

# Fundamental Opinions

Member meeting 141210

## **A sustainable university**

Education is a human right and must be available for everyone and every activity at Linnaeus University must start from this assumption. Each individual must be given the opportunity to be accepted to and to finish their studies at Linnaeus University. No student at Linnaeus University must worry about, or feel, that they are victims of discrimination or violation.

To keep higher education in Sweden as an accessible and natural right for everyone, it must be free of charge for everyone. If the financial conditions dictate the accessibility of the education, there is a risk that the education's quality, diversity and role as an obvious human right in a global society are compromised. Access to higher education must never be dictated by individual/personal financial circumstances.

In the Linnaeus Region, Linnaeus University, plays an important role in social development. This also implies a responsibility to act as a role model for others, in issues such as equal rights, diversity and equality. The operation and the norms that control who feels welcome must continuously be examined and questioned.

In academia, equal value of all human beings and the ability to influence are fundamental principles. Therefore, all activities must reflect diversity and openness to enable free dialogue between different groups in society. Diversity promotes education as well as research, enabling new perspectives, and this gives an added understanding between different groups in society. To create a centre of learning that is an actual option for a diverse body of students, the recruitment work must be continuous and extensive.

The accessibility of education for everyone must be evident, regardless of the preconditions or limitations of the individual. To adapt the education after the preconditions of the diverse group of students is very important and must never be down-prioritised or forgotten.

The unique situation of Linnaeus University with its two main locations is a source of a number of opportunities and obstacles. To make the most of the opportunities and overcome the obstacles created by this situation, there must be an open dialogue between the two regions, and also between the University and Linnéstudenterna. The location of the education must not limit its accessibility. Linnaeus University must continuously work together with the regions and Linnéstudenterna to make all education available for all students.

### **Linnéstudenterna's opinions:**

- All education and mandatory elements must be free of charge.

- All travelling in connection with, or due to studies, must be free of charge.
- Linnaeus University must continuously work with improving their methods for diverse recruitment.
- Equality and diversity must be the focus for all activities at the entire university.

## **Student influence**

The students' influence over their studies and their everyday life must never be questioned. Student influence is prescribed by law and is dependent on a well-functioning system with democratically appointed student representatives. The university is responsible for providing Linnéstudenterna with the requirements to appoint these representatives. The students must also be given an actual chance to democratically influence their situation and their education through executive groups and committees at the university, and through public committees in the surrounding community. The students who accept to become a student representative are taking on a great responsibility. To make it attractive to take on this responsibility, there must be a realistic financial compensation based on the extent of the commission, and the student must be able to combine this with full time studies.

Linnéstudenterna, the Student Union, is one of the most important reviewers of the daily operation of the University. Therefore, it is important for the students as well as for the university, that the Student Union is financially stable. The University is responsible for creating conditions for a Student Union so they can do a good job. This must be guaranteed by support from the university. However, it is important that these means do not impair the independence of the student union. The means distributed to the student union must be distributed with a great deal of forward planning, and without compromising the critical and reviewing role of the student union.

One of the best ways for the students to influence their education is prescribed by law: course evaluations. These are essential to get several students' different perspectives on how the course was carried out and to get an analysis of its contents. It must be a natural and obvious habit for the students to fill out course evaluations. For this to become a reality there must be routines for the course evaluations. It is not acceptable that course evaluations are delayed until long after the course is finished, or that they are carried out in a way that the student's anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

The quality of the education must never be compromised. The students invest so much time and money, by taking loans for their education, and they deserve a good education to ensure a job and personal development. An important quality control is performed in the national reviews, but these are limited in scope and are not performed often enough. So it is very important that the universities have their own quality control systems to complement the one performed nationally. The students must of course participate in these, but the main responsibility must be the university's. The students affected by the reviewed education must be able to voice their opinions in the reviews that are performed.

### **Linnéstudenterna's opinions:**

- Student influence must be guaranteed by the university.

