

Introduction

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) is a Student Union (SU) body at Chalmers University of Technology (Chalmers). DS exist to promote issues that are of joint interest to doctoral students. All doctoral students at Chalmers are DS members and each year a board is elected by a General Assembly. The members of the DS Board represent the doctoral students in key administrative boards and committees in order to monitor and influence the research education quality and working conditions of doctoral students at Chalmers.

This document is drafted as a preliminary operational plan (OP) specifying the activities for the DS Board for 2014-2015. The operational plan is divided into a number of focus areas.

DS Core Operating Activities

Representation

Being able to represent the doctoral students in various governing and consultative bodies is a very valuable tool for achieving DS' main objectives. Therefore the main focus areas and the core operating activities of the DS Board is providing representation.

DS shall:

- Provide active representation in bodies and committees at Chalmers (see separate list). Active participation means that DS representatives should participate at least at 75% of the meetings.

Communication

DS shall:

- Maintain an updated webpage as means of communication with its members.
- Continually improve and update the webpage to increase usability.
- Publish a newsletter about twice a year to inform about the upcoming events and highlight the recent activities
- Advertise for DS. How can we let the PhD students know that we exist, what we do and for what issues they can come to us.

Events

DS shall:

- Represent Chalmers during the CHARM fair and doctoral student introduction seminar

- Organize useful events that benefit social skills and life quality of PhD students, as well as their academic career, and give the opportunity to share their concerns and issues regarding PhD life.

Follow-up and feedback

DS shall:

- Offer opportunities to give feedback on our work and our activities. The board needs to know what all members think of their activities, what are their concerns, if its too far away from realistic issues that PhD students have or not. In general to help the DS board tune its way at least once or twice a year in accordance to PhD students needs and concerns.

Other activities

In addition to these activities the DS board provides the services of a Doctoral Student Ombudsman (Doktorandsombud, DO) and nominates a candidate for the Supervisor of the Year Award. Furthermore, functioning as a point of contact for parties wanting to get in touch with representatives for the doctoral students at Chalmers is one of the core activities of DS.

Recruitment and Grass Root Support

For the maintenance of high standards and legitimacy as representatives of the DS members it is central for the Board to communicate with the members. Recruitment of active members to different assignments and a constant turnover of Board members are also required.

DS shall:

- Strive towards that all departments at Chalmers have a representative on the board.
- Encourage and support the development of local doctoral student councils.
- Improve information between local councils and DS board by offering that DS board members can attend council meetings and vice versa.

Non-Swedish speakers' access to information

As half of the newly employed doctoral students are non-Swedish speakers the University must make sure that essential information is available to them. This includes, but is not limited to, employment terms, safety information, rules and regulations, work tools, support information, information about rights and responsibilities etc.

DS shall:

- Work for that all essential information to PhD students from Chalmers should be accessible in English.

- Provide all official DS communication and documentation in English.

Collaboration and Organizational Integration with the Student Union

DS is a part of the Student Union (SU) at Chalmers, and there is great practical and strategic value in increasing our collaboration.

DS shall:

- Have a continuous relationship with SU board
- Have a broad representation of board members in SU committees and sub committees
- Strive to formally organize the DS agreement with Chalmers through SU

National influence and representation

As DS values the possibility to have an exchange of ideas with other SU and doctoral organizations and influence the policy making on a national level, DS will cooperate with organizations such as The Swedish National Union of Students – Doctoral Student Committee (SFS-DK), where it is possible. DS should also strive to show the value of participating in such national organizations.

DS shall:

- Provide representation and actively participate in the work of SFS-DK on a national level.

