

The Doctoral Student Guild (DS) – Plan of Operation – 2017/2018

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 doctoral students at all Chalmers departments. It represents the doctoral 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 2017-2018.

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 doctoral 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

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2.2. Communication

It is of greatest importance that information regarding doctoral students at Chalmers is communicated towards the doctoral 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 doctoral 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 doctoral 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 doctoral 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 doctoral student culture, thereby life quality of doctoral students and give the opportunity to share their concerns and issues regarding doctoral student 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 doctoral 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 doctoral students views are heard in the yearly wage negotiations. Therefore it is important that DS is in contact with the doctoral students’ trade union Saco.

DS shall:

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

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3. Other activities

In addition to our Core Operating Activities the DS board provides additional services such as Doctoral Student Ombudsman (Doktorandombud, 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 (Doktorandombud, DOMB)

The ombudsman (DOMB) is one of the most important services granted by DS to any doctoral student who may experience a problematic situation in their doctoral studies. The DOMB is bound to confidentially and never acts on his/her own initiative. The DOMB can help the doctoral 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 undertook a demanding process to recruit a new DOMB, which was hired in early 2016, being Moyra McDill. During 2017/2018, DS will focus on supporting the DOMB when needed.

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 doctoral students. During 2015/2016 it was proposed that the winner will hold a presentation on the conference on teaching and learning (KUL) after receiving the award, and DS is involved in organizing/supporting this to take place during 2016/2017 together with Sofia Månsson.

DS shall:

- Carry on the selection process according to criteria considered of high importance by the doctoral 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.

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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. The investigation focuses on differences between divisions/departments around Chalmers, for instance in terms of amount of courses, distribution among doctoral students at the department, how hours spent on department duty are accounted for and language requirements of the course versus language proficiency of the doctoral student.

DS Shall:

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

3.7. PhD Satisfaction survey

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 doctoral student satisfaction. A report was released and presented (see DS homepage) identifying a variety of problems that are encountered during the doctoral 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.
- (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 and coming to its solution, with or without external support.

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- (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.

Since the survey was conducted several years ago, DS aims to make a new survey and send this out during the fall to investigate if the area of interest for doctoral students have changed.

DS Shall:

- Conduct a survey based on previous survey, Chalmers employee survey and experience in doctoral student life.
- Analyze the survey results (Follow up track), partly during this activity year and partly during 2018/19.
- Develop a plan for improvement (Policy track), during 2018/19 and possibly into 2019/20.
- Raise awareness of the results among doctoral students (Publicity track) and Chalmers instances, during 2018/19 and 2019/20.

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 performed together with Linnea Qvirist (chair of DS board 2016/17), as adjunct and senior advisor to the DS board.

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 doctoral 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. DS also wish to push for formalized support for examiners.

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.

4.3. Improving Medarbetarsamtal and Individual Study Plan (ISP)

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The appraisal talk (medarbetarsamtal) held yearly with your closest manager (for Chalmers employed doctoral students) and the follow up meeting held annually or preferably bi-annually as well as the individual study plan (ISP) are important meetings/documents for the doctoral student. Together provide a tool to help planning the PhD studies, a way of spotting potential things to improve as well as a safety for the doctoral student on what has been agreed on. The acceptance for the medarbetarsamtal and study plan has been increasing the past years. DS aims to continue to monitor this topic to assure that all eligible doctoral students have this possibility.

DS participated in a reference group evaluating an IT platform for ISP during the 2015-16. The group recommended not pursuing the specific solution that was offered to Chalmers. The reasoning behind this was that the specific platform was considered to not help the doctoral students to plan their research any better than the current paper version. However, the working group thought that an IT platform would be a preferable option if made right. But before any such change would take place Chalmers wanted to see how the next Ladok, version 3, was implemented. An ISP IT system will be connected to Ladok and thereby the implementation of Ladok will dictate an implementation of the potential ISP IT system.

A successful ISP IT system is dependent on the content, specifically the formulation of the questions in the ISP, more than anything else. Thereby it was decided in FUN that the working group on the IT platform will be reinstated to evaluate the content starting this fall. This will allow Chalmers to be ready with the content when a decision can be made to start looking at the implementation part. DS is represented in the group and plans to actively work towards content that protects and helps the doctoral student to plan her or his research.

4.4. Doctoral student portal

During 2015/16 and 2016/17 DS proposed a plan for a new Doctoral Portal and during 2017 a first version of the Doctoral student portal was out. Since autumn 2017 it is possible for doctoral students to sign up for undergraduate courses as well as exams online. Information about PhD education (Handbook, Graduate Schools and Courses) is available at the portal as well as GTS courses are handled here. DS aims to advocate for that the portal should take advantage of the new capabilities in Ladok 3, once the new Ladok is implemented (see 4.3 for more information about Ladok 3). The submitted plan includes multiple suggestions that are dependent on the coming Ladok 3 implementation. During 2017/18 DS aims to include more information and connect more functions to the Doctoral student portal.

4.5. Doctoral student work environment

During 2017 FUN started a working group (DAM project = doktoranders arbetsmiljö) to investigate the doctoral student work environment, led by Helen Lejon and Magnus Åkerström. The group will study the doctoral student work environment, recommend possible areas to improve and give examples on good work environments at Chalmers. The project is divided into two parts:

1. Analysis of already available statistics regarding the doctoral student work environment (from example LADOK, the employee survey, personal administrative document, earlier notes and studies at Chalmers etc.)

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2. Collect additional information and continue the analysis from the results of part 1 (for example by interviews and/or workshops with representatives)

Once this project has evolved, the work group will contact important instances, such as DS, with further information and ask the instances to participate. DS aim is to monitor the progress of the work group via FUN and have a representative in the discussions after the project has evolved. DS will also convey the analyzed results of the doctoral student survey. This is without giving access to the answer of survey, but so that important conclusions are used to support the DAM project.

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 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. In addition, DS aims to reformulate the question related to this in the Chalmers survey.

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 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 doctoral students to obtain permanent residency after 4 years in Sweden. After another year the non EU/ESS doctoral 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.

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5.3. [The visa duration time](#)

The short visa duration time is an issue for non-EU doctoral students in Sweden, was 1 year until last spring. The short visa duration was not only time consuming for the non-European doctoral students, it causes issues when going on conferences. Since the spring 2016 the visa duration time has changed to 2 years to better match 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.

5.5. [Chalmers Committee for Internationalization \(CKI\)](#)

Chalmers Committee for Internationalization is on hold, but DS has a representative once the committee reinitiate its work.