

THS STUDENT REPORT

Introduction

The Student Union (THS) at the Royal Institute of Technology was founded in 1902 and since then has represented the students of the Royal Institute of Technology in the University and the rest of society. The main focus of the THS has always been to raise actions on behalf of the students through a unified student voice in matters regarding the quality of the courses and study programmes and the prerequisites for studies in all of the courses and study programmes at KTH. The work has taken different forms throughout history but has recently been characterised by close cooperation and a good dialogue with KTH and the notion that the student union and the University are striving to reach the same goal - that all students at KTH should have the best possible study time and leave KTH with the best possible qualification.

This approach has also characterised the work of THS and KTH on self-assessment for the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) audit of the University's quality assurance work and since day one, the student union has been represented in the steering group for the self-assessment. Our perception is that through this, we have had a very large influence and have been able to contribute with the student perspective to all relevant parts of the document. We thank KTH for the good cooperation and the great consideration that has been taken into account in the work! With this in mind, the THS student report should be read as a complement to the KTH self-assessment rather than as an independent document.

The author of the student report is Jonathan Edin, full-time remunerated THS *Head of Educational Affairs*, who has also been the representative appointed by THS to the KTH steering group for self-assessment. During the process, opinions have been collected from other students and doctoral students who are involved in matters of student representation at KTH-central, as well as at school and programme level. This has been done through a workshop at the THS EduCouncil, to which everyone at THS who is involved in influencing courses and study programmes is invited, as well as in personal conversations, in particular with the THS Doctoral Student Chapter Presidium. The purpose of this was to gather the widest picture possible of the student perspective on the work by KTH on quality issues. The document decided by the authorised representative for the student union, *THS Opinions 2018*, also formed the basis for some of the content in the student report.

The THS Student Union Board decided on the student report per capsulam on 16/05/2019 (1819-KS-PC-005)

Part 1: Student influence in the quality system

In essence, THS has a positive perspective on the work that KTH is doing on securing and developing the quality of its courses and study programmes. The system is clearly designed to be based on the student experience of the individual courses and their course and study programme situation and then to clearly pass on the information that has emerged, in order to enable areas for development to be identified at the right level in the KTH organisation and to facilitate measures being suggested. The students have the right and opportunity to be represented in all these fora and to be involved in the discussion and present their views on the issues.

A general request that we would like to direct to KTH regarding its quality work is to emphasise the importance of the quality work being a matter for all employees at the University and also a central aspect of the responsibilities of both the teachers and the administrative staff. Working systematically on securing and developing the quality of the courses and study programmes and the functions that will give students good conditions under which to participate in and complete the courses and study programmes must never be seen as a burden or a bureaucratic process. We want to encourage KTH to discuss issues concerning quality at a broader peer level and how both THS, its student representatives and individual students are

given the opportunity to participate and contribute to a culture of participation in the development of the KTH operations.

Part 2: THS picture of the assessment areas

Governance and organisation

KTH has a solid quality system that is reported clearly and involves a very large part of the staff at KTH. There is no doubt that the system has good potential to contribute to the development of the quality of the courses and study programmes at KTH and the iterative process that happens around the development of the quality system itself has already provided clear improvements to the work. An example of this is that the chairpersons of the School Councils has been given better opportunities to familiarise themselves with the material in preparation for the respective quality dialogues with the schools by inviting them to participate in the DF workshop on common areas for development and through closer preparatory work with their respective DF.

Although in theory there is a clear delegation through the documents listed in the KTH self-assessment (BO1BG 1.4), it is however not a rare experience for there to be an unclear mandate in the quality issues amongst the students working in the different parts of the quality system regarding who really has the power to influence something in the courses and study programmes. To a certain extent, this may be due to an ambiguity in the steering documents but it is mainly due to the responsibility put primarily on the PA but also to GA and FA, without giving them the mandate to implement what emerges from the various parts of the system. The power relationship between the Faculty Council governance of quality work and the staff responsibility of line managers is not always clear and this means that those who have the closest contact with the students in the courses and study programmes cannot always make use of incoming input. THS believes that the roles of PA, GA and FA should be clarified and reinforced.

