

Policy for widening access and participation at the University of Gothenburg

Decision-maker	Vice-Chancellor
Responsible unit	Educational Affairs
Date of decision	13 April 2023
Period of validity	Until further notice
Summary	The Policy for widening access and participation describes the University's overall goals for its work to widen access and participation in education at first-, second- and third-cycle levels.

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Introduction

Widening access and participation is an important strategic matter, and essential for sustainable, knowledge-based societal development. Education and knowledge building are mobilising forces in society with the ability to influence and provoke change. UHR has stated that “Opportunities for all to access higher education, and ultimately influence and power is a question of democracy” and that “Higher education institutions have a social responsibility to ensure that the diversity which exists in society is reflected in higher education”¹. Long-term work to improve the quality of education and research requires equal opportunities to higher education for all. Different perspectives and experiences can challenge our assumptions and unleash potential². According to our vision document *A University for the World*, the University of Gothenburg strives to be a higher education institution that takes responsibility for societal development and is contributing to a sustainable world³. With this in mind, the University of Gothenburg sees widening access and participation as important work for improving the quality of education and research. The University’s work to “actively promote and widen access to higher education” has its basis in Sweden’s Higher Education Act Chapter 1, Section 5.

Work on widening access and participation at the University of Gothenburg is:

- part of the University’s operational development, and part of strategic quality work which includes matters related to diversity and equal treatment
- a University-wide concern and a responsibility for all parts of the University
- a matter that concerns all education levels: first-, second- and third-cycle.

Purpose and definitions

The purpose of the Policy for widening access and participation is to set out the overall goals and direction of the University’s work to widen access and participation, as well as to create structure, long-term process in this work, and a systematic approach to it. The Policy for widening access and participation at the University of Gothenburg is part of its governance system and applies to education and students at all education levels.

Widening access refers to work to increase the proportion of students in categories that can be considered under-represented in today’s student population⁴. The categories that the University of Gothenburg is

¹ UHR report: <https://www.uhr.se/publikationer/publikationsbutiken/kan-excellens-uppnas-i-homogena-studentgrupper/>

² Ghosh, R.(2012), Diversity and Excellence in higher education. Is there a conflict? in *The University of Chicago Press Journals, Comparative Education Review*, Volume 56, Number 3, pp 349–365. [Diversity and Excellence in Higher Education: Is There a Conflict? \(qu.se\)](#)

³ Vision document *A University for the World*: [1772612_vision_2030.pdf \(qu.se\)](#)

⁴ UHR report: <https://www.uhr.se/publikationer/publikationsbutiken/kan-excellens-uppnas-i-homogena-studentgrupper/>

focusing on are social background⁵ and Swedish/foreign background⁶ as well as the categories gender⁷, age and functional diversity.

Widening participation refers to inclusive studies which enable education on equal terms, regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, Swedish/foreign background, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, age or social background. Good pedagogy and an inclusive learning environment are fundamentally important to the University's work to widen participation. The University's Pedagogical Ideas Programme⁸ can provide support.

Overall goals

The University of Gothenburg is to be an open, accessible and inclusive higher education institution.

To achieve these goals, the University is to:

- work actively to ensure that under-represented groups can be given the opportunity to study at all levels at the University of Gothenburg
- offer support so that all students get the best possible conditions for completing their studies while maintaining the quality of the education provided
- strive to increase knowledge and skills within the University concerning the importance of diversity⁹, that is, that a greater mix of different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences is seen as a resource in a long-term quality development.

Basic conditions

The University's work with widening access and participation requires coordination and cooperation (internally and with the community at large). Its work with widening participation involves measures to promote inclusion throughout the period of studies. This is fundamental to succeeding in widening access. Furthermore, a clear structure and organisation is needed for continuous work that contributes skills and tools. The imbalance in recruitment to higher education is a process that starts very early. Research also shows the importance of instilling the idea of university studies at an early age¹⁰, for example in schools. Efforts to combat imbalanced recruitment therefore require systematic and structural solutions.

⁵ Social background – Statistics based on parents' educational level in six categories. See for example UKÄ (2022), *Universitets och högskolors arbete med att främja och bredda rekryteringen till högre utbildning Tematisk utvärdering* [The work of higher education institutions to promote and widen access to higher education, Thematic evaluation] Part 1, page 32.

⁶ The term 'foreign background' refers to persons born abroad or born in Sweden where both their parents are foreign-born. Definition according to <https://www.scb.se/contentassets/60768c27d88c434a8036d1fdb595bf65/mis-2002-3.pdf> page 10

⁷ The statistics are based only on the legal sex assigned at birth in this case. In recent years, a majority of newly registered students have been women, which means that there is an under-representation of men.

