

Introduction

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) is a student union (SU) body at Chalmers University of Technology (Chalmers). It is the key coordinating body that represents the interests of all doctoral students across Chalmers in several key boards and committees within the institution and outside of it (the Swedish National Union of Students - Doctoral Student Committee or SFS-DK).

More specifically, our goal is to improve the existing conditions for doctoral students at Chalmers by:

- Representing the interests of doctoral students in several key boards and committees at Chalmers (including the Institutional group: Chalmers AB, Faculty Board, Committee for research education, or Forskarutbildningsnämnden – FUN, etc.)
- Identifying, preventing, and eliminating issues related to doctoral education at Chalmers (such as contributing to a better work environment that fosters the growth of both the PhD student and his/her research output)
- Becoming a communication hub by facilitating a direct link between the PhD students and the institution groups (such as the Chalmers AB foundation or FUN etc.)
- Ensuring that the rights of every doctoral student are withheld by closely working with the DOMB and the vice-rector for research and education (FUN) at Chalmers

The DS exists to promote and monitor/follow-up on matters that are of joint interest to all the doctoral students across the university. Every doctoral student is a voting member of the DS and has the right to elect the governing board (which is done annually at the General Assembly). In general, the activities of the DS are divided into –

1. Core operating activities
2. Supplemental activities
3. Advisory roles
4. Sideline activities

The new board was elected in the month of May 2020. This document is drafted as a preliminary plan of operation (PoO) specifying the activities for this elected DS Board for the period 2020-2021.

1. Core operating activities

The DS is involved in several activities that directly impact both the quality of doctoral education as well as the overall environment for research. These activities are in the direct interest of every doctoral student employed at Chalmers and are listed in this section.

1.1 Representation

To represent the interests of doctoral students in various governing and consultative bodies is a valuable tool for achieving the DS's main objectives, i.e. to contribute to a better environment that fosters the growth of both the PhD student and his/her research output. Therefore, one of the core operating activities of the DS Board is to provide such a wide-spread representation.

In relation to this, **the DS shall:**

Provide active representation in bodies, committees and work groups at Chalmers. Active representation would mean that the assigned DS representatives should participate in at least 75% of the meetings. Currently the board provides representation in the following institutional groups:

- Chalmers AB board
- AJK / Work Environment and Equality Council
- Faculty Council
- Forskarutbildningsnämnd FUN /
Research Education Council
- Forskningsnämnden FN
- Chalmers Research Foundation
(Forskningsfonden)
- Chalmers ethics committee
- Focus group Equality
- Research misconduct
- Student Union board meeting (FUM)
- Institutional Council (formerly: Library council)
- University evaluation group (about to be finalized)
- University evaluation group for sustainability

1.2 SACO: Trade union and wage negotiations

The DS is also actively engaged in matters dealing with labor rights and labor law (pertinent to the employment of doctoral students). It is essential that the doctoral student's interests are appropriately represented during the yearly wage negotiations.

In relation to this, **the DS shall:**

- Communicate with SACO the rights of doctoral students.
- Participate in the yearly wage negotiations between SACO and Chalmers.

1.3 Communication

It is of greatest importance that information relevant to doctoral education at Chalmers is communicated appropriately. In relation to this, the DS has a number of activities to ensure that a clear and efficient communication channel is established between the institution and the doctoral student. Information pertaining to the current activities of the DS board would be regularly updated across the various communication channels to ensure a rapid and efficient dissemination of relevant information.

With regards to this, **the DS shall:**

- Maintain and develop an independent website (<http://www.dokt.chs.chalmers.se/>) as a means of communicating the most relevant information.
- Use the capabilities of social media (i.e. [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), etc.) to better reach out to doctoral students.

- Publish a [newsletter](#) twice a year to spread the information about upcoming events and further highlight recent DS activities.
- Advertise on behalf of the DS whenever an opportunity arises. Mainly to let the doctoral students know that the DS exists, and to further inform them about the kind of issues that are generally handled.

1.4 PhD student reach-out

In connection with the previous point, the DS oversees and initiates a number of outreach activities to include all PhD students within the discussions that are currently handled by the board. This is achieved by regularly reaching out to the local PhD councils (via a local PhD council coordinator), thereby ensuring a smooth communication between the DS board and the local councils. Such a regular dialogue would uplift the overall quality of doctoral education and further give the PhD students an opportunity to directly share their immediate concerns and issues with the DS board.

Furthermore, motivation is a critical (and often difficult to achieve) pre-requisite that is required to enable the engagement of PhD students. A pivotal argument towards a valid motivation is that *'PhD students, who are not yet in the final year of their studies, would usually be affected by most issues that are being discussed at the DS board'*. The DS outreach initiatives would emphasize on this 'global' message to better engage the students.

With regards to this, **the DS shall:**

- Appoint a local PhD council coordinator who shall monitor the activities undertaken within all the local PhD councils at Chalmers.
- Facilitate a two-way communication between the local councils and the DS board, by allowing DS board members to attend local council meetings.
- Organize workshops and/or relevant training modules for the members of the local councils to educate them about DS activities.
- Organize informal gatherings such as PhD barbeques and/or other social events to try and engage all the PhD students at Chalmers.

