Students representation in institutional governance
Case: Finland

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History matters

- Three significant periods without which the current situation cannot be understood
  - 1640’s
  - Mid-19th century
  - 1960s
Student representation in University governance: Universities Act

Public Universities
- Board:
  - External members: at least 40% seats
  - Professors, staff and students: no group may exceed 50% of the rest of the seats
- Internal collegiate body
  - none of the 3 groups may exceed 50% of the seats

Foundation universities
- Board
  - entirely external members
- Internal multimember administrative body:
  - none of the groups may exceed 50% of the seats
Student union

Among the students of the university there is a student union, which shall have self-government. The purpose of the student union is to act as a link between its members and to promote their societal, social and intellectual aspirations and their aspirations regarding studies and students' status in society. The student union is to participate in the educational mission of the university referred to in Chapter 3 by preparing students for active, enlightened and critical citizenship.
Automatic membership

All the university students who have been admitted to programmes leading to a lower or higher university degree, with the exception of students in made-to-order education, shall belong to the student union. The student union may also accept other students of the university as members.
Student union and university governance

The especial duty of the student union shall be

– to nominate student representatives to the administrative bodies of the university referred to in Chapter 3;
Students in polytechnics governance: Polytechnics Act

The board shall be presided over by the rector. In addition, the board shall include the representation of the other leadership, full-time teachers, other full-time staff and full-time degree students of the polytechnic and representatives of business and industry and other sectors of the labour market.

None shall have more than 50%, externals may not have more than a third.
Polytechnic student body

- A polytechnic shall have a student body to which the full-time students of the polytechnic may belong. The student body may also admit other polytechnic students as members.

- The duties of the student body shall be to select student representatives for the polytechnic board and other multimember bodies referred to in Section 12(2.4) and to participate in other polytechnic activities.
National level

- Umbrella organisations for local student unions in universities (SYL, est. 1921) and polytechnics (SAMOK, est. 1996)
  - Well-resourced
  - FINHEEC
  - Student housing and health care

- As a standard, included in Ministry working groups and heard as a stakeholder
By way of analysis

- In a small country, with relatively flat hierarchies, relevant people are known and easily accessed
- Many policy makers have a background in student movement
- “Embracing radicalism to death” – policy since the 1960s
- High external legitimacy of student representation
- Well-resourced student unions enable professional approach to student representation
Future challenges

- Managerialisation of university governance
  - Diminishing role of collegial bodies in general
- Impact of the new Universities Act: from formal structures to informal influence
  - Case: Aalto University
- New Polytechnics Act 2014?
- Emergence of other stakeholders into HE arena: diminishing relative influence of students
- Maintaining internal legitimacy of the student representation
  - Too much professionalisation?
  - Relatively low turnout in the student union elections (universities: 29, 6% in 2011)