

Your guide to

SFS

**Sweden's National Union of
Students (SFS)**

Foreword

This guide is aimed at member unions affiliated to SFS, to elected representatives within SFS, but also to those who are curious about us and would like to know more! SFS is governed democratically by the member unions, which decide what SFS is and what it does. We would therefore like this guide to give you an introduction to the organisation as a member; how you influence SFS and how SFS in turn has an influence in a national and international context.

The work on the guide has been a part of SFS's organisational focus issues for 2019-2022 and its aim is to increase knowledge about the organisation among the members. This guide will provide a presentation of what the organisation is currently like, the context in which SFS operates, as well as how you can influence SFS's priorities and political goals as a member. You can read the guide from start to finish, but it is also possible to look up the chapters you would like to learn more about.

If you would like to find out more about SFS's ongoing activities or would like more detail, please contact SFS's Presidium or Board for further information.

Enjoy the read!

Linn Svärd
Chair
2021/2022

Oskar M Wiik
Deputy Chair
2021/2022



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To start with...

What is SFS and why do we exist?

SFS is the collected voice of students and it pursues issues that students have in common at a national and international level. As the collected student voice, SFS's principal task is to represent the members' and the students' interests. This entails having an influence in issues that are important for students.

SFS has some fifty affiliated member unions, which together account for approximately 340,000 of the country's students. SFS's member unions are highly diverse, which means that SFS represents students with different conditions and from different kinds of courses. This gives SFS a unique opportunity to speak for the student group as a whole, making SFS an important discussion partner for the authorities within higher education.

SFS

1. History

To understand SFS, it can be beneficial to start by placing the organisation in a historical context. So let's go back to just after the end of the First World War. At that time there was a need for cooperation between students, and the solution was to set up an organisation. At the beginning, SFS's principal role was to coordinate Swedish students in international issues, as a national organisation was required to participate in different international contexts.

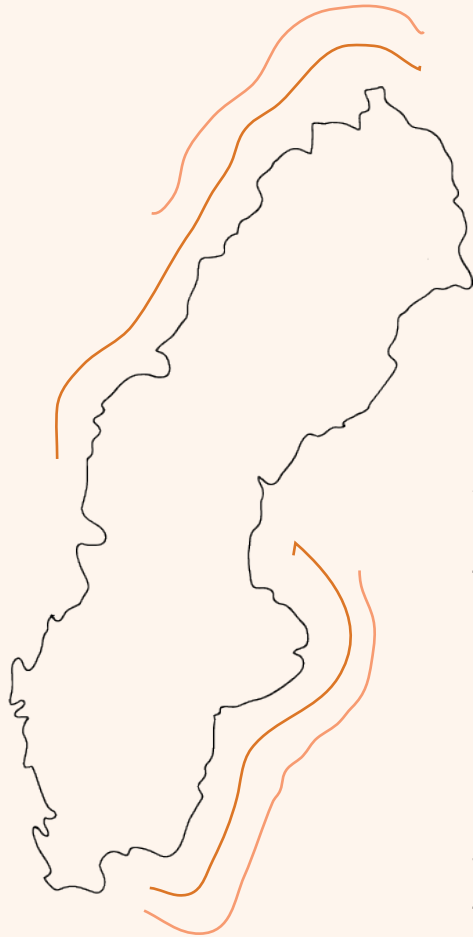
SFS was officially established on 19 March 1921. SFS's activities were expanded in 1930 when a decision was made to conduct a socio-economic survey to show the government that students needed lower ticket prices on the railways. This was the birth of SFS as a lobbying organisation.

SFS's organisation, finances and role has changed during the 100 years that the organisation has been in existence. SFS has always operated on the basis of students' needs and interests, which have changed over the years. As a result of the students' need for cheaper travel and student literature, SFS set up the Kilroy travel agent, the Akademibokhandeln bookshop, the Student Card etc. SFS has also contributed to the fact that we have student representation at national level, that student finance has increased, better conditions for students with children, construction of student housing, that educational expertise should be important when making appointments etc.

The areas in which we work have been continuously widened and today SFS is engaged in almost all issues that concern students. Over the years, SFS has been affected by internal factors, such as who the members are and what they want, and by external pressures, for example, changes in society or new laws and rules such as the abolition of compulsory student union membership.



