, so that they have a possibility to connect with colleagues in their own field (supervisors, staff, and fellow doctoral candidates). Office spaces where they are cut off from their closest colleagues do not offer the support of the community.
- 2) It improves the contact to the supervisor(s) and thus the supervision of doctoral candidates.
- 3) It connects doctoral candidates to their own field and community, and thus gives access to the vital silent knowledge (on funding, upcoming projects, courses, conferences, social events etc.) circulating at the departments, access to which significantly aids the timely completion of doctoral dissertations.
- 4) Such integration also greatly improves the future career prospects of doctoral candidates
- 5) Integration into a relevant research community also promotes wellbeing at work: the peer-support of fellow doctoral students as well as lecturers and professors reduces stress and helps doctoral candidates make progress in their studies.

Case study: changes about to be made in the Faculty of Arts Topelia building

When changes in office space occur, the changes that now are about to be made in the Faculty of Arts serve as a good example of how not to manage office spaces.

The faculty is being concentrated into the Topelia and Metsätalo buildings due to a need to save 25% of the faculty's square meters. The decisions have been made without consulting the research community at all, and presented when there are only 7 weeks to the actual move.

The new facilities of shared open offices are not suited to the needs and work of researchers. Research has revealed that open offices in fact do not improve work efficiency. (See for example: Sundstrom, Burt, and Kamp 1980; Evans and Johnson 2000; Smith, Jackson, and Klein 2009; Pejtersen, Feveile, Christensen, and Burr 2011; Davis, Leach, and Clegg, 2011). Researchers need offices where they can concentrate in silence, keep their necessary research material, and meet with students in private. When communicating details of the new facilities the architect from the university (Tilapalvelut) was surprisingly arrogant and unaware of the work community's needs. For example he suggested that researchers "examine their bookshelves critically" as shelf space in the new office will be significantly reduced. Books constitute an obvious necessity for research in the humanities - will laboratories be closed on other campuses if the equipment does not fit the architect's plans?

Furthermore, it was suggested that the doctoral students apply for offices in the so-called Sokrates complex. It is a shared space connected to no relevant disciplinary context, where no one has their own designated desk and everyone works from their own laptop. This would destroy existing research communities and disconnect doctoral students from their respective disciplines. When this was pointed out the architect suggested we ask our professors to come there for coffee breaks - this idea of busy professors making time to do this is simply absurd. The network of a research community consists of more than professors. In addition, breaking away the doctoral students from their disciplines on one campus would harm the concerned disciplines because their doctoral students would not have as good chances to complete their doctoral studies as those that have proper offices in connection to their research groups/disciplines.

Lastly, no ways of participation in the process of planning the new offices was offered during the communication of the above-mentioned first information.

This is not how distribution of office spaces should be managed. The research community needs to be heard in the planning phase to ensure that the new office spaces correspond to its needs. **In addition, it is crucial that the office spaces can accommodate the entire research community, including the doctoral students.**

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Studies on open-plan offices and their effect on people's work performance:

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Sundstrom, E., Burt, R. E. and Kamp, D. 1980. Privacy at Work: Architectural Correlates of Job and Job Performance, *The Academy of Management Journal* Vol. 23, No. 1, Mar. 1980, 101-117. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/255498>

Pejtersen, J.H., Feveile, H, Christensen K.B., and Burr H. 2011 Sickness absence associated with shared and open-plan offices: a national cross sectional questionnaire survey. *Scandinavian Journal of Work Environment & Health*. 2011 Sep; 37(5):376-82. Epub 2011 Apr 28.

Evans G.W., Johnson D. 2000. Stress and open-office noise. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 2000 Oct; 85(5):779-83.

Smith, T. L., Jackson K., Klein W. 2009. Open-plan offices: Task performance and mental workload, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 2009 vol. 29 issue 2, 279-289.

HYVÄT's PhD student survey 2018 can be accessed on HYVÄT's homepage:

<https://blogs.helsinki.fi/phd-association/hyvät-phd-student-survey-2018/>

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