

SFS operational plan 2023/24

Proposition 1

SFS



Covering letter

Proposition 1: SFS operational plan 2023/24

The Board is responsible for preparing proposals for the operational plan for Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS) General Assembly, SFSFUM. To that end, the Board has issued invitations to submit comments on proposals on three occasions. Initially at the autumn members' meeting where the Board invited the member unions to either propose a solution to a problem or simply notify the SFS Secretariat and Board with of problems and obstacles that it could continue working on. An open form was then made available for member unions to submit comments. The third and final occasion was at the spring members' meeting when the Board put forward proposals based on views it had previously received and the general situation. In its proposed operational plan, the Board has worked to ensure a reasonable load and taken into account possibilities to have an influence in the issues. The Board proposes a restrictive approach to the number of issues, with the ambition to be able to work more substantively on the issues.

The operational plan's structure has been simplified in recent years and today sets out priority issues for SFS to engage with. The issues in the operational plan are those that have been raised in conversations with authorities and which are usually given greater scope in SFS's policies and activities.

More resources in terms of both funds and time are to be reserved for the assignments in the operational plan. There are two types of issues in the operational plan: three-year focus issues and one-year priority issues. This year, it is the latter that the Board is proposing for the 2023/24 financial year.

It is proposed that the three-year issues remain without adjustment. It is proposed that a new political focus issue is presented for the 2023/24 financial year, for preparation by the Board. Besides this, the financial year is characterised by global events. One issue among others that the Board knows will be discussed is a new research proposition.

There are also issues in the Tidö political agreement related to students and doctoral students. SFS will be monitoring these issues. Besides the issues set out in the operational plan for 2023/24, SFS will continue to work on previous years' issues, such as health and housing, in order to make use of the work that has commenced.

Background to proposal for new issues

The majority of students at first- or second-cycle level fund themselves through student finance. The current student finance system is a basic prerequisite for an open and egalitarian higher education. Forms of education and students' living conditions have changed and certain parts of the student finance system can now constitute an obstacle to students' ability to support themselves. We have observed in the 2022/23 financial year how the financial situation for students has worsened. Besides high inflation, soaring energy costs and an inadequate adjustment of the student loan and grant in relation to inflation, student finance has actually been reduced.

The Board proposes to investigate an issue that is of particular importance for doctoral



students: An appropriate and legally secure individual study plan (ISP). This issue has been prepared with the support of the SFS Postgraduate Student Committee. An individual



study plan is drawn up for each doctoral student in which the student's and the higher education institution's undertakings are defined and which specifies how the student should achieve the learning objectives in the general syllabus. Among other things, the ISP sets out which courses and educational elements the doctoral student plans to complete, the supervisor's role and undertaking, the supervision's scope and time schedule. The ISP functions as a governing, legal document specifying how the doctoral student will achieve the learning objectives in the general syllabus. The ISP also constitutes a tool for ongoing planning and documentation of the doctoral programme, in which the doctoral student's performance is also measured. The document consequently both places requirements on the doctoral student and protects the student's rights. In situations where the doctoral student feels that the higher education institution has not provided the resources necessary to achieve the learning objectives or if resources are withdrawn where the higher education institution claims that the doctoral student has seriously neglected his or her obligations, the ISP constitutes an important basis for remedial measures.

Digital elements are becoming increasingly common and are changing the conditions to pursue, access and deliver educational programmes. The rapid development within the area requires both resources and better conditions to ensure high quality. Enabling this to take place will require the student movement to set requirements that educational quality is not impaired in the rapid development that is underway with regard to the digital transition. In recent years, the issue has been discussed within SFS, but not prioritised, the Board now feels that the issue needs to be made a priority.

In spring 2023, the higher education sector was surprised by the issue of open and accessible Artificial Intelligence, AI, and the higher education institution are now trying to determine how it should be dealt with operationally. In a divided debate, the Board believes that SFS should take a leading position and put forward the students' view of how AI can be used in higher education.



Draft decisions

The Board proposes to the General Assembly
to adopt SFS operational plan for 2023/24.



Operational plan 2023/24
Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS)

SFS



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Introduction

The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) is the national lobbying organisation for student unions and students. SFS works nationally and internationally on issues in relation to high-quality education and better studying conditions. SFS will make the voices of students and postgraduates heard in contexts where higher education is addressed or subject to decisions. SFS appoints student representatives to national bodies, responds to referrals, publishes reports and keeps up to date with the world at large. The political lobbying work must be supported by the organisation in which member activities are held. These organisations will promote discussion and exchange of experience between member unions.