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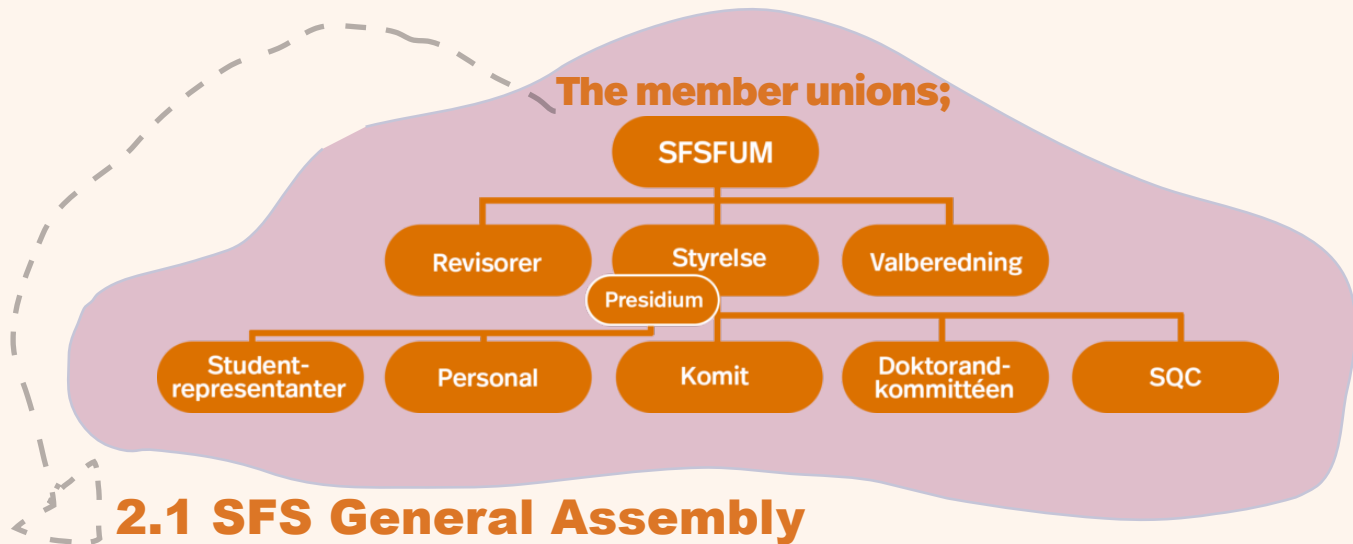
1.2 Student unions throughout the country

In the context of Swedish higher education, student unions are democratically structured organisations whose purpose is regulated in the Higher Education Act. Even though the student unions have the same purpose, different unions have different internal organisations. This is important to bear in mind if you work with or within SFS, as SFS has affiliated student unions from Sweden's largest and smallest higher education institutions. The unions have different priorities, conditions and resources to pursue their work - both internally and in relation to SFS. For example, certain unions have large offices with several full-time employees, while others have no elected representatives working full-time.

The student unions usually have an influence at a local and regional level - in relation to their own higher education institution, municipality and region. *SFS does not operate in relation to individual higher education institutions*, rather the individual union does this best. On the other hand, SFS brings unions throughout the country together to determine priorities and which important common issues are to be pursued at national and international level.

2. SFS organisation

This chapter presents an account of SFS's internal organisation and the different component parts of the organisation. In addition, it will provide a description of different ways that you can be involved in influencing SFS as a member.



2.1 SFS General Assembly

SFS General Assembly (SFSFUM) is the organisation's highest decision-making body. The General Assembly traditionally meets every year in April or May and consists of 349 mandates distributed throughout all member unions. The unions are represented in relation to how many students they represent. This means that the more students the union represents, the more mandates the union has at SFSFUM.

SFSFUM deals with proposals from the board (propositions) and proposals from member unions (motions). The General Assembly decides on the organisation's governing documents and selects the elected representatives for bodies such as the Presidium and the Board. SFSFUM principally consists of two different parts: "Opinion Square" (åsiqtstorg) and plenary meetings. Opinion Square, which can be described as an interactive discussion forum where the members can discuss and take a position on the different proposals, is held prior to plenary meetings. It is called Opinion Square because it is an open meeting where different opinions and perspectives are welcomed. During the plenary meeting, all delegates and the Board gather in a large lecture theatre and vote for or against different proposals.

Issues that are regularly dealt with by FUM

Election of SFS Presidium
Election to SFS Board
Election to SFS Election Committee
Election to SFS auditor
SFS budget and membership fee
SFS operational plan
SFS opinion documents and statutes, when needed
Propositions by the Board
Motions by members

Member meetings

Besides SFSFUM, SFS arranges member meetings. The purpose of the member meetings is to provide feedback on SFS's activities, discuss relevant issues, support and discuss proposals in advance of SFSFUM. The member meetings usually take place at least once per semester and are an important meeting point in establishing cohesion among SFS members.

