



**Karolinska  
Institutet**

# **Instructions for student influence at Karolinska Institutet**

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# Instructions for student influence at Karolinska Institutet

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## Introduction

Active and engaged student involvement is essential to the development efforts of the university and the quality of academic education.

Quality work is a common concern for the staff and students of all universities<sup>1</sup>. The students have a statutory right to exercise influence over their education and the higher education institutions have a statutory obligation to encourage their students to take an active part in the further development of their education<sup>2</sup>.

By student is meant anyone who has been admitted to and is pursuing higher education<sup>3</sup> at first (Bachelor), second (Master), and third (Doctoral)-cycle levels<sup>4</sup>.

All students are co-actors in the university's activities and have therefore shared responsibility as regards influencing and developing their education. For such influence to be realised, the students need to take an active and engaged role as individuals and as a collective, but this cannot happen without their views, opinions and suggestions being requested and respected. The university is therefore bound to take active measures to facilitate and encourage students to participate in educational development.

The students are entitled to representation when decisions or preparations are made that have a bearing on their courses or programmes or their situation<sup>5</sup>. This also includes matters concerning budgets, resources and administration<sup>6</sup>.

If a decision is to be made by a group of individuals, the students are entitled to representation by at least three members. The number of student representatives in such a group may however be fewer if there are special grounds in view of the total number of members in the group<sup>7</sup>.

If decisions or preparations are to be made by one single individual, information is to be provided and consultation take place with a student representative in ample time before the decision is made or preparations concluded<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 1 Section 4

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 1 Section 4a

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Ordinance Chap 1 Section 4

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 1 Section 7

<sup>5</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 2 Section 7

<sup>6</sup> Government bill 1999/2000:28, Student influence and quality development in higher education p.28-29

<sup>7</sup> Higher Education Ordinance Chap 2 Section 14

## **Responsibility for student influence at Karolinska Institutet**

Formal student influence (i.e. that students are entitled to representation when decisions or preparations are made that have a bearing on their education or situation) is the responsibility of the Vice-President.

The Vice-President holds regular meetings with the presidents of the student unions for the purposes of information exchange and consultation. At such meetings, they discuss the formal and practical functioning of student influence. The students unions are also entitled to append to their regular annual report to KI a special report on their views on student influence at KI and how it has developed.

The creation of a healthy study environment requires the students' views on education and the study environment to be heeded. The Deputy Vice-President for Higher Education and the Deputy Vice-President for Doctoral Education have responsibility for this within their respective educational fields, and have regular meetings with student union representatives for information exchange and consultation.

## **Student union status**

Every three years, KI invites the student associations who wish to be recognised as student unions to apply for this status<sup>8</sup>. A decision on student union status remains valid for three years<sup>9</sup>, and shall specify at which organisational or geographical part or parts of the university the association is to have the status of union.

The following associations have been granted union status within their field for 2019–2021:

- *Medical Students' Association in Stockholm (MF)* for all programmes at all levels at KI, except for first and second-cycle education presided over by the Department of Dental Medicine.
- *Student Union of Odontology (OF)* for all first and second-cycle education presided over by the Department of Dental Medicine.

The main purpose of a student union is to monitor and take part in the development of courses and programmes<sup>10</sup>.

## **Student representation**

In order to exercise influence, students are entitled to be included on all bodies that have some bearing on their education. Matters relating to budgets, resources and administration are also important to education and the students' situation, and the students should be entitled to representation on management groups, supervisory groups, investigative committees, etc<sup>11</sup>. KI's basic principle is that

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<sup>8</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 4 Section 8

<sup>9</sup> Ordinance on Student Unions Section 4

<sup>10</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 4 Section 9

<sup>11</sup> Government bill 1999/2000:28, Student influence and quality development in higher education

the students are to have a strong position in the decision-making process with the possibility of representation in all groups that have a bearing on their education and/or situation.

Student representatives are appointed by the student unions. The unions distribute the available places between themselves and decide on whom to appoint to each one. The appointees represent all students regardless of educational level, programme or union. KI may not decide on any particular distribution or appointment. In some cases, a certain distribution might be appropriate, and the person responsible for the body may propose a particular configuration of union, educational level and programme representation. The unions are, however, not obliged to comply with this proposal, and only in such cases where the unions are unable to agree can KI decide on how the places are to be allocated<sup>12</sup>.

