

SFS position:

An open and equal university

Adopted by SFS council 2021



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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 on specific issues. The standpoint shall constitute guidance for SFS's elected representatives and office. SFS's position: An open and equal university presents SFS's views on what an open and equal university means and how it can be achieved. In the document, student refers to students in education at undergraduate and advanced level as well as postgraduate education, unless otherwise stated.

2. Broadening recruitment - more paths to higher education

This chapter deals with how more people can find a path to higher education and who bears the main responsibility for broadened recruitment. The chapter also identifies the obstacles that need to be addressed. Broadened recruitment is about giving everyone the opportunity and conditions to apply for and be admitted to higher education. To get there, the universities' recruitment of students from groups that are underrepresented in academic education must increase.

2.1 Composition of the student cohort

The university shall work actively to broaden recruitment to higher education, for example by adapting marketing strategies and expanding the supply of education to a broader target audience. However, it is not just the university's responsibility. It is in the interest of society as a whole to have a well-educated population with different life experiences. The student cohort must reflect the composition of society. Through a reflection of the composition of society, experiences, perspectives and competencies in the development of the knowledge society are utilized. With a broad representation, the breadth of the knowledge that is created increases, at the same time as it becomes available to more people. Thus, students get ready to meet tomorrow's challenges. In order to achieve broadened recruitment, the state, municipality and other parts of society must pursue an active policy that encourages study and makes it possible for everyone to have the choice to study higher education.

2.2 Study and career guidance

It is important that higher education institutions inform about the educations they offer, and then not only about their content but also in what ways the educations can be useful, for example what opportunities they lead to after completing their studies. Here, study and career guidance play an important role in informing about the usefulness of higher education. Study guidance must be available at upper secondary school, adult education, the employment service and municipal libraries, as well as access to

information and conversations about the possibility of higher education. Easily accessible study guidance means that more people pay attention to higher education.

2.3 Paying students

SFS believes that education should be free of charge for everyone. SFS is strongly opposed to fees for higher education and distances itself from higher education that is financed through tuition fees. If fees still exist, SFS believes that alternatives are needed to make higher education more accessible to fee-paying students. Such alternatives include, for example, government scholarships that can be applied for by fee-paying students.

2.4 Education as a human right

SFS believes that higher education is a human right that must be independent of citizenship status. Therefore, SFS wants people who have not yet had time to obtain a residence permit to be given the opportunity to study in Sweden. Higher education contributes to the individual being included in Swedish society. Full-time studies should, in the same way as work, be a path to a permanent residence permit. Foreign education is a competence and asset for both academia and the Swedish labor market. Knowledge should not be wasted, therefore SFS believes that clear and effective validation of foreign educational qualifications is needed. It is not enough to provide funds to different authorities, there must also be a uniform, functioning and legally secure system to use in the validation process.

3. Broadened participation and available studies

Broadened participation is about designing the education so that everyone who has been accepted has the opportunity to complete it, among other things through pedagogical development and the right to support measures.

A broad and heterogeneous cohort of students places high demands on treatment and varied educational arrangements that guarantee an inclusive study and work environment, which SFS's principle program highlights. In a heterogeneous cohort of students, there is varying knowledge about the academy and its language, a language that a student needs to know in order to participate in the academic knowledge development. An inclusive educational program protects fee exemption and available teaching materials. Students' living environments must meet the statutory accessibility requirements, and be a good physical and psychosocial work environment for everyone.

Access to economic and social security systems affects the broader participation. Financial security through student financial aid systems reduces the need to work alongside full-time studies in order for the economy to converge. The social security system supports when a student becomes ill. During periods of illness, the country's

student health clinics play an important role. As the disease becomes more long-lasting, students must be covered by a well-functioning security system in order to have time to be rehabilitated back to studies. Likewise, the parent and student must be covered by a well-functioning security system.

3.1 Equal conditions

Students bring varying prior knowledge and different pre-understandings for the academy into their studies. To enable everyone's knowledge of academic ethics and the art of both writing and speaking academically, there must be a national responsibility to ensure the supply of free courses in academic writing, speaking and writing workshops at the country's universities. Such courses must not be jeopardized by the financial conditions of the higher education institutions.

