

Administrator: The Board

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# Proposition 1

SFS operational plan 21/22

# Covering letter

## Proposition 1: SFS operational plan 21/22

### About the document and how it is used

SFS operational plan 21/22 is an overall strategic document which sets out the specific priority areas for the financial year. The document is not intended to cover everything that SFS will do during a financial year, but is a starting point for what is most important. In addition to the contents of the operational plan, SFS also performs lobbying work based on the opinions it has formulated. The extent of this lobbying depends on how much time is available and the opportunities that exist to put our opinions across.

The Board gives tangible shape to the activities decided by the General Assembly, which involves formulating clear objectives for how the aims of the activities are to be achieved. Governance documents, budgets, political situations and the resources available to the organisation are established in concrete terms. The proposal is compiled by the Board in accordance with proposals and views put forward by the member unions.

Certain issues come up every year, housing for example, but are not present in the operational plan unless there is to be a specific initiative. There are also other types of issues which can be relevant in certain years. One such issue which is currently relevant is SFS' anniversary. The anniversary celebration will continue into the 21/22 financial year, partly because the anniversary year lasts throughout 2021 and partly because the celebration has been postponed. There are also issues which can be implemented during the year, but that were not foreseeable at the time of preparing the operational plan. During the current financial year, a large proportion of the time has been prioritised for various consequences of the corona pandemic, and that will probably also be the case for 21/22.

### The operational plan will not set out any new opinions

SFS will not put forward any new political opinions, but will operate on the basis of opinions that are adopted by SFSFUM. The aims and the work to achieve them are based on SFS' programme of principles and positions. The Board has decided to keep the proposal for the operational plan brief, and has consequently not presented SFS' opinions in detail in relation to the respective issue. The Board thereby hopes to avoid motions that do not harmonise with opinions adopted by SFS.

### Focus issues

During the 21/22 financial year, SFS enters the final year of an organisational focus issue and the first year of a new political focus issue. A new organisational focus issue will be

adopted at SFSFUM 2022. The organisational focus issue previously adopted, “SFS uniform, suitable communication”, will be reproduced in its original form with no changes.

The Board's proposal for a new three year political focus issue is “Conditions for high educational quality”. The proposal has three aims. In discussion with member unions about the Board's draft proposal, it emerged that more background was needed for two of the aims. This background follows below as the explanation is not intended to be a part of the operational plan.

#### Abolish the productivity deduction

The productivity deduction is a mechanism within the state budget which, in brief, means that grants are deliberately not increased in line with costs. The aim of the productivity deduction is to create space for reform and to streamline public organisations so that they follow the private sector's productivity. What this means in practice for the universities is that the amounts provided in compensation for the different “price tags” are not increased. Sweden's university lecturers and researchers have calculated what the effect for the price tags is in the report [System faults in the knowledge factory](#). The productivity deduction cannot be directly equated to the lack of teacher-led hours, but the erosion is leading to Sweden having the lowest number of teacher-led hours in Europe.

The problem for universities is that a large part of the operation cannot be streamlined. Universities can be made more efficient to some extent compared with today, for example through increased national cooperation and streamlining within administration, but with more and more additional assignments, the operation cannot be assumed to continue to have the same quality if a productivity deduction is imposed. The effect will be that fewer teachers are employed and that certain teachers will have to finish or have inferior conditions. As the grants to the universities are divided between research and education, a reprioritisation towards research is also taking place as it receives more revenues every year while education receives less through the productivity deduction. There is consequently a continuous reprioritisation from education to research within the framework of the current resource system.

Abolishing the productivity deduction is important as it is a control mechanism which is slowly eroding the resources available for universities. Without resources, the high ambitions that there are for higher education in Sweden cannot be achieved. The productivity deduction is not a necessity, and SFS' perception is that it would be possible to abolish the productivity deduction for universities.

