



SFS Operational Plan 2024/25

Proposal 1



Covering letter

Proposition 1: SFS operational plan 2024/25

The Board is responsible for preparing proposals for the operational plan for Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS) General Assembly, SFSFUM. To prepare this, the Board has issued invitations to submit comments on proposals during four members' meetings and through three different surveys, which results in 7 total occasions. Initially during the autumn members' meeting in Umeå the Board invited the member unions to inform SFS on what the current matters are at their respective higher education institutions, and what did not work the way it should. This was done so that the Board could get material needed to propose a new political focus issue, something that went into the work of producing a new proposed operational plan. After that there were two digital members' meetings where the member unions were invited to submit comments on the work on the new political focus issue. The fourth, and final occasion, was at the members' meeting in Ultuna where the Board presented the proposed operational plan that was based on previously collected comments and the general situation.

In its proposed operational plan, the Board has worked to ensure that there is cohesion in the issues and that the most current, and crucial, matters for students and the student unions are presented. The Board proposes a restrictive approach to the number of issues, with the ambition to be able to work more substantively on the issues. With this the Board will decrease in number, going from thirteen to nine, during the upcoming financial year, which is something that needs to be taken into consideration in the operational plan.

The operational plan's structure has been simplified in recent years and today maps out two matters that will be prioritised for three years, and a few matters that will be prioritised for a year. 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 attention, funds and time are to be reserved for the assignments in the operational plan.

The three-year organisational focus issue is adopted for the period 2022/23-24/25. The Board is suggesting a new three-year political focus issue for the operational years of 2024/25-2026/27. Besides this, the Board has taken global events into consideration that might affect the upcoming financial year. Issues that the Board knows will be discussed is the new research and innovation proposal from the government, and the overall socioeconomic situation. There are also issues in the Tidö political agreement related to students and doctoral students. SFS will continue to monitor these issues. Besides the issues set out in the proposed operational plan, SFS will probably continue to work on previous years' issues in some capacity, such as the ISP for doctoral students and higher education pedagogy, in order to make use of the work that has commenced.

Background to proposals for new issues

When the Board was coming up with a new political focus issue, and prioritised issues, they have tried to analyse what issues are of importance for the students and the member unions of SFS. In the final proposal the Board believes that a comprehensive

suggestion has been made. The quality of education has kept current during the financial year, and that is why the Board suggests that SFS involvement is to continue in the matter and, not only, will the focus be on the financial system but also on academic freedom. The student welfare matters are also important, which is why the Board has decided to suggest that they will be a part of a prioritised issue. Lastly the prerequisites of student unions has become a highly current issue, which is why the Board also has included this in the issues in the operational plan.

When it comes to the quality of education the Board suggests that SFS continues to focus on changing the financing of higher education. It is work that has, basically, been going on since the introduction of the current system back in 1993. Since the introduction of the performance-based system, there has been an extensive hollowing out of higher education. It is currently estimated that seven billion Swedish kronor is missing in order to ensure that the funding will reach the levels that were when the system was introduced. Therefore, the Board, after discussions with the member unions, has made the judgement that the issue of hollowing out higher education is still current and fully central for the education quality for students. SFS needs to continue to push for a reform in the financial system. Another fundamental part of education is that it is to be free from influence, and that it can operate freely from the basis of science and art. The discussion about academic freedom, and its status in Sweden, has become more and more current. Neither policy on a day-to-day basis or the short term financial interests should define what can, and cannot, be researched or taught at the higher education institutions. Academic freedom is not only central for the higher education institutions, but it is also central in society and for the student movement. Therefore, the Board suggests that SFS will get involved in the issue of academic freedom, this as a part of the work to guarantee a high qualitative education for students and to add the student perspective to the issue.

The legally mandated student influence in Sweden is conducted through student unions, and through SFS. In their analysis, the Board has noted that there are alarming problems and challenges that we need to fight in order for them to change. A lot of student unions today find themselves experiencing difficult prerequisites when working with their core mission. In the first budget proposal of the government, the funding for student influence was cut. The student union movement has to gather now in order to stop the cuts in finance, and create prerequisites for student influence that are good. Furthermore, the Board sees that it needs more knowledge, and more of a basis, that can support the student union movement when it comes to our prerequisites and the future. There is also a lot of room for improvement in making it possible for international students to participate in the student union movement. Lastly it is also important that SFS protects its finances and the organisation in order to guarantee survival, especially in times when the conditions are uncertain.

