

# University of the Arts Student Union's Policy Paper on Developing the University of the Arts Helsinki

Unofficial translation

## *Thoughts on the future of Uniarts Helsinki*

"The University of the Arts Helsinki is an international trendsetter of arts education and research, which strengthens art as a renewing force in society." (University of Arts Helsinki Strategy 2017-2020). According to Uniarts Helsinki's Strategy, in the 2020s, Finland is in the upswing of culture and civilization, and art helps to find creative ways to solve problems both with the economy and with community.

According to the University of the Arts Student Union, Uniarts Helsinki is responsible for enabling the development of art, science, bildung and culture. For us, Uniarts Helsinki is a pioneer in its field, and it courageously combines its different academies. It is also a serious university among academics, both in Finland and internationally. Our teaching is of high quality, our research pioneering and our community warm and safe, which includes both students and the whole staff. Students are the heart and the key asset of the University, and Uniarts Helsinki has to constantly evolve according to the students' wishes. Every student has the right to an individual study path, and the student's needs should be at the heart of all activities.

In this policy paper, University of the Arts Student Union has put together guidelines to which the University of the Arts Helsinki should be developed. The guidelines are broken down by theme and not by study sectors, but some of them are only relevant to certain academies or degree programs.

## **1. Students are the heart of the university**

Students are the renewing force and the future of the University. Students and their well-being must be central in all decision-making. Students must be invested in, both in resources and in working hours.

Uniarts Helsinki has to offer its students the open-minded possibility to create entirely new kinds of art and methods for making art. Extensive artistic sophistication must be present in the student's life. Uniarts Helsinki must give its students the opportunity to study over academy borders whenever possible. The University of the Arts Helsinki gives wings to art.

In addition to art, Uniarts Helsinki is excellent in science and research. Students must have good guidance from the beginning of their studies in their own scientific writing. This promotes the quality of Bachelor's and Master's theses and helps graduation within the scheduled plan.

### Concrete action proposals:

- Uniarts Helsinki must introduce a period system.
  - At the university level, the system must change to a common annual rhythm, where the academic year consists of four periods with simultaneous holidays. The student has the opportunity to choose new courses for each period, which helps the planning of the studies. One course may also continue over multiple periods.
- Feedback is to be invested in, both quantitatively and qualitatively.
  - Feedback is a natural part of the student's life and is also given as mid-course evaluations. The feedback must be given in conversation with the student and it must support the student's development.
  - The teachers should also ask feedback on their work and modify their teaching according to it.
  - Giving and receiving feedback should be a part of the teacher's working time and the course schedule, and its quality or quantity may not depend on the goodwill of an individual teacher.
  - Academies should have uniform practices for collecting anonymous student feedback.

- Course delivery methods should be diversified by enabling an alternative delivery method (e.g. exam or essay option) in more courses than at present.
- Guidance should be increased and developed to meet the needs of students.
  - The student should always get high-quality guidance whenever necessary, whether it is study guidance, guidance in an artistic project or guidance in bachelor's or master's theses.
- Students should have a central role in university decision-making.
  - The views of students should always be heard before decisions are made.

## 2. An individual study path for the student

Students of Uniarts Helsinki can follow an individual path of study according to their own interests. Especially in the case of advanced studies students must have equal opportunities, regardless of their academy or degree program, to study according to their own preferences, either broadly or specializing in a specific area of their choosing. Uniarts Helsinki should be aware of the evolving needs of the art field and, accordingly, develop new, cross-disciplinary study modules.

### Concrete action proposals:

- Opportunities for common studies should be improved.
  - The students must have a real chance of getting the common studies to fit in their own schedule. This is facilitated, for example, by reserving a certain time in the weekly schedule for common studies or mobility studies.
  - The students should be able to study individual courses or larger units from other academies and degree programs as well as their own.
- The daily and weekly rhythm of studies must be unified at the university level.
  - As far as possible, teaching and courses are to be held at the same time in different academies and degree programs. A unified daily schedule enables mobility between the academies.
- The structure of degree programs should enable individual study paths.
  - There must be space in the structures for studying other study modules or minor subjects for example from another academy or university.
  - JOO studies in other universities should be made more accessible and better communicated.
  - Students in Swedish-speaking degree programs should have the right to receive instruction in Swedish and students in English-speaking degree programs in English.
  - International degree students who are not required to speak Finnish or Swedish at the application stage must have the right to receive instruction in English.
- Degree work, dissertations etc. should be enabled to be completed more freely, for example by combining different forms of art.
- Students' self-produced productions should be supported, and free spaces given to students for their own productions without extra bureaucracy.

## 3. The structure of the University of the Arts Helsinki

In the future, the University of the Arts Helsinki will consist of separate and independent academies, but the boundaries between them must be as low as possible and the division into different academies must not become an obstacle for new openings. The structures of Uniarts Helsinki need to be functional and non-categorical so that the best possible way of studying is available for everyone. Structures must also support the equal treatment of students and the rules and practices of different academies need to be unified in this respect, taking into account the specificities of different degree programs.

The broadening of the fields of study offered in Uniarts Helsinki and the related co-operation should be discussed with other universities offering studies in arts or arts research, and with the Ministry of Education and Culture. In the long run, Uniarts Helsinki should aim to bring in completely new fields of art, such as set design, costume design, art education, cinema and circus art.

