DOCTORAL GRADUATES' REASONS FOR SATISFACTION WITH THEIR DEGREE IN TERMS OF THEIR CAREER

A summary of the open-ended responses provided by doctoral graduates at the University of Helsinki for the national career monitoring survey

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SUMMARY
This report analyses the responses to the open-ended question of the national career monitoring survey measuring the doctoral graduates' overall satisfaction with their degree in terms of their career. The analysis encompasses the responses received from graduates of all University of Helsinki doctoral schools.

Picture: The conferment ceremony of the Faculty of Philosophy 2019/Bonafide weddings
Career monitoring report on 2014-2016 doctoral graduates' satisfaction with their degree in terms of their career

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Summary and recommendations for further actions

This report examines doctoral graduates' satisfaction with their degree with regard to their career. The respondents completed their degree in 2014, 2015 or 2016. The analysis is based on responses to the national career monitoring surveys aimed at doctoral graduates; more specifically, the responses to open-ended questions on the respondents' overall satisfaction with their degree in terms of their career. The surveys were completed between 2017 and 2019.

The national career monitoring surveys for doctoral graduates, which began in 2017, are distributed every autumn to doctoral graduates who completed their degree during the past three years. Information on the target group is obtained from the national VIRTA database (which combines data from the student records of Finnish universities). The background variables of the respondents are supplemented with information from the student records (doctoral school, doctoral programme or faculty).

The 2019 surveys were sent to respondents by text message (to those whose phone number was known) or by email (all others). Additionally, the universities distributed the survey by email to those in the target group whose details were found in alumni registers. The data was collected in a nationwide and central manner by Research Stats Service TUPA of the University of Tampere and CSC – the IT Centre for Science, in collaboration with the career monitoring group of the Aarresaari career services network.

Responses are always processed confidentially and in such a way that individual respondents cannot be identified.

The University of Helsinki has four doctoral schools, from which approximately 400–500 doctoral degree holders graduate each year. They are requested to respond to the career monitoring survey three years after graduation. The response rate is typically some 50 percent with some variation by faculty. The respondents are asked to rate their satisfaction with their doctoral degree, completed three years previously, in terms of their career using a six-tier scale (very satisfied, satisfied, slightly satisfied, slightly dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). They also have an opportunity to provide open-ended responses. This report presents a summary of the various grounds given by the respondents for their rating. The responses were divided into two groups based on the reported satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and responses from each doctoral school were analysed separately. Responses where the respondents reported being either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their degree were included in the "satisfied" group. All other responses were interpreted as dissatisfied, as the other options allowed for some degree of dissatisfaction. The career monitoring survey can be considered to be a fairly representative sample of doctoral graduates, as the respondents form a relatively accurate representation of the gender and age distribution of recent doctoral graduates. However, Finnish citizens were slightly overrepresented among the respondents compared to all doctoral graduates.
Overall, doctoral graduates reported being very satisfied with the career opportunities resulting from their degree. A doctoral degree is a prerequisite for all research careers, which is why completing the degree in order to further a research career either did not stir much emotion or was a source of satisfaction for the respondents because of the resulting career advancement. Especially respondents pursuing research careers might report pursuing their ideal vocation or that they found it difficult to imagine doing something else.

For many, a doctoral degree was a sign of expertise. Most found their doctoral degree useful in terms of their career, some were indifferent towards it or thought it did not hurt their chances. However, a few respondents reported that the doctoral degree had not had a satisfactory effect on their career. For some, the benefits of the degree remained unclear or were expected to become apparent at a later date.

Most respondents were satisfied with their degree in terms of their career if they had been able to steer or advance in their career the way they had hoped for, which is not surprising in itself. Many had secured their current job thanks to knowledge and skills obtained through doctoral studies. The respondents were also satisfied with their degree if it had enabled them to do meaningful work or if it had qualified them for their current duties. Some enjoyed the international aspect of their work. The respondents considered their degree to be beneficial to their career if they were able to use the related skills in their work or if their doctoral thesis was otherwise relevant to their current job. The resulting feeling of control and competence was important for building a meaningful career. It was important for many respondents to be profiled as experts in their field; this applied both to research careers and those pursuing careers in the private sector in businesses or consultant positions. In addition, the respondents were satisfied with their career if it provided opportunities for learning.

A doctoral degree also led to prestige and a social impact, and its value was also acknowledged outside of academia, at least according to satisfied respondents. Doctoral education was found to provide a wide range of skills and networks that were beneficial later on. For many respondents, completing the degree was a way to further enhance their expertise. This also affected the respondents’ view of themselves as well as the personal satisfaction and added value gained from the degree. In general, a doctoral degree was considered an indication of in-depth expertise and related skills, such as project management and the ability to work with a long-term approach. The respondents listed a wide range of skills obtained through the degree, but they could roughly be classified into technical, theoretical and transferable skills. Technical skills were listed particularly often in fields that involve using various instruments and software; theoretical skills included theoretical and methodological competence pertaining to one's field of expertise, and transferable skills entailed, for example, in writing and presentation skills.

It is important to develop skills such as these during doctoral training, as a lack thereof was considered to hamper or delay career development. Doctoral education should be seen as an entity with a solid scientific basis upon which other competences such as project management, information retrieval, networking and interaction skills, as well as transferable skills such as communication, business-related and leadership skills can be
built in a way that supports the desired career path. In addition, each subset of competences can be refined into "tactical skills", i.e., specialised skill sets such as composing research funding applications, popularising science, giving lectures, or mastering international negotiation styles.

Implementing this palette of skills requires reflection from both doctoral students planning their studies as well as all supporting parties. It is important for doctoral students to obtain sufficient transferable skills and to understand what kinds of skills they may need in the future. For example, speaking at academic events and serving as a consultant require presentation skills, which is something that doctoral students may not consider at the start of their research project. The role of supervisor(s) is important, but in certain cases their contacts outside academia are limited, rendering it necessary for doctoral students to obtain other kinds of support. Monitoring groups might be able to assist doctoral students in building professional networks and in connecting with senior scholars about which skills they should obtain.

The respondents were somewhat dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career if they had experienced difficulties finding employment. Fixed-term contracts and short research funding periods were a major cause of dissatisfaction, the resulting uncertainty being particularly stressful to those with families. Combining a family with a (research) career was not always easy. Harsh competition where the rate by which publications were produced was a key merit was another challenge associated with the academia. While the respondents might be satisfied with their degree in terms of their career thus far, they could nevertheless be worried about their future prospects.

The respondents were worried about the value of their degree in other sectors, and many had experienced being seen as 'overqualified' or other forms of prejudice pertaining to 'academics'. Many were wondering whether they would be able to transition to other sectors. Some respondents considered doctoral degrees to be geared towards a career in academia. It is vital that doctoral degrees always generate additional value rather than hamper one's career. The label of being overqualified or a perceived lack of appreciation are discouraging for doctoral graduates and harmful to society.

Salary was another factor by which the respondents evaluated their satisfaction with their degree and career. Most respondents were satisfied with their salary, but there was also variation in the level of pay and the graduates evaluated their pay in relation to their level of education. A low salary was felt to denote a lack of appreciation.