- The University is responsible for informing the student union about the student representative posts.
- Linnaeus University has a responsibility to support Linnéstudenterna financially.
- Linnéstudenterna's operation is, and must be, independent of the university.
- Student representatives appointed by the student union must receive a realistic financial compensation from the university.
- Student representatives must have clear information about who to contact if they have questions regarding their post.
- Students must always be able to influence their situation, within, as well as outside of the university.
- Course evaluations must always be carried out in close connection with the ending of a course.
- The university must have a well-functioning quality reviewing system as a complement to the national reviewing system.

## **Education**

### **Teacher competence**

One of the most important contacts in education is the contact between students and teachers. In the classroom is where the students get an in-depth knowledge of the subject. It is very important that the university can offer a well-adjusted number of teacher-led teaching hours. It is difficult to set a general requirement for how many hours all subjects must have, since it varies and different subjects require different numbers of teacher-led hours.

It is of utmost importance that the teaching staff has a good knowledge of learning processes and pedagogics to be able to convey knowledge to the students in the best way. Teachers without pedagogic skills do not belong in this university. Linnéstudenterna find it essential that PhD students are teaching other students, and they must also have pedagogical training. It is very important that the university supports the PhD students and encourages them to venture into the classrooms.

Linnéstudenterna's opinion is that examiners and academic supervisors on all academic levels must have knowledge in areas such as equal rights, to be able to support students, give the students a diversity perspective, encourage norm criticism and to prevent discrimination. Examiners and academic tutors at Linnaeus University must complete training and prove their knowledge of equal rights issues.

For the university to uphold high quality education, the teaching staff must also have academic competence. Linnéstudenterna welcomes a mix of lecturers, associate professors, docents, and professors. Linnéstudenterna also encourages the university to have a larger number of teachers with higher academic degrees. The advantage of this is that these teachers will have more scholarly or scientific approaches to their subjects, and they can give their students a research perspective.

**Linnéstudenterna's opinions:**

- Teacher-led hours are crucial to the quality of education.
- Teachers and teaching PhD students must have high pedagogic competence and they must receive pedagogic training.
- All examiners and academic tutors, at all academic levels, must have completed training to give them an understanding of for instance equal rights.
- The number of teachers with higher academic degrees must be high.

## **Students' rights**

The university is a public authority and therefore has a responsibility to ensure the students' legal security and to be perceptive to arising problems. Information to students must be clear and direct and must not leave any room for misinterpretation, regarding for instance the rules for examinations. The grade criteria that all students have the right to receive for each course must be clear and binding. This way students will know what it takes to achieve the desired grade.

Students who suspect that their examinations have been incorrectly graded must always have the right to have their examinations regraded by an independent examiner. A grade must never be lowered at a review, since a higher grade is considered a favourable government decision and cannot be changed into something negative for the student.

Students are entitled to a comprehensive and useful education. A useful education will have a broad perspective and all aspects are necessary for the students when they put their education to use after they finished their studies. Useful means that a student must be employable after they finish their studies, but also implies that the student can use the education as an individual and enrich the society as a member of society. The university has a responsibility to ensure that the education is useful for the student.

It is also important that students, during their studies, can connect with the business world through a good contact with the business world, but the education must also provide the students with knowledge about research in the area. Through these two aspects, the students will be prepared for careers in the commercial sector as well as academic careers.

**Linnéstudenterna's opinions:**

- Students must have the right to have their exams and grades reviewed by an independent examiner.
- There must be clear and binding grade criteria.
- All educations must have a good connection with the business world.
- All educations must have a clear research connection.
- All educations must be useful for the students as individuals and members of society.

## Well-functioning student life

Life as a student is multifaceted and varied. There are uncountable ways to engage in student life if you want to become involved and influence your social life as a student, or have an effect on the academic quality. Linnéstudenterna's opinion is that students need a well-functioning social life at the location where they are studying. Linnéstudenterna's job is dependent on committed students and a good contact with student associations. There must always be ways for the students to become involved.

The student associations approved by Linnéstudenterna are some of the Student Union's most important and committed cooperation partners and these relationships must be treasured, maintained and developed. To enable student involvement, Linnéstudenterna must work together with students, student associations and Linnaeus University to create and uphold an open, welcoming and inclusive environment.

