

STRATEGY 2016-2021

The Faculty of Social Sciences at Aalborg University



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK



INTRODUCTION

The strategy for the Faculty of Social Sciences sets the overall framework and charts the course of the core activities of the Faculty – research, education and knowledge collaboration – for the years 2016-2021. It will serve to ensure that through our targeted focus on quality and network maintenance, we will contribute with new knowledge and research-based study programmes of relevance to the world of research and to the surrounding society. The strategy must be regarded an independent contribution to Aalborg University's vision and strategy, and as a strategic framework for managerial resource priorities as well as for initiatives taking place at the departments and schools of the Faculty.

The strategy will help ensure that we conduct high-quality research which will have an impact on scientific and societal contexts, and that our strategic collaboration with strong national and international research environments will enable us to break new ground within research. Our research will be critical as well as problem and solution-oriented, thus contributing to the development of society on a national and regional scale.

The key driver is our researchers' freedom and independence to pursue basic and application oriented research questions. We strive for new discoveries and excellence in research, and we perceive curiosity, freedom of speech, fairness and critical dialogue to be core values in this endeavour.

We provide education of the highest quality, enabling students to gather cutting-edge knowledge within their field of study. PBL and other pedagogical learning methods will serve to challenge students and motivate them to pursue new knowledge in order to acquire competences aimed at a national and global job market.

After a period of booming student numbers, the primary target of our present strategy period is to consolidate and further develop existing robust study programmes. We will focus on basing all of our educational activities on research and on involving our students in concrete research activities.

Internationalisation remains an important aspect of both re-

search and teaching activities, and a global perspective remains essential for social sciences graduates. We will therefore make sure that global societal challenges are addressed in our study programmes, and we will increase the number of international activities included in the study programmes offered at the Faculty.

Collaboration with various external partners is a strong tradition at the Faculty, and this strategy will serve to further increase the integration of knowledge collaboration in both research and teaching activities. Our students' close links to the job market and their sharing of knowledge and insights in an on-going dialogue with the surrounding society contribute to ensuring input to the Faculty which is relevant to both society and research. In the coming strategy period, we will intensify and ensure network formation and dialogue with public and private actors.

Efficient and dynamic administrative support focusing on simple and transparent procedures is essential for the successful implementation of the strategy. At the same time, the welfare of our staff and students is also essential in order to fulfil our ambition of ensuring and developing the quality of our research, education and knowledge collaboration. Therefore, we will focus on creating transparency in the organisation and its objectives and decision-making processes. We will engage in close collaboration with the Academic Council and the consultation and occupational health and safety committees on our strategic objectives and their realisation.

Job satisfaction and student wellbeing must be an integral part of the implementation of the strategy of the Faculty. This will be ensured through dialogue in collegiate bodies, in the day-to-day activities of the management, in relationships among colleagues and collaboration fora for students. The Faculty management is responsible for ensuring a healthy working environment. Ensuring wellbeing is a collective task requiring the joint efforts of management and staff.

The strategy as the guiding framework for the areas to which the Faculty will give top priority in the period 2016-2021 will be implemented in annual plans within the individual focus areas, including descriptions of individual initiatives, actors and available resources. The annual plans will be a topic addressed in our ongoing discussions with the Academic Council. This working method will cause us to be attentive and agile as regards changes in work conditions when implementing the strategy.

RESEARCH

RESEARCH QUALITY AND IMPACT

The Faculty of Social Sciences bases its core activities on research of the highest quality which has an impact on relevant scientific and societal contexts. This is conditional on creative and efficient research organisation, participation in strong international research networks, internal and external collaboration opportunities, attractive work conditions, risk tolerance in management and financing as well as research training characterised by quality, efficiency and a high international standard. At the same time, the continuous development of research quality presupposes systematic and on-going assessment of the research and the framework in which it is conducted.