Good or inadequate supervision and guidance during doctoral education affected the respondents' satisfaction with their degree in terms of their career. In other words, supervision and planning during the doctoral thesis project affects much more than just the research project graded in the public examination. For many respondents, the topic of the doctoral thesis affected their subsequent employment prospects, which is why it should be carefully considered. As the relevance of the doctoral thesis to subsequent duties would appear to affect subsequent job satisfaction, care should be taken to consider its potential applications and interest groups already at the start of doctoral education.
Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction over being unable or afraid to use their expertise as fully as they wanted in their work. Being able to ‘sell’ one’s competence was a necessity not only when job hunting but also when trying to advance one’s career or when taking on more demanding duties. Some doctoral graduates might benefit from an opportunity to discuss these issues with peers who have faced similar difficulties or found solutions to their problems. Alumni networks might be a good way to help new doctoral graduates establishing themselves in various sectors outside the academia where their abilities might otherwise be overlooked. The respondents listed knowledge-based management and the courage to take initiatives as examples of such abilities. Some respondents called for more appreciation of scientific education and the competence of doctoral graduates in general from the part of social forces such as interest groups or political actors.

Doctoral education is often a long process, and any delays (especially ones outside the doctoral students’ own control) were found to hamper career development, which caused some respondents to question the benefits of the degree in relation to the time spent. Hence, it is important to ensure that completing the degree is a rewarding experience both during and after doctoral education. For instance, supervision, funding and collegial attitudes all affect the efficient planning of the thesis process. Some complete their dissertations alongside or as part of their day jobs, which calls for support for setting a proper pace for the project.

University support is needed especially in fields where career paths can be unclear or where employment prospects are uncertain. Those aiming for careers in academia wished for more support for postdoctoral education; they felt that salaried doctoral students might have had it even easier than junior postdoctoral researchers, who are expected to provide results in order to secure further funding.

For further information on the results of the career monitoring survey, please contact Eric Carver (Strategic Services for Teaching) or Tuukka Kangas (Institutional Research and Analysis).
A total of 450 doctoral students graduated from the Doctoral School in Humanities and Social Sciences in 2014-2016, roughly half of whom responded to the career monitoring survey. Not all respondents provided open-ended responses. The analysis includes responses from graduates who completed their degrees in 2014, 2015 or 2016. The respondents were from all 11 doctoral programmes operating under the Doctoral School in Humanities and Social Sciences and they provided their responses in Finnish, Swedish or English. A total of 135 satisfied (respondents who selected either very satisfied or satisfied from the available options) and 59 dissatisfied (respondents who selected either somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied from the available options) open-ended responses were recorded.

Open-ended responses of those satisfied with their degree in terms of their career

The fact that a doctoral degree was a prerequisite for a research career was by far the most significant reason cited by respondents satisfied with their degree in terms of their career. Most satisfied respondents pointed out that obtaining a doctoral degree was the only way to advance in their career. Many also stated that a doctoral degree provided the necessary basic skills for academic research and development.

The respondents reported being satisfied with their degree because it had helped them advance in their career as desired; their jobs corresponded with their level of education and their degree had brought them desirable career opportunities. One respondent stated that the degree had diversified their career. Several satisfied respondents pointed out that the doctoral degree increased the range of available job opportunities and allowed them to stand out from among prospective applicants, thus giving them an edge in the recruitment process. One respondent stated that the degree increased job security.

The respondents felt that their work was meaningful and, for many, the doctorate had enabled them to take on more meaningful work duties. Some respondents reported securing an intriguing job that even exceeded their expectations. In addition, many respondents in research positions described being in their ideal vocation. One respondent reported taking on other duties alongside their post that enabled them to make fuller use of their expertise and broaden their job description. Doctoral education allowed the respondents to study the topic of their choice and to continue their research with the help of a good research infrastructure.

Numerous respondents felt that the doctoral degree had prepared them for their current duties, while some reported having acquired top-level qualifications for their current position. Some had completed their degree alongside their job with the express purpose of supporting them in their current duties. For them, doctoral education meant useful and diverse work experience that provided variety to their daily duties. One respondent
reported that a doctorate alone did not guarantee sufficient expertise in a rapidly evolving labour market, but that it did provide additional support. They felt that a lack of a diverse education was evident among their colleagues and lamented the fact that not even governmental employers appeared to understand the link between a doctoral degree and knowledge-based management or the related benefits.

*Useful career-related skills obtained through doctoral education* listed by respondents included analytic skills, leadership experience, methodological competence, theoretical mastery of the discipline, management of large bodies of information, oral and written expression, as well as presentation skills. In addition, several respondents reported learning critical thinking, which was something that they could use in their career. Some reported gaining solid experience that qualified them for a wide range of duties as well as reached a level of expertise that increased their confidence. Other opportunities and skills gained through doctoral education were also reported: one respondent reported learning how to sell their expertise and to get short international work assignments. Another stated that the degree had opened doors to speaking and training positions. A couple of respondents satisfied with their degree in terms of their career reported using partner networks in their work; one stated that doctoral education was particularly helpful in creating professional networks outside their own field and the University.

The doctoral degree is also associated with *prestige and impact*. Several respondents reported that the doctorate increased their impact in their field. Prestige was not limited to academia, as several people indicated that the doctorate also increased their credibility as consultants or experts in the private sector. One respondent, who was working as an entrepreneur, reported having been contacted more frequently by prospective clients. Another said that their title and managerial duties gave them prestige. The doctorate was also thought to be a *sign of competence*. Researchers in particular are required to complete a doctoral degree to qualify for subsequent jobs; one respondent stated that they were now a "full member of the academic community".

For some, the significance and value of the degree was more related to their *own perceptions of capability*. The degree was a personal achievement, a long-awaited dream come true or a show of perseverance. Some also felt content about being able to bring a long project to completion. One respondent stated that completing the doctorate had affected how they viewed themselves.

*Some were satisfied with either their degree or their career, but had complaints about doctoral education in general.* A few respondents were dissatisfied with their supervision, either because it had been difficult to get or because it had solely focused on the doctoral thesis, overlooking other issues. The respondent in question suggested mentoring as a way to fill any gaps in supervision on matters other than the completion of the thesis. A couple of respondents also reported needing more extensive networks and supervision before graduating and embarking on their postdoctoral careers. General complaints included insufficient training in academic writing, language skills and international activities, as well as the fact that presentation skills as well as skills pertaining to self-
employment and media relations had to be obtained from other sources. These respondents had often actively sought other necessary knowledge and skills.

The doctoral degree was seen as very useful or the respondents had no complaints, but they were not satisfied with all aspects of the degree process. One respondent reported that the graduation process took a long time, which is why a smooth transition into employment was strongly dependent on sheer luck. Another respondent stated that fragmented research funding hampered their progress.

Those satisfied with their degree reflected upon alternative career opportunities, highlighting concerns over the significance of the degree in other sectors or positions. Some respondents reported not knowing whether the degree would be useful outside academia. A couple of respondents felt that the effect of the doctorate on their employment was unclear, as technically, at least, a lower-level degree and experience would have been sufficient. Some felt that the greatest benefits of the doctorate were yet to come. Other concerns reported by the respondents included private sector employers favouring younger applicants, a lack of appreciation for the degree outside research institutes, and depression over not finding a job that corresponded with their level of education. The doctorate was not seen as optimal in terms of career development in the sense that completing one was time-consuming and the same time spent in the private sector would already have led to a more senior position. However, the doctoral degree was a challenging undertaking, and the respondents wished it were also understood and valued outside their fields and academia. One respondent pointed out that completing a doctorate was not reflected in their salary.