#### Concrete action proposals:

- The opportunity to make new innovations and find new opportunities for co-operation beyond traditional academy boundaries should be actively nurtured.
- Degree names must be reviewed critically and carefully and can be renewed if needed.
  - Cross-disciplinary and non-artistic education (e.g. Arts Management) can be introduced, for example, with a Master of Arts title.
- The opportunity to organize common studies for students of all the academies should be looked into.
  - In the early stages of the studies, for example, a common art philosophy or art history course can be organized for all new students at Uniarts Helsinki.
  - For example, in the Master's phase, a joint course on working life can be offered for all Master's students.
- Structures must protect the goal of a broad civilization and the degree structures must have room for optional studies. Students should not be punished for studying "too much".
  - Limits for course credits per degree program must be abandoned and optional studies (excluding small group studies) should be possible to participate in if they do not prevent the student from advancing in their studies according to the aimed schedule.
  - Lecture courses must always be free to participate in - accordingly, private lessons should not be allowed to anyone beyond what is prescribed in the degree structure.
  - Optional studies (including private instruction) can be grouped into "study baskets" according to how much resources they spend, so that students can choose a certain number of studies from each basket.

#### **4. The community of the University of the Arts Helsinki**

The University of the Arts Helsinki is a warm and safe community. We must have zero tolerance for inappropriate treatment, harassment and gender prejudices. Communicating between students and staff should be open and fair. Hierarchical use of power should also be monitored in teaching and evaluation situations so that the power structures are not misused. The problems are not to be silenced, but everything possible must be done to solve them. Uniarts Helsinki is also a good employer, where teachers and other staff feel that their work is valued.

#### Concrete action proposals:

- The university must provide facilities and opportunities for building the university community and meeting students and teachers across academy boundaries.
- It must be ensured that the students' well-being working group, harassment contact persons, occupational safety and security officers and equality officers know the contents of their work and interact with other actors in active dialogue. They will be provided with training as needed.
- Compulsory training is provided for staff on the ethics of the teacher and the proper treatment of students.
- A working culture where no kind of harassment is allowed and where appeared cases are investigated at once must be actively created in Uniarts Helsinki.
- Tutoring activities are promoted to ensure that all the new students are integrated to the university.
  - The content of the new student welcoming period is discussed each year with the student union.
  - All the common content of the welcoming period must be genuinely useful and inclusive so that the new students will immediately be in contact with other Uniarts Helsinki students.

#### **5. University decision-making**

The university's decision-making must be open and consistently follow the university's strategic lines. The interests of the university and the interests of the students should not be placed against each other – instead, they form a common entity. The students' voice must be heard in recruitments and the communication about them must be transparent. The quality of teaching is constantly being developed through functioning and effective evaluation mechanisms.

The student representation should also appear in preparatory working groups, and student representatives must always be treated as equal members of the working group. Power should not imperceptibly move away from democratic bodies, but discussions and decisions must always be made in tripartite organs where the students are also represented. University decision-making should strive to be effective, but never at the expense of transparency and democracy.

#### Concrete action proposals:

- When designing new working groups, student representation must always be considered and student representatives must be appointed by the student union.
- Requests to appoint student representatives should be sent to the student union well in advance, bearing in mind that they are statutory positions under public law, requiring an open process and a sufficiently long application period.
- The decision-making bodies and working groups of the university and its academies should strive for a sensible entity, in which each body has its own clear role, and there is no overlapping between them.

## **6. International opportunities**

In many fields represented in the University of the Arts Helsinki, it offers the highest level of education in Finland, and due to this monopoly position, benchmarks need to be sought globally. Internationality is increasingly important in studies, with many students aiming for an international career, and the possibilities offered by internationality must be taken into account when planning courses.

Integration of the international students must not stumble upon a language barrier, and all the information students need must also be available in English without having to separately ask for it. On the other hand, internationality does not just mean speaking English, but genuine contact between people from different countries and cultures. The language of art is universal, and the community supports all its students.

#### Concrete action proposals:

- International cooperation and international study opportunities need to be increased.
  - Both short and longer-term exchange opportunities should be developed and communicated to the students better. Exchange studies should also be encouraged on behalf of the staff.
- Access to language studies, e.g. JOO-studies in other universities, should be improved and students better informed about them.
- International students should be given the opportunity to study in the same courses with others. Thus the Finnish-speaking students also learn how to work in an international community.
- International students must have equal opportunities to act as student representatives in the university's administration, which requires e.g. translation of meeting documents into English whenever necessary.

## **7. Working life and interaction in society**

The university is an educational institution designed to educate a student into society. This involves essentially the transition to working life when the degree is completed or when graduation is approaching. Working life studies in different degree programs should provide students with the ability to function in many different roles in today's changing working life, which means a lot more than merely entrepreneurial studies. Working life prospects should be taken into account in every student's studies, but the content must be suited to the needs of different degree programs.

The University of the Arts Helsinki is also a part of Finnish society, and as a multidisciplinary art institution it has both the opportunity and the obligation to speak for art and art education. By participating in the social discussion on the status of art, the university also serves as a good example for its students and thus fulfills the statutory task of educating students as active citizens.

Concrete action proposals:

- The opportunities for internships need to be examined openly.
  - Students should have the opportunity to do an internship as part of their studies and, depending on the duration, receive an agreed course credit from it.
  - Students must be allowed to freely apply for an internship position they consider suitable.
- Working life studies need to be reformed and developed to better respond to the current working life and to provide students with a broad range of skills required in working life.
- The university leaders should play a role as active debaters in society and actively take a stand for art and art education in particular.

*Approved by the University of the Arts Student Union Representative Council at its meeting 1/2018  
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