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Guidance for work on student influence at Uppsala University

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1. Introduction

This document is intended for employees of Uppsala University who have a role connected to student influence at the University. The guidance is a supplement to the Guidelines for Student Influence at Uppsala University (UFV 2019/2792). The guidelines are the governing framework, while the guidance is intended to support work on student influence by developing and clarifying the guidelines and providing practical advice and tips.

The guidance document is intended to provide support in line with the chronology of the process and thus has a different structure to the guidelines. Just as in the guidelines, the focus is on student influence through student representation, but the guidance also takes a broader approach to the area by providing information and advice in section 8 on student safety representatives, course evaluations, programme evaluations and individual study plans for doctoral students.

1.1. Why student influence?

Collegiality and student influence are fundamental principles at Uppsala University, and this is highlighted in [Uppsala University's Mission, Goals & Strategies](#). Students, teachers and other employees are collectively responsible at the University for contributing to the quality of activities and the University's development, albeit through different roles. This is clarified in the [Teaching and Learning Programme](#) for Uppsala University. [Uppsala University's rules of procedure](#) also describe the role and responsibility of students. Students are involved in influencing education and the study environment by expressing views and constructive criticism, for example in the form of course evaluations, as student representatives or student safety representatives, and through involvement in students' unions.

The better the conditions are for students to exercise student influence, the better the results will be of that influence. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to encourage student influence, develop structures that facilitate the process and contribute in various ways to the students being able to exercise student influence.

1.2. Formal and informal student influence

Student influence can be exercised in both informal and formal contexts. Informal student influence is exercised in the course or programme-oriented interaction between students and teachers, for example a spontaneous conversation about how a course is perceived from the students' perspective. This guidance provides support for work on formal student influence, in which the students are entitled under the Higher Education Ordinance to representation when decisions or preparations are made on issues that have bearing on their courses or programmes or the situation of students.

2. Decisions

Here, ‘student’ refers to any person admitted to and undertaking Bachelor’s, Master’s or doctoral level studies. A person on a period of leave from studies, for example to work for a student union, is also considered a student in this context and can thus be a student representative.

2.1. Decisions taken by a group of individuals

According to the [Higher Education Ordinance](#), students are entitled to have representatives via the students’ unions in all decision-making and deliberating bodies that have some kind of significance for their education or the students’ situation. For this reason, students are represented on department boards, faculty and disciplinary domain boards and specific decision-making bodies within education and research. Student representatives are full members of such bodies.

A deliberating body is a body that prepares and investigates issues for further approval, for example a working committee that prepares department board or faculty board meetings. There may also be other, more temporary, groups that are commissioned to work on a specific issue for approval by another body?

2.2. Decisions taken by a single individual

When decisions are made or prepared by a single person that are of importance for education or the students' situation, special emphasis needs to be placed on taking the student perspective into account. At departmental level, one-person decisions are often made by the head of department or director of studies, but there can also be other decision-makers. Consultation is primarily conducted with a student representative representing students affected by the decision. For example, decisions by the head of department can be prepared with a student representative from the department board.

With regard to decisions by the Vice-Chancellor and the University Director, there are established procedures governing student influence.

When decisions or preparations are made by a single individual, information should be provided and consultation should be conducted in good time before the decision is taken or the preparations are complete. Consultation with student representatives can be conducted via email, telephone calls, consultation meetings or decision-making meetings. The person who takes the decision is responsible for guaranteeing student influence. The decision or preparation should state whether – and if so, how – information has been provided and consultations have taken place.

It can be difficult to decide which decisions by a single individual require student representation and which do not. One way to view it is that ongoing management is not to be regarded as a decision requiring student influence. On the other hand, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) has criticised this formulation and believes there may still be reasons to include student influence in certain decisions of this type.

Ultimately, UKÄ's views are about whether a decision is important for education or the students' situation, in which case student representation is required.

2.3. Decisions taken outside semester times

If a decision is taken outside a semester, for example during the summer period when many bodies are not working, student influence should still be maintained. If it is not clear who or which bodies can contribute a student perspective on the matter, it is a good idea to contact the relevant students' unions or the Uppsala University Student Unions (UUFS) collaborative body to find a solution together.