The operational plan is adopted by the highest decision-making body, the General Assembly, and constitutes the basis for the work during the 2023/24 financial year. It is then the responsibility of the Board, committees and Secretariat to formulate and implement the General Assembly's decisions based on the ambitions of the operational plan. The assignment is limited to two focus issues that run over three years, as well as four one-year priority issues. The activities require solid preparation, implementation and supplementary work. SFS's bodies and departments must therefore receive operational support and structure in order to carry out their activities. SFS's Board will also designate a city that works to promote students' and postgraduate students' situation and living conditions as "Student City of the Year". The plan is to hold SFS General Assembly for the following financial year in the designated city.

Focus issues

SFS has two political focus issues that run over three years. The political and organisational focus issue is adopted by the General Assembly in subsequent years. Work is initiated during the first year, with most of the activities carried out in the second year, and the third year planned for further work, implementation and follow-up. A clear and definite form for the focus issues contributes to strengthening SFS's lobbying work and organisation.

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.



Stop the underfunding of higher education

Lack of resources is a major obstacle to achieving high quality education. In order for educational programmes to achieve and maintain a high level of quality, the actual



costs of the education need to be covered. Current funding for education is not sufficient to create the conditions for high educational quality and an outdated system of allocating resources reinforces the impact of this underfunding.

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. For there to be a real opportunity to implement high-quality education, the basic grant needs to be increased, the resource allocation system adapted to the actual costs of the education and the productivity deduction abolished.

Better conditions for teaching methods in higher education

In order to achieve a high quality of education, everyone who teaches needs to have a basic training in teaching methods for higher education, as well as regularly undergo high-quality skills development in higher education teaching methods. As with all education, a strong research base is required in higher education teaching methods. It should be a priority nationally, as well as at each higher education institution, that research is conducted into higher education teaching methods, as well as that courses in higher education teaching methods should be based on research. The pedagogical units at the institutions have a specific responsibility to develop the skills of academic staff within traditional and digital forms, as well as in any future forms of work and educational assignments. For this to be possible, resources need to be allocated and structures put in place for a national exchange.

For more people to have a meaningful access to higher education, special pedagogical initiatives should be developed. A national context should be created where questions about special pedagogical initiatives can be discussed. This could enable more equivalent special pedagogical initiatives to exist within the higher education institutions, as well as between the higher education institutions and in higher education.

Organisational focus issue 22/23-24/25

Importance and value of engagement

Adopted by the General Assembly in 2022

It is important that SFS is an organisation that safeguards and strengthens those who choose to get involved and that that engagement does not risk leading to unfavourable consequences for the individual. SFS has been working for several years to strengthen students' well-being and mental health, however, what has not been as prominent is the work in relation to well-being among elected representatives within the organisation. SFS is not immune from the problems that are also reflected in society, and further focus is therefore required to create a sustainable organisation that safeguards its elected officers and their engagement.

The organisational focus issue consists of four areas that include aspects of how SFS can formulate the activities in order for sustainable engagement to be in focus. It concerns SFS having an inclusive and sustainable leadership and beneficial conditions for engagement, systematic and accessible training within the organisation, and

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appreciation and value placed on engagement in SFS.



Sustainable leadership

All elements of SFS's organisation shall be characterised by long-term, inclusive and sustainable leadership. There should be a clear responsibility on the part of the leader in relation to ensuring equality of knowledge, good communication, development and understanding of individuals' conditions and tasks. SFS should have a culture where leadership is imbued with openness and participation. SFS must inspire future leaders in the student movement and ensure SFS's survival and stability in the education sector.

Forms of engagement

SFS shall endeavour to ensure that engagement continues to grow and that elected representatives within the organisation are provided with beneficial conditions to fulfil their commitments. If engagement is to continue to grow, it requires continuity and recruitment. Recruitment of elected representatives needs to be improved, which is achieved partly through development of the activities and partly through developing the work of the Election Committee. Continuity within the organisation should also be valued and maintained as it is important in ensuring the organisation's survival.

In addition to this, SFS needs to put work into strengthening the conditions for taking on and executing an elected post. Conditions vary and can be affected by practical obstacles as well as the elected representative's life situation, which means that the organisation needs to work actively to lower thresholds for engagement in SFS. In order for the varied conditions of elected representatives not to play a significant role, it is of great importance that there is clarity in how assignments are formulated and that they are designed systematically.

Live learning

Learning from and within SFS is important to ensure the organisation's survival and development. The handover between old and new is needed to ensure that relevant information and different established ways of working are not lost. For volunteers, it is crucial for the assignment that an appropriate introduction is available regardless of which assignment they will perform within SFS. Major opportunities for training in a range of relevant areas should also be available for elected officers in the organisation. To ensure that handover, introduction and training are accessible and appropriate, standardised processes should be developed for these areas.