Systematically encouraging participation is something that THS considers to be very important for both students and staff employed at KTH. In our opinion, the most important thing is that teachers have a greater responsibility through peer influencing structures, in particular for those concerning quality is a prerequisite for the working methods to be anchored and disseminated and for the knowledge and experience available to be utilised. In a similar manner, the students must be an important party to the same working method. The doctoral students sit in a special place as both students and employees and therefore have an extra important and complicated role. The doctoral students at KTH are organised within the THS Doctoral Student Chapter, which has the right to appoint representatives and to exert influence at KTH at the central, local and programme level. An influence over their workplace is also guaranteed through the APT meetings. This is especially important for the scholarship doctoral students who are conducting their doctoral studies at KTH and have a weaker position at the university and therefore their ability to influence should be particularly emphasised.

Prerequisites

For THS, the student conditions for studying are a very central issue and the opportunities for students to exert influence over the decisions that create the course and study programme environments and in other ways create the conditions for students to enjoy and feel good during their time studying at KTH should be strategically reinforced in the collaboration between KTH and THS.

The list of areas in which THS believes that KTH has potential for development that can be accommodated under BO2BG 2.3 might be made long. An important work in the assessment criteria is the support for students with disabilities within the framework of 'KTH FUNKA' under which, following internal criticism from teachers and students, KTH now conducts as a larger review of the guideline regulating this student support with a strong THS presence. It is of the utmost importance that KTH ensures that students with the right to support from WORK are given good support and other students the same in general, the conditions under which to carry out their courses and study programmes and that the support is available in all current learning and examination activities.

Overall, the physical study environments are a KTH strength. The majority of classrooms are perceived as appropriate by the students and the KTH premises are well attended during the year. Of course this is positive but it means that there is often a shortage of study places, not least in the examination periods. The problem is generally experienced as more severe at the KTH Campus than at the campus areas in Flemingsberg, Södertälje and Kista. An issue raised by students is annoyance with the fact that many exercise rooms are locked when not in use and there are many who wish that the halls could be open during daytime so they can be used as study areas. KTH provides the THS chapters with chapter facilities that are used extensively as study places and for social purposes, which is highly appreciated and a prerequisite for the activities of the chapters. A very much needed refurbishing of the lecture halls is currently underway and is taking care of many of the problems highlighted by the students. These include poor sound insulation, lack of electrical outlets and from time to time, poorly functioning technical equipment.

According to the KTH Vision 2027, the digital study environment is to be as high a priority as the physical campus environment, but this is far from the current state according to THS. THS believes that the introduction of the new KTH LMS Canvas has been successful overall and that most people feel that Canvas works better than the previous LMS. However, the courses vary greatly in quality and we would like to see KTH working more clearly to support all teachers by giving them the resources to learn from each other and through various educational initiatives, to give them the best opportunities to use Canvas to its full potential. THS encourages KTH to continue working on the development of its digital environments and to place a greater emphasis on living up to the goal of a digital campus environment that maintains the same high quality as the physical.

An important student support that is perceived to have great variations in quality throughout KTH is the student support office functions and in particular the study and career counsellors and international coordinators. These are incredibly central in order to facilitate the studies and it is very important that KTH can ensure that the students can adapt their own study time and make studying abroad possible. During the THS Education workshop many experiences from the represented chapters were shared and it turned out that many perceive their study counsellors to lack knowledge and coordination and that they do not fulfil the function as we expect them to. The study counselling is sometimes also heavily burdened in terms of workload and many students feel that it may take a long time to get help from it. In addition, a large part of their duties are purely administrative and THS believes that they should be able to devote themselves more to actual counselling. It must also be emphasised that many were very satisfied with their study counsellors but the opinion of THS is that KTH must reduce the vulnerability in the system and ensure that this level of quality can be systematically offered to all students. Attention should also be paid to the needs of the doctoral students for counselling both during and prior to the completion of their studies. THS is aware that a discussion around a coordinated study and career counselling is conducted at KTH and encourages a holistic approach that improves the working situation for the employees, as well as the quality of support for the students.