1.5 Events related to doctoral education

The DS helps in organizing and coordinating several events that benefits the doctoral student.

With regards to this, **the DS shall:**

- Represent doctoral education at Chalmers during the [CHARM](#) fair.
- Organize an event where PhD alumni meet current PhD students and report about their career in industry.
- Organize a [workshop series](#) to navigate academia and maximize ones potential covering sessions on self-leadership, sleep management and stress management.
- Co-organize the "[Introduction for Doctoral Students](#)" to supply the new PhD student with the most relevant information regarding doctoral studies in Sweden.
- Present the DS at all local PhD councils in order to improve its visibility.

1.6 Follow-up and feedback

The DS board represents all doctoral students at Chalmers, hence it is important that the board's activities are regularly monitored and appropriately disseminated.

With regards to this, the DS shall:

- Hold biannual General Assemblies which gives every DS member the opportunity to offer feedback on the board and its activities.
- Send out a survey (once every two years) that directly addresses aspects related to the overall satisfaction of the doctoral employment
- Present trends noted in these surveys and other internal evaluations at the various institutional groups (such as for e.g. FUN), in order to bring about a suitable change.

2 Supplemental activities

In addition to the core operating activities, the DS board initiates and supports several supplemental activities such as, the functioning of the Doctoral Student Ombudsman (Doktorandombud, DOMB), the Supervisor of the Year Award, the development of an electronic platform ESP, to name a few. These activities are listed in this section.

2.1 Doktorand ombudsman (DOMB)

The ombudsman (DOMB) is one of the most important services granted by the DS to any doctoral student. The DOMB can help the doctoral student (who is in need of help) to identify issues, discuss potential solutions as well as be a supporting party in meetings with the supervisor and/or department/institution. In early 2016, Moyra McDill started her role as the DOMB.

It should be noted that the DOMB is hired by the DS, and he/she directly reports to the board (i.e. is not a Chalmers employee). In order to support the DOMB, the DS shall:

- Provide/sponsor the DOMB with the suitable infrastructure (such as relevant courses and/or other overheads like office space etc.) to ensure a smooth functioning of the role.
- Engage with the DOMB regularly to understand the general nature of the cases being handled.
- Present the DOMB at the "[Introduction for Doctoral Students](#)" event.
- Actively involve in improving the conditions of employment (through the yearly appraisal meetings – employee satisfaction discussions about the DOMB role).
- Assess general trends in the DOMB's cases, so as to propose/enforce a suitable change at the institutional level (through the various groups such as FUN for e.g.).
- Initiate the recruitment of a new DOMB in the beginning of 2021.

2.2 Supervisor of the year

Each year the Chalmers awards the 'Supervisor of the Year' prize. The DS is involved in organizing/supporting the award of this prize (together with Sofia Månsson). The visibility and importance that this prize carries requires emphasis, and the DS would aid in such an effort by leading the dissemination of the relevant information.

In relation to this, **the DS shall:**

- Carry on the selection process according to the relevant criteria (as assessed by the doctoral students).
- Actively engage in reaching out to as many PhD students as possible: utilize the help of local councils for a more efficient reach-out (involve the local PhD council coordinators)
- Advertise the ‘call for the prize’ via the several DS communication channels and through posters/flyers
- Enhance the discussion among students and supervisors about the importance of a good supervision.
- Interview previous/current winners of the prize to further improve the visibility of the award (these interviews are published in the DS newsletter and on the webpage)

2.3 Recruitment and grass-root support (nomination committee)

To fulfill the requirement for an effective and coordinated DS board, it is essential for the board to communicate with its members. This is achieved through the regular board meetings which are used to evaluate the various activities undertaken by the members. Further, recruitment of active members for different assignments and a constant turnover of DS board members is also a requirement.

In relation to this, **the DS shall:**

- Strive towards equal representation from all departments at Chalmers. That is to say, each department is strongly encouraged to have at least one representative at the DS board.
- Encourage and support the development of local doctoral student councils, which represent doctoral students at a departmental level.

2.4 Collaboration and organizational integration with the student union (Chalmers Studentkår)

DS is a part of the student union (Chalmers Studentkår), and there is great practical and strategic value in our collaboration with them. The kår has a strong say in matters that affect student life at Chalmers, and it is valuable to foster an active relationship with them.

In relation to this, **the DS shall:**

- Have a continuous relationship with the board of the Chalmers Studentkår.
- Strive to formally organize the DS agreement with Chalmers through the Chalmers Studentkår.

2.5 National influence and representation

DS values the possibility to have an exchange of ideas with other student unions and doctoral organizations across Sweden and further influence the policy making at a national level. In relation to this, the DS cooperates with organizations such as [The Swedish National Union of Students –](#)

Doctoral Student Committee (SFS-DK).

With regards to this, **the DS shall:**

- Actively involve in the activities of the SFS-DK by applying membership again in the beginning of 2021.
- Communicate national level policy changes to the institution as well as the local PhD councils.