### Linnéstudenterna's opinions:

- There must be meeting places for students.
- Drug free activities must be available.
- A well-functioning student life requires opportunities for students to get involved and organised.
- A well-functioning student life requires varied student association activities with opportunities to start new associations.
- The social environment at the study locations must be open, welcoming and inclusive.
- A well-functioning student life requires an open, welcoming and inclusive environment between Linnéstudenterna and the student associations.
- The Student Union must have a good contact and relationship with the student associations and enable good contact between the associations and the university.

## Study conditions

There are several requirements that must be met until Linnéstudenterna can consider the students' study situations safe and tolerable. Factors such as social protection, finances, accommodation, and working environment are all essential for students to effectively manage their studies and finish their studies.

### Social protection

Linnéstudenterna thinks that the university, the study location and the home are the places where the working environment is most the important to be able to study.

Being a student is a full-time occupation, and must have the same social protection as other full-time occupations. There must be adequate social protection for students who, for some reason, have to take a study break, and this must encourage these students to return to their studies. Illness, injuries

or parental leave are examples of situations where students' rights must be the same as others in full-time employment. Linnéstudenterna's opinion is that it is not reasonable to spend a number of years at a university as a fulltime student without qualifying for any type of social protection, such as retirement benefits, unemployment insurance or sickness allowance.

The situation for PhD students can in several cases be somewhat different from other students, but they still have the same requirements for their studies. PhD students must also have access to the same social protection as other students, such as financial, housing and working environment stability. Especially social protection and finances are uncertain factors if the PhD students are not employed from the first day they are posted at the university.

### **Linnéstudenterna's opinions**

- Students must have the same social protection and benefits as full time employees.
- All types of studies must qualify for social benefits, such as retirement benefits, unemployment insurance or sickness allowance.
- The working environment at the university, study location and home must be a good.
- All PhD students must have employment from the first day, with reasonable payment.

### **Student finance**

The student aid system is divided into a student grant and a student loan and is meant to cover the basic student living expenses. The balance between grant and loan is often a problem. Linnéstudenterna is critical to a student aid development that will give a high level of debt. Students are an investment for the future and they should not be burdened by unreasonable debts when they start working.

The rules regarding grants and loans are often complicated and will not always allow for the fact that university students are a very diverse group. Their life situations are very different and it is important that the student aid system takes this into consideration. The sum of the student aid must cover the living expenses for students with different life situations. Linnéstudenterna also thinks that students should not have to work during their studies. The Student Union understands that the students are a diverse group and some life situations will not allow any other alternative than working during the studies. In situations like these, the rules regarding student aid, such as free amount, must not stop the students from adapting their student life to their life situation.

### **Linnéstudenterna's opinions:**

- The student aid system must be generous and allow for different life situations.
- There must be a balance between the grant and the loan part of the student aid.
- The student aid must give students a tolerable life situation by actually covering the basic expenses.

### **Housing**

Linnéstudenterna thinks that a place to live is one of the most basic requirements to succeed with your studies. The students at Linnaeus University must be able to find housing within reasonable time to be able to plan and carry out their studies. Student housing must be easily accessible, have a good standard and be reasonably priced.

Linnéstudenterna's opinion is that the municipalities in the study locations are responsible for analysing the need for student housing, and to follow up on this, especially regarding new developments. The best way to practically apply this, according to Linnéstudenterna, is to have well-functioning and comprehensive housing guarantees, calculated after the diverse group of students.

**Linnéstudenterna's opinions:**

- Students must be offered student housing within a month from the start of the semester.
- The municipalities in each study location are responsible for the number of student housing, so it matches the number of students who need accommodation.
- There must be well-functioning and comprehensive housing guarantees on all of Linnaeus University study locations.
- All student accommodation must have a tolerable standard of living.
- The rent cost for student housing must not amount to more than one third of the student aid.
- All rent increases must be justifiable and reasonable.