3.2 Costs linked to studies

Teaching materials or learning tools are instruments that the student needs in order to be able to achieve the course's learning objectives. The higher education in Sweden must by law be free of charge, but if students need to pay for teaching materials and learning tools to achieve the course objectives, the higher education is not free of charge for the individual student. Study materials and learning tools that are required to be prepared in order to create the conditions to achieve the course objectives must therefore be paid for by the higher education institution and not the student. A list of which teaching materials and learning tools are needed for students to be able to participate in a course must be published no later than two months before the start of the course. Regardless of whether a student needs to read the study material or plan to complete the course, the individual student must know the prerequisites in good time and be able to plan their participation.

Initially, funds should be added to the university libraries to increase the availability of course literature. This also means that the university needs to broaden the range of, for example, open course literature and licenses for digital editions. Since not all education is characterized by course literature or campus-based learning, the software required for an education needs to be made available to all students. The material required for practical elements of the education must be available to the students at the university. Since there are many hidden costs for students who participate in work-based education, VFU, it is important that students are compensated for expenses they have in connection with VFU. Thus, students will receive full reimbursement for all costs associated with internships or VFU, including travel and accommodation.

3.3 Available learning environments

Learning environment refers to a place where learning takes place. Learning environment can be both physical and virtual. The learning environment must be adapted to the pedagogy used in each learning component to stimulate the development of knowledge.

The opportunity to study together is a question of quality. Exchange of experiences is one of the academic pillars for creating new knowledge. Some forms of education are characterized by physical learning environments. The physical learning environment may contain barriers to participation. The teaching must be on an accessible basis independent of the student population. Likewise, students with children should not be excluded from the absence of, for example, changing tables, breastfeeding stations or learning environments where children are also welcome.

Students must also be given the opportunity to plan their everyday life in accordance with the scope of the studies according to the pace of study established in the syllabus. Therefore, the times for examinations should be arranged within the framework of the scope of the study pace. A course that is read during the day must be examined during the day on weekdays, just as a course that is read in the evening must be examined during the evening.

The digital learning environment must be satisfactory. This means that there is a need for space for discussion and exchange of experiences in a natural way via digital learning platforms. The digital learning platforms must be adapted to speech synthesis, be able to be translated into other languages and take into account

3.4 Psychosocial health and a prerequisite for a good working environment

Mental illness is a societal problem that also affects many students. The student's mental health can affect the ability to complete their studies and if fewer students pass their studies due to mental illness, it will entail increased costs for both society and the individual. For the individual, it also leads to poorer conditions for future challenges in, for example, working life. There can be many reasons why students suffer from mental illness where some causes are more general for all people and others are more linked to the study situation and the work environment at the university.

Students, just like employees, must have the right to a safe social and organizational work environment. Therefore, it is of great importance that the state and its authorities have guidelines, laws and regulations that support a good working environment for students. A good work environment for students is not the same as for employees. Among other things, it is of great importance for students' work environment that there are well-made and well-thought-out course and education plans that ensure a reasonable

workload and coherent educational programs as well as accessible, comfortable and safe physical environments. In addition, there is a general need for support bodies at the university for handling conflicts, both between students and between students and employees. It is also important to ensure the existence of mediating functions between students and any supervisors, especially in positions where the risk of personal conflicts may arise.

It shall be the role of the student unions to appoint a student safety representative at each higher education institution. The student unions must be given good conditions to be able to appoint and coordinate the functions of student safety representatives. Student safety representatives shall receive training that corresponds to the standard of the safety representatives' training. It is the university's responsibility to provide quality education for student safety representatives. It shall be up to each higher education institution to, in consultation with the respective student union, decide which party organizes the basic training. Student safety representatives must have a position that corresponds to the safety representatives', regardless of whether they work with a physical or psychosocial work environment.

There are several authorities that supervise the higher education institutions. This supervision shall also refer to how higher education institutions meet the requirements set for the work environment and students' situation at the higher education institution. When several authorities are involved, it is important to have collaboration that involves anchoring within and between the authorities that possess competence in the area, regardless of which authority is primarily responsible for supervision. The authorities should assist with education or with another method, support and contribute to following up the higher education institutions' systematic work environment work so that it takes place efficiently and close to the student. SFS believes that the authorities should develop this work together through collaboration and that the responsibility rests equally heavily on all authorities that are responsible for the students' work environment.