Even those satisfied with their degree in terms of their career had concerns over forging a career in academia. The most frequently cited concern was fixed-term contracts. Several responses reflected on the dilemma over funding difficulties and following one’s passion. A few respondents reported that a research career was also financially challenging from the perspective of family life. A couple of international respondents reported not being able to find permanent work in Finland and were skeptical of their chances of ever doing so. In addition, individual respondents expressed concerns over the overall decline of the public sector, reported distrust in the University of Helsinki as an institution, and had plans to complete a second degree or change careers entirely because current research policies limited their opportunities for career advancement, such as obtaining a docentship.

Respondents were satisfied with their degree if they were able to compile their degree as they wished or to combine in it many topics of interest, if they had received good supervision, or if the degree had received international recognition or increased their salary. Some were pleased that they had been able to advance their research subject or field and that they had been able to generate new knowledge and related applications; for instance, one respondent stated that their doctoral thesis was now being used as a textbook.
Open-ended responses of those dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career

The most frequently cited concern by far among those dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career was the discrepancy between their degree and the limited career opportunities available. Fixed-term contracts were the main complaint, as they fostered uncertainty about the future and were a source of stress because of the short-term nature of the work in general. Fragmented contracts and limited opportunities in general were a source of dissatisfaction for both prospective postdoctoral researchers and those pursuing careers outside academia.

Both researchers and those working outside academia complained about their funding issues and poor employment opportunities, and many felt that both career options were equally challenging.

Research careers were made less attractive by the demands of the job, including having to compromise on one’s priorities, and the harsh competitiveness in the field. An otherwise poor atmosphere and the difficulty of obtaining a lectureship caused dissatisfaction with the choice of completing a doctorate. On the other hand, one respondent felt that not even other doctoral graduates often understood the funding issues they were facing, causing feelings of humiliation over supposedly doing the wrong kind of research or failing to build appropriate networks.

Academia was seen as ruthless in that a failure to produce the required number of publications disqualified one from applying for certain jobs and positions, as academic merit, measured by the number of publications, was the main selection criterion. For one respondent, poor supervision had delayed their graduation process, hampering their job-seeking efforts; another thought that their degree qualified them for "the old world" and was incompatible with modern academia that places the most weight on a rapid publication rate.

Transitioning to the private sector was seen as difficult, with many respondents attributing this to insufficient skills. Such skills included leadership skills as well as transferable skills that would enable diverse career paths. In addition, a couple of respondents felt that realistic career counselling was lacking in doctoral education. One respondent felt that currently there was a greater need for cross-disciplinary expertise and other broader skill sets, such as ICT skills. Some felt that focusing on research pushed doctoral students out of the "regular" job market, and returning to other sectors was extremely difficult if one had spent a long time away from the school/education sector, for instance. One respondent thought that it was difficult to adapt to professional life with the knowledge currently imparted by doctoral education, as there were few opportunities for applying research-based knowledge in practice. Another was frustrated with the fast pace of professional life where changes requested by employees were not implemented with a long-term approach.

Those employed outside academia in general were dissatisfied with their degree because it did not generate enough additional value, or it even turned out to be a hindrance. For
many, a doctoral degree did not facilitate employment; instead, it closed many doors due to the perception of being "overqualified". The respondents stated that the work they had found was too easy compared to their level of education, that they were unable to make full use of their expertise and that they would have been fine even without the degree, even if some of them mentioned having learned useful skills in the course of their doctoral studies. These respondents felt that a doctoral degree was not useful outside the university.

A few felt that a doctoral degree was somewhat beneficial in terms of recruitment, but only a little and possibly only outside Finland. One respondent with a doctorate in economics stated that, apart from research positions, there were few potential jobs available in Finland. Another felt that the choices made during the degree, such as professional networks, affected employment prospects more than the degree itself. One linguistics expert felt that the contents of the degree were secondary to their job. A handful of respondents felt that their degree had no concrete effects or benefits.

Several respondents claimed that the doctoral degree was not appreciated outside academia. They felt that people did not understand the work involved in a doctorate or were unable to empathise with someone pursuing a research career. Some respondents felt that their field of research was not seen as important in professional life outside academia.

Finally, some respondents were dissatisfied with their degree because it had not increased their salary.
A total of 207 doctoral graduates completed their degree in the Doctoral School in Biological, Environmental and Food Sciences (YEB) in 2014-2016. Some 40 per cent of them responded to the career monitoring survey, with some variance between response rates in different years. Not all respondents provided open-ended responses. This analysis includes doctoral graduates from all six doctoral programmes operating under the Doctoral School in Biological, Environmental and Food Sciences in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Responses were provided in Finnish, Swedish and English. A total of 40 satisfied (respondents who selected either very satisfied or satisfied from the available options) and 37 dissatisfied (respondents who selected either somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied from the available options) open-ended responses were recorded.

Open-ended responses of those satisfied with their degree in terms of their career

Those satisfied with their degree often cited the necessity of the doctoral degree for pursuing their chosen career, the attraction of their current job, the competence gained through doctoral studies, and the general prestige of the doctorate as key reasons behind their satisfaction.

Respondents working in academia in particular reported that they would not have got their current job without a doctorate, stating that it was not possible to pursue a research career without a doctorate, because a doctorate was like a "driving licence" and basic qualification for the job. In addition, many respondents pointed out that a research career was both a goal and a choice as well as a job that they liked. The duties of a researcher were described as interesting, suitably varied, enjoyable, motivating and challenging. Continuing to pursue – or advancing in – a research career, securing a permanent position and gaining internationalisation opportunities were a source of satisfaction.

The respondents' satisfaction with their salary varied. One respondent described their salary (of some 4,500 euros per month) as reasonable, while another thought that theirs (a little under 3,000 euros) was deplorable compared to the duration of the education. A third was satisfied with their research position and salary of some 3,500 euros, describing it as "fairly good, i.e., a little more than the Finnish average".

Respondents working outside academia also brought up the benefits of the degree, stating that they would not have secured their current job without the knowledge and skills gained through doctoral studies. In addition, one respondent stated that they had not been unemployed since completing their doctorate and thought that the doctorate had been somewhat helpful in that regard. One person currently working in a management position
for the government stated that the doctorate had been essential for advancing in their
career to more meaningful, better paid and more prestigious duties. According to them, the
other way to earn a similar or larger salary would have meant a career change and
transition to the private sector. Another respondent currently working in a governmental
expert position believed that the doctorate demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the field,
which was a prerequisite for their current wide-ranging and diverse duties. One respondent
working in a research position in a private company reported earning a higher salary
thanks to their doctorate.