2.4. When student representatives should not be present

There are preparations and decisions in which it is not appropriate for student representatives to participate. In such cases, it is important for the manager of each body to conduct a careful assessment and be able to justify why the decision is not deemed to be of importance for education or the students' situation, or why student representatives should not participate for other reasons.

3. Appointing a student representative

The students' unions are responsible for appointing student representatives. They can do this themselves or delegate it to other student associations at Uppsala University. Uppsala University supports the students' unions in their work by ensuring that students are informed about the possibility of student influence and why it is important. Furthermore, Uppsala University needs to make it easier in various ways for the students' unions to understand what is required for different assignments, such as what prior knowledge may be suitable for a particular assignment. The responsibility for these information initiatives lies with people in senior positions, such as department and faculty management. In order to coordinate the information initiatives, a department can, for example, appoint a person who has special responsibility for student influence, both to coordinate information for new students and to be the contact person for student representatives.

3.1. Fostering interest for student influence assignments

Students do not always know what student influence means or how it can be exercised. Rooted in the idea of collegiality between students, teachers and other staff, it is important to make it clear to students how they can get involved and have an influence.

An active dialogue about collaboration with relevant students' unions is encouraged, to create interest in assignments involving student influence. It is a good idea to highlight what the person involved in student influence contributes to, why it can be useful on their CV and that remuneration is usually given for assignments as a student representative (see [Guidelines on the remuneration of undergraduate and Master's](#)

students on boards, committees and councils (In Swedish only: [Riktlinjer för arvodering av studenter på grundnivå och avancerad nivå i styrelser, nämnder och råd](#)) and [Guidelines for extending the period of employment and study for doctoral students in elected positions](#)). Other arguments to encourage involvement may be that it creates a network of contacts both at and beyond the University and that it can provide skills which complement education and which can be attractive to future employers. [Some assignments are beneficial when applying for studies abroad](#). Explain that the student can request a certificate of the work done that can be used in job applications or similar after completing the assignment.

Inform students that they can be given the opportunity to adapt their study route when this is financially and practically feasible. The student then contacts the course director or study and career counsellor on the relevant programme to make an individual adaptation. Try to find solutions when meetings clash with teaching and provide the opportunity to make up for compulsory teaching components in an alternative way, or implement major adjustments such as extended study time.

In order to reach all the University's students with information about opportunities involving student influence, various efforts may be needed. Teachers can explain about opportunities involving student influence on their own or invite relevant students' unions to a seminar or lecture to talk about different opportunities together. There are often more established channels for reaching degree programme students such as larger introductions, which may give cause to consider how students can be reached in freestanding courses. International students may have a different understanding of student influence and thus need specifically targeted information to be able to decide whether and how they want to get involved. It is also important to include all relevant campuses, regardless of whether the studies take place in Uppsala, in Visby or remotely.

The head of department is responsible for ensuring compliance with student influence at departmental level. The students' unions compile and clarify assignments for interested students within the framework of the unions' collaboration.

3.2. Appointment procedure

To ensure that the students' unions are able to appoint representatives in a strong position to make a contribution, the assignment needs to be described as clearly as possible and with good planning. When a request is sent to relevant students' unions, it is a good idea for it to contain:

- A description of the body's role and context.
- Who the contact person is at the body (or an organisational email address).
- How many student representatives are needed, including any alternates and what expectations are placed on an alternate.
- If there is a wish for the representative to have a specific level of education, for example, it may be appropriate to have a student at doctoral level for bodies relating to doctoral education.

- How many meetings are involved and their typical length.
- How much time the student representative needs to plan to spend on preparation and follow-up. Are there expectations of participation in preparatory work/groups between the meetings?
- When the assignment will begin and end.
- Which language is mainly spoken at the meetings, based on the [Language policy for Uppsala University](#).
- Information about remuneration.
- Other important information about the assignment, such as the expectations placed on the student representative, whether it includes travel, whether it is possible to participate digitally, or other practical issues that are important to know.

