

Self-Evaluation Report

Doctoral School of Social Sciences

April 2014



International Evaluation



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Contents

List of Abbreviations	2
Summary	3
Introduction	5
Chapter 1 Presentation of The Doctoral School	8
Institutional embedment.....	10
General contents of the doctoral programme at AAU	10
Quality assurance in the PhD process	11
Overall aim and profile	12
Sociology and Social Work.....	12
Political Science	13
Innovation Economics Programme	14
Business Economics Programme	15
SPIRIT	15
Law and Business Law	16
Education, Learning and Philosophy	17
Sub-conclusion.....	18
Chapter 2 Strategic Action Plan 2012-15	19
Chapter 3 Recruitment and Completion	23
Annual Enrolment.....	23
PhD population.....	24
Annual degrees awarded.....	24
Models of financing and procedures for recruitment.....	25
Marks from PhD student’s master’s degrees	26
Average study time.....	27
The strategic initiative for completing inactive PhD students	28
Discontinuation rates	29
Resubmission rates.....	31
Sub-conclusion.....	31
Chapter 4 Quality Assurance of the PhD Process	33
4.1. Four-step model for monitoring the PhD students’ progress.	33
4.2. Guidelines for writing a PhD thesis	34
4.3. Supervision	36
Sub-conclusion.....	40
Chapter 5 PhD Courses	42
Sub-conclusion.....	44
Chapter 6 International Profile	45
Recruitment of international PhD students	45
International PhD student mobility.....	45
Ensuring optimal conditions for international cooperation.....	47
Sub-conclusion.....	47
Chapter 7 Working Environment and Affiliation to Research Groups	49
General working environment	49
Research group affiliation	51
Sub-conclusion.....	52
Chapter 8 Conclusion and Strategic Perspectives	53
List of References	57

List of Abbreviations

AAU: Aalborg University

FSS: The Faculty of Social Sciences

DSSS: The Doctoral School of Social Sciences

ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EUA: European University Association

EUA-CDE: The European University Association, Council for Doctoral Education

ARDE: Accountable Research Environment for Doctoral Education

AU: Aarhus University

KU: Copenhagen University

RUC: Roskilde University

SDU: University of Southern Denmark

APV: Workplace assessment

Summary

This self-evaluation report has been prepared as part of the international evaluation of the Doctoral School of Social Sciences (DSSS) at Aalborg University. The international evaluation is organised in accordance with the ENQA-guidelines for following review-steps: Terms of reference, self-evaluation report, constituting external panel, site-visit, production of final report, decision making processes. DSSS was established in 2008 as an outcome of the amendment of The Danish University Act 2007. The overall aim of the DSSS is to ensure doctoral education of high quality, effectiveness and international standard in core fields of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS).

The self-evaluation report describes the development, the organisation and the activities of the DSSS and evaluates specific core initiatives in relation to the PhD process. The international profile of the school and the working conditions for the PhD students are also described. The report emphasises accountability, quality enhancement and transparency throughout the whole PhD process. The assessment takes its point of departure in the Strategic Action Plan (2012-2015) and the conclusion includes suggestions for future targets.

Introduction gives an outline of the report, its background, and the quality assurance criteria for evaluating doctoral education. The focal points in the evaluation are presented and explained together with an overview of the included data and sources.

Chapter 1 *Presentation of the doctoral school* describes the doctoral school: the institutional context, the organisation and management, the organisation flow in managing the PhD process, the overall aim of the DSSS. Subsequently, the 7 doctoral programmes are presented emphasising the research environment and the PhD students' affiliation to research groups as an important element in the everyday training of the PhD students.

Chapter 2 *Strategic action plan* presents the four-year action plan that was introduced in 2012 as part of the general quality assurance of the doctoral training and with reference to the strategy of the FSS. This plan and the targets defined in it are discussed throughout the evaluation report.

Chapter 3 *Recruitment and completion* describes the development of enrolment and awarded degrees as well as the composition of the doctoral school's current population of PhD students. Subsequently, recruitment and completion of PhD students is discussed with focus on recruitment procedures and practices and on connections between the profiles of the recruited PhD students and their discontinuation rates and average study time. A specific initiative targeting inactive PhD students is evaluated, as the outcome of this initiative is influencing the completion trends significantly.

Chapter 4 *Quality assurance of the PhD process* evaluates three initiatives that DSSS has implemented in order to enhance quality and facilitate completion of the PhD theses within three years: a)

Four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress; b) Guidelines for writing a PhD thesis; c) Enhancing the quality of PhD supervision.

Chapter 5 *PhD courses* presents the purpose of courses, the types of courses offered, and the profile of PhD courses within the last two years. As a key element in quality assurance the school has decided to offer 20-25 PhD courses each year. Many courses have a strong international element, and the invited international keynote contribute to strengthening the international profile and network at the faculty.

Chapter 6 *International Profile* evaluates the status and development of the international environment for doctoral education at the DSSS. The chapter is divided in three parts, focusing on global recruitment, international PhD student mobility, and optimal conditions for international cooperation about PhD education.

Chapter 7 *Working environment and affiliation to research groups* is based on the results from a workplace assessment survey and divided in two main parts. Firstly, the general working conditions in terms of work load, stress, recognition and conflicts are discussed, while the second part elaborates specifically on research group affiliation for PhD students.

Chapter 8 *Conclusion and strategic perspectives* follows the structures of the Strategic Action Plan and assesses the achievements related to the targets and sub-targets in the plan. Based on the evaluation report the chapter raises the question as to which future targets to consider.

Introduction

The Danish University Act of 2008 requires that each doctoral school is internationally evaluated every fifth year. At Aalborg University the responsibility for evaluation of the four doctoral schools has been delegated to each faculty.

At the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) the Dean drew up Terms of Reference for the international evaluation in August 2013 in consultation with the director of the Doctoral School and the PhD board (appendix 0.1). The international evaluation is organised in accordance with guidelines for review steps stated by ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education): Terms of Reference; self-evaluation report; constituting external panel; site-visit by the panel; production of final report; decision making processes.¹

Another important guideline is the quality assurance criteria stated by The European University Association, Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE), which specifically address the doctoral education as the third cycle education. The report “Accountable Research Environment for Doctoral Education” (ARDE) underlines the differences between quality assurance for doctoral education and quality assurance for the first and the second cycle:

*“Doctoral education is fundamentally different from teaching-based first and second cycle. It is highly individual; doctoral candidates do not follow predictable path which is carved out in successive modules, but they follow a hypothesis or an idea leading them to uncharted territory, which they must learn to navigate”.*²

The report states that it is important to relate quality assurance of the doctoral education closely to the institutional context and research strategies. The characteristics of Aalborg University as a relatively young university founded on interdisciplinary research and problem-based learning have an important impact on the doctoral education.

The self-evaluation focuses on the key elements accountability, quality enhancement and transparency in the European standard for quality assurance of doctoral schools within the following areas:

- Accountability in management of doctoral education
- External and internal evaluation, emphasising practices for monitoring the progression in PhD studies
- PhD supervision as a key element to improve accountability as well as enhancement
- Career development, transferable skills training and career training.³

This self-evaluation includes these areas except career development, which only became a focal point 2013 when a new element about career paths and research strategies for PhD was added to

¹ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Hilsinkki 2009; European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) “Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area”, Occasional Papers 19, 2013.

² Byrne et al. (2013) “Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project”. EUA Publication 2013, p.8.

³ Byrne et al. (2013), p. 5.

Strategic Action Plan. However, the discussion about transferable skills will be included in relation to valuation of the offered PhD courses.

In addition to the European standards, the self-evaluation contains some elements that are closely related to the specific research environment for PhD students at the Faculty of Social Sciences as well as some of the most important specific initiatives for monitoring the doctoral training processes developed by the Doctoral School of Social Sciences:

- Initiatives concerning inactive PhD students who are significantly behind schedule
- A four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress
- Outline of guidelines for different models for writing a PhD thesis
- Internationalisation and establishing agreements about joint and double degrees
- The research environment and the PhD students' affiliation with research groups

Outline and focal points

After a brief presentation of the Doctoral School, the seven doctoral programmes and the Strategic Action Plan, five focal points are discussed:

- Recruitment and completion (including an initiative concerning inactive PhD students)
- Regulating the PhD process
 - Four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress
 - Guidelines for writing a PhD thesis
 - PhD supervision
- PhD courses
- Internationalisation, including agreements about joint and double degrees
- Working conditions and affiliation with colleagues

Data and sources

The evaluation is based on different sources:

Universities Denmark is the organisation of the eight Danish universities, which works to enhance their cooperation, visibility and impact. To ensure that its members have the best possible conditions for shouldering their responsibilities in research, research-based education and dissemination of knowledge, the organisation publishes statistics across the eight universities, including data about the development in doctoral education.

The PhD Manager System, Aalborg University, the university's internal ICT system for PhD administration. Every detail about the PhD students and their progress is registered in the system, which makes it possible to conduct statistical analyses of enrolment, awarded degrees, average study time, financing etc.

Some of the information is already systematised and analysed by the Doctoral School in Annual Report 2012 and 2013 (appendices 0.2 and 0.3), but additional analyses have been conducted for this report.

Workplace Assessment from the PhD students is based on data from the general workplace assessment from Aalborg University (APV enquiry). Data for the APV enquiry was collected in December 2012. The enquiry included four questions specifically directed at the PhD students. To obtain a more complete picture of the work environment, some questions directed at all university staff are included. These questions elaborate on the accountability of the doctoral education in relation to working conditions, emphasising especially PhD supervision and the PhD students' affiliation with colleagues and research groups.

The response rate of the general APV for the whole university was 70 % and for the faculty of Social Sciences 67 %. The response rate for PhD students at the Social Sciences Faculty was 64.2%.⁴

Approximately 40 % of the PhDs did not answer the questionnaire, and there is a risk that the non-response is systematic, which refers to the data's lack of representativeness. Unfortunately the PhD data from the APV enquiry is based on less than 100 respondents, which affects the results and the possibilities to analyse variations between different groups of PhD students. Moreover, the APV data only includes part of the PhD population because PhD students enrolled without employment as PhD fellow are not included.

The self-evaluation report is written by the director and the secretariat of the DSSS with contribution from heads of the doctoral programmes. Stud.scient.soc. Lærke Højbjerg Pedersen conducted the analysis of the APV data and stud.merc. Sune Bo L. Johansen registered the development in different models of PhD theses.

⁴ In general the faculties of the PhDs have a response rate above 50 %. PhD students at the Faculty of Humanities have the highest rate at 68.5 %, Medicine 68.4 %, and Engineering and Science 52.7 %. For more information about the APV enquiry see [Aalborg University's APV](#).

Chapter 1

Presentation of The Doctoral School

The Doctoral School of Social Sciences (DSSS) was established in 2008 after the amendment of The Danish University Act in 2007, which introduced doctoral programmes and PhD study boards as statutory institutions at Danish universities with formal responsibility for PhD education. The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) constituted a task group in September 2007 with a mandate to describe the organisation and management of the coming doctoral school. The task group, which consisted of a delegate from each department under the FSS and two PhD students, issued a memorandum concerning the establishment of DSSS (appendix 1.1). The school is placed under the FSS, and is organised with a director of the doctoral school designated by the Dean, a secretariat and a PhD study board consisting of two PhD students and the heads of the seven individual doctoral programmes (see figure 1.1). The director of the DSSS is also appointed chairman of the PhD study board.⁵

The assurance of quality and legitimacy in PhD education is embedded in AAU's general organisational structure through delegations in the "Statutes of the self-governing institution Aalborg University" (appendix 1.2) and with reference to the PhD Order (appendix 1.3) and The Danish University Act (appendix 1.4).

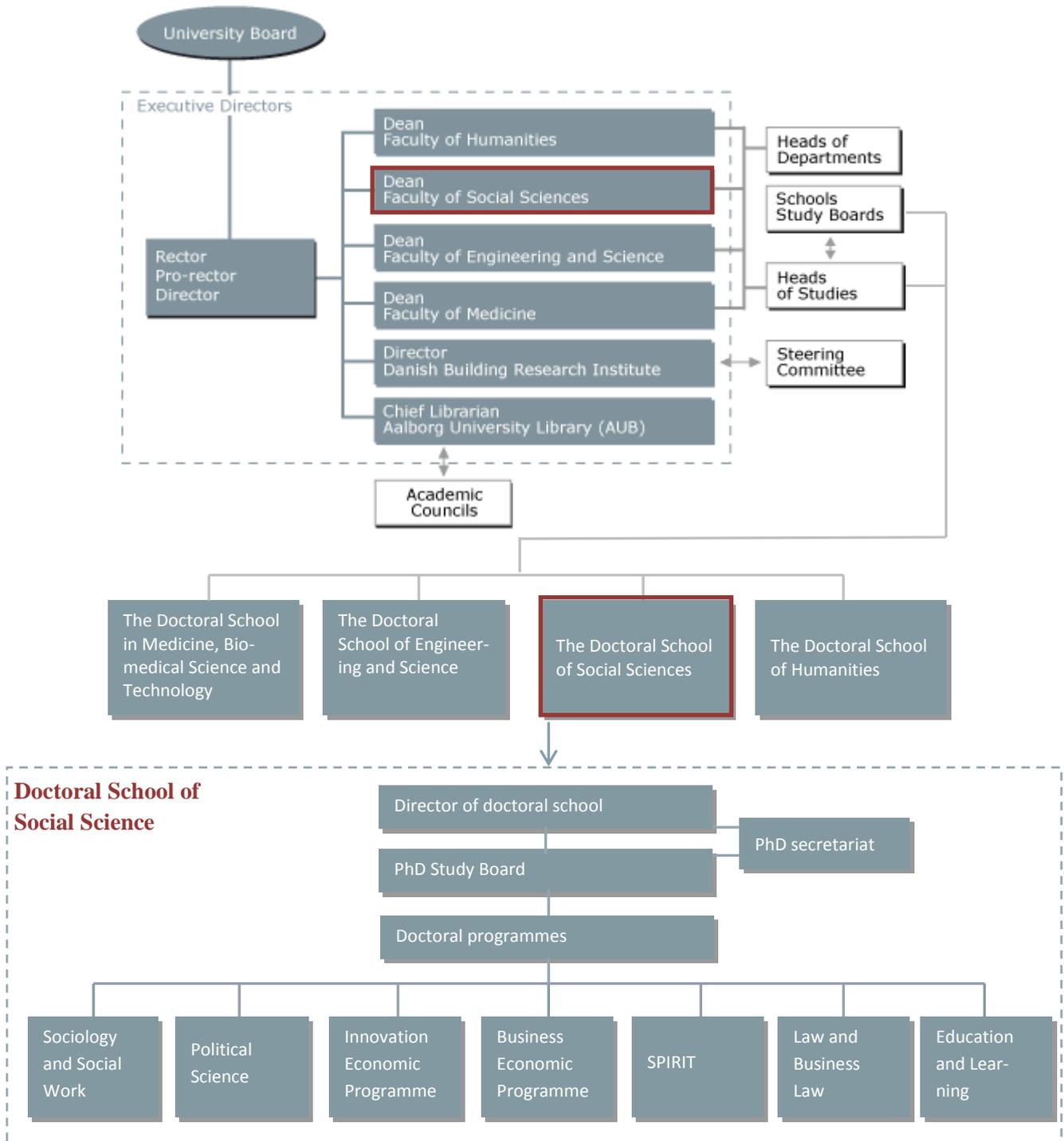
The actual establishment of PhD schools is decided by the Rector, while the affiliated university responsibilities are delegated to lower management levels or placed in Academic Councils and PhD study boards. For instance, the Dean appoints expert assessment committees after recommendation from the PhD study board, while the Academic Council awards the PhD degrees after recommendation from the assessment committees.

