

# Linnaeus Union's Document of Opinions



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# Introduction

This document outlines Linnaeus Union's positions in various matter. It serves as the political platform from which we conduct our daily advocacy work towards the university, Kalmar municipality, Växjö municipality, and other actors and stakeholders. Linnaeus Union represents all students and PhD student at Linnaeus University, who have diverse opinions, experiences, and personal circumstances. However, there are issues where students share similar thoughts. Therefore, the opinion document addresses student-related issues such as the study environment, educational matters, and student conditions.

Linnaeus Union's Document of Opinions is an important tool in making our work more transparent to our members and the student body at large. It does not contain party political positions. The document is approved by the membership meeting, which means it is clearly presented to the members of the organization. They have the opportunity to provide input and propose changes during the membership meetings. This can be done by submitting motions before the membership meeting or attending relevant meetings as a member.

The Document of Opinions is used by all representatives of Linnaeus Union, both employees and elected officials. The document permeates the entire organization's activities and is considered in meetings with students, Linnaeus University, other collaborative partners, and the media. The document forms the foundation of the organization's work and contributes to creating the best student experience for everyone.

# Fundamental Principles

## Equal Education

Society is constantly progressing, and the university has a responsibility to adapt and evolve at necessary pace. Currently, more and more people are attending higher education, and it is the university's responsibility to ensure that education is accessible to all. Equal education is based on the principle that all higher education should be free of charge, accessible, and inclusive.

For higher education to be accessible to all, an important principle is that it must be tuition-free for all students. If financial conditions determine the accessibility of education, the quality, diversity, and rightful place of education as a human right in a globalized society may be lost. All activities at the university should be characterized by inclusion and openness. It is essential that the university focuses on broadened recruitment and guarantees an environment free from discrimination in order to promote greater diversity. Every individual in society should have the opportunity to pursue higher education.

## Student Involvement

Student involvement in the university's development work enhances education quality. Student influence works best when students are included. When students are involved in decision-making processes regarding education, it creates a better study environment. The student union plays an important role in this matter as an independent entity that can influence the university on behalf of the students. It is important that the university ensures that there is always at least one independent student union at the institution, given the opportunity to engage in advocacy work for the students.

Students' influence over education is legally mandated and must never be questioned. The university is responsible for providing the student union with the necessary conditions to work with student involvement. The new perspectives that students contribute with should not be undermined.

## Two Main Locations, One University

Linnaeus University has an important role in societal development. This entails a responsibility to be a role model for others in matters of equal opportunities, diversity, and gender equality. The unique situation of Linnaeus University situated at two main locations presents both opportunities and challenges. To seize the opportunities and overcome the challenges associated with being situated at two main locations, there must be open dialogue between the regions, Linnaeus University, and the student union.

The location of programmes should not limit their accessibility. Linnaeus University must, Together with the regions and the student union, constantly work to make the university's entire range of offerings accessible to all students.

As a student union located in two cities, good collaboration is essential between the offices. All students at Linnaeus University should receive equal support from the student union, regardless of which main location they study at.

# Linnaeus Union's Opinions

## Educational Quality

Students have the right to receive the tools they need to complete their studies. This includes high educational quality. Having high quality and quality assurance contributes to a prominent and meaningful development of education and work at the university.

Discussions about higher quality must constantly be present in university dialogues. For students, it is of utmost importance that higher education development focuses on quality and that education continuously expands. Good results alone do not indicate high quality; there must also be a quality evaluation system used by the university.

## Teaching

Linnaeus University must meet the needs of a diverse student group. It is during lectures and teacher-led instruction that students gain in-depth knowledge of their subject. Therefore, it is important to offer an appropriate number of teacher-led hours. Students learn in different ways, so it is important to provide different types of teaching and assessment methods. Linnaeus University should strive to ensure that opportunities and resources are available to provide educational support and/or adaptations for students in need. The student union believes that it is crucial for PhD students who teach to also have pedagogical competence, in addition to subject-matter knowledge.

