

INTRODUCTION

This report covers several topics about PhD students. The report begins with problem areas and related proposed actions, i.e. stress, supervision, lack of information, courses at KAU and number of ECTS, teaching time, and research environment stimulation.

The second section begins with describing the profile of the participants and provides general information. Then, the survey covers the following topics:

- The impact of the Covid19 on the PhD students,
- Stress-related issues of the PhD students,
- supervision,
- career plan,
- PhD courses,
- Research environments at KAU, and
- The work environment at KAU.

PROBLEM AREAS & PROPOSED ACTIONS

STRESS

Stress is a common issue. Many respondents feel they never catch up with their work. Many also shared they have headaches, pain in their neck and shoulders. Causes can be diverse and complex, and they should be addressed. The university has the responsibility for PhDs work environment. Thus, the GSA Board encourages KAU to actively address issues related to stress and mental health among PhD students.

Proposed actions

- Enhancing PhD communities and social interactions at the department or subject level or with research school to **address the isolation** of PhD students.
- Checking all routines to **introduce and include the PhD students in their work environment** are running smoothly for newly arrived PhD students
- Providing **more information about doctoral studies**. For example, clearer guidelines and frameworks of how to go through and achieve doctoral studies. The lack of confidence about work also shows a need to address uncertainties to judge the quality of their work.
- Providing **guidance to supervisors** to identify PhD students' stress and mental health and direct them to get support
- Providing **clear information and guidance for the PhD students** who face stress-related issues (e.g. stress-relieving activities)

SUPERVISION

Overall, PhD students are positive about supervision, but it also shows some room for improvement. Lack of guidance by the supervisor(s) is an important issue raised by 20.5% of the informants. Also, 17 % of the respondents has thought about changing their supervisor. Although the majority of the respondents seem to be satisfied, there is a small minority that needs a change.

In addition, many respondents answered that they lack stimulation and inspiration to solve research issues in their environment.

Proposed actions:

- Arranging supervision workshops regularly (e.g. every few years) for continuous updates to supervisors about the latest research on supervision

- Setting up a system of evaluation and reward (e.g. a price for the best supervisor, which could give more merits to supervise PhD students)

INFORMATION

The results in the survey show that PhD students need more information about life in Sweden.

Proposed action:

- Providing more accessible information about life in Sweden for newcomers and international PhD students

COURSES AT KAU

Many PhD students are dissatisfied with the **number of ECTS** they need for courses. Not all PhD students need the same amount, and it varies greatly (less than 30 to 90 ECTS), which makes the level of difficulty to achieve doctoral studies uneven. Some students need more credits for courses, although they are expected to have a similar quality dissertation as students who need fewer credits, and who consequently have more time for their thesis. In other words, the workload is unevenly distributed among PhD students.

Proposed action:

- Standardising the number of ECTS across subjects might not be possible, but the university should offer equal conditions regarding the workload of PhD students.

Another issue regarding courses is **the number of general training courses at KAU**.

Proposed action:

- Looking over potential opportunities to develop more general training courses

TEACHING TIME

28.8% of the respondents found the time they dedicate to teaching is more than the teaching time set out in their terms of employment. This problem does not concern PhD students only.

Proposed action:

- Time grids for teaching activities should be revised and adapted to the context (e.g. transferring a course that was taught in class to an online course, etc.)

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT STIMULATION

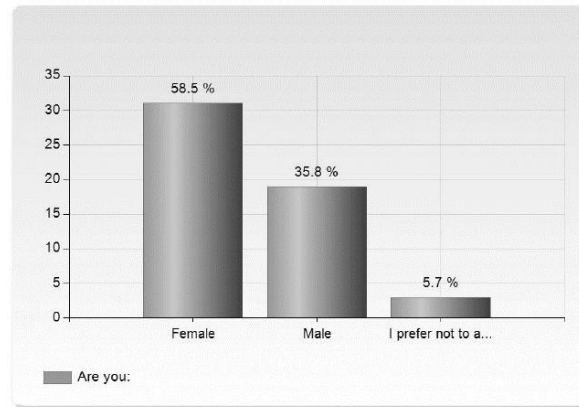
20.5% of the respondents highlight the lack of a stimulating research environment.

Proposed action

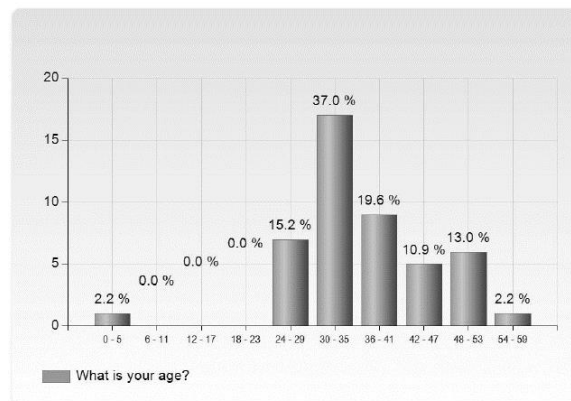
- The university could encourage research schools to develop across subjects
- The university could encourage closer connections among similar subjects in Sweden and neighbouring countries so that the PhD students are involved in Nordic networks

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Fifty-three students answered the survey. The distribution in terms of gender is not well balanced as the results show, and more female than male answered:

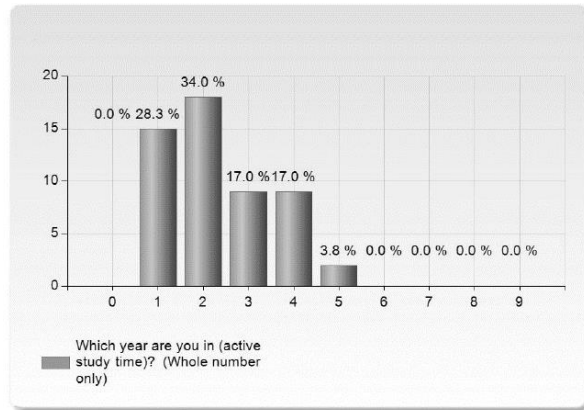


30-35 is the age category the most represented among the respondents (37.0%). Then, the 36-41 age category comes (19.6%), followed by the 24-29 age category (15.2%), the 48-53 age category (13.0%), and eventually, the 54-59 age category (2.2%).



As the figure above shows, almost all departments are represented in the survey. Students from the Department of Educational studies are the most represented (18.9%), while students from Engineering and Physics are the least represented (1.9%). In terms of length of study, most of the respondents are either in their second (34%) or first year (28.3%).

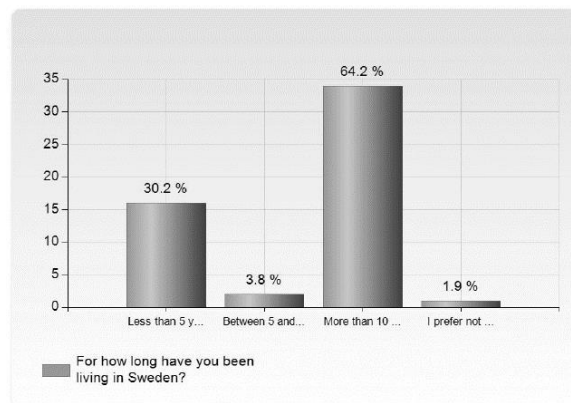
Which department are you affiliated with?	Number of Responses
Karlstad Business School	3 (5.7%)
Department of Artistic Studies	0 (0.0%)
Department of Political, Historical, Religious and Cultural Studies	7 (13.2%)
Department of Social and Psychological Studies	5 (9.4%)
Department of Language, Literature and Intercultural Studies	3 (5.7%)
Department of Geography, Media and Communication	6 (11.3%)
Department of Educational Studies	10 (18.9%)
Department of Environmental and Life Sciences	4 (7.5%)
Department of Health Sciences	6 (11.3%)
Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences	3 (5.7%)
Department of Engineering and Physics	1 (1.9%)
Department of Mathematics and Computer Science	5 (9.4%)
Total	53 (100.0%)



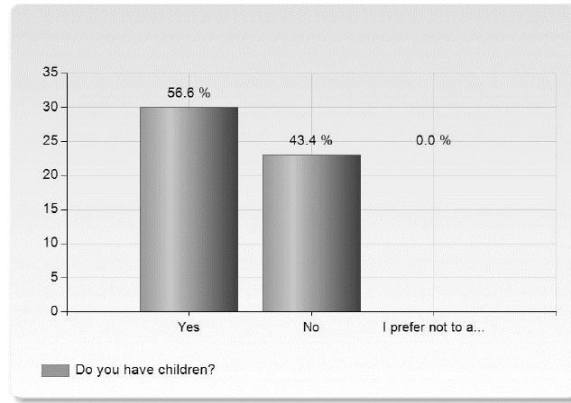
The great majority of students (79.2%) have not had a long break from their study, and 15.1% had. Eventually, most of the respondents are internally funded (54.7%) and externally funded (22.6%).