Within the organisational structure of the actual doctoral school, the legal responsibilities are handled by the director of the doctoral school and the PhD study board. The main responsibilities of the director are admission of PhD students, designation of principal supervisors, approval of 'research and study plans' (PhD plan), regular assessment of PhD studies (progress reports), and internal rules for assessment. The PhD study board primarily handles the school's academic policy and makes propositions and recommendations to the director for internal rules regarding admission to the PhD programme, organisation and content of the PhD programme including arrangement and evaluation of PhD courses, supervision and appointment of supervisors, and writing, submission and defence of the PhD thesis.

The outcome of the structural management and responsibilities for quality assurance regarding admission, completion and regulation for the PhD process is evaluated in Chapter 3 and 4, and PhD courses are evaluated in Chapter 5.

⁵ The first director of the doctoral school was Professor Jørgen Gulddahl Rasmussen, Dept. of Business and Management. On April 1 2012, Professor Ann-Dorte Christensen, Dept. of Sociology and Social Work, took over as director. For further information about PhD study board, heads of programmes, secretary and programme boards (appendix 1.5)

Figure 1.1 Organisation and management at Aalborg University



Institutional embedment

Though most of the judicial responsibilities for doctoral education are delegated to the individual doctoral schools, it is a priority for the DSSS to ensure institutional embedment of the school's activities and development. The embedment is ensured by a close strategic cooperation between the director of the DSSS and the dean of the FSS through a combination of scheduled meetings to discuss and follow up on status and strategy of the doctoral school and ad hoc meetings about principal cases, where the dean as the highest authority at the faculty is consulted, before decisions are made.

The Faculty Management and the Academic Council also have important roles in the operation and development of the doctoral school. Thus the director of the DSSS has been attending meetings in the Faculty Management about; input from the DSSS to the Faculty's Research Strategy; teaching obligation for PhD students; and a new system for submitting PhD dissertations, including control for plagiarism. The Academic Council has been consulted in the drawing up of the Strategic Action Plan for the DSSS, and latest regarding an increased focus on career paths for PhD students.

General contents of the doctoral programme at AAU

The doctoral programme at AAU is a three year study corresponding to 180 ECTS credits. To get admission to the doctoral programme the PhD applicant must hold a degree equivalent to a Danish Master's degree (see chapter 3 for further information about enrolment).

The doctoral programme comprises the following elements:

- Independent research work under supervision (the PhD project)
- A PhD thesis on the basis of the PhD project
- PhD course activities corresponding to 30 ECTS credits
- Communication activities, including teaching and other forms of knowledge dissemination, which is related to the student's PhD project (600 hours)
- Participation in active research environments, including stays at other, mainly foreign, research institutions

Quality assurance in the PhD process

Commencement of study	Job advertisement	<p>The dean approves the financing and the strategy on recommendation from the department and upon quality assurance by the financial department at the faculty.</p> <p>The dean approves the assessment committee on recommendation from the Academic Council and upon quality assurance by the PhD administration (both genders representation and academic level of minimum associate professor).</p> <p>The applicants are given 8 days to object to the committee on the basis of impartiality.</p>
	Enrolment	<p>The director of doctoral school quality assures and approves the assessment of each applicant on behalf of the dean. The director reacts if the assessment does not meet formal requirements.</p> <p>The applicants are given the opportunity to comment on the assessment within 8 days, and possible comments/complaints are dealt with by the assessment committee on behalf of the dean.</p> <p>The director of doctoral school decides whom to enrol on recommendation from the head of relevant department and doctoral programme and quality assures that the admission criteria according to the PhD Order (appendix 1.3) and Internal rules (appendix 4.5) are fulfilled.</p> <p>The dean decides whom to employ on recommendation from the director of doctoral school. (See also appendix 3.2 for enrolment procedures)</p>
During the study	Appointment of principal supervisor	The director of doctoral school quality assures and approves the appointment (or replacement) of principal supervisor on recommendation from the department. (See appendices 1.3 and 4.5). The PhD administration notifies the supervisor of his/her obligations.
	Progress reports (four-step-model)	<p>Director of doctoral school quality assures and approves the student's PhD plan on recommendation from the principal supervisor, the head of doctoral programme and the head of department.</p> <p>Director of doctoral school quality assures and approves the progress reports for each student (four-step model) on recommendation from the principal supervisor and the head of doctoral programme. The student is given two weeks to comment on the supervisor's report.</p> <p>Director of doctoral school reacts if one party does not recommend the plan or progress report for approval, and the student is given the opportunity to get back on course within three months. (See Chapter 4 and appendices 1.3 and 4.5)</p>
	Supervisor courses/PhD courses	The PhD study board decides and assures the quality of the courses. The courses are evaluated by the participants.
Completion of study	Submission of PhD thesis	<p>The director of doctoral school quality assures that the study has been satisfactory on recommendation from the principal supervisor according to the PhD Order (appendix 1.3) and approves the thesis for expert assessment.</p> <p>On behalf of the PhD study board the director of doctoral school quality assures and recommends the assessment committee to the dean on recommendation from the department, and the director approves the committee on behalf of the dean.</p> <p>The student is given the opportunity to object to the committee on the basis of impartiality within 8 days.</p>
	Assessment of thesis	<p>The preliminary recommendation is quality assured by the director of doctoral school. The director may demand that the committee alters the assessment according to formal requirements (appendices 4.8 and 4.9).</p> <p>If the thesis is not recommended for defence, the author is given two weeks to comment, and the director may subsequently give the author three months to improve the thesis on recommendation from the assessment committee.</p>
	Award of degree	The PhD administration quality assures the final recommendation, and the Academic Council awards the degree on the basis of the final recommendation.

Overall aim and profile

The overall aim of DSSS is to ensure doctoral programmes of high quality, effectiveness and high international standard in the Faculty of Social Sciences' core research and teaching activities.

Over the past six years, the number of PhD students at DSSS has increased steadily from 99 in 2008 to 154 in 2013. The increase is a result of the government's objective to promote doctoral programmes and of a strengthened effort by the FSS. In 2011 and 2012 the Faculty had a target of 40 new PhD students per year, via among other things increased use of co-financed grants. In 2013, there was a slight decline in enrolment due to a tight economic period at the Faculty.

DSSS focuses on creating a framework for an active national and international doctoral education including the best possible study environment to motivate and encourage PhD students to develop their academic competences in the most innovative and creative way. This requires that the Doctoral School on the one hand cooperates with national and international research environments, private companies and the public sector and, on the other hand, organises daily activities to give PhD students optimal sparring, scientific support and learning from senior colleagues. Furthermore there are a number of formal procedures (like regular evaluations, courses and teaching) as well as initiatives for quality assurance, to which we return below.

The Doctoral School offers seven doctoral programmes:

- Sociology and Social Work
- Political Science
- Innovation Economics Programme
- Business Economics Programme
- SPIRIT – School for Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Research of Interculturalism and Transnationality
- The Doctoral Programme in Law and Business Law
- Education, Learning, and Philosophy

Each of the doctoral programmes is managed by a head of programme.

Sociology and Social Work

The doctoral programme in sociology and social work is tightly linked to the department's core research fields, namely sociology, social work as well as work life and organisation. In 2013, the programme had 40 PhD students, who are connected to one of the Department's research groups:

- CASTOR – Centre for Sociological Analysis of Social Transformations
- SAGA – Sociological Analysis – General and Applied Research
- SocMap – Research Group for Demography, Social Geography and Health
- FOSO – Social Work Research Group
- Psychology & Society

- Leo – Research Group for Labour Markets, Education and Organisation
- COMA – Center for Organisation, Management and Administration (in collaboration with the Department of Political Science)

Each PhD student is primarily affiliated with their main supervisor's research group but may participate in activities organised by other groups. Each research group is responsible for giving the PhD students opportunities to present their research projects or research papers for discussion several times during their enrolment.

Since 2012, the programme has co-organised PhD courses in sociology with the Department of Sociology at Copenhagen University. A course in sociological theory was held in the spring term of 2013 and a course in research design in the fall term. Within the field of social work, courses are developed in a well-established summer school network with representatives from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. The network was established in 2008, and summer schools in social work from 2009 to 2013 have received support from NORDFORSK. In organisation studies, courses are developed in close cooperation with the Department for Political Science.

The head of programme meets with the PhD students twice a year concerning a specific topic, for instance writing a thesis, assessment of a thesis, or application procedures for postdoctoral funding.

PhD activities are continuously discussed in the programme board which consists of four professors and two PhD students. The PhD students have formed their own networks in Aalborg and in Copenhagen called GISP and AHA, which organise meetings about research related issues as well as purely social events. They also assign buddies, i.e., "older" members who take care of new PhD students and introduce them to different tasks and routines during the first months of enrolment.

Political Science

A common theme of the doctoral programme in Political Science is changes in the economic, political and administrative system, the public sector and in state-market-civil society relations. PhD students should acquire sound knowledge of classical and modern theories, analytical approaches and concepts as well as analytical methods and techniques. In 2013, the programme had 27 PhD students. The doctoral programme is connected to the department's research units:

- The Center for Comparative Welfare Studies (CCWS)
- Centre for Labour Market Research (CARMA)
- Organisation and administration
- Center for IS Management
- Center for Mobility Research
- Political Communication, identity and participation
- Research Center for Evaluation (FCE)
- Economics, Business and Politics
- Global Refugee Studies (GRS)
- Center for Opinions and Analysis (COPAN)

- Center for Organisation, Management and Administration (COMA) (in cooperation with Department of Sociology and Social Work)
- Global Development Studies (GDS)

PhD students are included in research units where they present their research design and their results are discussed. They have organised a lunch club that meets twice a month to discuss themes of common interest and present projects. The head of the doctoral programme meets with the PhD group 1-2 times a year, when significant new information is available, or issues should be discussed with PhD group.

The programme has a mentoring scheme that is connected to the research groups, and sometimes across the groups. The mentor is available for questions and meetings with new PhD students.

The programme has five PhD fellows with non-Danish background, and virtually all communication and joint meetings are held in English. The programme cooperates internationally with The Interdepartmental Centre for Research Training in Economics and Management (CIFREM), CRIC (Centre for Resolution of International Conflicts), University of Trento and via AAU membership in Scancor (Scandinavian Consortium for Organisational Research) in a Nordic-American network of Nordic universities and Stanford University, USA.

Innovation Economics Programme

The Innovation Economics Programme is located at the Department of Business and Management together with the Business Economics Programme.

The programme is centred on the key elements of economic development, knowledge, innovation, entrepreneurship, macroeconomics, health economics and creativity. The programme in Economics of Innovation has existed since 1996, but was changed in 2008. In recent years, new topics have been added, such as macroeconomics, health economics and creativity.

The doctoral programme is connected to the following research groups:

- IKE (Innovation, Knowledge and Economic dynamics)
- EOB (Entrepreneurship and Organisational Behaviour)
- MaMTEP (Macroeconomic Methodology, Theory and Economic Policy)
- ORCA (Organisational Renewal Creativity Applied)
- DCHI (Danish Center for Improvement in Health Care)

The programme is part of the cross-university collaboration DRUID (Danish Research Unit in Industrial Dynamics), where the IKE and EOB groups participate in close collaboration with researchers from Copenhagen Business School and University of Southern Denmark. One of the main events is an annual DRUID Academy conference for PhD students within the fields of economics, entrepreneurship and management of innovation, technology and organisations organised by researchers from Aalborg University since 2002.

The PhD students regularly present their work at internal research seminars in the various research groups and they have participated actively in many national and international PhD courses and conferences. Furthermore, many of the students collaborate closely with companies and public organisations.

Business Economics Programme

The Business Economics Programme is located at the Department of Business and Management together with the Innovation Economics Programme. The focus areas are international managerial economy, organisation, strategy, auditing and management accounting. The programme was established in 2008 and is connected to the following research groups:

- MAC (Management Accounting and Control)
- IBC (International Business Centre)
- FIRM (Firms, Innovation, Relationship & Management)

The programme is connected to the network DOME (Doctoral Programme in Organisation and Management Theory), a cross-university collaboration between Aalborg University, University of Southern Denmark, Roskilde University and Aarhus University. DOME is a very important platform for PhD students within organisation and management because the participating universities offer international PhD courses of high academic quality on theory and methods of organisation and management studies at the micro organisational level.

The PhD students regularly present their work at internal research seminars in the various research groups and participate actively in many national and international PhD courses and conferences. Furthermore, many of the students collaborate closely with companies and public organisations.

The doctoral programmes in Innovation Economics and Business Economics are considered as one management area with a total of 46 PhD students.

