

FUURT'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY WITHIN UNIVERSITIES

Published in March 2021, the report of the working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to assess the state of the administrative autonomy in different universities included recommendations for the development of the universities' activities. The Board of the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers (FUURT) deemed these recommendations to be good and decided to contribute to their concretisation. The following FUURT recommendations are intended to further specify the areas for development as identified in the report and to provide practical examples.

The recommendations have been prepared in collaboration with all FUURT member associations and by drawing advantage from the experiences of FUURT representatives serving as university board members.

FUURT's recommendations to support democracy within universities were approved by the Union Board on 17 September 2021.

A. Strengthening the role of the faculties' multi-member administrative bodies

Current state

The tasks of the multi-member administrative bodies of faculties or corresponding units are related, for example, to the following areas: 1) degree education (incl. the curricula, degree requirements, student admission criteria, student quantities, the establishing and discontinuing of major subjects and degree programmes), 2) recruitment, 3) adjunct professorships (titles of docent), 4) doctoral dissertation review processes, permissions to defend the dissertation, appointment of reviewers etc., 5) planning and implementation of faculty activities and finances, 6) dean appointment and 7) quality and development work. There is wide variation between the different universities in terms of the tasks of the faculties' multi-member administrative bodies and also as regards the power held by the administrative bodies in relation to a particular area of tasks. The strong position of the

faculties' multi-member administrative bodies in decision-making concerning the faculty is justified because, first, these bodies are close to the faculty-level matters subject to decision-making and, second, the members of these bodies are democratically elected to represent the staff and students of the relevant faculty.

FUURT's recommendations

1. The universities shall regularly review the task descriptions of the faculties' multi-member administrative bodies and request the members of the administrative bodies and the university community to submit proposals for developing the role of the administrative body within the university in question.
2. The administrative bodies shall be granted full or partial power of decision in central matters that impact the everyday activities of the faculty, such as the appointment of the dean and the planning of the activities and finances of the faculty. This power of decision shall be specifically documented in the university regulations.

A useful model can be found in, for example, the Regulations of the University of Helsinki. According to Section 8, the duties of the faculty council are, among other things, to 'select the dean' (as provided for in a later section) and to 'decide annually on the faculty's implementation plan, operational objectives, the focus areas for the development of staff structures and budget grounds as well as monitor their implementation while taking the faculty's operational goals into account'. (The dean is responsible for the preparation of the abovementioned documents and for the drafting of the budget in accordance with the agreed grounds.)

B. Compliance with the tripartite principle in the various phases of decision-making processes

Current state

Within universities, the tripartite principle is widely applied in the multi-member administrative bodies at the university and faculty levels. However, there is variation in the application of the equal tripartite principle. An overview of preparatory bodies and working groups indicates that the tripartite principle is usually not documented and the practices appear to vary largely, even within a particular university.

FUURT's recommendations

3. In order to ensure the equal representation of different groups within university communities, the equal tripartite principle shall be applicable to, as a minimum, all official multi-member administrative bodies.

As regards the working groups responsible for the preparation of decisions, the tripartite principle (or, whenever possible, the equal tripartite principle) shall be applied.

C. Improving inclusion and transparency in elections

Current state

Universities differ in terms of determining the university community members' rights to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections. The situation is particularly varied for researchers with grant funding. In some universities, they have the right to vote and stand as a candidate if they are conducting their research 'with the permission of the university', but this is not the case for all universities. A major challenge in terms of inclusion in university democracy is the uncertain or variable position of the middle-group members of the university community, in particular. Fixed-

term employment relationships and a heavy workload can make it difficult for an individual to take part in elections and commit to a role in shared decision-making.

FUURT's recommendations

4. Inclusion in university democracy shall be strengthened by giving those who conduct their research with grant funding the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections.

A useful model is found in, for example, the Election Rules of Tampere University. According to Section 2, 'eligibility in university elections is granted to a competent person (...) who is conducting research at the university with the permission of the university and grant funding'.

5. To improve the opportunities to participate in the democratically elected administrative bodies for those members of the university community who are in an uncertain or variable position, continuity shall be safeguarded in situations where the elected individual is not a member of the university community for the entire term of the administrative body in question. For this purpose, a good idea would be to use list elections instead of personal elections, in which case the candidate on the list who received the next largest number of votes would be selected as the successor.
6. The possibility of electoral alliances would also improve the transparency of university democracy. Already when forming alliances, the candidates would have to make clear what type of university policies they advocate. A model for the documentation of electoral alliances can be found in, for example, the Election Rules of the University of Eastern Finland.

D. Strengthening the collaboration of the university board and the multi-member administrative body

Current state

The practices concerning the collaboration between the university board and the multi-member administrative body (Collegium/Consistory/Academic Board) vary across universities. Some universities have documented the collaboration in their regulations, but some have failed to document it although collaboration is carried out on a regular basis.

FUURT's recommendations

7. Universities shall include in their regulations specific provisions for the meetings of the university board and the multi-member administrative body in order to ensure that the implementation of such meetings will not be dependent on individual actors.

A model provision can be found in, for example, the University of Jyväskylä Regulations, Section 4: 'The University Board shall meet with the University Collegium at least twice a year'.

8. It is recommended that the chairpersons of the university board and the multi-member administrative body meet on a regular basis and discuss the current decision-making matters being processed within each body.
9. It is recommended that the chairperson of the university board has the right to be present and speak at the meetings of the multi-member administrative body, and vice versa. There must, however, be clearly defined practices for the use of this right so as to enable the bodies to work without any representative of the other body being present.

10. It is a good idea for the bodies to arrange informal meetings in order to build a common foundation for collaboration.

E. Strengthening the sustainability and openness of administrative processes

Current state

In terms of the sustainability and openness of administrative processes, it appears that universities should improve their practices to some extent in multiple areas. For instance, the internal rules may contain provisions that are not observed in practice, the regulations can refer to instructions that do not exist, or everyday activities are based on varying routines rather than on documented processes. By properly documenting the practices, it is possible to enhance the transparency of the processes and provide the entire university community with an opportunity to assess the functioning of the processes.

FUURT's recommendations

11. Universities shall regularly review their regulations and ensure that they only contain references to existing instructions and guidelines.
12. The principles for the composition of working groups shall be documented and openly available.
13. When new university board members are being recruited, all members of the university community shall have the opportunity to propose candidates directly.