

Policy and guidance documents

Document type:	Policy
Decision date:	20/04/2018
Decided by/Title:	The University Board
Period of validity:	Until further notice
Document Supervisor/Function:	Education Officer University Executive Office
Ref. no.:	LED 1.3-2018/247
Version:	1.0
Revision date:	

Policy for student influence at Malmö University

Introduction

Students at Sweden's universities and university colleges have a statutory right to exercise influence over their education and they are expected to take an active part in the work of developing it further. In this document, Malmö University wishes to express what student influence involves, why student influence is important and how strong student influence can be realised at the university. The basis is that students' participation in the implementation, evaluation and development of the education is both desirable and necessary, as well as decisive for its quality. The students' perspective, prior knowledge and experiences are needed for the development of courses, programmes and the learning environment as a whole. The commitment of the teaching staff to the work on student influence gives the pedagogical development work a stamp of reinforced quality and greater relevance.

Strong student influence is reliant on joint commitment and acceptance of responsibility by both students and university staff. Developing student influence is an important aspect of the university's ongoing task of working for sustainable social development, welfare, fairness, equal opportunity and equal rights.

Definitions

According to the law, student influence is the students' right to exercise influence over their education. Among other things, student influence exists to ensure that the education is of good quality. Quality work is a joint responsibility for staff and for students. The law also states that universities and university colleges shall work to ensure that students take an active part in work to further develop the education. This means that the students' experiences and viewpoints shall be taken into consideration. This applies both to individual students' commitment and also to students who are engaged in students' and doctoral students' unions.

As indicated in the relevant legislation, student influence refers to representation in various bodies and that the students' interests are catered for and are reflected in concrete action and changes.

Students refers to students at first, second and third cycle levels.

Teachers refers to teachers at first and second cycle level and supervisors at third cycle level.

Student influence at Malmö University

Malmö University identifies three types of student influence: *formal student influence*, *semi-formal student influence* and *informal student influence*.

Formal student influence

The formal student influence is the influence established in legislation and regulations, which is exercised by democratically elected student representatives in the university's decision-making committees and bodies, such as boards and committees for educational issues, research issues and gender equality issues. Students shall be given the opportunity to exert influence at an early stage. One prerequisite for genuine student influence is therefore that students are also represented in preparatory committees and bodies.

The university is responsible for informing students about how they can exert influence at different levels of the university. The appointment of student representatives is handled by the students themselves through the student bodies that have been granted formal status by the university board. The student unions ensure that student representatives are chosen for the committees and bodies of the institution's faculties and the library, as well as all university committees and bodies, as well as that representatives of the doctoral students are appointed to the governing committees and bodies of the university that have places for such representatives.

A tried and tested form of students' formal influence over their education is the course evaluation. Course evaluations can be seen as the individual student's most concrete path to student influence (see the Guidelines for the course evaluation process for education at first and second cycle levels). If course evaluations are to function as a means of student influence, there must be active and constructive participation by every student, a well-functioning structure for compiling and reporting course evaluations and action and feedback of results on the part of the university.

Semi-formal student influence

Semi-formal student influence is not laid down in law in the same way as formal influence and the student unions are not involved in the same formal ways when it comes to electing student representatives. The purpose is to encourage active dialogue between appointed student representatives and the responsible teachers. The dialogues cannot be said to be formal decision making, but they are an important part of supporting the quality system.

The influence exercised by student representatives in different types of *influence councils*, which at Malmö University take the form, for example, of programme councils, course councils and supervisors' fora, is part of the semi-formal student influence. Influence councils are initiated within the faculties, which also assist the students in appointing representatives from within the relevant student groups.

The students' opportunities for influence during ongoing courses represent another part of semi-formal influence. Students should be given the opportunity for continuous evaluation as a supplement to course evaluation.

Informal student influence

Informal influence arises in the day-to-day and direct communication between students and teachers/other staff. To enable informal student influence, it is necessary for teachers and other staff to be encouraging, as well as available and receptive to students' views.

Shared responsibility and mutual commitment

Student influence is exercised through collaboration between Malmö University and the student bodies that have been granted formal status by the university board.

The basic prerequisite for student influence is close collaboration between the university, the student bodies and the students. If such a collaboration is to function as effectively as possible, a clear division of responsibilities is needed.

