

SFS Programme of Principles

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SFS Programme of Principles

1. Introduction

This is the Programme of Principles of Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS). The Programme of Principles is SFS's ideological platform and describes SFS's vision for a knowledge society and the principles that should permeate higher education. Based on SFS's vision, the Programme constitutes an account of the organisation's values. All the political influencing work carried out by SFS can and shall be guided by the Programme of Principles. The Programme does not aim to describe proposed reforms or concrete political solutions for SFS to drive. Instead, all positions taken on political issues, and all political focuses chosen by the organisation shall be made with an analysis and using a rhetoric that corresponds to the principles expressed herein.

1.1 Vision for a knowledge society

The vision for a knowledge society is based on an independent and democratic academia having a central role in societal development and common well-being. The importance and exceptional position of academia is legitimised through high quality, broad popular support and a high degree of student influence and collegial co-determination.

A knowledge society is permeated by a conviction and insight that higher education is of benefit to both the general public and the individual. Equal opportunities for all to access higher education is fundamental to how higher education is directed and operates, and it is self-evident that the education should be provided free of charge for everybody. There is also a comprehensive social security system which, in combination with decent social and financial conditions in other respects, provide good prerequisites for students to carry on higher education. A knowledge society is of global concern and crosses national borders.

High educational quality is a right for all students. Higher education is based on a scientific or artistic foundation plus tested experience, and is permeated by constant development and improvement. The basic aim of higher education is to provide students with usable knowledge.

1.2 Academia in a knowledge society

The core activity of academia is to create, refine and disseminate knowledge. Academia therefore plays an utterly crucial role in the development of a knowledge society. Higher education, research and collaboration between academia and society as a whole are utterly crucial for creating social, economic and ecological sustainability.

All aspects of sustainability are central for society. The state has a specific responsibility at national level to set clear requirements for sustainability aspects within academia, in

particular in view of the speed of climate change and its major adverse impact on society. Academia should therefore be proactive in reducing its own climate impact. The institutions of higher education also have unique opportunities to provide education and research on sustainability that will benefit society as a whole. Sustainability is not limited to one specific scientific discipline, but can be included in all subject areas. It is essential that sustainability issues within academia are treated in an international context. It is important that mobility is not restricted, but internationalisation requires responsibility.

The major challenges facing society cannot be solved by politics, the open market, a civil society or a knowledge society single-handedly. Academia therefore has a key role to play as a junction between the various activities at a local, regional, national and international level. Through the mediation of knowledge by academia, solutions can be created that best address common problems relating to environmental, health-related, economic, technological or social issues.

1.3 The role and task of academia

The primary purpose of higher education is to give people the opportunity to develop into independent individuals with the ability to scrutinise critically, understand and relate to their environment. Academia shall also give individuals the opportunity to develop personally. In this way, education gives individuals greater power to direct their own lives and to fulfil their potential.

Academia also plays an important role in maintaining and developing a democratic society. Education and research must be characterised by diversity and openness that offers room for free discussion; Discussion that in turn gives rise to new thoughts and ideas.

The wish to fulfil the short-term needs of the labour market must never trump academia's mandate to promote the general development of the general public and individuals. The knowledge development that individuals undergo within academia is entirely crucial for their professional development and professional lives.

1.4 The values of academia

The equal value and ability to influence of human beings are central to academia. This means that diversity among students, scientists and other personnel is an important goal. Diversity brings with it more perspectives on research and education and at the same time contributes to understanding between persons from various parts of society. Considering the impact of academia on people's lives and the central importance of a knowledge society, academia must be made available in order for people to participate in it, regardless of their living conditions. In order to achieve public support and trust in academia, it is important that its recruitment results in a true reflection of society's composition.

To open up academia and make it a real alternative for everyone, the universities' methods for widening recruitment and attendance must constantly be improved. A heterogeneous student group entails greater requirements in respect of treatment and pedagogically thought-out educational programmes, guaranteeing an inclusive study and work environment. The norms that control who feels welcome in academia must be continuously scrutinised and questioned. There must be strategies for counteracting excluding structures throughout academia.

It is important to maintain a critical attitude in order to see structures and injustices. Against the background of the knowledge that exists on power structures within academia, gender inequality and structural discrimination must not be accepted. It is important that academia adopts a position in favour of equality, human rights and against racism, fascism and violent extremism. The goal shall be for academia to be characterised by a norm-critical attitude and to strive to be an example to other activities within the equal terms area.

2. The prerequisites of academia

Universities and colleges shall be strategically geographically located and be spread across all of Sweden, something which is absolutely necessary for studies and research to be a genuine alternative for everyone and to ensure the supply of skills. Great breadth in terms of the research and the education offered shall exist within and between universities.

