

## **TIME FOR CHANGE**

### **The future Danish university policy**

An explanatory memorandum to the political agreement on new university legislation

The Danish universities are vital social institutions that generate and disseminate knowledge and competencies to the entire society.

The increase in national and international competition for knowledge and competencies places new and intensified demands on the Danish universities – as well as on their interaction with the rest of the knowledge system.

A reform of the Danish universities must therefore strengthen the efficiency and resolution of the universities as well as increase their interaction with society. The reform should ensure greater openness, increased academic self-determination and the freedom to decide its own internal organisation within the legislative framework. The reform and its implementation should be based on known and stable financial frameworks.

The future university policy in Denmark can be summed up with the words: freedom with responsibility.

The main elements in the reform are:

1. The universities' duty portfolios
2. Research-based education
3. Management
  - 3.a. Boards of Directors
  - 3.b. Managerial staff
  - 3.c. Academic Councils and Curriculum Boards
4. Internal quality assurance and quality development
5. Advisory panels
6. Steering
7. Independent ownership and regulations
8. Deregulation

#### **1. The universities' duty portfolios**

The purpose of the universities is to conduct research and provide research-based education at a high level of international excellence. And a university should, based on its research and study programmes, contribute research results and knowledge to society with a view to furthering growth, welfare and development throughout society.

A new university legislation should emphasise that the universities be committed to actively exchanging knowledge with the surrounding society, including actively contributing to and participating in the public debate on essential social conditions.

The universities' roles as cultural and value leaders should be maintained. It is essential that universities attend to basic research and, based on that, maintain and develop important basic disciplines in the academic disciplines that the university offers. This also applies even though the disciplines do not immediately find concrete or direct usage in, say, the private business community.

In continuation of this, the new legislation should maintain that the universities be committed to upholding the freedom of research. The freedom of research is bound to the university. The individual researchers should continue to have the right to choose methods, procedures and topics within the strategic frameworks laid out in a University Performance Contract. The individual researcher can, however, be prescribed certain duties by the management as is the case today.

In connection with this, the universities should also uphold research ethics.

The universities' duties can consequently be combined under four headings: research, education, dissemination and the exchange of knowledge.

*The exchange of knowledge* has the following significance for the universities' duty portfolios:

- the universities actively and mutually exchange knowledge and competencies with a majority of the players, organisations, authorities and public and private businesses in society
- the universities are open to society and realise research and education with a view to, among other things, furthering growth, welfare and development throughout society where this is relevant and possible within a university's profile
- the universities cooperate with other universities and research institutions, including industrial research institutions
- the universities incorporate the library function into their exchange of knowledge plans, including how the library function contributes to the dissemination and exchange of knowledge through education
- the universities should contribute to ensuring research affiliation for medium-cycle higher education institutions
- the universities are committed to developing international cooperation and through this to contributing to the development of Danish society and its basic values.

The universities' *education* duty includes offering research-based BA and graduate programmes, researcher education programmes and MA programmes as well as other research-based continuing and further education programmes at a high level of international excellence.

A prerequisite to the goal of fulfilling the university's duty portfolio, is that strategic decisions be made and prioritised between selected research and academic fields within the university's positions of strength, thereby highlighting the university's profile.

## 2. Research-based education

Universities educate – in addition to PhDs – highly qualified BAs and graduates with specific competency profiles. The marked student dropout rates within several university disciplines should be reduced, while credit transfer issues, dead-ends and “double degrees” should be avoided.

The content and structures of study programmes should be developed in several areas in order to continue to ensure these central education policy goals and in order to increase flexibility and international mobility both in Denmark and abroad. This also applies to mobility between Danish universities.

The basic structure with independent student intake for the three-year BA programmes and two-year graduate programmes should be maintained. The programmes and the individual elements in the programmes should be assessed in terms of ECTS points (European Credit Transfer System), the joint European model for *quantitative* assessment of higher education study programmes. According to the ECTS rules, 60 ECTS points equal one year’s full-time study. A number of countries, including Denmark, have already introduced ECTS as a national system of measurement.

Today, many universities have already implemented a number of initiatives for the purpose of changing the content, relevance and structure of their study programmes. This development should be supported by the initiation of a systematic development of all university study programmes within the following general framework:

The *study programme structure* should be reorganised, in areas where this has not yet been done, with a view to ensuring a genuine implementation of the 3+2 structure with three-year BAs followed by two-year graduate programmes.