#### Clear obstacles to openly share course material

Open access to course material relates to educational quality in the sense that the usefulness of the education concerned substantially influences the material to which students have access. When course material is not shared openly, there is a major risk of students applying, and being accepted, to courses solely because they want to have access to, for example, course material and literature. This represents a major obstacle to the universities' actual streamlining and the students' learning environment as a whole.

Before the digitalisation of universities, much of the course material was openly available through libraries, and while in theory digitalisation might mean an even freer sharing of knowledge and material, in practice it has entailed the opposite.

Digitalisation has led to much of the course material now instead being available via digital learning platforms, with these platforms in some cases structured in such a way that course material is largely only shared with course participants.

There are a number of structural obstacles to making course material available on a broad basis. The so-called teacher exemption means that each teacher personally owns the rights to the material they produce, which means that the universities cannot determine that course material should be openly shared.

Another issue is the problematic effect that has arisen as a result of the new law on accessibility in digital public service. The law means that all material produced by authorities (which many universities are) must be made accessible. This has entailed challenges for teachers as there are no resources available to make modifications. This has been interpreted by some that it is possible to avoid adapting course material by having the material in closed learning platforms. This is problematic from both an accessibility perspective and because it provides a further impetus towards a closed knowledge society.

Precisely what the solutions to this problem are will be the subject of the Board's and the Secretariat's treatment of the focus issue.

## Proposition 1:

SFS operational plan 21/22

Draft decision

The Board proposes that the General Assembly

**adopts** the SFS operational plan 21/22 document in its entirety.

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# 1. Introduction

The document has been adopted by SFS General Assembly in 2021 and constitutes the basis for SFS' work during the 21/22 financial year and governs SFS' elected officers and Secretariat. SFS is a national lobbying organisation which promotes issues for students and postgraduate students. In order to influence a relatively slow political process, the SFS organisation must have a consistently long-term and strategic approach.

SFS Operational Plan 21/22 constitutes the General Assembly's remit for the SFS Board. The assignment is limited to focus issues, one-year activities and recurring activities. The aim of the three parts is to clarify how SFS' operations are structured. Furthermore, SFS' Board, Committees and Secretariat give tangible shape to the aims and associated activities based on this document.

The rotation for the focus issues has changed and, as they are going to be overlapping, a new organisational focus issue for 22/23-24/25 will be adopted at SFSFUM 2022 (in accordance with SFS Activities 20/21, Ref. no.: O44-23/2021).

The celebration of SFS' centenary continues despite the banquet being postponed to provisionally take place in March 2022 due to the corona pandemic's restrictions. The anniversary represents an excellent opportunity to disseminate information about SFS and what SFS has achieved since its founding. The celebration will take place during the year through SFS arranging anniversary seminars within different subjects, as well as establishing an anniversary publication.

The corona pandemic has led to new areas that have to be monitored and managed by the student movement. Both local and national consequences need to be addressed and the effects of the pandemic may be prolonged. Continuing to monitor these areas requires flexibility in the organisation, with new problems being addressed and managed on an ongoing basis in effective communication between SFS and its members.

# 2. Focus issues

The focus issues are based on a three-year cycle so that the work can be planned on a long-term basis, with the intention for each focus issue to last for three years. Having a clear and permanent form for the focus issues is a part of the work to achieve a long-term influence and organisation, and also that they run in parallel.

At the SFS General Assembly in 2018, the General Assembly decided to adopt the three-year political focus issue "Students' Psychosocial Health and Working Environment" (SFS Activities 18/19 Reg. no.: O412-1/1718). This document proposes a new political focus issue for 21/22-23/24: Conditions for high educational quality.

In 2019 the SFS General Assembly decided to adopt the organisational focus issue "SFS Uniform, Suitable Communication" (SFS Activities 19/20 Reg. no.: O412-1/1819). Implementation and evaluation will continue during the third and final year, 21/22, along

with work on producing a new organisational focus for adoption by the General Assembly in 2022.