## Internationalization in Education

Linnaeus University presents itself as an international university and thus has a responsibility to ensure the quality of courses offered to international students. Teachers who teach or supervise in a language other than their native language should have good knowledge and proficiency in the languages they teach in. It is important that international students can receive credits for the courses they have taken when they return to their home university. International universities that collaborate with Linnaeus University should have high educational quality. In our view, internationalization also means that students admitted to Linnaeus University should have good opportunities to study or conduct internship abroad as part of their education.

## Cheating and Plagiarism

Cheating is a common reason for students to be suspended. It is important that the university and the student union actively works to minimize opportunities for cheating and plagiarism. The student union does not under any circumstance accept cheating or plagiarism as a method to pass an examination. It may be the case that cheating is a result of a student being in a difficult situation or having other study-related problems, but being reported for cheating puts significant pressure on the student and can negatively impact studies.

## Sustainable Education

The university has a responsibility to promote sustainable development, and should permeate all activities. This should be done with the EU's strategy for sustainable development, Agenda 2030, and Sweden's environmental goals in mind. When students graduate, they should possess knowledge and understanding of how society can achieve sustainable development in relation to their chosen field of study. The university should work to ensure that all students have the possibility to live sustainably in their chosen study location. By implementing practical environmental adaptations, the

university creates a credible profile in environmental matters, and by using existing routines in scheduling, uploading compendiums and other materials on digital platforms, energy and natural resources are saved.

Climate and environmental aspects should be considered when the university plans travel routes and conferences. Climate and environmental requirements should be taken into account in procurement contexts.

## Linnaeus Union Demands:

- That the university should have a functional quality assurance system in addition to national quality assurance systems.
- That students should have the opportunity to actively participate in quality work.
- That all programmes should maintain the same high quality regardless of the pace at which it is studied or whether it is offered on-campus or as distance education.
- That teachers and PhD students should have high pedagogical competence and have undergone pedagogical training. Furthermore, they should continuously update their pedagogical competence within the framework offered by the university.
- That formal higher education pedagogical training or experience should be prioritized and meritorious in the hiring of teachers.
- That the university should strive for a diverse gender distribution and diversity among faculty staff.
- That full-time students should, based on circumstances, have at least 15 hours of teacher contact per week, and the corresponding for part-time studies.
- That students have the right to feedback on submitted assignments and examinations within 15 working days.
- That the university should work towards integration between exchange students, international students, and Swedish students.
- That the university actively works to provide students with the opportunity for exchange studies.
- That degree certificates should be internationally accessible.
- That any preparatory exams related to exchange studies should be free of charge.
- That all students reported for cheating and plagiarism are treated equally.
- That the university follows up on students who have cheated, investigates the reasons behind it, and assists the student to the extent possible in case of potential problems.
- That the university handles cases related to cheating and plagiarism promptly.
- That university staff should report to the disciplinary board when there is suspicion of cheating.
- That the university should have a sustainability mindset within its operations.
- That the university should have developed procedures for managing digital sharing and storage of materials.

# Student Influence

## Course Evaluations

The most important tool through which students can influence their education is course evaluations. Through course evaluations, students can participate in shaping and improving the quality of education. To make course evaluations work as an influencing tool, it is necessary for them to be well-developed, have a high response rate, and be followed up and discussed with the students.

Course evaluations are an excellent way to gather students' opinions, which is needed to ensure and further develop the quality of education. Currently, students find it difficult to understand the importance of course evaluations and perceive them as meaningless, leading to a decrease in participation. Therefore, it is important for the university to have guidelines that are implemented and adhered to.

The university must also encourage students to actively share their experiences. If the university establishes structures where student representatives can participate in the work of course evaluations, they can contribute to disseminating the results and providing constructive improvement suggestions.

## Students' Rights

The university is a public authority and therefore has an obligation to ensure students' legal certainty and be responsive to problems that arise. Information provided to students should be clear and unambiguous, leaving no room for interpretation regarding, for example, examinations. The grading criteria to which students are entitled should be clear and binding. In this way, students know what is expected of them to achieve the desired grade. ~~A student who suspects that their examination has been incorrectly assessed has the right to have their examination and grade reassessed by an independent examiner.~~ However, a student's grade should never be lowered during a reassessment since a higher grade is considered a favorable decision by the authority and therefore cannot be changed to the detriment of the student.