Modular structures are to be implemented for all BA programmes where students acquire strong academic competencies, and such programmes are to conclude with a Bachelor project carried out in the third year of study. BA programmes should be structured in such a way as to give students the academic prerequisites for several relevant graduate programmes – including graduate programmes at other universities. Students have the right to be admitted to a graduate programme, but the curriculum reform would mean that students with a BA degree, as a rule, could choose between several relevant graduate programmes. However, this assumes that it is academically justified, i.e. there must be an academic connection between the BA programme and the graduate programmes applied to. Academic progression should be ensured within the BA programme itself and, thus, in the relationship between the BA and graduate programmes.

The individual university should continue to lay down the admittance requirements to its graduate programmes and usually also the number of admission places according to the provision of “open admittance”, but this information should be made more visible to the students than has been the case until now. For the individual student, there should be a guarantee of admittance to at least one graduate programme that can be considered, academically speaking, to be a logical extension of the BA degree the student has earned. In the interest of ensuring real options for BA students with regard to access and admittance to graduate programmes and, ensuring their legal rights at the same time, an inter-university coordinated enrolment system (InterUniversitær Koordineret Tilmelding – IU-KOT) is to be implemented over a number of years in cooperation with the universities.

The universities should be committed to cooperating on and coordinating between the BA programmes and the relevant graduate programmes with regard to context, academic relevance and progression.

*Graduate programmes* should be organised in modules in such a way as to ensure the academic coherence and progression. In graduate programmes it should be possible for students to choose between different modules and, thus, construct study programmes with different competency profiles aimed at different employment areas in both the private and public sectors, including among others, an upper-secondary teaching or research career. The study programme should conclude with a graduate thesis.

Departures from the above-mentioned education structure may occur for certain programmes, in particular for programmes that result in some sort of authorisation such as medical and veterinary programmes.

*Individual student guidance* should be strengthened. In order to reduce the number of dropouts and to support students in a more flexible education structure, universities should focus to a greater extent on student guidance. Universities should be able to guide the students and make clear to them which competencies and employment opportunities are attainable through the selection of individual modules and certain combinations of modular courses and whether there are any modules on the BA level which are required by various graduate programmes. This student guidance can also focus on career guidance, especially in the final years of study.

Universities should continue to provide, within their academic fields, three-year researcher education programmes at the PhD level.

Henceforth, universities should, as something new, be obligated to provide research-based further and continued education for the adult population. Another important duty for the universities within their academic fields is to develop and offer new MA programmes and other research-based further and continued education programmes. Many universities have already begun working on this task.

A university should, as always, decide autonomously which programmes it will offer within its academic areas of focus, but the programmes offered should still be approved by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. After discussions with the universities, the Ministry will prepare an executive order which describes in more detail the conditions and procedures for approval of new programmes.

To provide for a regional demand for a university programme in a geographic area where there is no university that can be approved for the task, teaching provided on-site by another approved institution (“udlagt undervisning”) may be relevant. A university that is approved to offer a study programme can, thus, also choose to offer this programme as “on-site teaching”. However, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation must still approve the decision to offer an approved programme as “on-site teaching”.

The above-mentioned changes to the content and structure of education programmes will be phased in – after the legislation has entered into force – over a period of several years and after a process

that will be debated between and agreed upon by the universities and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

In connection with the structuring of the provisions on industrial research institutions' obligation to contribute to university programmes, a provision should be formulated stating that non-profit organisations, with their own well-documented competencies, knowledge and experiences at an academic university level, may in rare cases contribute to the universities' research-based education within certain academic fields. The application for such an inclusion should be submitted by the degree-providing university with the university's position for approval by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

### **3. Management**

The purpose of a reform of the managerial structure of the universities is to strengthen the management and increase the universities' efficiency and resolution.

This need is a result of the demand for and expansion of duty portfolios as well as the increased international competition in research and education and the struggle to attract students and researchers. The increased cooperation with the business community, other public business and national and international research institutions also increases the demands for academic and financial prioritisation.

A managerial reform should ensure that research, education and the exchange of knowledge be boosted to a high level of international excellence.

The managerial reform should generally contribute to underpinning and strengthening current attempts to develop management, organisation and education.

#### *3a. Boards of Directors*

The Board of Directors hires the Rector. The Board of Directors approves the university's budget, strategy and development plan and regulations and, thus, provides the guidelines and directions for the university's daily management. The Board of Directors enters into University Performance Contracts with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. A sense of openness regarding the work of the Board of Directors should prevail.

