

Agenda: DS Board Meeting #HT23-X, 2023-11-20

Time: 12:00 – 13:45

Place: [Zoom](#) (ID: 680 8296 2605, code: 964516) and room Götaplatsen V2-2427C on Vasa Hus 2

§1. Election of meeting officials and approval of agenda (Francisco)

Chair – Francisco Blas Izquierdo Riera

Secretary – Fredrik Börjesson Sandén

Reviewer – Athanasios Theodoridis (until 13:15), Rahul Aggarwal (after 13:15 elected when Athanasios had to leave).

Decision: The agenda and meeting officials were approved

§2. Meeting notice (Francisco)

Meeting was decided to be held on Monday as to ensure that the DS have an official stance to bring to the Faculty Council Meeting.

Decision: The notice was in due order

§3. Words from the president of DS (Francisco)

The decision to forbid political manifestations at Chalmers campus (henceforth “the decision”) has been though by Students as unnecessary harsh, and an infringement of the discussions typical to a university. The decision was taken due to threats against students in relation to a work fair. The students were also exposed on social media, and so the decision was put into place to protect these students.

The president of the DS board has taken actions to address this, including presenting motions at the FUM meeting (as an elected FUM representative), keeping communication with the Student Union and trying to keep a communication channel open with the headmaster.

The flow of information was delayed for a few days, making the situation more difficult to manage.

Decision: none

§4. Words from the President of Chalmers (Martin Jacobi)

The last few weeks we have had a “situation” in the middle east, which affects Chalmers too. This creates a polarized situation at Chalmers.

There have been activities at Chalmers to push for Chalmers to take a stance in the conflict, which in and of itself is not a problem.

The problem was that some students were exposed to “situations” that made them uncomfortable/exposed/unsafe, and a breach of the Chalmers code of conduct. This situation was escalating.

As the line manager, the headmaster is ultimately responsible for the work environment at Chalmers.

To de-escalate the situation, the decision was put in place, both by the headmaster and the chair of the student union. However, it was not clearly communicated that this was a temporary decision.

The situation had an unprecedented effect in media and at Chalmers.

Work has been done to formulate a procedure to ensure a safe work environment without overly infringing on the freedom of Chalmers faculty and students. This decision was taken on Friday (17/11).

Further feedback on the new decision put in place on Friday is requested/welcome.

Decision: none

§5. Words from the Chalmers Student Union (CHS) (David Hedgren)

There is a disparity between the student body at large and the DS/the doctoral students. The DS situation was less evaluated than those of most other “normal” students.

Potentially, this is related to a larger issue with the DS being somewhat neglected within the student union at large.

We also do not know if there is a difference in opinion of international students about the decision, and how to manage their opinion in the future.

Crisis plans/emergency powers of the student union are under revision in light of this event.

Decision: none

§6. Discussion of the issues (everybody)

The decision was not discussed with the DS before it was put into place.

The company which sparked the decision being put into place does not have any specific relation with the student union, DS, or Chalmers at large. There is no “official” stance on the company from Chalmers, and so the work fair itself is free to take any decision it wants. All work fairs except for CHARM is autonomous at Chalmers.

Who will be the one deciding whether or not a manifestation is allowed?

This is being set up, but there will be a group of people discussing the issue.

The very final decision rests with the headmaster, as he always has the mandate to lock down potentially “dangerous” decisions.

The union will also make its own decision.

Both Chalmers and the union are apolitical organizations. Political views will not influence the decisions taken.

There has to be a clear decision of what is acceptable and not, as especially international students may feel at risk for their residence permit if they think that they have conducted an illegal act.

Chalmers can not decide what is legal and not. A breach of Chalmers conduct or policy does not have an influence in and of itself on legality. However, this was not communicated clearly.

There is a discussion if FUM should consider its stance on weather companies should be banned from every work fair at Chalmers. In the end, this is up to the student body to decide, but the discussion in and of itself may/will be worth having.

The Ukraine-russian conflict is difference, as Russia have been sanctioned by the Swedish nation. Nevertheless, there have been actions at Chalmers in favour of Ukraine, with demonstrations in favour of Ukraine have seen at Chalmers. Why is there a strong stance in that conflict, but not in the Israel-Hamas war? Why is it acceptable to take a stance in that war but not the other.