Clear and transparent rules for PhD studies

DS will continue the work for a more formalized way of monitoring the supervision of the PhD student. Today, a framework exists but is implemented differently at different departments. The system is structured so that every supervisor has to follow them, but the interpretation of the guidelines, or sometimes reluctance to follow them, has high impact on the quality of the education. Three of the main topics on which we will focus are:

- Reducing the considerable variation in the time when a student receives the licentiate degree.
- Improving the acceptance of “medarbetarsamtal” and follow-up of the study plan at all departments.
- Investigating the procedures concerning departmental work duties for doctoral students. Aiming towards an answer of how it differs at different division/department around Chalmers. Based on the outcome of such analysis, decide on activities to improve the research education further.
 - Reach out to local PhD student councils who can help analysing the situation at each department.
- Working towards acceptance of PhD students receiving their full amount of vacation days paid out in salary at the end of their contract after the PhD defence.

Satisfaction in PhD studies

Our goal is to improve terms for doctoral studies at Chalmers. In order to better represent the students and identify key area of interest, last year, DS analyzed the previously gathered survey data about PhD student satisfaction and produced a report with the findings. This report can be found on DS homepage and identifies a variety of problems that can be encountered during the PhD education.

Various continuation tracks have been identified. This year DS will engage in activities aimed at raising the awareness of the emerged issues among the PhD students, both as a preventive measure and as a way to empower the students with the tools needed for diagnosing a problem and coming to its solution, with or without external support. This set of activities will be referred to as “publicity” track.

At the same time DS will inform Chalmers about the findings and conclusions from the survey and ask for their intervention to improve the status quo. The aim is to initiate and catalyze a change of policies and procedures that impact positively on the situation of the PhD students and ensure fair and equal treatment. This operation is quite challenging as it requires the activation and collaboration of various decision-making bodies. It will be referred to as “policy” track and it will most likely require further and long-term efforts.

Generic and Transferable skills

Chalmers University of Technology offers a course package of interdisciplinary personal and professional development classes for doctoral students, this is called Generic and Transferable Skills (GTS). Representing the doctoral students, DS sees it as important to help improvement of the courses included in the GTS package. DS aims to be in contact with the GTS educational officer to give our view on potential improvements.

Self-administration of PhD students

DS shall inform all students about the change and follow up on the accessible functionalities of the platform.

Mecenat and the SJ rebate

Doctoral students are eligible for the Mecenat student card. Students on an activity level of more than 75% percent should receive an additional rebate for SJ, the train company, on their Mecenat card. This rebate is not present for some doctoral students at some circumstances even though there are eligible for it. DS aims towards analyzing which are the concern parties and later to work for a solution. It seems to both be a problem when doctoral students are paying the Student Union members fee too early as well as industrial Ph.D. receiving part or full amount of their pay from the industry.

On our watch list

Visa issues for Non EU/ESS Doctoral Students

The previous visa and working permit praxis for non EU/ESS doctoral students who are employed by Chalmers (or industry) was to issue student visas. This was a nuisance for the individual doctoral student, and had probably in addition a negative impact on the competitiveness of the Swedish Universities including Chalmers when attracting talent. After a 3 years-long journey advocating for changing the previous regulations, an intermediate goal was reached! A bill regarding the visa for PhD studies was approved by the Swedish parliament in the June of 2014. In short, the bill makes it possible for non EU/ESS PhD students to obtain permanent residency after 4 years in Sweden. After another year the non EU/ESS PhD students can apply for Swedish citizenship. This topic is utterly important for our members and it ought to be monitored going forward and that no drawback law is passed with the government of 2014-2018. There have for instance initially been problems with the Swedish Migration Board. DS needs to monitor the success of the implementation regarding the bill from June 2014. During the present year DS aims to continue this work to improve the situation of non EU/ESS PhD students. The next thing that ought to be tackled is a change of visa duration time. It is currently 1 year, but the PhD is a program of several years. The visa duration ought to be at least matching the total contract duration of 1+2+2 years.

New Rules of Procedure – Doctoral Programs Chalmers

A new version of the Rules of Procedure for Doctoral Programs was decided upon last activity year by the Board of Research Education. There were changes in the procedures of change of supervisor, discontinued employment and licentiate degree / level. DS needs to monitor that these changes do not affect doctoral students in a negative way and are implemented / followed as intended.