In order to be able to prevent mental illness, SFS believes that the state and its authorities must ensure that the higher education institutions investigate, evaluate and keep statistics on the students' health situation and the causes of the students' mental illness. It is of great importance that the higher education institutions find out the reasons behind the problem in order to be able to remedy and prevent it.

3.5 Recovery

Recovery is an essential prerequisite for a sustainable work environment for students, just like for all people. Workload is one of many factors that drive up the need for recovery. A person who does not get enough recovery is at risk of persistent fatigue, which in the long run can lead to chronic fatigue. SFS believes that students should have good opportunities for appropriate recovery during their studies, partly through the

higher education institutions' planning of the execution of the education and partly through a longer period of recovery.

3.6 The student finance system

The student finance system is a basic prerequisite for an open and equal university. SFS's general principle is that the study grant must fully cover students' actual expenses and enable a reasonable standard of living. The student financial aid system must also be adapted to lifelong learning and enable studies throughout life. SFS believes that the student loan should be balanced between loans and grants. It must also be possible to separate weeks with student loans and weeks with student grants.

The student financial aid system must be adapted to the length of the education. The Bologna process made the education at the advanced level one year longer with the transition from a 4-year master's to a 5 year master's. This has contributed to reduced opportunities to start more programs and courses than a bachelor's or a master's degree. The opportunities to study summer courses with study grants are available, but the eligibility to start another education or course during or after completing the degree is reduced. As the Swedish student grant system has not followed the university's development with longer and more programs and is not adapted to lifelong learning and the emphasis on the university's educational assignment, an increase in the number of study grant weeks is needed. SFS believes that the number of weeks for which study grants can be applied for should be sufficient for at least eight years of full-time studies. Increasing the number of weeks is in line with the length of the education and the university's educational assignment.

SFS wants the grant weeks and loan weeks with study funds to be possible to divide and thus be consumed separately. Linking these prevents lifelong learning and the opportunity to, for example, try out higher education through a single course funded by study grants. This means that if a student studies a semester and only applies for a study grant, the right to a student loan for the corresponding number of weeks is also consumed. This is a system that punishes individuals who choose to only apply for study grants. The student financial aid system should not control how the student finances his studies.

Students who have children are a group that is particularly financially vulnerable. There must therefore be a satisfactory system for parent students to be able to receive grants to cover the extra costs that result from being a parent student. It is important that all parent students who have extra costs are entitled to the supplementary allowance, regardless of the family situation in general. Other circumstances, such as where the child is registered, should also not affect the possibility of receiving the allowance.

Lifelong learning means that it must be possible to apply for higher education at any time in life. Therefore, the age limit for how late in life it is possible to apply for study grants should be changed to retirement age. At the same time, the student debt must

always be written off when retiring, as this makes it easier for those who have taken out a student loan late in life. Having to pay off your student debt after retirement discourages you from studying later in life and makes it more difficult to pursue further education or retraining.

The fact that the weeks with student loans are limited is a direct obstacle to lifelong learning and Sweden as a nation of knowledge. SFS therefore believes that the student financial aid system should be a more dynamic system. This system means that if a student has repaid a certain number of weeks on his student loan, he can again use these to finance studies. An obstacle to lifelong learning is the tax-free amount that regulates what income a student may have in addition to his studies. SFS has the principle that the study grant must cover the student's actual costs. SFS is basically positive to a tax-free amount, as it is a guarantee that it will always be possible to finance their studies with study grants and without the need for a side income. However, the free amount, for example, should not constitute an obstacle to home sales or the transfer of capital between accounts. It must also be taken into account that, as an employee or contractor, it is not always possible to anticipate or plan when payment will take place. Students should not be liable for repayment due to unforeseen or unplanned income. SFS also believes that the exemption amount should only apply to the weeks the student receives study grants.

3.7 Health care

The study period entails factors such as stress and uncertain living conditions that can lead to a need for student health care. Sometimes the disease or the mental and / or physical illness is related to studies. Therefore, the country's student health clinics are important for students to be given the right conditions to feel good throughout their studies. Due to erosion in the education budget, the funds for student health clinics in the country are being reduced at the same time as the need for the clinics is increasing, and especially for students with stress-related problems. SFS considers that a student health clinic may not charge fees from students. The student health activities of clinics must also not be cut down as a consequence of higher education institutions being forced to save. It is also important that a good national standard for the activities of student health clinics is established, so that students' well-being is guaranteed, regardless of the choice of place of study or education.