The doctoral degree had also advanced many respondents' career in very concrete ways.
One doctoral graduate reported building a company based on their doctoral research.
Another praised the University of Helsinki for creating an international, interactive
community that helped them get to know people from different backgrounds, which was
very useful. In addition, the University had access to many resources in the form of
software and equipment, enabling the respondent to learn a lot from experts in many
different fields. A third respondent stated that their duties now included presenting
scientific research grant applications, and thanks to their degree they were familiar with
both the principles of academic research and the demands of the field. A fourth
respondent reported that the doctorate worked well to prepare them for a wide range of
duties by equipping them with many excellent skills, such as the ability to take initiative,
project management, time management, the ability to take responsibility, confidence in
one's ability to learn new things, diverse communication skills, analytic thinking, source
criticism, a realistic outlook on various matters, efficiency, the ability to enjoy one's work, a
desire to engage in lifelong learning, good professional networks, an understanding of the
scientific process and academia, as well as good ICT skills. On the other hand, one
respondent lamented the fact that in a workplace with few doctoral graduates, other people
often did not understand what kind of competence a doctoral degree provides.

For many, the degree had been a source of prestige as well as expertise. One respondent
described it as a key milestone in their career, which brought with it competence and
professional esteem. Overall, the degree was described to provide knowledge and skills
for the graduates' current duties, extensive international networks, good professional
experience, and general education. One respondent who worked in research felt that they
were now an equal with their colleagues. The degree also provided credibility: one
respondent believed that their analytical skills would be put to optimal use through doctoral
studies, even if they were to eventually end up working in the private sector; they
described doctoral studies as the best education they had received. The respondents
reported that doctoral degrees were held in high regard in expert positions in the private
sector.

For some respondents, the degree was a source of pride and affected how they viewed
themselves. One respondent stated that completing the degree was an overall confidence
boost, while another said that they now felt smart and that they had finally achieved
something through their own merits. A third respondent had wanted to complete a
doctorate and be a qualified expert in their field. For a fourth, the doctorate had brought
more confidence and a better ability to learn new things compared to their master's degree. This person believed that a more profound understanding of both theories and methods enabled one to evaluate various causal relationships in different sectors of society. One respondent explained that, as a woman under 30, the doctorate had increased her credibility in front of others, which was useful in many ways. Another reported that the doctoral thesis improved both their competence and tenacity.

The respondents were also happy with their supervision. One praised the high-quality thesis supervision that genuinely provided the necessary tools and skills for challenging positions. Another was happy with their supervisors for being very supportive.

However, certain shortcomings regarding the degree and its usefulness in terms of one's career were also observed. The respondents reflected upon qualification requirements and negative attitudes in workplaces outside the University. One respondent currently working for the government stated that the degree could have been more challenging than it was due to the current trend of rapidly changing duties and qualification requirements. Another reported being seen as overqualified for many positions for which they might nevertheless be interested in applying. Similarly, a third respondent stated that were they planning to pursue any other career besides research, a doctoral degree would be a hindrance rather than a help; they reported being seen by recruiters as "overqualified" for other positions in the field.

One respondent felt that alternative career paths received inadequate support and that, in their department at least, doctoral education provided very limited resources for seeking employment in the private sector. This person felt that doctoral education was geared towards careers in academia and did not take into account alternative career paths; what support and opportunities were available depended greatly on individual supervisors and degree programmes. Another respondent stated that the doctoral degree was useful when pursuing a research career, but was not necessary in their current job in the private sector.

In academia, respondents were troubled by funding difficulties. One respondent described how as a new and unemployed doctoral graduate they had felt 'quite empty', but that their career had picked up again after some successful research grant applications. Another stated, however, that finding a job that was not grant-funded was difficult.

Open-ended responses of those dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career

Those dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career cited uncertainty about future prospects, diminished job options due to being overqualified and general prejudice as the main reasons behind their dissatisfaction. In addition, not all respondents felt that the contents of the degree were optimal in terms of their career.

The respondents stated that the doctorate did not change their job prospects, as the majority of available jobs were in academia, there were few open positions and those were highly sought after. The doctoral degree did not open doors to positions where it would
have been useful, or while it opened some doors it simultaneously closed others, especially as regards more practice-oriented positions. One respondent thought that the contents and requirements of the doctoral degree were very university-centric, even though few graduates find careers at universities or other institutes of higher education. Another respondent believed to have secured their current job thanks to personal networks, while a couple of others felt that the degree did not adequately qualify them for positions outside academia. The Finnish job market was also seen as prejudiced against doctoral graduates.

The respondents were disappointed with the job prospects in academia. One respondent believed they were likely to become unemployed, as there were no more research jobs to be found. Another stated that research careers were too fragmented and uncertain for people with families. A third was dissatisfied because not even 10 years of studies guaranteed a permanent position in academia. They were considering a career change to secure a livelihood.

Doctoral graduates were not always well received in the job market; instead, many had faced prejudice. According to one respondent, doctoral graduates were thought of as tunnel-visioned academics who demanded better pay despite being inflexible and set in their ways. A couple of respondents complained that they were overqualified for jobs that interested them. One graduate reported that they had not been able to get another fixed-term contract after graduation because they were now considered too expensive. Another said that completing the degree had been comparable to a hobby, as it had not brought them any additional benefits; their clients were unwilling to pay extra for the additional qualification. A third respondent brought up the devaluation of education in general; before, doctoral graduates were valued and actively recruited in the public sector, but such positions were long gone. Instead, many positions where a master's degree was once required are now available to graduates from universities of applied sciences, so a doctorate is more a hindrance when applying for public positions.

The Finnish job market was considered challenging, especially in terms of finding permanent positions. An international respondent wondered whether it would be hard for them to find a permanent position in Finland due to their competence and background. Another reported finding employment at an international company because it was willing to hire a Finnish doctoral graduate. In addition, the respondents lamented their limited employment options and the cost-benefit ratio of the degree in terms of time spent on it. One respondent felt that the window of opportunity opened by the doctoral degree was small. Another described being somewhat bitter, as they felt it would have been smarter to gain five years of work experience elsewhere than to spend that time completing a doctoral thesis.

The respondents reflected upon the significance of the degree and the education received in many different ways. One respondent felt that the degree itself was not a necessity, but it was important to understand academia and the principles of scientific research. Another felt similarly, stating that the important thing career-wise was the competence gained through doctoral education rather than the degree itself. A third stated that the degree had
not been very important to them, while a fourth commented that for an academic career it would have been important to work in a team, produce more publications and gain more teaching experience. A fifth thought that the research experience they had gained was one-sided compared to their Finnish and international colleagues, but that their project management and other skills compensated for it.

A couple of respondents brought up the role of the supervisor, which was seen as significant. One respondent reported that their supervisor did not show enough interest in their doctoral thesis, let alone help them create professional networks. Another criticised the quality of doctoral education at their department.

A few listed some positive qualities about their degree, although they were not entirely satisfied with its effect on their career. One respondent reported enjoying their research career, while another had secured their current job thanks to their doctorate and mentioned that when it came to job-seeking, their analytical skills, logical thinking and scientific approach to matters were an advantage. A third stated that their English-language proficiency and the overall appreciation of a doctoral degree had worked to their advantage in seeking employment. A fourth said that their thesis topic was interesting and that they enjoyed research, which is why they did not regret completing their degree. The respondents also mentioned that a doctorate demonstrated an ability to complete long-term projects; one respondent believed that municipalities no longer considered doctoral graduates to be too theoretically oriented. For some, the value of the doctoral thesis was connected to a sense of personal achievement; they completed the degree not to advance their career, but to demonstrate to themselves that they had finished what they started. For instance, one respondent found a job during their doctoral studies, but wanted to finish their thesis anyway.