Members of the Board should jointly be able to contribute to furthering the university's strategic efforts with their experience with and insight into education, research and the dissemination and sharing of knowledge. Furthermore, Members of the Board should have managerial, organisational and financial experience, including the management of budgets.

The Board of Directors should have an external majority. The Chairperson of the Board is selected by the Board from among its external members.

There should be at least two student members on the Board, just as both the academic and technical-administrative staff should be represented.

The Board's external members are appointed as individual private persons, rather than as representatives of certain special interests. Foreign research and education experience should be represented. It is essential that the external members have different backgrounds – they might, for example, come from other research institutions, the cultural life, other public businesses, the business community and so forth – as the Board should, in part, reflect the profile and duties of the university and, in part, represent a broad coalition so as to guard against a unilateral representation of certain sectors or of certain competencies and experiences.

The university constitutes the first Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is constituted with the observation of the above-mentioned requirements for its composition.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation approves that the composition of the first Board of Directors lives up to the above-mentioned requirements for composition.

The first Board of Directors composes a set of regulations that lay down the composition, size, election procedures, etc. of the Board, including how the external representatives are henceforth selected. The set of regulations is approved by the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation.

The individual university may choose to establish a Council or similar body whose composition, duties and organisation are set out in the set of regulations.

The general principle for managerial staff is that the Board of Directors hires the Rector; the Rector hires the Deans; and the Deans hire the Heads of Departments. The procedures for appointment ensure academic and managerial legitimacy.

### *3b. Managerial staff*

#### *Rector*

The Rector is responsible for the daily management of the university, must report directly to the Board of Directors and he or she may – as is the case today – delegate duties to the remaining managers. The Rector prepares presentations for the Board of Directors on the budget, regulations and University Performance Contracts. The Rector also prepares presentations for the Board of Directors on the general research and education strategies, organizational and personnel plans and the exchange of knowledge with society.

The Rector also prepares plans of action for the implementation of University Performance Contracts which are approved by the Board of Directors.

The Rector should be a recognised researcher in one of the university's central academic fields and possess insight into the education sector. The Rector should have experience in management and the organization of research environments. Moreover, the Rector should have insight into the university's activities and its interaction with society. The procedures for the appointment of the Rector should ensure academic and managerial legitimacy. The procedures are to be set out in the university's regulations.

#### *Faculties and departments*

The university may choose autonomously to be split its activities up into faculties, each lead by a Dean. The faculty consists of a number of departments, each lead by a Head of Department.

The Dean should be a recognised researcher and be experienced in and have insight into education, management and the university's interaction with society. The Head of Department should be a recognised researcher and should have teaching experience.

The faculties are managed on a daily basis by their respective deans. The Dean is responsible for the faculty's research, study programmes and teaching, budget, personnel and organisation within the strategies, etc. set out by the Board of Directors. The Dean prepares research and study programmes according to presentations from the departments. The Dean approves the curricula. In order to fulfil his or her personnel responsibility, the Dean hires and dismisses the Heads of Departments. The Dean is also responsible for the management development of the Heads of Department. The Dean is expected to construct an organisation which underpins the deanship.

#### *Heads of Department*

The departments are the units where research and study normally take place.

The Head of Department is responsible for the department's research, study programmes, including study and research environments, budget and personnel. The Head of Department should construct an organisation which carries out all of the department's duties with the involvement of students, academic and technical-administrative staff.

The Head of Department may appoint Heads of Research, Junior Heads of Departments and he or she may delegate to them managerial duties.

### *3c. Academic Councils and Curriculum Boards*

#### *Academic Councils*

An internally composed Academic Council should be established. The Council's members should be selected from among the academic staff and students. The Rector is the Chairperson for the Academic Council unless it is established at the Faculty level.

The Academic Council expresses its opinions on all academic matters of importance for the university's academic activities and is obligated to consider the academic matters which the Rector presents.

The Academic Council recommends new strategically important research and study initiatives. It comes with suggestions to the Rector regarding central strategic research areas and plans for the exchange of knowledge.

This guidance should form the basis for the presentations the Rector prepares for the Board of Directors. Furthermore, the Academic Council guides the Rector on the internal distribution of basic funding. The Council recommends the composition of expert committees. The Council confers academic degrees (Dr., PhD and Dr. honoris causa).