SFS has been a part of the student welfare issues since the early 20th century. Since the student finance system was introduced it has been a crucial prerequisite in order to go through a higher education. However, types of education and students' living situation has since changed, and certain parts of the system can now constitute an obstacle to students' studies and their lives. Combined with high inflation, an insufficient revaluation and strikingly high rent levels on student housing, it all leads to a real

reduction in the student finance. Therefore the student finance system needs to be reformed, and there also needs to be other reforms within student welfare in order to facilitate students. Among other things there needs to be a change in the housing allowance and the possibility of being on sick leave part time.

In a lot of the issues that the Board has talked about in the text above, it is often a matter of a work that will stretch out for longer than a year. However the Board believes that the issues are current enough that they need some extra focus for the upcoming year. The Board would like to emphasise the importance of SFS as an organisation that must relate to the long term, and therefore it is important to evaluate how, and if, these issues can be worked on during the future years.

Draft decisions

The Board proposes to the General Assembly
to adopt SFS operational plan for 2024/25.



Verksamhetsplan 2024/2025

Sveriges förenade studentkårer

SFS

Table of contents

Introduction	1
Focus issues	2
Political focus issue 2024/25-26/27	
The path forward for higher education	3
Reform the financial system for universities and colleges	3
Academic freedom	3
Organisational focus issue 22/23-24/25	
Importance and value of engagement	5
Sustainable leadership	5
Forms of engagement	5
Live learning	6
The value of engagement	6
Priority issues	7
The prerequisites of the student unions	7
A sustainable student economy	8



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 2024/25 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. The Board of SFS 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 the SFS General Assembly for the following financial year in the designated city.



Focus issues

SFS has two focus issues that run over three years, a political focus issue and an organisational focus issue. 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.

At the General Assembly in 2021 the assembly decided to adopt the political focus issue “Conditions for high educational quality” (SFS operational plan 2020/21 Dnr: O412-2/2021). With this document a new political focus issue for 2024/25-2026/27 is suggested: The path forward for higher education.



Political focus issue 2024/25-26/27

The path forward for higher education

Adopted by the General Assembly in 2024

All students have the right to a high quality education. Even if the definition of quality is something that differs between subject areas, there are still some prerequisites that ensure that the education works. On a fundamental basis there is a need for a functioning financial system, and a fundamental academic freedom that allows academia to flourish and grow into its full potential. SFS is an important driving force in guaranteeing a high quality education, and consistently pushes issues that are related to students.

Reform the financial system for universities and colleges

The financial system for higher education and research continues to hinder the development in Sweden. In order to achieve and maintain a high quality education the actual costs for that education, as in teaching staff and room, need to be covered by the financial system. The current financial system for higher education does not take into account the increase of costs and the increased demand on higher educational institutions. Hollowed-out governmental compensation amount (ersättningsbelopp), in addition to the limitations that exist with the current financial system, tries to remove obstacles but instead it just adds more of them and in the end results in the lack of prerequisites for quality in a higher education. Simultaneously the productivity deduction (produktivitetsavdrag) continues to, each year, weaken the universities and colleges.

The financial system for higher education needs to change in order to guarantee a higher quality in education, research basis and the opportunity for learning for students. The governmental compensation amount needs to increase whilst either removing, or decreasing, the performance-based part of the amount. The productivity deduction needs to be abolished and the financial system needs a fundamental remake.

Academic freedom

In recent years it has not mattered what side, or colour, the government has been. One thing that has been a common denominator in the different governments has been that the policy regarding higher education has been marked by encroachments on academic freedom. This has been everything from shortened mandates of the boards of higher educational institutes, to arbitrarily set qualitative targets. The political will to control academia is not only unfortunate but also damaging. The education that students take a part of is at a risk to be characterised by political visions and election promises, instead of being based on research.

There needs to be more actions taken in order to protect academic freedom from being run by political governance. The freedom of education needs to be regulated in the constitutions on the same basis as the freedom of research, the number of qualitative targets regulated by law needs to be lowered, and the state governance of the operations



of higher educational institutions needs to stop while the independence of academia needs to increase.



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 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 the survival of SFS 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

The prerequisites of the student unions

All student unions work to achieve a common goal, despite traditions, size or place: to make the life of a student be a better one. The prerequisites to operate as a student union, both locally at their higher education institution and nearby area, continues to weaken. The opportunity for student influence is key within academia and a basic requirement to ensure quality within the education. As the prerequisites of the student unions change, new needs arise for SFS to meet and protect on a national level.