Some of the dissatisfied respondents had ended up changing careers or completing further education. One respondent had completed another second-cycle university degree in a different field and found that their doctoral degree was useful but that finding employment required further education. On the other hand, they wondered whether they’d be further in their career if they had only completed the second degree in a different field. One graduate reported being unable to find any kind of work that was even remotely related to their area of expertise and had ended up changing careers. Their expertise turned out to be useful in their new career.

A few were unhappy with their career because they were unable to use their expertise as extensively as they wanted. One respondent reported that their work corresponded with their area of expertise but not their level of knowledge. According to them, doctoral-level expertise was not valued because it had no direct practical applications, such as the ability to use specific software. The problem was not the lack of potential applications, but the lack of courage and confidence to take action to promote one’s expertise.

Some respondents reflected upon their thesis topic. One respondent said that their thesis was related to their work but not to the exact topic they were working on. Another graduate reflected that their thesis topic was not very useful outside academia. According to them,
in a situation where there are few research fellow positions and limited research funding, better integration into the job market was essential. This, on the other hand, requires support from senior researchers, prospective companies and political actors. A third stated that their work was not related to their thesis topic and that they should have completed their thesis on a more general topic.
A total of 209 new doctoral degree holders graduated from the Doctoral School in Natural Sciences in 2014-2016. Approximately 40% of the graduates responded to the career monitoring survey, but not all respondents provided open-ended responses. This analysis includes doctoral graduates from all eleven doctoral programmes operating under the Doctoral School in Natural Sciences in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Responses were provided in Finnish, Swedish and English. A total of 44 satisfied (respondents who selected either very satisfied or satisfied from the available options) and 13 dissatisfied (respondents who selected either somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied from the available options) open-ended responses were recorded.

Open-ended responses of those satisfied with their degree in terms of their career

Those satisfied with their degree in terms of their career cited the following as their main reasons for their satisfaction: acquiring all-round expertise, having an opportunity to make use of their thesis topic, gaining prestige, and obtaining qualifications for the next step in their career or for a specific position.

Many described gaining wide-ranging expertise and qualifications through doctoral studies. For instance, one respondent reported gaining “an ideal basis” for a career in high technology. Another reported being now able to “complete or learn literally any job in the field of chemistry”. A third stated that their degree gave a good foundation for a junior researcher, which was why they secured landed a job at a top-level university and research institute where they have had ample opportunities to use the competence obtained in the course of their doctoral studies. Doctoral studies were described as an educational process; one respondent mentioned transferable skills, stating that their importance could not be stressed enough.

Several people reported using the skills obtained through doctoral studies in their current work. In addition, those pursuing a research career also mentioned the international aspect of a doctorate. One stated that the degree gave them not only an opportunity to pursue a research career, but also a way to work abroad in positions relevant to their education and expertise, while another reported that their versatile skill set and international contacts had helped them to easily find employment relevant to their level of education. The respondents were satisfied with their employment as they now had an opportunity to both use their existing expertise and learn new things. For some, an international workplace was an additional bonus.

The responses also discussed the differences between academia and other sectors as well as the significance of the degree with regard to employment prospects. The respondents reflected on their current jobs in relation to their thesis topics and the usability
of the expertise obtained through doctoral education. For some, the degree had been of great benefit, while others reported that it had not been a hindrance. Most considered the degree a sign of expertise, but some were afraid of negative stigma. One respondent currently pursuing an academic career where a doctoral degree is essential, nevertheless believed that their degree had given them knowledge and skills that would be advantageous were they ever to venture outside academia. Similarly, another researcher at the university pointed out that a doctoral degree was also a gateway to various expert positions in the private sector; in fact, they had already received some job offers, most likely due to their doctoral degree and subsequent postdoctoral work experience.

Several respondents reported being happy with their degree and career because they were able to combine their thesis topic with their current duties. One graduate’s job was related to the topic of their thesis and their degree had contributed to both their commercial and career-related successes. Another graduate working in the private sector reported being satisfied because they were able to find their current job thanks to having a well-suited thesis topic. A third stated that their job corresponded with their education right down to the topic of their thesis. However, they had doubts whether the degree would be as beneficial in subsequent recruitment processes outside the special field in question.

Mastering one’s field, being profiled as an expert or making use of one’s expertise were sources of satisfaction for the respondents. One graduate from the field of mathematics was happy that their expertise could be used in a wide range of fields. Another said that their degree enabled them to focus on a specific topic, something that would not have been possible to do in Finland otherwise, while a third reported being satisfied because they were able to conduct the kind of research that they wanted and were now one of the world’s leading experts in their field.

Others felt that the degree was useful or it had given them an additional advantage in the job market. One international respondent working in the private sector reported that finding employment was hard for a foreigner, but that a doctoral degree from the University of Helsinki gave them an advantage. Another stated that their degree opened doors to better jobs. One stated that at their workplace it was possible to work as a researcher even without a doctoral degree, but that it increased their salary and qualified them for certain duties, as a doctoral degree is usually required to act as the principal investigator in funding applications, for instance. Another graduate also reported that their aim had been a doctoral degree because it would enable them to stand out at their workplace. They also stated that a doctoral degree was key in research project management. At their workplace, doctoral degrees were valued and considered a demonstration of competence.

For many, a doctoral degree was essential in their current job due to both skills and qualifications requirements. Some stated that they would not have their current job without a doctorate and for postdoctoral researchers a doctoral degree was obviously a necessity. A few said that a doctoral degree was not a requirement at their current job, but in practice they would not have got the position without one. A physicist pointed out that there were plenty of people with doctorates in their field, so it was good to be on an equal footing. Two respondents reported being satisfied with their degree because it had met their
expectations. One person reported allowing their doctoral studies to take their own course without setting particular goals. For them, a doctoral thesis was a necessity for pursuing a research career and they found it difficult to imagine doing anything else. Many researchers expressed similar neutral attitudes toward their degree.

For some, the doctorate was at least somewhat useful in terms of their career or it had not become a hindrance. One respondent stated that the degree itself was pretty insignificant, while another said “well, it was not a hindrance either.” A third expressed similar sentiments, stating that, based on their experiences interviewing for jobs in the private sector, a doctoral degree did not hurt their chances.

Those that had identified shortcomings or challenges elaborated their views as follows: One respondent stated that the doctoral degree had allowed them to pursue the kind of career path that they had aimed for, but that they suspected that a doctoral degree might be a hindrance if they were to change careers due to being labelled as “overqualified and/or an academic”. Another reported obtaining all necessary qualifications for independent research, but wished the studies had focused more on writing grant applications, possibly through compulsory studies. Another graduate felt that the degree was extremely useful in academia, but that companies were more often looking for familiarity with industrial processes or master’s level expertise.

Not everyone found it easy to find employment outside academia. One person saw the doctoral degree as a “narrow specialist training” suitable for a career in academia, but often too specialised for other sectors. They stated that they would be even more satisfied with their degree if it enabled a career outside academia or the studies had included guidance on “how to get there”.