SPIRIT

SPIRIT is an interdisciplinary and cross-faculty doctoral programme in humanities and the social sciences. SPIRIT is located at the Department of Culture and Global Studies. The focus areas are studies of themes and theoretical issues related to the intertwining of political, cultural, and socio-economic processes, with particular emphasis on contemporary globalisation trends and their historical preconditions. It is dedicated to examining – from the combined vantage point of both the human and the social sciences – cultural, political and socio-economic issues on a spectrum ranging from the local and regional dimension over the national level to the transnational global processes that increasingly impinge on the organisation of life and the structure and dynamics of the world. In 2013, the programme had 15 PhD students enrolled in social sciences (and 14 in the humanities). Ten nationalities are represented in the programme.

The programme is connected to the following research groups:

- CC – Culture and Consumption
- CCIS – Center for Comparative Integration Studies
- CEPS – Cultural Encounters in Premodern Societies
- CHI – Contemporary History
- COMID – Center for the Study of Migration and Diversity
- DIR – Research Center on Development and International Relations
- EDGE – Centre for Equality, Diversity, Gender
- FREIA – Gender Research Center in Aalborg
- Global History of UNESCO Project
- IHR – Interdisciplinary Health Research
- RGIS – Research Group in International Studies
- TRU – Tourism Research Unit

The PhD students are included in a research group where they present their research design and papers. The PhD students are invited to participate in all activities in the research group with which they are affiliated. The programme arranges 4-5 seminars per year. The PhD students have formed their own network. They have one meeting every month where they present research papers and/or discuss common problems related to the enrolment. The project secretariat and the programme director participate in a meeting 1-2 times a year.

The programme participates in the nationwide network of History, Anthropology and Archaeology, which offers one PhD course a year and occasionally a summer school.

The PhD activities are continuously discussed in the programme board which consists of 7 senior researchers and 1 PhD student.

Law and Business Law

The doctoral programme was established in connection with the faculty's established Bachelor- and Master programme in law, the existing programme in Business Law and the established Department of Law in 2008. The doctoral programme is located at the department of Law. In 2013, the programme had 9 PhD students.

The programme is anchored in the 3 research groups of the Department, where the PhD students are affiliated with one of the groups:

- *The public*: Legal relationship between government and citizen, for instance administrative law, tax law, criminal law and a subgroup that, over a long period, has been working on social justice issues.
- *Enterprise relationship*: Classic property law, e.g., the sale of goods act and collateralisation; corporate law is included along with EU law; modern technology and modern information policy, i.e. personal data law, media law, IT-law, communication and information law, IPR and cyber-crime.

- *The private citizen:* Jurisdictions such as family, children and inheritance law. Additional human rights and the legal position of foreigners and refugees.

The programme is a partner in the nationwide JurForsk network and offers PhD courses in collaboration with the network. Danish Legal Research Training Programme – JurForsk – is a collaboration between: Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen (UC); Department of Law, School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University (AU); Department of Law, University of Southern Denmark (SDU); Department of Law, Aalborg University (AAU); Law Department, Copenhagen Business School (CBS) and Institute of Food and Resource Economics, Faculty of Science, University of Copenhagen (SCIENCE). The programme also participates in the Nordic Network for Legal Research Education, which offers PhD courses.

The aim of the doctoral programme is to contribute to the recruitment of a legal research environment at an international level to benefit future research at the Department of Law and the legal expertise of the surrounding community. For this purpose, the programme strives for close cooperation with the private sector and public authorities.

PhD students at the Department of Law attend a PhD club that organises relevant professional events for example on article writing and fundraising. PhD students in the legal research group on Enterprise relationship are members of a network with professionals in academia and the business sector.

Education, Learning and Philosophy

The doctoral programme Education, Learning and Philosophy is an interdisciplinary and cross-faculty doctoral programme between the humanities and the social sciences. The programme is located in the Department of Learning and Philosophy. It collaborates closely with the doctoral programme Technology and Science, which is located in the same department but its PhD students are enrolled in the Doctoral School of Engineering and Science and the Doctoral School of Medicine.

The programme was established in 2000, and especially during the past two years the programme has seen a major growth. In 2013, 17 PhD students were enrolled in the social sciences (11 in humanities).

The topics and disciplines covered by the programme include learning and teaching in educational systems; cultures and diversity in education and learning; education policy; PBL and higher education; organisational learning and workplace learning; ICT-mediated learning; sustainable leadership and management; culture-driven innovation; applied philosophy; philosophy and ethics of leadership, techno-anthropology; methodology of research on education.

Research activities in the department are organised in cross-disciplinary research groups. All PhD students are required to be members of at least one research group, normally the same group as their supervisor. PhD students are expected to present their research in the group. The research groups with their senior faculty members and research projects provide an excellent environment for socializing the students into the practises of conducting research and academic activities.

Social science PhD students are mainly present in the following research groups:

- Centre for Education Policy and Evaluation Research
- CLIO – Centre for Learning in Organisations
- Higher Education Research Group
- Learning and Education Research Group
- LSP – Laboratory for Research Based School Development and Pedagogical Practice
- Research Team on Sustainable Governance

PhD students participate actively in national and international PhD courses and conferences, and many collaborate with companies and public organisations.

The PhD activities are continuously discussed in the programme board, which consists of six senior researchers and two PhD students.

Delphi is a cross-disciplinary network of PhD students and research assistants at the faculties of Social Sciences and the Humanities at AAU. The network is economic funded by the two faculties. The aim is to support young researchers through activities directed at improving their academic and social experiences at university. Dephi arranges meetings once a month to discuss new proposals and selected topics, for instance in relation to PhD processes.

Sub-conclusion

The seven doctoral programmes are characterised by the diversity within the faculty of social sciences in relation to the academic scope and profile as well as the number of enrolled PhD students. Some of the programmes are interdisciplinary, some are organised across two faculties, and others are more related to mainstream social science disciplines.

However, all PhD students in the doctoral programmes *are expected to be affiliated with a research group* as an important part of the daily work environment and a unit for scientific meetings, presentations and discussions for both academic seniors and academic juniors, including PhD students. In some doctoral programmes, the PhD students have organised their own networks and some of the programmes have established mentoring schemes for newly enrolled PhD students. Finally, Delphi is prioritised as an important cross-disciplinary meeting place for PhD students.

These initiatives indicate an awareness of the importance of including the doctoral education and PhD students in the daily activities and in the academic discussions. It is obviously a strategy at department and faculty level to strengthen inclusion of PhD students; provide optimum conditions for academic learning processes to avoid and reduce the risk of isolation and loneliness among PhD students.

In Chapter 7 we will go further into these questions and evaluate the PhD students' assessments of how these initiatives to promote an inclusive and responsive academic working environment work in practice.

Chapter 2

Strategic Action Plan 2012-15

In August 2012, a four-year strategic action plan for DSSS was adopted as part of the general quality assurance of the doctoral training and with reference to the faculty strategies. It consisted of nine elements and in 2013 an element about career paths and research strategies for PhDs was added.

The plan and its main and sub-targets are described below. Monitoring of the plan is presented in Annual Report 2012 and 2013. The elements will be expanded throughout this evaluation report. In the conclusion, we return to the strategy plan in order to monitor and draw up a balance sheet on the quality assurance and management processes.

1. Efficiency improvements and completion of present and future PhD projects. Principal activities are:

- Status of and a plan for inactive PhD students
- Evaluation of the four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress with special focus on discussions after 12 and 30 months of the PhD study
- Mandatory supervisor courses and implementation of the memorandum concerning supervision
- Accessible and flexible guidelines for writing a thesis
- Discussion and possible revision of the required hours of teaching and knowledge dissemination for PhD students
- Discussion and a possible increase of supervision hours for PhD supervisors

The work in these areas commenced in spring 2012, continued in autumn 2012 and will be included in the annual reports of 2012 and 2013. The follow-up work will continue for the next 3 years.

This element will be developed further throughout the evaluation report

2. Strengthening the Doctoral School's international profile, including development of joint and double degrees

- Information from the Doctoral School shall be available in Danish and English
- Ensuring optimal conditions for international cooperation on doctoral programmes, including the establishment of double and joint degrees
- Strengthened coordination of the faculties' initiatives for cooperation with international doctoral schools
- Encouraging a stay abroad for PhD students; increased number of international job advertisements, etc.

2012: All documents on the website should be available in Danish and English.

From 2012: Developing agreements on joint and double degrees.

Target: Develop a minimum of 1-2 agreements per programme.

This element will be developed further in Chapter 6

3. Embedment of previous cross-institutional doctoral programmes and development of new interdisciplinary PhD cooperation agreements in Denmark

- List of the cross-institutional PhD cooperation agreements in which the School's doctoral programmes are involved (e.g. FiOL, JurForsk as well as History, Archaeology and Ethnology)
- Preparation of a plan for embedment of activities from cross-institutional programmes that expire (e.g. PolForsk and VoF-Welfare State and Diversity)
- Develop national and international cooperation agreements
- Develop cooperation with other doctoral schools at AAU

2012: An overview is created, and a memorandum is made concerning the development and contribution to cross-institutional cooperation, including the plan for embedment. 2013: Development and consolidation of network and cooperation agreements.

This element will be developed further in Chapter 1 and 5

4. Development of PhD courses

Increasing PhD course activities expected to be organised as follows:

- *Generic PhD courses* offered every or every second year (e.g. method courses, philosophy of science, research design and process-oriented courses such as flow writing, media and communication, basic pedagogic courses and a course for PhD supervisors)
- *Thematic PhD courses* within different disciplines depending on current proposals from research groups, PhD students, the local doctoral programmes and research activities e.g. visits by guest professors, conferences and seminars

The PhD courses will (1) offer a wide range of qualified educational opportunities for our PhD students; (2) attract other Danish and international PhD students as a means of profiling the Doctoral School and the faculty's research environments; (3) strengthen the connection between the research programme and the faculty's research environments, including active involvement of guest researchers in the education and supervision of PhD students.

2012: Determination and consolidation of the model for PhD courses, including registration in national database. Autumn 2012 and 2013: Development of existing and new PhD courses. The target: Provide 20-25 PhD courses every year.

This element will be developed further in Chapter 5.

5. Ensuring optimal everyday conditions for the PhD students:

- Participation in research groups at the department level
- Teaching and knowledge dissemination obligations
- Visits and stays at other institutions as part of internationalisation

Autumn 2012 – overview of PhD students' stay abroad. Focus on the relation between research, teaching and knowledge dissemination 2013-2014: APV – Workplace Assessment for PhD students (cooperation with HR).

This element will be developed further in Chapter 1 and 7.

6. Support to the PhD students' organisations and networks

- Delphi, the PhD association at the Faculty of Social Sciences at AAU
- Local networks in the doctoral programmes

Continuing financial support to Delphi. Initiate local networks at the level of department and doctoral programmes.

This element will be developed further in Chapter 1 and 7.

7. Career paths and research strategies for PhDs

In light of the dramatic increase in the number of PhD students, initiatives were launched in 2013 to make the PhDs' career paths and opportunities more transparent. Likewise, the PhD students' internal and external career paths will be made more transparent, e.g. via the Faculty's research strategy, which has increased focus on young researchers' opportunities and competences, for example in terms of obtaining external grants (e.g. post docs).

2014: Investigation on employment patterns of the School's graduates over the past 10 years will be conducted. 2015: Conference on the Career Path for graduated PhD Students will be arranged. Both initiatives will be conducted in cooperation with the other doctoral schools at AAU.

This element is not included in the self-evaluation. Discussed in the conclusion as a focal point for further equality enhancement.

8. Continuing focus on administrative efficiency improvements

Administrative tasks in the following areas:

- Job adverts, enrolment and composition of assessment committees
- Approval of assessments, including PhD courses and teaching obligations
- Approval of application for credit transfer, advance credit transfer and dispensation
- Networking with other administrative employees at AAU's doctoral schools to exchange experience
- IT-system PhD Manager for evaluation of PhD plans and the four evaluation reports of the PhD study
- Submission of PhD dissertations via the VBN system

Autumn 2012: A guide is issued to all PhD supervisors and PhD students. The administrative efficiency improvements are implemented at all levels. 2013 and 2014: PhD Manager and VBN submission, publication and plagiarism will be implemented.

This element will be developed further throughout the evaluation report

9. Annual reports and ongoing progress reports for the development of the Doctoral School

Annual reports about the development at the doctoral school and the doctoral programmes will be produced. The reports will contain the number of Danish and foreign PhD students, completed theses, average PhD enrolment period and a list of course activities offered by the Doctoral School and the doctoral programmes.

From 2012 Annual Reports will be prepared every year to monitor the strategic actions plan and present information about the development of the Doctoral School (e.g. enrolled PhD students and awarded degrees), internationalisation, collaborations partners, PhD Courses etc.

See appendices 0.2 and 0.3 for Annual Reports 2012 and 2013.

10. The international evaluation in 2013

- Establishing the framework for the international evaluation of the Doctoral School. The evaluation will be conducted in 2014

*Autumn 2012 and autumn 2013: Drafting documentation (simultaneously with the annual reports).
Spring 2014: Preparation of self-evaluation report and subsequent site visit by the international evaluation panel in May. Evaluation report by the panel will be delivered in august 2014. Autumn 2014: Processing the international evaluation and adjustments for strategic action plan.*

Chapter 3

Recruitment and Completion

The seven doctoral programmes presented in Part 1 vary considerably in terms of volume and profile of PhD students. To understand the relations between student profiles, recruitment, completion and discontinuation, this chapter first describes and illustrates the development of enrolment and awarded degrees as well as the composition of the doctoral school's current PhD population. Next, recruitment and completion of PhD students is discussed. How are legitimacy and quality assurance embedded in the procedures for recruitment, how are the PhD projects financed, how did the recruited PhD students perform in their masters, and what are the connections between the profiles of the recruited PhD students and their discontinuation rates and average study time?

A specific initiative for completing inactive PhD students is also evaluated, as the outcome of the initiative affects the completion trends significantly.

Thus, the objective of the chapter is to evaluate the procedures and practices for recruitment and completion, related to average study time and rates of discontinuation.

