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Signed by 916 signatures, the petition “A better contract and fair wage for Teaching Assistants at the Geneva Graduate Institute” was submitted to the Grand Conseil and both the Direction and Foundation Board of the Institute.

What has happened since last Spring? Learn more about our petition submitted to the Grand Conseil of Geneva, the unsuccessful negotiations held with the Direction, our collective mobilisation activities, and discussions with the Foundation Board to better salaries and contractual conditions for Teaching Assistants (TAs).

The launch of the petition for better contracts and fair wages

During the three negotiation meetings in February and March with the management of the Institute, obtained thanks to the intervention of the Collective Chamber of Labour Relations (CRCT), the Direction of the Institute rejected all TA demands. The Direction refused to address TAs’ requests, to consider any fund reallocation, and to share any budget information. In April, then, TA representatives closed the conciliation process at the CRCT, thus opening the way to several collective actions.

Among these actions, a poster campaign was carried out on 26th April (most of the posters were removed within a few hours). A public Town Hall open to all members of the Institute community took place on 27th April to answer related questions.

On 10th May, several TAs, RAs, PhD researchers, and MA students gathered in front of the Maison de la Paix for a bake sale, a picnic and a press conference. Members of the GISA Board and the Committee of ACCORDER (the association of mid-level teaching and research staff), and representatives of actionuni (the umbrella organisation of mid-level staff associations in Switzerland) spoke in solidarity with our demands for better working conditions. The same day, the petition “A better contract and fair wage for Teaching Assistants at the Geneva Graduate Institute,” addressed to the Grand Conseil of Geneva (the cantonal parliament) and to the Direction and Foundation Board of the Institute, was launched.

The Foundation Board worries that Geneva’s social safety net is not working

TA representatives reached out to the Institute’s Foundation Board and a meeting was organised on 24th May. During this meeting, in response to TAs describing the hardships entailed by living in Geneva with 3,000 CHF net per month, the Foundation Board expressed concern that the social safety net of Geneva was failing to work better for assistants. However, the Board persists in its refusal to improve TA contracts. These decisions are unacceptable given the significant public subsidies granted to the Institute.

The Foundation Board maintains that the Institute's PhD should be regarded as a study programme. It also maintains that previous members of the ADA Board were satisfied with the PhD reform and that, therefore, TAs’ demands cannot be taken into account. These statements are flawed, lack grounding, and do not explain the difference in treatment between TAs and RAs at the Institute.

Do not hesitate to reach out to ada.president@graduateinstitute.ch or cbarrelet@sit-syndicat.ch for any questions or doubts!

Already in 2020, the group of experts commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ) as part of the institutional accreditation of the Institute had reported that TAs' contractual conditions were particularly difficult. In April 2021, the Direction refused to discuss any changes to TAs' contract and salary despite concerns expressed by the ADA Board and the GISA Vice-President (VP) for PhD programmes in 2020-2021 concerning the PhD reform.

In particular, the GISA VP for PhD programmes submitted a list of issues identified by doctoral researchers, TAs, and RAs regarding the PhD reform. These were totally disregarded in the implementation of the reform. Issues included, among many others, the inadequate salary of TAs, the division of their remuneration between a grant and a wage (the activity rate was still 100%), and the insufficient amount awarded as doctoral scholarship (which was 6'000 CHF higher in the document presented at the time than what was finally implemented). In addition, the ADA Board denounced TA's contractual conditions at the Collège des Enseignant-e-s on May 18, 2021.

Despite this, TA contractual conditions were never the object of negotiations. It is also important to emphasise that the funding package implemented since September 2022 is different from what was presented in 2021. Furthermore, PhD researchers, assistants, and their representatives did not participate in the discussion leading to these changes. Indeed, the document concerning the reform stipulated that TAs would keep the same status, namely a status of employees and scholarship holders because they are considered trainees. This claim is highly problematic, insofar as a TA with a Master's degree cannot be considered a trainee in the Swiss academic context. The document also specified that doctoral researchers should consider their PhD programme more as a first step in their professional career than as a continuation of their studies. It is to be noted that the RA contract always allocates significant time for doctoral research, just like the 70% and 100% TA contracts proposed by the Direction in December 2021 and April and June 2022. Finally, it seems to us that the fact that the PhD is a study programme was not explicitly part of the reform until the Direction decided to unilaterally and artificially reduce the activity rate of the TA contract from 100% to 45% in June 2022 in response to demands to improve TAs' contractual conditions.

916 signatures: strong support from the higher education sector in Geneva!

On 3rd October, SIT and ADA submitted to the Grand Conseil of Geneva and to the Direction and Foundation Board of the Institute the signatures of 916 people from the Geneva higher education sector, including more than 500 from the Institute's current and past staff and student body. The event was covered by media outlets [Le Courrier](#), [RadioLac](#) and the [Tribune de Genève](#). TA demands include:

- to combine the scholarship and the wage into a single salary in order to obtain full social protection for the work actually carried out;
- to increase the activity rate to correspond to the reality of the work performed, generally 100%;
- to increase net remuneration (currently 38,220 CHF/year) so that at least it reaches Geneva's legal minimum wage, i.e. 49,920 CHF/year gross.

TAs receive a net monthly remuneration of 3,019 CHF after tuition fees. This salary is made up of a wage of 1,900 CHF gross per month (24.30 CHF per hour) and a scholarship of 1,541.67 CHF per month on which no social security contributions are paid. As it has been explained several times, this means that TAs only pay small retirement contributions; encounter significant difficulties in obtaining housing; postpone or forgo medical and

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preventive care; and, in some cases, choose to suspend family life plans for lack of financial means.

These 916 signatures are a strong signal of solidarity towards the Institute's TAs and of the importance of recognising their essential role in the higher education sector. It is crucial to fight against practices that devalue their research work and that go against everything that has been fought for in Switzerland for several years by mid-level staff associations and labour unions. In particular, it is unacceptable to claim that doctoral research is a step of personal development, as the Direction did in the statements to the Tribune de Genève and RadioLac.

We are addressing the petition to the Direction and Foundation Board of the Geneva Graduate Institute and to the Grand Conseil of Geneva given that the Institute receives 33 million CHF in public subsidies, the allocation of which remains unclear. The community must know what public money is being used for! We also ask the Institute's Direction to allocate part of the 33 million CHF from the canton of Geneva and the Confederation to pay decent salaries to assistants.

TAs look forward to proposals for medium- and long-term structural and sustainable solutions to their precarity. We maintain our request to resume negotiations.

For more information, visit the [information package](#) produced by TA representatives and the [SIT webpage](#) dedicated to union work in the sector.



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