### **Annual agreement with the unions**

To ensure that student influence is realised at all levels, KI and the student unions enter an agreement every year on how student influence is to be guaranteed in the bodies that deal with matters relating to education and the students' situation.

Every autumn, KI compiles a list of the decision-making, preparatory and advisory bodies in its organisation (general organisation, departments and administration) that deal with matters relating to education or the students' situation, including the number of student representatives on each and identifying the individuals delegated to decide on matters relating to education or the students' situation (including doctoral education and doctoral students).

The list is to be sent to the student unions by 31 October.

It is the responsibility of the student unions to ensure that the places are distributed between the unions, to hold elections/appoint representatives, and to observe the equality perspective. The unions may decide that student influence on a body shall instead be effected by, for example, requesting the underlying documentation and proposals for a decision to be sent to them (to a given email address) a week before the meeting to give them an opportunity to submit their comments or views. The student unions may also decide not to appoint representatives to a particular body.

The unions are required to submit details of which union (and which section within it) appoints student representatives to which body, the names of the representatives, if representation is to be effected by other means (including contact details), or if the unions have opted not to have representation on a body, by 28/29 February at the latest.

Pending the appointment of new representatives, unless the student unions have requested otherwise, KI calls the sitting representatives to the meetings.

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<sup>12</sup> Ordinance on Student Unions section 7

### **Appointment of student representatives during the year**

In the event of vacancies or of new groups/decision makers, a request for the appointment of a new representative is to be sent to the unions and the central administration (via email to [studrep@medicinskaforeningen.se](mailto:studrep@medicinskaforeningen.se), [UU@ofsthlm.se](mailto:UU@ofsthlm.se) and [studentrepresentation@ki.se](mailto:studentrepresentation@ki.se)).

In order for the unions to be able to appoint student representatives to new and temporary groupings (e.g. committees, project groups) or decision-makers, the relevant information is normally to be sent to the unions (by email, see previous paragraph) by no later than one month before the group's first meeting. Should the grouping be the outcome of a preparatory meeting or decision in which a student representative has participated, this person and the decision-maker /administrator responsible are required to ensure that the student unions are duly informed.

The student unions are required to ensure that all written requests for a student representative are dealt with and replied to within ten working days. Should such a request not be replied to within ten working days, it will be taken to mean that the unions do not wish to be represented on the matter in question.

The student unions' reply shall state:

- whether a student representative has been/will be appointed – identifying both the student union (and which internal section, if relevant) responsible for the appointment and the appointee – or when a student representative can be appointed
- *or* whether student influence will instead be effected through receipt of the underlying documentation and proposals for a decision (to be sent to a given email address)
- *or* whether the unions are opting not to appoint a representative/representatives.

If an appointed student representative resigns the position prematurely (i.e. before the end of the year) and a vacancy appears, he or she must inform the relevant student union that a replacement needs to be appointed.

### **Support and education for student representatives**

Effective and independent student influence depends heavily on the ability of the student unions to take responsibility for training and supporting the student representatives. To this end, KI offers the student unions a course for representatives on the rules governing the university and how the organisation operates.

### **Certificate**

Student representatives are entitled, on request, to obtain a written certificate of their commission of trust at KI.

### **Student influence when preparation and decision-making is done by a group**

The student representatives in a group have the same rights and obligations as the other group members. The designated student representative guarantees the student influence as required by Chap. 2 Section 7 of the Higher Education Act. The student representative represents all students (i.e. including those studying at another level and/or on another programme) and the student unions are required to ensure that the appointed student representatives are able to gather opinions, anchor decisions and feed back to the students concerned.

It is the responsibility of the chairperson of every preparatory body to ensure that every new student representative on that body receives a relevant introduction to its function and procedures, and that the student representatives are given the same information and discussion material as the other group members at the same time (i.e. well in advance of the meeting).

### **Duty of attendance**

Student representatives have the same duty of attendance at meetings convened by KI as all other group members.

KI shall facilitate student engagement as representatives during their study time. Student representatives shall be given opportunities to take compulsory modules or courses at another time or compensate in another acceptable way if such modules or courses are missed due to their duty of attendance. The student is to announce his/her absence from obligatory modules or courses to the examiner beforehand and come to an agreement on how they are to be retaken. It is the responsibility of the examiner to judge if and, if so how absence from obligatory modules or courses may be retaken under the prevailing practical and financial circumstances.

