RESEARCH STRATEGY
2016-2021
Department of Sociology and Social Work

“Knowledge with societal impact”
The purpose of “Research Strategy 2016-2021” is to improve the conditions for relevant social research of high quality and broad impact in Danish society and internationally.

A constant focus on quality, relevance and impact is necessary to ensure a solid resource foundation for social research, and the strategy thus also aims to secure research-based teaching, the hallmark of universities.

It is an overarching goal that the department, during the strategy period, becomes better at exploiting existing research potentials in and across research groups and environments to the benefit of research, students and society.

The department’s research profile

In the period 2011-2015, the Department of Sociology and Social Work has worked to develop and strengthen its research profile and position, nationally and internationally, in order to solidify its research foundation.

The department sees room for and acceptance of diversity among research groups as an important element in the strong research foundation it has built. Therefore, the department must continue to promote and support a culture that comprises small, emerging as well as large, established research groups. The department sees diversity as an asset that contributes considerably to the high quality of the knowledge produced at the department. The Department of Sociology and Social Work will therefore continue to support that the research groups pursue their fields of interest and make room for innovative thinking within the groups.

A shared characteristic of all research groups at the department is that they strive to produce knowledge of high quality and broad relevance for research fields and for society.

The department’s research profile is currently characterised by applied research and basic research, a strong national profile, interdisciplinarity and increased focus on international positioning.

The research is organised in seven research groups within the following core areas: social work, labour market and education, organisation and management, sociological analysis, criminology, demography, social geography and health, ethics, social psychology, and finally social differentiation and social control.
Research strategy, 2016-2021

The department’s research strategy for 2016-2021 focuses on core trends in the research field at Aalborg University, The Faculty of Social Sciences, and not least, the department itself. An important element in this focus is the individual research groups’ strategic plans.

In the future, Aalborg University will be a “civic university”, i.e., a university with societal impact, nationally and internationally, via solution-oriented and interdisciplinary research.

With the Research Strategy 2016-2021 and its title “Knowledge with Societal Impact”, the Department of Sociology and Social Work continues its efforts to strengthen the department’s research foundation.

Knowledge with societal impact is knowledge that is relevant and affects the society that surrounds us and in which we exist, and knowledge that has potential to influence its specific field of research.

Likewise, the strategy 2016-2021 supports The Faculty of Social Science’s two tracks for development of research: “Action Plan for Taking Home External Funding” and “Strategy 2016-2021”. The influence from the two tracks is reflected in the headings of the four strategic themes:

- External funding
- Publication
- Networks
- Competence development of researchers

The strategy relates to internationalisation and “The Internationalisation Strategy for the Faculty of Social Sciences at Aalborg University (AAU-Samf)”, as all strategic themes contain focus areas concerning how the department can and will reinforce its international position in the coming years.

It is important to point out that the department as a whole adheres to the research strategy 2016-2021. Individual research groups and researchers are not expected to comply with all its focus areas. However, all research groups are expected to contribute to all strategic themes under the focus areas that are relevant and realistic to them.

External funding

In the period 2011-2015, the department has expanded the portfolio of external funding, and it is expected to sustain this level in 2016-2021. An important element in taking home external funding
is high quality applications. To ensure a high quality in applications and thereby secure external funding, the department is working intensely with the following focus areas:

**Research types**

*Free, researcher-initiated research and small collaborative projects*

Department of Sociology and Social Work has built a solid platform based on free, researcher-initiated research funded by, among others, the Independent Research Fund Denmark and the Velux Foundation as well as smaller collaborative projects supported by, e.g., TrygFonden, the Obel Family Foundation, municipalities and regions.

Both types of research allow the department can to sustain a solid research foundation and produce *knowledge with societal impact*.

**Strategic research**

Traditionally, the department's research has primarily been based on free, researcher-initiated research and small collaborative projects. In 2016-2021, however, the department in collaboration with external partners expects to submit more applications for strategic research, e.g., Horizon2020. Some of the “grand societal challenges” will be addressed, e.g., health and security. Research groups with this interest are expected to ensure a suitable size, research weight and network in relation to applying for this type of funding.

It is a priority that the relevant groups can participate in preliminary discussions of upcoming calls and lobbying in EU contexts. To support this endeavour, the department will contribute economically to the extent possible. Furthermore, the relevant research groups are expected to take advantage of the courses offered concerning applications for the large strategic funds.

**The research secretariat**

In 2016-2021, the department will continue to offer administrative support, targeted information about calls and quality in external applications via the department's research secretariat. The secretariat consists of an in-house fundraiser and assistance with project economy. The latter includes, e.g., preparation of budgets and subsequent management of project economy. The fundraiser can assist the researchers with finding and applying for external funding for different projects and activities (national, EU, international), preparation of applications, advice and sparring concerning guidelines, budget and format requirements, as well as merging, reviewing and submission of applications.

