



## CHAPTER 4

# Staff at Swedish Higher Education Institutions

Staff at Swedish higher education institutions form a diverse group whose roles, backgrounds, and career paths shape both education and research. This chapter highlights how staff are distributed across categories and fields of research and development, and how patterns of gender and background vary. It also examines salaries and employment conditions, as well as career opportunities and challenges for those pursuing an academic path. Finally, it looks at staff with duties outside teaching and research, showing how their composition has shifted over time.

### Staff composition at Swedish higher education institutions

In 2024, higher education institutions in Sweden employed approximately 70,190 individuals, corresponding to 55,970 full-time equivalents. Staff were divided into two main categories: research and teaching staff (59 per cent) and staff with duties other than teaching and research (41 per cent).

Third-cycle students contribute significantly to research and teaching at Swedish higher education institutions. However, they are primarily considered students and are therefore not included in the category of research and teaching staff. Just under 11,000 third-cycle students were employed by higher education institutions in 2024, either through a doctoral studentship or another form of employment.

The overall gender distribution was relatively balanced, with women accounting for 55 per cent and men for 45 per cent of all staff. Men were in the majority among research and teaching staff, while women predominated among staff with duties other than teaching and research.

### Research and teaching staff at Swedish higher education institutions

Research and teaching staff are divided into six employment categories:

- Professors
- Senior lecturers
- Career-development positions
- Lecturers
- Other research and teaching staff with a third-cycle qualification
- Other research and teaching staff without a third-cycle qualification

Professors and senior lecturers, as well as associate senior lecturers (included in career-development positions), are regulated in the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434). Higher education institutions determine which staff categories to include beyond those set out in the Act and how to structure academic and research career paths.

For a position of lecturer, a third-cycle qualification is generally not required. The exact requirements are determined by each higher education institution.

#### **Career-development positions following a third-cycle qualification**

A common first step in Sweden for graduates with a third-cycle qualification is a career-development position. These fixed-term positions are designed to help individuals qualify further, both academically or artistically and in teaching, for a continued career in academia. The category includes postdoctoral researchers, associate senior lecturers, and research associates. Associate senior lecturers have the right to apply for and be considered for promotion to senior lecturer.

In 2024, a total of 4,640 individuals held career-development positions. Most were employed as postdoctoral researchers (77 per cent) or associate senior lecturers (22 per cent). This distribution was similar for both women and men.

Competition for career-development positions is high, as more third-cycle graduates complete their studies than there are positions available.

#### **Staff composition differs across fields of research and development**

The distribution of staff across employment categories varies by field of research and development. These differences are influenced by the balance between teaching and research in each field, as well as by the availability of external research funding.

Career-development positions are most common in the natural sciences, engineering and technology, and the medical and health sciences. Together, these three fields accounted for 80 per cent of all career-development positions. They also have a large share of other types of research staff, reflecting the strong emphasis on research in these areas.

Senior lecturers accounted for the largest share of staff in the social sciences, and in the arts and humanities – 46 and 43 per cent respectively. These fields also had the highest proportions of lecturers, at around 20 per cent in both, and are generally characterised by a stronger focus on teaching.

#### **Professor appointments are rare within twelve years of graduation**

The highest academic position in Sweden is professor. Fewer than 3 per cent of those who obtained a third-cycle qualification in 2012 had been appointed professor within twelve years. Although the number of newly appointed professors has remained relatively stable over the past two decades, the number of researchers and senior lecturers has grown significantly.

Each year over the past decade, a larger share of men than women have been appointed professor within twelve years – just over 3 per cent of men and just over 2 per cent of women in the 2012 cohort. Although women remain underrepresented among professors, those who reach this level tend, on average, to be appointed slightly earlier than men.

### Fixed-term appointments are a distinct feature of academic careers

Fixed-term employment plays a central role in Swedish academic career paths and is more common in higher education than in the labour market as a whole. This is partly because certain fixed-term positions are specific to the sector. These include career-development positions, staff employed part-time alongside a main occupation outside the higher education institution, and visiting professors – roles that either form part of structured academic career systems or reflect the higher education institution's engagement with external stakeholders.

Fixed-term appointments are particularly prevalent at the beginning of an academic career. In 2024, 78 per cent of staff under the age of 35 held such a position. Career-development positions are by definition fixed-term, and they accounted for 56 per cent of all fixed-term appointments. Among other employment categories, fixed-term employment was most common among research and teaching staff without a third-cycle qualification. More than a third in this category held such a position.

