

Collective for the Paris-Saclay University employees with insecure status  
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Orsay, 1 August 2022

To Professor Estelle Iacona, President of Paris-Saclay University; to Professor Sylvie Pommier, assistant Vice-President, in charge of the doctoral level; to Hamida Muller, director of the “PhD house” (“Maison du Doctorat”); to all 21 doctoral schools’ boards in Paris-Saclay University.

**Subject: request for doctoral tuition fees exemption, as of university reopening 2022/2023**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, PhD students in Paris-Saclay university, are hereby **demanding exemption from doctoral tuition fees, from next university reopening onwards**. Such a step would help mitigate the extreme job insecurity affecting young PhD students today. It also would help PhD students obtain a full-fledged professional recognition.

**PhD students are, first and foremost, university students, and as such they should not be required to pay in order to actually be able to work.** Young researchers as a whole actively help the university work properly through their own teaching or research works. About research first: our PhD works become source materials for conference papers or scientific publications. These scientific knowledge transfer tasks contribute to the strengthening of Paris-Saclay university’s labs reputation. Then, about teaching, most young researchers actually are both PhD students and teachers, and as such they actively participate to the students’ education and assessment. Lastly, plenty of PhD students commit to various collective responsibilities, or to their current research team’s scientific events. That is why both the national law\* and European guidelines\*\* acknowledge doctoral training as an actual work experience.

Moreover, it must be mentioned that **each and every PhD student is a university worker, including those who are not paid for the research they carry out**. Also, their current “vacataire” status deprives them from their most basic social rights, and as such, giving them an actual contract is a pressing matter. At the very least, we want the University to make sure that these “vacataires”, who cannot benefit from having an actual contract, get a monthly wage, as stipulated in the legal provisions introduced on December 24<sup>th</sup> 2020 through the Research Programming Act.

**PhD students also are workers with an insecure status\*\*\***, continuously suffering from the persistent lack of financial support that has affected the French higher education system for around 20 years now. PhD students are indeed facing financial stress over the course of their doctoral career. Whether we are financially supported - but consistently solicited for various doctoral tasks, mainly teaching – or not - and

therefore compelled to apply for temporary “vacataire” positions, one after the other – **seldom does our wages match the amount of tasks and working time carried out. Which means that we too often find ourselves working for free.** With the extent of our scientific, educational or administrative responsibilities, our research activities tend not to be prioritised, but even then, the University still puts a lot of pressure on the PhD students, prompting them to finish their PhD within three years. But in view of how long it actually takes to finish a PhD work, many of us find themselves without financial support, in a situation of extreme precarity, at the end of their PhD. This has a significant negative impact on our mental health.

**Furthermore, PhD students are impacted first-hand by the inflation pressures this period puts us through (inflation rate of 6,1% over the course of one year in July 2022\*\*\*\*), the University must introduce a tuition fees exemption measure for PhD students, in order not to worsen their financial situation. It is getting critical at this point.**

Many universities already introduced such measures, acknowledging PhD students as university staff members. Paris 1 and Paris 2 universities, Paris-Nanterre, Paris Dauphine, Lyon 2, Strasbourg ou Toulouse Jean Jaurès are examples of this. They acknowledged PhD students as an essential academic workforce, and admitted that, without us, they could not properly carry their public service mission.

**This is why we demand:**

**-The introduction of a tuition fees exemption measure, fitting our status as university workers**

**-An actual contract for “vacataires” PhD students and the strict observance of the legal obligation which stipulates that, from September 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 onwards, “vacataires” must be granted a monthly wage.**

We thank you in advance for your attention,

Yours respectfully

*Paris-Saclay University's precarious workers collective*

\*Education Code article n°612-7 stipulates: “these doctoral courses (...) are considered as **actual research working experience**”.

\*\*In the European Charter for Researchers, the European Commission states the following:

“*All researchers engaged in a research career should be recognised as professionals and be treated accordingly. This should commence at the beginning of their careers, namely at postgraduate level, and should include all levels, regardless of their classification at national level (e.g.*

*employee, postgraduate student, doctoral candidate, postdoctoral fellow, civil servants*)”, European Commission, European Charter for Researchers - General Principles and Requirements applicable to Employers and Funders, 2005, p.17

\*\*\*about French PhD students’ social and financial precarity:

-Adèle B. Combes, *Comment l’université broie les jeunes chercheurs. Précarité, Harcèlement, Loi du silence (How university crushes young researchers. Precarity, Harassment, Omerta)*, 2022

-« Dans l’enfer de ces doctorants pris entre précarité financière et galères administratives » (« Inside PhD students’ hellish experience, between financial precarity and administrative headaches »), *Les Échos*, January 24th 2001 (see online : <https://start.lesechos.fr/apprendre/universites-ecoles/ces-doctorants-pris-entre-precarite-financiere-et-galeres-administratives-1283798>).

-« Réforme de la recherche, la précarité invisible des doctorants » (« Research reform, PhD students’ invisible precarity »), *La Croix*, February 12th 2020 (see online : <https://www.lacroix.com/Famille/Education/Reforme-recherche-precarite-invisible-doctorants-2020-02-12-1201077862>)

-« Doctorants et docteurs précaires » (« PhD students and doctors with insecure status »), *Libération*, February 12th 2020 (see online :

[https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/02/12/doctorants-et-docteurs-precaires-on-n-est-jamais-assez-bien-alors-qu-on-se-tue-au-travail\\_1777870/](https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/02/12/doctorants-et-docteurs-precaires-on-n-est-jamais-assez-bien-alors-qu-on-se-tue-au-travail_1777870/)).

\*\*\*from INSEE (“National Institute for Statistic and Economic Studies”), online at

<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6479967#tableau-ipc-flash-g1-fr>. Before the pay rise provided for in the Research Programming Act, a doctoral contract’s minimal net pay amounts to 1387.54 euros. Assuming that prices would, over the course of the next academic year, remain at their current level, this 6.1% inflation rate would amount to **a total loss of slightly more than 1000 euros in buying power**. Exempting us paying from tuition fees, **and extending the doctoral contracts’ pay rise to every PhD student, could reduce inflation’s negative impact on our living conditions by half**.