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Policy, goals and rules for student influence at Mälardalen University

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Introduction

Mälardalen University (MDU) aim is to be an attractive and recognised higher education institution with students and doctoral students who drive their education, which is stated in the *Vision, goals and strategy – Mälardalen University*. Active students who are willing and able to influence their education are a central aspect in developing high quality education and the organisation. It is in the University's interest to have strong student influence and MDU therefore works actively to contribute to involvement so that the students' viewpoints, experiences and opinions can be considered in the development of courses, programmes and the study situation.

Student influence is regulated in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) and the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), where it states, that students have the right to exert influence over their education and the University must work to ensure that they take an active part in the further development of their education. The students themselves are also expected to take an active part in efforts to develop and improve their education.

Quality development is an issue of common concern for both students and employees and requires a joint commitment and responsibility. Developing well-functioning and clear forms of student influence is thus an important part of the University's quality assurance activities. MDU actively works with this in accordance with the *Board's rules of procedure for Mälardalen University*.

Purpose

To ensure that the statutory student influence is fulfilled, a coherent way of working at the University is required, as well as close cooperation between MDU and the Student Union which is appointed by the University Board.

The purpose of this document is to clarify the way of working with student influence at MDU. By working with a clear structure and towards a common goal, we contribute to an increased commitment where students want to be involved in the development efforts. This in turn leads to a systematic way of working that promotes, strengthens and quality assures student influence at the University.

Student influence at Mälardalen University

There are several forms of student influence, which can take place in various ways, both formal and informal. The policy with its guidelines focuses on the formal student influence with a focus on the influence exercised through student representation.

Definitions

Student influence and student participation

Student influence refers to the influence that students in education at first-cycle, second-cycle and third-cycle level have the right to exercise over their education and study situation, in accordance with laws and regulations. The formal student influence at MDU comprises two parts: course evaluations/programme evaluations and student influence which is regulated by laws and regulation.

Student participation refers to participation that takes place in forms other than the above definition and thus constitutes informal student influence. Informal student influence takes place in the meeting between student and teacher, the Schools or other units at the University through, for example, spontaneous conversations about how a course is experienced from the student's perspective, through cooperation, groups and projects that promote the development of their education.

Since decisions are not made or preparation takes place during informal student influence, the student who participates does not have to have a role as a student representative.

Student representation and the student representative

Student representation exists for students to have influence over their own education. The University is governed by the Board of directors, committees

and other decision-making and preparatory bodies and it is through these that the courses and study programmes are planned, evaluated and developed. There are dedicated places available to student representatives in these groups.

A student representative represents the opinions of students in the bodies where decisions are made or prepared which affect the students' education or situation.

A student representative is appointed by the Student Union and represents all students on the University's preparatory and decision-making bodies. This also applies to non-members of the Student Union and in programmes this applies regardless of the semester.

Students

For the purposes of this document, a student is a person who has been admitted and pursues higher education at first-cycle, second-cycle and third-cycle level at MDU, students in the natural sciences/technical foundation years and students who are part of an international exchange programme in an agreement between MDU and another higher education institution.

Employees

An employee refers to those who are employed at MDU and who process questions/decisions that have an impact on the students' education and study situation.

Goals

National goals

The Higher Education Act states that the organisation must be adapted so that a high quality is achieved in education and research. The available resources must be used effectively to maintain high quality in the organisation. The University must work to ensure that it is easy for students to take an active role in the further development of their education.

Strategic goals for quality assured student influence at MDU

As part of the work in improving and developing education, MDU must ensure that students' views and experiences are considered, and therefore the following local goals have been established:

- MDU will clarify the guidelines and processes for student influence at the University to achieve uniform ways of working.
- MDU will ensure that information about students' rights, organisation and representation is continuously communicated to students and employees.
- MDU will continue to make use of the individual's views on education through course evaluations and programme evaluations. The student will receive information about the results of evaluations and about any changes that may be made based on the answers in the course evaluations.

Conditions

Uniformity

In accordance with *The Board's Rules of Procedure* the University will work to create good and uniform conditions for student influence. Student influence is exercised by the Student Union which has been recognised by the University Board. The Student Union is responsible for the organisation of the students and appoints student representatives in preparatory and decision-making bodies.

