

The future starts now!

A manifesto for a dialogue on
Swedish higher education in 2030

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SUHF

The Association of
Swedish Higher Education Institutions

How can institutions of higher education best develop academic excellence and at the same time contribute responsibly to sustainable social development in Sweden and in the world? The Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF) wishes, on the basis on this manifesto, to initiate a dialogue with decision makers and those who shape public opinion.

How will society manage the challenges of the future?

Society is facing major challenges. No one can be sure what kind of society will be shaped during the decades ahead. However, the issues we struggle with today will probably be much the same as those we struggle with tomorrow.

The most pressing issues we are facing include climate change, globalisation, urbanisation, the future of the European community, the preconditions of politics, divisions within and between countries, cultural integration, human rights, energy supplies, environmental threats, wars and famine, welfare challenges, growth and competitiveness, supplies of pure water, health, ageing populations and attitudinal differences between the generations. Many of these issues are included among the seventeen sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

The role of institutions of higher education is to problematize, formulate questions and provide answers – sometimes to questions that have not yet been asked. The challenges of the future make the roles of education, research, innovation and collaboration ever more important.

Society should be open, inclusive and democratic. Defending and developing such a society requires profound, extensive knowledge that is continuously reviewed and developed through education and research of the very highest quality. Universities play indispensable roles in the building, maintaining and developing of society. Therefore, institutions of higher education must be autonomous, while in close interplay with society and a resource for all citizens.

Institutions of higher education offer a uniquely successful setting for the education and research society needs, both now and for the future. To ensure success in the long term, the higher education sector must be characterized by competence, dialogue and distinct profiles.

Competence – academic freedom and responsibility

Taking responsibility, both individually and as a group, is a fundamental and dynamic capacity that will be increasingly required of students, staff and partners in the community. This will involve the ability for individuals and groups to formulate their own questions and subject contemporary society to critical scrutiny.

The mission of higher education and research is complex and multi-faceted, and will remain so. Academic responsibility requires collegiate transparency and collaboration with others in validating both established and new knowledge, where an open science system forms a cornerstone. This is a guarantee for the fundamental quality of all academic activities.

Taking this kind of responsibility requires sound academic leadership, leadership that can ensure that both organisation and working conditions allow individuals and institutions to flourish. Based on responsibility and academic freedom, universities will be strengthened as independent institutions and agents of social change.



Dialogue – the courage to challenge

The challenges of the future demand that education and research not shy away from what is difficult or inconvenient. The existing, the obvious and the self-evident should be and must be challenged. Only in this way can new knowledge be created and new insights gained.

To challenge means to initiate and participate in dialogues within and between disciplines and with society. This means that researchers, lecturers and students must challenge not only themselves but also others, both in regard to their own results and to those of others, as well as the ways in which society uses their results. To challenge requires openness, security, confidence and courage. To challenge requires boldness and being allowed sometimes to fail.

Through their specific competencies and through cross-disciplinary cooperation, academics in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, medicine, fine arts and technology should not only provoke and stimulate debate but also be active in setting the public agenda.

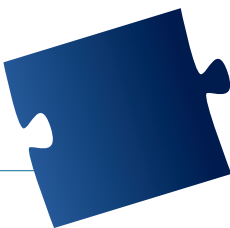
Distinct profiles – a key strength

An ever more complex society increases the need for a wide diversity of education and research settings. Therefore, we need a higher education landscape that has diversity both in research and in our ways of organising and implementing teaching and learning, both in scope and in various geographical locations.

For each higher education institution, being different means assuming responsibility for its own future instead of being forced into a standard format of organization and areas of knowledge.

Each institution of higher education must be valued, assessed and funded on its own individual premise rather than to a given standard. The higher education system must therefore promote the diversity and autonomy of institutions.

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