A couple of respondents reported liking their current job but that it entailed some less satisfactory aspects, such as frequent travel. One respondent described how their job was essentially similar to that of a doctoral student, but with more duties and responsibilities. However, they reported enjoying research and pointed out that they would not have been able to secure their current fixed-term postdoctoral researcher position without completing a doctoral degree first.

Satisfaction was also affected by appreciation in professional life: one respondent stated that their employer, a research institute, appreciated and supported postgraduate education and degrees, which increased appreciation among colleagues. Another reported that the clients of their company greatly appreciated their expertise and academic qualifications. For them, the effects of their research had become tangible in the form of increased revenue. A third respondent working in the private sector reported being able to establish their professional reputation as an expert thanks to their doctoral degree. Other reasons for satisfaction included an interesting job or better duties, better pay and potential permanent contracts.

A career was not always the main reason for completing doctoral studies, and a couple of respondents reported doing so primarily for personal reasons. One said that they wanted
to complete a doctoral degree, while another reported that the degree was a key part of their identity.

Open-ended responses of those dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career

Doctoral graduates from the Doctoral School of Natural Sciences were dissatisfied with their degree in terms of their career for different reasons, but the key problems listed were *prejudices against doctoral graduates, difficulty finding employment and the applicability of research experience and related skills*. Other reasons included uncertain income in academia and the effects of supervision on the transition into the job market.

The respondents reflected on whether the doctoral degree was a *hindrance to employment*. One respondent felt that their degree did more harm than good when searching for a job. Another expressed the same view, stating that a doctoral degree was not always an advantage when trying to find a research position in the private sector. They felt that doctoral graduates were often “seen as impractical, half-mad scientists living in their own world or as being after more than just a basic research position”. One respondent felt that no matter what they tried, they did not seem to be able to find employment. Another reported having had to retrain, so in terms of time the doctoral degree represented many wasted years. Yet another reported securing a job as a postdoctoral researcher, but felt that an academic career in general led to poorer employment outcomes. Another stated that their doctoral thesis constituted basic research. They felt that the job market in their field was dismal, and that they frankly did not know what kind of job they would be able to get even in the private sector.

One respondent had found that a doctoral degree had both advantages and disadvantages when searching for a job. They questioned the feasibility of an academic career for people with families, stating that they might have been interested in a career in academia, but found that it did not appear practicable, at least if they wanted a somewhat secure income. A second respondent also had doubts about earning a living in a research career; they reported that they were satisfied with graduating in a short period of time and being able to transfer to a more rewarding research position after completing their thesis. Having no option but to continue their research on a grant would not have been good for their income.

The respondents also reflected upon the *skills gained through their degree*. One respondent reported learning a lot and having had opportunities to develop a wide range of skills and qualifications. Another reported that the content of the degree was fit for purpose, expressing special gratitude for journal article workshops for doctoral students. For them, doctoral students should be encouraged further to take various transferable skills courses in fields such as data management. They also mentioned that developing scientific communication skills was left entirely to doctoral students’ own initiative and wished that the university would offer more support in that regard. Finally, they felt that
ways to appreciate societal impact both during and after doctoral studies (possibly through credits or scholarships) should be developed further. A third respondent reported that the majority of their experience during doctoral studies was in designing, assembling and using measuring equipment and data, and that only their data management experience had been of any use in their current job – and that they had had to learn a great deal more even in that area. According to them, their experience in the experimental side of the process had not been any use at all.

Two respondents reported being dissatisfied with their degree because poor supervision impaired their transition to the job market. Another was disappointed over having had “little to no support” from their department or supervisor in finding employment in academia after graduation. Yet another reported that their supervisor was not able to sufficiently support their thesis project. Their graduation was delayed as a result, causing them further trouble when, for example, applying for subsequent research funding. They proposed that universities should draw up a set of criteria for supervisors, especially pertaining to their practical abilities rather than just their title, as inadequate supervision caused great inequality among otherwise skilled doctoral students. They felt that in these situations doctoral students alone shouldered the burden of delayed graduation, even though insufficient supervision was a key contributor.
A total of 419 doctoral graduates completed their degree in the Doctoral School in Health Sciences in 2014-2016. Their response rate to the career monitoring survey varied between 40 and 50 per cent. Not all respondents provided open-ended answers to questions pertaining to their degree satisfaction. This analysis includes doctoral graduates from all eleven doctoral programmes operating under the Doctoral School in Health Sciences in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Responses were provided in Finnish, Swedish and English. A total of 93 satisfied (respondents who selected either very satisfied or satisfied from the available options) and 40 dissatisfied (respondents who selected either somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied from the available options) open-ended responses were recorded.

Graduates from the Doctoral School in Health Sciences appeared to be generally very satisfied with their degree in terms of their career. The main reasons behind their satisfaction included the relevance of their education to their current job, learning useful skills, career advancement, gaining an expert status and achieving a goal. Many respondents cited several reasons, i.e., the doctorate contributed to successes in many aspects of their career and employment. Physicians often cited improved competence in their specialty and critical thinking as key skills learned through doctoral education. Their resulting career paths and perceived benefits also seemed clearer than those of other doctoral graduates at the University of Helsinki.

Most respondents were satisfied with their degree because it was closely linked to their current job, which was considered useful. Specifically, the respondents valued extensive education in their specialty, with one respondent stating that, for a physician, research was not compulsory but that it was extremely educational and useful. According to them, a large number of physicians in their workplace had completed a doctoral degree, which was why it was easy to fit in after obtaining the same education and experience. In contrast one graduate felt that in a specialty focused on clinical laboratory services, the importance of research had increased. Another said that a doctoral degree gave them knowledge and skills that facilitated their work as an entrepreneur, but also enabled them to use their experience in teaching, instruction and consultation-related duties. One reported that doctoral studies were useful in their everyday clinical practice. They described acquiring knowledge and skills that they would not have been able to learn otherwise but that were essential to their work. One doctoral graduate also reported getting interesting further research work thanks to their degree.

Several respondents cited enhancing their expertise as a source of satisfaction. One respondent reported working in the same position both before and after completing their
doctorate and that the degree was definitely useful. Another stated that research brought a whole new aspect to their job, one that roused their interest and had later enabled them to analyse research results more extensively. One respondent, working as an entrepreneur at a private practice, felt that the doctoral degree did not affect their employment opportunities and that they already had the required professional qualifications for their job, but that doctoral studies had given them more in-depth knowledge. For another, the degree and skills learned through research were of great use, as they were able to use both clinical and research-based knowledge and skills in their work.

Some respondents reported getting a permanent position or the job that they had wanted thanks to completing a doctoral degree. One respondent was happy that they had got a permanent post after graduation. Another reported that the doctoral degree had been their goal and that they had worked hard for it. After graduation, they had immediately received a permanent position. Next, they were hoping to advance in their career. A third respondent was pleased about having been able to complete their degree flexibly to fit in with their life situation at the time and that the degree had led to the position they had been aiming for from the start.