## 2.1 Political focus issue 21/22–23/24 Conditions for high educational quality

Adopted by the General Assembly in 2021

High educational quality is a right for all students. There are many different aspects that constitute educational quality, for example, the competence of teachers and supervisors, design of courses and programmes, access to complete research environments and the education's usefulness. However, what all aspects of educational quality have in common is that favourable conditions need to be in place to achieve high quality. This focus issue identifies central areas where the conditions need to be strengthened.

Based on this, the political aims established by the General Assembly in 2021 were as follows:

### **Abolish the productivity deduction for universities**

Lack of resources is a major obstacle to achieving high quality education. The productivity deduction means that the funds granted by the state for universities do not take sufficient account of the cost increase that inflation entails. The erosion of the resources for higher education needs to be stopped if there is to be a real possibility of delivering high quality education.

### **Better conditions for teaching methods in higher education**

Achieving high educational quality requires everybody who teaches to have the opportunity for skills development within teaching methods in higher education. Just as for all education, teaching methods in higher education require a strong research base, something which needs to be a priority both nationally and in each higher education institution. The pedagogical units at the institutions have a specific responsibility to develop the skills of academic staff within digital forms. This requires resources as well as a national exchange.

### **Remove obstacles to openly share course materials**

To achieve high quality education for all, and thus contribute to an open knowledge society, it is important that course materials are shared openly to as great an extent as possible. In theory, the digitalisation of education provides major opportunities for this, however, in practice, a large proportion of course material is shut behind closed platforms. This is often due to structures and incentives that have not been adapted to modern society.

## 2.2 Organisational focus issue 19/20–21/22 SFS uniform, suitable communication

Approved by the General Assembly in 2019.



SFS is an organisation that communicates with many stakeholders in society. Some communication is more internal, such as exchange of information between member unions and elected officers within the organisation. Other communication is intended to form part of the organisation's advocacy work and to form opinion. There are several challenges and opportunities associated with SFS' communication.

Which type of information must reach which stakeholders, how communication must be designed and when information must be issued are considerations that must often be weighed on a case-by-case basis. As an organisation that is run by its members, it is also important for two-way communication with the student unions to be as effective as possible. The activities have always been communicated in different ways and development work is constantly taking place to send out and collect information as effectively as possible. SFS needs to take overall control in order for communication to take place uniformly and for all communication to have a clear purpose and objective.

SFS began work to update the SFS IT environment during the 2018/2019 financial year. The work will continue during the 2019/2020 financial year and forms an important part of the work on SFS' communication. The aim is for the exchange of the IT environment to lay the basis and create opportunities for making SFS' communication more suitable and effective. After the implementation of the IT environment itself, work remains to be done to fill the website and intranet with relevant content that must as far as possible be made accessible for the target audience.

SFS' communication uses the website and intranet mainly for internal communication while social media is also widely used by the organisation. Various channels, particularly Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, are used in different ways for different purposes. SFS needs to investigate what channels are best for what purpose.

Content for all communication spaces is created in different ways and for different purposes. SFS needs to produce materials that can be reused, such as information pages, educational materials and images. Other communication needs to be adapted according to the situation but then requires a solid basis such as templates, graphic profiles and the planned communication strategy.

SFS' activities are broad-based and are aimed at different stakeholders and persons. SFS' various committees have different purposes and therefore the objectives of the communication and the material developed will need to be adapted according to each committee. Work with student representatives will also need to be taken into consideration in the development of SFS' communication.

Part of the work on SFS' communication consists of increasing knowledge of the organisation among the member unions. At present, there is a lack of good introductory material on SFS as an organisation and its national work on student and educational issues. Since different student unions in Sweden have different possibilities for accessing the national work, there is a need for a guide to SFS.

Some of SFS' internal communication takes place via digital and physical meetings. The work on SFS' communication will therefore also involve developing activities such as member meetings and determining how two-way communication between the student unions and SFS works.

The work of developing more suitable communication will require close cooperation with the member unions in order to achieve the best possible results. A large part of the communication takes place to and with the member unions since they are closest to the students and know what they are asking for. Establishment of effective support is time-consuming for both parties and it is therefore important that we give the whole organisation time to work on the issues.

