



Strengthened influence for international students

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Linköping University has for a long time had a vision about becoming a university with international standing and internationalisation is, therefore, one of the keywords in the new strategic plan for 2030. The student unions consider the vision as an international university intriguing and want a more distinct and contributory part of it in the future.

The Swedish government has for a long time considered an increased internationalisation of Swedish universities being of great importance and decided in 2017 to appoint the inquiry *Internationalisation of higher education institutions, dir. 2017:19*.

The inquiry touches on several aspects of internationalisation, but the area that this basis foremost will refer to is discussed in *chapter 4: "Student influence"*. The chapter discusses both the meaning of student influence, differences in prerequisites for student influence and an international view with befitting comparisons. The inquiry also establishes that the prerequisites of student influence for international students need to be strengthened at Swedish universities. It also presents recommendations to the universities on how to continue working with these questions regarding influence for international students.

The Inquiry therefore makes a number of recommendations to strengthen student influence for foreign students. Higher education institutions should:

- *work together with the student unions to develop ways for foreign students to have an influence;*
- *actively inform incoming students about student influence opportunities and the work of the student unions, both before arriving in Sweden and during introduction periods, as well as during their actual studies,*
- *work to improve opportunities for English-speaking students to take on student representative roles and clarify the conditions for participation in various forums, as well as the opportunities for linguistic support, and*
- *offer the student unions support with translating their steering documents, such as statutes, operational plans and policy documents, and*
- *clarify their expectations as well as the financial terms placed on the unions' undertakings for supporting foreign students.*

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¹From: *Internationalisation of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (U 2017:02), chap 4.7, page 38.*

To work efficiently with the internationalisation Linköping University needed guidelines, strategies and goals to establish and develop the organisation in the right direction. Linköping University's operational plan and budget for 2019, therefore, included the assignment: *To develop an internationalisation strategy to gather our strength and set priorities.*

The project was led by the director of internationalisation, Maria Engelmark (*project manager*), and Maria Swartz, *Head of Unit at the Collaboration Unit and responsible for LiU's strategic collaborations (assistant project manager)*. In February 2020 a decision was taken to establish this new internationalisation strategy (DNR LIU 2019-00489). The decision also states who participated in the making of the strategy: *Both the faculties, in particular through pro-deans for research and education, as well as the institutions, were involved in the project's work. Within the framework of the project, workshops were also held within the Coordination group of International Education Issues, SIU.* The decision and strategy are attached to this basis.

LiU's internationalisation strategy is divided into five areas:

1. LiU's international standing
2. Internationalisation at home
3. International collaboration
4. Support for internationalisation
5. Prioritised geographical regions

The strategy does not treat any time frame, except for a paragraph in the introduction that refers to Agenda 2030; *"The global challenges cannot be solved within national borders. On the contrary, extensive international collaboration is needed. Higher education and research play a particularly important role in the implementation of Agenda 2030 in an international context, and in the utilisation of knowledge assets in collaboration with other players."*

Linköping University has around 1100 international students and 30 international programs. The numbers are substantial enough to give incentive for increased prerequisites for student influence to have a more central role in the internationalisation strategy. In the strategy, the student influence is only once mentioned in 4. Support for internationalisation as *"international students have the opportunity to make their voices heard during their period of study at LiU"*.

4. Support for internationalisation

Goal: *LiU has well-developed administrative support that promotes the integration of internationalisation in all parts of the university and that is characterised by the principle of "One Way In".*

This is to be achieved by:
designing support with respect to internationalisation based on the perspective of students and co-workers. Indicators of development in the right direction:

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- *International students have the opportunity to make their voices heard during their period of study at LiU.*

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² An internationalisation strategy to gather our strength and set priorities (DNR LIU-2019-00489), page 6.

The student unions believe that the mentioning of influence for international students in this area is essential, but opine that the possibility for student influence should be a more overriding theme. It should not only be in regards to the development of aid and support but in the possibility to influence the university's operation and development. The wording of the indication is also vague, that international students "*have the opportunity to make their voices heard during their study period at LiU*" is not an indicator of development in the right direction but a fundamental requirement that a university has before admitting international students. An indicator of suitable development should for example be that international students have "good opportunities to student influence" or "equal opportunities to influence as Swedish speaking students".

To fulfil the union assignment (Dnr-2018-03878) the student unions, who represent a substantial number of international students, work to a great extent with the internationalisation of their organisations. It, however, became clear during the pandemic that there needed to be better infrastructure and clarity in the collaboration between the university and student unions regarding the communication and the influence for international students. A lot of the information regarding the pandemic that reached the student unions such as decisions, pandemic grades and items of written comment was only received in Swedish. For the student unions, there was therefore an increased workload that required a lot of resources from the unions to be safe in knowing that they still represented the international students.

Even without the pandemic, the student unions work hard to strengthen the influence for the international students. Since the internationalisation of *Medical Biology* into the bachelor program *Experimental and Industrial biomedicine*, at the Medical Faculty, Consensus has implemented internationalisation as one of three priority goals in their business plan both for 18/19 and 20/21. This led to an internal internationalisation inquiry, an international committee, translation of the regulatory documents, a bilingual website and a bilingual social media presence, as well as Consensus seven committees all offered to be held in English to enable contribution from international students. Despite this immense work, Consensus feels that they still can't represent these students as well as the other programs at the Medical Faculty.

The two other unions at LiU have done other measures to improve the representation of international students, but there are still too considerable differences in prerequisites, from the university, for the unions to comfortably encourage international students to apply for a position in the union. A reason behind the large differences in the prerequisites for influence, despite an internal union internationalisation, is that the University's communication for a majority still is in Swedish. This worsens the possibility for the student unions to request opinions and positions from international students. These students are also prevented from being offered student representative assignments to the same extent as Swedish-speaking students in the University's forum, a problem that the university needs to address.

In summary, we opine that, with Linköping University's vision about being a university with international standing, the internationalisation strategy does not proportionally or sufficiently address the influence of international students. The strategy's only formulation regarding student influence becomes too narrowly directed towards the line of support and the vague formulations make it hard to evaluate improval. This ends up with the university not having a strategy for the work with strengthened influence for international students. A strategy needs more action and directness to actualise this type of change. Despite the student unions ongoing work to internationalise their organisations, the university also needs to aim in the same direction and create prerequisites for the union's progress to be established in the university structure.

The student unions opine that to provide this increase of influence for international students the Vice-Chancellor should establish a working group. The group shall contain both competence, mandate and strong student representation and be assigned the mission to increase the influence for international students, preferably by creating an action plan for the years ahead. The group shall also present a proposal for revision of the internationalisation strategy if this document faces a future after the implementation of the new strategic plan.

The student unions therefore request:

- *The management council general view on the importance of influence for international students.*
- *An account of the future and inclusion of the internationalisation strategy in the upcoming implementation of the new strategic plan.*
- *The management councils view at the student unions proposition of the proceeding with appointment of a working group and assignment, and possibly an account of the council's own ideas on approaches.*