64.2% of the respondents are from Sweden, while 34% are not. In terms of language, more than half of the participants (69.8%) are fluent in Swedish, while 30.2% of the participants are not.

More than half (64.2%) of the participants have been living in Sweden for more than ten years. A significant share of the participants (30.2%) has been living in Sweden for less than five years. Only two participants (3.8%) have been living in Sweden between five and ten years.



A small majority of the participants (56.6%) do have children, and 43.4% do not have children.



BEING A PHD STUDENT DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

A high number of participants (84.9%) in the survey feel that the pandemic has affected their work. Although 14.9% of the respondents felt they had not been affected, the pandemic has affected the work of other respondents in several ways. Major issues are **isolation** (61.7%), **lack of productivity** (42.6%), the **alteration of planned research activities** (36.2%). An even more concerning figure is the number of PhD students who had to **stop their research**, i.e. 14.9%.

If yes, how has the pandemic affected your work?	Number of Responses
I am less productive	20 (42.6%)
My working hours have increased	9 (19.1%)
I have to dedicate more time to my family (e.g. child care)	12 (25.5%)
I have had to stop my planned research activities	7 (14.9%)
I have had to alter my planned research activities	17 (36.2%)
I feel isolated	29 (61.7%)
My research has not been affected	7 (14.9%)
Other	9 (19.1%)
Total	110 (234.0%)

The respondents were asked to expand on their answer, and the testimonies below highlight specific issues:

If you have selected "other" or if you wish to comment on your situation, explain how the pandemic has affected your work:

Mer otydliga gränser mellan jobb och privat när mest jobbar hemma. Sämre humör när barn kommer hem och Jag fortsätter vara på samma plats.

Unable to work directly with advisors living/working in foreign countries because they could not travel

Cancelled conferences, less opportunities to network with other researchers, a cancelled trip for a writing retreat have all led to less productivity. The isolation has also affected my mental health, leading to feelings of depression and anxiety.

Some courses delayed

More interesting webinar to participate in since they are online

The pandemic struck when I was in an intense writing phase so I would probably been isolated anyway. But the fact that I cannot meet colleagues in the same way and not having a proper working space at home has affected me negatively.

I do struggle a lot with motivation and thus I feel that I am working at a much slower pace than before and get tired a lot easier.

It is simply not as much fun when I am not around my fellow doctoral candidates or colleagues.

The work has been more demanding to carry out due to worse working environment and less collegial feedback.

Financially: I have had to invest money to create a functional workspace at home. Psychologically: It is hard to concentrate working from home, and this creates more stress and frustration. This is in addition to the isolation from not being around my coworkers and other PhD students.

The isolation is both good and bad. Bad because I miss my colleges and good because Im in a writing period so the isolation gives me a nice focus.

It's better now because I don't have to go to work and pointlessly sit in my office any more.

none

I have just recently started my PhD so I am not sure how the pandemic has affected my work

Cancelled conferences lead to chances lost when it comes to networking with other researchers within my field

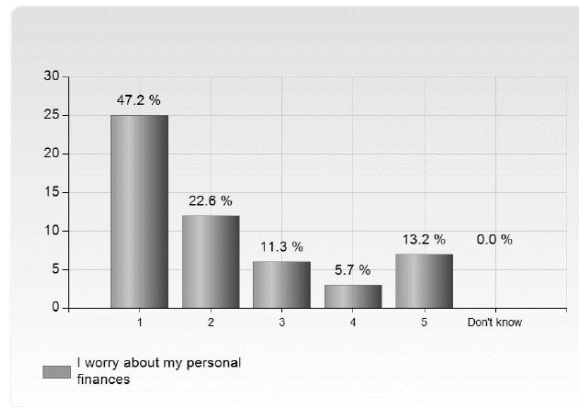
One of my planned forthcoming study had to be cancelled and another one moved further (as last study) due to expected delay (upto 2years) in receiving data from various registries. Therefore I have to replan and find a new study which had taken considerable time.

No conferences, digital conferences is coming up but not the same. Writing sessions is also cancelled.

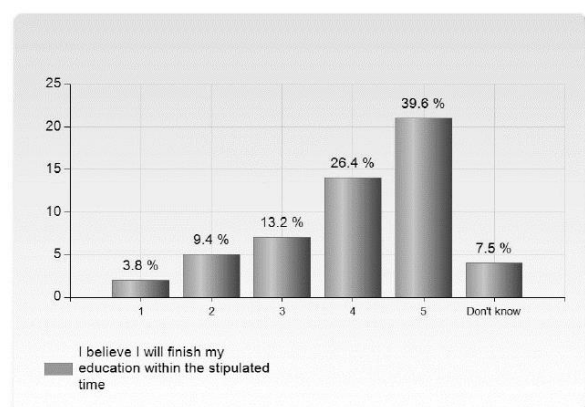
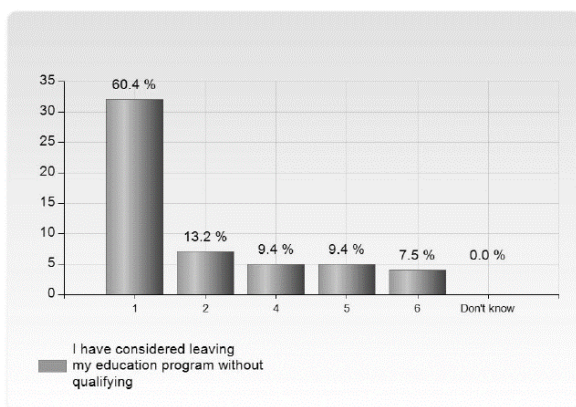
STRESS-RELATED ISSUES

Different issues are highlighted in this section. First, we provide a background of the potential sources of stress, and then, we introduce the results directly related to stress.

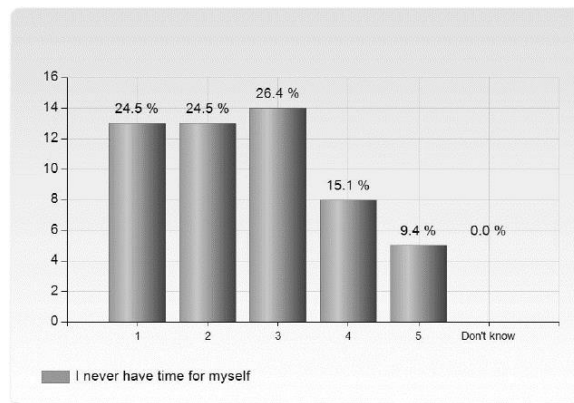
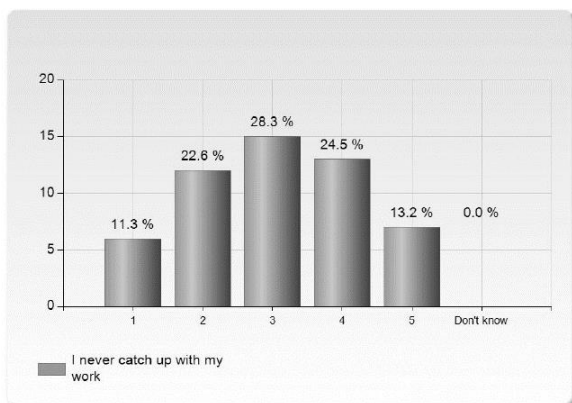
About finances, most of the PhD students do not worry about their personal finance (47.2%). However, 18.9% of the respondents do:



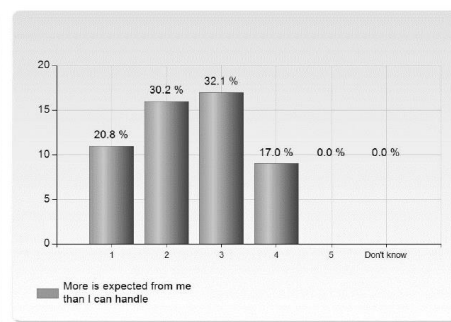
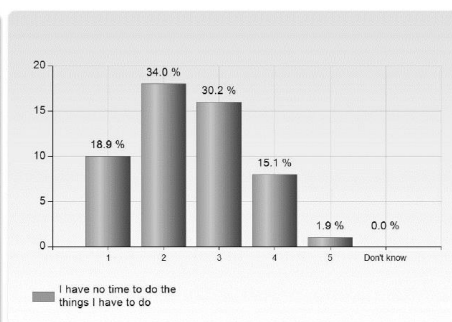
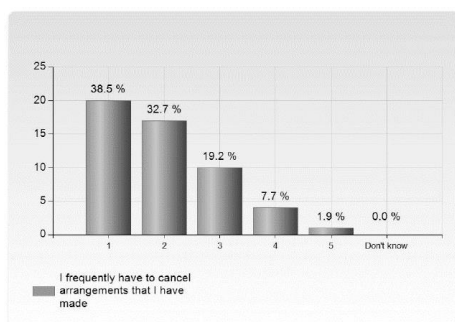
Considering leaving an education program without qualifying is a potential indicator of issues related to the PhD education. 60.4% of the respondents have not considered leaving their PhD education. However, 16.9% have considered it seriously. Also, 66% of the students are rather confident that they finish their PhD on time, while 13.2% are not.