2.6 PhD satisfaction survey

DS aims at improving the conditions for doctoral studies at Chalmers. In order to better represent the students and identify key area of interest, the DS sends out a survey which is further analyzed in the following three continuation tracks:

- 1) Follow-up Track - This can be seen as yet another opportunity to receive and analyze feedback in the Chalmers Employee Survey and hence build on the doctoral student's voice in improving satisfaction.
- 2) Publicity Track - Engage in activities aimed at raising the awareness of the emerged issues among the doctoral students, both as a preventive measure and as a way to empower the students with the tools needed for diagnosing a problem.
- 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 doctoral students and ensure fair and equal treatment.

With regards to this, **the DS shall:**

- Conclude the analysis of the survey from 2020 (Follow up track).
- Develop a plan for improvement (Policy track), during 2020/21.
- Raise awareness of the results among doctoral students (Publicity track) and Chalmers instances, during 2020/21.

2.7 Electronic study plan (ESP)

The DS was involved in designing an electronic platform (2015/16) to aid in the seamless tracking of a doctoral student's progress (the study plan). This system was officially approved by the Institutional committees during 2017/18 with the decision to constitute a work group to evaluate its immediate implementation. A steering committee consisting of members from the DS board with other members from FUN and the institutional work groups was constituted and the implementation of the ESP is currently in progress. DS is ensuring its quality and giving constant feedback on the work in progress.

In relation to this, **the DS shall:**

- Represent the doctoral student's interests in the steer group by actively relaying relevant

- information to the group.
- Form and lead a sub-committee consisting of members from all local councils at Chalmers (which will be chaired by the DS board representative).
 - Facilitate a two-way communication between the local council ESP committee and the steering group in order to directly influence the desired changes.

3. Advisory roles

The DS is indirectly involved in several other activities that impact the quality of doctoral education. These advisory involvements are primarily through the representation at the various committees (such as at FUN). There are a few activities which would require some regular monitoring. These are listed in this section.

4.2 New rules of procedure – Doctoral education at Chalmers

A new version of the Rules of Procedure for Doctoral Programs was decided in August 2020 and is replacing the last version from 2014. The changes were based on input from the DS, local councils and DOMB. The vice rector of research education declared the Rules of Procedure a “living document” that shall from now on be updated in a more frequent manner.

3.1 PhD studies follow-up

FUN has initiated an activity to improve the existing framework for the PhD studies follow-up. This new framework closely ties-in with the ESP and aims at ensuring a uniform framework for evaluating PhD education. DS also wishes for such a framework and will push for its formalized support. The formulation of this new framework is now about to be implemented and its progress will be further monitored by DS. (mainly through the FUN meetings).

3.2 Improving doctoral courses

FUN has also been involved in improving the doctoral courses provided at Chalmers. The DS survey showed that there was a need to improve the visibility and availability of existing courses as well as provide more courses in order to satisfy the demand. DS will also monitor this closely, actively providing suggestions to the institutional committees and work groups.

3.3 Evaluation of GTS (generic and transferable skills)

Chalmers offers a course package of interdisciplinary personal and professional development courses for doctoral students, i.e. the generic and transferable skills (GTS) package. The DS considers the improvement of these offered courses as an important matter. During the last year, the GTS package has been evaluated thoroughly and decisions on restructuring and improvements are in a process where DS is currently having a strong voice on how these changes can be most beneficial to the PhD students.

3.4 Impact of Covid-19 on PhD students

The ongoing pandemic caused by the coronavirus has impact on PhD students and their education due to difficulties in setting up a remote work-flow and establishing efficiency while working from home. Delays in experimental work due to restricted access to laboratories or instruments, dependency on external partners who have a complete or partial shut-down can be problematic. Cancelled conferences and research visits are important for networking with the research community and potential employers. Psycho-social impacts due to social distancing and exclusion are expected as well as safety concerns due to risk of contamination when working in narrow laboratory spaces. DS shall monitor these concerns and address them to the university management on all levels to reduce the impact on the individual PhD student as much as possible.

3.5 Economy in Balance

In order to get the economy in balance, PhD students can be negatively affected by the decisions made by Chalmers. For example, reduced budget to GTS courses can result in many of these courses being cancelled, reduced percentage of maximum allowed departmental duties (for example 10% instead of 20%), can reduce ones teaching activities. The DS will monitor future discussions closely and take action when necessary to reduce any potential negative consequences that may evolve from any decisions.

4 Sideline activities

These are the topics that the DS has on its radar but have not assigned any dedicated activities to as yet.

4.1 Time for licentiate degree

Reducing the considerable variation noticed in the time needed for the completion of a licentiate has been a regularly addressed matter. All doctoral 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.

4.2 Restructuring DS and local councils

To ensure that both DS and local councils are benefitting maximally from each other in their endeavor of creating an optimal and fair working situation for all PhD students at Chalmers, and to create a more systematic way in which DS and local councils collaborate with each other, DS is planning to suggest a new model for how to bring the DS and local councils under one umbrella. In other words, we seek to restructure, or at least initiate a model, for how DS and local councils can optimally work together.