

To the Executive Board of EDAMBA

Appraisal of Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Aalborg University

1. Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Ann Cathrine Criddle and Dr Poul Andersen for helping us to organize our visit.

We are grateful to the programme directors, senior management, staff and PhD students who dedicated time to share their experience and explain to us the organization of their PhD programme.

2. Introduction

The appraisal visit team comprised Hans Siggaard Jensen and François Collet

The AAU Doctoral School for Social Sciences of the University of Aalborg was created in 2008 and is currently going through a major transformation. From 2019, the school is expected to host four doctoral programs: Sociology and Social Work, Political Science, Business Economics, Law and Business Law within the department of business and management.

3. The overall research and doctoral education strategy of the applicant

Research Strategy of the School

The research strategy of the School of Social Science aims to grow its applied and basic research activities alongside different mutually complementary dimensions: funding, international collaborations and influence on society. Further, the school aims to maintain focus on ethics and freedom. Last, the school aims to increase the number of international students.

Developing PhD activities is part of the action plan to achieve these goals. Further, the school plans to facilitate the affiliation of international faculty, evaluate research outputs, focus on the impact that research may have on society. Inter-disciplinary research is considered to be a means to achieve goals.

To increase the level of resources, the school participate in competitive funding and other type of external funding. This is partly due to funding cuts at the University and State level.

Doctoral Education Strategy

There has been an increase in the number of international students which is consistent with the aim of internationalizing the school. In contrast, a very high percentage of the faculty remains local (90%)

The faculty is research active and publishes both in English and in Danish. There has been a decline of PhD due to cut off funding by the Danish state, budget decisions at the University level and pressure of some faculty to hire post-docs.

A few students follow the 4+4 model, which starts to recruit at the Master level (double affiliation Master Student/PhD).

4. Research environment

The faculty of Business and economics is organized by research groups. Students are socialized with the work of the group and present their own work to the group.

There are different types of seminars: Early stage papers, full papers, pre-conference papers, Publication clinic to deal with reviewers, how to write an introduction, pre-defenses workshop: discussant of each chapters. Further students prepare posters, send papers to conferences. Seminars are monthly. Students presents regularly (6 months, 1 year).

The innovation groups organizes a PhD student's conference. Further, belonging to DRUID is used a means to have PhD students meeting with other programs. DRUID is a Danish research association that focuses research on innovation and the dynamics of structural, institutional and geographic change. The DRUID annual conference is an international reference in this research area.

In some groups, faculty work on papers with PhD students. In other groups, there is more of a separation.

35% percent PhD students are from abroad.

The two campuses (Aalborg & Copenhagen) makes integration difficult and require a considerable amount of effort. Systematic effort are to maintain the two locations integrated with monthly compulsory meeting on the Aalborg site.

The process of supervision is well organized:

- It is customary to have 2 supervisors. The supervisors are suggested by the head of department and approved by the head of the doctoral school
- Supervisors take a 2 days course in PhD supervision that they need to do take. The course creates a network across departments.
- Qualification to supervise: being PhD a holder at associate professor level (approximately 90 faculty are qualified and 25-30 supervise)

Candidates apply to PhD positions, which ensure the fit between the candidate and the supervisor Students work with faculty as junior colleagues.

The PhD board has 2 students' representatives that are elected by the students. Students have office spaces and work on site.

The school encourages mobility and provides funding. Students go away 3 months abroad and attend international research conferences.

For student welfare, there is an office work place environment. The secretaries of the program also play an important role.

5. Admission

Position are advertised on the web of the school. The announcement provides detailed information and an application deadline.

Requirements (e.g. previous education, TOEFL, GMAT, etc.):

- Candidates have to demonstrate their level of English through a standardized English as foreign language test (IELTS)
- Candidates to the PhD program need to hold an MSc in the Social Sciences, Law or equivalent.
- No prior research training/experience is required.

Master students at Aalborg have traditionally been a source of recruitment. It is not easy to recruit highly talented students. Top students are offered an internship until a

PhD position opens. A substantial number of students come from Aalborg (Approximately half). The field of applicants is broad. The Copenhagen campus gets more applications.

Assessment criteria (prior academic results and achievements)

- The faculty select the students and propose to admit students.
- The head of department , head of program make the final decision
- The program evaluates the feasibility, consistency and the methods of the research project.
- Candidates apply to PhD positions, which ensure the fit between the candidate and the supervisor
- The faculty interviews candidates.

Overall the system of recruitment is well designed and set up to ensure quality of the candidates admitted into the program.

6. The doctoral programme under consideration for membership

The doctoral school is independent from the school management.

