



Strategic action plan for the Doctoral School of Social Sciences 2016-2021.

The overall objective of the doctoral school is to consolidate research training of high quality, high efficiency and high international standard. By striving to create the best possible educational environment, the doctoral school seeks to motivate its PhD students and enhance their research skills. In this respect, priority is given to a number of focus areas for the period 2016-2021. These are described in the following, along with the initiatives and subsidiary goals of 2016-2017.

1. Recruitment and continuity

Included in the Faculty's strategy is the ensuring of a stable PhD intake based on flexibility and a balance in the types of financing and admission. In this regard, priority is given to the following:

- Implementing flexible PhD processes (4+4) (autumn 2016)
- Ensuring a certain proportion of fully funded PhD scholarships (ongoing)
- Increasing the use of the industrial PhD scheme (ongoing)

The objective is to reach an annual intake of 20-25 PhD students (of which a minimum of 25% must be fully internally funded and 75% must be externally funded either in full or in part) and an increased number of enrolments through the industrial PhD scheme.

2. Quality assurance and efficient PhD processes

During the previous strategy period, the Faculty succeeded in implementing efficient PhD processes. Delayed PhD processes were completed, the PhD students graduated, and the Faculty's PhD student population now consisted of active PhD students only. All principal supervisors completed compulsory courses, and the average completion time was reduced from 5.3 years to 3.4 years. However, late 2015/early 2016 was marked by an increase in re-submissions, i.e. previously submitted PhD theses which, in their initial form, the assessment committees had considered not to qualify for the award of a PhD degree. With a view to ensure the continued efficiency and quality of PhD processes, priority is given to the following focus areas:

- Specifying and assessing the submission rates of individual doctoral programmes (autumn 2016)
- Analysing the questionnaire responses supplied by external assessors (autumn 2016)
- Completing courses in supervision primarily offered to new supervisors, including an introduction to assessment work (autumn 2016)
- Evaluating internal quality assurance procedures (autumn 2016 - Spring 2017)
- Ensuring the quality of admission processes through expert assessments and the maintenance of requirements applying to project descriptions (ongoing)
- Continuous focus and follow-up on timely completions (ongoing)

The objective for PhD completions is to reduce the number of re-submissions and to maintain an average completion time of no more than 3.4 years.

3. Optimal workplace conditions in research training

During the recently concluded strategy period, the doctoral school has focused on integrating PhD students in their research environments and on increasing the flexibility of the teaching and dissemination obligations of PhD students. Furthermore, the doctoral school introduced final evaluations provided by PhD students on their experience of the introduction process, the overall process, supervision, working environment etc. In the continuous improvement of the overall workplace conditions of PhD students, high priority is given to the following initiatives:

- Including the PhD students' affiliation to and active participation in research groups as a key element in the Faculty's research strategy and its internal research organisation (autumn 2016)
- Preparing an introductory leaflet targeted at new PhD students (autumn 2016)
- Increasing the focus on wellbeing and stress prevention, including offers to participate in stress management courses (autumn 2016/ongoing)
- Evaluating the framework of the organisations and networks of PhD students (autumn 2016)
- Increasing the number of introductory courses and courses in good scientific practice offered to PhD students (autumn 2016/ongoing)
- Introducing a formalised mentoring scheme to improve the integration of new Danish and international PhD students (autumn 2016)
- Analysing and following up on PhD student evaluations of the overall PhD process (spring 2017/ongoing)

The overall objective is the continuous improvement of the working environment of PhD students. Evaluations received from PhD graduates and the results of workplace evaluations are used for follow-up. Strengthening and unifying PhD students' affiliation to and participation in research groups is defined as a specific intermediate aim.

4. PhD Courses

During the previous strategy period, the doctoral school has intensified its course activities to include an annual course portfolio of 20-25 generic and subject-specific courses targeted at Danish, international, internal and external PhD students. With a view to ensure consolidation and development, priority is given to the following focus areas:

- Reinforced organisation of the courses offered (autumn 2016)
- Evaluating the course portfolio of 2014-2016, taking into account the balance between thematic courses and generic language and process courses (spring 2017)

The objective is an internationally oriented and academically balanced annual course portfolio of 20-25 courses.