While the above section indicates that the majority of the students are not too worried about finance and education, the section below mitigates these results concerning stress-related issues. 37.7% of the students agree that they never catch up with their work while 33.9% disagree. In addition, most of the students (49%) answered that they have time for themselves. 24.5% stated the opposite:



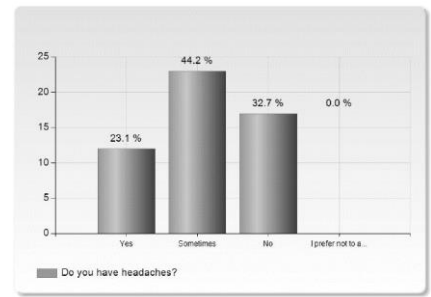
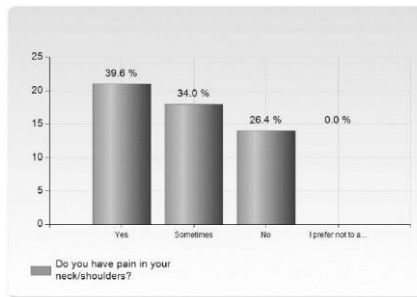
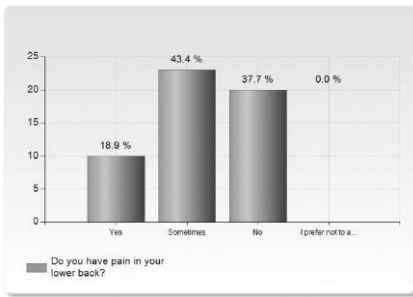
71.2% of the students do not frequently have to cancel arrangements for themselves, but a small minority has (9.6%). However, PhD students are more mitigated about the fact that they have no time to do the things they have to do. 52.9% disagree with that statement, while 17% agree. The same proportion of students (17%) agree on the fact that more is expected from them than they can handle. 51% of the respondents disagree with this statement:



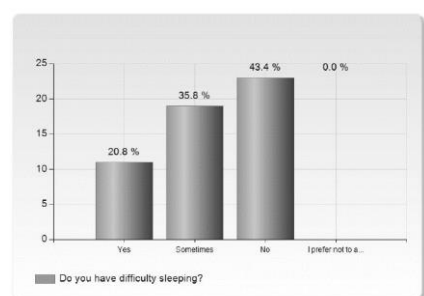
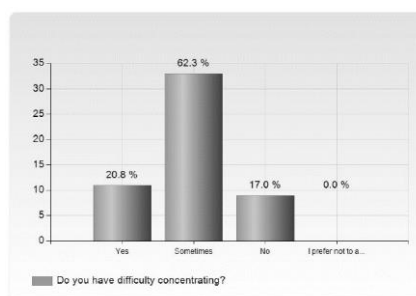
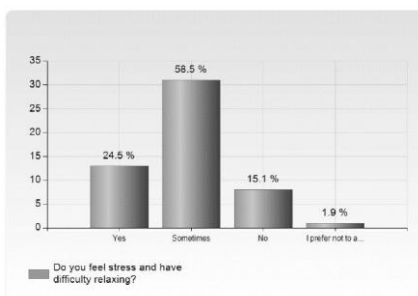
Concerning the perceived obstacles to achieving their PhD education, students answered first: I doubt my own capabilities (52.3%), then comes personal reasons (45.5%), an unbalanced combination of work and family commitments (43.2%). Eventually, students answered lack of guidance by my supervisor(s) (20.5%), lack of stimulating research environment (20.5%), lack results or failed experiments (11.4%), and they did not have the ambition to do a PhD in the first place (4.5%).

Perceived obstacles:	Number of Responses
Personal reasons	20 (45.5%)
An unbalanced combination of work and family commitments	19 (43.2%)
I doubt my own capabilities	23 (52.3%)
I didn't have the ambition to do a PhD in the first place	2 (4.5%)
Lack of guidance by my supervisor(s)	9 (20.5%)
Lack of a stimulating research environment	9 (20.5%)
Lack of results/failed experiment(s)	5 (11.4%)
Total	87 (197.7%)

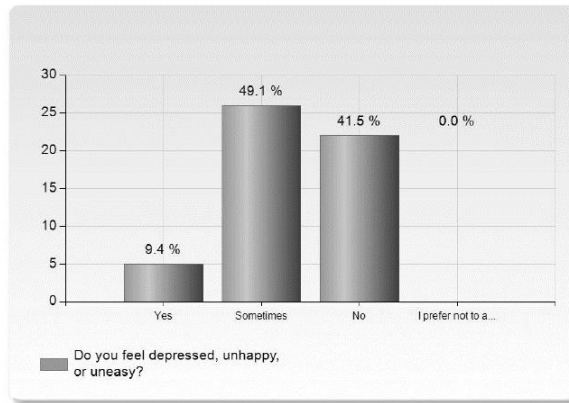
This section focuses on the **potential signs of stress**. 18.9% of the students have pain in their lower back, almost 40% of the respondents feel pain in their neck/shoulders, and 23.1% of the respondents have headaches:



Almost 25% of the respondents feel stress and have difficulty relaxing. A smaller portion of the students have difficulty concentrating (20.8%), and the same amount of respondents (20.8%) have difficulty sleeping:

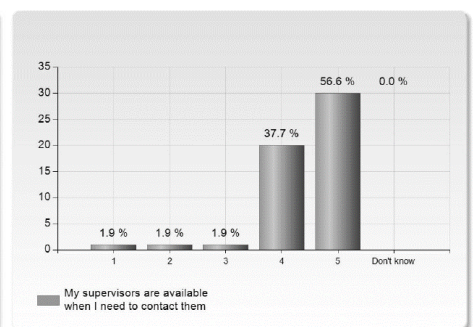
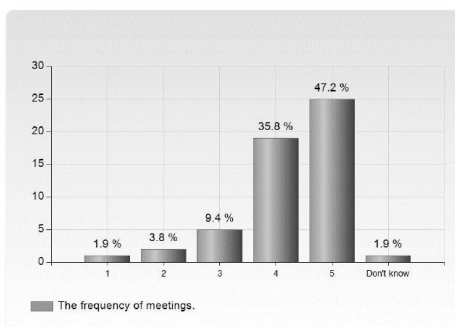
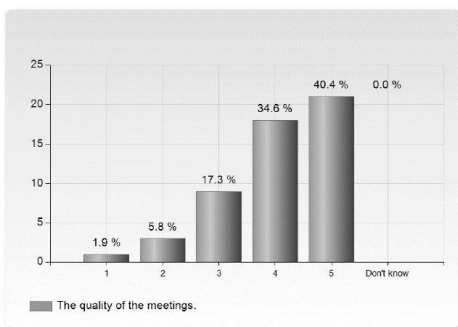


However, only 9.4% of the students feel depressed, unhappy or uneasy, and 49.1% feel depressed, unhappy or uneasy sometimes. The result below suggests that a bigger proportion of the students have stress-related issues.