#### *The Director of Studies and the Curriculum Board*

The Dean should appoint one or more Curriculum Boards and, based on the recommendation of the Curriculum Board, he or she should appoint one or more Directors of Study. The Curriculum Board should consist of 50 per cent students and 50 per cent academic staff and these are established through elections held among the students and academic staff respectively. The number of Directors of Study and Curriculum Boards is stipulated in the university's regulations within the legislative framework.

#### **4. Internal quality assurance and quality development**

A continuous and systematic evaluation of research, study programmes and teaching should take place.

The universities should be obligated to implement research, study and teaching evaluations on the basis of the departments' strategic research and study programmes. The evaluation should be systematically followed up on and this should be part of the university's reporting and action areas in the University Performance Contracts. The evaluation reports and the prepared follow-up plans should be available to the public.

The university determines in its University Performance Contract the evaluation's form and frequency.

The Rector, Dean and/or Heads of Departments and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation may ask the Danish Evaluation Institute or other organisations and institutions, including international institutions, to take charge of or contribute to the rotation evaluations.

The universities are responsible for the composition of external evaluation panels which are to be approved by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. The universities set out autonomously the concept of these evaluations. However, as a minimum there must be graduate and user evaluations with an aim to uncovering the relevance, topicality and quality of the study programmes from the perspective of competency. The evaluations and follow-up plans should be discussed with the relative Curriculum Boards and made public.

The suggested managerial model in which the Head of Department is obligated to follow-up on the evaluations also serves to underpin the department's evaluation of the quality of study programmes' with regard to academic level, content and education theory. It is the Head of Department's responsibility to initiate relevant follow-up procedures for the study programme and teaching evaluations.

The provisions that at least one-third of a study programme be documented via external examiners should be maintained. The regulations regarding external examiners will be clarified, including the fact that the Bachelor project and the graduate thesis are to be judged by external examiners.

In connection with the contracting of the second-generation of University Performance Agreements, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation will submit a detailed account to the Danish Parliament.



## **5. Advisory panels**

As part of the university's quality assurance and development, it is possible to set out in the university's regulations that an advisory panel be appointed at faculties and/or departments whose purpose is to advise the Dean or Heads of Department on issues regarding research, education and the exchange of knowledge. The purpose is to contribute to the continuous prioritisation and selection of fields of research and study as well as recruitment to research teams.

## **6. Steering (University Performance Agreements)**

With this proposal for a new managerial structure, the coming Boards and Rectors will be responsible for following-up on the goals set out in the University Performance Agreements. The Rector should initiate the process of working on the Performance Agreements, which the Board of Directors enters into with the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation as a mutually binding agreement.

After the expiration of the term of the Development Agreement, it would form the basis for the distribution of any new funding to the universities and for entering into a new Development Agreement.

The new University Development Agreements should describe and clarify the vision and action areas of the individual university and focus on the university's duties: research, education, including research-based further and continued education, research affiliation and the dissemination and exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, the Development Agreements should indicate the future cooperation efforts with external parties and the operative goals for working with quality development and the like.

The Development Agreements will be an essential tool for the Board of Directors to use in their considerations with regard to dealing with any inadequate goal-related performance.

In addition to qualitative goals regarding such issues as credits, increased completion of studies, internal follow-up on study programmes, teaching and research evaluations and the like, the Agreements should also include quantitative and measurable indicators for the universities' activities and results, which the management can use as a managerial and steering tool.

They should, therefore, contain clear success criteria which are set out via debate between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and the universities. Such new and clearer success criteria might, for example, be: student mobility, completion and dropout rates, including the number of graduates who have received Bachelor, Candidatus and PhD degrees, volume, quality and the dissemination/publication of research as well as the commercialisation and patenting of research results. Furthermore, every university should develop concepts for use in comparisons (benchmarking) with regard to other relevant Danish and international universities as part of their continuous development.

The success criteria should, thus, make it possible to compare across faculties, activity types and universities. The universities should, in this regard, publish the above-mentioned data on student

intake and dropouts, changes of study direction, credits and the like with a view to increased transparency for prospective students, cooperative partners, etc.

The management of each university should be allowed to decide autonomously how to attain their success criteria. One approach would be for the Board of Directors and the Rector to enter into internal Performance Agreements with the managerial staff at a lower level regarding the specific goals for research, education and the other areas.