Overall objectives

- Increasing the number of research units of a high international standard within selected areas
- Acquiring particularly prestigious research funding
- Increasing the number of contributions to the most recognised publishing channels
- Strengthening and expanding international research networks
- Improving the conditions and development of good research management and organisation
- Increasing the focus on and profiling of the Faculty's research and its impact on society
- Keeping a constant focus on freedom of research and research ethics.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- A focus on the internal organisation of research, with a special focus on the tasks of research groups, management and coordination, PhD activities, inclusion of students in research activities etc.
- Improved conditions for affiliating internationally recognised researchers to research groups
- Continued support for research talents, including further development of the talent management programme
- Research evaluation at all departments
- Systematic dissemination of the Faculty's research, with a special focus on its impact on society

- Efforts aimed at the implementation of a code of continued high research integrity under the auspices of the Academic Council.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

High-quality research breaks new ground, and creating the conditions for this is crucial for these breakthroughs to be supported in the process towards establishment and consolidation as strong research environments with international clout. Identification of innovative research which challenges established theories, methods and paradigms thus requires competent and risk-minded management; this is often facilitated by interdisciplinary collaboration and collaboration with external actors.

Overall objectives

- Improving collaboration structures across departments and faculties with a view to developing interdisciplinary positions of strength
- Developing and supporting interdisciplinary areas and ideas with a potential for success
- Focusing on strategic collaboration with external partners.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- Development of mechanisms to support knowledge sharing and collaboration across departments; focus will be on research plans and academic ventures
- Acquisition of seed funding at department and faculty levels for the support of innovative environments and research programmes
- Establishment of a number of interdisciplinary research initiatives with potential to acquire major external funding
- Establishment of an infrastructure focused on data sharing.

STRATEGIC ACQUISITION OF EXTERNAL FUNDING

An increase in the acquisition of external funding is essential to secure attractive research conditions. Researchers at the Faculty of Social Sciences are successful in acquiring external funding, including funding exposed to competition, as well as funding from collaboration projects with business enterprises, public authorities etc. Both funding types reflect the Faculty's focus on the scientific and societal impact of research as well as the importance of knowledge collaboration with external actors.

In order to ensure the appropriate utilisation of resources as well as the greatest possible success in their work, departments and research environments should, to the largest extent possible, base their acquisition of external research funding and their concrete collaboration agreements on strategic priorities.

Overall objectives

- Maintaining the acquisition of external funding at a high level and ensuring a balance in overall research funding, including research funding exposed to competition, funding from private foundations and funding from collaboration projects
- Extending and streamlining administrative support for application procedures and for the implementation and reporting of externally financed projects.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- Internal quality assurance procedures relating to research applications
- Systematic collection, processing and dissemination of feedback from research applications
- Knowledge sharing as regards the acquisition of external funding, including a mentor practice for young researchers
- Identification and support of strong areas of research with potential to acquire major external funding.



EDUCATION

RESEARCH-BASED EDUCATION

Research-based teaching and supervision are important quality parameters in all the study programmes of the Faculty. The development and implementation of various types of research-based teaching are always considered essential, as is the optimal inclusion of our academic staff in the creation of the best possible framework for student learning.

The students are familiar with the characteristics of higher education and receive support which enables them to work and reflect critically and dynamically on their academic field as well as to expand their involvement in society. Research-based teaching focusing on global vision and insight.

Overall objectives

- Relevant contact between students and research environments
- Explicit correlation between research and education
- A range of different types of research-based teaching will be implemented in the study programmes
- Talent development scheme for particularly talented students.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- Experiments with new types of research-based teaching in collaboration between research environments, departments, schools and study boards
- Advancement of increasing interdisciplinarity and disciplinary interfaces between study programmes, departments and faculties, for instance by means of the matrix model
- Systematic and adequate pedagogical competence development of full-time and part-time academic staff
- Initiatives to stimulate collective knowledge-sharing, synergies and collaboration in teaching activities
- Increased recognition of good teaching and supervision practices
- Realisation of an expansionary employment policy to ensure a sufficient proportion of teaching by researchers in all of our study programmes
- More strategic contact with upper secondary schools

- Acknowledgement and distinction of talented students who have made a special effort
- An increase in student assistant jobs related to research
- All study programmes are focused on global challenges, including activities conducted in English, and the Faculty welcomes the participation of international researchers.

LEARNING METHODS AND STUDY ENVIRONMENTS

Problem and project-based learning (PBL) remains the pedagogical framework of all teaching at the Faculty of Social Sciences. To ensure that our students achieve the best possible learning outcomes, it is essential that we continue to develop and rethink PBL on the basis of our experience and new opportunities that arise. ICT might be better incorporated in our PBL work than at present, for instance.

Inspiring courses and new learning methods will ensure that our students are active and committed to their studies. A high study intensity yields better learning outcomes and contributes to maintaining and improving study efficiency.