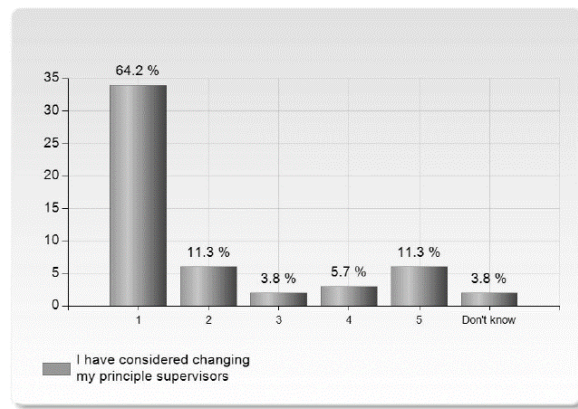
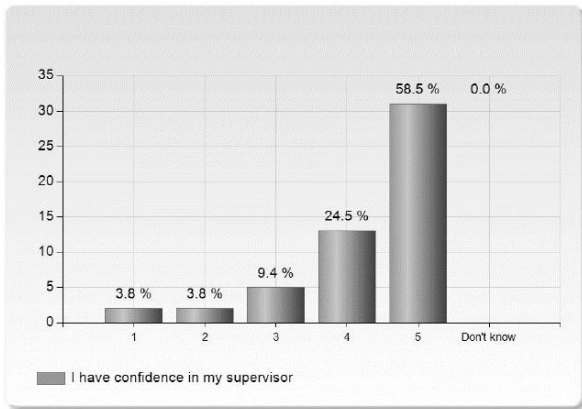


SUPERVISION

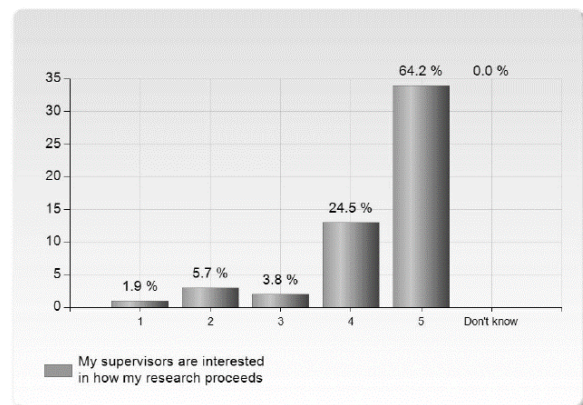
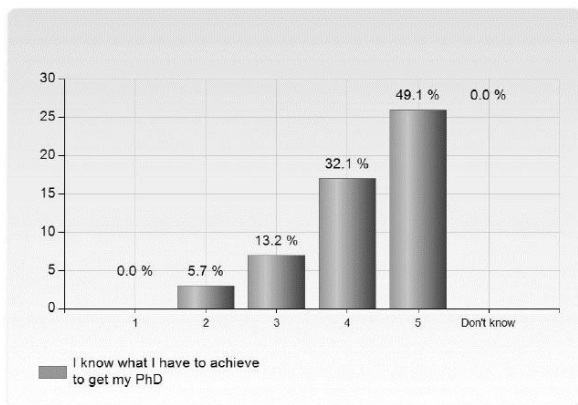
This section assesses supervision broadly. Overall, PhD students are highly or well satisfied with supervision. A minority faces issues, though. Concerning the frequency of the meetings, a great majority of the respondents is well satisfied and highly satisfied. In addition, PhD students are highly satisfied with the quality of the meeting. This result mirrors the answers of the respondents about the availability of the supervisors, which shows great availability of the supervisors for their doctoral students.



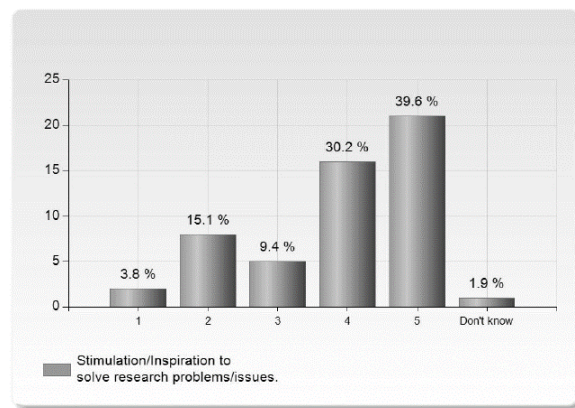
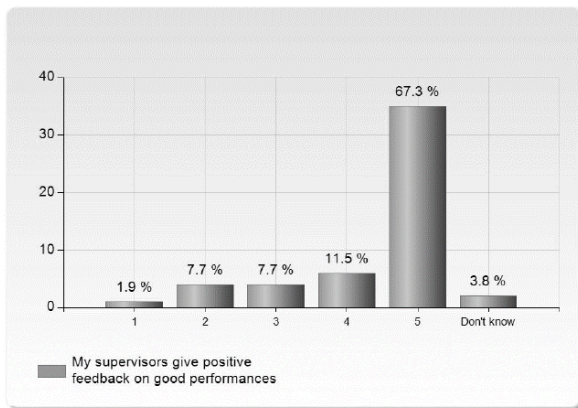
83% of PhD students have confidence in their supervisors. 7.6% do not, and 9.4% gave a moderate answer. Also, while the great majority of the student (75.5%) has not considered changing their principal supervisor, 17% has.



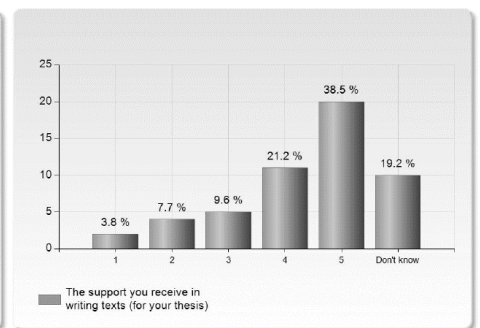
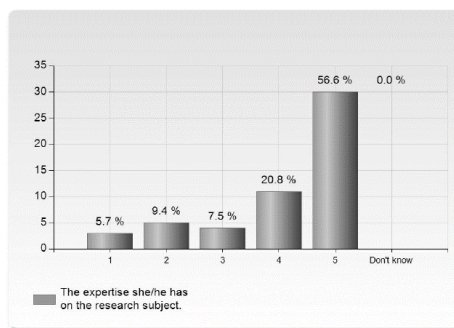
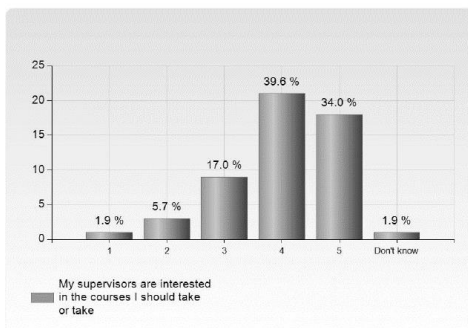
81.2% of the respondents are confident about knowing what they need to do to achieve their PhD. None answered they do not know, although 5.7% are not sure. Importantly, the great majority of the supervisors shows interest in the progress of the research of doctoral students.



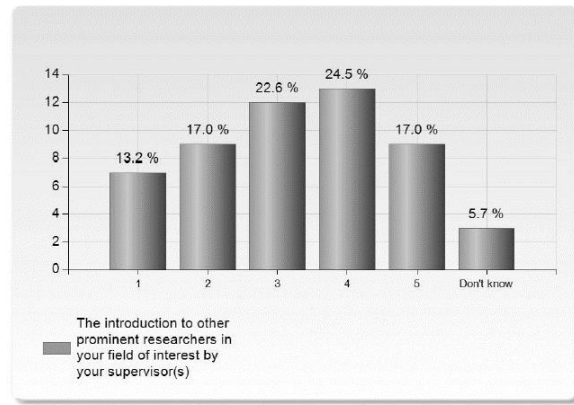
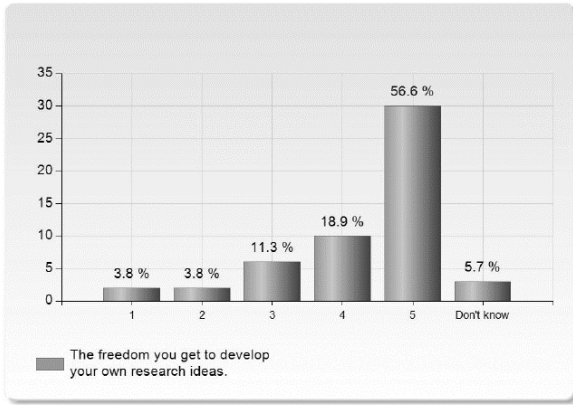
In addition, most PhD students (67.3%) answered that they receive positive feedback on good performances. However, the results are more mitigated regarding stimulations and inspiration to solve research issues. Although a good majority (69.8%) feel positive about it, 18.9% feel negative about it.