Because of this, the organisational ambitions established by the General Assembly in 2019 are:

### **SFS Communication Strategy**

SFS must have a strategy for how SFS communicates on various issues. It must contain what is to be communicated, what channels are used and what the target audience for each issue is. SFS must develop materials that can be used in communication in the long term based on needs and the strategy.

### **Meeting places within SFS**

On the basis of the communication strategy developed and the needs of the activities, SFS must develop proposals for solutions for inclusion of international students and students with functional variations, among others, in member activities and meetings. This forms part of the work to ensure that SFS has the best possible basis for its work to strengthen the student movement in a representative and inclusive way.

### **A guide to SFS**

In order to strengthen national and local student influence, SFS must produce a guide aimed at describing SFS as an organisation and the issues on which SFS is working. The guide must also contain information that can help the member unions in their work on educational issues, work at national level and work in collaboration with SFS. The guide must be developed to make it as accessible as possible for the target group.

## **3. One-year activities**

The one-year activities are structured in three areas: conditions for academia, conditions for study and conditions for SFS. The respective part has a background text and the aim subsequently indicates what SFS should advocate.

## 3.1 Conditions for academia

### 3.1.1 Dimensioning of education at first- and second-cycle level

Dimensioning concerns planning the size and focus for the range of programmes. The higher education institutions have great freedom to decide themselves on the dimensioning of their range of programmes and their content. However, according to their public service agreements, the range of programmes at universities and colleges at first- and second-cycle level must correspond to the students' demand and the labour market's needs. There is not always a balance between these two aspects, and there are several examples where the government allocated more places solely with respect to the labour market's needs. SFS considers that such actions have no point unless it is of interest for prospective students, and they can actually be harmful to the quality. SFS needs to counter this worrying development.

#### **Aims**

SFS will work to ensure that it is the students' demand and conditions for high quality in education that govern the issue of dimensioning of programmes at first- and second-cycle level.

### 3.1.2 Design of the degree system

A degree system determines what constitutes a university degree, for example, based on subject studied and credits. The degree system, which is appendix 2 to the Higher Education Ordinance, contains provisions regarding which degrees may be taken at first-cycle and second-cycle, as well as at third-cycle level, and which requirements have to be met for the respective degree, what is called the qualification descriptor. It is the government that decides this. In addition, each university has jurisdiction over the local degree system and decides on local rules. A degree may only be issued if the programme meets the requirements laid down in the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, as well as in the college or university's own governing document for the degree. This means that qualitative targets can vary between the higher education institution even if the programme is said to be the same.

The fact that the qualitative targets are decided at national level by the government is problematic, the degree system will be a way to implement political measures that risk undermining educational quality. In practice, an expansion in the number of qualitative targets without the higher education institutions being given proper support gives the institutions an impossible task. SFS therefore considers that the responsibility for deciding on the degree system should lie with an authority that can effectively gain the support of both the sector and stakeholders.

#### **Aims**

SFS will work to ensure that a national authority has ownership of the qualitative targets and is commissioned to embed them and revise them on a continuous basis.

## 3.2 Conditions for studies

### 3.2.1 Mental health

SFS is concluding the focus issue “Students' psychosocial health and working environment” in the 20/21 financial year. However, the issue of students' mental health is far from completed, and the government provided notification in July 2020 that a number of authorities will submit information for a forthcoming national strategy in relation to mental health and suicide prevention. The authorities' individual analyses must be presented no later than autumn 2021 and a final report for the commission will be presented the following year. The commission represents a beneficial opportunity for SFS to continue working with students' mental health and for its improvement.

In spring 2020 the Swedish Higher Education Authority, UKÄ, presented a survey of student health care that had been commissioned by the government: “Student healthcare services at Sweden's universities and colleges”. SFS considers that the collaboration within student healthcare services needs to be further strengthened and that the survey represents a good basis to continue working on the issue. SFS shares UKÄ's assessment and proposal.