There may be a revision of general rules at Chalmers of what is appropriate to do. The headmaster himself is not in favour to openly encourage visiting and participating in demonstration in general.

There have also been motions to discourage involvement in “common events”, which was interpreted to mean manifestations and the like.

The headmaster is also surprised by this. His stance is to remain neutral; not encourage or discourage any action.

In the first statement regarding the ban, there was a paragraph that stated that manifestations included posters, meetings etc. This did not go over well with certain students. Especially since often being “apolitical” in and itself may be a political statement.

The ban was never intended to be permanent.

Why is this a problem only at Chalmers? There does not seem to be a similar problem at other universities.

Chalmers did not have strong enough policies to make the decision immediately, and it cannot be compared to other universities, and many other universities often have bans in place already, and often they do not own their own campus, which we do.

The union is directed by its statutes, and an opinion-document. This conflict is uniquely division among the student body, and there is not a clear right and wrong that most of the student body will subscribe to. The system and proceedings for this type of matters may need to be changed in the future in light of these events.

A reason not included in the DS on the initial decision was perceived as a line-manager question, and since it was not supposed to be permanent it was not necessarily a DS-question. Also, due to the time constraints, swift action was taken.

As of 2023-11-20, there is no ban in place for political manifestations at Chalmers. The formal procedures will be put in place as soon as possible. A “how-to” document or process may be put in place when the procedures are in place. There is no approval process, per-se, but there will be a dialogue about the process and the manifestation.

When is a decision urgent and not? Looking at the sexual-harassment issue, that is also a work-place issue, but no decision has been taken on that issue.

Urgent matters evolve quickly and require swift action, as the situation can worsen or change rapidly. For sexual harassment that poses an imminent danger of harm to an employee, immediate action is necessary. However, if the issue is related to policy and does not pose a serious harm to a person in the absence of an immediate decision, then it should involve an inclusive discussion rather than a quick decision made by a few individuals

– The headmaster agrees with the principle of what is stated. The statement of apolitically is in the Chalmers foundation, but it can be interpreted in different ways. We adhere to our foundational documents, rules, and regulations as mandated by the country, and base our decisions on these guidelines. In cases where these rules and regulations do not provide clear guidance, we strive to remain apolitical

Chalmers is not apolitical in all cases. Even such things as “all genders are welcome at Chalmers”, are in some sense a political statement. Would it be better to abandon the idea of apoliticality, but instead define a set of values to guide decision-making?

The headmaster agrees with the principle of what is stated. The statement of apolitically is in the Chalmers foundation, but it can be interpreted in different ways.

Different faculties have different stances and views themselves. This makes things confusing for people who cannot find one singular guideline.

This will have to be discussed further as there is not one singular guideline for Chalmers as a whole.

Chalmers, by and large, does not have an internal foreign policy, but we follow the national guidelines.

While the student union is not a political body in itself, students may, and are encouraged to have their own personal political views.

There should be a way to get a clarification of similar decisions in the future. We can not go immediately to the headmaster to get our answers. There must also be a time limit for the answer.

Decision: none

§7. Proposal of decisions to be taken and vote (DS board)

Due to the meeting running late, the board agrees that Francisco will bring the proposals to the board for discussion and acceptance (if nobody opposes them)

Decision: accepted

§8. Meeting is closed (Francisco)

Decision: meeting was closed at 13:45

Glossary

Work group names

6DS: Events work group

CoDS: Communication work group

IT: Information Technologies work group.

MoDS: Onboarding (Mottagning) work group.

NoCo: Nomination committee.

REDS: Research and Education work group.

WESEE: Work Environment, Sustainability, Equality and Ethics work group.