Working methods and opportunities for learning must be systematic to ensure that knowledge and engagement are not lost between terms of office.

The value of engagement Everyone who participates in SFS is involved in strengthening the organisation and the student movement. The majority of the assignments within SFS take place on a voluntary basis and it is therefore important that the organisation works to make the individual feel valuable. In order to show appreciation to those who get involved, SFS should work with different forms of appreciation symbols. Appreciation for elected representatives within SFS should be prioritised so that there is a culture within SFS where engagement is appreciated. The engagement itself, as well as the



assignments that exist within SFS, are enriching in terms of, for example, experience, networking and skills, which should be further strengthened.

Priority issues

Students' financial situation

SFS report [The limits of student finance - an evaluation of how the student finance system has developed for different groups of higher education students since the reform in 2001](#) shows that the student finance system needs to be modernised. Today, students have more or different needs than the current student finance system can meet. For example, it is not possible to get back weeks that have been used, this is directly counter-productive to ambitions for lifelong learning. There are other parts of the student finance system that do not interact particularly well with a contemporary study- and living situation such as the possibility of separating grant and loan or how the threshold is formulated.

The majority of the country's students live in places that suffer from a shortage of student accommodation. Many students consequently experience an insecure situation and sublet accommodation or rent a room. The housing allowance can relieve students' housing situation, but the allowance is not adapted for students and many do not apply through fear of being required to make repayments. The housing allowance should be made available and adapted to better meet the students' needs in line with [The inquiry into housing allowance and maintenance support – reduced indebtedness and increased accuracy](#).

Mandatory work placements often entail additional costs for which the student is not compensated. Additional costs for studies should not burden the student and, regardless of study location, national guidelines for compensation so that a student can benefit from the entire programme are called for.

Ambitions

- SFS will work to ensure a more appropriate and modern student finance.
- SFS will work to ensure that the housing allowance is made available for students.
- SFS will work to ensure that students are compensated for costs related to mandatory work placements.

An appropriate and legally secure ISP

There are problem areas and ambiguities associated with the individual study plan, ISP. The report [How are postgraduate students feeling](#) suggests that doctoral students are generally positive towards ISP, however, it also states that one third do not feel it is meaningful and just over one tenth feel that it contributes to stress. Discussions with doctoral organisations in the higher education institutions confirm that the work is perceived as administrative and time-consuming, so in many cases it is left entirely up to the doctoral student to update. It also emerges that the process differs between higher education institutions. Aspects that do not function well at one institution are dealt with



better at another, which illustrates the need for exchange of experience to be strengthened nationally.

If establishment of and work on ISPs takes place on an arbitrary basis, doctoral students can be exposed to risk, as they often find themselves in situations where they are dependent on specific individuals. There is not currently an overall approach to how ISPs can be improved in order to be effective and contribute to higher quality doctoral programmes and a better study environment for doctoral students. There is therefore a need for SFS to intensify its work on the issue.

Ambitions

- SFS will highlight the doctoral student's and the higher education institution's undertaking through and in the individual study plan.
- SFS will facilitate a national exchange of experience and the dissemination of good examples of the establishment of and the work on individual study plans.

Remote learning

Today, one in five students in Sweden is registered on a remote programme. Despite this, the student union movement does not have an underlying position, approach and opinions when it comes to remote education. This form of education is also expected to increase in connection with the transition in society, where universities need to welcome students who have different conditions than students on campus-based programmes. Obviously, remote programmes must have the same perspective and approach as other programmes within the higher education institutions, but at the same time, remote education has several distinctive features that makes it different. It is time for SFS to engage in the issue of remote education in order to develop its monitoring of programmes, ability to represent all students and at the same time support member unions in their work on remote education. The question of student influence on remote programmes is also unresearched. It is not clear whether traditional forms of student influence such as course evaluations, student representation and student union involvement have as much of an impact on remote programmes.

Ambitions

- SFS will develop SFS's opinions on remote education.
- SFS will strengthen the student perspective on the issue of remote education.

Artificial Intelligence in higher education

Artificial intelligence, AI, is an area that is under development and discussed increasingly frequently among higher education institutions and authorities, but the subject remains complex. This is partly due to ignorance surrounding the ethical and legal challenges, but also the conditions it enables for better quality education. SFS does not currently have either an underlying position or opinions surrounding AI, and it also lacks an understanding of its impact on higher education. Due to the rapid development in the area and the discussions being held, SFS therefore intends to prioritise the issue in



order to be proactive and ensure that high quality is retained within higher education.

Ambitions

- SFS will take an active role in the issue of artificial intelligence in higher education.