Cooperation and commitment

MDU and the Student Union will work together to create a good basis for compliance with regulations and guidelines regarding student influence and consultation.

To ensure a high quality of student influence at the University, MDU will actively work with development areas and processes that encourage student participation, commitment and responsibility.

Communication

Well-functioning communication is a prerequisite for active student influence. MDU and the Student Union must have a well-functioning and continuous discussion between one another on matters relating to the students' situation or on that which has a direct or significant impact on the students' education.

Rules

Legal point of departure

The Higher Education Ordinance states that a University must compile the course evaluations and convey the results and any decisions on measures that are prompted by the course evaluations. The results must be available to the students.

Furthermore, students have the right to be represented when decisions are made or when preparation takes place which has an impact on the education or the students' situation. In accordance with this, students have the right to be represented by at least three members if a decision is to be made by a group where there is a requirement that most of the persons in the group have scientific or artistic competence. However, the number of student representatives in such a group may be fewer if there are special reasons with respect to the total number of members of the group.

If a decision is to be taken, or preparation is to be conducted by one person, a student representative must be informed well in advance of the decision or completion of the preparation (Higher Education Ordinance, 1993:100).

Moreover, the University will decide itself on the students' right to representation.

Local rules

Student representatives in preparatory and decision-making bodies

The Student Union, which is appointed by the University's Board of governors, has the right to, in accordance with the *Board's rules of procedure* and what is stated below, appoint student representatives to the University's preparatory and decision-making bodies. In addition, the University must, where appropriate, ask the Student Union for their participation in projects, working groups or the equivalent, permanent as well as temporary.

At the University, there is a presumption about student representation, which means that when there is uncertainty about whether student representation should take place, information must always be provided and consultation must always take place.

Student representatives in the University-wide preparatory and decision-making bodies

A list of which of the University-wide bodies students have the right to be represented in must be made available to the Student Union. The Head of the Division of Student Affairs ensures at the start of each semester with the Registrar at the Vice-Chancellor's office that the list of these bodies is up to date. The Student Union appoints student representatives to the bodies and informs the Registrar through the Vice-Chancellor's Management group. The Student Union's appointment of student representatives who pursue third-cycle research programmes will be done in consultation with the Doctoral Student Council.

Student representatives in newly established University-wide preparatory and decision-making bodies

Before a body is established, the Student Union must be consulted on whether the body's activities are important for the education and the students' situation and, in consultation with the Student Union, decide on the number of places to be used.

Student representatives at the Schools

At the Schools, students must be represented on the councils that work with the development of educational activities on issues that impact the students' education or situation.

At the Schools, the councils in which students have the right to be represented, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Board and Schools, are as follows:

- Adviser to the Vice-Chancellor
- The Schools educational council
- A programme council for each programme
- Government research funding body
- Supervisors' committee

Consultation when individual officials make decisions

In cases where an individual person prepares or makes decisions relevant to education or the students' situation, information must be provided to and consultation must take place with a student representative well in advance of the decision or completion of the preparation. If such a representative is not available, decision-makers must inform the Student Union well in advance of the preparation.

In the exercise of public authority against an individual where an individual person makes decisions, no right exists for student influence.

Recruitment of student representatives

MDU will continuously provide students with information about the opportunities and benefits of being a student representative. Employees should refer students to the Student Union's application page if they are interested in applying for the assignment of student representative.

If there are special requests for representation from a particular group of students, the Student Union must be notified of this.

Appointment of student representatives

Appointing student representatives is referred to in Chapter 2, Section 7 of the Higher Education Act and can only be decided by the Student Union which has been appointed by the Board.

Vacancies

When there are no representatives for the offered places, the respective body or council must ensure that documents are provided to the Student Union for their information. The Student Union is responsible for providing a functional address to which the documents must be sent. If the Student Union does not submit comments within a period of two weeks, the opportunity of student influence is considered to be fulfilled.

Student participation

When appointing students to groups or other compositions that are not preparatory or decision-making, no consultation needs to take place with the Student Union.

Remuneration of student representatives who pursue education at first and second cycle level and those studying in the technical foundation year

Students who pursue education at first-cycle and second cycle level and students on foundation years, and those who have been appointed by the Student Union as student representatives in preparatory and decision-making bodies at the University are entitled to compensation for their assignments of SEK 130 per hour or SEK 65 per started half hour.