Annual Enrolment

The table below shows that the trend in annual enrolment has increased by nearly 200 % from 2008-2012. The increase is partly due to the government's "Globalisation Fund"⁶, where doctoral education was one of the main elements in a 6 year strategy plan (2007-2012) aiming at innovation and economic growth, and partly due to the faculty's strategic focus on doctoral education. From 2012 to 2013, enrolments declined again, primarily because of a strategic priority on completion at the faculty and the doctoral school. The current population of 154 students (table 3.2) is the highest count since the establishment of the school, and it is a faculty objective to maintain an annual intake of approximately 40 students.

A characteristic trend in the annual enrolment is that the majority is women. In 2013, 31 of 39 enrolled PhD students were women. In comparison, the population in the Master's degree programmes at FSS was 61 % women and 39 % men in 2013.⁷

⁶ [Aftale om udmøntning af Globaliseringspuljen](#)

⁷ The trend towards a majority of female PhD students at FSS was already ascertained in 2008, when a longitudinal study of the unequal gender profile at Aalborg University investigated gender differences in recruitment to different positions in the staff hierarchy. The investigation showed that male graduates at the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Science and Technology from 1988-2005 had a greater chance of obtaining a PhD scholarship. At FSS it was the other way around. However, the investigation emphasised that the overrepresentation of women among the PhD students was not reflected in the higher proportion of women as assistant professors, associate professors and professors (Emerek and Larsen, 2011). The research project on gender equality in recruitment of staff to Aalborg University (based on both qualitative and quantitative research) was an important element in supporting gender equality initiatives at AAU from 2008 and the following years (Borchorst et al. 2008). In order to evaluate the increasing amount of graduated PhD candidates a follow-up investigation about the current gender equality profile at AAU as well as FSS could be recommended.

Table 3.1 Annual Enrolment of PhD students 2008-2013

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	Rate
Men	10	9	11	14	22	8	74	39 %
Women	7	12	15	23	28	31	116	61 %
Danish	14	16	19	31	42	33	155	82 %
International	3	5	7	6	8	6	35	18 %
Enrolled total	17	21	26	37	50	39	190	100 %

Source: AAU's PhD Manager system

PhD population

The majority of enrolled women is also evident in table 3.2, which illustrates the distribution of the total population of PhD students on sex, nationality and doctoral programmes. Two thirds of all active PhD students at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences are women, and the trend is particularly apparent in the doctoral programmes in Sociology and Social Work and Law and Business Law.

The division between Danish and international PhD students is discussed explicitly in Chapter 6 concerning the international profile of the DSSS.

Table 3.2 PhD population as of 31 December 2013

	Sociology/Social Work	Political Science	Innovation/ Business	SPIRIT	Law/business law	Education/ learning	Total	Rate
Men	6	11	22	5	0	8	52	34 %
Women	34	16	24	10	9	9	102	66 %
Danish	39	22	29	9	9	12	120	78 %
International	1	5	17	6	0	5	34	22 %
Total	40	27	46	15	9	17	154	100 %

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: The PhD population is calculated on the basis of enrolled PhD students up to and including December 31 for each year.

Note: The PhD population includes PhD students on sabbatical leave and PhD students who have submitted their theses, but are awaiting assessment and/or award of degree.

Annual degrees awarded

The number of degrees awarded in 2012 declined, partially due to challenges associated with completion of dissertations. During 2012 and 2013 efforts were increased in relation to quality, completion and efficiency in the doctoral education, including PhD supervision and streamlining of the assessment process (the initiatives are evaluated later in the report). It is too early to measure the actual effect of the efforts: however, the trend has turned from 2012 to 2013 when the number of awarded degrees almost doubled from 12 to 23.⁸

⁸ For an overview and summaries of awarded degrees 2012-2013, see appendix 3.1

Table 3.3 Annual degrees awarded 2008-2013

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	Rate
Men	5	2	9	9	5	8	38	43 %
Women	7	6	6	9	7	15	50	57 %
Danish	10	4	13	13	10	19	69	78 %
International	2	4	2	5	2	4	19	22 %
Degrees total	12	8	15	18	12	23	88	100 %

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Degrees awarded are registered when they are approved by the Academic Council.

Models of financing and procedures for recruitment

The PhD stipends are based on different models of financing which influence the terms on which the PhD students are recruited and how their PhD projects are conducted. Either the PhD is fully internally financed, or the PhD is partially or fully externally financed. *Internally financed* stipends are historically the ordinary form of PhD projects where the position is financed by the faculty. In addition to the general standards and requirements for recruitment, internally financed stipends have to be advertised and follow the existing procedures and regulations for PhD vacancies. The same procedures apply to *co-financed* PhD projects, if the external financing is less than 50 % of the total costs, while PhD students whose stipend is co-financed by more than 50 % can be employed and enrolled without previous advertisement as part of a cooperation agreement between the department and the grant giver. Lastly, *fully externally financed* PhD projects cover PhD students nominated by grant givers with at least 95 % financing, PhD students enrolled without employment, and PhD students enrolled as *industrial PhDs*. For each type of employment specific rules and procedures embed the legitimacy of each PhD project. A precise description of the DSSS procedures for recruitment is found in appendix 3.2, while the following depicts on the trends and development of the three general models of financing.

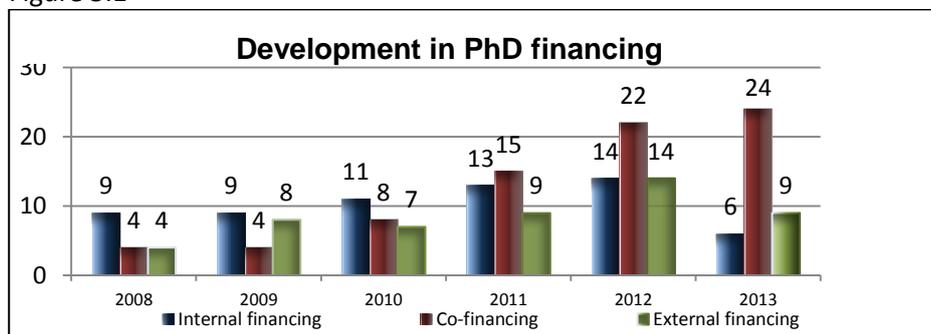
As mentioned, internally financed stipends are historically the ordinary form of PhD projects. However, figure 3.1 shows that the rate of externally financed projects (also covering enrolled PhDs without employment and industrial PhDs) and especially co-financed projects has increased significantly from 2008 to 2013, whereas the number of fully financed ordinary stipends has dropped. The co-financed PhD stipends have been a key element in the Innovation Strategy of the FSS to increase collaboration with external partner organisations.⁹ However, the PhD Study Board has highlighted this as a focal point in terms of securing opportunities to incorporate the doctoral programmes in the strategic management of the research profile.

Comparing the doctoral programmes, figure 3.2 shows that Sociology and Social Work has the highest rate of co-financed stipends, while Education and Learning and Innovation and Business Economics have the highest rates of externally financed stipends. In Law and Business Law, how-

⁹ For an overview of collaboration partners in relation to enrolled PhD students by the end of 2013, see Annual report 2013 p. 20.

ever, all active students are internally financed, primarily due to limited external collaboration opportunities and a structural need for internal recruitment.

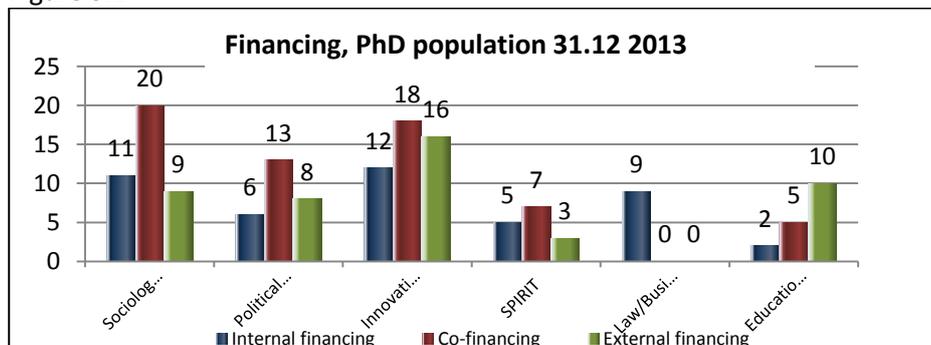
Figure 3.1



Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Internally financed projects are at least 90 % internally funded; externally financed projects are at least 90 % externally funded; the remainder are defined as co-financed projects.

Figure 3.2



Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Internally financed projects are at least 90 % internally funded; externally financed projects are at least 90 % externally funded; the remainder are defined as co-financed projects.

Marks¹⁰ from PhD student's master's degrees

Because of the above mentioned divergent procedures for the different models of financing and employment, and because of the distinctive development in the financing of PhD stipends, the doctoral school chose to investigate possible fluctuations in the level of the enrolled PhD students' master's certificates. From 2008 to 2013 the doctoral school enrolled 193 PhD students, and table 3.4 shows a minor decrease in average marks for master's theses as well as the master's degree in general, when the marks from 2008 are excluded.

Table 3.4 Development in marks from MA-/MSc degrees 2008-2013

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Master's thesis	10.17	11.44	11.38	11	10.76	10.56	10.86
Master's average	8.88	10.22	10.19	10.34	9.8	9.36	9.83

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Not all results from enrolled PhD students' master's degree are registered in the management system. For master's theses, 143 of 193 are registered; for the master's degree average 86 of 193 are registered

¹⁰ The Danish 7-point scale is [convertible to the ECTS marking scale](#).

In table 3.5 and 3.6 the average marks for master's thesis are distributed on sex, nationality and forms of financing for all enrolled PhD students in the period 2008 to 2013. Again the picture is high and stable marks for all PhD student profiles, which indicates healthy recruitment policies and practices for doctoral education and thus a PhD population with talent and high qualifications. There are no indications that the increasing rates of co-financed and externally financed stipends are affecting the qualification level negatively. On the contrary, externally financed stipends excel with the highest average marks, which may indicate a degree of 'headhunting' regarding externally funded research projects.

Table 3.5 Average marks, enrolled PhD students 2008 – 2013 (PhD student profiles)

	Men	Women	Internal financing	Co-financing	External financing	Total
Count	51	95	54	64	27	146
Average mark	10.69	10.96	10.89	10.84	11.26	10.86

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Table 3.5 and 3.6 are based on marks from master's theses because of best data availability. 146 thesis marks have been registered out of a total of 193 enrolled PhD students. Lack of registration is primarily related to the enrolment of international PhD students.

Table 3.6 Average marks, enrolled PhD students 2008-2013 (Doctoral programmes)

	Sociology/Social Work	Political Science	Innovation/Business	SPIRIT	Law/business law	Education/learning	Total
Count	40	32	41	12	11	10	146
Average mark	10.65	11.28	10.73	11	11	11.6	10.86

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System

Average study time

The standard time limit in Denmark for completing a PhD is three years (plus three months for the Academic Council to award the degree, which is counted when measuring average study time). Table 3.7 illustrates the development of average study time from 2008 to 2013 across different social science doctoral schools in Denmark. The trend is a decreasing average study time for completed PhDs at DSSS, yet the average study time from 2008 to 2011 is significantly higher than for other doctoral schools of social sciences in Denmark.

Table 3.7 Development in average study time (benchmark between doctoral schools of social sciences)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
AAU	5.6	5.5	4.8	4.5	3.9	5.2
AU	4.2	4	N/A	3.2	3.4	N/A
KU	4.1	4	N/A	3.3	3.1	N/A
RUC	4.5	5	N/A	3.9	3.4	N/A
SDU	3.8	4	N/A	3.9	3.3	N/A

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System and "[Universities in Denmark](#)".

Note: Data from 2010 and 2013 are not available for the other universities via "Danish Universities".

Note: Duration of study is the period from enrolment until the Academic Council awards the degree.

Note: Sabbaticals (maternity/paternity leave and sickness) are subtracted in the statistics.

Note: PhD studies completed with merits or without previous study time (PhD order, section 15(2)) are subtracted from the statistics.

In 2012, documentation of this development encouraged an increased strategic focus on “*efficiency improvements and completion of present and future PhD project*” (Strategic Action Plan 2012-2015, point 1 (appendix 3.3)) containing a number specific initiatives. The initiatives concerning regular assessments, thesis guidelines and supervision are all evaluated in chapter 4, while “*Status of and a plan for inactive PhD students*” is considered here due to its direct influence on the trends in average study time and discontinuation rates (table 3.8-3.14).

The strategic initiative for completing inactive PhD students

Status of inactive and significantly delayed PhD students comprised all PhD students who had surpassed the expected end date of their PhD study by more than one year without submitting their PhD thesis. Subsequently a letter (appendices 3.4 and 3.5) was sent to this group of PhD students, asking them to draw up a plan for the completion of their thesis (in cooperation with their principal supervisor) within a period of two months. Many of the delayed PhD students thus chose to submit a plan for completion, and have since completed their PhD study during 2013, while others chose to end their enrolment with the opportunity for later submission of the PhD thesis without previous PhD study (with reference to the PhD order, section 15(2)).

While the implementation of this continuing initiative has resulted in a clarification and to a great extent completion of inactive PhD students as well as a present PhD population with no inactive PhD students, it has affected the following statistics on completion and discontinuation. Thus the rise in average study time from 3.9 years in 2012 to 5.2 years in 2013 is primarily due to the delayed PhD students (some with more than ten years of study time) who chose to submit and follow a plan for completion, while the rates of discontinuation are influenced by the inactive PhD students who chose to end their enrolment with the opportunity for later submission. It is therefore expected that the average study time will drop to less than 4 years in 2014 followed by a continuing decrease in the following years.

As far as average study time distributed on programmes and PhD student profiles, the only distinctive variation is for international students where the 17 awarded degrees from 2008 to 2013 are awarded after an average study time of 5.38 years. The study time for international students, which in the period 2008-2012 is 7.8 months longer than for an average Danish student, might be partly caused by students who at some point leave the university to visit their home country during their enrolment. The variation between programmes is only noticeable for the doctoral programmes in Law and Business Law and Education and Learning. However, the count of awarded degrees (4 and 5 respectively) is too low to draw any conclusions.