⁸ [Pedagogical Ideas Programme – Pedagogical Development and Interactive Learning \(PIL\), University of Gothenburg \(gu.se\)](https://www.gu.se/education/pedagogical-ideas-programme)

⁹ Examples of how the term 'diversity' is defined can be found in EUA, 2019 page 23, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/web_diversity%20equity%20and%20inclusion%20in%20european%20higher%20education%20institutions.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/_uhr.se/publikationer/2017/uhr-utbildning-gar-i-arv.pdf

Faculties formulate explicit and, if possible, measurable goals, as well as their strategies for how they plan to achieve the goals of their work with widening access and participation. Difficulties may arise when overarching goals are to be implemented in organisations with different types of conditions. It is important to be aware of potential goal conflicts in different parts of the organisation, and the necessity of working strategically with these goal conflicts.

The University-wide level is to provide support to core activities (education and research) in work related to measures and the coordination of University-wide actions.

First- and second-cycle students and doctoral students are to be given opportunities to participate actively in work to widen access and participation. The University, in cooperation with the student unions, is to ensure that student representatives are offered a place in relevant bodies and that there are arenas at all levels (first-, second- and third-cycle) for getting input from student representatives.

Organisation and responsibilities

The **University Board** is responsible for ensuring that the University fulfils its mission in accordance with the regulations governing its activities and its appropriation directions, which includes widening access and lifelong learning under Chapter 1 Section 5 of the Swedish Higher Education Act.

The **Vice-Chancellor** decides on relevant governing documents, etc., and follows up the area via for example annual reports and operational dialogues in the **University Management Council**.

The **University Board of Education** is a forum for regularly sharing experiences and monitoring progress. The Board may also assign specific tasks to the Unit for Pedagogical Development and Interactive Learning (**PIL**) and to the Unit for Academic Language (**ASK**) related to widening access and participation.

The **Unit for Pedagogical Development and Interactive Learning (PIL)** is responsible for ensuring that courses in teaching and learning in higher education include a range of perspectives, highlight and discuss prevailing norms, and support the departments' Education Coordinators and teaching staff in developing inclusive aspects of teaching.

The **Unit for Academic Language (ASK)** is responsible for strengthening the University's general knowledge of academic language for both teaching staff and students. In its orientation in teaching and learning in higher education, ASK must pay particular attention to the implications of widening access and participation for the University's courses and study programmes, and teaching and learning in higher education.

The **Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education** is responsible for specific actions in the area of widening access and participation and their follow-up.

The **University Library** has goals and activities that aim to run the Library in ways that help to widen participation, but also to widen access. The **Library Board** has a special responsibility to monitor the implementation and development of the University Library's activities from these perspectives.

The **Faculty Boards** “are responsible for the strategic planning, overall governance and quality assurance of education, research and third stream activities”¹¹. Faculty boards are responsible for monitoring, quality assurance and the development of their faculty’s core activities (education and research) and thus play a key role in highlighting the results of the University’s work with widening access and participation. This work should be apparent in the goals and strategies of the faculties.

The **Heads of Department** are responsible for widening access and participation in the courses and study programmes offered at their departments. The departments should have goals and measures in the area that are measurable, realistic, sustainable in the long term, and anchored in their own operational needs.

The **Educational Affairs unit** has a special responsibility to support the University’s activities in matters related to widening access and participation, in particular questions related to the coordination of this work, sharing experience, the development of tools and methods for recruiting students, certain statistics, admissions and student services/support.

The **Communications Unit** should pursue the goal of widening access in all its communications activities that target prospective students. This task includes communications campaigns in the area targeting specific groups, and support to the departments/equivalent.

Follow-up

Widening access and participation is followed up as part of the University’s quality assurance and development work, and more specifically in forums where actions to widen access and participation are dealt with.

Every three years, the Educational Affairs unit will obtain statistics and data from Statistics Sweden (SCB), the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) and the *Bak- och framgrund system* (Ladok) to map the student population from the perspective of widening access and to monitor progress towards the set, measurable goals at different education levels and in different parts of the University. The faculties must ensure that widening access and participation are part of their work with their vision for research, education and collaboration with society. Furthermore, prioritised activities to widen access and participation must be included in the annual Operational Plan. This work is followed up in the same process as other activities.

The University-wide level compiles, analyses and presents a picture every three years to the University Board of Education and communicates this picture to relevant parties. This work also includes compiling resources in the form of materials and descriptions of best practice.