The University pays the Student Union compensation retrospectively, per semester according to the reported number of hours. The Student Union, in turn, pays compensation directly to the student representatives.

The representatives who participate in the University Board are remunerated in accordance with a special arrangement.

A student who conducts informal student influence through student participation and who also has an assignment as a student representative is not paid for their time in the compositions where student participation is conducted.

Reduction in working hours for student representatives who are pursuing third-cycle courses and study programmes

Students who pursue education in third-cycle research programmes and whose studies are funded by doctoral studentships are entitled to a 10 per cent reduction in working hours for their duties as student representatives in preparatory and decision-making bodies at the University. The Chair of the Doctoral Student Council is entitled to a 20 per cent reduction in working hours, as described in the Higher Education Ordinance.

Responsibility for quality-assured student influence

Mälardalen University's responsibility

- Employees must take note of and work according to this document. Deans of the Schools and Heads of Division must be responsible to disseminate the document to their employees for information and increased knowledge of how student influence is organised at the University. Through active measures, the University will disseminate information about student influence in the channels it has at its disposal, to generate commitment and participation among students.
- Each School will provide the Student Union with up-to-date information on the councils, Boards and/or bodies where students in the School have the right to be represented. The Head of the Division of Student Affairs ensures at the start of each semester together with the respective School that the information is up to date. In cases where a School or management lacks student representatives, the School, together with the Student Union, is responsible for regularly informing new students about the importance of and opportunities regarding student influence.

- The convener of each body ensures that each new student representative receives the necessary introduction to the respective body's functioning and way of working. The convener calls students to a meeting and is responsible for ensuring that they receive the documents they need to prepare before each meeting.
- When there are no representatives for the offered places, the respective bodies must ensure that documents are provided to the Student Union for their information. The Student Union is responsible for providing a functional address to which the documents must be sent. If the Student Union does not submit comments within a period of two weeks, student influence is considered to be fulfilled.

The Student Union's responsibility

- The Student Union will work to ensure that Board members and the student representatives appointed by the Student Union have good knowledge of the University's work related to student influence.
- The Student Union is responsible for appointing and dismissing student representatives in all the preparatory and decision-making bodies at the University, permanent as well as temporary, on which the Vice-Chancellor or Dean of School makes decisions and will work continuously to fill vacant places where student representation is included and requested.
- The Student Union, in collaboration with MDU, is responsible for providing training every year to the student representatives about student influence and how it is organised at the University.
- The Student Union will keep a note of which bodies at the University in which the Student Union has representatives and those who have been appointed for the various assignments. The information must be communicated to the University and the Student Union is responsible for continuously updating these lists in the event of changes.

Joint responsibility

- The Student Union, which is appointed by the Board of Directors, has the main responsibility for the exercise of student influence, i.e. students' participation in preparatory and decision-making bodies. The Vice-Chancellor is also responsible for deciding on the necessary rules to guarantee that student influence functions properly. The Vice-Chancellor is responsible for entering into an agreement with the Student Union that

has been approved by the Board of Directors to further regulate cooperation.

- MDU and Mälardalen Student Union have a shared responsibility to continuously conduct discussions to strengthen and further develop student influence at the University. MDU will provide forums for discussion and cooperation and Mälardalen Student Union will actively participate in the cooperation forums or other cooperative constellations that exist at the University.
- MDU and Mälardalen Student Union have a joint responsibility to develop processes that encourage the students' participation, commitment and responsibility at the University.

Implementation and follow-up

The work with quality-assured student influence should be known among administrators, decision-makers, in the Boards, councils and bodies that affect student influence. Knowledge of student influence will be disseminated through communication, discussions and training to everyone involved in student influence efforts. Knowledge should permeate the organisation and it is the responsibility of the entire University to work in accordance with this.

Follow-up and revision of this document will be conducted in accordance with the University's quality assurance policy and will be done in connection with the renewal of the partnership agreement with the Student Union, which is recognised by the University Board, every three years. A revision of the Board's or the Vice-Chancellor's Rules of Procedure may also prompt a revision of this document.