Education and research both require resources. To ensure the right conditions to shoulder its role in a knowledge society, academia requires education and research to be financed in such a way as to not compromise academic freedom or the quality of the education. Most of the research carried out shall be financed by the general public through public funds not open to private competition.

2.1 Dimensioning

A knowledge society assumes a high proportion of academically educated human beings. National comparisons of educational levels must be carried out with countries with high educational policy ambitions that are comparable to Sweden. The size of academia must be governed by the need for a broad educational offering and the opportunity to carry out research in a large number of areas. It is important that people are not denied the right to higher education as a result of too few places being available in higher education.

2.2 Students and scientists

In academia, students and scientists collaborate with each other in education and research. Students play an important role within academia, and can contribute to education, research and the university's collaboration with society as a whole. This

requires the right prerequisites in the form of skilled and committed teachers and a management that recognises students as an asset.

Scientists in various positions may have either teaching or research as their primary occupation, albeit at varying intervals and intensity. Neither of the assignments must ever have the upper hand.

Research students have a special position as both teachers and scientists. As students, they are being educated and meeting scientists in various roles, at the same time as in their roles as researchers at the start of their careers and in their interaction with first and second-cycle students in teaching also are scientists. By having this two-fold position, research students are therefore covered by the rights and the obligations that apply for both these roles.

In order for the teaching personnel to have the prerequisites to be skilled within both research and teaching, conscious direction is required from both politicians and from the university management. This requires factors such as a well-functioning resource allocation system for education and research both from the state and within the university, access to competency development for teachers, clear career paths and functioning employment security systems for the university personnel. To ensure commitment and competency within the framework of education, there shall be systems which reward pedagogical expertise in the teaching staff.

2.3 Collaboration with society as a whole

A mutual link between higher education and research is a necessity for maintaining high quality of both education and research. Through collaboration with society as a whole, innovations and knowledge dissemination are created, which contribute to the development of a knowledge society. Both society as a whole and academia benefit from the dissemination of knowledge that occurs through collaboration within the frameworks of education and research.

As a large part of research is financed with the help of public funds, it is important that both the results and the data are also available to the general public. The result of all publicly financed research must therefore be made available through open archives. To stimulate the creation of innovations and promote collaboration, it is also important that private funds can be allocated to research.

2.4 Freedom of academia, structural prerequisites and democratic ideals

The unique role in society held by academia makes it of public interest. Higher education, research and the collaboration between academia and society as a whole impacts on people, irrespective of whether they are themselves active within academia. Through

politics, the general public can affect the structural prerequisites for and governance of academia. It is also through politics that the general public formulates its expectations of, and the need of, academia.

Academic freedom should always be sought, but in constant balance with academic responsibility. Academic freedom means that students and scientists shall have the opportunity for free knowledge seeking within academia. Academic responsibility means that the universities and scientists shall follow all applicable laws, legislation, regulations and collegial decisions, as well as have responsibility towards those participating and investing in academia - society and primarily the students.

There is a natural conflict between the freedom of academia and its responsibility which leads to demand and need for transparency and influence between academia's interests. In order for academia to take its responsibility, the freedom of academia is however a basic prerequisite. It is therefore important from a long-term perspective that neither politics or the open market encroach upon the academic freedom. It is also key that academia understands the expectations and needs of society and the students, but that it is academia itself that controls its activities in order that these are eventually met.

Supporting the freedom and responsibility of academia requires the greatest possible long-term view, clarity, predictability and trust from the political arena as well as complete financing of the university's activities. In addition, politics must provide a realistic and solution-oriented attitude towards academia's activities and mandate. Society as a whole shall collaborate with academia and students, but its special interests must never trump academia's mandate. Academic freedom must be ensured so that academia is not reduced to solely being a political labour market instrument. Under strong academic freedom balanced with academic responsibility, academia will contribute to and stimulate the development of society and individuals.

In order for the general public to perceive academia as legitimate, freedom from fees, admission on equal terms at all levels, transparency, the rule of law, popular and democratic representation throughout, accessibility and high quality of education and research are crucial. To live up to these expectations, academia must have a relationship with politics that is characterised by mutual trust and confidence.

Academia must also be governed internally according to democratic principles. Not least, it is important that there is broad representation of students, scientists and other personnel on boards and other decision-making and other drafting bodies. The universities shall have the opportunity to welcome external representatives to the decision-making bodies in order to promote the multifaceted perspectives of their activities. However, the external representatives may never be the largest group. In order for academia to be fit for purpose at all levels, the internal leadership, and the well-founded collegial decision-making on which it is based, must include a comprehensive, strong and independent student influence. Internal management of the universities largely comprises four fundamental systems: resource division, quality, employment and

governance. These systems shall aim to be transparent, easy to understand, impartial, flexible, nationally compatible and promote quality.

