

Administrator: The Board

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Proposition 5

SFS's position:

The sustainable academy

Covering letter

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An aim for the 20/21 financial year was that SFS would develop its opinions within the area of sustainable development. The work was focused on areas within ecological sustainability as it was primarily here that SFS lacked opinions. It was also noted that to be an organisation that can have an influence within the area and drive it forward requires development of an opinion. The Board has chosen to convey the results of this development in the form of a new position, so that it can be an integrated and embedded part of SFS' lobbying going forward. This proposition proposes that the position is adopted as a response to the need for more in-depth opinions on sustainable development within the academic world.

It emerged in the discussions during the 2019/2020 financial year that it is not possible to separate the three sustainability dimensions (ecological, social and economic), but that it is primarily within ecological sustainability that SFS lacks opinions. The Board has therefore chosen to formulate the position so that it concerns all dimensions, however, as SFS already has existing opinions concerning social and economic sustainability in other documents, the ecological dimension has been given precedence in this document.

All academic programmes should be based on research and proven experience within one or multiple scientific fields which make the optimum contribution in different ways. Different elements in the universities' programmes can promote sustainable development independently of how they are designated and it is natural that many educational areas are focused on the dimension of sustainable development that is directly affected by the research and teaching that they conduct.

In order to implement Agenda 2030, the universities and colleges have a global responsibility to promote long-term knowledge and knowledge development that benefits society based on solid academic integrity. Future solutions are based to a high degree on science and research-linked education. The Agenda 2030 delegation submitted its final report in 2019 and in June 2020 the government put forward a bill on how Agenda 2030 should be implemented in Sweden. The report proposes that universities and colleges should participate in the implementation. SFS has reason to monitor and influence the implementation.

The balance between sustainable development and the higher education institutions' autonomy is an important, but difficult and much debated, decision. The Board has developed this in the position in order to clarify that SFS considers that the higher education institutions should have the freedom to formulate programme content as well as research questions and choice of method, but that they are entitled to direct

resources towards research and educational areas which correspond to identified challenges for society. In the best case, control of resources corresponds to requirements for further research and education identified by the higher education institutions themselves. This is not a new decision in this position, but rather is in line with formulations that have already been decided in SFS Programme of Principles

Background to the formulation in the Higher Education Act

In December 2005 the government adopted the proposed provision in the Higher Education Act to give universities and colleges a specific remit to promote sustainable development in their activities. In its decision, the Education Committee argued that universities' education and research have major importance for whether it will be possible to achieve the objective of sustainable development, and did not realise that the change in the law would impact on freedom of education and research. The committee also observed that the provision in the Higher Education Act gave tangible shape to the sustainable development goals that already existed in the Instrument of Government, which governs public activities as a whole.

The provision, which was inserted in the first paragraph of chapter 1, section 5, reads:

In the course of their operations, higher education institutions shall promote sustainable development to assure for present and future generations a sound and healthy environment, economic and social welfare, and justice.

The provision came into force on 1 February 2006.

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SFS's position: The sustainable academy

Draft decision

The Board proposes to the General Assembly

that it adopt the document "SFS position: The sustainable academy" in its entirety.

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1. Introduction

This position is an opinion document subordinate to the Programme of Principles of Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS), with the aim of clarifying SFS's opinions in specific issues. The standpoint shall constitute guidance for SFS's elected representatives and office. SFS's position: The sustainable academy presents more detailed opinions on sustainable development. In the document, "student" refers to students within education at first-, second- and third-cycle level.

In the document, sustainable development refers to a development that ensures a healthy and sound environment, economic and social welfare, as well as justice, without it being at the expense of future generations.

2. The academy's role in sustainable development

Academic freedom, integrity and space for critical dialogue are basic prerequisites for high quality education and research. To enable the higher education institutions to contribute most effectively, they must be fundamentally independent stakeholders in society. The academy has the responsibility to disseminate and utilise knowledge about sustainable development and to contribute objectivity to the social debate.

Science and research-linked education of the highest quality is a prerequisite for the transition to a sustainable society. SFS believes that durable, stable and resilient institutions and structures are required to implement the transition. The academy, and in particular the students, play a supporting role in this.

The academy's remit to create and convey knowledge to promote society's sustainable development presupposes that the content of education and research, as well as its results, are free of political influence. Politics, business and society have extensive and legitimate expectations that research and higher education will contribute to a sustainable society. Political control of resources to the higher education institutions related to central challenges for society should therefore promote the institutions' freedom to, individually or collectively, develop well thought-out approaches and strategic perspectives on sustainability within education, research and collaboration, rather than restrict them.

