

Political Programme

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INTRODUCTION

Society is in constant flux. Demographic change, the transformation of working life, climate change and economic uncertainty shape everyday life, challenge existing structures and affect wellbeing. Students are not outside these changes; they live them in their day-to-day lives. Finland's population is aging and the number of working-age people is decreasing as smaller age cohorts enter the labour market. To ensure Finland can respond to the challenges posed by the changing population structure and a weakening dependency ratio, we must make sure that as many people as possible can participate in working life. This requires that the workforce of the future is not only skilled but also well.

Student wellbeing has been weak for a long time. The intensification of studies, insufficient social security and rising housing costs weigh on everyday life. Broader phenomena such as climate change and economic uncertainty also affect students' coping. The student population mirrors the diversity and social breadth of society as a whole, and students' physical and mental health are central prerequisites for personal resources and study ability. Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) operate in this reality and play a key role in responding to societal changes. They strengthen competence, build links to working life, develop international cooperation and promote sustainable development. Internationalisation is visible both as student mobility and as multicultural learning environments, and it is built on genuine inclusion, equality and opportunities to influence. Higher education policy must recognise students' diverse life situations and safeguard the foundation that enables study, wellbeing and participation both in Finland and at the European level.

The Political Programme guides SAMOK's advocacy and influencing work. It is divided into five entities: society; UAS education; internationality; livelihood and housing; and wellbeing. The Political Programme is valid until further notice and can be updated by the General Assembly upon proposal of the Board or member organisations. The Political Programme is complemented by position papers that address specific entities in more detail. Policy papers are approved by the board. If a new policy paper is created or an existing one is updated in its entirety, member organisations are given the opportunity to comment. The policy paper is presented to the General Assembly for information.

SAMOK's position papers include:

- Position paper on housing,
- Position paper on internships,
- Position paper on public funding for student unions,
- Position paper on student admissions and open UAS,
- FSHS advocacy position paper,
- More Internationality programme,
- More Internationality at Home programme, and
- SAMOK's long-term EU advocacy plan 2024–2028

SOCIETY

A polarising society, inequality and social exclusion are among the key challenges of our time—challenges to which educational equality is an effective response. Therefore, society must guarantee that everyone has equal opportunities for education and competence development at all stages of life. Civil society is an essential part of Finnish society, and its importance must be recognised when addressing these challenges. Free education lays the foundation for equal opportunities to acquire knowledge and competence. The continual transformation of working life changes the content of work and the competence it requires. Lifelong learning enables competence to be updated at different stages of a career. As careers become more fragmented and longer, education supports the individual throughout life alongside a functioning pension system.

Free education

- Degree education is accessible and free of charge for all students, and equality is embedded in the structures and operations of higher education.
- Universities of Applied Sciences should primarily provide free degree education.
- Education is seen as a right for all—not as a commodity for sale.
- The principle of free education is realised at all levels and in all forms of education.
- Subjective right to early childhood education enables students with families to study full-time.

Lifelong learning

- Equality and equity in the Finnish education system are developed as a whole—from early childhood education to lifelong learning during one's career.
- Lifelong learning is a cross-cutting principle at all levels of education regardless of the form of education. It is part of degree structures, the implementation of studies, working life and the identification and recognition of prior learning.
- The entire education and social security system encourages people from diverse backgrounds to engage in lifelong learning.
- Lifelong learning and degree education are not in competition in the funding and operations of higher education institutions.
- Funding targeted to lifelong learning is safeguarded.

Careers

- Discussion on careers considers the entire length of the working life. Studies, as well as work done before and during studies, are recognised as part of one's overall career.
- Significantly greater and preventative investments are made in occupational wellbeing and work ability already during studies. Flexibilities in working life are developed by taking into account employees' different life stages and ages.
- The terms and profitability of work will be improved.
- Reskilling and lifelong learning support work ability throughout the career.
- Combining studies, family life and work is facilitated by developing support services and financial support as well as by making education more flexible.

- Master's degrees in the same field (UAS/University) are recognised as equivalent in an employee's career and salary progression.
- Unionisation during one's career is supported both in higher education and in workplaces.