Malmö University's responsibilities

- Students' representation in decision-making and preparatory bodies: Malmö University is responsible for ensuring that student representatives have places in all the university's preparatory and decision-making committees and bodies that discuss issues of importance for education or the students' situation. This also applies to temporary working groups, investigations etc. The reasons for any exceptions shall be communicated to the students in writing. In faculty-specific committees and bodies, the dean is responsible for making places available. The head of department is similarly responsible for department-specific committees and bodies.

- Consultation when decisions are made by individual officers: The Higher Education Ordinance states that if a decision that is of significance for the education and the students' situation is not to be made or prepared by a body but by only one person, information shall be given to and consultation shall occur with a student representative in good time before the decision is made or the preparation completed. The university's routines and guidelines for decision-making processes shall be followed so that student influence is safeguarded.
- Information: The students' insight into the forms of student influence in all the activities of the university depends on the university having updated information on its website about which committees and bodies exist. This shall show which issues each committee and body handles and who the members are. Here, as in other contexts, the university shall inform about the opportunities for participating in student influence. It shall be clearly stated that the students' active participation is both desirable and necessary for the development of education at the university.
- Support for the students: To enable the students' formal influence to occur, the university shall introduce student representatives into the work of the committees and bodies that are affected. The chair of the committee or body in question is responsible for this introduction. It is a prerequisite for student representatives in different committees and bodies being able to combine this representation with studies that all staff are aware and understand that such representation is a statutory right and requires the student's time and work.
- Certification: Student representatives who have formal representation tasks receive certification from the university for this work. The certificate is issued by the administrator of the committee or preparatory body and signed by its chair.

The responsibility of the student bodies

In the same way as for the university, it is the responsibility of the students' union and other student bodies to maintain good structures for student influence. The primary responsibility lies in recruiting student representatives for the university's committees and bodies. Here, the student bodies shall endeavour to ensure that the student representatives reflect the composition of the student population with regard to gender, ethnic background and educational background, for example.

The student bodies shall communicate the internal division of responsibility with regard to filling student representative places to the university. The university shall be informed of any cases where the student bodies have not succeeded in appointing a student representative.

The student bodies shall, to the best of their ability, contribute participation and knowledge when the university so requests, for temporary working groups, focus groups and other bodies for example.

The joint responsibilities of Malmö University and the student bodies

It is also important that the university supports the work of the student bodies of recruiting student representatives for the university's committees and bodies. This is done by giving the student bodies opportunity to inform new students about their activities. To facilitate the appointment of student representatives, the dean is responsible for providing a complete list of the committees and bodies at the faculty with places for student representatives and an explanation of which issues they discuss.

The work of the individual student representatives shall also be encouraged, supported and facilitated in the best way possible.

The responsibilities of individual students and teachers

All students are involved in the university's activities and thereby have a joint responsibility to influence and develop the education. Students should make active use of the opportunities for influence that are offered during their period of study.

Teachers are responsible for initiating and finding good forms of dialogue and for ensuring the students have the opportunity to be heard. Teachers cannot achieve a positive development alone, but they can - in concrete teaching situations - create the necessary space for this.

Doctoral students

The nature of third cycle education, with an individual study plan and limited time spent in joint courses, means that influence mainly occurs in the dialogue between supervisor and doctoral student. The doctoral student shall be given the opportunity to influence the individual study plan, courses and the different contexts in which third cycle education is discussed.

Doctoral students shall be given the opportunity to be represented in the bodies of the university that perform preparatory work and decision making in issues relating to research and third cycle education. Part of the task of those responsible for third cycle education at faculty and department level is to inform both doctoral students and supervisors about doctoral students' right to influence their education. This also means that the opportunity to perform course evaluations shall be offered to doctoral students in the same way as for other students at the university.

The commitment of doctoral students at local and central level should be encouraged and supported by their immediate superiors so that this is not a barrier to the parallel research studies. A representative who is engaged in formal tasks has the right to an extension of the period of education.

Implementation and follow up

The work of strengthening student influence shall be implemented and followed up according to the same structure as otherwise applies at faculty and department level. This document does not give guidelines for this work. It is the task of the faculties to decide on how student influence policy shall be implemented and followed up. Some examples of concrete actions and indicators are as follows.

The faculties should perform monitoring on an annual basis to ensure that all committees, bodies and influence councils have student representation, as well as how student representatives have participated in preparations for decisions made by individuals. There should also be an analysis of how student influence functions. There should also be a follow-up on how information and educational initiatives aimed at teachers and other staff have been organised.

The faculties should also follow up how they have informed and prepared students for being representatives and how they have supported the work of the student bodies in recruiting representatives.