Some tips if you are going to participate at FUM

PRIOR TO FUM:

- Appoint your delegation in good time so that you have time to read and discuss all motions and propositions for SFSFUM. A lot happens during SFSFUM, so try to be well prepared before you arrive!
- Participate in the member meetings prior to FUM. The Board's propositions are prepared and supported at the member meetings prior to FUM and you can be an active part of the preparatory work through participating on these occasions.

DURING FUM:

Certain member unions organise themselves within different groupings during SFSFUM and it can be beneficial to keep track of them, of the allocation of mandates among the unions and where your union is positioned.

AFTER FUM:

Respond to SFS's evaluations and get involved in improving FUM for next year.

2.2 Internal organisation

The Board

SFS's Board consists of SFS Chair, Deputy Chair and 11 voluntary members selected by SFSFUM. The Board is ultimately responsible for the organisation's activities and leads SFS from a strategic perspective in both organisational and political issues.

The Presidium

The Presidium consists of a Chair and a Deputy Chair and is selected by SFS General Assembly. Together they constitute a body called "the Presidium". Different organisations' presidiums consist of different constellations and roles, but within SFS the Chair and Deputy Chair constitute the Presidium. The Presidium is full-time, paid students who are the outward face of the student movement. This means that it represents the country's students and works in both the short- and long-term to have an influence in various issues concerning student politics. They are also responsible for the day-to-day management of the SFS office and implement the decisions that SFSFUM has ratified together with the Board.

Student representatives

SFS also appoints student representatives to different bodies at national level. The student representatives give students a voice in forums which concern issues of student and higher education politics at a national level. In their role as student representatives, they do not put forward their own opinion, rather they base themselves on the opinion document that SFSFUM has approved.

Committees

The Board appoints committees in order to assemble expertise and engagement within certain specific issues. There are currently three different committees within SFS. They are:

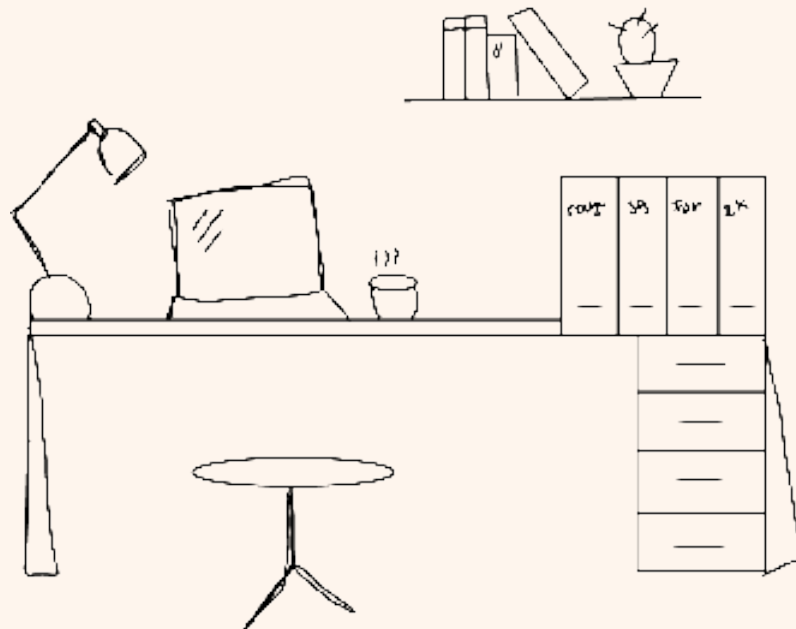
- *SFS-DK - SFS Postgraduate Student Committee*
- *SQC - SFS Quality Committee*
- *Komit - SFS International Committee*

Komit and SQC are led by the SFS Presidium, while SFS-DK is led by its own Chair appointed by the Board.

2.3 SFS office

The work of SFS's office is led by the Presidium and it performs large parts of the operational work relating to SFS's organisation and policies. Everyone in the office is employed and is available as support in the everyday work. Over the years, SFS has been organised in different ways depending on the organisation's priorities and prerequisites. It has also had numerous employees and a large office, however, at present (2021) SFS has a smaller office consisting of an Organisational secretary, two Political secretaries, an Event coordinator, a Member coordinator and a Communications Officer.