Pension system

- Intergenerational fairness is the cross-cutting theme of future pension reforms.
- Pension contributions are placed on a sustainable footing taking into account increased life expectancy and demographic change so that intergenerational fairness will also be realised in the future.
- Pension accrues from work carried out before the age of 16, from the completion of degrees, and for periods of parental leave and unemployment.
- Decisions on the use of pension funds will not be brought under parliamentary decision-making; instead, decisions will continue to be made on a tripartite basis.
- Extending careers is approached with intergenerational fairness by reducing the contribution burden on younger generations and by guaranteeing both service and pension promises. Extending careers must not increase pressure on younger generations to work during their studies.

UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES (UAS) EDUCATION

Working life increasingly requires high-level competence as routine tasks give way to expertise and problem-solving. This shift necessitates raising and diversifying the level of education and competence, which in turn requires investments in education. Developing the higher education system while maintaining its core tasks ensures that Finland has enough skilled people to build a sustainable and successful welfare society. In the dual model, the two higher education sectors have their own roles in meeting the needs of society, working life and individuals. Higher education institutions also have a global responsibility—to promote sustainable development, strengthen community and support individuals as part of a broader whole. UAS education plays a significant role in combining work-life-oriented competence, international cooperation and participation in the European higher education community.

Higher education system

- The Finnish higher education landscape consists of Universities of Applied Sciences and universities.
- The degree system includes both work-life-oriented and research-oriented lower and higher degrees.
- The higher education network covers the whole of Finland.
- Differences between higher education institutions are reflected in the content of degrees and the competence they produce.
- Higher education institutions cooperate closely in teaching and support services—not only with each other but also with upper secondary institutions. Students can complete courses through cross-institutional study agreements.
- A functioning dual model is based on a division of responsibilities defined by operational objectives. Flexibility within the dual model is strengthened in the student pathway.
- Higher education structures are developed on educational policy grounds.
- The autonomy of UAS is strengthened through legislation.
- UAS education is developed by introducing the 'Master' title and the right to award a professional doctorate.
- In higher education consortia, the equitable development and availability of higher education degrees is ensured.
- UAS are comprehensively part of European higher education networks.
- Degrees are awarded by the higher education institution in question, which is responsible for the degree as a whole regardless of where studies have been completed.

Global responsibility

- Higher education institutions integrate global responsibility and sustainable development into their strategies.
- Higher education institutions promote a safe, equal and healthy environment.
- Higher education includes studies and competence development that support the sustainable use of natural resources and the preservation of carrying capacity far into the future.

- Clear national guidelines are established for the responsible use of AI in higher education, and both teaching staff and students are trained in its appropriate use.
- Communities connected to higher education have a social responsibility towards students.
- The primary purpose of education export is to increase internationality, competence and mobility.
- Education export must not divert resources from degree education and, in the longer term, must bring additional resources to the institution's operations.
- Education export projects must comply with ethical principles. They are regularly evaluated, taking into account equal treatment of students and legal protection.
- Education export projects must be covered by the institution's quality assurance, and implemented projects must be assessed as independently as possible.
- Students at Risk scholarship schemes enable studies in an EU country for students who are denied the right to education—or other human rights—due to their civic activity in their home country.

Steering and funding

- UAS legislation and funding are reviewed and developed as a whole.
- Funding for UAS education is commensurate with the educational mission.
- Any increase in intake is accompanied by sufficient funding. In addition to starting places, attention is paid to supporting study progression.
- The UAS funding model is reformed to support the sustainable development of education, its quality and to steer institutions to create flexibility in studies.
- The degree- and output-focus of the funding model is eased.
- UAS profile themselves according to their educational expertise and regional needs.
- The provision of education is based on qualitative and quantitative foresight carried out by the UAS within nationally set frameworks.
- European higher education networks are primarily funded from the EU budget.
- Funding for RDI activities in UAS is increased without cutting funding from degree education.