5. Enhanced international profile

On 1 January 2016, 22% of our staff members were international PhD students, and the doctoral school has increased its focus on improving the framework conditions of this particular group of staff members through the establishment of cooperation agreements on joint degree and double degree programmes

with universities abroad (on 1 January 2016, four agreements were in place) and by compiling a guide for stays abroad (approximately 50% of the Faculty's PhD students go on stays abroad during their PhD studies). In our efforts to further strengthen the international profile of the doctoral school, the following initiatives must be targeted:

- Ensuring that international PhD students are actively integrated in their research groups
- Strengthening the institutional framework of international cooperation on research training; this includes establishing formal agreements on degree cooperation and participating in international mobility programmes
- Continuing the improvement of framework conditions for international PhD students, such as targeted guidance and guaranteed teaching experience. Decentralised strategies are supported by the working group on the improved integration of international PhD students (presentation by the working group: autumn 2016)
Focusing on stays abroad; this includes a clarification of how departments manage the legal requirements applying to PhD student exchanges/studies abroad and an evaluation of how the overall framework may be strengthened, such as through economic incentives
- Continuing the development and internationalisation of courses offered by the doctoral school, including the use of international keynotes, interaction with international activities and dissemination of international research

Specific objectives are dependent on decentralised strategic priorities. The development is monitored through continuous evaluation (cf. section 8).

6. Interdisciplinarity and PBL

Interdisciplinarity and PBL are new strategic focus areas at the doctoral school. The increased focus on interdisciplinarity will not only contribute to innovative research and breakthroughs, it will also create results in promoting a holistic approach to the relations between, for instance, labour market, economy and health.

With reference to AAU's strategy "Knowledge for the World" we wish to increase our focus on PBL, both in terms of how we introduce new PhD students to this learning approach and in terms of ensuring the integration of PBL in the form and content of our PhD programme. Thus, priority is given to the following initiatives:

- Developing interdisciplinary PhD courses to support interdisciplinary PhD processes (autumn 2016/ongoing)
- Implementing more interdisciplinary PhD processes – both within the departments and across department and faculty boundaries (ongoing)
- Implementing a basic course in PBL, focusing in particular on international PhD students (included in the autumn 2016 introductory course and integrated in the basic course in pedagogy)
- Analysing the form and content of the PhD programme to ensure that this complies with Aalborg University's updated PBL principles (autumn 2016)

7. Career profiles of PhD graduates

In 2015, the doctoral school conducted a register-based study of the career paths of PhD graduates from the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences at Aalborg University. This study showed a high level of employment for PhD graduates from the Faculty of Social Sciences, in spite of the significant increase in the number of awarded PhD degrees. However, the study calls attention to challenges associated with the broad academic scope of the career profiles of PhD graduates from the Faculty of Social Sci-

ences; these challenges exist both at a national level and specifically at AAU. In the future strategy period, priority is given to the following:

- Completing a follow-up qualitative study, taking an in-depth look at the career choices of PhD graduates as well as the demand for and application of the specific competences of PhD graduates (in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities) (autumn 2016)
- Organising a career conference based on the results of the qualitative study and focusing on potential employers (spring 2017)
- Following up on the study by focusing on broader career paths, including the clarification of the transferable skills of PhD graduates of the Faculty of Social Sciences (spring 2017/ongoing)
- Cooperating with the Careers Centre on the career guidance of PhD students (ongoing)

The overall objective is to maintain the employment rate of PhD graduates of the Faculty of Social Sciences at 90-100%. Moreover, the breadth of the career profiles of PhD graduates must be increased (continuously evaluated in relation to "Where do they go").

8. Follow-up and annual reports

To follow up on and evaluate the prioritised strategic focus areas, annual reports will be prepared which will account for the development of the doctoral school and the PhD programmes.