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## Student Representatives

Students' influence over their education and daily life should never be questioned. Students' influence over education is legislatively mandated and dependent on a well-functioning system with democratically elected student representatives. The university is responsible for providing the student union with the conditions to appoint these representatives. Students must be given a genuine opportunity to democratically influence their education by being represented in the preparatory and decision-making bodies at the university. A student who holds a position as a student representative has significant responsibility. It is the university's responsibility to develop flexible and transparent forms of influence that give all students the opportunity to make an impact.

## Student Safety Representatives

A student safety representative represents students in various contexts concerning the physical and psychosocial study environment. The working environment for students is not always taken

seriously, and therefore, there must be forums to address these types of issues. Clarification is needed regarding who is responsible and the procedures for identifying and addressing work environment deficiencies that affect large student groups. Prioritizing follow-ups on how students experience the physical and psychosocial study environment at the university level is necessary. Being a student safety representative is a position of trust. Currently, the university only takes responsibility for the teaching-related work environment and not for the entire study period, even though a significant part of students' study time consists of self-study outside lecture halls.

## EUniWell

The Linnaeus Union aims to strive for the students' voices to be heard and have influence in all relevant arenas where Linnaeus University's work affects students. Since 2020, Linnaeus University has been a part of EUniWell (European Universities for Well-being), which is a university alliance consisting of several institutions across Europe. Since November 1, 2023, EUniWell has transitioned from being a pilot project to becoming part of the university's regular operations. EUniWell brings several opportunities for us students, and to ensure that the work is carried out in the best interest of students, the Linnaeus Union aims to be an active and contributing participant in Linnaeus University's work within the alliance. Therefore, an EUniWell committee has been established within the Linnaeus Union to work on precisely this. The committee is always to be led by a union board member, but all students at Linnaeus University are welcome to apply and contribute to its work as long as they are members of the Linnaeus Union. The purpose of the EUniWell committee is both to create added value for members of the Linnaeus Union and to ensure a strong student perspective and student influence within EUniWell.

## Linnaeus Union Demands:

- That, based on course evaluations and syllabi, all courses should be evaluated and followed up on to serve as the basis for further development of education.
- That course evaluations should be conducted anonymously.
- That the previous course evaluation for the current course should be available to students no later than the start of the course.
- That all course convenors should undergo training in course evaluations.
- That course evaluations should be conducted in all courses, and that all students taking a course should be given the opportunity to fill out the course evaluation.
- That students have the right to have their examination and grade reassessed by an independent examiner.
- That clear and binding grading criteria should be in place.
- That students' influence must be guaranteed by the university.
- That the university has a responsibility to inform the student union about available student representative positions.
- That students can be represented in all decision-making and preparatory bodies.
- That student representatives should have clear information about whom to contact regarding their assignments.
- That there should be room for at least one student safety representative per faculty.
- That the university should take responsibility for students' physical and psychosocial work environment.
- That students and staff should participate in occupational health and safety work on equal terms.

# An Inclusive Student Life

## Students' Health

An academic education places high demands on students. Students' well-being is influenced by their studies as well as factors such as part-time work or family circumstances. Therefore, it is important that students in need of support receive it from the university. Students should be able to study without risking their physical and mental health. Having close collaboration between the student union and student health services is important in order to help students in need at an early stage. All students should have equal access to support from the university. The university has a responsibility to work with preventive measures for students' health. Sufficient resources should be allocated to student health services to ensure that all students have access to support if needed.

## Evolving Study Environment

The facilities where students spend their time are considered their workplaces. Having access to suitable and safe teaching facilities is essential. For students, it is fundamental to have access to study spaces, which means that the number of study places needs to be increased in proportion to the number of students. It is also crucial to have sufficient space for students to heat and eat their own food.

The opportunity to use a wireless network and have access to functioning computer labs should also be prioritized. These resources should be available to students in all areas of the university, regardless of location. The access must be adjusted according to the number of students. No student should have to go home just to eat or study. The university should be a campus in motion, continuously evolving based on existing needs. The university should offer creative study environments that not only meet the requirements but go beyond.