Table 3.8 Average study time for all awarded degrees 2008-2013 (doctoral programmes)

	Men	Women	Danish	International	Internal financing	Co-financing	External financing	Total
Awarded degrees	35	48	66	17	43	16	24	83
Average study time	4.75	4.71	4.56	5.38	4.87	4.36	4.72	4.73

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Sabbaticals (maternity/paternity leave and sickness) are subtracted in table 3.7 and 3.8.

Note: PhDs completed with merits or without previous study time (PhD order, section 15(2)) are subtracted in table 3.7 and 3.8.

Note: Duration of study is the period from enrolment until the Academic Council awards the degree

Table 3.9 Average study time for all awarded degrees 2008 – 2013 (PhD student profiles)

	Sociology/Social Work	Political Science	Innovation and Business	SPIRIT	Law/business law	Education/ learning	Total
Awarded degrees	18	19	20	17	4	5	83
Average study time	4.56	4.83	4.76	4.85	3.56	5.34	4.73

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Discontinuation rates

Another significant indicator of quality in doctoral education is the rate of discontinuation. Table 3.10 illustrates the overall discontinuation rates for PhD students enrolled 2005-2010, as they are expected to finish their projects between 2008 and 2013. The fluctuations between the rates conceal possible trends in discontinuation; however, the table reveals that few PhD students from each of the earlier enrolment years were still active at the turn of 2013 and thus are still not comprised by the initiative for inactive PhD students.

Table 3.10 Development in discontinuation rates, enrolled PhD students 2005-2010

Year of enrolment	Count	Awarded degrees	Disenrolled with no degree	Active (31.12.2013)	Leave/part time	Discontinuation rate (%)
2005	14	12	1	1	0	7.1%
2006	17	11	4	2	0	23.5%
2007	16	12	3	1	0	18.8%
2008	17	13	2	2	0	11.8%
2009	21	13	2	5	1	9.5%
2010	26	5	4	15	2	15.4%
2005-2010	111	66	16	26	3	14.4%

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Discontinuation rates are measured by following the process of each enrolled PhD student from 2005 to 2010.

Note: When subtracting the students disenrolled because of the above mentioned initiative, the total discontinuation rate for students enrolled between 2005 and 2010 is 12.6 %.

Distinctive variations appear in the discontinuation rates distributed on doctoral programmes and student profiles (table 3.12 and 3.13). The total count for each doctoral programme indicates a trend of relatively high discontinuation rates in the doctoral programmes in Sociology and Social Work and Political Science (15.4 % and 19.2 %, respectively), whereas the discontinuation rate for the Innovation and Business programmes is relatively low. The number of enrolled PhD students in the remaining programmes is too low to draw any conclusions.

Table 3.12 Discontinuation rates, doctoral programmes, enrolled PhDs 2005-2010

	Sociology/Social Work	Political Science	Innovation and Business	SPIRIT	Law/business law	Education and learning	Total
Degree	15	16	17	9	3	6	66
No degree	4	5	2	2	1	2	16
Still active	7	5	9	4	1	3	29
Discontinuation rate	15.4%	19.2%	7.1%	13.3%	20.0%	18.2%	14.4%

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Discontinuation rates are measured by following the process of each enrolled PhD student from 2005 to 2010.

Regarding PhD student profiles, table 3.13 shows that discontinuation rates for enrolled PhD students between 2005 and 2010 are a little higher for men than for women, yet the difference is too small to assume a certain tendency. The variations for Danish/international students are more significant; none of the 19 enrolled international students between 2005 and 2010 have been disenrolled without a degree, while the average discontinuation rate for the Danish PhD students is 20 %. The tendency is contrary to the trends in average study time, but the relatively high rate of "still active" for international students (12 of 19) supports the indications from table 3.8 regarding average study time for international PhD students.

Concerning models of financing there is an indication that discontinuation is more prevalent among internal and co-financed PhD stipends, while only 1 of 21 enrolled PhD students with full external financing has been disenrolled without a degree.

Due to the relatively limited data basis of 111 PhD students, the conclusions are not absolute. However, the variety in discontinuation between the different models of financing might indicate a higher degree of research group affiliation among externally financed PhD students, as they are employed in specific research projects, while internal and co-financed PhD students are likely to work more independently with the given research project.

Table 3.13 Discontinuation rates, student profiles, enrolled PhDs 2005-2010, DSSS

	Men	Women	Danish	International	Internal financing	Co-financing	External financing	Total
Degree	30	36	47	19	33	12	21	66
No degree	8	8	16	0	10	5	1	16
Still active	12	17	17	12	10	7	12	29
Discontinuation rate	16.0%	13.1%	20.0%	0.0%	18.9%	20.8%	2.9%	14.4%

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Discontinuation rates are measured by following the process of each enrolled PhD student from 2005 to 2010.

Finally, it is relevant to look at the average study time in relation to discontinuation, since it is a focal point for the DSSS that potential complications in completing a PhD study are detected as early as possible. The latest development in average study time for discontinued PhD students is influenced considerably by the initiatives for completion of inactive PhD students, and therefore table 3.14 does not show the expected decrease in average study time before discontinuation. However, the DSSS expects a pronounced decrease from 2014 and forward, partly because of the comple-

tion of inactive PhD students and partly because of the strategic focus on monitoring the PhD students' progress (procedures for regulating and evaluating the PhD process are evaluated in Chapter 4).

Table 3.14 Average study time for discontinued PhD-students

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Count	1	2	3	0	9	10	25
Average study time (years)	2.5	2.54	1.35	0	3.56	5.32	3.88

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System

Resubmission rates

After the submission of the PhD thesis, the assessment committee makes its recommendation to the institution as to whether the thesis fulfils the requirements for awarding the degree. If it does, the defence can take place, but if the PhD thesis is not recommended for der defence, it may be resubmitted in a revised version within a deadline of at least three months. This right is embedded in the Danish PhD order and carried out at the DSSS in connection with the preliminary assessment of the PhD thesis. Table 3.15 and 3.16 illustrates the rate of resubmission in the total count of 88 awarded degrees in the period 2008 ti 2012. In total, 12 PhD students have resubmitted their thesis at least on time before the PhD defence, and all of them have been awarded their PhD degree subsequently. There are no significant variations in resubmission rates between student profiles, while the variation between doctoral programmes is more or less random because of the low count of resubmissions in the individual programmes.

Table 3.15 Resubmission rates for all awarded degrees 2008 – 2012 (PhD student profiles)

	Men	Women	Danish	International	Internal financing	Co-financing	External financing	Total
Degree	38	50	69	19	45	18	25	88
Resubmission	6	6	10	2	6	2	4	12
Resubmission rate	16%	12%	14%	11%	13%	11%	16%	14%

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: Resubmission rates are measured by relating the number of resubmitted dissertations to the total count of awarded degrees in the period 2008 to 2012.

Table 3.16 Resubmission rates for all awarded degrees 2008-2012 (Doctoral programmes)

	Sociology/Social Work	Political Science	Innovation/ Business	SPIRIT	Law/business law	Education/ learning	Total
Degree	19	20	20	18	5	6	88
Resubmission	3	4	2	1	1	1	12
Resubmission rate	16%	20%	10%	6%	20%	17%	14%

Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Sub-conclusion

The development from the establishment of the DSSS in 2008 to 2013 is characterised by a continual increase in PhD enrolment, which has resulted in a record-breaking PhD population of 154 students by the end of 2013. The largest doctoral programmes in terms of population are Innovation

and Business Economic and Sociology and Social Work. SPIRIT and Education and Learning are cross-faculty programmes, and table 3.2 displays only the share of PhD students enrolled at the DSSS. Strategically and prospectively, the DSSS and the FSS in 2012 aimed to stabilise PhD enrolment and the PhD population with increased focus on completion. There is a majority of women in all of doctoral programmes, especially in Sociology and Social Work and Law and Business Law. Except for the decrease in 2012, the number of annual degrees awarded is increasing. However, DSSS must maintain its focus on the current initiatives related to quality, completion and efficiency in order to stabilise the PhD population with corresponding rates of annual intake and annual completion.

Fundamentally, the legitimacy of PhD education is embedded in the precise and comprehensive procedures for recruitment and compliance with the law. In addition to securing the legal basis, the procedures for each type of employment assure quality in the recruitment practices and thus a PhD programme characterised by talent, efficiency and high completion rates for each PhD profile.

The development in the types of employment/financing models with increasing external financed and especially co-financed PhD stipends was part of a strategy for collaboration with external partners. On the other hand it has been highlighted by the PhD study board as a critical point in terms of securing opportunities to incorporate the doctoral programmes as a strategic element in focusing on specific research profiles. The investigation of possible fluctuations in the level of the different types of enrolled PhD students' master's certificates did not show distinctive variations, which indicates healthy recruitment policies and practices. Only externally financed stipends stand out with a higher average of thesis marks, indicating a higher degree of talent recruitment.

Because of the critical benchmarks between the doctoral schools of social sciences in Denmark, efficiency and average study time became a focal point for the DSSS in its strategic action plan from 2012. Thus, by virtue of these specific initiatives, the DSSS expects a significant drop in the average study time from 2014 and forward.

Significant and interesting variations appeared in the total count of discontinued PhD students from 2008 to 2012. For instance, international PhD students seem to complete their PhD projects with very low discontinuation rates compared to Danish students. Likewise, large variations exist between the different models of financing, where the low discontinuation rates for externally financed stipends can indicate a high level of talent recruitment as well as research group affiliation.

As for the trend in average study time, the DSSS expects a significant drop in the discontinuation rates from 2014 and forward due to the initiative for completing inactive PhD students in 2012 and 2013 and the strategic focus on internal evaluation of the PhD students' progress, thesis guidelines and supervision, which are evaluated in the following sections.

Chapter 4

Quality Assurance of the PhD Process

This chapter evaluates three specific initiatives implemented by DSSS to support quality enhancement, shorten the average duration of the PhD study and facilitate completion of the PhD thesis: (1) a four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress; (2) guidelines for writing a PhD thesis; (3) enhancing the quality of PhD supervision.

4.1. Four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress.

In November 2008 the DSSS decided to implement a new structure for internal progress reports on individual students during their period of study. The progress of the three-year PhD study was earlier assessed in six written bi-annual progress reports. In 2008 the PhD study board decided to reduce the number of reports to four of which two should be oral and somewhat more elaborated. The main purpose was to ensure the quality of the PhD work in progress. In addition it was a method to increase the efficiency of the individual study in order to shorten the average duration of study for our students.

As an essential part of the initiative, each PhD student would receive two oral assessments including advice not only from the supervisors but also from an 'external' discussant – a senior researcher within the research area. This initiative has introduced new and more qualitative perspectives on the internal evaluations as well as a number of deadlines to be respected (see appendices 4.1 and 4.2).

The four-step model is structured as follows:

- 1st Progress report (written): after 6 months
- 2nd Progress report (written and oral): after 12 months
- 3rd Progress report (written): after 24 months
- 4th Progress report (written and oral): after 30 months

The principal supervisor writes the progress reports on the basis of consultations with the PhD student. The supervisor must take periods of documented illness, maternity/paternity leave and other approved leave into account.

Progress report 1 is written 6 months from enrolment date. The report contains the principal supervisor's written evaluation of the progress of the PhD work, a listing of teaching hours, knowledge dissemination hours, and ECTS valued activities. Based on this information, the supervisor states whether the overall progress of the PhD study can be recommended for approval.

Progress report 2 is written and oral and is carried out 12 months from enrolment date. The head of doctoral programme initiates a meeting attended by the PhD student, the principal supervisor

(and possibly the secondary supervisor) and a discussant. The aim is to assess the progress of the PhD project and to decide whether any adjustments of the PhD plan are required.

The principal supervisor is responsible for writing a summary of the meeting, containing a conclusion and information about the participants. In addition the supervisor states whether the overall progress of the PhD study can be recommended for approval.¹¹

Progress report 3 is written 24 months from enrolment date. It contains the principal supervisor's written evaluation of the progress of the PhD work, a listing of teaching hours, knowledge dissemination hours and ECTS valued activities. Based on this information, the supervisor states whether the overall progress of the PhD study can be recommended for approval.

Progress report 4 is written and oral and is carried out 30 months from enrolment date. The head of doctoral programme initiates a meeting attended by the PhD student, the principal supervisor (and possibly a secondary supervisor) and a discussant. The aim is to assess the progress of the PhD project and to disclose any special considerations about the completion of the PhD project within the next six months. Some of the programmes use the term "pre-defence", others "final seminar".

The principal supervisor is responsible for writing a summary of the meeting, containing a conclusion and information about the participants. In addition the supervisor states whether the overall progress of the PhD study can be recommended for approval.

The four-step model has been continuously assessed and refined over the last five years at courses for PhD supervisors, in the management of the doctoral school, at meetings at the department level between head of programmes, PhD students and PhD supervisors as well as in the PhD study board. In 2013 the different elements of the model were closely examined by the study board, and it was stated that the four-step model (and especially the second and the fourth progress reports) are very important initiatives to stimulate the PhD students' completion of their thesis.

Implementation of the four-step model has been difficult and complicated due to the many actors involved. In June 2013 the PhD study board consequently underscored the role and the management responsibilities of the principal supervisor; the role of the discussant, including a statement that the time compensation of 50 hours for the PhD supervisor is too low and finally increasing management support from the PhD secretary, for instance through a digital reminder to the person in charge of the next step (see appendix 4.3).

4.2. Guidelines for writing a PhD thesis

Due to widespread uncertainty among the PhD students about the requirements in the different thesis models, the PhD study board initiated a discussion of this issue in 2011. Some of the questions

¹¹ In connection with all progress reports, the PhD students have the opportunity to submit their comments on the principal supervisor's assessment within two weeks from the date of receipt of the progress report (pursuant to section 10, subsection 1, in the PhD Order). Each progress report must be approved by the head of doctoral programme, the head of department and finally the director of the doctoral school. If the progress report is not approved, the student is given 3 months to get back on course (pursuant to section 10, subsection 2, in the PhD Order).

raised where: How many pages are expected for a monograph? How many articles are expected for a thesis based on articles? Must all articles be published before the thesis is submitted? Is it possible to submit articles with co-authors as a part of the thesis? If you have made an evaluation report for external collaborations partners, do you have to rewrite it for the PhD thesis or can you integrate it? No doubt this uncertainty was not only frustrating for the PhD students; it was also distracting the focus and affecting the efficiency and the completion of the thesis.

