

Board candidate's handbook

This brief guide explains what the National Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences SAMOK does, what kind of positions of trust are available in the union's board and how you can run for the positions.

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National Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences SAMOK in a nutshell

SAMOK is an organisation formed by the 23 student unions of Finnish universities of applied sciences to oversee and promote the interests of students of universities of applied sciences at the national level. Advocacy and interest representation at SAMOK is carried out by board members and salaried employees together. In addition to advocacy work, we offer services that support the work of student unions, such as educational events. In other words, our work is quite different from that of student unions: instead of the higher education community, the target group of our activities is society as a whole and the structures that affect students, such as legislation and the social security system. Our office is located in Kamppi, Helsinki. The union currently employs eight people, about whom you can find out more on our website under [Contact information](#).

The highest authority in SAMOK is the General Assembly, which consists of representatives of student unions. The Assembly convenes once a year and elects the Board of the union for the following year from among its members. If you decide to stand as a candidate for SAMOK's Board, the General Assembly is where the election is decided. The General Assembly also approves the annual action plan in accordance with the union's strategy and decides on various documents guiding

advocacy work, such as the political programme for 2022. We recommend that you familiarise yourself with SAMOK's current policy documentation on our website under [Documents](#) if you are running for the Board. We also recommend that you read SAMOK's general assembly materials.

What does SAMOK do?

Advocacy and interest representation aimed at improving the status of university of applied sciences students nationwide is at the core of our work. Social issues to which we seek solutions include:

- How should education at universities of applied sciences be developed to better meet the needs of future working life?
- How could education at university of applied sciences provide more people with increased skills and capacity for international working life?
- How do we ensure that people have a genuine opportunity to get an education as far as their own resources and motivation permit?
- How do we ensure that universities of applied sciences offer opportunities for lifelong learning?
- How do we reform social security to meet the challenges of the future?
- How do we develop the healthcare system to support future work and study ability?
- How do we develop intergenerational fairness?

For practical reasons, our advocacy work is divided into sectors. Each sector is overseen by at least one expert who works with a member of the Board of Directors. Our interest representation sectors are:

- **social policy**, including
 - development of student financial aid and social security
 - influencing housing policy to ensure student housing
- **welfare policy**, including
 - promoting student health care and wellbeing
 - promoting student equality and equality of education
- **education policy**, including
 - development of teaching
 - student admissions
 - developing the administration and funding of higher education institutions in the best possible way for students
 - development of student representative activities in higher education institutions
- **international student policy**, including
 - cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU) umbrella organisation
 - cooperation with Nordic and Baltic countries (Nordisk Ordförande Mötet NOM)

- monitoring of EU education policy coordination initiatives
- promoting student mobility

In addition to interest representation and advocacy work, SAMOK offers services that support the activities of student unions. Member services can be found on our website under [Services](#). In addition, as part of other activities, SAMOK actively communicates with decision-makers, stakeholders and, of course, student unions. In other words, some of our Board members have other responsibilities alongside their interest representation sectors.

Activities of SAMOK's Board of Directors

According to the union's rules, SAMOK's Board of Directors consists of the Chair, 1 or 2 Vice Chairs and a minimum of two and a maximum of seven other members. In other words, a total of 4 to 10 people are elected to the Board. The Board's term of office begins on 1 January and ends on 31 December. The primary task of the Board is to implement the union's action plan and strategy.

A feature shared by all of SAMOK's positions of trust is that they involve advocacy work in the form of meeting and influencing various stakeholders, such as Members of Parliament and their assistants, political parties, labour market organisations and public officials for the benefit of students of universities of applied sciences. This type of advocacy work, in turn, requires fact-finding and reading up on background materials as well as knowledge of lobbying processes and methods, for example.

Tasks common to all positions of trust also include communication in SAMOK's various channels, participation in the union's internal and external meetings and workgroups, public appearances at various events and towards the media (especially the Chair and Vice Chairs), and regularly meeting with student unions in connection with various events. All elected persons receive training in the tasks at the beginning of the Board's term of office and tasks are carried out in cooperation with employees, so even if you have no previous experience of similar tasks, you need not be intimidated by the above list.

Duties within the Board of Directors

- **Chair**

The Chair directs the activities of the Board and, through it, the union in close cooperation with the Executive Director. The Chair presides over the meetings, is responsible for the division of duties of the Board, internal management, the Board's advocacy and interest representation and, together with the Executive Director, prepares the agendas of Board meetings. In addition to these, the Chair acts as the union's representative to the world. The Chair may also have political responsibilities based on the division of duties and responsibilities decided by the Board.

This year, the nominal duties of the Chair include: Leadership – political lobbying, Parliamentary elections and ESU, as well as much more.

