



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 student 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, FUN, etc.)
- Ensuring that the rights of every doctoral student are protected by closely working with the DOMB and the vice-rector for research education at Chalmers
- Promoting connections and a sense of belonging among doctoral students both within Chalmers and outside by working with onboarding and communication of information as well as organizing social activities

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. Sideline activities

The new board was elected in the month of April 2023. This document is drafted as a preliminary plan of operation (PoO) specifying the activities for this elected DS Board for the period 2023-2024.

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 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
- Fakultetsrådet / Faculty Council
- Forskarutbildningsnämnd FUN / Research Education Council
- Forskningsnämnden FN
- Chalmers Research Foundation (Forskningsfonden)
- Central skyddskommitté – central protection committee
- Research misconduct (EOK)
- Student Union council meeting (FUM)
- Institutional council CLS (formerly: Library council)
- Work group on PhD students' work environment

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

1.3 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 students 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.

It should be noted that the DOMB is hired by the DS, and they directly report 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.).
- Assess how well-known, accessible and satisfactorily the DOMB’s services are perceived by the doctoral students and support the DOMB in improving these measures.
- Examine the possibilities to move the DOMB’s employment to the responsibility of the student union to provide an improved guidance and leadership as well as work environment for the DOMB.

1.4 Communication

It is of greatest importance that information relevant to doctoral students 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 at least 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.

1.5 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 partly by regularly reaching out to the PhD councils at the departments, thereby ensuring a smooth communication between the DS board and the local councils; partly by creating and maintaining direct communication channels between the DS board and the doctoral students. This dialogue aim to give the PhD students an opportunity to directly share their immediate concerns and issues with the DS board, enabling the DS board to better represent the doctoral students in consequence. On the other hand, this dialogue also can provide an effective way to share information about the rights of doctoral students and DS’ activities. This is relevant in particular to aid doctoral students in understanding how the board’s work impacts their own studies and work

situation and in turn to improve the engagement of doctoral students in the work done by DS.

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

- Facilitate a two-way communication between the local councils and the DS board, e.g. by allowing DS board members to attend local council meetings and appointing a local PhD council coordinator.
- Provide a way for local PhD councils to exchange challenges, experience and best-practices from their departments, as well 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.

1.6 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.

1.7 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. These activities are listed in this section.

2.1 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.
- 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.

2.2 Recruitment, grass-root (nomination committee)

To ensure continuity in the work of the DS board even over several terms it is important to recruit new members for the next term. The board members ideally represent the diversity of Chalmers’ PhD students and its different departments. Furthermore, it is desirable to involve doctoral students who are not members of the DS board whenever feasible.

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.
- Encourage doctoral students to join their activities whenever feasible.

2.3 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.
- Investigate the possibility to transfer the employment of the DOMB to the student union (see 1.3)
- Improve the possibilities for doctoral students to also become members of other sections of the student union in addition to DS.
- Participate in the KU meetings with other Section Presidents and the student union management.

2.4 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.
- Communicate national level policy changes to the institution as well as the local PhD councils.

2.5 PhD satisfaction survey

DS aims at improving the conditions for doctoral studies 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:**

- Finalize and publish a report of the analysis of the survey from 2022.
- Conduct a new survey based on the survey from 2022 during the 2023/2024 term.

- Make the aggregated results from the survey accessible to others working on the improvement of the doctoral students' situation, i.e. the local PhD councils.
- Analyze the results of this survey and summarize the results of the analysis in an accessible way, e.g. as a presentation.
- Examine the possibility to develop analysis tools that can be used even for future versions of the survey.
- Raise awareness of the results among doctoral students and Chalmers instances.

2.6 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 and further improve the new, work-group based structure of the DS board.
- Re-visit the routines for hand-over and follow-up on issues identified in previous years.
- Improve the structure suggested for the plan of operations for the next years.

2.7 KUL mässan

In 2024 Chalmers is again organizing a conference for education and learning ([Konferens för utbildning och lärande](#)). DS has even this year been asked to have a representative in the organizing committee who will give input regarding the PhD perspective.

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

- Participate in the organization of the KUL conference.

2.8 Collaboration with Dr. Genie

Dr. Genie is the recently founded doctoral student branch of Chalmers' initiative on gender balance, Genie. In this forum each department should be represented by one doctoral student, and the representative's work is considered as departmental duties. It is important for DS to maintain a good cooperation with Dr. Genie and join efforts to improve equality, diversity and inclusion within Chalmers.

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

- Establish and maintain a good cooperation with Dr. Genie.

2.9 Participation in the internal evaluation process for research education

During 2024, a research schools at Chalmers will undergo an (internal) evaluation process led by FUN. The process will involve PhD representants at each department as well as within the “central evaluation group”.

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

- Support the local PhD councils with information about the process to ensure that they can accompany the evaluation at their departments critically.
- Facilitate exchange between PhD students involved in the process.
- Select a representative for the central evaluation group who will also report back about the process to the DS board.

3. Focus topics and other activities

Apart from the continuous work listed above, DS also pursues improvements in topics that sometimes are more specific than those missions, and sometimes are so broad that they touch several topics at once. They are listed below.

3.1 Prevention of harassment

In May 2022, a national study regarding gender-based vulnerability to sexual harassment in academia has been published by a research cooperation led by Karolinska Institutet (available [here](#)). The study pinpoints female and non-binary PhD students as especially exposed, a difference that is even more pronounced at Chalmers than in the sector at large. Since then different forums at Chalmers (such as FUN, faculty council, etc.) have been discussing the matter, but apart from education and discussion efforts in the departments no real changes have happened. This underlines the importance of DS taking an active role in these matters and demand an improvement of the situation.

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

- Incorporate the work against all forms of harassment and discrimination in all its efforts.
- Ensure that this topic is treated with priority, e.g. by continuing the working group formed on this issue by the last term’s board.
- Formulate and advocate changes deemed necessary to improve the situation.

3.2 Departmental duties

Distribution, keeping track and compensation of departmental duties varies wildly between different departments and divisions at Chalmers. For a considerable share of doctoral students, problems regarding this area are a major cause of stress and dissatisfaction. The DS board has worked in different

areas on this topic, partly by coordinating improvement efforts from the local PhD councils, partly by bringing up this topic for discussion in FUN, where a more precise formulation of those tasks has as a result been incorporated into the rules of procedure.

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

- Continue to monitor and summarize problems in this area.
- Strive for improvement by supporting the local PhD councils and/or working on this topics in the groups where DS is represented (e.g. FUN)

3.3 Climate action

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

With regards to this topic, the DS shall:

- Monitor actions and relevant reports addressing Chalmers commitments to reducing climate impact.
- Liaise with relevant persons at Chalmers to drive action forward concerning climate impact reductions.

3.4 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.

3.5 Extension of residence permit for PhD students

The processing time of residence permits at Migrationsverket has been very long in during the last years, and PhD students who needed a residence permit to enter Sweden/EU faced 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). Due to changes made regarding the duration for which the permit is granted, as well as an improvement in the processing time this issue seems to have less of an impact. However, DS needs to continue to monitor this and furthermore consider the possibility to take action against the changes made to the possibility to get permanent residency after completion of a PhD in Sweden.