The Organisational secretary manages a large number of practical and administrative issues, such as the day-to-day accounts management. SFS's Political secretaries support the Presidium's work. For example, they are engaged in external monitoring, writing reports and supporting documents, responding to consultations and writing debate articles. In their work they rely on the opinion documents that the members approved at SFSFUM. The Event coordinator works with SFS' events and manages SFS 100 years anniversary. The Member coordinator is responsible for supporting SFS's member unions. The Communications Officer has contact with the media and is responsible for all external communication. The Communications Officer is also responsible for the organisation's website, social media and supporting the Presidium in its communicational work in relation to the authorities, the media and members. Besides these roles, there can be certain time-limited positions.



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2.4 SFS governing documents

SFS is governed internally by various governing documents. The governing documents are in place in order to structure, organise and provide information about the goals and guidelines the organisation has.

The are three categories of governing documents within SFS:

1. Governing documents approved by FUM. The first level of governing documents are the documents approved by SFSFUM. These include statutes, opinion programme, operational plan and budget, as well as positions and statements on political issues.

2. Governing documents approved by the Board. The second level is governing documents approved by the Board. These include various policies and rules of procedure. For example, travel policy, student representation policy etc.

3. Documents approved by the Presidium. The third level is documents approved by the SFS Presidium. These include responses to consultations and reports based on the opinions that the SFSFUM has approved and decisions concerning student representatives.

SFS opinion documents

Let's go into more detail on SFS's political governing documents and how they relate to each other

SFS' Programme of Principles The Programme of Principles constitutes SFS's ideological basis and all of SFS's political values are entered in the Programme. The Programme of Principles acts as guidance in all political lobbying that SFS performs.

Political positions: Based on the Programme of Principles, there are more specific opinions formulated in the political positions. SFS's positions clarify and develop the organisation's opinions surrounding a range of specific issues. For example, student housing.

Operational plan: Besides the Programme of Principles and positions, the operational plan is also a governing document with political content. The operational plan contains three-year focus issues, but is based on pre-existing opinions from the Programme of Principles or positions. If an opinion is not formulated in other governing documents, it is possible to make a demand through the operational plan that one is produced.

2.5 SFS' finances

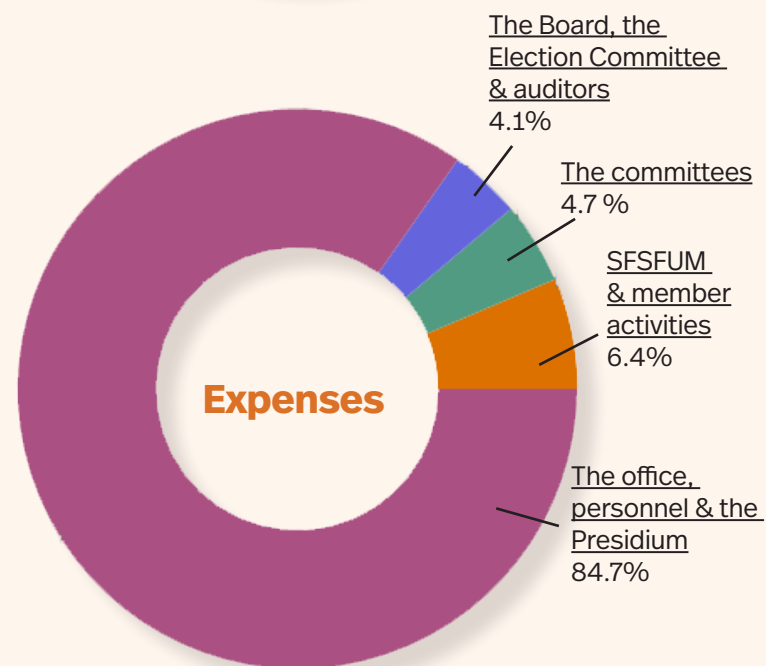
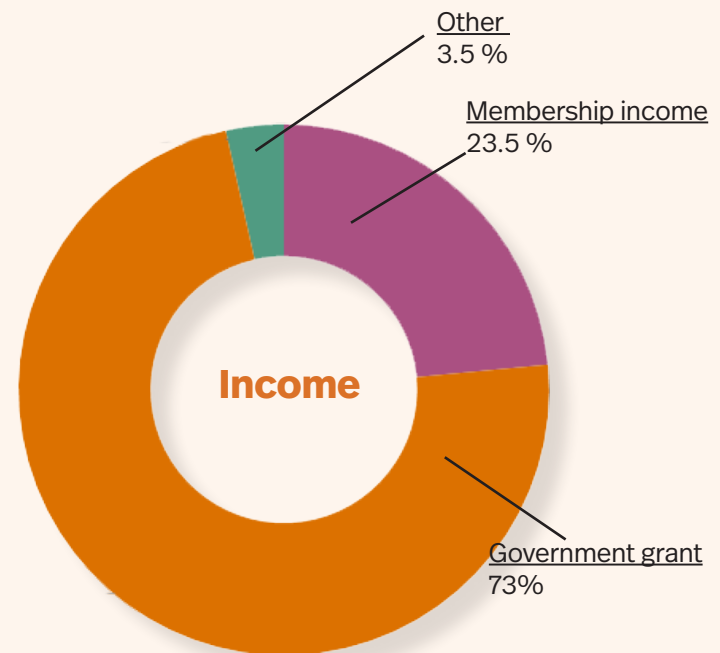
SFS's finances have varied over the years, due to both internal and external factors.