Design, execution and results

A consistent problem that KTH touches upon to some extent in its own self-assessment is the difficulty around feedback and communication of the audit results across the different levels of the quality system (BO3BG3.7, and BO1BG1.6). Here, THS wants to refine and sharpen the self-critique presented by KTH. Communication with the existing students is perceived as a weakness of KTH, irrespective of the subject and it is common for both central and local level THS student representatives to be asked about things that should be a matter of course for KTH to be able to communicate. A parallel can be drawn with BO1BG 1.4 where there is often ambiguity in who is responsible for different parts of communication. THS is of the opinion that this perception is shared by a large proportion of both the KTH administrative and teaching staff.

A clear example of how communication was an under-prioritised part of the KTH quality assurance work is the lack of availability of course evaluations and course analyses, which was also found by the UKÄ in its legal review in 2018. THS agrees with the critique that has emerged from the audit of the University. During the workshop held by THS that involved students from a large number of chapters and

programmes in issues concerning courses and study programmes, we could only come up with one single example of a course in which the course analysis been made available in a satisfactory manner to the students and the general perception was that it is only a minority of teachers in the programmes that report their efforts to develop their course to some extent. In cases in which it is done, it usually takes place during an introductory lecture for the new students on the course, where the teacher then provides an account of the feedback received through the course evaluations from the participants on the course in the previous year and which changes have been made to the course offering for this year. The perception is that course analysis is usually done at first and second cycle education levels but is rarely made available but the problem is considered to be even worse at third cycle education level. The doctoral students generally find that the work on quality assurance of the courses is not given the same weight as corresponding work at the lower levels and that the courses are generally administered in a worse manner.

THS is satisfied with the updated KTH guideline for course evaluations and course analysis and has provided significant contributions to its preparation. We also welcome the work done on the course information project (KIP) to create a place where students can easily access published course analyses and hope for a successful implementation. Ensuring that the guideline is applied and integrated into all of the courses and study programmes at KTH should be a priority for KTH in order to ensure that the foundation of the quality work reaches and covers all students, irrespective of programme, level or campus.

The link between education and research is symptomatic of a certain perspective of KTH's quality assurance that appears in many parts of the self-assessment. Just as is written in the self-assessment, KTH is a university with very high quality research and as a student union, it is our view that the students are very much aware that the teachers are often high-profile and skilled researchers. Therefore, the problem does not lie in a direct lack of connection between research and education but rather in how it is communicated to the students, and that KTH is missing out on an opportunity to show the link between the two core tasks more clearly. Our experience is that those parts in the program evaluations that relate to research links often fail to ensure that there is a link, but rather rely on course transcending activities and cohesion courses to deliver this link. This applies to KTH's three-year programmes, as well as to teaching in first cycle education in the Master of Science in Engineering programmes. As mentioned, this is not unique to this evaluation criteria but is rather something that can be found in many areas. THS feels that closer contact with KTH research is in the interest of the students and requests that KTH works more clearly to ensure and develop the presence of its research in courses and study programmes in both first cycle and second cycle education.

Equal opportunities

The education and research at KTH is characterized in its work on equality by its historical context and the fact that both the student group and the faculty have been and are still are male-dominated and the subject of technology is clearly encoded as male. It is clear that KTH is working intentionally and proactively on this basis and there is much to be commended on in the initiatives that have been made. The KTH Equality Office is visible throughout KTH and has good and close contact with THS and KTH students and the cooperation is generally good.

There are clear elements of JML (Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Treatment) in the courses and study programmes but there are differences between how well functioning they are at the different programmes. Perhaps the most important aspect of the JML issues and issues of equal opportunities in particular, is the teaching staff. During the previously mentioned workshop, there were several examples mentioned of teaching staff who used sexist, heteronormative and otherwise offensive language and/or action. The experiences of how well the different cases have been handled by KTH differ and in some cases the criticised teacher has continued to teach the course in subsequent years, despite being brought to the PAs attention (and has then received the same criticism from the new student group). THS requests that KTH provide better conditions and support, in particular for PA, GA and FA to address these types of case and to ensure that students get courses and study programmes in which everyone feels included. the gender balance of the teaching staff is also a matter that has been raised by the representatives of the chapters, where certain programmes (especially in the first years) have a very low percentage of women in teaching positions. To increase the presence and visibility of females teaching in the faculty is a something

that THS believes that KTH should work with on a broader front and something that we think would be an effective way in which to break norms set in the walls and to make more people feel welcome at KTH. It is of the utmost importance that KTH continue with and intensify their efforts to employ a higher proportion of female teachers.

