

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 2013-2014. 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

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:

- Advertise for DS. How can we let the PhD students know that we exist, what we do and what can they come to us for?
- 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:

- Ensure that all departments at Chalmers have a representative in the board.
- Encourage and support the development of local doctoral student councils.
- Provide all official DS communication and documentation in English
- 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.

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 political debate on a national level, DS will cooperate with organizations such as SFS-DK and SDF, 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 and SDF 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 implanted 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. Two 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.

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 performed a survey regarding how satisfied PhD students are with their studies and about a fourth of all PhD students answered. This year, DS will analyze the answers both at Chalmers and at the departmental level through the local student representatives. A summary of the results will be published online and discussions will be initiated within the Chalmers administration to help PhD students have a better work environment. Furthermore, the results will be compared with the outcomes of the employee survey issued by Chalmers

Self-administration of PhD students

PhD students do not have the chance to monitor their progress in courses and their studies in general without time consuming manual administration. DS will highlight this problem in different decisional bodies at Chalmers and collaborate with the administration to define a better working platform.

On our watch list

Visa issues for Non EU/ESS Doctoral Students

The current visa and working permit praxis for non EU/ESS doctoral students who are employed by Chalmers (or industry) is to issue student visas. This is a nuisance for the individual doctoral student, and can in addition have a negative impact on the competitiveness of the Swedish Universities including Chalmers when attracting talent. The overall goal of DS during 2010-2011 was to change this practice to one that leads to the issue of work visas i.e. a form of visa where the residence during the doctoral process is counted for eligibility for citizenship. Progress has been made in the issue, and a national proposal in line with this opinion is currently being discussed at the parliament. The question should remain of the monitor of the DS board until a national decision in our favour has been made.