Income primarily derives from membership fees (internally) and government grants (externally), but can also derive from certain externally financed projects.

Expenses primarily comprise personnel costs (salaries for the Presidium and the office, costs for premises etc.). This is because SFS's employees are the organisation's principal tool in the exercise of political lobbying. It is the personnel's day-to-day work that enables the organisation to function, and where SFSFUM's opinions are made tangible and implemented. Other expenses are constituted by ongoing activities such as SFSFUM and the work of the committees and the Board.

SFSFUM determines the financial framework, which means that FUM establishes the cost centres that the Board and the Presidium subsequently adhere to during the financial year.

If you would like to know more about the exact income and expenses, SFS's annual accounts are available on the website.



The graphs show an average percentage of income and expenses between 2014-2019

2.6 How you have an influence as a member

If you would like to influence SFS and have an idea that you would like to make a reality, there are various ways to go about it. SFSFUM sets the parameters and if you would like to influence SFS's opinions and priorities, here is an example of what you can do!

Step 1. You informally discuss your idea with the Board of SFS and other member unions. You then address the idea formally at a member meeting.

Step 2. There is a lot of support for your idea and you decide to take it further to FUM (in the best case, the Board accepts your feedback and proposes the change itself, you can then skip steps 3 and 4).

Step 3. You review the rest of the governing documents and realise either that:

a) You do not need to change the opinion documents. This is because you find support for your idea, or because there is nothing to oppose it.

Procedure: In such case, you can demand that your proposal is entered in the operational plan so that SFS can work on the issue during the forthcoming financial year.

b) You need to make a change to the opinion documents. This is because there are opinions that go against your idea.

Procedure: You make a demand to FUM that specific formulations in the position or the Programme of Principles are changed. Before FUM, you have formulated a proposal on which SFS's Board and the other unions can take a position.

Step 4. FUM votes in favour of your proposal and your idea is implemented!

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More opportunities to have an influence

You can participate in the member meetings and thus gain an insight into the operation and be involved in all support processes at an early stage.

Your union can arrange a member meeting under the auspices of SFS and decide in connection with that on the agenda for a host union session, as well as plan an activity in connection with the meeting.

You can gain a greater insight into SFS's activities through familiarising yourself with the Board's and the committees' work by reading the Board documents.

You can apply for one of many elected posts within SFS, for example, as a board member, a student representative or a member of the committees.

Besides influencing SFS's parameters and priorities through SFSFUM, there are other ways to proceed if you would like to influence SFS during the course of the financial year.

Please contact the Presidium or the Board and suggest a coffee if you have any thoughts and reflections you would like to discuss!

The logo for SFS, consisting of the letters 'SFS' in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.

3. National lobbying

SFS exists in order to coordinate the collected student voice in Sweden. The national context in which SFS has an influence consists of many different actors and processes. This chapter will describe the state governance, different political processes and actors.

State governance

The higher education sector is Sweden's largest public activity. The majority of Swedish universities and colleges are public authorities. Even though universities have a lot of autonomy and freedom, they are nevertheless governed as public authorities. State governance can have different forms, but in summary, the state governs through laws and rules, budgets, public service agreements and various official decisions.

Public and private higher education institutions

Some of SFS's member unions operate in private higher education institutions and these are not regulated in the same ways as the public universities. The higher education institutions that are not public are not covered by the the Higher Education Act and other regulations that will be described in the following chapter.

The definition of students

When laws and statutes talk about students, they are referring to students who study at first-cycle and second-cycle level, as well as postgraduate students studying at third-cycle level.