Governance

- The status of the student union is defined in legislation governing UAS.
- The role of student unions is recognised in society and within higher education communities, and their operations are safeguarded.
- Student unions have access to sufficient funding for their activities.
- All students enrolled in degree education at a UAS belong to the student union. Students may resign their membership if they wish.
- A genuine tripartite model is realised in higher education institutions, with student unions represented as full members in governance and decision-making.
- The number of teaching staff in relation to students and the amount of teaching hours are sufficient to ensure educational quality.
- Teaching staff receive continuing education, their wellbeing is supported and they are ensured the capacity to utilise new technology and teaching methods.

- Regular work-life periods for teaching staff are a natural part of institutional operations and ensure the currency of their work-life competence.
- Teaching staff have sufficient resources to perform their duties.
- The role of higher education IT administration is developed to support teaching.

Structure and quality of education

- Finnish UAS education is the best in the world.
- High-quality and continually developing UAS education is socially valued and recognised.
- Continuing education, specialisation education and the development of study content enable rapid responses to changing labour market needs. Degree structures correspond to the needs of working life.
- Students participate in the development and assessment of quality assurance systems.
- The quality of education in all UAS is high by European standards and internationally competitive.
- UAS and degree-awarding studies are evaluated nationally and internationally.
- The Master's degree (UAS) and its admission criteria are developed. The recognition and esteem of the Master's degree (UAS) in working life are improved.
- Focusing on educational quality and the development of students' competence enables diverse learning. Study completion times are made flexible when necessary.

Content of education

- The UAS Bachelor's degree corresponds to level six (6) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the UAS Master's degree provides the competences defined at level seven (7). The professional doctorate must correspond to level eight (8).
- The combined scope of lower and higher degrees is, as a rule, 300 ECTS credits across all fields.
- UAS structures and systems support different study modes such as blended and online studies.
- The implementation mode of UAS education corresponds to that for which the student was admitted.
- All students have access to a broad course offering. Higher education studies are accepted as part of a degree regardless of the institution where they were completed.
- Courses delivered through different modes are offered extensively, enabling students to choose the way of studying that suits them best.
- Students can receive qualitative feedback if they wish.
- The entry level of new students is taken into account, and study content is designed accordingly to support progression. Studies are tailored so that students have adequate ICT skills, language proficiency and mathematical skills for their field.
- Diversity in studies is ensured through alternative methods of completion.
- The workload and allocation of credits are equivalent across institutions and fields. Studies are dimensioned so that workload is evenly distributed across courses and semesters.
- Studies can be completed in multimodal, multidisciplinary, flexible and year-round ways using diverse study methods.
- Curricula take into account different ways of learning and guarantee accessible study opportunities for all.

- Institutions have functioning arrangements for identifying and recognising prior learning, which are developed and strengthened. Competence is recognised regardless of where it was acquired.

Student admissions and links to working life

- Student selection processes are transparent and fair. Applicants are treated equally in admissions.
- Applicants are primarily selected to study a field of education. During their studies, students choose a more specific orientation within the field. When designing programmes, sufficient options for choice are ensured.
- Admissions support educational equality.
- Higher education institutions enable easy transfers within and between institutions.
- Students must always be paid compensation for internships corresponding to the general wage level in the field.
- Higher education institutions must ensure internship opportunities for every student.
- The thesis is a respected, well-supervised and high-quality demonstration of a student's competence.
- Research, development and innovation (RDI) activities are transparent and closely linked to teaching. UAS teaching staff and students participate in RDI activities.
- Studies include appropriate multidisciplinary, work-life-oriented projects and RDI projects in which students learn to apply their competence in diverse situations and to work across disciplines. At the same time, students gain strong work-life skills and develop their expertise.

INTERNATIONALITY

Internationality is an inseparable part of higher education and student life. Finland is part of Europe, the European Union and the wider international community, which is increasingly visible in higher education. Cooperation across borders, multilingual learning environments and encounters between cultures are integral to studies and to growing into a global professional. European higher education cooperation is evolving rapidly and is also shaping the Finnish higher education system. International competence is not created only through mobility; it is also built in everyday interaction, in diverse communities and through opportunities to learn languages and different perspectives. International students and immigrants are expected to integrate into the community, study and transition to working life simultaneously. Promoting internationality in higher education requires a commitment to equality and sustainable development, and the possibility for students to participate and influence also in European decision-making.