¹¹ Rules of Procedure at the University of Gothenburg 2022, p. 19 [Microsoft Word – Rules of procedure University of Goteborg 2022.docx \(gu.se\)](#)

Legislation and policy documents relevant to the area

1. [Admission regulations for first- and second-cycle courses and study programmes](#) with the application of alternative selection and assessment of prior learning
2. [Admission regulations for third-cycle studies](#)
3. [Policy for study and career counselling](#)
4. [Policy for the development of teaching and learning in higher education \(Swedish only\)](#) with associated [Pedagogical Ideas Programme](#)
5. [Accessibility policy and action plan \(Swedish only\)](#)
6. [Policy for gender equality and equal treatment](#)
7. [Policy för kvalitetssäkring och kvalitetsutveckling av utbildning vid Göteborgs universitetet 2022](#)
8. [Internationalisation Strategy for 2021–2024](#)
9. [Language Policy at the University of Gothenburg](#)
10. [A University for the World](#) the University of Gothenburg's vision for 2021–2030
11. [Goals and strategies for the University as a whole 2021–2030](#)
12. [Swedish Higher Education Act](#) (1992:1434)
13. [Discrimination Act](#)
14. [Delegation of authority 2022](#)
15. [Rules of procedure 2022](#)

Guidance and suggestions for actions and initiatives

Widening access requires a broad and strategic approach. It is a complex task that includes structured actions in a number of areas and an understanding of how these areas are interconnected.¹² For the University of Gothenburg, this means strategic work based primarily on the recommendations that the University received in connection with the Swedish Higher Education Authority's thematic evaluation of widening access in 2022.¹³ Here are some focus areas and suggestions for actions/initiatives in each area:

1. Work to influence attitudes to higher education in order to instil the idea of pursuing higher education in a broad target group early in their lives (including groups with low rates of transition to higher education).
 - Initiate and establish structured and long-term cooperation with the school system (including the study counselling system and placements within the school system) with the aim of widening access
 - Develop cooperation with the municipality and other actors in the local community
 - Develop regional cooperation in this area.
2. Widened outreach activities to recruit students at all education levels.
 - Review and further develop the University's education offering with new courses and study programmes and freestanding courses
 - Develop regional and national cooperation for widened and targeted student recruitment initiatives
 - Develop recruitment strategies and measurable goals to promote and widen access to doctoral education
 - Encourage lifelong learning¹⁴ in cooperation with trade and industry, the public sector and civil society.
3. The application of entry requirement rules¹⁵ at all education levels as an instrument for widening access.

¹²UHR report: <https://www.uhr.se/publikationer/publikationsbutiken/kan-excellens-uppnas-i-homogena-studentgrupper/>

¹³UKÄ, 2022. Thematic evaluation of the work of higher education institutions to promote and widen access to higher education, [Tematiska utvärderingar – Universitetskanslersämbetet \(uka.se\)](https://www.uka.se/tematiska-utvarderingar-universitetskanslersambetet)

¹⁴ On lifelong learning and the new Student finance scheme for transition and retraining: *Promemoria om ändring i högskolelagen för att främja den akademiska friheten och tydliggöra lärosätenas roll för det livslånga lärandet* [Memorandum on amendments to the Swedish Higher Education Act to promote academic freedom and clarify the role of higher education institutions in lifelong learning] <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/91f4a50aa80942688edbca0ccb1db8ad/promemoria-andringar-i-hogskolelagen-for-att-framja-den-akademiska-friheten-och-tydliggora-larosatenas-roll-for-det-livslanga-larandet/>

Omställningsstudiestöd för flexibilitet, omställningsförmåga och trygghet [Student finance scheme for transition and retraining] Govt Bill 2021/22:176 <https://www.regeringen.se/globalassets/regeringen/block/aktualitetsblock/arbetsmarknadsdepartementet/trygghet-och-omstallning/flexibilitet-omstallningsformaga-och-trygghet.pdf>

¹⁵ The decision-making procedure on matters of admission, entry requirements and selection is set out in the Admission regulations for first- and second-cycle courses and study programmes (Reg. No. GU 2021/2938) and the Admission regulations for third-cycle studies (Reg. No. V 2015/905)

- Strengthen the University's work concerning validation and the assessment of prior learning for entry to higher education as well as credit transfers from prior learning within a study programme
- Develop and systematise work to increase mobility between post-secondary education and university
- Develop work with locally determined selection criteria for courses and study programmes
- Create multiple gateways and pathways to higher education (e.g. through bridging and prerequisite courses, introduction to higher education courses, bridging programmes).

4. Widening participation in all education levels is as important as widening access.

- Develop the introduction for students at first-, second-and third-cycle levels
- Strengthen work with accessibility at first-, second-and third-cycle levels
- Develop regional and national collaboration to widen participation
- Develop the University's learning environment, which includes the educational, physical, and psychosocial learning environments as well as the virtual learning environment, from the perspective of sustainability and inclusion
- Develop support systems to allow studies to be undertaken on equal terms at all levels
- Develop regional and national cooperation within teaching and learning in higher education
- Systematically strengthen the conditions for work to widen participation in international mobility¹⁶ (such as through developing a range of mobility windows including virtual mobility or blended mobility), and take advantage of opportunities to continue developing knowledge about inclusion and widening participation in international mobility among the University of Gothenburg's staff and international partners
- Take advantage of the work and cooperation within the European university alliance EUTOPIA.

¹⁶ From the Internationalisation Strategy for University of Gothenburg 2021–2024