SFS lobbying

SFS is an official consultation body in political issues relating to students and higher education, and it has the right to appoint national student representatives. In addition to this, SFS is engaged in lobbying activities through external monitoring and familiarity with political processes. SFS's lobbying can be manifested in many different ways. In some issues SFS has an influence reactively, and in others proactively. The reactive work involves reacting to proposals presented by decision-makers. Proactively, SFS works to formulate SFSFUM's opinions into concrete proposals to the powers that be. SFS's Presidium works to communicate the students' voice through, for example, participating in meetings with the decision-making bodies, influencing opinion, and writing reports and opinion pieces. An important part of the lobbying work entails identifying at which level and when an issue should be pursued.

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3.1 Different actors

At national level there are a large range of actors which have an influence in issues that concern higher education. The different levels at which SFS works in order to have an influence extend between decision-makers and different opinion formers.

Decision-makers

Government

The government governs Sweden and is the driving force behind changes in our laws. The changes that the government would like to implement are formulated in bills that are put before Parliament for ratification.

Ministry of Education and Research

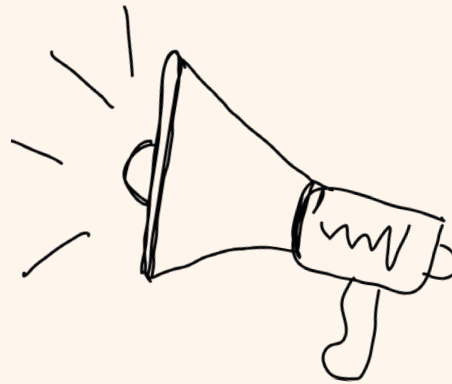
The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the Government's education and research policy. Various public authorities and research councils come under the Ministry.

Parliament

Parliament is the highest decision-making body in Sweden. One of Parliament's most important tasks is to decide on laws.

The committees

The Education Committee (UU). Consists of Members of Parliament from all political parties. UU prepares educational issues for Parliament.



Public universities and colleges

Opinion formers

Free-standing interest organisations

There are a large number of free-standing interest organisations and collaborative bodies engaged in influencing our decision-makers. SFS is one such organisation.

Trade union organisations

The task of trade union organisations is to safeguard employees' interests in working life. The trade unions work to further the professional interests of university lecturers and researchers both locally at the higher education institutions and centrally in relation to the Ministry, media etc.

Relevant authorities

Below is a brief description of authorities that are under the Ministry of Education and Research.

UKÄ - Swedish Higher Education Authority is the agency responsible for quality assessment, which means that it reviews the quality of higher education and the universities' quality assurance systems. UKÄ is also responsible for statistical follow-up of Swedish higher education institutions and legal supervision.

UHR - Swedish Council for Higher Education has a wide remit. The authority works with admission to higher education, is responsible for antagning.se, SweSAT and supports the universities in their work to ensure increased diversity, equal rights and broader recruitment. The agency also works with international cooperation, mobility and assessment of foreign courses. In addition to this, UHR is also engaged in disseminating information about higher education and is responsible for operating several major IT systems within universities.

CSN - Board of Student Finance is the authority in Sweden which manages student finance, home equipment loans and driving licence loans. CSN also writes reports and keeps statistics on students' financial and social situations.

ÖKS - National Board of Appeal for Student Aid is a public authority with the principal task of processing appeals of CSN's decisions on award and recovery of student finance.

HAN - Higher Education Expulsions Board processes matters concerning the expulsion of students from higher education programmes after notification from vice-chancellors at higher education institutions. According to the Higher Education Act, students who have been found guilty of serious criminality can be expelled from their course if there is a significant risk that the student can harm another person or damage valuable property during their course. A decision on expulsion means that the student may not continue his or her studies.

ÖNH - Higher Education Appeals Board is an authority with the task of processing appeals of certain decisions made within universities and higher vocational colleges. ÖHN is the final body in these matters, and it is therefore not possible to appeal the Board's decision.

Besides these authorities, SFS works to influence many other bodies that come under, for example, the Ministry of Finance, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Employment.

A list of other actors

Besides the aforementioned agencies, there are also public research councils and interest organisations with which SFS has close collaboration. Some of them are listed below.

National collaborative organisations and opinion formers

SUHF - Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions. SUHF is a membership organisation for universities and colleges.

Svenskt näringsliv - Confederation of Swedish Enterprise is a Swedish employers organisation which represents private companies in Sweden.

VA - Public and Science is a non-profit association with the aim of promoting dialogue, cooperation and openness between researchers and the general public. SFS is a member of VA.

IVA - Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences is a royal engineering academy with the function of promoting technical and economic disciplines, as well as business development.