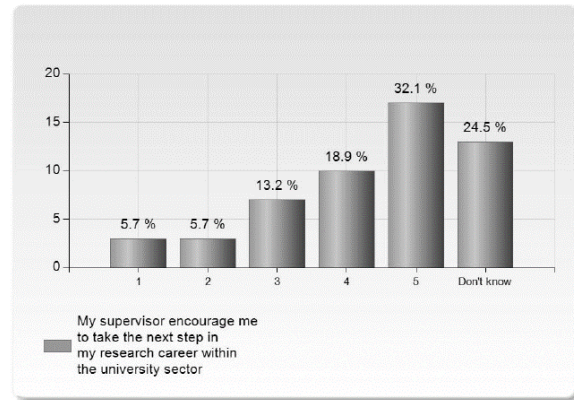
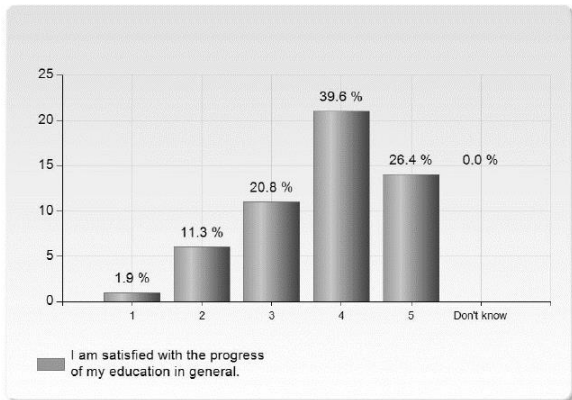
Also, most of the supervisors seem to be following up on courses the PhD students take. A few students (7.6%) felt their supervisors are not interested in the courses they should take. Also, 77.4% of the students recognise the expertise of their supervisors, while 15.1% do not. Eventually, 59.7% of the students are satisfied with the support they receive in writing texts, and 11,5% are not.



75.5% of the students feel they have the freedom to research their own projects, while 7.6% feel they don't. Also, introduction to other prominent researchers in the field by supervisors is a very mitigated topic, and only 31.5% have got this opportunity while 30.2% haven't.



PhD students are in the majority (66%) satisfied with the progress of their education and 13.2% are not. 20.8% provided a moderate answer. Eventually, a high number of students (24.5%) is probably not in a position to answer if their supervisors will encourage them to take the next step in their research career. Those who could answer were mainly positive about this statement, although 11.4% were negative.

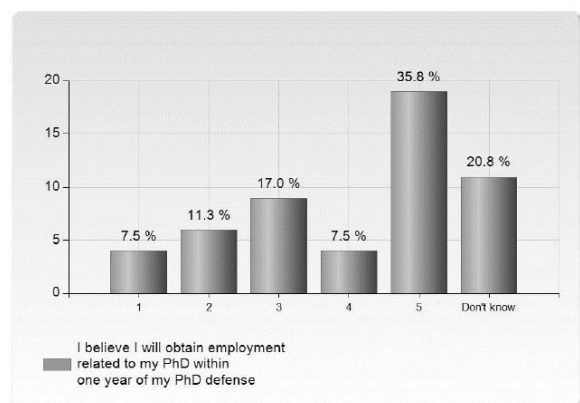
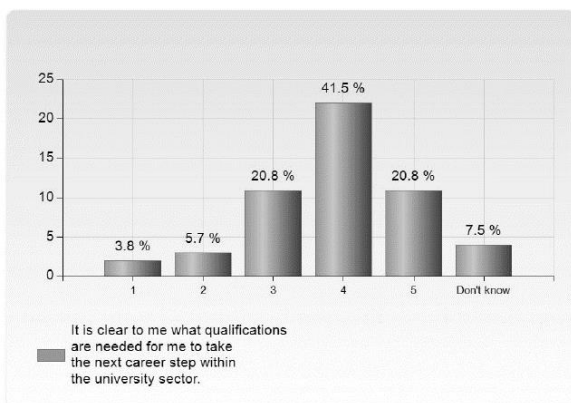


AFTER THE PHD

Most of the respondents (60.4%) wish to pursue an academic career, although 20.8% don't know.

My primary aim is:	Number of Responses
An academic career at a university	32 (60.4%)
An academic career within a non-university organisation	2 (3.8%)
A career in government/public sector	2 (3.8%)
A career in private organisation	4 (7.5%)
Other	2 (3.8%)
Don't know	11 (20.8%)
Total	53 (100.0%)

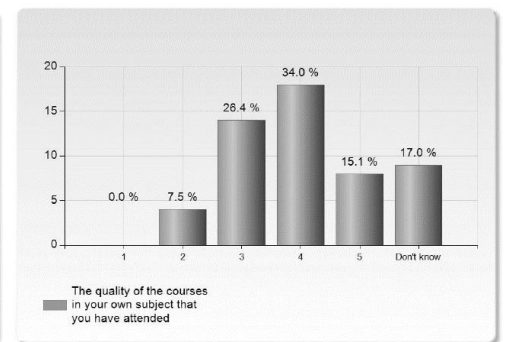
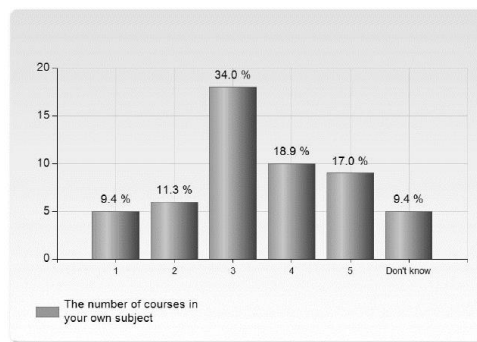
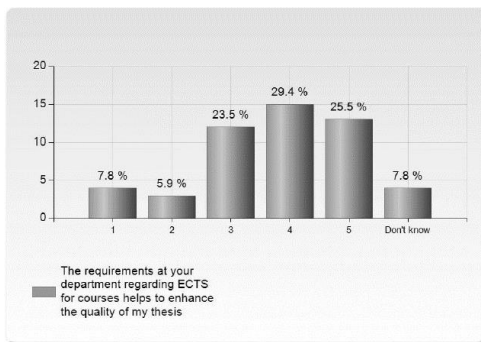
Most of the respondents (62.3%) answered that they know what qualifications they need to take the next career step within the university sector. A few (9.5%) do not know. Also, 43.3% of the respondents are rather confident that they will get employment within a year after their graduation.



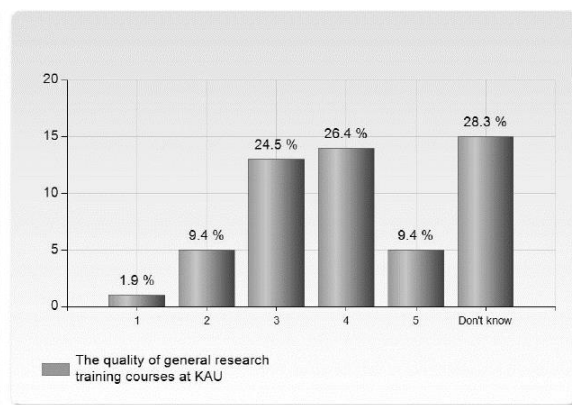
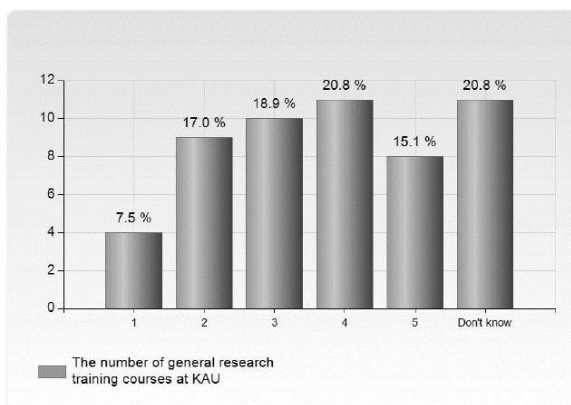
PHD COURSES

The amount of ECTS varies a lot among PhD students, some students need less than 30 (5.9%), others need 30 (7.8%), 45 (5.9%), 60 (33.3%), 75 (7.8%), between 80 and 89 (3.9%), and 90 (35.3%) ECTS:

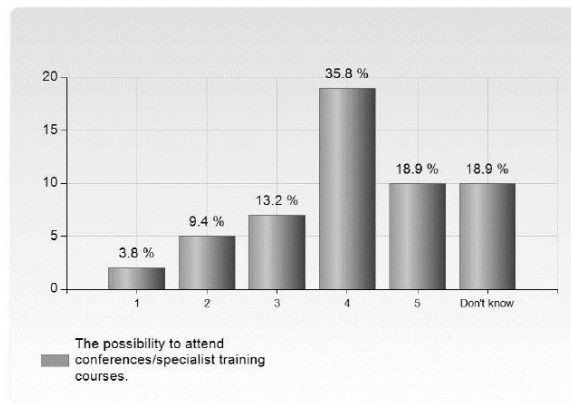
The majority of the respondents (54.9%) feel that the number of ECTS for courses help to enhance the quality of their thesis. 13.7% feel otherwise. The satisfaction towards the number of courses in the subject of the participants is more mitigated. 20.5% are rather dissatisfied, 35.9% are rather satisfied. Concerning the quality of courses attended, PhD students (49.1%) are rather satisfied.