The decrease of direct government funding that was announced by the government hollows out the possibilities for student unions to have a long term influence. At the same time there is an all time high inflation that affects the funds, meaning that the funds that once were enough to finance the operations now are slowly losing their value. When the compulsory students' union membership was abolished there was a calculation made that showed that the direct government funding for student unions had to amount to 310 kr per HST, which today equals about 400 kr. This amount was to ensure that the student unions could operate to the same extent and with the same quality. In reality, when the proposal became a reality, the direct government funding amounted to about 100 kr per HST. The Swedish Higher Education Authority has proposed raising the amount to be three or four times higher. The direct government funding needs to increase in order to strengthen and ensure student influence. Such reinforcements would improve the prerequisites for developing the quality significantly at our universities and colleges.

In 2017 The Swedish Higher Education Authority published the report [Studentinflytandet – Kartläggning och analys av studentinflytandets förutsättningar efter kårobligatoriets avskaffande](#) (Student influence - mapping and analysis of the prerequisites of student influence after the compulsory students' union membership was abolished). The report highlights a lot of important parts of the prerequisites and challenges in the future for student unions. A similar study, or a following report, should be done in order to provide a better state of knowledge and foundation. It can reasonably be carried out either by SFS or, with a request from SFS, an authority or a government investigation.

The participation of international students within the student unions needs to be strengthened, and the residence permit cannot be an obstacle for being active in the student union movement. Obstacles on a national level need to be removed so that international students can be active in student unions, and also take on remunerated positions that would require taking a break in their studies. Through this the student influence can be further strengthened.

As the prerequisites for student unions' change, so do the prerequisites for SFS. Therefore, SFS will actively work to maintain a sustainable economy to ensure long-term survival.

Ambitions:

- SFS shall work for a permanent increase in the direct government funding for student unions.
- SFS shall work for a mapping to be done of the prerequisites for the student union movement in Sweden.
- SFS shall work to eliminate obstacles on a national level so that international students are able to take remunerated positions of trusts at a student union.
- SFS shall work to ensure a sustainable economy and organisation.

A sustainable student economy

It is time to modernise the student finance system. For over one hundred years the system has been a crucial factor in attending a higher education. There needs to be new reforms if the system is to fully serve its purpose in today's reality. Particular focus needs to be that the system can guarantee that students have a functional financial situation, and the possibility of recovery.

The length of higher education has increased since the Bologna Process and the new System of Qualifications was adopted in 2007, something that wasn't followed up with adjustments in the student finance system. To ensure that everyone has the possibility to attend an education on a higher level it is important to have a student finance system that is flexible. The students of today aren't just met with longer programmes but also with a need to broaden their skills, something that is needed in order to face a labour market that is under constant development. There needs to be a student finance system that is better adapted in facing the needs of the students.

A lot of students also choose to work while studying, and then work full-time during the summer. This is to ensure that they have enough income to support themselves during their studies. To ensure that the period of study is more equal for all students it is important that earned income allowance is tried with monthly data, this is to ensure that students don't risk having to pay back their student finance due to choosing or needing to work.

In Sweden there is also a wide housing shortage that affects a lot of students, who often get referred to second-hand accommodation and newly built housing that, in the end, can be a lot more expensive than the average. Today students spend about 33% of their monthly income on accommodation, in comparison other groups in society spend about 20% of their monthly income. The current system, where there is a separate housing allowance with Försäkringskassan, is neither efficient nor is it sustainable. Instead it causes confusion for both parties and is a contributing factor to frustration in the already stressful life of a student that is in need of financial aid. To minimise the risk of having to pay the allowance back, the government should establish having the housing allowance be regulated with monthly data.

In recent years the mental health in society has declined, and students are a group that is particularly affected by this. In a report from 2021, The Swedish Board of Student Finance (CSN) stated that a third of students that state they are experiencing health



issues do so due to their financial situation. Today it is impossible for students to study part time and also be on part time sick leave. Instead students either have to go on full time sick leave or just keep fighting through their education, despite them suffering from some form of health issue. This is something that would be considered unreasonable at a workplace, and should also be considered unreasonable for students.

Ambitions:

- SFS shall work for a more purposive and modern student finance, with particular focus on guaranteeing recovery and a decent standard of living.
- SFS shall work to make the housing allowance available to students.
- SFS shall work to make it possible for students to go on part time sick leave.