To demonstrate that engineers and scientists who do not fall within the normative image is important in more contexts than in only the staff who teach courses at KTH. In study visits and lectures from those external to KTH and alumni, it is especially important to take the different JML perspectives into account and this is something we wish that KTH worked with more clearly. Highlighting important technical and scientific advances, for example female researchers, is something that is done in some courses and which is highly appreciated among students. We agree with the analysis in the self-assessment regarding the need for skills development for PA with respect to matters of equal opportunities mainstreaming in order to strengthen the parts of their respective programme analyses and to better integrate equal opportunities into the regular quality work.

Student and doctoral student perspectives

As described in the introduction of this student report, the regular collaboration between THS and KTH to provide the students and doctoral students with the opportunity to contribute with their perspective in decisions concerning their education or study situation functions relatively well. Of course, there are many areas in which there is both a need and potential for significant improvement for THS student representatives to do this. Overall, we want KTH to mark and communicate more clearly the ambition of participation incorporated into the KTH Vision 2027:

“Success at KTH is achieved through joint efforts by employees and students together. The student union at the Royal Institute of Technology is an important factor in the quality and attractiveness of KTH as a study environment through its activities around the courses and study programmes. The student representatives actively defend the quality of education in form and content through an expert, continuous and strategic influence at all levels. The student union activities are an important part of the social study community and contribute to the attractiveness of courses and to lively and creative campus environments.”

As described in the self-assessment, a very large part of the THS initiatives are devoted to the quality work by students engaged in the study boards in the THS chapters. Their work is invaluable but requires that programme managers and teachers understand the importance of the collaboration and the shared vision of THS and KTH. In most cases, the study boards are satisfied with the cooperation with their respective PAs but in cases in which the collaboration is not satisfactory, it becomes very clear that it is very difficult for students in the programmes concerned to be part of contributing to developing the quality of the course and study programmes and the course and study programme environments. This pinpoints the vulnerability of the system in the form of dependence on the people in the roles with responsibility that exist within and that are related to courses and study programmes. THS is reluctant to say that a system in which the risk that students are not given a real opportunity to be part of developing their courses and study programmes can really be considered as ensuring a well-functioning student influence.

In the courses and study programmes that do not fit into the traditional technology and architecture programmes, it is even clearer that there are major challenges with regard to the promotion of the right of the students to have an impact. In this category we focus on further education. For these students, as well as for those who are studying in the technical preparatory year/semester, we call on KTH to review the possibilities of developing opportunities for influence. Another category that has more challenges in getting the influence to which it is entitled is that of international students, where in particular the language barrier stands in the way of being able to utilise the right to represent themselves and their fellow students on the same terms as Swedish-speaking students. We would like to remind KTH that there will be required an updated approach and overall initiatives that will be taken to ensure that the perspective of international students can be incorporated on the same terms and that this is something THS is happy to be an active part of.



The doctoral students are a student group at KTH that often expresses frustration at their ability to exert influence over the education and the study situation at KTH, especially in relation to how conditions differ between them and students from first and second cycle education. There are examples from KTH-central and school level, as to how doctoral students are not prepared the opportunity to represent in fora in which they have an interest in participating and in which decisions are prepared with a significant impact on their courses and study programmes. A large proportion of doctoral students at KTH is not Swedish-speaking and this is also a barrier to their ability to exert influence in the preparatory processes in which Swedish is spoken. In addition, many doctoral students feel that they are not given the conditions or are directly advised against actively participating in the exercise of student influence. This is primarily in the form of not being given time within their individual study plans due to a lack of understanding of the need for doctoral student influence but also through other administrative barriers. Another problem is that the exclusive right of the doctoral student to represent the doctoral students to KTH is not always respected and that the doctoral representatives and programme advisory committee are formed on the initiative of the faculty without the knowledge of the chapter. This is a serious problem and KTH should spread the knowledge more widely about THS and the status of doctoral students as a student union also for the third cycle education students at KTH. In order for KTH to have a well-functioning influence from third cycle education students, KTH must implement initiatives to encourage and provide the conditions for exercising the same.

