



SFS Operational Plan 2025/26

Proposition 1





Cover Letter

Proposition 1: SFS Activity Plan 2025/26

It is the responsibility of the board to prepare a proposed operational plan for the General Assembly, SFSFUM.

In recent years, the operational plan has followed the same structure: two three-year focus areas, one political and one organisational, as well as a number of one-year prioritised issues. The three-year political focus area has been adopted for the period 2024/25–2026/27. The proposed operational plan is largely shaped by the announced reduction in funding for student influence. This represents a severe blow to student unions and SFS.

During the operational year, the Board has gathered proposals from member unions through both member meetings and visits. The Board proposes a new three-year organisational focus area for the operational years 2025/26–2027/28, as well as three one-year prioritised issues.

The Board assesses that the issues highlighted in the operational plan are critical for both student unions and students across the country and will shape the activities that SFS should prioritise in the upcoming operational year. The Board has also included issues raised in discussions with politicians and government agencies, as well as issues identified as areas that typically receive more attention in SFS policy and operations.

SFS's activities extend beyond the activity plan. The upcoming operational year will be shaped by the inquiries announced by the government in the autumn 2024 budget bill and the Research and Innovation Bill, as well as the 2026 parliamentary election.

The operational plan significantly guides how SFS allocates its time and resources.

Background to the Proposal for a New Organisational Focus Area

SFS's organisational focus area aims to strengthen member unions' influence over SFS as an organisation by setting a direction for the next three years.

How the ambitions of the organisational focus area are translated from words into action is specified and planned in the first phase of work during the first year of the focus area. After that, the focus shifts to implementation.

The current organisational focus area, *The Importance and Value of Engagement*, focuses on increasing engagement in SFS and ensuring that involvement in SFS is sustainable. *The Importance and Value of Engagement* has contributed to systematising how SFS works with elected representatives and student representatives. Routines and processes have been introduced to ensure that engaged individuals have the right conditions and that engagement feels rewarding. It has also led to the development of member coordination, where SFS now has networks and member meetings that are continuously

evaluated. This focus area was adopted during a time shaped by the pandemic and the challenges it posed for the student movement. In retrospect, it has at times been perceived as unclear, and the concretizations that have been made have not been clear to members. This is a lesson that the Board takes with them.

In preparing the new organisational focus area, the Board discussed the future of the student movement and SFS's priorities for achieving its vision. In developing a new organisational focus area, the need for a long-term vision and direction was emphasised. Rather than being internally focused on SFS, the new organisational focus area should take a comprehensive approach to the student movement. SFS is currently the voice of students in the national debate, but the announced reduction in funding for student unions and SFS has demonstrated the need for a united front. By working together, SFS and student unions can make the student movement a significant social force. In this spirit, the proposed new organisational focus area emerged: *A Strong and United Student Movement*.

Background to the Proposal for Prioritised Issues

In identifying prioritised issues, the Board has sought to highlight topics of particular importance to SFS's member unions and Sweden's students. The Board considers that these issues cover the priorities identified during the operational year. The announced reduction in state funding remains relevant, and the final decision will be made in the budget bill for 2026. Beyond this, deteriorating economic conditions continue to challenge students, which is why the Board proposes prioritising this policy area in the next operational year. Finally, the Board has chosen to highlight Students at Risk, a program aimed at enabling students under persecution to complete their studies in Sweden.

Given the announced reduction in funding for student unions, the Board proposes a prioritised issue regarding student union financing. The autumn budget bill will confirm whether the announced cuts will be realised, and beyond this, the 2025/26 operational year will be shaped by an emerging election campaign. The Board considers it essential that SFS prioritises securing funding for student unions. All student unions should have the opportunity to conduct student advocacy at their institutions. Student influence is central to academia and a fundamental requirement for ensuring that education is of high quality and evolves in line with society. Representing a broader range of students with new student groups places new demands on student unions, which must be reflected in government funding. A reduction in funding undermines the ability of student unions to fulfill their core mission. It is crucial that the student movement unites to prevent the announced cuts and advocates for an increase that ensures long-term stability in student unions' operations.

