

1. Introduction

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) is a Student Union (SU) body at Chalmers University of Technology (Chalmers). DS is the coordinating mechanism between PhD students at all Chalmers departments. It represents the PhD students' interests in several key boards and committees at Chalmers (including the Board of Chalmers AB, Faculty Board, Research Education Committee, etc.) and outside of Chalmers (the Swedish National Union of Students - Doctoral Student Committee).

Our goal is to improve terms for doctoral students at Chalmers by:

- Representing doctoral students in several key boards and committees at Chalmers
- Identifying, preventing, and eliminating structural problems
- Becoming a communication hub for doctoral students

DS exists to promote issues that are of joint interest to doctoral students. All doctoral students at Chalmers are DS members and the board is elected annually at the General Assembly (GA).

This document is drafted as a preliminary plan of operational (PoO) specifying the activities for the DS Board for 2015-2016.

2. Core Operating Activities

2.1. Representation

To represent the doctoral students in various governing and consultative bodies is a 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. Active representation means that DS representatives should participate in at least 75% of the meetings. Currently the board provides representation of the PhD students in the following committees:

- Chalmers AB board
- AJK / Work Environment and Equality Council
- Faculty Council
- FUN / Research Education Council
- Repub / Reference group for e-publication
- Chalmers Research Foundation
- Research Misconduct Council
- Library Council
- CKI / Chalmers Committee for Internationalization

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) – Plan of Operation – 2015/2016

2.2. Communication

It is of greatest importance that information regarding PhD students at Chalmers is communicated towards the PhD students. DS has a number of activities to assure good communication.

DS shall:

- Maintain and develop the DS webpage (<http://www.dokt.chs.chalmers.se/>) as means of communication with its members.
- Use the capabilities of social media (i.e. [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), etc.) to better reach out to the PhD students.
- Publish a [newsletter](#) about twice a year to inform about the upcoming events and highlight the recent activities.
- Advertise for DS when opportunity arises. To let the PhD students know that DS exists, and to inform about the activities DS is involved in and to inform about what kind of issues that the PhD students can come to us for.

2.3. Events

DS shall:

- Represent Chalmers during the [CHARM](#) fair.
- Present the role of the DS at the “[Introduction for Doctoral Students](#)” seminar .
- Organize useful events that benefit PhD culture, thereby life quality of PhD students and give the opportunity to share their concerns and issues regarding PhD life.

2.4. Follow-up and Feedback

The DS board represents all doctoral students at Chalmers, hence it is important that the board’s activities are valuable and realistic in respect to the PhD students.

DS shall:

- Hold biannual General Assemblies which offers DS members the opportunity to give feedback on our (DS Board) work and activities.

2.5. Saco and wage-negotiations

DS often find themselves asked questions regarding labor rights and labor law. Additional to this it is important that the PhD students views are heard in the yearly wage negotiations. Therefore it is important that DS is in contact with the PhD students’ trade union Saco.

DS shall:

- Communicate with Saco about rights for PhD students.
- Participate in the yearly wage negotiations between Saco and Chalmers.

3. Other activities

In addition to our Core Operating Activities the DS board provides additional services such as Doctoral Student Ombudsman (Doktorandsombud, DOMB), organizes the Supervisor of the Year Award, and many more. Furthermore DS functions as a point of contact for parties wanting to get in touch with representatives for the doctoral students at Chalmers.

3.1. Ombudsman (Doktorandsombud, DOMB)

The ombudsman (DOMB) is one of the most important services granted by DS to any PhD student who may experience a problematic situation in their PhD studies. The DOMB is bound to confidentially and never acts on his/her own initiative. The DOMB can help the PhD student, in need of help, to identify issues, discuss potential solutions as well as be a support in meetings with supervisor or department.

In autumn 2015 DS has undertaken a demanding process to recruit a new DOMB. The position was advertised through public channels and an interviewing and evaluation process was defined and carried out. A new ombudsman shall be in place before the end of 2015. Meanwhile DS grants service via a temporary ombudsman.

3.2. Supervisor of the Year

Each year the Chalmers Supervisor of the Year award is assigned to a supervisor, who has shown excellent supervision qualities and a large concern towards his/her PhD students.

DS shall:

- Carry on the selection process according to criteria considered of high importance by the PhD students.
- Enhance the discussion among students and supervisors about the values of a good supervision.

3.3. Recruitment and Grass Root Support

To fulfill our goal of high standards and legitimacy as representatives of the DS members it is central for the Board to communicate with its members. Recruitment of active members for different assignments and a constant turnover of DS board members is also required.

DS shall:

- Strive towards representation from all departments at Chalmers. That is to say each department is strongly encouraged to have a representative sitting on the DS 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.

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) – Plan of Operation – 2015/2016

3.4. 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 the SU board.
- Strive to formally organize the DS agreement with Chalmers through the SU.