- **Vice Chair**



The Vice Chair works in close cooperation with the Chair and as their deputy in matters that are the Chair's responsibility. The Vice Chair performs the duties of the Chair if the latter is prevented from attending to their duties. In addition to their own responsibilities, the Vice Chair also has tasks and responsibilities based on the division of duties within the Board.

This year, the nominal duties of the Vice Chair include: Leadership – political lobbying and education policy, as well as much more. The Vice Chair also often manages services and the planning of internal office meetings.

- **Member of the Board**

Board members, including the Chair and Vice Chair, collectively form the union's highest decision-making body between meetings of the General Assembly. The Board manages the union's day-to-day operations and works in close cooperation with the union's employees. Each Board member has their own areas of responsibility, which determines their current duties. Although Board members may have a very limited sphere of duties, as Board members, they are responsible for matters related to the operations of the union as a whole and its advocacy and interest representation in particular. The Board also acts as the collective supervisor of the Executive Director. This year, the responsibilities of the members of the Board of Directors are divided as follows:

- Social policy and non-discrimination
- Communication and community
- Services and international affairs
- Board members also have many other duties. For example, they participate in various workgroups and advocate SAMOK's agenda in the same way as the Chair and Vice Chairs.

What is required to serve on the Board?

- Interest in making an impact on society and working in an advocacy organisation
- Willingness to understand social phenomena and the capacity to learn about them
- Readiness to network and learn new skills
- Commitment to the duties: the position of trust on the Board of Directors is year-round and full-time (members are paid a monthly compensation decided by the General Assembly)
- Ability to cooperate: We are a small work community, and Board members work in close cooperation with each other, their partner and other employees
- Knowledge of NGO activities, different student unions, SAMOK and the field of universities of applied sciences
- Readiness to travel to Helsinki several times a week. The position of trust on the Board is full-time and the union's office, as well as the offices of our most important targets for advocacy work are located in Helsinki. If necessary, SAMOK will help you arrange an apartment and cover the costs of the move
- Evening and weekend work and travelling. The amount of these depends partly on the task and your own priorities

Why should I run for a position in a national advocacy organisation?

- You get to promote the cause of students in universities of applied sciences at the national level
- You learn new things about interest representation, issues affecting university of applied sciences students and NGO activities
- You gain expertise in international cooperation and advocacy work
- You will be supported by a colleague with whom you work with and learn from
- You will build networks and learn useful career skills

"My year with SAMOK was tremendously interesting and I learned my skills every day. The work was challenging at times, but I received support from employees, other Board members and colleagues in NGOs based in Lapinrinne. In particular, the two elections held in the spring offered plenty of learning opportunities and experience in higher education policy, lobbying and running a campaign. Without SAMOK, I wouldn't be where I am today."

SAMOK alumnus 2019

How do I run for the Board?

Anyone can stand as a candidate for SAMOK's Board of Directors, and we encourage people of different genders and backgrounds to stand for election. If you are interested in working at SAMOK, the first thing you should do is ask the student union of your university of applied sciences how candidates are nominated in your union. The decision on who will ultimately be elected to the Board is made by representatives at SAMOK's Annual General Assembly, which is held in October or November.

Candidates must be proposed to the General Assembly in order to participate in the election of the Chair, Vice Chair or Board members. You can stand as a candidate until the start of the elections. The Chair is elected first, followed by the Vice Chair(s) and finally the members of the Board of Directors. After the election of the Chair, it is possible to nominate candidates for the Vice Chair election, and finally the Board members' election. An official nomination speech (usually by the candidate's home student union) is given ahead of the General Assembly election, as well as a support speech or speeches by a representative of some other student union and the candidate's own presentation speech.

If you stand as a candidate, you should actively communicate your candidacy to the student unions. It is worth asking for help with campaigning, and many candidates have a campaign manager from within or outside their student union to discuss campaign themes and communication strategy as a candidate. Many candidates also arrange separate presentation meetings with student unions.

For more information about standing as a candidate, see the [candidates' webinar slides](#).

How does SAMOK support candidates?

Board candidates nominated before the General Assembly will be able to take advantage of services offered by SAMOK to candidates. For example, panels are organised for candidates before the General Assembly, where candidates can present their views and campaign themes to student unions. Some of the panels will be streamed and/or recorded. Presentations of candidates will also be published on SAMOK's website, and candidates are given the opportunity to write a blog post presenting their views, which will also be published on the website. Usually, presentations of candidates are typically distributed to SAMOK's mailing list, often in the form of a PDF file, for example. The email is typically sent out in two or three languages (Finnish, Swedish, English).