After profound discussions, taking the different traditions and subject areas into consideration, the PhD study board reached an agreement across the different programmes to recommend one of the following three models for writing a PhD thesis.

1. A *monograph* is based on individual authorship. It is recommended that the thesis does not exceed 300 pages (all in all).
2. An *article based thesis* typically consists of 4 articles plus 1 summary report of 50 pages. All articles must be qualified for publication, and at least half are expected to be submitted or published. A maximum of half of the articles can be co-authored and the contribution from the PhD student must be substantial and clearly indicated. The final assessment of whether articles are qualified for publication rests with the committee that assesses the thesis, not journal editors and referees.
3. A *combination model* consists of either a) or b)
 - a. A research report with 2 articles. The research report of 75-100 pages can be either a theoretically based analysis of an autonomous problem or a predominantly empirical contribution. A summary may be included in the report or appended separately (approx. 50 pages).
 - b. An empirical research report of approx. 100 pages plus a mainly theoretical report of approx. 100 pages including the summary.

Additionally, it is stated that the decision about the thesis models is closely linked to the subject matter of the thesis and must be discussed thoroughly with the principal supervisor. It is recommended that the thesis model is decided no later than at the 12 month evaluation (second progress report).

It is emphasised, that **these models are guidelines** which means that there may be variations within the different disciplines at the Doctoral School, just as some PhD theses are adjacent to other disciplines with other traditions.

Tabel 4.1. The development in different model of PhD thesis

Model	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Monograph	11	8	13	15	6	19	72
Article based thesis	1	0	0	1	4	2	8
Combination Model	0	0	2	2	2	2	8
Total	12	8	15	18	12	23	88

Source: PhD Manager.

Note: The PhD theses included are submitted theses with subsequently awarded degrees.

The table shows that a huge majority of the awarded PhD degrees are based on monographs. Within the last six years, only 8 were based on articles and only 8 on the combination model. 5 of the article based theses are from Innovation and Business Economics, 2 from Political Science, and 1 from Sociology and Social Work. PhD theses based on the combination model are distributed equally among Sociology and Social Work, Political Science, Innovation and Business Economics, and SPIRIT. However, since 2012 when the models were defined, there has been a slight increase in the share of article based theses. Still the numbers are very small and may be coincidental.

In the workplace assessment (APV/AAU) the PhD students are asked if they knew the requirement for their PhD thesis.

Table 4.2: I know the requirements for my thesis		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	8	15%
To a high degree	19	36%
Partly	20	38%
To a low degree	3	6%
To a very low degree	2	4%
Not relevant	1	2%
Total	53	101%

Source: APV enquiry, Aalborg University, December 2012.

The table shows that half of the PhD students (51%) are aware of the demands for their thesis. Just above one-third (exactly 37.7%) partly know the requirements. The APV data was collected in December 2012 and the different thesis models were defined in the beginning of 2012 after a thorough debate in the PhD study board as well as in the different programmes. On the background of an active debate is it not satisfactory that half of the PhD students indicate that they do not know the requirements of their PhD thesis.

The APV data allow a comparison with responses from PhD students at the other faculties. PhD students at Engineering and Health Sciences know more than the social science PhD students about the requirements for their thesis (62% and 69% respectively answer ‘to a very high degree’ or ‘to a high degree’). The PhD students in the Humanities know a bit less about the requirements (43% answer ‘to a very high degree’ or ‘to a high degree’). One explanation on these differences may be that PhD students in the first two mentioned faculties are more strongly integrated in research groups and in projects managed by senior colleagues.

4.3. Supervision

At the European level supervision is emphasised as one of the most important elements to enhance the quality in doctoral education because the supervisors have the main responsibility for the academic training of the PhD students and are the main link between institutional management and

strategies and their implementation.¹² At the DSSS, the quality of supervision has been a focal point since 2008.

Procedure and management

On recommendation from the Department, the director of the Doctoral School appoints the principal supervisor, who must be a senior researcher (qualifications corresponding to professor or associate professor) within the field of the PhD project. Secondary supervisors can be appointed and the DSSS recommends that it is decided no later than the 12 month assessment (2nd step) whether to appoint a secondary supervisor. Each PhD student is granted 50 hours of supervision each term (if a secondary supervisor is assigned, the hours must be divided, for instance 40/10 or 30/20).

Supervisors' multiple tasks

In 2010 and 2011, Delphi (Network for PhD students at the Faculty level) and the PhD study board had a comprehensive debate about the role and responsibilities for supervisors. The reason was the increasing number of PhD students and PhD supervisors as well as critique from some PhD students who argue that they did not receive sufficient supervision. In November 2011, the PhD study board agreed upon a minute specifying the following areas of responsibility for the principal supervisor:

- Introduce new PhD students to the department, the doctoral programme, research groups and networks (together with the head of doctoral programme)
- Inform the PhD student about the PhD plan and the four-step evaluation model
- Responsible for supervision and for evaluating the progress in the PhD study. It is expected that PhD students meet their supervisor for supervision at least once a month (except vacation periods)
- The form of supervision must be decided between supervisor and PhD student and included in the PhD plan (to be confirmed by the director of DSSS)
- Advise the PhD student about teaching and dissemination of knowledge throughout the PhD study
- Advise the PhD student about PhD courses and support the PhD student in attending seminars and conferences within the research field
- Confirm the PhD plan and carry out the four-step evaluation
- Write a statement that the whole PhD study is fulfilled when the PhD thesis is ready for submission.

(See appendices 4.1 and 4.2)

How many PhD students to supervise?

The number of PhD students for each principal supervisor

Supervisors with 1 PhD student: 34

Supervisors with 2 PhD students: 18

Supervisors with 3 PhD students: 5

Supervisors with 4 PhD students: 2

¹² Byrne et al. (2013) "Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project". EUA Publication 2013, p.28.

Supervisors with 5 PhD students: 0
Supervisors with 6 PhD students: 0
Supervisors with 7 PhD students: 2
Supervisors with 8 PhD students: 1
Supervisors with 9 PhD students: 1

The outline shows that the majority of the principal supervisors are currently supervising one or two PhD students. Two principal supervisors are responsible for 7 PhD students each; one principal supervisor is responsible for 8 PhD students, and finally one is principal supervisor of 9 PhD students.¹³ The Doctoral School has not set any limitations of the number of PhD students per supervisor. The heads of department are responsible for ensuring that the staff is able to handle their tasks, considering the total workload. However, this is an important issue to discuss for instance in the PhD study board and in relation to PhD supervisor courses.

PhD Supervisor Courses

From 2008 to 2012 the DSSS offered 2 PhD supervisor courses. One course was taught by Vernon Trafford (Anglia Ruskin University, UK) and Tony Wigram (AAU). The other course was taught by Johannes Wagner (SDU).¹⁴

When the Strategic Action Plan for the DSSS was adopted in August 2012 one of the main elements was to intensify the focus on supervision of PhD students by providing regularly supervisor courses relevant to both new and more experienced supervisors. The PhD study board decided to recommend mandatory PhD courses and this recommendation was followed by the Dean and the Faculty Management.

The consequence of this decision is that all principal supervisors must attend a course for PhD supervisors either in 2013 or 2014. For principal supervisors who do not attend the courses, the heads of department, who have the staff responsibility, must decide what to do.

The courses are offered (to both principal and secondary supervisors) twice in 2013 and 2014. Professor Linda L. Andersen from Roskilde University is invited as teacher. The theme of the courses is: *Kvalitet i forskeruddannelse – vejledning mellem styring og proces* [*Quality assurance in doctoral training – supervision between management and processes*].

32 principal supervisors attended the courses in autumn 2013 (14 in September 2013; 18 in November 2013). This means that about half of the PhD principal supervisors have attended the courses, which is very satisfactorily. The last 31 supervisors are expected to attend the PhD supervisor courses in autumn 2014.

¹³ At the Doctoral School of Humanities /AAU the majority of the principal supervisors are also responsible for one or two PhD students. However one is the principal supervisor of ten PhD students, cf. Doctoral School of Humanities, Aalborg University: *Internal Evaluation Report*, December 2013. At the Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen no principal supervisor has more than 5 PhD students, cf. Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen: *Self-Reported Evaluation*, October 2012

¹⁴ In 2007, 2 PhD supervisor courses were held in collaboration with Roskilde University.

The supervisor courses in 2013 have been evaluated, and in general the supervisors are satisfied with the content and the teaching. However the evaluations suggest a stronger focus on exchange of experiences among the PhD supervisors, including discussion of complicated supervision cases. (Appendix 4.4)

The next two PhD supervision courses will take place in autumn 2014, and the non-Danish speaking PhD supervisors are invited to participate in a PhD course in English at the Doctoral School of the Humanities, AAU.

The PhD students' assessment of supervision

The APV enquiry/AAU 2012 included a battery of questions specifically directed at the PhD students. Two of the questions concern the PhD students' satisfaction with supervision.

Table 4.3: I am receiving the supervision I need		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	9	17.0%
To a high degree	19	35.8%
Partly	16	30.2%
To a low degree	1	1.9%
To a very low degree	7	13.2%
Not relevant	1	1.9%
Total	53	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry, Aalborg University, December 2012.

A small majority of the PhD students find that they receive the supervision they need since 52.8 % agree “to a very high degree” and “to a high degree”. One-third of the PhD students “partly” agree which is a relatively high share. 13.2% agree, corresponding to seven respondents, “to a very low degree”.

Table 4.4: I find the supervision to be of a high quality		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	10	18.9%
To a high degree	26	49.1%
Partly	10	18.9%
To a low degree	3	5.7%
To a very low degree	3	5.7%
Not relevant	1	1.9%
Total	53	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry, Aalborg University, December 2012.

Table 4.4 concerns the quality of the supervision. In total 68 % of the PhD students find the supervision “to a very high degree” and “to a high degree” to be of a high quality. Just below one-fifth of the students “partly” agree that the supervision has a high quality.

The table shows that the PhD students take an overall positive stand towards the quality of the supervision that they receive.

An interpretation across the two questions indicates that the PhD students in general are satisfied with the quality of the supervision, but many indicate that they do not get the supervision they need. A similar relation between the quality and the volume of supervision is found at the Doctoral School of the Humanities, while the PhD students at Engineering and Medicine Sciences indicate a higher degree of correspondence between quality and volume.

To supplement the above information, the PhD study board has recently decided to ask the PhD students to complete a questionnaire about the PhD process (including supervision) when they have been awarded their degree.

Teaching obligations and the work of assessment committees

Due to the chapter’s focus on selected quality aspects, two important elements have not been discussed: the PhD students’ teaching and knowledge dissemination obligations and the assessment committees’ work. Especially the latter element is strongly regulated by national guidelines.

As regards *teaching obligation and dissemination of knowledge*, the Faculty of Social Sciences reduces the teaching obligations for PhD students from the nationally prescribed 840 to 600 teaching hours. In 2012, a list of possible knowledge dissemination activities besides teaching was prepared in cooperation with the Faculty Management. If the PhD students replace more than 100 hours of teaching with knowledge dissemination it must be approved by the head of department. (See appendices 4.5 and 4.6)

As regards the *assessment of PhD thesis*, the DSSS has recently revised the guidelines for PhD Assessment Committees in order to specify the assessment criteria, the procedures and the structure of the written assessment. To obtain more systematic information on the assessment process, the study board has decided that members of the assessment committee in the future will be asked to complete a questionnaire focusing on the procedure for assessment, the public defence and the level of the assessed PhD thesis. (See appendices 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9)

Sub-conclusion

The *four-step evaluation model* has been a key element in the quality enhancement at the DSSS. The development and implementation of the model have been long and complicated because of the many management procedures and actors. However, agreement on the model has been reached and especially that the 2nd and 4th progress reports (which include an oral presentation and a discussion) are important for the progression in the PhD study and for shortening the completion time and increasing the rate of success.

The common *guidelines for thesis models* were formulated to overcome the PhD students’ uncertainties about the content, form and volume of the thesis. However, in 2012 after the debate on the

guidelines about one-third of the PhD students still indicated that they only partly knew what was required for their thesis. This indicates the necessity of maintaining focus on the issue. A huge majority of the theses are still monographs. However, in recent years there has been a slight increase in the share of article based theses and theses based on a combination model.

Since the DSSS started in 2008, *PhD supervision* has been a basic element of quality enhancement activities. The multiple tasks and responsibilities of the supervisors have been specified, for instance monthly supervisory meetings. The supervisors have many different responsibilities for each PhD student, not only scientific supervision of the PhD thesis but also related to students' teaching, knowledge dissemination and participation in PhD courses as well as administrative management of the PhD study. It is therefore a question whether it is appropriate that some supervisors have 7-9 PhD students. In general, the PhD students are satisfied with the quality of the supervision, but many indicate that they need more. Since 2013, training of supervisors has been intensified through mandatory PhD supervisor courses. Half of the principal supervisors attended the courses in 2013 and the rest of the supervisors are expected to attend the courses in 2014.

Chapter 5

PhD Courses

As a part of the doctoral training the PhD student must participate in PhD courses or similar activities corresponding to 30 ECTS points (6 months full-time studies) (See appendices 1.3, 4.5 and 5.1). The PhD students are expected to attend both generic courses and thematic courses within specific disciplines and subjects. The exact distribution of the courses must be related to the content of the PhD project and the qualifications of the individual PhD student. As mentioned in Chapter 4, advising the PhD student about PhD courses is one of the important tasks for the principal supervisor.