### **Student influence when preparation and decision-making is done by an individual**

The Higher Education Act and Ordinance entitle the student representatives to information and consultation when an individual at the higher education institution prepares or decides on matters that have a bearing on education or the students' situation. Consultation with a student representative is to be seen as a natural part of the preparatory work. The aim of this consultation rule is to guarantee student influence when matters are prepared and decided by an individual rather than a group.

### **Consultation with student representatives**

Most of the matters that concern education or the students' situation should be handled by preparatory and decision-making bodies on which the students are represented. When decisions are taken by an individual, information is to be passed to and consultation is to be held with a student representative well in advance of the decision or the conclusion of the preparation process. This can be achieved by:

*Consultation by email*, e.g. when decisions are taken by a Dean. At the conclusion of a preparatory process, a proposal for decision is to be sent to a student representative. The student representative may ask questions about the proposal, demand clarifications and present objections. It is important to make clear that the student representative does not have to back the proposal and may insist on additional preparation before the decision is taken. It is the student representative's responsibility to ensure that requests for consultation via email are dealt with and replied to within five working days. In his/her reply, the student representative may ask for more time, subject to a maximum extension of five working days, to gather the opinions of other students. So that the student representatives can identify such emails as being requests for consultation, the subject line should start with the words *Förslag till beslut*.

*Advisory meetings*, e.g. of the management advisory council. Such a council handles matters of principle importance and of a university-wide nature. Its function is advisory and it constitutes a forum for dialogue and the anchoring of decisions by the decision-makers.

*Decision meetings*, e.g. when decisions are taken by the President. A student representative is summoned to attend when proposals for decisions are being prepared so that he/she may ask questions or present objections. The relevant documentation is to be distributed well in advance of the meeting (approx. one week). A decision meeting should be preceded by a preparatory meeting at which information on forthcoming matters is distributed.

### **Occasions on which there may be no student representation**

The students are entitled to representation on all decision-making and preparatory procedures that have a bearing on education and the students' situation, with the following exceptions:

- The students are not to take part on matters relating to individual students, such as on the assessment of performance, unless the matter is disciplinary, in which case two representatives are allowed.<sup>13</sup>
- The students are not to judge scientific quality or standards, as this requires scientific competence, which at KI means PhD level.
- The students are not to take part in decisions concerning who is to be appointed to a particular office or position (e.g. Departmental Director of Education, Director of Doctoral Studies, course coordinating teacher, examiner), as such matters, given that they concern the allocation of assignments, fall to management to decide. However, the students are to be involved in the preparation work of the actual appointment, the assignment description and the competence demands on the appointee.

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<sup>13</sup> Higher Education Ordinance Chap 10 Section 4

The students are also to be involved in the preparation of elections in which they do not have voting or nomination rights.

- The students may not participate in the administration of matters relating to individual members of staff or individual recruitment other as regulated in the employment procedures. They may, however, influence staffing matters on a general level as regards, for example, sufficient personnel for education and meeting student needs and access to learning resources.

### **Student influence through evaluations**

Students who are on or who have completed a course may pass on their experiences and opinions of the course through a course evaluation. Such evaluations are to be collated and students informed of the results and any decisions or measures thus prompted<sup>14</sup>. The results are to be made available to the students on the course website<sup>15</sup>.

The *Guidelines for the quality assessment of first and second-cycle education (Doc. No 1-577/2016)* contains guidelines and procedures for course evaluation that are to be used for all first and second-cycle courses, as well as guidelines for the collation of the results and their presentation to the students.

Course evaluations for third-cycle courses are regulated in *Rules for doctoral education (Doc. No 1-88/2018)*.

Additional surveys and evaluations (the student barometer, the clinical placement survey, the degree survey, the alumni survey, thematic evaluations, etc.) are also used for gathering the students' experiences and opinions regarding their education and situation.

### **The student unions' referral body for matters circulated internally for comment**

When opinions on a particular matter are to be gathered through a referral process involving one or more referral bodies (e.g. departments) and when this matter has a bearing on education or the students' situation, the student unions are to be treated as one of the referral bodies.

### **References**

Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434)  
Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100)  
Ordinance on Student Unions (SFS 2009:769)  
Government bill 1999/2000:28 – *Student influence and quality development in higher education*

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<sup>14</sup> Higher Education Act Chap 1 Section 14

<sup>15</sup> Guidelines for the quality assessment of first and second-cycle education (Doc No 1-577/2016)

Government bill 2008/09:154 – *Freedom and Influence – the abolition of  
mandatory student union membership.*