One respondent felt that their degree was appreciated and that they had been able to get their current job as a result. They believed that they very likely would not have been selected for the position without a doctoral degree. Another graduate reported that they had learned a great deal during doctoral studies and received a good grade for their thesis, which very likely helped to get them postdoctoral research funding. A third described their researcher years as an intellectually rich and rewarding time that they recalled with fondness. In addition, they believed that they would never have secured their current job without completing a doctoral degree. For them, the degree was a way to stand out from among the other applicants and a chance to demonstrate certain qualities, such as tenacity, self-direction and project management skills. Another reported being satisfied because the doctoral degree enabled them to very quickly get another job. Some reported being satisfied with their degree because a doctoral degree from the University of Helsinki was a source of pride and that the University also had a good international reputation.

The graduates listed a wide range of skills learned through research that they felt had given them an advantage in the workplace, such as analytical thinking and research-based argumentation, the ability to critically evaluate scientific articles, and an in-depth focus on key topics in the field. Other skills listed included skills related to data analysis, project management and the ability to take responsibility in various areas, the management of large bodies of information, information seeking and retrieval, written communication skills, learning new working methods, reporting research results, and presentation skills. Finally, the respondents emphasised obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of their field. One respondent reported obtaining skills that were essential to further developing their current job duties.

Many also stated that the degree process was a useful and very educational experience. One respondent reported that doctoral education provided the professional competence necessary for solving complex problems in a multidisciplinary environment. Another stated
that completing the degree was fun and taught many useful skills, in addition to which an understanding of the research process and evaluating research completed by others was essential in their work. A third reported learning skills that were difficult to obtain otherwise. Those skills had helped them to obtain and to successfully do their job. Other benefits listed by the respondents included the opportunity to build professional networks both in Finland and internationally.

A couple of respondents lamented the fact that the practical skills obtained through the degree were not something they could use in their job very often, although they were able to use them occasionally. Another respondent stated that they were able to use their skills “regrettably infrequently” because other duties took up most of their time. For some, the degree had not yet resulted in concrete benefits, but that they believed it would benefit them in the future. One respondent explained that the doctoral degree had given them expertise in a specific field of biomedicine, which was helpful in securing employment now and hopefully also in the future. For them, however, what was essential was not the degree itself, but the research topic and work experience obtained, also after graduation. A few made comparisons between a doctoral degree and specialist training. According to them, a doctoral degree had thus far not been that important, but in the future, as a licensed specialist, it would be useful when applying for permanent posts or management positions as well as in pay negotiations.

Many respondents were satisfied because the degree had enabled them to advance in their career. For some, the degree was essential for or a “stepping stone” in career advancement, while for others it improved their chances in or opened up new opportunities for career advancement. One respondent reported that a doctoral degree was not essential for their current job, but that it was useful. However, they were considering applying for a job at a university hospital where the significance of a doctoral degree would become far greater. They felt that the degree improved their standing in the job market. Two respondents were satisfied with being able to continue their research careers and to supervise junior researchers. One reported that the doctoral degree had enabled them to build a versatile academic career both in Finland and abroad. In their current job, a doctoral degree was always required, unless the applicant had otherwise obtained extensive experience in similar duties, which was why they felt they had been able to stand out from among prospective applicants. One respondent explained that the degree had broadened their scope of duties and enabled them to apply for a wider range of jobs on the market. Another reported that they had received several interesting job offers after completing their degree.

Some respondents’ satisfaction with their degree could be explained by their satisfaction with their current duties. One respondent described their current duties as very wide-ranging, while another reported that the things learned in the course of doctoral studies generated additional value for clients and increased the meaningfulness of their work. One reported that completing the degree brought with it new challenges, such as research and supervision duties.
A large number of respondents had a neutral stance with regard to the benefits of the degree; for them, the degree was a formal qualification or an objective to be achieved without particular expectations. One respondent stated that they would not be able to work in a field that interested them without a doctoral degree, while another reported aiming for a research career from the outset. A respondent working in the private sector reported being happy with their publications and having enjoyed their research career studying a topic of their choice. Another respondent in the private sector commented that they knew what they were doing and what to expect, and that they did not expect the degree to advance their career all that much outside the university.

Many were satisfied with the expert status gained through the degree. One respondent reported that, thanks to the degree, they were now considered a special expert in a certain field and that they were now able to complete new interesting tasks alongside their day job. Other sources of satisfaction included having a formal demonstration of competence and project management skills, a better status and pay, and consultation duties obtained thanks to completing the degree. One respondent felt that they were a very sought-after and valued asset in the company at which they worked, while another reported that doctoral degrees were appreciated by employers in their field. A third found that the degree had improved their standing in professional life and within research. One respondent currently working in a governmental research position reported that they now felt qualified for their demanding position and that they were an equal with their international colleagues.

One respondent had somewhat mixed feelings about their current status. They explained that the degree did not increase their salary or allow them to transition to more demanding or meaningful duties. The degree enabled them to successfully apply for a specific position, but they were unsure whether it would be of any use in the "regular job market". One respondent wondered why others seemed to put so much weight on the formal title, i.e., why their opinion seemed to matter much more now. They felt that it was strange, but presumably quite common, and stressed that they personally cared more about gaining concrete expertise and the opportunity to learn something new every day.

Although the majority of respondents were satisfied with their degree in terms of their career, some sources of dissatisfaction with either degree or career were reported. These included, for example, limited career opportunities in other sectors, the duration of the studies, insufficient relevance of the thesis topic to current job duties, or the comparability of a doctoral degree to specialist training in medicine. One respondent complained that while the doctoral degree was rewarding and useful in certain tasks, the duration of the studies in Finland was often far too long. They strongly felt that the maximum duration of doctoral studies should be five years, because, provided that the supervision was adequate, it was definitely enough time to learn all that a doctoral graduate needs to know.

One respondent commented that the degree provided a limited number of skills that were suitable or helpful for a career outside academia. A respondent in an administrative position for the government had complaints about insufficient opportunities for networking and an overly narrow focus on a specific topic; they reported that in their current career
they would have benefited from greater applicability and professional contacts. Another person explained that their doctoral research was unrelated to their current job as a public official. One respondent replied that doctoral education had provided them with the necessary knowledge and skills to pursue a research career, but that they had discovered afterwards that they would have needed to complete specific courses, which they must now complete as and when they need them or have time to do so.

The respondents made comparisons between a doctoral degree and a specialist degree in medicine. One respondent acknowledged that their clinical competence had improved as a result of conducting research in the field, but that overall, research experience or doctoral degrees were not valued as highly as a specialist degree in medicine. They surmised that had they not completed a doctorate first, they might already have completed their specialist training. Another physician stated that, in practice, a doctorate was a requirement for obtaining a specialist position at a university hospital, but that it did not guarantee a permanent post, at least not quickly.

Some respondents were dissatisfied with their pay. One person pursuing a research career reported finding only short fixed-term contracts and research grants immediately after graduation, which resulted in lower pay. Another stated that it would be much more motivating if doctoral graduates received a pay rise after completing their thesis. They found it incomprehensible that a doctoral degree was not sufficient grounds for a pay rise. A third reported finding doctoral education interesting, rewarding and arduous, but that, sadly, it did not lead to a better position or higher pay.