Department names

ACE: Architecture and Civil Engineering

K: Chemistry and Chemical engineering

CLS: Communication and Learning in Science

CSE: Computer Science and Engineering

E2: Electrical Engineering

IMS: Industrial and Material Science

LIFE: Life Sciences

MV: Mathematical Science

M2: Mechanics and Maritime Sciences

MC2: Microtechnology and Nanoscience

F: Physics

SEE: Space Earth and Environment

TME: Technology Management and Economics

Other

CHS: Chalmers Student Union

GA: General Assembly

Annexes

Received member opinions

Universities represent education, discussion, and a collective shaping of the future. It is a place where ideas are being exchanged. Open discussions and free speech are the fundamentals of democracy and will always be part of good education and research.

However, our free speech should never be taken for granted. Recently, we have seen external pressure from countries to extradite our citizens and change our laws. We are in the midst of a very turbulent situation in Israel and Palestine, while the war in Ukraine is still ongoing, and we are just getting out of a global pandemic. It is especially in these times that our democratic values and rights are the most important.

We at Chalmers have an opportunity to lead by example in the fight for democracy, but instead restrict what can be expressed in a civil, democratic manner. This decision was rushed, and made without the input from the majority of people who it affected. Politics is not something one can choose to not partake in, as it is always present. Science is political, universities are political, and life is political.

Hate speech is a criminal offense in Sweden, and has no place at Chalmers. So how do we avoid these dangerous ideas? Prejudices and hate grow when the discussion is not open and information is kept exclusive. It is not okay for people to feel unsafe, but feeling uncomfortable when confronted with different ideas or the realities of other people is. Should decisions like the one that was made be proactive? If it was reactive, was this a proportional reaction, and what was being reacted to? Is it acceptable to make such drastic changes, changes that send a clear message of the stance Chalmers takes in the World, without having the support of the students and the staff? These are questions we should expect answers to.

One of Chalmers's values is supposed to be 'openness', but the recent actions seem to indicate the opposite. In the future, I hope Chalmers does not rush to make these decisions, only to have to backtrack less than a week later. We as students value openness, but not only in name.

Isak Brundin
PhD student at MC2

DS Stance

Below you'll find the decisions proposed and accepted by the members of the board. Footnotes are included to provide clarifications or to explain how they were followed-up.

From: Francisco Izquierdo (Chair) <chair@dokt.chs.chalmers.se>

To: DSBoard2023

Date: 20/11/23, 16:51

Subject: [DSBoard2023] Suggestions: stances of DS regarding the ban and how it was communicated.

Hi all,

Before we start I would like to thank everybody for having kept the meeting polite and respectful. I think we have all given a great example of how to handle serious policy matters in a democratic society.

There is a lot to discuss and digest, but we should adopt some stances before tomorrow. We also should try to be transparent and thus I will attach this discussion thread (including your answers) to the minutes.

With that said, here are my proposals (but please bring your own if you have better ones).

Regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Many of us chose to follow a path on research instead of more lucrative careers in the industry out of a belief that our research would bring improvement to our society in one way or another. Because of this, we would like to see conflicts like this one being solved peacefully instead of through force and violence. We are aware of the complexity of this specific situation in a world in which finding true information is harder than ever. As researchers we strive to filter real information away from disinformation and would like to encourage everybody in the wider society to try to do the same while still staying open to arguments that conflict with their own views. Because of this along with the wide variety of experiences and views across our student body we at DS would like not to take a stance on this other than what encouraging everybody to be critical of the information they receive no matter whether it agrees with their views or not so that they can take their own positions in the most informed way possible.

Regarding the situation leading to the ban

As an organization formed by students who quite often volunteer their time in the hopes of making a better campus for everybody, DS is particularly concerned with the situation leading to the ban. We consider both threats and public exposure of students volunteering their time without a political aim to improve life at campus absolutely unacceptable. We believe that a working democracy depends on its members being able to improve it in the ways they see adequate safely and therefore we consider these actions execrable, specially taking into account that the actions of these students never had a political aim to start with.

Regarding the ban on political demonstrations¹

Unfortunately politics permeate all aspects of society and while we try our best to remain neutral in our research we are still human beings with our own views and opinions. Politics influence what we teach and in what topic our research is funded, in exchange we influence politics by uncovering new facts and bringing new ideas to the table based on our own experiences.