Further indicators may include deficiencies in student influence and how these have been discovered, analysed and acted upon, something that may be reflected in the reports of the student bodies.

The student bodies send annual reports to the vice-chancellor as part of the comments on the university's annual report. Here, the student bodies comment on student influence at the university, how student influence is developed and what deficiencies may have been noted.

Appendix

The Swedish Higher Education Act

Chapter 1 section 4 The operations of higher education institutions shall be arranged to ensure that high standards are attained in courses and study programmes and in research. The resources available shall be used effectively to sustain a high standard of operation. Quality assurance procedures are the shared concern of staff and students at higher education institutions.

Chapter 1 section 4a Students shall be entitled to exert influence over the courses and study programmes at higher education institutions. Higher education institutions shall endeavour to enable students to play an active role in the continued development of courses and study programmes.

Chapter 2 section 4 The Government shall appoint the chair of the board of governors of a higher education institution. The vice-chancellor shall be a member of the board of governors. Teachers and students at the higher education institution shall be entitled to representation on the board of governors. The Government or the authority decided by the Government can, pursuant to chapter 8 section 7 of the Constitution Act, issue regulations regarding the number of such members and how they shall be appointed. The Government appoints other members of the board of governors. Staff representatives shall be entitled to attend and make representations at meetings of the board of governors.

Chapter 2 section 7 The students are entitled to representation when decisions or preparations are made that have bearing on their courses or programmes or the situation of students. The Government or the authority decided by the Government can, pursuant to chapter 8 section 7 of the Constitution Act, issue regulations regarding the number of such representatives and how they shall be appointed.

Chapter 2 section 8 In the regulations on how students appoint members of the board or representatives pursuant to section 7, the Government may delegate the selection of representatives to specific individuals or associations.

Chapter 4 section 9 A student union shall lay down that its main purpose is to monitor and take part in the development of courses and programmes as well as the conditions applying to studies at the higher education institution.

The Higher Education Ordinance

Chapter 1 section 7 The Ordinance on Student Unions (2009:769) contains regulations on how such members of the board as the students, pursuant to chapter 2 section 4 of the Swedish Higher Education Act (1992:1434) have the right to appoint, shall be appointed. The Ordinance on Student Unions also contains provisions on how representatives of students pursuant to chapter 2 section 7 of the Swedish Higher Education Act shall be appointed. The Ordinance concerning Remuneration for Positions on Government Boards, Committees, Councils, etc. (1992:1299) shall apply to the members of the board of governors of a higher education institution appointed by the students.

Chapter 1 section 14 Higher education institutions shall enable students who are participating in or have completed a course to express their experiences of and views on the course through a course evaluation to be organised by the higher education institution.

The higher education institution shall collate the course evaluations and provide information about their results and any actions prompted by the course evaluations. The results shall be made available to the students.

Chapter 2 section 7a The teachers are entitled to be represented by three members of the board of governors. The teachers' representatives shall be elected within the higher education institution. The higher education institution may issue more specific regulations about the election procedure. The students are entitled to be represented by three members of the board of governors.

Chapter 2 section 8 The vice-chancellor shall be appointed by a Government decision for a period of no more than six years on the basis of a proposal from the board of governors of the higher education institution. The appointment may be extended but no more than twice and for no more than three years at a time.

Before the board of governors submits its proposal, consultation shall take place with the teachers, other employees and students in the manner determined by the board of governors.

In the process of proposing a vice-chancellor, the board of governors shall as far as possible consider both female and male candidates. The board of governors shall account to the Government for the way in which the gender equality aspect has been taken into account.

Chapter 2 section 14 Section 7 of Chapter 2 of the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) contains a provision on the entitlement of students to representation when decisions or preparations are made.

If decisions or preparations are to be made by one single individual, information is to be provided and consultation take place with a student representative in ample time before the decision is made or preparations concluded.

If a decision is to be made by a group of individuals pursuant to the second paragraph of Section 6 of Chapter 2 of the Higher Education Act, the students are entitled to representation by at least three members. The number of student representatives in such a group may however be fewer if there are special grounds in view of the total number of members in the group.

In other respects the higher education institution itself decides on the entitlement of students to the representation stipulated in the first paragraph above.

Chapter 10 section 4 The disciplinary board shall consist of the vice-chancellor as chair, a legally qualified member who shall hold or have held tenure as a judge, and a representative of the teaching staff at the higher education institution. The students at the higher education institution shall be entitled to representation on the board by two members.