Government research councils

Research councils are organisations that provide research funding, and the term is usually used for organisations which distribute government funding to research. The research councils come under different ministries.

VR - Swedish Research Council is Sweden's largest state body that funds research and provides support for research within all disciplinary research domains.

Vinnova - The agency for innovation systems, VINNOVA, is a government agency with the remit to promote sustainable growth through development of effective innovation systems and funding of needs-driven research.

FAS - Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, FAS, is a government agency which initiates and finances basic and needs-governed research into working life, health and welfare

FORMAS - Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning is a Swedish research council and a government agency under the Ministry of the Environment with the task of contributing to the support of prominent research within sustainable development.

Forte - Forte is a research council which funds scientific research for people's health, working life and welfare.

Trade union organisations

SULF - Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers is the trade union and professional organisation for university teachers, researchers and doctoral candidates.

SACO - Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, is a central trade union organisation.

TCO - Confederation of Professional Employees.

ST - ST is a trade union for people employed within public organisations.

3.2 Laws and regulations

There is a description below of relevant laws and statutes that Parliament and the government has passed.

The Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act (1992:1434) is a law which regulates colleges and universities in Sweden which have the state as principal. It sets out, for example, that students must have the right to have an influence and that universities and colleges must cooperate with society as a whole.

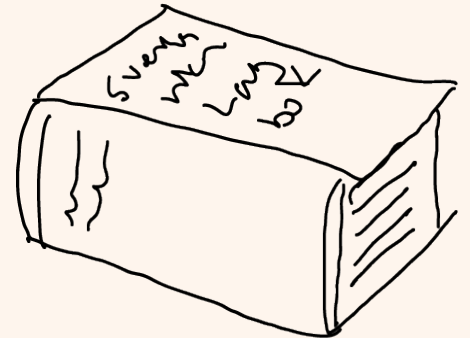
The Higher Education Ordinance

The Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100) supplements the provisions in the Higher Education Act. For example, it contains admission regulations, qualitative targets and information about what can be appealed.

Other laws and statutes

Besides the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, there are other laws and statutes which govern the activities of public universities and colleges.

- The Public Administration Act (2017:900)
- The Discrimination Act (2008:567)
- Ordinance (1993:1153) on Reporting of Studies and Other Matters at Universities and Colleges
- Ordinance (2002:760) on Contract Education at Universities and University Colleges
- Act concerning authority to award certain qualifications (1993:792)



Regulations regarding student influence

Student influence on public universities and colleges is also legally regulated, with further reading available in the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance and the Student Union Ordinance. Among other things, the Higher Education Act stipulates that the students unions' principal purpose is to monitor and participate in the development of educational programmes and prerequisites for studies at universities and colleges. HF also states that student unions must be democratically structured organisations with the capacity to represent students within the union's area of operations. Further reading is available about this in the different laws, which can be found on Parliament's website.

3.3 State governance

State direction can come in different forms, and there is a description below of common policy instruments and processes.

Legislative proposals, inquiries & referrals

Before the government puts forward a legislative proposal, a special investigator or a committee is often appointed with the commission to investigate a specific issue. The results are collected in a report. When this happens, SFS and other interest organisations that want to have an influence on the legislative proposal can lobby the inquiry. In this context it is possible to have an influence in various steps, with the first step being to influence the inquiry's terms of reference and subsequently the inquiry's content.

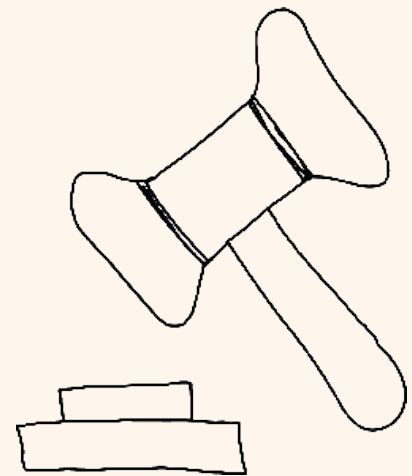
Before the government takes a position on a new legislative proposal, the inquiry submits the proposal for referral to authorities, organisations and other stakeholders. The government can thus ascertain what those affected think, and what support the proposal has.

The budget process

Another important process is the government's budget proposal. Universities and colleges, the student unions and SFS receive government funding and the budget therefore influences the higher education sector. The work of producing the government's budget proposal starts more a year before the budget is approved. SFS and other interest organisations therefore want to be involved in having an influence in good time before the proposal is put to Parliament.