- structure of the programme(s):
 - The program follows Danish regulations and comprises several steps.
 - 3 month submission of PhD plan
 - 6 months progress report
 - 12 months second progress report
 - 24 months third progress report
 - 30 months fourth progress report
 - 36 months submission of thesis
- The coursework amounts to 30 ECTS credits.
- The duration of the program is 3 years. Some extensions are possible but the program aims to maintain the duration of the program as close as possible to 3 years.
- There are double degree agreements with Chinese Academy of Science. Other agreements. A supervisor is in Aalborg, the other in China. First PhD student has to graduate yet. This is a new project.
- Funding and financial support (scholarships, tuition, etc.)
 - Students are funded by the Danish state of a research fund from a project. The level of funding of the University has been decreasing.

- There is funding to participate in external PhD courses, research conferences, and buy computer software.

Doctoral courses (content, duration, mandatory, electives, exam and evaluation); do they support the learning of sound research designs, the ability to use relevant theories and critical thinking throughout the process?

There is a core body of course taught at Aalborg. However, students very often take short courses that are organized through an informal network (faculty) with funds of the group.

- Training varies considerably as a function of the area of specialization.
- Core course common to all students are Academic writing, Research Ethics (Danish Code of Conduct for Research), and Pedagogy.
- There limited internal training For example, the Business and Economics candidates take a course on theory building, an epistemology course (“reflexivity in organizational research”), a course in Economics and course a RUNIN course and how Universities contribute to regional development.
- Supervisor arrange training through external courses in Danish Universities but also in other types of Universities.
- The program clearly nurtures a critical reflective behavior through course in research ethics, the role of regional universities. In the Business Economics program, the course on reflexivity also train students to think critically.
- All students in all area of specialization take a course in the ethics of research.

The limitation of the course offering is due to the size of each program within the school.

The school is setting a limit of 2 students supervised by faculty.

Students are required to teach. Teaching workload is counted in hours: 600 h over 3 years. 200 hours. 1 contact hour = 5 hours. About 40 hours in total. Alternatively, the students can manage 5 project groups.

7. The doctoral thesis and defense

- the format of theses (monography, article-based, language)
 - The internal regulations do not specify the format (monography or articles) of the thesis.
 - The thesis can be written in Danish or English and should include a summary in both languages. Most theses are written in English.
 - Theses committee have 3 members. 1 internal, 1 external Danish, 1 international. In the Business Economics, there are 2 international faculty. There is a requirement to have gender representation.
 - Defense is oral with open evaluation

The format of the thesis and the defense is well organized and is meant to help the candidate to get quality feed-bac.

8. The key stakeholders

During our appraisal visit we met with key stakeholders of the PhD program.

9:00-10:00 Meet with programme directors and senior management	
Rasmus Antoft	Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
Søren Kristiansen	Vice Dean, Research, Faculty of Social Sciences
Poul Houman Andersen	PhD Study Director
Christian Richter Østergaard	Head of PhD-programme, Department of Business and Management
10:00-11:00 Meet with supervisors and staff involved in delivering modules on the PhD programme	
Janne Seemann	Department of Sociology and Social Work
Dmitrij Slepnirov	Department of Business and Management
Christian Richter Østergaard	Department of Business and Management
Jesper Lindgaard Christensen	Department of Business and Management
11:00-12:30 Tour of facilities and access to programme documentation & theses	
Dorte Baymler	Department of Business and Management
Anne Lone Bråten	AAU PhD
Ann Cathrine Criddle	AAU PhD
13:15-13:45 Meet with PhD students	
Sascha Struwe	Department of Business and Management
Annette Willemoes	Department of Business and Management

Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen	Department of Sociology and Social Work
Olivia Benfeldt	Department of Political Science
13:45-14:45 Meet with programme officers	
Christian Richter Østergaard	Department of Business and Management
Lars Skov Henriksen	Department of Sociology and Social Work
Morten Balle Henriksen	Department of Political Science

The program directors, supervisors and administrative staff provided in-depth explanations. The team is highly professional and committed to develop doctoral research at a high level and provide support to the PhD students. The PhD students provided us also a very good insight into their projects, how their work is organized.

9. The quality assurance and monitoring of progress

- At the level of the PhD student (frequency of monitoring and evaluating of milestones and deliveries)
 - There are several milestones (months 3, 6, 12, 24, 30 and 36) during the PhD process. These provide a structure for the evaluation of progress of the PhD student.
- At the level of the supervisor:
 - The main supervisor formally confirms at 4 points during the doctoral program that the student is making progress. Supervisors are expected to meet at a minimum once a month with the students.
- at the programme level
- at School level

12. Proposal to the EDAMBA Executive Committee

We make an unconditional recommendation for the admission committee. The program is very professional. The strong point is the socialization of students into research processes, which ensure that PhD candidates progressively integrate in the research community. The facilities and administrative support is excellent. The weak-point of the program is the offering of course, which remains limited and is partly a constraint associated with scale. Overall, the program is very well organized and train good junior researchers.