35.9% are rather satisfied with the number of general research training courses at KAU, and a similar proportion of students is rather satisfied with the quality of these courses. 24.5% are rather not satisfied with the number of general research training courses at KAU, and 11.3% are rather dissatisfied with the quality of these courses:

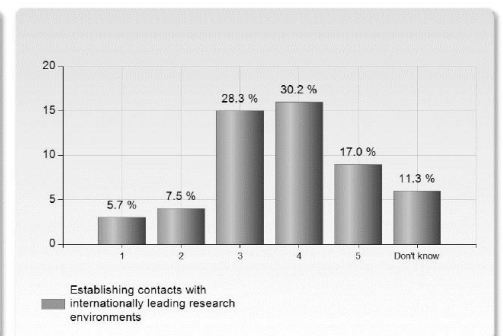
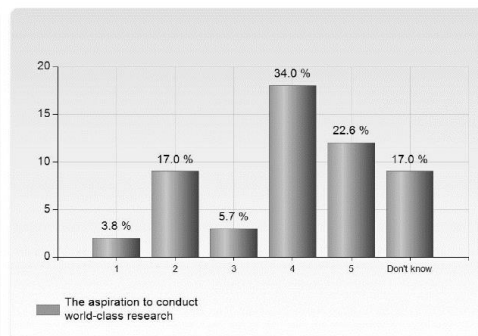
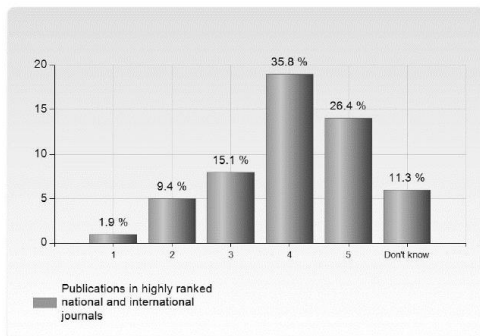


Overall, the respondents are rather satisfied (54.7%) of the possibility to attend conference/specialist training courses, and 13.2% are rather not.

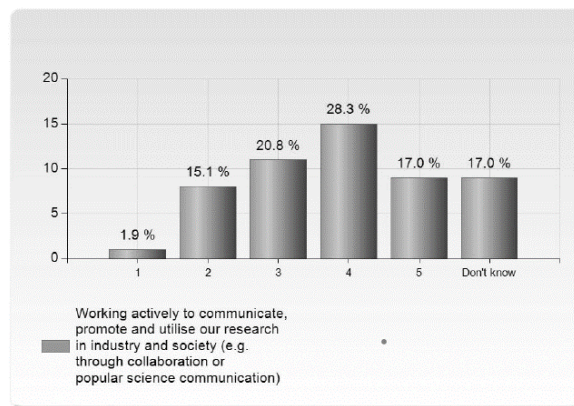


YOUR RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

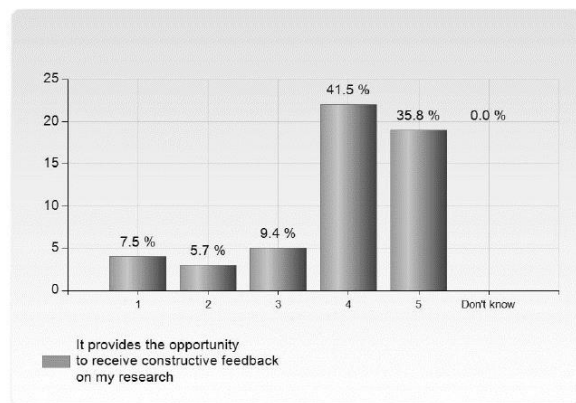
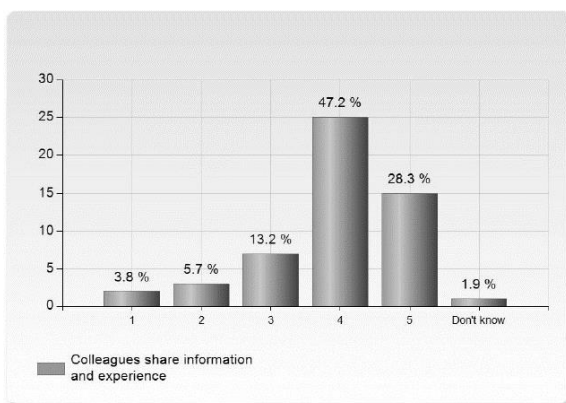
62.2% of the respondents think that their main research environment places great importance on publications in highly ranked national and international journals, while 11.3% think otherwise. In a similar vein, 56.6% of the respondents think that their main research environment places great importance on the aspiration to conduct world-class research, while 20.8% think otherwise. 47.2% of the respondents think that their main research environment places great importance on establishing contacts with internationally leading research environments while 13.2% think otherwise.



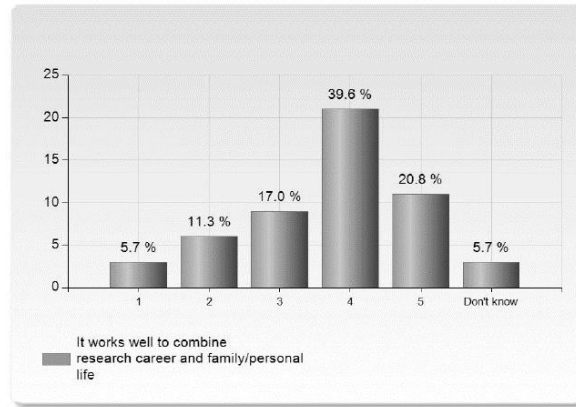
45.3% of the respondents think that their main research environment places great importance on working actively to communicate, promote and utilise our research in industry and society (e.g. through collaboration or popular science communication), while 17% think otherwise.



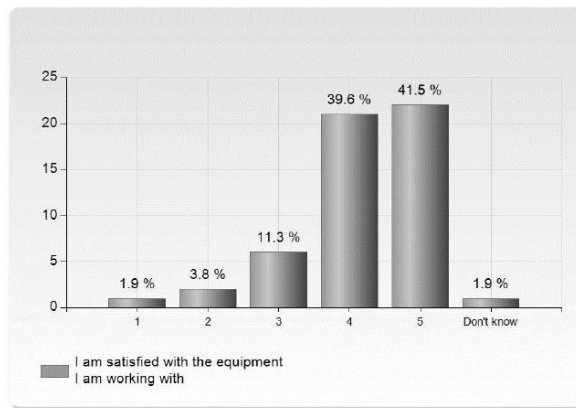
A big majority of the students (75.5%) agree with the following statement “colleagues share information and experience,” and 9.5% disagree. There is also a strong agreement among the participants (77.3%) that the research environment provides the opportunity to receive constructive feedback on their research. However, 13.2% of the respondents disagree.



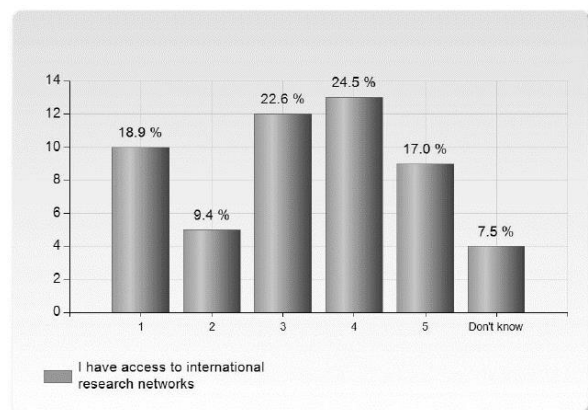
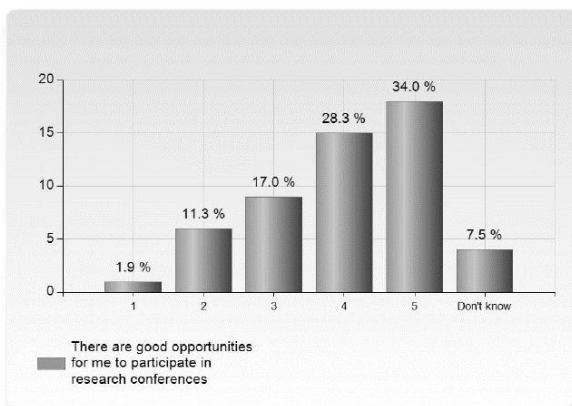
60.4% of the respondents feel that it works well to combine research career and family/personal life, while 17% feel that it doesn't.



