

Stockholms
universitets
studentkår



Q&A

for RALV-representatives

What is RALV?

RALV stands for “Council for Work Environment and Equal Possibilities” (Swedish: Rådet för arbetsmiljö och lika villkor).

In 2015, the President of the university decided that each department, or equivalent, shall have their own respective RALV that oversees local work environment issues and matters concerning equality and equal possibilities.

In some departments, the council is called “the work environment group,” “the work environment committee” or similar. Certain departments have also divided their responsibilities into two groups, with one group focusing on work environment and the other focusing on equality.

What is the purpose of RALV?

The purpose of RALV is to highlight, prepare, and work on matters concerning physical and psychosocial work environment as well as equal possibilities. Through RALV, the departments can identify and resolve issues in the work environment. The council also has a responsibility to ensure that the work environment at the departments is of a high quality and that everyone can take part in education on equal terms.

Who are members of RALV?

RALV consists of the Head of Department, who has the main responsibility for their department’s work environment, employee safety representatives, student safety representatives and, in many cases, equality representatives. Other staff members at the department who work with this matter attend the council meetings as well, such as the department’s Head of Administration.

What does RALV do?

RALV is a preparatory body, which means that it is a forum for discussing and preparing decisions that are then implemented by the Head of Department or the Department Board.

Most often, RALV is responsible for drafting proposals for a work environment plan. It is a document that outlines how the department shall manage the work environment and what aims and guidelines the department shall implement to ensure that the work environment is of high quality. In many cases, RALV also drafts proposals for other documents that in some way regulate work environment and matters concerning equal possibilities. These can be crisis plans, equal treatment plans, equality plans, action plans or similar. After RALV has drafted proposals for these documents, the Department Board decides on them.

RALV is also responsible for following up on and evaluating the documents to ensure that the department complies with them and that the proposed aims have been achieved.

RALV sometimes conducts surveys, for example department-wide employee surveys on the workplace environment. RALV then evaluates and compiles the results to identify and solve current work environment issues. Incidents and accidents at work are also discussed during the meetings, and risk and safety assessments are made of different types of classes and examinations, such as laboratory work. The council can also serve as a consultation body for several types of decisions that might benefit from a workplace environment or equal terms perspective.



What is a student safety representative?

At Stockholm University (SU), student councils and PhD student councils have the right to appoint a study environment representative and an equality representative.

Study environment representatives shall be regarded as student safety representatives. Their task is to represent students at their departments (sections in the case of Faculty of Science) in matters concerning students' physical and psychosocial work environment.

Equality representatives represent students in matters concerning equality and equal possibilities. Both the study environment and the equality representatives are representatives in their local RALV.

What is the difference between a safety representative and a student safety representative?

A safety representative is appointed by the labor union and represents employees at the department. A student safety representative is appointed by students through their student union.

At Stockholm University Student Union (SUS), local student councils and PhD student councils have the mandate to appoint student safety representatives. Safety representatives have the right to order suspension of work if they find serious issues in the work environment. The student safety representatives can't do this.

Safety representatives can also discuss confidential matters with their labor union as they are bound to professional secrecy. However, this does not apply to student unions and therefore the student safety representatives do not have the same opportunity. Otherwise, student safety representatives have the same rights and capabilities as safety representatives.

What is a safety round?

Safety representatives and student safety representatives are called to safety rounds. These are group inspections of the department's various premises to check for any issues in the physical work environment. These may include loose safety tape, electrical outlets not functioning properly, untidy rooms, poor ventilation, blocked emergency exits, etc.

A protocol is written after each safety round with a list of detected issues and suggestions for improvement. These protocols are often discussed at RALV meetings and are a good way for you, as a student safety representative, to get an overview of common work environment issues at the department, as well as what is important to pay attention to. Therefore, it is good to read the protocols when they are sent out before the meetings. It can also be useful to report on the most important points to your student or PhD student council. As a student safety representative, you also have the right to request safety rounds if you deem it necessary.

What topics are discussed in RALV?

RALV discusses all topics concerning the work environment and equal possibilities. These can be divided into three categories – physical work environment, psychosocial work environment, and work environment matters concerning organizational structure.

Common topics concerning work environment include ventilation, lighting, safety risks, ergonomics, study spaces, etc.

