

## Contract education and the student unions

### Proposition 4

#### Draft decision

The Board proposes to the General Assembly

**that**, in SFS's position: Higher education's scope, range, funding and admission, to add to 3.5 Contract Education the text:

There is a value in having different forms of education, including contract education. Contract education should constitute an opportunity to acquire knowledge for individuals engaged in established working life, sometimes without previous academic experience, as well as for companies and organisations. Contract education must never be a purchased short cut to higher education, with everything that goes with it, higher education credits for example, but should primarily be a means of learning and skills development for external actors in collaboration with higher education institutions.

SFS considers that participants in contracted programmes are not students and should therefore not be equated with the students admitted to higher education. However, participants in contract education should be treated equivalently to students. This includes issues concerning study environment, disciplinary matters and so on. Each contracted programme is responsible for the respective quality assurance. If a student union participates in quality assurance of a contracted programme and monitoring of the participants' study situation, it shall receive reimbursement from the higher education institution.

If a participant in a contracted programme can demonstrate the knowledge required for accreditation as an academic qualification, (s)he shall be offered that opportunity. Participants shall be entitled to transparency and influence over their education. The status of participants needs to be clear in relation to how students are regulated.

Contract education should be implemented in such a way that it does not impact adversely on ordinary activities, in particular educational programmes. In addition to this, it is up to each client and higher education institution to design the programmes with aspects such as cross listed courses, responsible staff and course literature. The programmes that are similar in form and content to an academic course of study should be converted into one, with the resultant consequences.

For SFS, the principle of an admissions system based on merit and free higher education is indisputable. Nevertheless, it is also indisputable that participants in programmes should be treated equally regardless of who they are, where they come from or the social

status they have. Contract education must never constitute an opportunity for certain individuals to bypass the formal requirements for admission to higher education. Contract education must never constitute an alternative admissions system.

## Covering letter

At SFS General Assembly 2021 it was decided to commission SFS's Board to develop SFS's position surrounding contract education. The Board accepted this task and looked into the matter in depth. Consultation has taken place with member unions at member meetings.

### What is contract education?

Universities and colleges have long had the opportunity to arrange programmes on behalf of authorities, businesses and other organisations. Employers who wish to strengthen their operations with new knowledge, or organisations that wish to give job seekers an opportunity for skills development can do so through contract education. It can also fulfil a function in the labour market, for example, when programmes are ordered for job seekers or a trade union for its members. It is the client of the contract education, usually the employer, who appoints the course participants.

Contract education must rest on a scholarly basis and be of the same high quality as other programmes at a higher education institution. A contract education can vary in scope and extend over several semesters or just half a day. A commissioned course can provide higher education credits and degrees, but it is not a requirement. A contractor can purchase contract education where the course participant studies together with students on regular courses funded by grants, so-called cross listed courses. Participants in contract education do not need to have previous experience from a higher education institution or university.

### About proposals in SFS' position: Scope, range, financing and admission in higher education

A new section 3.5 is proposed to address contract education in its entirety. In the section, the Board wishes to develop SFS's views on contracted programmes as a form of education.

The starting point is that SFS is in favour of contracted programmes as a form of education, as there is a value in having a wide range of forms of education. Contract education fulfils an important social function and provides an opportunity for people to obtain skills development with an academic character. Being located at higher education institutions enables the contract education to access central academic functions, such as peer reviews. However, SFS safeguards the regular education that takes place at the higher education institution and emphasises the importance of ensuring that the courses are not equated.

It is important that regular programmes provided at the higher education institution are not adversely affected by the fact that contract education is provided, for example, in the form of reduced teacher-led time. The Board proposes that SFS should not represent participants in contract education. When contract education is conducted at a higher education institution, it is the client's responsibility to ensure that participants have an influence and to ensure the quality of the education. The Board believes that it is up to

each individual student union how it should relate to participants in contract education, however, SFS can constitute a support in this respect and facilitate discussion between member unions.