When a student becomes ill or suffers from mental or physical illness, it is unclear whether the student should turn to primary care or a student health clinic. In addition to this, there is also uncertainty for the student health clinic as to what their respective primary care responsibilities are. SFS believes that the student health clinic's preventive function and complementary role towards primary care must be clarified by establishing the state's student health clinic's function. SFS also believes that the lack of collaboration is so serious that the state should actively promote collaboration efforts between these parties to a greater extent. This collaboration between the higher education institutions' student health clinics, student unions and the respective region

should be developed so that students who feel bad do not get stuck between authorities and institutions while waiting for care. Healthcare, on the other hand, can also act preventively. The student health clinics, higher education institutions and healthcare's preventative measures is a crucial prerequisite for promoting good health among students.

3.8 Social security systems

All students must be able to be ill with a functioning social insurance. The parental insurance must be adapted to students. It should be obvious that a student should be able to resume his or her studies after a parental leave. SFS believes that students should be able to start a family without losing their jobs. Students' study time must be as safe and as insured as for other groups in society. Therefore, SFS requires that students be able to be on sick leave part-time. Students' health insurance and compensation for the care of a sick child must be linked to the studies instead of the study grant to include all students. SFS considers that the waiting period for sick leave and care of a sick child should be a maximum of 7 days.

When a student returns to studies after a period of illness, the student shall have the right to rehabilitation. The responsibility for students' rehabilitation lies with the education provider according to law. It must be clear which initiatives the student is entitled to and what the education provider is obliged to offer. The student who wishes must be able to be rehabilitated back to studies. The universities' responsibilities include helping students who have fallen behind due to illness by formulating a plan for how they will be able to return to studies, make up for missed steps and eventually complete a degree. SFS demands that higher education institutions and other authorities adapt their activities so that it is possible to cope with the rehabilitation responsibility and if this does not happen, measures should be taken.

Research students' security conditions vary depending on the form of funding. SFS believes that all doctoral students should get a secure job from day one to be covered by the social security systems. It is never justifiable to refuse doctoral students a secure job. It is a political responsibility to ensure that the higher education institutions employ all doctoral students and accept that the costs may therefore increase somewhat. For postgraduate students who are employed in a place other than the academy, the higher education institution must ensure that postgraduate students are insured through the other employer and are covered by the social security systems.

3.9 Broadened opportunities for influence

There are several obstacles that can affect students' opportunities for student influence. Student influence is largely limited to those students who have an understanding of the Swedish language. This can be put in relation to the university's desire for increased internationalization. In order for student influence to be accessible to all, language barriers must not stand in the way. Therefore, the Language Act on official languages

must enable higher education institutions to be bilingual. Through bilingualism, participation becomes more equal for both Swedish-speaking and non-Swedish-speaking students.

In addition to linguistic conditions, there are other obstacles that limit the possibility of student influence. Enabling student representation assignments can, for example, be remuneration and compensation for missed teaching time. SFS believes that if financial compensation is paid to the elected representatives who are not students, there must also be compensation or compensation to student representatives. Compensation for doctoral students shall aim to create the opportunity to participate in student-influence and collegial influence within the framework of the doctoral student position.

3.10 Studying with a disability

All higher education must be accessible and designed for everyone. Examination methods, teaching environments and learning tools need to be developed beyond norms for how teaching has traditionally been conducted. In addition to a developed and accessible higher education, there is a need for pedagogical support measures. Pedagogical support measures aim to reduce or remove obstacles for students with documented disabilities so that everyone can study on the same terms regardless of disability.

A disability should not be an obstacle to applying for higher education. Lack of pedagogical support measures or facilities that are not accessible should also not be reasons for a student to interrupt his studies. Therefore, it is of great importance that funds for pedagogical support measures are never jeopardized in the universities' budgets. SFS also demands that at national level there should always be secure funding for pedagogical support measures.

There are no national guidelines for what is meant by special educational support measures. The lack of national guidelines contributes to an imbalance between the Swedish higher education institutions in the supply and design of pedagogical support measures. There is also no minimum level for what a student can expect for support as accepted at a course. Therefore, SFS wants guidelines to be prepared for a national consensus. With a common definition, SFS wants to see a standardized basic offer with pedagogical support measures. The pedagogical support must then be able to be individually adapted to meet the individual student's needs.