Matters concerning psychosocial work environment can include stress, anxiety, workplace culture, communication, opportunities for participation, etc.

Work environment matters concerning organization are, for example, how the work with workplace environment issues is structured, the number of safety representatives, how clear are the instructions and what is expected of students, how easy it is to influence your work environment, and how easy it is to get in touch with the person responsible for the work regarding workplace environment or your safety representative.

What does it mean to be a student representative in RALV? What are my rights and obligations?

As a representative in RALV, your role is to represent all students in your area of protection (typically your department) in matters concerning work environment, while the equality representative represents students in matters concerning equal possibilities. By being a representative in your local RALV, you will be involved in the planning and following-up on activities falling under aforementioned matters.

You are entitled to an introduction where you will be informed on how RALV works and what terms and documents are useful to know. Your department is responsible for ensuring that you

receive an introduction. Contact the Chair of your local RALV or the contact person for student influence at your department if you have not been invited to the introduction.

You have the right to receive documents for the meetings at the same time as the other members. You have the right to speak, attend, and vote at the meetings. This also means that you have the right to request amendments to various documents and to submit annotations. An annotation is usually submitted if you are not satisfied with a decision and want to explain how you think it should have been decided instead. If you are very dissatisfied with the decision, you can express dissent. This is a way to clearly indicate that you do not want to take any responsibility for the outcome of the decision.

You are entitled to remuneration for the meetings you attend. The amount of money you get is regulated by the “Regulations for student influence.” If you are a PhD student, you do not receive monetary compensation but instead an extension of your employment. How much prolongation you get is regulated by the “Regulations for education and summative assessment at third-cycle level.”.

As a student safety representative, you have the right to be informed about the workplace environment procedures, as well as receive any information necessary for your role. The university has an obligation to notify you of any planned changes affecting the work environment in your area of protection,

and you have the right to take time off from your studies if it is necessary for you to be able to perform your duties. It is also worth noting that you do not carry any responsibility for the work environment, meaning you cannot be held responsible for any workplace environment issues in your department.

Your obligation as a student representative is to attend all RALV meetings. If you are unable to attend a meeting, it is important that you notify the Chair of RALV as well as your suppliant well in advance. It is also important that you inform your student council or PhD student council about the issues discussed in RALV. Likewise, it is highly appreciated to ask for input from your student or PhD student councils to discuss at the RALV meetings.



Why are students represented in RALV?

Students are represented in RALV to ensure that their voices and opinions are heard. Study environment and equality representatives are also part of RALV in order for them to report back relevant information to their student and PhD student council, so that they can in turn work more effectively with student influence. Likewise, it is important to have student representation in RALV so that the issues discussed in student councils can be brought up in RALV.

Which documents should I be familiar with?

We recommend keeping track of your department's documents regarding work environment. Usually, the work environment plan is the most important one. It could be good to read this document from time to time to see if decisions are being followed.

SU has a number of central policies and guidelines on work environment and equal terms. You can find them here: <https://www.su.se/staff/personnel/working-environment-equal-terms>

It might be worth familiarizing yourself with the Work Environment Act to find out what obligations the university has in terms of workplace environment: <https://www.av.se/en/work-environment-work-and-inspections/acts-and-regulations-about-work-environment/about-the-work-environment-act/>

The Discrimination Act may also be useful to familiarize yourself with: <https://www.do.se/choose-language/english/discrimination-act-2008567>

Please note that you do not need to be well-versed in all the laws, but it can be helpful to have a general idea of which laws relate to the work environment to know where to look for more information.

How do I get input from students on issues to bring up in RALV?

Your student council or PhD student council acts as a meeting place for all students and PhD students in your department or section. Therefore, during council meetings you should ask what the members would like you to bring up in RALV meetings. A good idea is to have a point on the agenda to discuss and reflect on work environment issues.

You can also ask if your student council or PhD student council can host a workshop or a themed meeting on work environment. We at the SUS office are happy to help with organizing workshops if you need assistance.

If your council has an Athena page, you can also use it to reach out to students. For example, you could send out a survey to students or PhD students in your department. By posting it on the Athena-page, you can quickly reach a big amount people. The department can help you to distribute the survey as well. When creating a survey, we recommend using simple, pre-designed tools, such as Google Forms. Try to keep your questions as simple as possible to avoid subjective interpretations. To be able to evaluate material faster, we recommend using statements such as “I feel that XXX is good at the department” and let the respondent rate their answer on a scale of 1-5 depending on whether they agree or not. If possible, you can end with a text field that allows the respondent to leave their own comments. This allows other students to add anything that you might have missed.