## Integration

Linnaeus University has a strong international profile. The university therefore has a responsibility to promote clear integration of international students. This entails the responsibility to embrace the experiences and perspectives of international students in their interaction with the local community and Swedish culture. Initiating integration-enhancing activities that strengthen international students' connection to the local community should be a priority for the university. The student union prioritizes the integration of international students, and their well-being is an important part of the union's work.

## Student Associations

At Linnaeus University, there should be a vibrant student association life that contributes to providing all students with opportunities for various social interactions. The student union's approved student associations are some of the union's most important, dedicated, and significant collaborative partners that should be valued and developed. All associations with a democratic foundation have the right to apply to become a student association. The educational associations, interest groups, student pubs, and nations that exist today, both in Kalmar and Växjö, play an invaluable role in everyone's student life. The student union has a responsibility to encourage good cooperation among existing associations to contribute to student benefit in a developmental and inclusive manner. To enable engagement, Linnaeus University should work to create and maintain an open, welcoming, and inclusive environment.

## Linnaeus Union Demands:

- That student health services are allocated the necessary resources to guarantee student well-being.
- That the staffing of student health services match demand.
- That there are student-based meeting places for study-related social purposes.
- That drug-free activities are a given within the study-related social environment.
- That alcohol-free activities are encouraged within the study-related social environment.
- That a well-functioning student life requires good opportunities for students to engage and organize themselves.
- That the social climate at the different study locations should be open, welcoming, and inclusive to promote cooperation among associations and the student union.
- That, to the extent possible, the student union facilitates good communication between associations and the university.
- That Linnaeus University should participate in the annual International Student Barometer.
- That Linnaeus University takes initiatives to improve the integration of international students.

# Students' Social Positioning

## Housing

Having a place to live is one of the most basic prerequisites for succeeding in one's studies. Students at Linnaeus University must have the opportunity to find accommodation within a reasonable time frame to plan and conduct studies. Student housing should be easily accessible, of good quality, and be reasonably priced to be considered suitable. The municipalities have a major responsibility to assess the demand and need for student housing and ensure that these needs are met, particularly when it comes to new construction projects.

This is best achieved through suitable and comprehensive housing guarantees tailored to the heterogeneous student group. When new student housing is being built, there should be a clear dialogue between the student union, the municipality, and the housing companies. The process of applying for housing benefits should be clear and straightforward.

## Student Grants

Access to student grants is a fundamental requirement for students to pursue higher education. Many students find that the grant does not cover their basic living costs. Students' life situations vary significantly, and it is important that the grant takes this into account. The total amount of the grant must be able to cover students' different living situations. Therefore, the grant should be increased to correspond to students' various living costs in accordance to the current economic situation. Students should not have to work extra jobs alongside their studies to financially survive.

At the same time, there may be a need for additional work. In such cases, regulations regarding student grants, such as income limits, should not hinder students from adapting their student lives according to their own needs.

## Social Protection for Students

For many, studying is a full-time occupation and should have social protection similar to other full-time occupations. There must be an acceptable safety net for students who, for various reasons, need to temporarily take a break from their studies, and that enables them to return to their studies. Illness, injuries, or parental leave are all examples of situations where students' rights must be equal to those of other full-time occupations. Full-time students should be offered the same social protection and rights, such as pensions, unemployment benefits, and sickness benefits, as other people in full-time occupations.

## Access to Course Literature

Students should, regardless of economic situation or functional variations, have access to assigned course literature. This should be done on the student's own terms, and the student should have the opportunity to adapt the situation according to their circumstances.

## Linnaeus Union Demands:

- That students should be offered affordable student housing within one month of the start of the semester.
- That the municipalities take responsible for ensuring that student housing is proportionate to demand and need.

- That there should be a comprehensive and well-functioning housing guarantee at all study locations.
- That the rent for student housing should not exceed one-third of the student grant.
- That all student housing should provide a reasonable standard of living.
- That the regulations regarding student grants should be generous and considerate of students' different life situations.
- That there should be a fair balance between the grant and loan portions of the student grant.
- That the student grant should provide all students a reasonable living situation by covering their actual expenses.
- That students should have social rights and protections equivalent to people who are employed.
- That all studies should be pensionable, eligible for unemployment benefits, and sickness benefits.
- That the working environment at the university, as a study location and home, should maintain a good standard.
- Course literature that only covers a few pages should be provided as a PDF by the university if copyright allows.