3. Control and financing

The universities have a major part to play in the transition, both in terms of reducing their own adverse impact on the environment and the climate, and contributing relevant knowledge to other sectors of society. It is of major importance that control

and financing models for academia also enable the higher education institutions, as the bodies which conduct scientific and artistic research, to set good examples.

The Higher Education Act stipulates that universities and colleges should promote sustainable development, which means that the institutions have a clear responsibility that the issue permeates all activities. SFS believes that the higher education institutions should work in tandem to promote sustainable development. This should take place systematically, clearly and be easily accessible for students as well as for others within the academic world.

It is important that there are also targets and ambitions for each institution's work on sustainable development, both in relation to their contribution to the transition for society in general, and for their own transition. The higher education institutions should take full ownership of the task. The organisation can vary depending on, for example, the institution's size and focus. It is important that there is an explicit plan for the work and that sustainable development is integrated into existing processes and that it is linked to clear management and organisational structures.

The university should identify risks, challenges and opportunities when the targets are set, but also relate them to the national targets to which Sweden has committed itself. The higher education institutions should promote sustainable development and comply with the national targets to the same extent as other authorities, regardless of whether they are an authority or not. This work should be followed-up by both the higher education institution itself and by the supervisory body. Furthermore, the higher education institutions have an additional responsibility to assist other stakeholders.

The sustainability work should be a part of the ordinary activities and each higher education institution should therefore allocate resources to finance it. Besides this, SFS believes that there is reason for each institution to account for their work and initiatives within sustainability in a specific schedule.

4. Education, research and collaboration

The academy conducts teaching, research and collaboration that contributes to sustainable development. The higher education institutions should have targets for sustainable development at all educational levels and within all subject areas.

Relevant perspectives on sustainable development should be integrated in all programmes. Different challenges for society can be addressed for the relevant subject area. Sustainable development should be integrated in the programme based on a multidisciplinary approach, as the different social challenges cannot be dealt with in isolation. There should be a systematic follow-up and development of the programme where sustainable development is concerned.

The programme should give the students sustainability skills that are relevant for their subject area and the programmes' aim in order to enable the students to contribute to the transition to a sustainable society. The transition to a more sustainable society affects all scientific fields. SFS therefore considers that all programmes can address relevant sustainability aspects, however, this presupposes that the teaching staff and supervisors have relevant expertise to integrate relevant research in the subject into the programme. What expertise this is varies between subject areas.

New research is required in the transition to a climate-neutral society. It concerns both developing innovations but also implementing them. Here too the higher education institutions have different conditions and opportunities. A part of this concerns the institutions having researchers and teachers with both knowledge and resources to work on these issues. Research itself requires resources and while all researchers should be allowed to choose research problems freely and operate within the frameworks of academic freedom, the State and the higher education institutions have a central role in, and are responsible for, determining which areas of research are allocated the most funds.

The higher education institutions also have a central role in acting as collaborative partners, as well as meeting places. It is of great importance that the research that is conducted is presented and highlighted. The activities that take place at or in connection to the higher education institutions play a central and important role for mutual learning. A part of the collaboration entails creating contact points and in this respect trade and industry, authorities and others bodies are central contributors. In order to have an influence on both individuals and society, utilisation of the education and research that exists at the higher education institutions is a cornerstone. The research that is pursued at the higher education institutions might need to be directed towards utilisation in order for the work undertaken to have a substantive effect.

5. The higher education institutions' own environmental and climate impact

The institutions are large organisations and consequently have a significant impact on the environment and the climate, both in their local environment and at the global level. As the universities are where scientific knowledge on the environment and the climate is held, it is important that they take an advanced position and also take responsibility for their environmental and climate impact in terms of their own actions. Management of the higher education institutions' assets should be included in the sustainability targets specified.

The public universities and colleges are the authorities which account for the greatest carbon dioxide emissions from air travel. The role of travel in the activities

of the academic world as well as other sectors of society which require air travel, therefore needs to be re-evaluated. Other parts of the universities' activities also account for extensive climate emissions. SFS considers that each university should identify what causes carbon dioxide emissions within their organisation and endeavour to minimise them.

The transition to sustainable development cannot be discussed in a national perspective, but must be seen as a global issue. Addressing the global challenges that sustainable development entails requires cooperation across national borders. Mobility among students, researchers and teachers between different higher education institutions includes opportunities to develop common strategies to meet the global challenges.

Swedish institutions of higher education should have more ambitious targets than simply to become climate-neutral themselves. Sweden, including the higher education institutions, has a great capacity to help the whole world's transition, which also entails opportunities for students to operate in an international context. Internationalisation through travel can entail increased emissions. The universities have a responsibility to use digital communication and efficient transportation in order to minimise emissions.