81.1% of the students are satisfied with the equipment they are working with, and 5.7% are not.

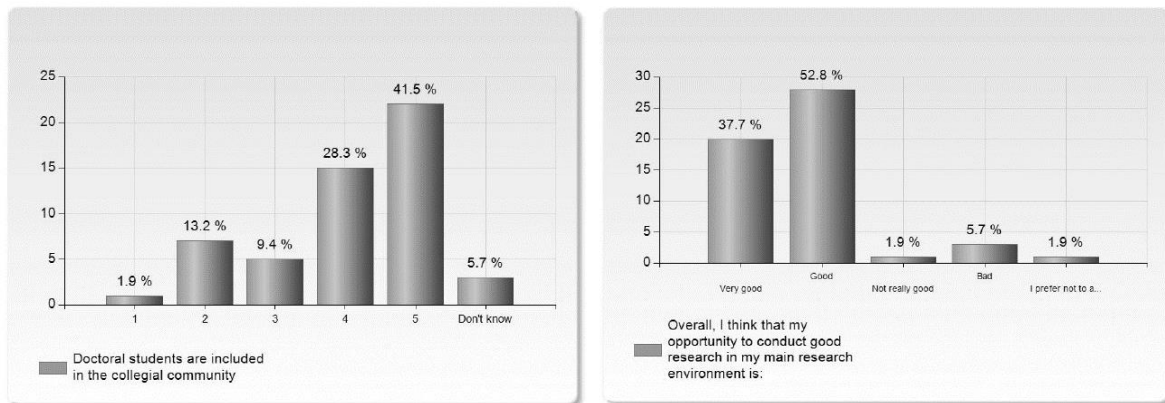


62.3% of the students think that there are good opportunities for them to participate in research conferences while 13.2% think otherwise. 41.5% of the respondents agree with the fact that they have access to international research networks, while 28.3% disagree.

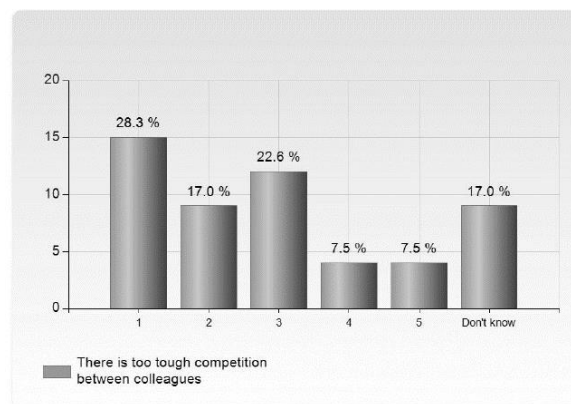


YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

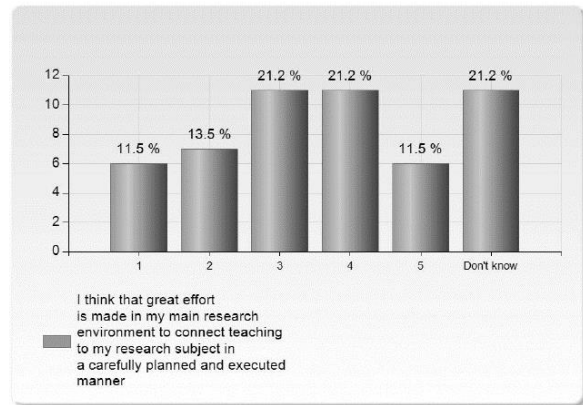
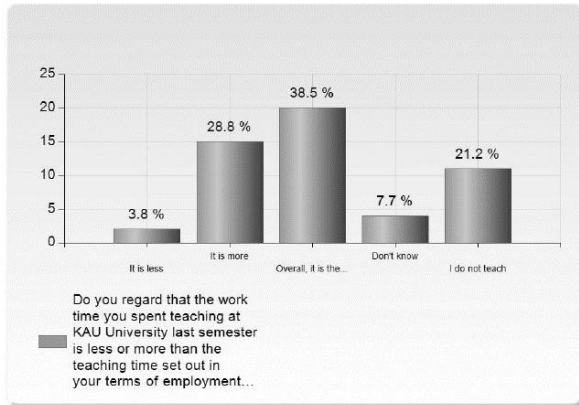
A good majority of students (69.8%) feel that they are included in the collegial community although 15.1% think otherwise. Overall, 90.5% of the students think that their opportunity to conduct good research in their main research environment is very good or good. 7.6% disagree.



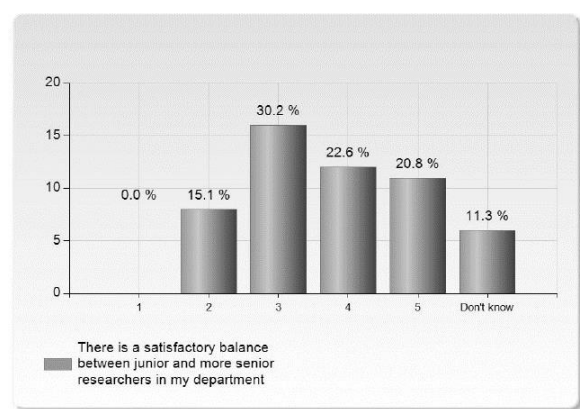
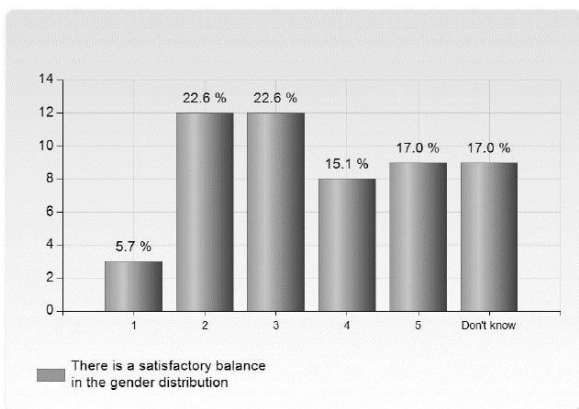
45.3% of the respondents do not think that there is too tough competition between colleagues, and 15% of the respondents think it is the case:



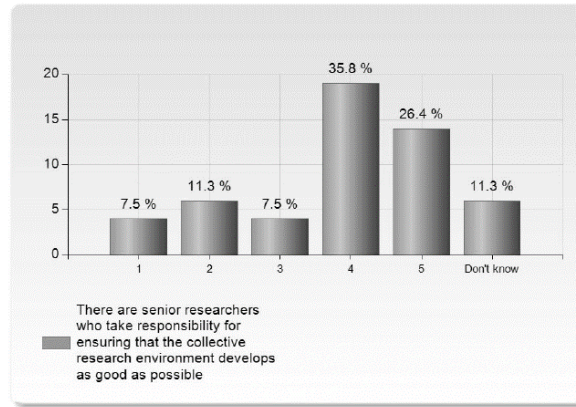
Concerning the time spent on teaching activities, 28.8% of the respondents found it is more than the teaching time set out in their terms of employment. 3.8% stated it is less, and 38.5% stated it is the same. 32.7% of the students think that there are great efforts to connect teaching to their research subject, while 25% think otherwise.



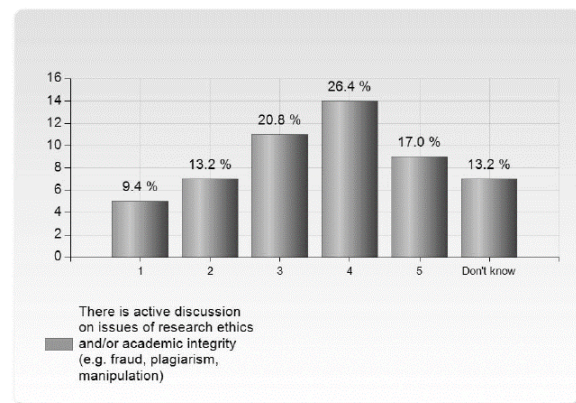
The results of gender distribution are mitigated. 32.1% of the respondents agree with the fact there is a satisfactory balance in gender distribution in their main research environment. However, 28.3% tend to disagree. 43.4% of the respondents think that there is a satisfactory balance between junior and more senior researchers, and 15.1% of the respondents tend to disagree.