# Equality

## Equal Conditions

Linnaeus University should be a university for everyone. It is a fundamental prerequisite for all students pursue and conduct higher education. Students have the right to feel safe and well-treated during their studies and should not encounter any form of discrimination. All students should feel safe regardless of sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion. Students with disabilities should be given equal opportunities to conduct studies, and it is thus of utmost importance that the university actively works towards equal conditions at all levels.

The student union works from a norm-critical and intersectional perspective. The student union distances itself from racism, fascism, and all forms of xenophobia and discrimination.

## Widening Recruitment and Participation

In academia, individuals' equal value of and their ability to influence is fundamental. Therefore, all activities must be characterized by diversity and openness, enabling free conversations among different social groups. Diversity benefits both education and research by bringing in new perspectives while fostering increased understanding among people. Work on widened recruitment and participation must continually evolve in order to create a university that is a true alternative for a heterogeneous student group. An example of this could be targeted measures, such as recruiting students from non-academic backgrounds. Everyone's access to accessible teaching must be a given, regardless of individual circumstances or limitations. Adapting teaching to the diverse conditions of the student group is important and must not be deprioritized or forgotten.

## Advice and Support

The university has a responsibility to provide guidance and support to different students during their time of study. Many students experience stress and anxiety for various reasons and feel the need for assistance from various areas. The university must more clearly promote the different support functions available so that it is evident where students should turn to for support. University sections that work to create a more inclusive environment should be prioritized financially, and their significance to the students must not be questioned.

## Linnaeus Union Demands:

- That equality and diversity should characterize all activities throughout the university.
- That all students should have equal conditions to pursue their education.
- That no student should face discrimination in their education at the university.
- That the university actively works for equal conditions for all.
- That the university should have accessibility-adapted facilities.
- That students who require assistance such as companionship, interpreters, or similar support due to disabilities should be able to receive it.
- That easily accessible and free support should be available for students who, for various reasons, need assistance during their studies.
- That the university continuously works to improve its methods for widened recruitment and participation.
- That the university clearly informs students where they should turn to if they need advice and support.

# Doctoral Education

## PhD Student Representation

PhD students have a unique position at the university as they are primarily students but also employed. PhD student representation is a priority for the student union. It is important for both the university and the student union to utilize the knowledge that PhD students possess. Many aspects of doctoral research, such as individual study plans, supervisor committees, and guidance, are vital for successful studies. A focus area for the student union is to actively work towards ensuring that PhD students have the time and opportunity to be represented in the university's preparatory and decision-making bodies.

## Organizational Study Environment for PhD Students

A PhD student at Linnaeus University should feel safe and secure in their study and work environment. If a PhD student is subjected to harassment or discrimination, the university must consider the impact on the student's studies so that their work does not suffer. In cases where a PhD student cannot complete their degree within the specified timeframe, the institutions should take significant responsibility and explore possibilities to resolve the situation. In cases where a PhD student chooses to change supervisors, the matter should be handled promptly with careful consideration for the student's project and education. It is crucial to ensure that all PhD students have necessary knowledge of rules and procedures from the beginning of their doctoral education.

## Employment

PhD students have the right to a social safety net and should experience the same social security as other university employees. PhD salary levels should come with clear, objective guidelines for what the PhD students should have achieved and when they are considered ready to progress to the next step of the salary scale. PhD students should not be expected to work on their research projects during public holidays or vacation. It is important for supervisors to emphasize that PhD students should take their vacation and not expect them to work overtime.

## Linnaeus Union demands:

- That PhD students should be able to influence the choice of main and assistant supervisors.
- That a PhD student who wishes to change supervisors should have a genuine opportunity to do so.
- That all supervisors should have undergone supervisor training.
- That PhD students whose studies are funded by scholarships or educational grants should have the right to the same social security system as employed PhD students.
- That all PhD students should have an opportunity to complete their education within the predetermined timeframe, and extensions to the doctoral education should be granted in the case of inadequate research environment or supervision.