The department will continue to find and use the competences that are available at the central level, e.g. Fundraising and Project Management.
Systematic quality control of applications

The department expects that all research groups focus on designing and developing systematic methods for quality control of their external applications, e.g., via peer review, collaboration and knowledge sharing of experiences with taking home external funding. Furthermore, the groups are expected to make sure that all members in the environment are aware of the department’s research secretariat and the tasks with which it can assist.

Publications

In 2016-2021, the Department of Sociology and Social Work will maintain the high publication frequency achieved in 2011-2015 and maintain the broad publication profiles via the following focus areas:

Research time

The department’s management will facilitate the high publication frequency by continuing to support that all researchers have 40 per cent of their work time available for research. This will be ensured via a focus on appropriate teaching burden and better use of the sabbatical scheme, under which researchers can skip teaching entirely or partially for a semester to focus on research projects, publication activities or applications for external funding.

Good publication habits

In addition to maintaining the publication level from 2011-2015, the department will focus on building and developing publication habits.

The research groups are expected to (1) build publication habits and frameworks such as writing workshops, joint writing projects; (2) make sure that all group members are included in various publication projects; and (3) build and share, internally and externally, competences in terms of disseminating their work.

Building publication habits also require increased focus on publication outlets and levels. The department will therefore work systematically to have researchers publish at BFI level 2. The purpose is to document a high quality in the department’s publications and thereby ensure that the academic staff build CVs that are competitive in terms of obtaining research funding and in the accreditation of the department education programmes, also in the future.

Interdisciplinary publications

More interdisciplinary publications are a goal in 2016-2021 for the Department of Sociology and Social Work. This is ensured via increased focus on collaboration internally among the research
groups and externally, e.g., via increased co-publication with the research groups’ international network and partners.

**Networks**

A strategy to produce knowledge with societal impact implies that the department delivers research at a high national and international level. Department of Sociology and Social Work will ensure a continued high research level in the period 2016-2021 by consolidating existing networks and develop and expand new networks and partnerships.

**Research at international level**

Collaboration and knowledge sharing with national and international partners are important elements in terms of quality assuring the department’s research via dialogue with external partners, research collaboration across AAU, Danish universities and national borders. The research groups are therefore expected to participate in and initiate national and international networks, conferences and other types of collaboration within their respective research areas, e.g., research applications, workshops etc.

In order to increase the department’s visibility internationally and achieve a more international research environment, the department will expand its use of and ensure optimal utilization of international guest researchers. The department will therefore increase its focus on taking home funds for this purpose in the period 2016-2021.

**Practice networks**

The research groups are expected to focus on practice networks and on dissemination of their knowledge to key actors and partners. The objective is increased collaboration with practice networks and key actors, such as ministries, regions and municipalities, and that the department’s research remains highly relevant for the surrounding society in the future.

The department will make sure that researchers have opportunities to participate in and organize relevant conferences and thereby consolidate and expand existing and new networks to the extent it is economically feasible.

**Competence development of researchers**

The Department of Sociology and Social Work see talent and competence development of young as well as experienced researchers as important in terms of maintaining and strengthening its solid research foundation. The department will therefore focus on the following areas in the period 2016-2021:
Staff development interviews (SDI) and group development interviews (GDI)

SDI and GDI are important tools in terms of ensuring that the department’s researchers acquire the appropriate competences to secure their careers.

Professional development and career plans are focus areas in the annual staff development interviews with the head of department and in the ongoing dialogue between head of research/coordinator and the individual researcher.

The head of department should use the annual SDI to ensure that the individual researcher receives the appropriate support from the department and their research group to achieve their full potential.

Another tool in the relation between department management and research groups is group development interviews (GDI).

Competence development of young researchers

Career planning is an important element in terms of ensuring the right competence development for the department’s young researchers. It is the head of department’s responsibility that individual career planning is formulated for all PhD students, postdocs and assistant professors in connection with SDI. A formalised form for career planning is developed for this purpose and forms the basis for further dialogue concerning the young talent’s career with the head of department, the head of research and supervisors.

The research groups have a special responsibility for developing young researchers’ talent and competences. The research groups are expected to involve young researchers, e.g., in more experienced researchers’ projects, so that they obtain the competences they need in a career as researcher. The objective is that the young researchers become familiar with and participate actively in fundraising, publication, research networks etc.

Another important element in competence development of young researchers is internationalisation. It is required by law that all PhD students complete research stays at other, primarily foreign universities. The Department of Sociology and Social Work intends to expand the internationalisation of young researchers and encourages that external funding comprises funding for postdocs to complete part of their period abroad.

The Social Sciences’ Talent Programme for young research talents

In connection with competence development for young researchers, the department will, in cooperation with the research groups, recommend young researchers for the talent programme for young researchers at the Faculty of Social Sciences.
Finally, the department wants student involvement in relevant research activities in the research groups, e.g., while they are writing their theses or working on large semester projects.