Exchange periods and internationality at home

- Learning outcomes and content for international competence are defined at the national level, and international competence is included in all degrees.
- Students have diverse opportunities to gain international competence regardless of their life situation or degree by going on exchange, taking part in projects or internships abroad, and through internationalisation at home.
- Financial support for mobility periods abroad is secured equally for all students.
- Student social benefits travel with the student for the duration of the mobility period.
- Internationality is part of the everyday life of all members of higher education communities.
- Higher education institutions ensure the visibility and accessibility of internationality services for students.
- Every degree includes the possibility for a study exchange abroad so that the competence gained is counted towards the student's degree.
- The funding model of higher education institutions encourages student internationality.
- The funding, impact and inclusion of the Erasmus+ programme are strengthened.
- The introduction of the European Student Card is promoted as part of streamlining student mobility and EU-wide identification.
- Removing cross-border barriers facilitates student mobility and promotes international cooperation between higher education institutions.

Status of international students and immigrants

- International students and immigrants are offered free preparatory studies and instruction in national languages, taking into account the linguistic skills required for higher education studies.
- Employment in Finland is facilitated for international graduates by granting a permanent residence permit on the basis of graduation.
- Equal opportunities for international students and immigrants to obtain internships and jobs are promoted and supported.
- The prior learning and skills of immigrants are identified and recognised, and they are valued in society.

- Opportunities for international students to participate in the higher education community and in the development of higher education are strengthened.
- Higher education institutions offer international students language and integration studies as part of their degree.
- Employers re-evaluate the necessity of high-level domestic language proficiency to lower barriers to employment.
- Tuition fees for students coming from outside the EU/EEA area are abolished.
- Scholarship schemes in higher education institutions are comprehensive, and applying for scholarships is transparent and equal.
- The financial burden on international students is reduced by supporting their livelihood.

European cooperation

- Structured dialogue is strengthened at the EU level. National unions of students in European countries are strong and independent actors.
- Education policy decisions in the EU fall under supporting competence.
- The EU supports cooperation between Member States and promotes common guidelines for higher education.
- Internationality of all higher education institutions is supported equally, and the recognition of degrees between EU countries is smooth and uncomplicated.
- EU funding enables the support of European student and youth organisations through both core funding and project funding.
- Students are part of the decision-making of European University Alliances.

LIVELIHOOD AND HOUSING

Notions of work, family, livelihood and housing are in transition. The social security system no longer meets today's needs or ways of working. Income security varies across life situations, and financial uncertainty is particularly pronounced during studies. Student financial aid, housing costs and opportunities for mobility form a whole that defines students' everyday lives and affects equality in access to education. At the same time, an ageing population and changes in working life challenge traditional ideas of when and how support is provided in different life situations. In the midst of these phenomena, intergenerational fairness is emphasised as is the question of how well current systems withstand future societal and economic pressures.

Social security

- The Finnish benefits system is simple and understandable. It takes into account students' different life situations, enables full-time study and the combination of work and study.
- The benefits system encourages and enables lifelong learning.
- Students are covered by the same general benefit as other recipient groups.
- All student social security benefits are index-linked.
- Student social security is year-round.
- The level of student benefits enables full-time study.
- Social security does not encourage or oblige students to take on debt.
- Obligations and incentives related to social security are reasonable for recipients.
- Reconciling different benefits is effortless, and it is possible to apply for all benefits with a single form. Underutilisation of benefits is prevented by indicating during the application what benefits the applicant is entitled to based on the information provided.
- Parents' income or assets do not affect the level of social security for adult students. Social security is individual.
- Housing support can be received regardless of the form of tenure.
- Recovery, termination or reduction of benefits must not place students in unreasonable situations. A recipient's own explanation or plan is sufficient to return to the scope of the benefit.

Student financial aid system

- Student financial aid is weighted towards the study grant. Drawing or not drawing the student loan is voluntary and does not restrict access to other benefits.
- The combined amount of the study grant and housing supplement covers at least reasonable living costs in the place of residence. When determining the level of the housing supplement, regional rent levels are taken into account.
- The total number of months of financial aid enables the completion of both a lower and a higher degree.
- For the granting of discretionary additional months of aid, it is sufficient that a disease, an international mobility period or another weighty reason has affected the progress of studies.
- Months of aid recovered are not counted as used months of aid. Recovery is made in ascending order from the smallest to the largest amounts.