3.5. National Influence & Representation

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 continue to show the value of participating in such national organizations.

DS shall:

- Provide representation and actively participate in the work of SFS-DK.

3.6. Departmental Duties

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. External money will be applied for to cover this activity.

DS Shall:

- Reach out to local PhD student councils who can help analyzing the situation at each department.
- Compile information, discuss results, and suggest improvements/recommendations/comments

This activity will be dependent on external funds since it cannot be accommodated within current funds. Thereby, if no external funds can be received for the activity the scope might be altered significantly.

3.7. PhD Satisfaction

Our goal is to improve terms for doctoral studies at Chalmers. In order to better represent the students and identify key area of interest, in 2014 DS analyzed the 2013-14 survey data about PhD student satisfaction. A report was released and presented (see DS homepage) identifying a variety of problems that are encountered during the PhD education. Three continuation tracks were proposed:

- (1) Follow-up Track - This can be seen as yet another opportunity receive and analyze feedback in the Chalmers Employee Survey and hence build on the doctoral students' voice for improving satisfaction.

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) – Plan of Operation – 2015/2016

- (2) Publicity Track - 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.
- (3) Policy Track - Inform Chalmers about the findings and conclusions from the survey and ask for their intervention to improve the status quo. 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.

The priority during 2014-2015 has been on the publicity track. A presentation was produced and delivered to one PhD council. The positive feedback received confirms the need to involve all other councils. During 2015-2016. External money will be applied for to cover this activity.

DS Shall:

- Continue the Publicity track activities.
- Analyze the most recent survey results (Follow up track).
- Focus on developing a plan for improvement (Policy track).

The coordination of these activities is aided by internal documents. The work should as much as possible integrate with the baseline work of all DS representatives in order to maximize efficacy and efficiency.

This activity will be dependent on external funds since it cannot be accommodated within current funds. Thereby, if no external funds can be received for the activity the scope might be altered significantly.

4. On our wish list

These are the topic that DS has on its radar, but are not among the prioritized activities.

4.1. Clear/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 it, but the interpretation of the guidelines, or sometimes reluctance to follow them, has high impact on the quality of the education.

4.2. 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) package. 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.

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) – Plan of Operation – 2015/2016

4.3. Mecenat and 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 national train company, on their Mecenat card. This rebate is not given to some doctoral students at some circumstances even though there are eligible for it. It has been understood that the major issue lies in that the computer databases are not linked properly when a PhD student is paying the student union fee early. DS has taken several actions to address this issue to Chalmers and the student union. A solutions has not yet been found. DS aims keep it on its radar and address it when opportunity arises.

4.4. Improving Medarbetaresamtal and Study plan

The medarbetaresamtal and the study plan are an important meeting and document, respectively, for the PhD student. This provides a tool to help planning the PhD studies, a way of spotting potential things to improve as well as a safety for the PhD student on what has been agreed on. The acceptance for the medarbetaresamtal and study plan has been increasing the past years. DS aims to continue to monitor this topic to assure that all PhD students have this possibility.

4.5. Doctoral student portal

The doctoral students are currently lacking a portal that is similar to what the studentportalen is for the undergraduate students at Chalmers. It is currently not possible to sign up for Chalmers courses and exams online. PhD students cannot participate in the course evaluations. The Generic & Transferable skills courses are handled by a separate system. Information about the PhD education is located on Chalmers insidan in a less user-oriented manner. Having a portal for doctoral students would make the doctoral student life at Chalmers significantly easier. DS aims to advocate for the implementation of portal that caters to the doctoral students at Chalmers.

5. Sideline Activities

These are the topics that DS has on its radar, but that does not have any dedicated targeted activities.

5.1. Licentiate Degree

Reducing the considerable variation in the time when a student receives the licentiate degree has been an important action in the past. All PhD students should now be able to obtain a licentiate degree within 3 years. DS aims to continue to monitor this topic to spot and help to solve deviations from this.

5.2. 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 probably had, 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

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) – Plan of Operation – 2015/2016

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. DS aims to monitor the success of the implementation regarding the bill from June 2014.

There have initially been problems with the Swedish Migration Board regarding citizenships. If the applicant stated no interest in staying in Sweden during the visa application then these years have not been counted towards the citizenship. A choice that one was encouraged to do in order to obtain the visa. DS aims look into what can be done to address these issues in order to reach a change.

5.3. The visa duration time

The short visa duration time is an issue for non-EU PhD students in Sweden, it is currently 1 year while the PhD is a program of several years. The short visa duration is not only time consuming for the non-European PhD students, it causes issues when going on conferences. The visa duration should be at least matching the total contract duration of 1+2+2 years.

5.4. New Rules of Procedure – Doctoral Programs Chalmers

A new version of the Rules of Procedure for Doctoral Programs was decided upon 2013-2014's 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.