Overall objectives

- Improving the study environment; schools and study boards will be the key actors
- Maintaining the present high study efficiency level and the short completion time
- Increasing student investment of learning time in their programme
- Focusing on how students use their time before, during and after their teaching and supervision activities
- Focusing on how teachers may frame different learning methods so as to motivate students to invest more time in their studies, which may well in turn enhance the learning outcomes of students and the quality of study programmes
- All teaching staff will receive targeted pedagogical (continuing) education.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- Experiments with new learning methods to increase study intensity, including an increase in the use of e-learning
- Development projects at university level concerning good student work environments and learning envi-

ronments adapted to PBL

- A demand for collaboration in larger project groups with a view to enhancing disciplinary expertise and collaboration skills
- Development projects within PBL and digitisation.

FROM EDUCATION TO JOBS

Focus on the relevance of study programmes will be maintained, as this is an essential prerequisite for the employability of the Faculty's graduates. In this connection, PBL is a basic competence which will be developed in all study programmes under the Faculty. Moreover, graduate employment is an important political parameter for the success of our study programmes. Global vision and knowledge of society and its current challenges form a solid basis on which our graduates will gain a foothold in the job market. We create better employability conditions for our graduates by offering collaboration with organisations and stays abroad during their studies.

Overall objectives

- Increasing focus on reducing the time gap between graduation and the graduates' first job
- Creating closer contact between study programmes and the job market
- Increasing the proportion of students opting for stays abroad or internships as part of their studies.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- An increase in the number of students who write a project and their final thesis in collaboration with organisations, other external partners or a research group or environment affiliated to their study programme
- An increased number of interfaces will be created between students and the job market and society in general
- A systematic dialogue will be maintained with organisations hosting project oriented courses
- Identification of job application and employment patterns will be conducted
- Our portfolio of relevant student exchange agreements will be expanded.

CONTINUING AND FURTHER EDUCATION RELEVANT TO SOCIETY

The Faculty's continuing and further education plays an important part in our collaboration with the surrounding society; it is also an essential tool in disseminating our research results via our students to public and private

organisations. The supply of research based continuing and further education reflects the challenges faced by the business community and society in general. The Faculty Management and the organisation in general will support the establishment and consolidation of continuing and further education programmes, ensuring that they achieve a solid financial and organisational basis for development.

Overall objectives

- Providing targeted and flexible further and continuing education which accommodates essential challenges in society
- Ensuring economic consolidation of individual continuing and further education courses.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- An analysis of the Faculty's portfolio within the area of continuing and further education
- Measures to increase the number of students in minor part-time master programmes; examples of such measures may be marketing and restructuring initiatives.

COLLABORATION

KNOWLEDGE COLLABORATION

The Faculty has a strong tradition of knowledge collaboration with external regional, national and international partners; in various ways, this forms an integral element of our research and teaching activities. This collaboration helps provide relevant input from society to our research activities. It also provides a channel through which knowledge may spread and make an impact on society. Furthermore, it ensures that our students form a close contact to the world of practice during their studies, and it creates a window to their future job market.

Overall objectives

- Remaining an attractive collaboration partner for private enterprises, public organisations, government authorities etc.
- Utilising collaboration relationships for the continuous strengthening of core activities within research and education
- Intensifying our strategic knowledge collaboration and enhancing our network and dialogue with public and private actors.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- An overview will be created of existing collaboration activities and methods with a view to achieving knowledge sharing and method development
- The focus will be increased on collaboration in areas with a potential for stronger and closer relationships
- Network creation will be expanded with relevant enterprises and organisations in the surrounding society.

INCENTIVE AND RECOGNITION

Knowledge collaboration contributes to the development of the Faculty's core activities within research and education. The Faculty management will support incentives and recognition which may promote the involvement of individual researchers or research groups in knowledge collaboration.

Overall objectives

- Developing accreditation tools and frameworks which will contribute to promote the expansion and recogni-

tion of knowledge collaboration.

In the strategy period, the following initiatives will be implemented

- Conduction of studies of the promotion of knowledge collaboration carried out by other knowledge institutions in Denmark and abroad
- Strengthened collaboration between research environments, study programmes and key support functions
- Initiatives encouraging researchers and students to participate actively in knowledge collaboration
- Development of supportive organisational frameworks for external knowledge collaboration.



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