The Board also proposes a prioritised issue concerning students' economic conditions. The government has announced its intention to initiate a review of the student financial aid system. Students are heavily affected by rising costs in society, and it is high time to reevaluate the student financial aid system, which has remained largely unchanged since 2001. The conditions for studying and students' life situations have changed significantly since then, but student financial aid remains a crucial component of students' ability to pursue higher education.

Finally, the Board considers it timely to highlight the issue of Students at Risk (StAR). Many students worldwide lack the conditions to continue their studies and face threats and persecution due to their involvement in the student movement. Students at Risk is a program that enables students facing such circumstances to continue their education in Sweden. Similar programs already exist for researchers, where SFS and several institutions are already members. For StAR to achieve long-term sustainability, it needs to be prioritised, and SFS must collaborate with institutions and government agencies that can influence the issue. The right to education is a right worth defending, and StAR can give more students the opportunity to complete their education free from oppression.



Proposed decision

The Board proposes to the General Assembly

(#2-1) to adopt SFS operational plan for 2025/26.



Verksamhetsplan

2025/2026

Sveriges förenade studentkårer

SFS



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Introduction

Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS) is the national advocacy organisation for student unions and students. SFS works both nationally and internationally on issues concerning high-quality education and better conditions for studying. SFS ensures that the voices of students and doctoral candidates are heard in forums where higher education is discussed or decided upon. SFS appoints student representatives to national bodies, responds to government referrals, publishes reports, and monitors public discourse. The political advocacy work is anchored in the member unions, who contribute through various membership activities with input, knowledge exchange, and discussions.

The operational plan forms the foundation of activities during the 2025/26 operational year. It consists of two three-year focus areas and three one-year priority issues. The operational plan is adopted by the General Assembly and is then further specified and implemented by the Board and the SFS office.

During the operational year, the Board will select the *Student City of the Year*. This award is given to a city that actively works to improve the conditions for students. The selected *Student City of the Year* is expected to host the SFS General Assembly in the following operational year. Additionally, SFS will publish its annual housing report during the operational year.

SFS will conduct active external monitoring to remain relevant and alert in the public debate. SFS will continue to monitor issues that SFS has previously worked on to ensure continuity and sustainability, even if these are not designated as political focus areas or priority issues for the operational year. Therefore, SFS will specifically monitor:

- Students' work environment
- Pedagogy of higher education
- Announced and ongoing government inquiries

The government's announced reduction in funding for student unions represents an existential threat to both the unions and SFS. During the operational year, SFS will also revise its opinion programme document, which necessitates significant policy development. It is important that member unions are involved in this revision process.

Although the European Union formally lacks authority to legislate on higher education issues, Europe is becoming an increasingly important partner for Swedish universities. SFS should prioritise its international engagement more clearly in its operations. During the operational year, SFS will develop its work on European education policy in connection with the revision of the opinion programme.



The 2025/26 operational year will conclude just over three months before the 2026 parliamentary election. Special attention should therefore be given to the election campaign.

It is crucial that SFS works on these issues to ensure that its political advocacy remains relevant and effective.

Focus Areas

SFS has two focus areas, one political and one organisational, each spanning three years. The political and organisational focus areas are adopted by the General Assembly. In the first year, work is initiated, in the second year, most activities are implemented, and in the third year, further work, implementation, and follow-up are planned. A clear and structured format for focus areas strengthens SFS's advocacy efforts and organisational development.

At the SFS General Assembly in 2022, the Assembly decided to adopt the organisational focus area *The Importance and Value of Engagement*. In this document, a new organisational focus area for 2025/26–2027/28 is proposed: *A Strong and United Student Movement*.



Political Focus Area 2024/25 - 2026/27

The Way Forward for Higher Education

Adopted by the General Assembly in 2024. All students have the right to high-quality education. Although the definition of quality varies across disciplines, certain conditions are necessary for education to function effectively for everyone. Fundamentally, a well-functioning financing system and basic academic freedom are required to allow academia to reach its full potential. SFS is a key driver in ensuring high-quality education and consistently advocating for student-centred issues.