Try to coordinate the assignment requests if there are many that are relevant at the same time and be sure to send out the requests in good time. This will make it easier for the students' unions to process them and find student representatives, as it can sometimes take time to find a suitable person for the assignment.

In the case of bodies that regularly appoint student representatives, it is a good idea to have a dialogue with relevant students' unions about how the process of appointing representatives can be carried out in a smooth manner. The body can agree on a process for the procedure together with relevant students' unions.

3.3. If no representative is able to be appointed

Even if the University and the students' unions help each other arouse interest in the assignments, in some cases there may be no student representatives for an assignment. If the students' unions are unable to appoint a student representative to the assignment, they are responsible for notifying the body's chair or equivalent. The students' union can also describe whether it wishes to monitor the work in any other way, for example by being summoned and/or minutes being sent to a special address. The chair of the body decides whether it is possible to meet such wishes.

4. Introduction for the student representative

Everyone involved in the body is expected to contribute their perspective based on their conditions. Those who are well prepared and have understood their assignment and context find it easier to contribute constructively, which is why it is important to have an introduction for student representatives.

The chair of the body is responsible for giving the student representatives an introduction. Think through what is important for the student representative to be able to participate constructively. This can also be discussed with the students' unions who can contribute their perspective. Here are examples of some areas that can be good to discuss:

- Any background that can be important to know to understand the assignment.
- If there are any regulations and rules that have a major impact on the matters addressed at the body.
- The structure of the mandate and the roles. Perhaps a description of how the body relates to other parts of the organisation?
- The typical structure of the meetings. When and how the student representatives can add issues to the agenda and provide input. Are there unwritten rules that are important for the work to proceed smoothly? Is it possible to predict when certain issues will be managed during the year? An annual schedule can be illustrative to understand the larger context.
- Specific words and terms that are important to recognise – both those used in meeting contexts (adjournment, postponement, voting) and abbreviations and technical terms used in the area in question.

Additional ways to facilitate the process could be to offer a mentor or contact person to whom the student representative can turn with questions, and to offer pre-meetings at which the upcoming matters are reviewed.

Ensure that students have access to the meeting rooms, so that the lack of access cards does not become an obstacle.

It can be good to know that the students' unions regularly carry out introductory training courses of a more general nature, in which meeting formats within academia are discussed. There is also a [student influence handbook](#) published by Uppsala University Student Unions (UUFS).

5. During the assignment

The person who leads the work of a body needs to ensure that everyone is heard and has the opportunity to contribute. Remember to give space to the students' voices, without the situation becoming accusatory or discriminatory. A student representative has the same rights and obligations as other members unless otherwise stated. Ideally talk about what you do and why during the meeting and in the communication that takes place between meetings in which the student representative plays a part.

If there are matters in which student representatives should not participate, it may be appropriate to divide the meeting into two separate parts.

It can be good to check with the student representatives after the meeting if there are any question marks or if anything did not feel right. Does anything need to be explained or changed before the next meeting?

5.1. International students

International students require special attention to safeguard their ability to exercise student influence. One challenge can be that they often study at the University for a

relatively short period of time and therefore do not have the opportunity to get involved in the students' unions to such an extent, but the challenge can also be linguistic. Uppsala University's language policy provides some guidance for situations in which several languages need to be handled simultaneously.

The official language of the University as a public authority is Swedish, therefore meeting documents and meetings are usually in Swedish. If this is the case, and the student representative is not Swedish-speaking, you will have to discuss what can be done to create the right conditions for contributing. One way of handling meetings where participants speak different languages is for certain items or parts of the meetings to be conducted in English, if this facilitates the work. The notice to attend can be in English even if the documents and minutes are in Swedish. Extensive documentation can have a summary in English.

Another way to bring in the perspectives of non-Swedish-speaking students is for a Swedish-speaking representative to have reference group meetings in English between the meetings, in order to gather views and perspectives that would otherwise be lost. Where relevant, meeting minutes can be translated into English so that more people can read them.