In addition to low pay, the respondents were dissatisfied with the fact that their current position was not necessarily very challenging. One felt that a surplus of doctoral graduates in their field had led to a doctorate being a prerequisite (or at least an advantage) for many positions, even though a master’s degree would provide equally suitable qualifications for them. They also pointed out that doctoral graduates were better paid, but compared to many other fields the overall pay was relatively low. Another postdoctoral researcher reported that their pay had increased very little after graduation. They felt that their pay of under 3,000 euros per month was very bad compared to their level of education. They were very satisfied with their degree but felt that a doctoral degree or related competence was not valued enough in the job market to result in better pay or better standing, let alone any form of job security. According to them, this showed that education was not truly valued in society.

Some respondents considered their degree in the light of personal rather than career development. For one, it was a break from everyday life and their daily job, a hobby.
The most frequently cited cause for dissatisfaction at the Doctoral School in Health Sciences was difficulty finding employment or being labelled as overqualified, something which seemed to be less of a problem for clinicians compared to other doctoral graduates. Other reasons included uncertain benefits, problems related to poor planning of the degree, and insufficient pay.

Some respondents had faced prejudiced attitudes toward a research background or doctoral education. One reported that the degree did not help them find employment but that the employment office did not allow them to pursue another degree with better employment prospects. Another reported that the degree had not broadened their range of available job options. They had been labelled as "overqualified" for multiple jobs and that they were clearly "shunned" in the job market because they did not wish to pursue a research career at the university. They also pointed out that, as an experience, completing a doctoral degree was a fine achievement, but it was not reflected in their pay. A third respondent was currently employed in a position where a doctoral degree was required. However, they had had a pessimistic view about their employment prospects long after graduation, and felt that a doctoral degree was considered a liability in many positions due to being perceived as too highly educated. One respondent compared Finnish and international job markets, stating that their doctoral research experience was an asset internationally, but that in Finland they were having a harder time finding employment than they would have had with only a master’s degree. They suspected that Finland did not understand the value of doctoral graduates as well as countries with more established academic traditions. Another respondent had also received job offers from abroad.

Extended unemployment periods or difficulty finding a suitable job were also listed as sources of dissatisfaction. One doctoral graduate wished that their employment prospects were better. It had taken them a long time to find a job that corresponded with their level of education after graduation. They also stated that the university had given them very little support in their efforts, if at all. One respondent felt that their employment options were limited, especially because they were not able to relocate due to family reasons. One felt that their doctoral research dealt with a topic and methods that did not help them find employment. One reported not being able to find a job in their field after graduation. They had taken a short break, which they felt had been necessary, but that in hindsight had been a mistake. They hoped to find a job in their field, but found it exceedingly difficult and were facing an uncertain future. They felt that their situation was extremely painful and unfair, but that they were hoping to resolve the situation.

Research career plans were hampered by funding-related challenges and pressures. One respondent pursuing a research career felt that securing one’s first postdoctoral research position was easy (especially from abroad), because funding was readily available. However, the situation was likely to change rapidly and that in four years’ time finding
employment would be considerably more difficult unless one had managed to rise to a junior project management position. One respondent was disappointed that the degree had not resulted in research and teaching career opportunities, which had been their goal. They felt that in order to find employment relevant to their education, i.e., a research position, they had to strive to secure their own pay in the form of fixed-term research grants, which they felt was not a “realistic long-term solution for an adult”. Another graduate from the same doctoral programme reported not finding employment at all, because there were no research positions available. A third lamented that the degree had not helped them get beyond fixed-term contracts. One graduate in a research position in the community sector reported that they would never had pursued doctoral studies had they known beforehand just how much research funding was going to be cut.

In addition, some respondents felt that the benefits of the doctoral degree were minor or unclear. One reported that doctoral education was an educational experience, which was why they were not dissatisfied per se, but that the degree had not been of much benefit to them, as the resulting pay increase, for instance, had been largely negated by an increase in taxes. On the other hand, they felt that they had not experienced any downsides and that they were now perhaps able to be “wiser” about research knowledge. Another stated that the degree had not affected them much besides giving them a new title and some personal value. A third felt similarly, stating that they had enjoyed the research and thesis process, but did not find the degree particularly useful in their current job. However, they pointed out that the life experience itself was of course useful. One respondent reported that the degree had not been of much use to them, as their job description had stayed the same and they had no opportunities for career advancement. Another respondent working in the private sector stated that they would not be returning to research “under any circumstances”, so completing the degree would not have been necessary. However, they believed that the degree would be of some use. For some, the doctoral degree was primarily a necessary step in their research career. The degree was described as a continuation of doctoral education or a basic qualification for a researcher.

Others were dissatisfied about not being able to make further use of their extensive education. One person lamented the fact that the doctoral degree was required for their job, even though the job itself did not offer opportunities to carry out further research. They reported that pursuing postdoctoral clinical research at a university hospital was challenging due to limited time and resources. One respondent reported that, in practice, only a university of applied sciences degree was required for their current job, but that they had been given a new title (and a corresponding pay rise) because of their degree, even though their duties and responsibilities had remained the same. They believed that they would have advanced further in their career if they had made the move to the private sector earlier, because they had had to “start from the bottom”. All in all, they wished they had completed their doctoral thesis faster and with less effort: they felt that it should be possible to defend one’s thesis after publishing only one article, because the added value for one’s career was much less significant after that.
A few respondents made comments about the content of their doctoral education, which they were not entirely satisfied with, or skills that they had not obtained. One person stated that they were satisfied with their research expertise, but that more attention should have been paid to commercialisation skills, administration and management. Another reported that they would most likely have wanted to learn more about artificial intelligence and related topics. One respondent stated that their doctoral education had largely consisted of independent study, because they were only formally enrolled in a doctoral programme and felt that the training provided by the University had been limited and difficult to reconcile with their job. They wished for more cross-disciplinary education in particular.

A few respondents had complaints about the lack of planning of their doctoral thesis and related studies. One person reported that they had not planned their career to a great extent, and that they did not have very specific goals, so it was not a big issue for them, but they nevertheless lamented the fact that their thesis process was long and unsuccessful and therefore, in a sense, wasted. They described the project as drifting along for years without adequate supervision, but pointed out that they did not regret completing the degree and had enjoyed the process. One graduate stated that if they had been able to see the future, they would have selected a topic more closely related to their work.

For some, the challenges faced during doctoral education were related to their career choices. One graduate described their thesis project as a “battle for survival” with no room for anything else but completing articles on time, which was why they were unable to think about their career or its demands. They were now employed in a research position and lamented the fact that financial difficulties had forced them to accept the first job they were offered, even though it did not match their research interests. Another reported that they had lost interest in research due to an unfriendly work environment. They reported being happy with their current career in the private sector but lamented the fact that people lost interest in research because of team leaders who were not interested in doctoral students’ projects, but only hired them as extra help.

A few respondents were unhappy with their salary. One reported that their pay did not reflect their level of education at all. Another reported having to wait a long time for a pay rise after defending their thesis. A third researcher in the same field reported that the salary system of the University did not acknowledge the increased training and experience at all.

Some respondents did not consider their career to be a relevant measure of their satisfaction with their degree, or they were satisfied with doctoral education regardless of possible career-related challenges. One respondent was happy that doctoral studies taught them to examine the different aspects of their field from a wide range of perspectives as well as to search for information from a variety of sources with a critical eye. Another felt that they had been able to complete a meaningful research project as part of a great team. One pointed out that their degree was completed toward the end of their professional career, which is why its effects were limited.