

## 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 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 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 students and their 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 2022. This document is drafted as a preliminary plan of operation (PoO) specifying the activities for this elected DS Board for the period 2022-2023.

## 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 students and their 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
- Central skyddskommitté – central protection committee (previously AJK)
- 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 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 wage negotiations between SACO and Chalmers (none for the year of 2022-2023, will most likely start later during 2023)

### 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 [newsletters](#) (recommended twice a year) to spread information about upcoming events and further highlight recent DS activities.
- Advertise the DS whenever an opportunity arises, to let the doctoral students know about its role and the kind of issues it generally handles.

#### 1.4 PhD student reach-out

In connection with the previous point, the DS oversees and initiates several 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 is meant to 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, will usually be affected by most issues that are being discussed at the DS board'*. Hence, the DS outreach initiatives should 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, hikes, 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 benefit 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 educational sessions such as [workshop series](#) to navigate academia, or other suitable topics.
- 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) and the Supervisor of the Year Award, 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. A new DOMB were hired during autumn 2021 (after Moyra McDill who started her role as the DOMB in 2016), the new DOMB is called Pascale Blyth.

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.
- Be actively involved 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.).

### 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. The prize is given by the Chalmers administration and the winner is awarded 25 000 SEK. The visibility and importance that this prize carries requires emphasis, and the DS aids 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)
- Choose a winner and write a nomination letter for the administration.

### 2.3 Recruitment, grass-root (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. 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 Student Union (Kåren) 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 engage in the activities of the SFS-DK by renewing membership again in the

- spring of 2023.
- 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 students at Chalmers. In order to better represent the students and identify key areas 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:

- Evaluate the survey, which was conducted in 2022, for next survey in 2024.
- Conclude the analysis of the survey from 2022.
- Develop a plan for improvements and prepare for eventual handover to upcoming year.
- Raise awareness of the results among doctoral students and Chalmers instances, during 2022/23.

## 2.7 DS internal development

As DS is a constantly changing organization, with new members, change of focus and activities, it is important to constantly improve the organization. Furthermore, during the GA in May 2022, it was proposed that “the new board should revise the structure of the board (number of people on the board and number of representatives per department)”.

With regards to this, the DS shall:

- Identify areas of improvement for DS
- Create an action plan for the identified areas
- Revise the structure of the DS board.

# 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.

### 3.0 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 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 of 2020 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 2022 a revised package has been launched, and DS will monitor and come with improvement suggestions regarding the matter.

#### 3.4 Impact of Covid-19 on PhD students

The pandemic between 2020-2022 caused by the coronavirus has impacted PhD students and their education due to difficulties in setting up a remote workflow 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 has been problematic. Conferences and research visits, which are important opportunities for networking with the research community and potential employers, have been canceled or reduced to virtual events. 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. This will most likely be a matter for upcoming years as well as all side-effects of the pandemic that may come to be identified.

#### 3.5 Economy in Balance

In order to get the economy in balance, actions have been taken at Chalmers which might have had a negative impact on PhD students. Hence, DS shall monitor this and act on the matter if needed.

#### 3.6 KUL mässan

In 2023 Chalmers is organizing a conference for education and learning ([Konferens för utbildning och](#)

lärande). DS has been asked to have a representative in the organizing committee who will give input regarding the PhD perspective.

## 4. Sideline activities

These are the topics that the DS has on its radar but have not assigned any dedicated activities to as of 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 Working group regarding gender-based harassment study

A national study has been conducted regarding gender-based harassment in academia which pinpoints the female and non-binary persons as especially exposed. Meanwhile, the different forums at Chalmers (Such as FUN, faculty council, etc.) are discussing the matter but many of them seem to just do *just that, discuss*. Therefore, DS will form a working group with the aim to find solutions and actions which could be transferred to other forums at Chalmers to improve the situation. Link to the whole study (in Swedish): <https://ki.se/media/246914/download>

### 4.3 Teaching duty and points to take for education

There is still a problem with how the teaching duties are counted and what activities that are actually counted as "teaching duty". This becomes problematic as all activities that are not research are, per definition, draining the time of the PhD student to do research. Hence, this issue must be addressed formally and acknowledged broadly at Chalmers so that PhD students do not do more than 20%. Furthermore, PhD students are not always involved in the planning of who gets what teaching, which increases the risk of PhD students to end up teaching a course they do not want to teach or which they do not have the competence to do. Hence, DS should address this issue through the different forums available at Chalmers.

### 4.4 Climate action

To address the ever so important issue, DS should monitor the forums at Chalmers and, if necessary, intervene to support actions for reducing the climate impact. DS will also actively drive this issue.

### 4.5 Extension of residence permit for PhD students

Due to the very long processing time of Migrationsverket, the PhD students who need a residence permit to enter Sweden/EU face the risk of not being able to travel outside and return to Sweden during their waiting time for an extension of residence permit (if the previous one expires during the waiting time). This affects their work and personal life, for example, attending international courses/conferences, having vacations, and visiting family members and friends. This leads to a lot of stress for the PhD students and is also a matter of concern for equality. Hence, DS will advocate for a better process for the PhD students regarding the residence permit application process.