Together with the ST trade union, SFS has produced the survey “How are postgraduate students feeling”, concerning postgraduate students' mental health. The survey shows that postgraduate students are experiencing sleep difficulties to a worrying extent and, as a result of overloading, are not able to take the holiday to which they are entitled. The survey also reveals that a large number of postgraduate students are subject to harassment. There is widespread confusion surrounding who postgraduate students should turn to for support in these issues and also which rights and which rules there are concerning their education. Backed up by the survey, SFS must continue the work to drive through changes.

#### **Aims**

SFS will work to ensure that the government includes the students clearly and prominently in its mental health and suicide prevention work.

SFS will lobby for implementation of recommendations from surveys on mental health and working environment for students and postgraduate students.

### 3.2.2 Disciplinary cases

The number of disciplinary cases has dramatically increased, the reason for this is unclear. At present there are major differences between how the universities' are tackling the cases, not least what the outcome is for different types of case. The administration at the higher education institutions might differ, but the assessment and the consequences should as far as possible be the same, regardless of where the student is based. Among other things, it is of major importance that cases of sexual harassment are dealt with quickly. Regulations regarding disciplinary measures against students who, for example, cheat in exams, violate rules of procedure or harass others, are detailed in the Higher

Education Ordinance, tenth chapter. In addition to this, the universities have local procedures.

### **Aims**

SFS will work to ensure that disciplinary cases are handled and assessed in an equivalent and legally secure way.

### **3.2.3 More flexible student finance**

Students' finances is a recurrent issue. The majority of students at first- or second-cycle level fund themselves through student finance. This has to cover all living costs and be adapted to different individuals who apply to higher education for different reasons. In its current manifestation, the student finance system is acceptable in the sense that finance can be secured during the period of study and the system is a fundamental prerequisite for an open and equal university. On the other hand, there are parts that need to be developed, primarily concerning life-long learning.

The Bologna process meant that second level programmes became one year longer with the transition from one-year to two-year Masters degrees. This has contributed to reduced opportunities to start more than one Bachelor and one Master Programme. There are opportunities to study summer courses using student finance, but the choice of starting another programme or course during or after completion of exams is reduced. As the student finance system has not followed the universities' development of more and longer programmes, nor is it adapted for life-long learning and emphasis on the educational mandate of the universities, the number of weeks of student finance that can be applied for needs to be generally increased.

### **Aims**

SFS will work to ensure more flexible student finance.

## **3.3 Conditions for SFS**

### **3.3.1 Diversity and sustainable engagement within the student movement**

To ensure that SFS is able to represent all of Sweden's students, it should also reflect the student population. The student population is a heterogeneous group, while we can observe that SFS is a rather homogeneous organisation in several respects. As SFS is a reflection of its member unions, the work will be performed through consultation with, but also through support to, the member unions.

A specific challenge for SFS is to engage postgraduate students. Postgraduate students are often insufficiently informed about which rights they have and that they are represented at all by their student union and, by extension, by SFS. For postgraduate students to have a real opportunity to get involved, SFS needs to strengthen the conditions for postgraduate students to have access to information about both their rights and how they are represented.

In order to lower the thresholds and facilitate the work of recruitment to SFS, it must also be ensured that it is easy to understand the organisation. This process has progressed a long way through “Guide to SFS” and the continued work should focus on all elected posts within SFS in order to create a better understanding of what these roles entail and the basis for their remit.

The engagement within SFS should also be at a reasonable and sustainable level for everyone within SFS. SFS should therefore work to balance the workload within the organisation so that everybody who gets involved can find satisfaction, grow as a person and cope with their engagement.

### **Aims**

SFS will work to ensure that SFS is an organisation that is more representative of the student population as a whole.

SFS will lobby for postgraduate students to have access to the information they need to be able to engage in SFS activities.

SFS will endeavour to achieve a balanced and proportionate workload for all posts within SFS.