2.5 Student influence

Students shall be contributing actors within academia, and not be treated as customers in a market. They play a crucial role in the planning, governance and development of academia at all levels. Students have both the right and the duty to impact the activities of academia through active student influence. The students shall have the conditions and opportunity to have an influence in issues outside of academic activities that specifically concern the students' education or daily lives.

In order for student influence to function well, democratically governed student unions are needed, which are organisationally independent in relation to the university, national government and society as a whole. Student unions shall also as far as possible be guaranteed financial independence. There shall be clear laws, regulations and rules to regulate the granting of union status, guaranteeing the student unions a legally secure, clear and transparent process.

The university must clearly, accessibly and with proper foresight, inform its students at all levels of the relevant union status process. To ensure that student unions are independent in relation to the university, the university must not set requirements for union status other than those that are regulated in laws, statutes and regulations. There must therefore be clear communication of what is required in order to be granted union status, as well as opportunities to appeal within the process.

As a well-functioning student influence is a key concern for all of society as a contributing actor in academia, it is particularly important that all student unions are given the opportunity for knowledge development, regardless of each student union's circumstances. This should be at both a local and a national level.

Quality development, the rule of law in education and the students' well-being are key core issues for the student unions. Students' right to organise and their prerequisites for influence through student unions must be regulated in mandatory legislation.

2.6 Internationalisation

Academia's function in a knowledge society means that it very much participates in a globalised world. Both students and also researching and teaching personnel must have the opportunity for and be encouraged to undertake exchanges and international collaboration. It is therefore important that national regulations are adapted to promote mobility among students, scientists and other personnel. It is also important that students, researchers and teaching staff are given the opportunity to develop their intercultural skills to thereby enable effective and appropriate communication with other cultures.

Prerequisites must also be created for international student at all educational levels within academia to remain in the country after concluding their studies, as this is vital for societal development and the supply of skills. The processes for residence permits both pre and post studies shall work seamlessly and correctly - a residence permit must not be the limiting factor in being able to study at a Swedish university.

There shall be the opportunity for any students, researchers and teaching staff who do not know Swedish to learn the language in an efficient manner. The universities shall be organisatorily inclusive, including for non-Swedish speakers, regardless of any requirements for official languages; this includes all students being able to be student representatives at all levels. All students who are studying at a Swedish university shall be considered students of the university at which they are studying and be afforded the same rights and obligations.

SFS believes that education shall be free of charge for everyone. However, in the cases where fees are charged to students, these fees may never amount to more than the costs which are directly linked to the education that the student is undertaking. The universities should also clearly report how these expenses are calculated.

The admissions system functions on a meritocratic basis, and is intended so that the most worthy students are the first to gain access to education. This applies both for Swedish and for international students. It is therefore important that all students are accepted based on the same requirements and in the same admissions process.

2.7 Premises for academia

The academic premises shall be dimensioned and designed in such a way that they are fit for purpose and promote a good working environment. Management and ownership of the premises shall be in such a manner as to promote its activities. This means that the need for profit or other costs exceeding the actual operating and investment costs for the premises may not be charged to academia. This assumes that academia, in the form of scientific personnel and students, is participatory and represented in decisions concerning premises for academia.

3. Prerequisites for starting, continuing and completing higher education

3.1 Everybody is entitled to higher education

The starting point of a knowledge society is that education is a human right. In order for people to participate in higher education, potential obstacles must be overcome. This

requires both that a number of concrete prerequisites are fulfilled, and also that there is a good mutual attitude between the general public and academia.

A secure existence, in social and financial terms, during the period of study is decisive for students' ability to take on, undergo and complete their studies. Everyone must be given an equal opportunity to study. Therefore, financial obstacles for studies must be minimised and students must be covered by a comprehensive security system.

Students must not be expected to put up with worse living conditions than is considered reasonable for other members of society. The same applies to the physical and psychosocial study environment of students compared to the right to a good work environment for workers. Students shall not be expected to be occupied longer than a full-time equivalent in order to live a decent life.

3.2 Social security

Access to a reasonable standard of housing is one prerequisite for students to be able to live a decent life. In order for higher education to be a real possibility for everyone, a varied range of housing must be offered, to suit to a student population with varying needs. Politicians at all levels must take overall responsibility for tackling the housing shortage and, if necessary, finding solutions specifically tailored to students. Some form of state financial stimulus is necessary to meet the considerable need for student housing. The housing situation at a place of study should not be a determining factor in students' choice of courses. Accommodation costs must also be tailored to students' financial circumstances.

A state-operated student finance system is entirely necessary to give every person an equal opportunity to apply for higher education. In order for the student finance system to serve its purpose, it must be adapted to the cost level of society. The student finance system must be able to cover basic costs and expenses linked to recreation and leisure. The majority of student funds shall consist of contributions from the state. Undertaking paid work alongside studies shall be an opportunity and not a necessity in order to finance studies. The student finance system must also be designed in such a way that the socio-economic background or family situation of people do not constitute an obstacle to benefiting from the student finance system or higher education. The student finance system shall allow for study throughout a person's life.