5.2. Access to premises

Student representatives may need access to premises for their own meetings or training opportunities connected to student influence. Student associations have the right to use teaching premises for gatherings arranged by associations for their members. Applicable rules in this regard are outlined in the [Guidelines for access to and leasing of Uppsala University's premises \(Riktlinje för tillträde och upplåtelse i Uppsala universitets lokaler\)](#).

6. At the end of the assignment

The student representative's assignment is time-limited. When it ends, it can be a good idea to have some form of concluding conversation, to thank them for what they have contributed and listen to ideas for development. This could relate to both the body's work in general and how student influence can be developed in the future.

The chair of the body can, upon request, produce a certificate for the student representative detailing completed assignments. The students' unions issue a general certificate to the student representatives.

7. Problems that arise

There can always be situations in which an aspect of student influence does not work despite good intentions. Pay attention to signals that something is not working well and

contact the relevant student representatives or students' unions at an early stage to investigate what can be done.

A general tip is that the department, faculty or office appoints a contact person for student influence who is available to the students' unions.

7.1. Views and complaints

At a department or other organisation at which a course or programme is organised, such as a faculty or centre, it is possible for students to turn to, for example, teachers, programme coordinators, directors of studies, study counsellors or course administrators with questions, views and complaints regarding education and the students' situation.

Complaints are managed and resolved locally in the first instance, where the problem arose. In cases where the problems cannot be resolved locally, there are functions beyond the department that can be of assistance. There are various functions at the students' unions, such as student and doctoral student ombudsmen, student liaison officers and student safety representatives.

It is important for it to be clear to students how they go about presenting complaints and comments, and for this type of matter to be handled promptly when a case is submitted.

8. Additional forms of student influence

8.1. Student influence through student safety representatives

Students contribute to the University's systematic work environment management through student safety representatives, which is a concrete way of influencing the students' situation.

The Vice-Chancellor bears ultimate responsibility for the work environment at Uppsala University. The term 'work environment' also covers the study environment. Managers/heads of department are responsible for planning, organising and following up on work environment and equal opportunities management together with employees, students and safety representatives. Student safety representatives are appointed by the students via the students' unions. The University is responsible for informing students that they have the right to choose a safety representative. It can be a good idea to do this together with the students' unions in connection with information about other assignments within the framework of student influence.

Student safety representatives represent all students on the course or programme and monitor the work environment in their work environment area. Each students' union also appoints a chief student safety representative. Different students' unions have chosen to organise their work with safety representatives in different ways.

The higher education institution must regularly arrange training courses so that the designated student safety representatives have access to the information they need to

carry out their assignment. The training course is given in collaboration between the Buildings Division, the Human Resources Division, the Student Health Service and the students' unions. It lasts around two hours, in Swedish or English, and is a shorter version of the course offered to safety representatives for University employees.

8.2. Student influence through course evaluations

Course evaluations offer students an important opportunity to contribute to the development and improvement of courses at the higher education institution. Course evaluations fulfil two main functions:

- They give students an opportunity to reflect on their learning and education in a structured manner.
- They provide a basis for quality enhancement.

To aid work on course evaluations, there are [Guidelines for course evaluations](#) and [guidance providing advice and support](#).

8.3. Student influence through programme evaluations

Uppsala University's model for programme evaluations covers all education. The aim is for the model to motivate teachers, those in charge of study programmes and students to create an education of the highest national and international quality. The programme evaluations must include an overall assessment of the quality of the programme – its strengths, weaknesses and areas for development.

In accordance with [Uppsala University's Model for Review of Study Programmes – Guidelines](#), students take part in planning, implementing and following up on the programme evaluations. This is achieved through student representation in various deliberating and decision-making bodies, but also by giving students the opportunity to participate in the department's/programme's self-evaluation in connection with the programme evaluation. Course evaluations are often used as a basis for the self-evaluation process. There is also the opportunity during site visits for students to participate in the interviews held by the group of assessors. The students' unions announce assignments as members of assessment groups, in which at least one student must be included. In this case, the student can either be from a corresponding programme at another university or from a completely different programme at Uppsala University.

8.4. Student influence through individual study plans

For students at doctoral level, the preparation and follow-up of the individual study plan (see Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 6, Section 29) is a concrete way of influencing their study situation.