You can also use course reports. They are written after each course and are a compilation of course evaluations received by the department. The course evaluations tend to contain at least one question about work environment, therefore, by reviewing the answers you can get an idea of what issues students might have. For example, all course evaluations usually have a question about workload, such as how many hours students spend on the course.



Who can I contact if I have a question?

Student ombud at SUS: **studentombud@sus.se**

Student union's principal student safety representative, Disa Ahlblom-Berg:
ordforande@sus.se

Student Health Services: <https://www.su.se/english/education/student-health/stockholm-student-health-services>

Recommendations for further reading!

The Swedish Work Environment Authority has valuable information on its website: <https://www.av.se/en/>. Here you will find, for example, the Work Environment Ordinance, which complements the Work Environment Act.

Prevent is a non-governmental organization that works with both the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and the major labor unions on work environment issues. They have a lot of information for safety representatives, as well as information on work environment management on their website: <https://www.prevent.se/om-prevent/for-a-better-working-day/>

If you are new to RALV, it could be helpful to ask for minutes from previous meetings to get an overview of the issues usually discussed. Ask the Chair of RALV if they can send them to you.



Advice from previous RALV-representatives

“As a RALV-representative, it can feel a bit scary to express thoughts, questions, or critiques in front of the entire Department Board. For me, it has helped me to step outside of myself and try to see it as a significant role for the students. Why is it structured like this? What do you mean now? The role and operation of the departments are sometimes hard to comprehend, and it is my mission as a student representative to make it more understandable and less mysterious. To do that you must have the courage to ask questions! At the end of the day, the education is for us students!”

Filippa Olli

Former RALV-representative at the Department of Social Work

“As a student safety representative, I am personally interested in ensuring that students feel comfortable and can study in a safe environment. In specific, it can be minor things like squeaky doors that can cause irritation, to important things like first aid supplies being in place. As a new student safety representative, it can be good to hear from other students what they think is important or what they prioritize when it comes to the work/study environment and the psychosocial environment. But it is also okay to listen to what you think because often you are not alone in the way you think.”

Patrik Tengnér

Former RALV-representative at Fysikum

“To be ready for a RALV-meeting, it is good if you have read all the documents that are sent beforehand. This is to feel prepared for the meeting, but also to have the time to receive feedback from your own student council. If the department presents a new action plan that affects students, it can be good to let the student council read it and give their own opinions. Most often, the department wants a lot of input from its students, and being well prepared for the RALV-meetings allows you to give good input and thus improve the study environment based on students' own wishes.”

Sara Vazquez Usij

Former RALV-representative at the Department of Criminology



Advice from previous RALV-representatives

“Here are my best tips!

- Give comments and ask questions! If you are unsure of how something works or who is responsible, do not hesitate to bring it up in your local RALV or contact the SUS ombud!
- Work systematically! If students contact the student council with concerns, it is important to decide if and how the matter will be addressed – decide who will get back to the student and who contacts the department, e.g., the Chair of your local RALV. Contact the SUS office if you are unsure.
- Pay attention to things that affect the study environment and equal terms at your department, especially during a safety round. This can include both the physical study environment (e.g. whether the department has made study spaces available, whether students feel that ventilation and noise levels are good, whether the department has a first aid kit, and whether students have been informed about SAMIR), as well as the psychosocial study environment (e.g. whether students receive course information on time or experience problems with discrimination) and accessibility aspects (e.g. whether the department has access to an elevator or information in English).
- Familiarize yourself with the university’s reporting system SAMIR and Kammakollegiet’s casualty insurance for all students. You do not need to know everything in detail, the most important thing is to know that these exist and to be prepared to inform other students of their existence.
- Refer to university’s regulatory documents, for example Regulations for student influence, but also the Work Environment Act (AML) and the Work Environment Ordinance (AMF) in case of uncertainty. This contains everything about the mandate of student safety representative. The Swedish Work Environment Authority has also published a series of shorter booklets on work environment that can serve as inspiration!”

Elis Wibacke

Former Vice Chair at SUS and principal student safety representative. Represents students in central RALV.