If you have questions about SAMOK's activities, tasks of the Board of Directors or standing as a candidate, SAMOK's candidate support team, Chair and Executive Director are happy to answer questions about the above or any other topic related to the candidacy. Board members are also happy to answer questions about their work on the Board and daily routines. SAMOK's experts are happy to tell you more about subject matter issues.

The candidate support team consists of Aleksí Airaksinen (aleksi.airaksinen@samok.fi), Halla Kokkonen (halla.kokkonen@samok.fi) and Oona Pappila (oonna.pappila@samok.fi). Anti-harassment officers of the union and the candidate process are Erica Alaluusua (erica.alaluusua@samok.fi) and Adel Rizvi (adel.rizvi@samok.fi).

What else should I consider when running for the Board of Directors?

For many, SAMOK's candidacy is their first major campaign for an elected position. This means that you also have the opportunity to learn a lot about campaigning, sometimes also through mistakes.

If you are elected to the Board, the other applicants will become your coworkers. So treat all candidates with respect. Even if you don't make it on the Board, you will probably run into other candidates in the future as well, and good relations can prove to be very important.

SAMOK's [Code of Conduct](#) also applies to candidates and activities related to candidates.

Running in an election for the Board of an organisation like SAMOK is often mentally taxing, campaigning takes time and energy, and tensions rise during the General Assembly. For this reason, you should plan your autumn to allow enough time to rest and focus on other things. After the General Assembly, it is also a good idea to allow some time to recover, no matter the election result.

Orientation sessions will be arranged for those elected to the Board already in the autumn at SAMOK's office, so it is advisable to mark them in your schedule ahead of time. Learning new things and meeting people is easily taxing, so you won't have much time or energy to take care of other things during the orientation – especially if you want to get the most out of it ahead of an important year.

Orientation for the new Board of Directors:

Orientation for SAMOK's Board in 2024, Sunday to Thursday 5–9 November 2023

Orientation for SAMOK's Board in 2024, Sunday to Thursday 10–15 December 2023

How is campaigning done in practice?

Each campaign is unique based on the candidate's personality, and there are many ways to run a campaign. When campaigning, you can come up with new or rarely used methods, or stick to the most common forms of campaigning.

Planning and doing the groundwork

The saying 'well begun is half done' also applies to campaigning and planning. It's a good idea to plan your campaigning from the start and update your plans along the way to ensure that the campaign is run smoothly.

You should also consider the following questions in advance: Why are you running for SAMOK's Board? What issues do you want to promote at SAMOK? What role or area of responsibility are you interested in and why? What useful experience do you have? When thinking about the answers, it's a good idea to consult other people who have experience working with you and know your strengths. Conversations with others help you articulate what kind of candidate you are. You can involve many people in your planning!

Remember to also take time for rest and recovery. It is important that Board members are in good shape and motivated at the beginning of the year. For example, you can plan a precise timeline of when to do each task related to the campaign, familiarise yourself with the campaigns of previous years' candidates, etc.

Materials and communication

The **candidate letter** already mentioned above is a common and recommended way to start a campaign. The letter gives a first impression to those who do not already know you and ensures that your candidacy is communicated to a wide audience from the get-go. In the letter, it's a good idea to explain at least your motivation and experience and what position you are running for and why. The letter is typically sent out in PDF format in two or three languages (Finnish, Swedish, English).

Some candidates have also announced their candidacy on **social media**, either on their personal accounts or on a separate candidate account. For example, you can publish blogs or otherwise describe your thoughts in more detail on social media or **websites**.

Many candidates have asked for **references** from people who know them and shared these on social media, for example.

You can campaign just fine without using money, but some student unions grant campaign funds, which can be used for travel expenses or other campaign expenses, for example.

Reaching out to student unions

It's a good idea to meet with representatives of as many student unions as possible before the General Assembly. You won't necessarily be able to meet with everyone, so it is worth considering in advance whether some of the student unions would be particularly important for you to meet. It is advisable to start reaching out to student unions early so that you can agree on schedules. Autumn is a very busy time for many student unions, and the autumn break is just a few weeks before the General Assembly. Email and SAMOK's Slack channel are good contact channels. Many union representatives are happy to meet with candidates as this makes voting in the elections easier.

This is also worth planning in advance! Prepare a list of things you want to discuss or ask at the meeting. Be sure to leave time for questions and listen to the field and take note of issues you could support next year. Arranging meetings remotely is a good way to reduce the workload on both sides.

Good luck with your campaign!

Halla Kokkonen, Board Member

Oona Pappila, Board Member

Aleksi Airaksinen, Specialist, Communication Advising & Event Organising

Tekla Kosonen, Project Manager (SAMOK opiskelijakuntien tukena, SAMOK in support of student unions)