### 3.3.2 SFS Opinion structure

During the 19/20 and 20/21 financial years, the SFS Board has worked to develop SFS' opinions and review the existing positions in order to, among other things, achieve greater consistency. One problem is that many new members of SFS and also persons who have been engaged for a long time within SFS feel that it is difficult to understand SFS' opinions. Why do we have positions if we already have a programme of principles with our opinions? Should we only have principles and not concrete proposals for reforms/changes? Why do we just have positions in certain areas but not others? What is most important? What are our boundaries as an organisation, should we have opinions on things that do not necessarily directly concern students? These are some of the issues and challenges that have arisen during the Board's work on the opinion structure in 20/21.

Fundamental work will therefore be needed to simplify SFS' opinions, both for those who want to have an influence in issues and those who work with them on a daily basis. This is to ensure that it is clear year on year which opinions SFS stands for and also in order to avoid discussions about the opinions' relevance.

### **Aims**

SFS will complete a proposal for a new opinion structure and present it at SFSFUM 2022.

### 3.3.3 Support the higher education sector's long-term development

SFS activities can be viewed as a resource for the higher education sector and others in Sweden as the organisation has knowledge and competence within the relevant issues. Unfortunately, there are several actors inside and outside the sector for which this is not the case. There are also organisations that are not obvious actors within the higher

education sector, but that will influence the higher education sector and SFS' work in the short- or long-term. Examples of relevant actors are political youth associations, trade unions and trade and industry. SFS would be able to strengthen the conversation about higher education policy if these actors were better informed. The educational opportunities could create both engagement and greater competence within higher education policy. To do this, SFS will need to create an organisation and structures for the work to be implemented in the organisation's recurring activities.

### **Aims**

SFS will arrange educational opportunities concerning SFS and higher education policy for relevant actors which influence SFS in the short- or long-term.

## **4. Recurring activities**

One large, important part of the recurring activities is communication of SFS' positions on political issues and the results generated by day-to-day activities, both internally and externally. SFS' activities can be divided into two main processes: democratic processes and lobbying processes. Added to these are support processes that enable work to be carried out in the main processes. Many of these are recurring, ongoing activities that are evaluated and developed on a continuous basis by the Secretariat and the Board.

### **4.1 Democratic processes**

In order to ensure that there is support for SFS' lobbying work in the organisation, SFS must arrange member activities focusing on current issues and which enable discussions to be held between member unions. In addition, an introductory session is arranged at the beginning of the financial year with the aim of introducing the members to SFS. Democratic processes also aim to make students' and postgraduate students' voices heard in contexts where discussions and decisions on higher education take place. Appointment of student representatives in national bodies will guarantee this.

### **4.2 Lobbying processes**

It is of major importance that lobbying work is characterised by stability, which can be achieved through recurring activities. Relationships with and recognition of relevant stakeholders need to be maintained and strengthened. Ongoing political lobbying work must be carried out by means such as participation and debate on current topics. SFS must respond to referrals and publish reports whenever necessary as a part of its lobbying work. SFS will also keep itself updated on the world around it, nationally and internationally.

#### **4.2.1 Student City of the Year**

SFS will designate a city each year that works to promote students' and postgraduate students' situation and living conditions as "Student City of the Year". The plan is to hold the SFS General Assembly for the following financial year in the winning city.



#### 4.2.2 SFS Committees

SFS Postgraduate Student Committee, SFS Quality Committee and SFS International Committee will promote issues included in their respective areas of operation.

### 4.3 Support processes

The statutory activities require solid work on preparations, implementation and supplementary work. A good structure and proper work on statutory activities is of particular importance because it is fundamental for democracy in the organisation. SFS statutory bodies and departments must therefore receive operational support and structure in order to carry out their activities.

In addition to the work carried out by bodies provided for in the statutes, SFS' administrative work will be carried out by a staff. The Secretariat's ongoing tasks must include work on accounts, case management and external monitoring. SFS must endeavour to create a good working environment for both staff and the organisation's elected officers.