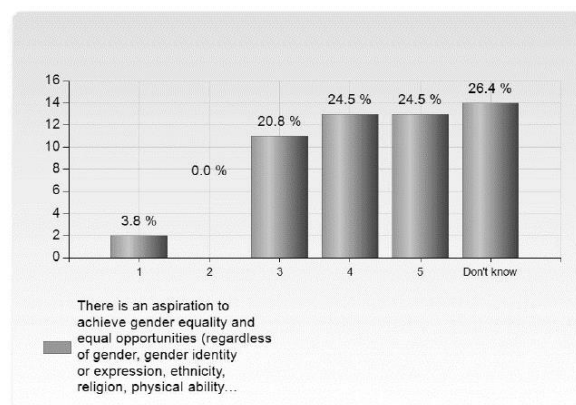
62.2% of the respondents think that there are senior researchers who take responsibility for ensuring that the collective research environment develops as good as possible while 18.8% think otherwise:



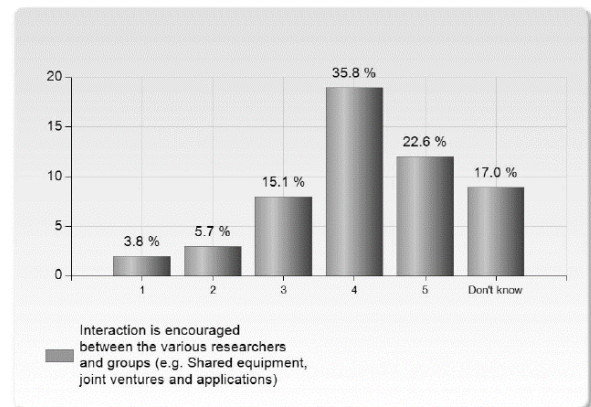
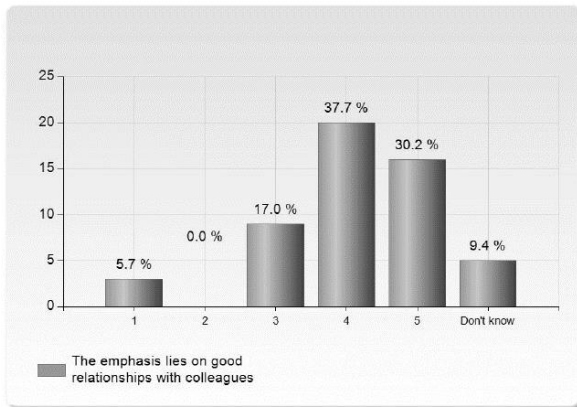
43.4% of the respondents tend to agree with the fact that there are active discussions on issues of research ethics and/or academic integrity (e.g. fraud, plagiarism, manipulation). However, 22.6% tend to disagree.



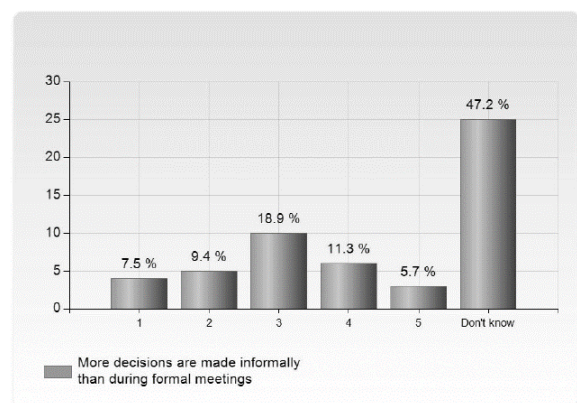
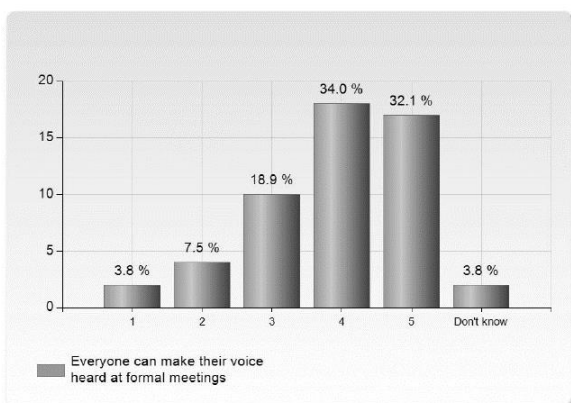
49% of the respondents tend to agree with the fact that there is an aspiration to achieve gender equality and equal opportunities (regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion, physical ability or disability, sexual orientation or age). 3.8% strongly disagree. Also, an important share of the respondents does not know (26.4%).



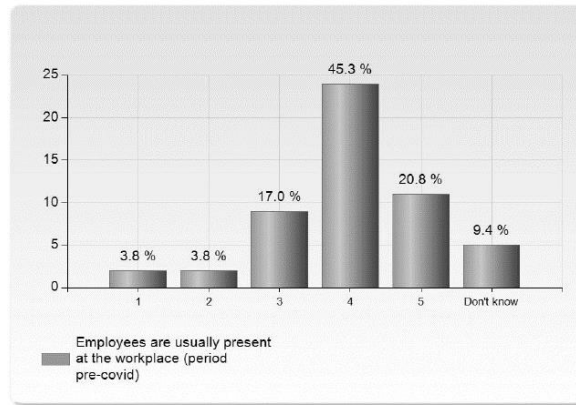
A large majority of the respondents (67.9%) agrees that the emphasis lies on good relationships with colleagues in their main research environment. 5.7% of the respondents strongly disagree. The majority of the respondents (58.4%) think that interaction is encouraged between the various researchers and groups (e.g. Shared equipment, joint ventures and applications). 9.5% tend to think otherwise.



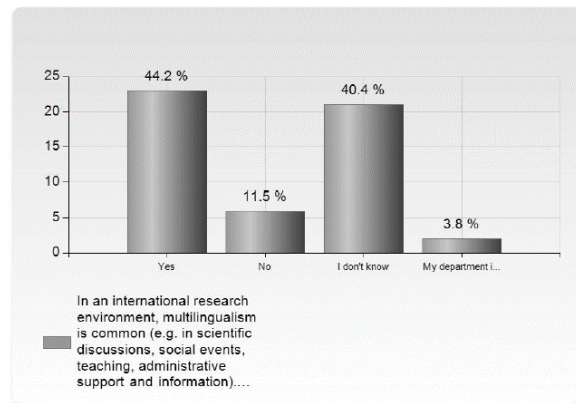
An important majority of the respondent (66.1%) agree with the fact everyone can make their voice heard at formal meetings, while 11.3% tend to disagree. Most of the respondents (47.2%) do not know if more decisions are made informally than during formal meetings. 17% think it is the case, and 16.9% think it is not.



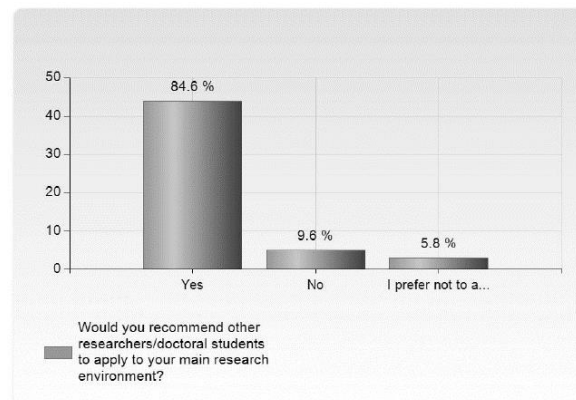
The majority of the respondents (66.1%) shared that employees are usually present at the workplace, and 7.8% stated otherwise.



Concerning language in their department, 44.2% of the respondents think that their department has found an effective way to handle multilingualism. 11.5% do not think so. A large share of the respondents (40.4%) do not know.



Eventually, a large share of the respondents would recommend other researchers/doctoral students to apply to their main research environment. However, 9.6% would not, and 5.8% prefer not to answer.



At a general level, 20.8% of the respondents think that the university should provide more information about life in Sweden. 11.3% do not, and the majority of the respondents does not know.