- The student loan compensation is granted annually.
- The amount of the student loan compensation is calculated on the basis of the total loan amount.
- Previous higher education studies or completed degrees do not affect eligibility for the student loan compensation.
- Interest assistance for student loans can be granted for at least five years. Interest assistance is paid simultaneously with the interest falling due.
- Enable the extension of the eligibility period for the student loan compensation also for students whose studies have been delayed due to reduced study ability, serving in an elected position in the student union, or an international mobility period.
- Every student has the right to at least one affordable hot meal per day.
- The meal subsidy guarantees a high-quality and affordable student meal.

Student housing and public transport

- The goal of student housing construction is to ensure sufficient affordable housing for all who need it. All students have the opportunity to apply for student housing.
- Student housing serves the needs of different student groups and supports everyday student life.
- Resident selection is equal regardless of whether a new student was selected based on certificate or entrance examination.
- Various production subsidies are widely available for student housing construction to ensure an affordable housing supply.
- Higher education institutions commit to promoting the availability of student housing by reserving housing for exchange students and international degree students in cooperation with housing providers.
- Municipal public transport introduces student discounts that apply to all degree and exchange students, available regardless of the municipality of residence and age.
- All higher education localities have functional, comprehensive and safe transport networks that enable students to commute from their homes to study locations.

WELLBEING

Finland's population is aging and the number of working-age people is decreasing. This development highlights the need to examine the conditions in which the workforce of the future grows and develops. The wellbeing of higher education students has deteriorated, visible in challenges to both physical and mental coping. Students in UAS represent the diversity of the population, and their needs are equally diverse. The environment, leisure opportunities and access to mobility increasingly influence the maintenance of study and work ability. The availability of wellbeing services varies by region and institution, and students' experience of accessibility is not uniform. At the same time, expectations placed on student health services are increasing. Securing preventative services and structures that support students' coping requires sufficient funding for the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS). Student wellbeing is increasingly part of the discussion on the conditions under which individuals can participate in society and working life now and in the future.

Equality and accessibility of education

- All students have the right and equal opportunity to balanced full-time study.
- Higher education facilities are accessible. In addition to physical accessibility, social and psychological accessibility are taken into account.
- Facilities include tools and practices that enable the participation of different students—for example, the use of induction loops.
- UAS education is provided in both official languages, Finnish and Swedish. In addition, education is provided in other languages deemed necessary.
- Equality, gender equality and intergenerational fairness are taken into account in all activities at both national and international levels.
- Named and trained harassment contact persons exist among students and staff.
- Students' legal protection and its supporting structures are a clear, transparent and accessible part of the higher education community.

Student diversity and guidance/support services

- Higher education institutions are physically, psychologically and socially safe places to study.
- Student wellbeing is supported better than before by organising studies to take into account students' holistic and diverse needs, by providing various forms of support and support services, and by fostering community and inclusion.
- Students' individual needs are recognised in teaching methods and instruction, which utilise up-to-date technology and pedagogy.
- Teaching is gender-sensitive.
- Teaching includes compulsory components on diversity and encounters.

Health, wellbeing and sports services

- The Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) provides student healthcare for all higher education students nationwide.

- In the development and allocation of social and health services, intergenerational fairness is taken into account.
- The focus of services is shifted from treating problems to actively promoting physical, mental and social wellbeing and preventing problems. An early intervention model is used to support psychological, physical and social functioning in the higher education community.
- Access to mental health, psychotherapy and substance abuse services is secured. There is a sufficient number of qualified professionals, and care is accessed in a timely manner.
- All higher education students fall within the scope of the therapy guarantee.
- The Student Welfare Act stipulates an obligation for higher education institutions to provide the services of study psychologists and study counsellors, with minimum staffing levels written into law.
- The organisation of sports services is a statutory task for higher education institutions and an integral part of every institution's strategy. Services are diverse, high-quality, easily accessible and free of charge for students.