Public service agreements

Once Parliament has approved the budget proposal, the government decides every year on public service agreements for all authorities. Every year, the public universities and colleges receive a public service agreement that contains comprehensive rules and guidelines on how the authority should operate. The government sets the targets for the activity and the funding to which it has access.



4. The committees' work

4.1 International lobbying

In order to have an influence on student issues at a European level, SFS is part of the European Students Union, ESU. ESU is an umbrella organisation which organises 45 national student organisations from 38 countries, including SFS. Within ESU there are different groupings and SFS is part of NOM, which stands for Nordiskt Ordförandemöte (Nordic Presidential Meeting). NOM is a Nordic network and its meetings primarily discuss common issues for the Nordic and Baltic countries. SFS is also part of EURODOC, which is a European collaborative body for organisations which organises PhD students and newly qualified PhDs at national level.

Komit, SFS's international committee, exists in order to have an influence on what SFS should pursue in an international context. Komit participates in ESU- and NOM meetings and represents SFS. However, in the context of EURODOC, it is SFS's Post-Graduate Committee that represents SFS. Komit and SFS-DK base their work on existing positions that SFSFUM has approved.

As a member, you are welcome to contact Komit and SFS-DK if you are curious about their work, or access reports that the committees write for SFS's Board.

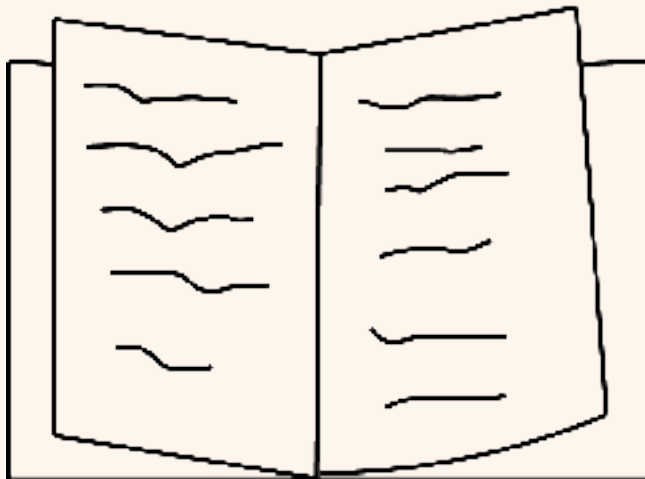


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4.2 Doctoral candidates within SFS

In Sweden, doctoral candidates are students who take third-cycle courses. This means that doctoral candidates have the same rights and obligations in terms of student influence as students at first-cycle level. SFS therefore has a committee which works with doctoral issues, SFS-DK. SFS-DK works with quality assurance of third-cycle courses and to improve conditions for doctoral candidates nationally and internationally. SFS-DK advises the Presidium and the Board on issues which concern doctoral candidates and their courses.

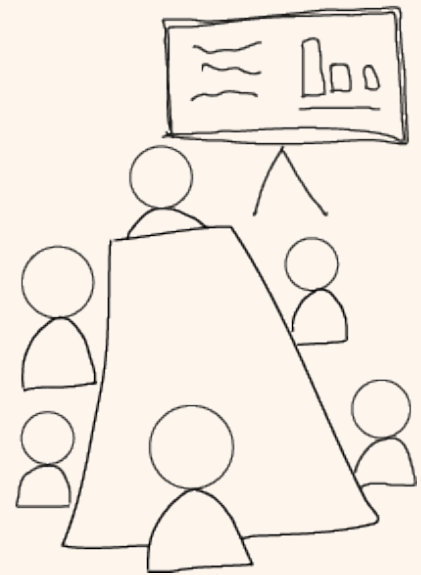
If you are a doctoral candidate and are interested in SFS-DK's work, please contact SFS-DK. You can also contact the student union at your higher education institution if you would like to get involved in changing the situation for doctoral candidates at your specific institution. Further information about SFS-DK is also available on SFS's website.



4.3 Quality management within SFS

That our courses and programmes maintain a high level of quality is an important issue and a common concern for both students and employees. All higher education institutions are continuously engaged in quality assurance, and student unions are involved in various ways in their higher education institution's quality assurance work.

At a national level, UKÄ is the agency that reviews quality in higher education and research. The national quality assurance system consists of different audits and a group of assessors is appointed for each audit. The assessment group includes a student representative nominated by SFS. SFS's quality committee, SQC, works on an ongoing basis with quality issues within SFS. SCQ leads SFS's student pool, which is a group of students trained to be assessors. If you are curious about quality assurance and would like to take part in SCQ's work, please contact SFS's quality committee on sqc@sfs.se.



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