Information about available support functions must be clear to both prospective and admitted students. Lack of information on available pedagogical support measures should also not prevent studies abroad.

4. An equal and representative teaching staff

In the principle program, SFS states that the academy shall be characterized by criticism of norms and strive to be a role model for other activities in the area of equal conditions. The importance of a more heterogeneous teaching staff that to a greater extent reflects society is highlighted, which would contribute to a broader knowledge and research production. Gender equality within the academy is progressing slowly, but in order to achieve a completely open and gender-equal university, more measures should be taken. For a broad university, it is also important to counteract that tasks and areas of science are considered to be linked to a certain gender, this can be prevented by making gender-specific study choices visible. A norm-critical approach is one of the ways to broaden the academy, in teaching as well as research.

4.1 From a homogeneous to a heterogeneous teaching staff

SFS believes that the teaching staff at the higher education institutions should reflect the composition of society. Therefore, all higher education institutions must actively oppose an obliquely recruited teaching staff by being critical of norms at each instance in order to achieve diversity and counteract a discriminatory structure. This will take place in parallel with long-term work with a focus on pedagogical merit. The academy has a tradition of not meriting pedagogical skills to the same extent as scientific skills. SFS believes that pedagogical skills should be seen as equivalent to scientific competence in teacher appointments. An outdated gender stereotypical view of teaching and administration becomes a trap for women that leads to reduced career opportunities. To counteract the fact that certain tasks are usually performed by a certain gender, the academy's activities must be given the same status.

The academy has traditionally had an over-representation of white older men. Those who belong to that group have traditionally received larger research grants, among other things through disproportionately large parts of so-called strategic research initiatives. SFS believes that research funding should be distributed so that it promotes the full breadth of the research staff in each field of science. In this way, the possibility increases for more people from under-represented groups to seek a career in the field of science and thereby pursue research with a broader perspective. Then the organization can also take advantage of a diversity of experiences that in the long run create better research and education.

If different types of experiences are valued by the academy, there are also more incentives for individuals who leave the academy for other working life to come back and contribute with new perspectives. SFS believes that applications for research funding should to a greater extent be prepared anonymously in order for applications to be assessed equally.

4.2 Norm-critical pedagogy

Norm-criticism is an approach where that which is often taken for granted is questioned. For example, there is always an author behind the course literature who carries his perception of science into the literature. Without a critique of norms, the literature list in a course can become homogeneous, and give students a picture of the reality of the field of knowledge and the field of science based on the definition of that particular author. The same applies to the content and planning of the education. The teacher has a great influence on the students' learning process and understanding of the field of knowledge and the field of science. Likewise, the teacher's language creates an idea of what is the right choice of words.

Historically, higher education and research have been conducted based on the male gender norm. Also the whiteness norm and norms around class, age and sexuality. It has contributed to pedagogical methods and research on education being adapted to privileged groups in society. A norm-critical pedagogy gives the student a broad understanding of the field of knowledge, makes norms visible within their own discipline and creates space for reflection on norms in learning. Through a critical approach, the results of the research can be made available to more people and contribute to societal change. SFS believes that all pedagogy in higher education should be norm-critical. In order to enable a norm-critical pedagogical basis in higher education, norm-critical perspectives must be included in the higher pedagogical education for teaching staff and doctoral students so that it can permeate all teaching at basic and advanced level.

4.3 Integration of equality

Integration of equality as a working method aims to ensure that all decisions made within government agencies are permeated by a gender equality perspective. This means that the authority must make an impact assessment for how different groups are affected in connection with decisions. In this way, it is possible to avoid or draw attention to the fact that groups are disadvantaged by the decision. The university as a whole must be integrated with gender equality in order to become more inclusive. Equality work does not only consist of gender equality and equal treatment plans or task forces with a mission. Gender equality is a perspective that must permeate all decisions, from the choices made by higher education institutions to decisions by the individual teacher about the structure of teaching. In order for the university to reflect society, reflection is needed on the consequences of different decisions for different groups. Only through awareness of gender equality can the learning process and research reflect different perspectives that lead to the development of the whole society. Integrating equality is an important piece of the puzzle for SFS to create a more equal and gender-equal university.