A follow-up of individuals who obtained a third-cycle qualification in 2016 found that the majority of those working at a Swedish higher education institution in the year after graduation held a fixed-term position. Four years later, however, most of those still employed in the sector held a permanent contract.

### Balanced gender distribution is rare across fields of research and development

The proportion of women has increased in all fields of research and development in the past decade, but gender distribution still varies between fields. In 2024, women accounted for 60 per cent of staff in the medical and health sciences – the largest share – compared with 30 per cent in engineering and technology.

Gender distribution also differs across categories of research and teaching staff within each field. A balanced distribution is defined as 40 to 60 per cent women and men. In 2024, only the arts and humanities met this criterion across all staff categories. In engineering and technology, women accounted for less than 40 per cent in every category. In the medical and health sciences, the share of women ranged from 56 to 81 per cent, except among professors, where it was 40 per cent.

### Professors remain the least gender-balanced staff category

While the gender distribution across most staff categories was relatively balanced, professors were the exception, with only one third women, and two thirds men. The number of female professors has, however, increased over the past decade.

Since senior lecturers form the main recruitment base for professors, disparities at that level affect the future gender balance amongst professors. The largest gender gap between professors and senior lecturers is found in the medical and health sciences, where in 2024 the share of women was 27 percentage points higher among senior lecturers.

To promote gender equality, recruitment targets for newly appointed professors have been in place since 1997. For 2025–2028, institution-specific targets stipulate that women should account for between about one third and just over one half of new professors. In the 2021–2023 period, however, only three out of 33 institutions reached these targets.

### Foreign background less common among research and teaching staff

In 2024, the majority of staff in most employment categories had a Swedish background, ranging from 22 to 81 per cent depending on staff category. A Swedish background refers to individuals born in Sweden with at least one parent also born in Sweden.

The second most common group comprised individuals born abroad to two foreign-born parents. Their share ranged from 16 to 76 per cent across staff categories and was highest among individuals in career-development positions.

Only 1 to 3 per cent of staff in any category were born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents. By contrast, this group is more strongly represented among students and third-cycle students, and they also have the highest transition rate from upper-secondary to higher education.

### Salaries vary by employment category, field, and gender

Salaries for research and teaching staff vary both by employment category and by field of research and development. Professors generally have the highest salaries, while other research and teaching staff without a third-cycle qualification have the lowest. Salary levels also differ between fields, with higher pay for senior lecturers and professors in the medical and health sciences and engineering and technology, and lower levels in the arts and humanities.

Gender pay gaps persist in most employment categories. Men generally earn more than women, even when comparing staff within the same employment category and research field. The gap is particularly marked among senior lecturers.

### Staff with duties other than teaching and research

Higher education institutions also employ staff with duties outside teaching and research – commonly referred to as technical and administrative staff. This group is divided into four categories: administrative staff, technical staff, library staff, and temporary staff on hourly or daily wages. In 2024, technical and administrative staff accounted for 41 per cent of all personnel at Swedish higher education institutions.

The largest category was administrative staff, who made up 64 per cent of staff with duties other than teaching and research. They include for example administrators, financial officers, communications officers, study and career guidance counsellors, research project coordinators, and central management personnel.

Technical staff constituted 30 per cent and include project managers, research engineers, and staff working in information technology (IT), facilities management, and cleaning services.

The remaining 6 per cent constituted of library staff and temporary staff.

In 2024, women made up two thirds of staff with duties other than teaching and research, while men accounted for one third. This is in contrast to the more balanced gender distribution observed among research and teaching staff.

#### **Gender distribution in leadership roles at Swedish higher education institutions**

In 2025, gender distribution at Swedish higher education institutions was balanced in two out of six leadership roles – vice-chancellors and deans or faculty heads – with women and men each accounting for between 40 and 60 per cent. Among vice-chancellors, women represented exactly 40 per cent.

Women made up more than 60 per cent of chief librarians, heads of administration, and deputy vice-chancellors. The share of women has increased significantly in the latter two roles over time, while women have consistently been in the majority among chief librarians.

The largest shares of men were found among vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors, at 60 and 62 per cent respectively.

#### **Shifts in the composition of technical and administrative staff**

Between 2014 and 2024, the number of staff with duties other than teaching and research increased by 7 per cent. This growth was considerably smaller than the 14 per cent increase in research and teaching staff during the same period. The number of administrative staff rose, while the number of technical staff and library staff declined. These developments reflect a gradual shift in the composition of staff at Sweden's higher education institutions over time.