Everybody living on a democratic society has the duty of raising their own voices and ideas so that our their views and needs are heard and taken into account when making decisions. We as researchers also have a duty, as experts in our fields, to bring facts and empiric results to the table to ensure that any decisions taken are as well informed as possible. Furthermore we also have the responsibility of bringing up any threats or risks to our society that we uncover so that action can be taken. The issues with climate change on which society is working on is one such example of this.

Because of this and the way the ban was phrased we at DS believe that the ban was excessive and overarching. We understand that Chalmers and CHS saw themselves in a situation on which they needed to act urgently to ensure the safety of the involved students, but we also believe that many other alternatives should have been considered and tested before taking such a drastic measure. Similarly we also feel that the duration of the ban was excessive taking into account the timeline of events. Since in its original formulation the ban was too board and indefinite, we saw it as a threat to our ability to perform our duties both as citizens but also as researchers towards our democratic society. We hope that Chalmers management does not consider such a policy ever again in the future. While we understand that the safety of the members of the academical community is critical for the function of the university, so is the ability to communicate and share our ideas and knowledge freely.

Finally we would like to commend those who despite the risks caused by the uncertainty of the original ban raised their voices against it, demonstrated against it and did other actions trying to show the issues and their disagreement with the policy to others in the academical community while being respectful with those involved. Brave people like you are needed to ensure a working democracy and you should feel honored to have had the guts top stand up in this situation.

Regarding the new policy political demonstrations

We believe that the new policy is reasonable and more in line with the expectations of a democratic society and of the Swedish one in particular. Being able to learn from ones mistakes is critical to great research and we are happy that this seems to have been the case here.

Regarding crisis communication

1 Fredrik Börjesson Sandén also added: "one thing I would like to bring is that much of the confusion and anger could have been avoided if it had been clearly stated from the start that the ban was temporary. I think that should be part of whatever statement we bring."

Many of us were bamboozled to learn about this issue from news and media (specially that from our countries of origin) instead of directly from Chalmers. We believe that both Chalmers and CHS need to do further work on this matter although we are aware it is a very complex one.

We at DS would like to commend the board of CHS for having stood the 6 hour of public questioning that was held at the last FuM (CHS council) meeting. Similarly we would like to send our appreciation both to David Hedgren (vicepresident of CHS) and to Martin Nilsson Jacobi (President of Chalmers) for having joined us on our last board meeting to discuss this issue and having been open to the barrage of questions that were raised from the board and also from other members of DS. We would also like to thank all of the DS members who participated on this meeting, despite it short notice, for doing so and holding the whole meeting constructive and professional.

Regarding the lack of input from PhDs. on the decisions

We are very concerned about the lack of participation DS (and by extension PhD. students at Chalmers) had in this decision. While it is understandable that at times the situation does not allow enough time to consult all the relevant stakeholders before damage is made, it is always critical that after the decision is taken and with the same level of urgency, they are given a chance to raise their views and concerns so that the decision can be reevaluated. This is not something that has happened this time, at least not with enough swiftness and which has caused more problems than desirable.

At DS, we see our task representing the voices of our fellow PhD. students as critical not only for our immediate future but also for the long term viability of Chalmers as an attractive place for future PhD. students. Therefore we actively refuse that Chalmers or CHS take decisions affecting us like these ones without first conferring with us.

On future collaboration with CHS

At DS we believe that future collaboration with CHS is critical to ensure that PhD students are also integrated in Chalmers' student life. We have various ongoing initiatives to further that goal and will keep working on them. We do not agree with the decision that was originally taken but we still believe that this might have been a mistake due to the (relative) inexperience of the management team combined with the pressure of the situation. Therefore we will continue collaborating with CHS as we have done until now to ensure PhD. students can become part of the Chalmers culture too.

Other decisions

To handle what is left of this situation I will allocate (unless somebody clearly opposes it now) 25 000 crowns from our budget² to hire a crisis communication expert (at an hourly rate slightly over what departments require we pay for departmental hours) to help us prepare a final communicate on this matter to be released along with the minutes ensuring that we minimize the risks of misunderstandings. I am aware we could enlist help from CHS' communicators but given their involvement I think it would be preferable to have help from a neutral source.

² This money was not used at the end.

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