Conditions for student influence is a concept that those of us within THS use often in our communications directed at KTH and we feel that we also want to emphasise this as an important term in this student submission. Students are often prepared to attend meetings but are seldom given the opportunity to fully participate in the preparation of questions in their interest. One example is how student representatives at one of the KTH schools were asked to condone and sign curricula for a large number of courses recently, where the majority of the courses were given in whole or in part to students in programmes at other schools. This cannot be considered to be a well-functioning student influence and we urge KTH to broaden the perspectives and improve the conditions for influence. All students should have the opportunity to also influence those parts of their education given by schools other than their own. Another problematic aspect of the same process was the short timeframe in which the student had to approve the official course syllabus. Providing a full-time student with a demanding course and study programme with enough time to familiarise themselves with an issue is an important component for good conditions for student influence.

In the student report for the legal supervision by UKÄ, THS raised the issue that the students are not invited to participate in central preparatory groups that handle issues that have an impact on the student situation at KTH. The same applies to cases in which individuals make decisions at KTH, another case where UKÄ directed criticism towards KTH. This criticism was addressed within the framework of the work described in the self-assessment with the updated guideline for student influence and in which THS is satisfied with the group work and the resulting guideline. However, the aforementioned problems remain. Particularly distressing is the fact that there have been a number of recruitments at KTH since the supervision where THS has clearly expressed their interest in participating, given that those recruited will have immense influence over both the education at TH and the situation of the students. THS wants to direct strong criticism towards KTH's procedure during these recruitments and the fact that the views of the student union went ignored when filling some of the most important positions at KTH. In addition, THS hopes that the work on implementing the agreed guideline on student participation reaches all activities within the University and that all management positions assume responsibility to ensure that based on the guidelines, effective student influence exists throughout KTH.

Labour market and collaboration

The question of how KTH ensures that its students are able to take part in the major efforts KTH is conducting in collaboration and the strong link to industry and other parties, thereby preparing them for a changing working life, is complex and is clearly influenced by the fact that the overwhelming majority of students are studying in a professional programme, rather than a purely academic one. The general view among the KTH students is that the University is successful in its collaboration but the perception differs among the students in different programmes about how well it is reflected in the content of the courses



and study programmes. Because of specialisations of the programmes the students are eager to be well prepared for the working life that awaits them and a wish for more collaboration related learning activities is widely shared. We also notice a difference between the broader and more science-oriented programmes (e.g. engineering physics, biotechnology, chemical engineering) and the more directly industry-oriented programmes (e.g. media technology, materials design, computer technology) and in how their students believe the collaborations should look like. Bachelors of Science in Engineering feel better prepared for professional life upon qualification than does the Masters of Science in Engineering graduates.

THS welcomes the proposals highlighted in the analysis by the PriU group that KTH should have clearer goals for how the different programmes will work with industry collaborations and thus ensure that all students regardless of programme and level are well prepared for working life. Similarly, we would like to recognize the current process of setting up the Master of Engineering programme in Technical Mathematics as a good example of how the needs and viewpoints of working life can be taken into account when a programme is to be set up and we hope that this will set the standard for how future establishment processes work in relation to professional life.

A sign of the great interest in business ties among KTH's students and THS members is the major activities carried out within THS in order to link the students to their future employers. The chapters conduct their own industry-specific events for students with lunch lectures and fairs. At a central level, THS conducts a wide variety of events are conducted for students, through theme weeks and other events. THS Armada is the largest student-driven labour market fair in the Nordic region with about 170 exhibiting companies, authorities and organisations. The KTH support for this activity is limited to the letting of premises and good cooperation. THS wishes to have a closer dialogue and better use of the knowledge and experience of those involved in the THS business contacts network and KTH business collaboration and that this can be better integrated into the education to better prepare the students for the working life that awaits them after graduation.