Until 2008 the majority of the offered PhD courses at the DSSS were developed in close cooperation with other institutions based on networks and formal programme partnerships. Such partnerships were typically funded by the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (2002-2012) and were cross-institutional doctoral programmes (for instance The Doctoral Programme for Welfare and Diversity (VoF) and The Danish Political Science Research Programme (PolForsk). The main activities of these programmes were developing and offering PhD courses of the highest international academic standard in order to strengthen the quality of Danish doctoral training. To give an example, 2005-2012 The Doctoral Programme for Welfare and Diversity invited 60 international keynotes and offered 54 PhD courses (35 were hosted at The Faculty of Social Sciences, AAU).¹⁵

Whereas the two cross-institutional doctoral programmes mentioned above became embedded in the DSSS, other programmes decided to continue the cross-institutional partnerships. Some of the most important cross-institutional partnerships for PhD courses in which the DSSS currently participates are:

- FiOL – “The Doctoral Programme in organisation and Management Education”. Collaboration between Danish Universities offering PhD courses in organisation and management studies.
- JurForsk “The Danish Legal Research Education Programme” – partnership between University of Copenhagen, Aarhus University, University of Southern Denmark, Aalborg University and CBS.
- Network for Educational Research – a national network for educational research and a Scandinavian network for action research.
- Network for History, Archaeology and Ethnology – Danish Research network offering an annual PhD course.

From 2008-2012 many PhD courses at DSSS were offered as part of cross-institutional partnerships. At the same time the doctoral school started developing its own courses, especially of the

¹⁵ See additional list of PhD courses and international keynotes at the PhD Programme Welfare and Diversity 2005-2012 (<http://www.soc.aau.dk/forskeruddannelsesprogram/>).

generic type: Academic Information Management, Flow Writing, Academic Writing and Publishing, Qualitative Data Analysis; Basic Course in Pedagogy for University Teachers (mandatory), methodology, etc.

Since 2012 and after the closing of some of the cross-institutional programmes, the DSSS has extended the number of PhD courses¹⁶ for several purposes (cf. Chapter 2 – The Strategic Action Plan):

- To provide a sufficient range of courses for the enrolled PhD students to achieve versatile and deep skills and qualifications.
- To attract other Danish and international PhD students in order to stimulate the academic climate and network related to the PhD process.
- To strengthen the connection between doctoral training and scientific activities in the research groups at the faculty, including for instance active involvement of invited guest researchers in doctoral training.

The content of the PhD course programme is based on proposals from research groups, PhD students and the local PhD programmes. The overall PhD course programme is quality assured and decided in the PhD board. The courses are advertised on the home page of the organising programme, DSSS' home page, and in the national database for PhD courses. Information about upcoming PhD courses is circulated through research networks.

Since 2012 the ambition of DSSS has been to offer *20-25 PhD courses* every year:

In 2012: 18 courses were offered – 4 generic courses and 12 thematic

In 2013: 22 courses were offered – 6 generic courses and 16 thematic.

In 2014: 18 courses are scheduled so far – 7 generic and 11 thematic¹⁷

(See appendix 5.2)

In 2012, 11 PhD courses were offered in English; in 2013, 18 PhD courses were in English. All together approximately *30 international keynotes* have been invited to PhD courses during the last two years which indicates that the courses constitute an important dimension in internationalisation of the PhD education as well as the internationalisation of the faculty.

In 2012 and 2013, the majority of the PhD courses was held by Sociology and Social Work (12 courses) and by Innovation and Business Economics (10 courses). Spirit hosted 7 courses and Political Sciences 5 courses. Education, Learning and Philosophy and Law/Business Law each hosted 2 courses. A few courses have been organised by Aalborg University Library and Learning Lab. The numbers are based on grants given to the programme responsible for organising the courses. However, many courses are interdisciplinary and address PhD students across different programmes. Note also that two of the PhD programmes cover two faculties, which means that their total number of PhD courses is not registered here. Finally, some courses are offered by cross-institutional part-

¹⁶ PhD supervisor courses are not included here but evaluated in Chapter 4.

¹⁷ The generic courses include method and methodology courses, for instance quantitative, qualitative and mixed method.

nerships like FiOl and JurForsk, and only the courses of which AAU has been in charge are included in the registration.

The average number of PhD students participating in each course was 13 in 2012 and 17 in 2013. Unfortunately the DSSS has not made a systematic registration of the amount of 'external' participants (not enrolled at the DSSS). But the general impression is that an increasing share of the participants is external, and the PhD board has therefore decided that from 2013 external participants are charged a fee for generic courses.^{18 19}

All PhD courses (2008-2012) have been evaluated via a questionnaire for participants. Subsequently the course organisers are supposed to summarise the answers and give their own comments as well as suggestions for improvement. The summaries (together with the results of the questionnaire) are submitted to the DSSS and subsequently evaluated by the PhD board.

Of course, evaluation results differ but overall the evaluations are positive. They confirm that the strategic priority on expanding and strengthening the PhD course activity during the last 2-3 year has improved the quality of the doctoral training. The evaluations also confirm the usefulness of combining courses which are offered on a regular basis every year or every two years (typically generic courses) with courses related to the current content of the different programmes and activities in the research groups.

In future two issues calls for discussion in the continuing improvement of the PhD courses. The first is to examine the needs for and possibilities of offering PhD courses on different academic levels. This has already been debated for courses in sociological method where there seems to be a need to differentiate between basic courses aimed at PhD students who have not been trained in sociological methods and advanced methodology courses aimed at other types of PhD students (for instance with a degree in sociology). The second question concerns career development for PhD students. The need for transferable skills which can be used in a wider range of careers in a European context has been emphasised as an essential part of the doctoral training.²⁰

Sub-conclusion

From 2008-2012, PhD courses were to a large extent provided in cross-institutional partnerships. Some partnerships ended, others continued. Since 2012, the target for DSSS has been to offer 20-25 PhD courses (including generic as well as thematic courses). This target has been fulfilled for 2013 (and will be for 2014). The main part of the PhD course programme is developed from below based on suggestions from PhD students, research groups and PhD programmes. The PhD courses have a strong international profile, which is possible because the doctoral school and the faculty allocate resources to invite international keynote speakers. In this perspective, the PhD courses contribute to internationalisation of the PhD studies and to strengthen the international profile and network at the faculty.

¹⁸ The balance between internal and external participants attending PhD courses at DSSS will be registered in the future as a part of the evaluation and the course organisers' summary of the course.

¹⁹ Charges for generic courses are part of the "[Open Market Agreement](#)" for PhD courses. Thematic courses are free, while generic courses may have a fee of up to DKK 1,200 per ECTS.

²⁰ Byrne et al. (2013) "Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project". EUA Publication 2013, p. 40.

Chapter 6

International Profile

In the implementation of the strategic action plan (appendix 3.3) and with reference to the faculty's internationalisation strategy,²¹ a series of initiatives have been launched to strengthen the international profile of the school. Delimited to the initiatives by the doctoral school, and without considering the many decentralised international activities in the doctoral programmes, this chapter evaluates the status and development of the international environment for doctoral education at the DSSS with focus on global recruitment, student mobility and international cooperation.

Recruitment of international PhD students

A large proportion of international students is not a goal in itself, yet the DSSS prioritises optimal conditions for international students in order to attract international talent and in general to internationalise its research environment. These conditions are ensured through a bilingual doctoral school where all relevant information is available in Danish and English, the internationally oriented research environments, and the development of the doctoral school's PhD course portfolio, which was described in the previous chapter.

Table 3.1 and 3.2 in chapter 3 illustrate the annual intake and current population of international PhD students and a significant variation in nationalities between the doctoral programmes. SPIRIT and the Innovation and Business Economics Programmes have the highest population of international PhD students (nearly 40 %), while there are very few international students in the doctoral programmes in Sociology and Social Work and Law and Business Law. The uneven distribution of international PhD students is mainly due to academic relevance, but also to traditions in the departments. As stated in chapter 3, the international PhD students have high completion rates compared to Danish students, though notably longer average study time.

Comparing the annual enrolment with population and completion, it shows that the average rate of enrolled international PhD students from 2008 to 2013 is 18 % (with the lowest rates from 2011 to 2013), while the international students make up 22 % of the present population and 22 % of the annual degrees awarded (table 3.2 and 3.3). It is thus expected that the doctoral school will experience a marginal decrease in the population of international PhD students in the following years, contrary to the strategic aim of strengthening the international profile.

International PhD student mobility

Encouraging student mobility/stays abroad is part of the school's strategic action plan, since it is considered an important element in the PhD students' personal and academic development. Furthermore, the following declaration of intent is stated in Danish PhD order: "*During the programme, the student is required to: Participate in active research environments, including stays at other, mainly foreign, research institutions, private research enterprises etc.*" (section 7(2)/appendix 1.3).

²¹ Internationaliseringsstrategi for Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Fakultet, Aalborg Universitet, november 2012.

The increased focus first of all resulted in a mapping of the study abroad periods for completed students between 2009 and 2013 showed that a high share of PhD students, especially in SPIRIT and Innovation Economics and Business Economics, already choose to study abroad (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2). Another outcome was an initiative for a website for social science PhD students with information on planning, economy, insurance and other important aspects of studying abroad (appendix 6.1).

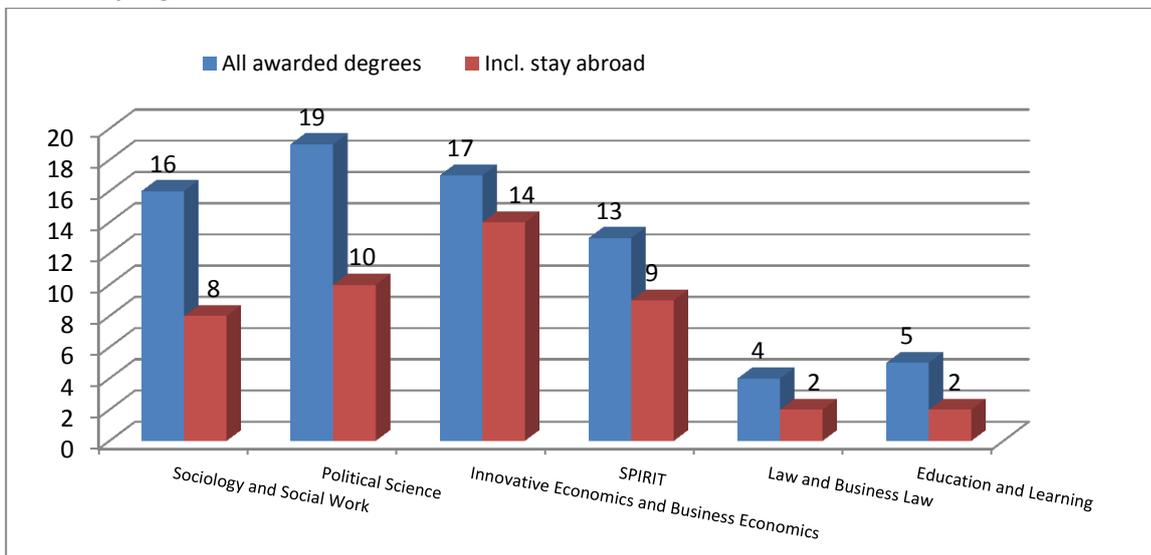
Figure 6.1 Share of completed PhD students who have studied abroad (%)



Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: PhD students enrolled under section 15(2) are subtracted as they are awarded a degree without a preceding period of study.

Figure 6.2 Share of completed PhD students from 2009-2013 who have studied abroad, distributed on doctoral programmes



Source: AAU's PhD Manager System.

Note: PhD students enrolled under section 15(2) are subtracted as they are awarded a degree without a preceding period of study.

Ensuring optimal conditions for international cooperation

Among the strategic initiatives for strengthening the international profile of DSSS is increased focus on bilateral agreements for international doctoral education partnerships, where the settings for entering agreements about joint and double degree PhD projects have been improved significantly. Guidelines for both joint and double degree partnerships have been made available on the website, where the doctoral programmes and potential partner universities can get information about the potentials and limitations of the two models, how to comply with legal requirements, financial aspects, agreement procedures etc. (appendix 6.2). A set of internal rules for international doctoral education partnerships has been formulated by the PhD study board and approved by the director of the doctoral school and the Dean, in order to secure quality in the entered agreements (appendix 6.3). The internal rules first of all contain agreement and recruitment procedures to ensure that the partner university has the required academic level, that the PhD student has the required qualifications, and procedures for PhD progress and completion equivalent to those for ordinary PhD students. Additionally, the DSSS requires that the duration of the required exchange programme must be minimum 6 months, before the degree can be awarded. This has been added to the legal requirements to ensure closer cooperation between the partner universities, and a greater extent of “joint” studies with regard to double degree partnerships. Lastly, standard forms for framework agreements and individual study agreements for both joint and double degree partnerships have been produced and made available on the doctoral school website (appendices 6.4 and 6.5).

As a result of the initiatives to ensure optimal conditions for international cooperation, the DSSS has entered framework agreements with the following three institutions:

- University of Málaga, Spain
- Quilmes National University, Argentina
- University of Ghent, Belgium

One individual agreement about a double degree project has been made with University of Málaga, and two individual agreements about joint degree projects have been made with Quilmes National University and University of Ghent. Negotiations with additional universities have been initiated, including University of Massachusetts in Boston. However, the target is that more doctoral programmes will act on the opportunities given by the joint and double degree partnership models.

Sub-conclusion

With regard to global recruitment, the DSSS has ensured good conditions for international students in terms of information access and an internationally oriented PhD course portfolio, and the population of international students is relatively high (22 % of the total population), though concentrated on specific doctoral programmes. The indications of stagnation and possibly a decline in the proportion of international students (18 % enrolment rate from 2008 to 2013) is likely related to the previously described development in models of financing. The objective is to maintain the present rate of international students.

The development in PhD student mobility is fluctuating, though showing concentration of studies abroad in SPIRIT and Innovation Economics and Business Economics. A few focused initiatives to

increase PhD students' desire to study abroad have been made, and focus on this specific aspect will continue in 2014 and forward.

The signing of formal international doctoral education partnerships is still at an infant stage, but the settings and framework for entering the agreements are in place. Thus, future focus will be on local implementation in the doctoral programmes by utilising the potentials of joint and double degree partnerships.

Chapter 7

Working Environment and Affiliation to Research Groups

This chapter evaluates the last of the prioritised focal points outlined in the introduction, namely working conditions and affiliation with colleagues. The DSSS sees job satisfaction and research group affiliation as vital elements in the doctoral education with great impact on efficiency and quality in the PhD progress as well as discontinuation rates. Selected relevant results from the *Workplace Assessment (APV)* form the basis for the following discussion of the working environment for PhD students enrolled at the DSSS.²²

General working environment

In the APV enquiry from December 2012 all staff members at AAU were questioned about general working conditions, work load, stress, recognition and conflicts. The PhD students' responses are discussed below.