Students who become ill or unemployed must never be forced into poverty or need to leave their studies due to unfair and dysfunctional security systems. All students shall be entitled to social security to the same extent as employees, and be covered by a property security system adapted to the needs of students. Like other parts of the security system, the student finance system must be adapted to suit a heterogenous student population, so as to guarantee that everybody, irrespective of background, dares to take the step into higher education.

3.3 Equal prerequisites for studies

Prioritising accessibility and adaptation to needs is a prerequisite for all students, regardless of background and needs, to be able to participate in higher education with equal prerequisites for studies. Admission and examination subject to the rule of law are crucial for safeguarding equal prerequisites for studies.

It is also important that there is a varied educational offering throughout the country, and good information on the education on offer for prospective students which includes more than simply quantitative measures per course. Together, these create opportunities for students to choose higher education according to their needs and interests. Higher education shall also be available to all, and adapted to students' varying circumstances and needs.

The academia of a knowledge society is characterised to a large extent by internationalisation in various ways. It is therefore important that higher education at all levels is planned and implemented on a scientifically grounded pedagogical basis, with good information in multiple languages and adapting to the student's varying educational cultural backgrounds.

4. The purpose of higher education and its distinctive nature

4.1 A useful education

The purpose of higher education is that it shall be useful to the student. The programmes offered must be based on humans' overall needs for knowledge and intellectual development in their working lives and societal lives in the long term. A useful education provides the students with the conditions to face a changing society as well as to practise subject-specific skills, general abilities and to have a critical attitude to the world around them. A distinguishing feature of higher education is that students are equipped to understand and analyse their own life situation and the society in which they live. For this to be possible, the students must learn to reflect on the acquired knowledge and the learning process itself.

In order to meet society's and the individual's need for occupation, a key part of higher education is to prepare students prior to their working life but also to create independent individuals with the ability to critically review, understand and relate to their surroundings. Different programmes have different prerequisites within the two mandates and it is important to create a balance to ensure the students have both parts. Some programmes address well-known needs on the labour market, while others instead create the prerequisites for creating new occupations. For the programmes with a well-known and clear link to working life, there shall be collaboration between the universities,

students and working life representatives in order to maximise the usefulness of the programme. However, it is important that the university provides information in respect of which general job opportunities there are for students to counteract the special interests from parties within the labour market.

The ability of students and scientists to contribute to new industries and to identify opportunities and create resources for exercising these opportunities are features that should be supported within academia.

4.2 Focus on students' learning

Responsibility for a student's learning process is shared between the student and the teacher. The role as academic teacher entails special demands linked to the purpose of higher education. In order to give a student the best possible education, it is important that knowledge is passed on by scientifically or artistically competent teachers. It is equally important that the teacher has solid higher education pedagogic skills. Everything taught within the framework for higher education shall rest on a scientific or artistic foundation. Likewise, all learning activities and the teaching provided shall be anchored in science and tested experience about student learning. To safeguard the necessary competency, higher education pedagogic training must be mandatory and recurrent for teaching personnel. All education leading to an examination must also be planned and conducted with a clear foundation in the national examination goals.

It is important that the teaching formats used are relevant to the education and varied, so that students can absorb the knowledge in the best possible way. Independent studies must never constitute the main part of any programme. Independent studies without guidance reduce the opportunities for students to develop the analytical and critical thinking that higher education requires.

4.3 Quality assurance

The purpose of quality management is to ensure and consolidate the opportunity for students to obtain a high quality education within all levels of higher education. Quality management shall in part guarantee a high minimum level, but primarily strengthen the development of the content and implementation of educational programmes. As academic activities are conducted in an international context, it follows that the quality management does to.

The higher education institution bears the responsibility for implementation of quality management. The higher education institution is responsible for independently developing quality management based on the adherence to scientific standards that should characterise all parts of academic practice. The universities are responsible for producing their own definition of quality based on the university's conditions and distinctive nature. This definition of quality must be based on the students' perspectives

and interests. The students play a central role in all parts of the quality management and particularly in its planning, implementation, analysis and follow-up.

4.4 Examination

In order for students to achieve the learning goals, it is important that the programme and examination is designed in a clear way in relation to the goals. Examinations shall be designed to make it possible for students to show that the goals have been achieved. The universities shall aim for a variety of types of examination. The students' learning shall always be the primary starting point when creating an examination paper; however the rule of law must always be ensured. It shall always be possible to review examinations and grades. Transparency, predictability and anonymity are important rule of law issues for students during and ahead of examinations. The grading system used must be fit for purpose for the programme in question, and facilitate mobility. When creating an educational programme, any knowledge and skills that are key to progression shall be ensured through examinations.