Reforming the Higher Education Funding System

The funding system for higher education and research continues to act as a constraint on Sweden's progress. To achieve and maintain high-quality education, funding must meet the actual resource needs of education. Escalating property costs consume an excessively large portion of university budgets—funds that could instead be allocated to teaching and research. These costs must be reduced, and the government must compensate universities for their expenditures. The current funding system does not account for cost developments or the increasing demands placed on universities. Deteriorating state funding allocations, combined with the limitations of the current system, create obstacles rather than solutions, resulting in insufficient conditions for high-quality education. Additionally, the annual productivity deduction continues to weaken universities and colleges. The funding system for higher education must be reformed to guarantee high quality, research integration, and effective learning opportunities for students. State funding allocations should be increased, the performance-based component should be removed or reduced, the productivity deduction should be abolished, university property costs should be reduced, and the funding system should be comprehensively restructured.

Academic Freedom

Regardless of the ruling government, recent years in higher education policy have been marked by infringements on academic freedom, from shortened board mandates to arbitrarily set degree targets. Political attempts to control academia are both unfortunate and harmful. Students' education risks being shaped more by political visions and campaign promises than by science. Several measures are therefore needed to protect academic freedom from political interference. The freedom of education should be constitutionally protected, just as the freedom of research is. The number of degree targets in the Higher Education Ordinance must be reduced, government micromanagement of university operations must cease, and the independence of academia must be strengthened.



Organisational Focus Area 2025/26 - 2027/28

A Strong and United Student Movement

The purpose of Sweden's National Union of Students (SFS) is to advocate for and protect the interests of member unions and students through political influence. A strong and united student movement enables successful advocacy efforts to ensure that Sweden's students have the necessary conditions to pursue high-quality education that benefits both individuals and society.

A strong and united student movement has a collective voice and purpose, working together toward shared goals. A united student movement does not mean uniformity of opinion; rather, it is crucial that diverse views and perspectives are represented. Enhanced collaboration between member unions and SFS strengthens the student movement as a national voice. SFS is well-positioned to support member unions' local political advocacy by serving as a knowledge resource and facilitating networking and experience-sharing opportunities. At the same time, SFS needs to increase member unions' involvement in national advocacy efforts.

A strong and united student movement actively engages many students. Greater representation ensures that all students' interests are considered and enhances the legitimacy of advocacy efforts. Increased engagement strengthens the movement's ability to influence decision-making. A strong student movement is one that is not only strong today but also in the future. More members and engaged students create favourable conditions for independence, stability, and long-term financial and organisational sustainability for both SFS and member unions.

Together, SFS and the student unions form Sweden's student movement, and we must stand united in facing future challenges.

Ambitions:

- SFS shall strengthen member unions' capacity for political advocacy.
- SFS shall include member unions in ongoing national advocacy efforts.
- Membership in SFS shall have a clear value.
- SFS shall work to increase the number of student unions that are members of SFS.

Priority Issues

Student Union Financing

All student unions, regardless of tradition, size, or location, work toward a common goal: to improve conditions for students. The ability of students to influence their education is central to academia and a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring that education is of high quality and develops in line with society. SFS plays a crucial role as a national force in safeguarding student union financing to enable continued high-quality student representation.

The government's announced reduction in funding for student influence undermines student unions' ability to sustain long-term advocacy. At the same time, rising costs mean that the financial support student unions receive loses value each year. Before the abolition of mandatory student union membership, the government inquiry [“Freedom for Students – On How to Abolish the Student Union and Nation Obligations”](#) proposed a grant of 310 SEK per full-time student, which today would amount to over 400 SEK. However, when implemented, the actual grant was only about 100 SEK per full-time student. [In 2017, the Swedish Higher Education Authority \(UKÄ\) proposed a three- to fourfold increase in the grant](#), yet after the planned reduction in 2026, the funding per student is projected to be at its lowest level ever. The final decision on this funding reduction is expected in the autumn budget bill. Should the proposed cut take effect, the focus must be on securing a permanent increase in the future.