Concerning work load, 36.4 % of the PhD students partly agree that demands concerning the work are too high, whereas only one PhD student indicates 'to a high degree'. It is difficult to interpret the incentive to answer "partly agree", but there is an indication of a well-balanced work load for PhD students at the DSSS, since the vast majority either partly agrees or agrees to a low degree that demands concerning work are too high.

Table 7.1: There are too high demands concerning my work		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	0	0.0%
To a high degree	1	1.8%
Partly	20	36.4%
To a low degree	22	40.0%
To a very low degree	5	9.1%
Not relevant	7	12.7%
Total	55	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

Table 7.2 examines work-related, long-term or intense stress. Stress is defined as follows:

“Stress is defined as an imbalance between what is demanded of a person and the resources he or she believes to have when dealing with these. Short-term stress is enabling a person to provide his/her best, while long-term and intense stress is a state of tension and pain which can have undesirable health consequences.”

²² The data basis is too small to analyse the distribution of answers across doctoral programmes, so the subject of analysis is the DSSS as a whole.

The majority (63.7 %) responded that long-term or intense stress occurs to a low or a very low degree. Just above one-fifth report that they are partly burdened by long-term stress, while fewer than 10 % experience long-term or intense stress to a high or very high degree.

Table 7.2: I am burdened by long-term or intense stress		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	2	3.6%
To a high degree	3	5.5%
Partly	13	23.6%
To a low degree	21	38.2%
To a very low degree	14	25.5%
Not relevant	2	3.6%
Total	55	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

The DSSS considers recognition important for a healthy working environment. The results in table 7.3 are a bit scattered, but almost half receive appropriate recognition “to a high degree” or “to a very high degree”, while 14 % feel that they do not receive appropriate recognition. Again approximately one third partly agrees. Even though the result is predominantly positive, it will be a forward target for the DSSS to increase the rate of students who feel appropriately recognised.

Table 7.3: I receive an appropriate amount of recognition for my work		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	6	10.5%
To a high degree	21	36.8%
Partly	21	36.8%
To a low degree	6	10.5%
To a very low degree	2	3.5%
Not relevant	1	1.8%
Total	57	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

With regard to conflicts at the workplace, table 7.4 shows that most PhD students only to a “low degree” or “very low degree” feel burdened. Notably, 20 % are “partly” or “to a high degree” burdened by conflicts at the workplace.

Table 7.4: I am burdened by conflicts at my workplace		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	0	0.0%
To a high degree	3	5.5%
Partly	8	14.5%
To a low degree	22	40.0%
To a very low degree	18	32.7%
Not relevant	4	7.3%
Total	55	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

Research group affiliation

Concerning doctoral education, biases exist that PhD students often are “left alone” to work independently with their research project.²³ As stated earlier, research group affiliation is considered vital for the development of PhD students’ qualifications and for the progress of the PhD project. As far as affiliation, the APV enquired about support from colleagues, professional feedback and sense of loneliness.

On “support from colleagues”, table 7.5 shows that 76.3 % agree that they receive the support from colleagues they need, while only one PhD student disagrees. The positive indications from table 7.5 change a bit when the wording is changed from “support” in table 7.5 to “professional feedback” in table 7.6. Thus, only 54.6 % agree that they receive the professional feedback they need, while the percentage was 76.3 concerning “support”. A similar picture was identified in chapter 4, where the PhD students expressed satisfaction with the quality in the supervision, but less satisfaction with the volume of supervision.

Table 7.5: My colleagues provide me with the support that I need		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	13	23.6%
To a high degree	29	52.7%
Partly	11	20.0%
To a low degree	0	0.0%
To a very low degree	1	1.8%
Not relevant	1	1.8%
Total	55	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

Table 7.6: I am receiving the professional feedback that I need from my colleagues		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	9	16.4%
To a high degree	21	38.2%
Partly	19	34.5%
To a low degree	4	7.3%
To a very low degree	1	1.8%
Not relevant	1	1.8%
Total	55	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

Indications that PhD students to some degree work independently with their research projects appear in table 7.7 where the feeling of loneliness is questioned. Just above half agree to a high degree

²³ Estelle Phillips, Derek.S. Pugh: How to get a PhD. Handbook for students and their supervisors, Open University Press, 2005

or partly agree that they feel lonely. The result on this specific question is not explicit by may support earlier predictions that research group affiliation varies in terms of employment/models of financing.

Table 7.7: I feel lonely in my work at AAU		
	Respondents	Percent
To a very high degree	3	5.5%
To a high degree	9	16.4%
Partly	17	30.9%
To a low degree	15	27.3%
To a very low degree	9	16.4%
Not relevant	2	3.6%
Total	55	100.0%

Source: APV enquiry/AAU 2012

Sub-conclusion

With regard to stress and demands concerning work, the results indicate a relatively balanced level of demands and work load, though some PhD students appear to be somewhat burdened by long-term or intense stress. Thus rather than reducing PhD student obligations, focus should be on stress symptoms and the general wellbeing of the individual students, either through supervision and staff development interviews, but probably most importantly through everyday interaction between colleagues.

Most PhD students agree or partly agree that they receive sufficient recognition for their work, but it is not satisfactory that some students do not agree and many only partly agree. Recognition is important for the motivation to progress and improve, and improvements in this specific aspect should be possible to reach in the individual doctoral programmes through processing in the PhD study board.

Elaborating specifically on research group affiliation as an aspect of the working environment for PhD students, the results from the APV indicate that PhD students receive a high degree of support from their colleagues, though the responses are more mediocre when it comes to professional feedback. Additionally a relatively large group to some degree feels lonely in their work at AAU. It is difficult to conclude on the somewhat conflicting results concerning affiliation, but one explanation could be that the general working environment including personal relations to colleagues is satisfactory, while professional and academic affiliation is more scattered.

Differences in working environment and research group affiliation between doctoral programmes and models of employment need further investigation, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Strategic Perspectives

The conclusion will follow the structure of the Strategic Action Plan (2012-2015) presented in Chapter 2 (appendix 3.3). (Readers who need a more detailed summary of the report are referred to the sub-conclusions after each chapter).

This chapter assesses achievements on the targets and sub-targets formulated two years ago in the Strategic Action Plan and asks which future targets should be considered. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the strategy was a part of the general quality assurance of the DSSS and when formulated in 2012 it consisted of nine elements; in 2013, the element about career paths for PhD students was added.

1. COMPLETION AND QUALITY OF THE PHD PROCESS

(“Efficiency improvements and completion of present and future PhD projects”)

This element has been evaluated primarily in chapter 3 and 4 emphasising the following items:

- Initiative related to inactive PhD students significantly behind schedule
- Four-step model for monitoring the PhD students’ progress
- Guidelines for writing a PhD thesis
- Supervision (including mandatory supervisor courses)

The main conclusion is that these items constitute cornerstones in the management of the PhD process in order to support quality enhancement, shorten average time and facilitate completion of the PhD thesis within the stipulated three years duration of the PhD study.

The first item (Initiative related to inactive PhD) may blur the current picture of DSSS efficiency. On the one hand, the initiative has contributed significantly to the rise in awarded degrees by helping some of the inactive PhD students complete. On the other hand it has resulted in a temporary increase in average study time and in the rate of discontinuation. Since the initiative has been completed, the average study time and rate of discontinuation is expected to decrease from 2014.

2. INTERNATIONALISATION

(“Strengthening the Doctoral School’s international profile, including development of joint and double degrees”)

This element is especially evaluated in Chapter 6 but also included in Chapter 5

The target of strengthening internationalisation has to a high degree been achieved. However, the differences in the distribution of international students and the level of international mobility between the doctoral programmes remain issues. Future targets could thus be to consider new initiatives aimed at the profiles of the doctoral programmes.

The settings and framework for international doctoral education partnership (joint and double degrees) have been established, but implementation of the framework in actual PhD projects is still in

a very early stage. Future targets could be to increase focus on implementation at the department level, in relation to the doctoral programmes and active research groups.

3. CROOS-INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES

(“Embedding of previous cross-institutional doctoral programmes and development of new interdisciplinary PhD cooperation agreements in Denmark”)

This element is evaluated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5

This target has been achieved. Some of the cross-institutional programmes have been embedded in the DSSS, others continue in a cross-institutional setting.

4. PhD Courses

This element is evaluated in Chapter 5

The development of PhD courses with a high international profile has been an on-going process since DSSS started in 2008. The sub-target decided in 2012 to provide 20-25 PhD courses annually has been achieved from 2013.

A possible future target is to provide PhD courses at different levels within specific areas. Another is to secure that the PhD courses as a whole give the PhD students transferable skills that can be used in the PhD project as well as “in a wide range of careers”.²⁴

5. RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT AND PHD STUDENTS’ AFFILIATION WITH RESEARCH GROUPS

(“Ensuring optimal everyday conditions for the PhD students”)

This element has been a focal point throughout this report and especially in Chapter 1 and 7.

The data indicate that PhD students in all PhD programmes are expected to be affiliated with a research group as an important part of their daily work environment. This framework for the daily work of the PhD students has a high priority at both department and faculty level because it gives optimum conditions for academic learning processes and reduces the risk of isolation and loneliness among the PhD students.

However, this is not always realised in practice. The PhD students’ response in the APV enquiry show a more blurred picture: on the one hand they feel recognised by their colleagues, but on the other hand they need more feedback. Additionally the levels of stress and loneliness indicated in the survey are too high.

²⁴ Byrne Joanne et al *Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project*. EUA Publications, Belgium 2013, p. 36.

There are several suggestions for future targets within this area: (a) to communicate to the research groups the importance of the affiliation of PhD students but at the same time emphasise the need for ‘active involvement’ – for instance through progressive presentations of the PhD project. (b) More information on this issue through additional investigations e.g. based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The next APV enquiry might include more questions specifically for PhD students and be followed up by qualitative investigations based on focus group interviews and/or qualitative interviews with the PhD students. (c) Acquiring more information about PhD students who drop out.

6. DELPHI AND NETWORKS

(“Support to the PhD students’ organisations and networks”)

This element is evaluated in Chapter 1 and 7

This target has been achieved. A possible future target could be mentoring schemes.

7. CAREER DEVELOPMENT

(“Career paths and research strategies for PhDs”)

New element added in 2013 and not included in the self-evaluation.

In light of the increasing number of PhD students, initiatives were launched in 2013 to make their career paths and opportunities more transparent. Likewise, the PhD students’ internal and external career paths will be made more transparent, e.g. via the Faculty’s research strategy, which has increased focus on young researchers’ opportunities and competences, for example in terms of obtaining external grants (e.g. postdoc positions).

Targets: An investigation of employment patterns of all graduated PhD candidates from Aalborg University over the past 10 years is planned for the autumn of 2014. The investigation will be based on register data and conducted by researchers from Department of Business and Management, AAU). In the spring of 2015, a career conference is planned, focusing on PhD candidates graduated from Aalborg University. Issues will include employment and career paths; transferable skills; and professional development and career tracking.

Both the employment analysis and the conference will be conducted in cooperation with the other doctoral schools at AAU.

This new element is suggested as a focal point for the DSSS in the two next two years because it is a significant dimension for further quality enhancement of doctoral training.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. the recommendations from European University Association (EUA) 2010, Salzburg II Recommendations.

8. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

(“Continuing focus on administrative efficiency improvements”)

This element has been evaluated throughout the evaluation report

Since 2008, management and administrative efficiency have been developed in accordance with external and internal quality assurance processes at all levels.

In 2014 two important improvements will be fully implemented:

- The IT-system PhD Manager (evaluation of PhD plans and the four-step model for monitoring the PhD students' progress)
- VBN system for submitting PhD dissertations (including control for plagiarism)

Future measures for improving management and administrative procedures to be implemented:

- Questionnaire for PhD candidates after awarded degree
- Questionnaire for member of Assessment Committee
- Evaluation of the four-step model among the PhD students
- Evaluation of teaching and knowledge dissemination

9. ANNUAL REPORTS

(“Annual reports and ongoing progress reports for the development of the Doctoral School”)

This target has been achieved. Annual reports have been published in 2012 and 2013. Future reports will focus on developing and monitoring the strategic action plan.

10. THE INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION 2014

This is in process. After completion of the self-evaluation report the site visit by the international evaluation panel will take place in May and the panel's report will be delivered medium 2014.

In the autumn the international evaluation will be processed by the PhD Board, the Faculty Management and the Academic Council in order to adjust the strategic action plan. Following this, a cross-disciplinary discussion of the evaluations between the four doctoral schools at AAU will take place. Finally, ultimo 2014, the Strategic Action Plan for the DSSS will be revised based on the outcome of the evaluation process.

List of References

Annual Report, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Aalborg University 2012.

Annual Report, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Aalborg University, 2013.

Borchorst Anette, Ruth Emerek, Britt Østergaard Larsen and Dorte Cohr Lützen: *Ligestilling – ad nye veje : køn i forskningsstillinger på Aalborg Universitet – Undersøgelsesresultater og handlingsforslag*, Aalborg Universitet 2008.

Byrne Joanne, Thomas Jørgensen and Tia Loukkola: *Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education – results of the ARDE project*. EUA Publications, Belgium, 2013.

Doctoral School of Humanities, Aalborg University: *Internal Evaluation Report*, December 2013

Emerek, Ruth and Britt Østergaard Larsen “The first steps into a ‘leaky pipeline’ – a longitudinal study of the pipeline within a Danish University”, *Brussels Economic Review*, Vol 54 (2/3), 2011

Estelle Phillips, Derek.S. Pugh: *How to get a PhD. Handbook for students and their supervisors*, Open University Press, 2005.

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Helsinki, 2009.

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*, Occasional Papers 19, 2013.

European University Association (EUA): *Salzburg II Recommendations: European Universities Achievements since 2005 in implementing the Salzburg Principles*, Brussels 2010.

Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen: *Self-Reported Evaluation*, October 2012

Internationaliseringsstrategi for Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Fakultet, Aalborg Universitet, november 2012

Året 2013, Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Fakultet, Aalborg Universitet, 2014