Student unions are facing new challenges as the student body becomes increasingly diverse. More students are studying remotely, more professionals are continuing their education, and the proportion of international students at Swedish institutions is growing. Representing this expanding diversity places new demands on student unions, which must be reflected in government funding. Every year, inflation erodes fixed grants. It is therefore essential that future grants are adjusted for inflation to ensure long-term, stable support for student unions. An increasing number of student unions rely on financial support from their institutions, which can compromise their independence. This situation could lead student unions to deprioritise certain issues to maintain good relations with their institutions and secure their funding.

Funding for student unions must be increased to ensure strong student influence. This is essential for student unions to fulfil their statutory duties. A weakened student influence will lead to education that is less adaptable to future needs and of lower quality, dealing a severe blow to Sweden as a knowledge-driven nation.

Ambitions:

- SFS shall work for a permanent increase in government funding for student unions.
- SFS shall advocate for inflation-adjusted government funding.

A Sustainable Student Economy

In its 2025 budget bill, the government announced an inquiry to review the student financial aid system. It is long overdue to modernise the system, which has remained largely unchanged since 2001. For over a century, student financial aid has been a key enabler of higher education accessibility. However, reforms are necessary to ensure the system fully serves today's students. In the report [Student Aid Reform](#), SFS proposes several reforms to modernise the financial aid system. During the operational year, SFS will work to ensure that an inquiry aimed at reforming the system is launched.

To strengthen access to education for all, flexible financial aid that meets students' needs is crucial. Students today face not only longer study periods but also the need to broaden their competencies to match an evolving job market. Several programmes require work-based placements (VFU) as a prerequisite for graduation and certification, resulting in increased costs for students, including placements outside commuting distance. No student should have to bear additional costs due to mandatory educational components.

Students enrolled in preparatory and introductory higher education programmes, such as technical and natural sciences foundation programmes, currently lack student status. Although their studies are largely equivalent to those of regular students, they do not have the right to student representation under the Higher Education Act or disciplinary protection under the Higher Education Ordinance. Instead, these programmes are regulated under the *2018:1519 Ordinance on Preparatory and Introductory Higher Education*. Additionally, students in foundation year programmes must meet a 100% academic completion rate to receive financial aid, which may prevent them from continuing into their degree programmes if they fail a single course. While the government acknowledges foundation year programmes as crucial for Sweden's skills supply, students in these programmes are disadvantaged despite living under similar conditions as other students. They should be granted student status and the same rights and obligations as other students.

Ambitions:

- SFS shall advocate for a more flexible and modern financial aid system.
- SFS shall work towards cost-free and accessible work-based placements.
- SFS shall ensure that students in preparatory and introductory higher education programmes are granted student status.

Students at Risk

Many students are forced to study under conditions where they face persecution and threats due to their involvement in the student movement. SFS maintains that no one should be forced to flee because of their engagement in student activism, but in cases where fleeing is unavoidable, there must be opportunities for them to continue their education in other countries.

There is already a programme in place to support researchers who are forced to flee, Scholars at Risk. Currently, SFS, together with 25 Swedish higher education institutions, is a member of the Swedish section of the programme. Scholars who are part of the programme are given refuge at one of the participating institutions and can continue their research and educational activities in Sweden. A similar programme should be established for students at risk.

Students at Risk (StAR) has already been implemented in Norway, where more than 100 students have received scholarships or the opportunity to study in the country since the programme began in 2013.

The implementation of a StAR programme will require significant resources beyond those available to SFS. In Norway, the programme is administered by the *Directorate for Higher Education and Skills*, the equivalent of Sweden's Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), and participating institutions manage the reception of students. Like Scholars at Risk, a programme such as StAR requires collaboration. To ensure that the programme is granted long-term viability, discussions with relevant authorities in Sweden are necessary.

SFS must support students who, due to their engagement in the student movement, are forced to flee in order to escape oppression. Education is a right that must be defended.

Ambition:

- SFS shall work to establish a Students at Risk programme in Sweden.