Annual report for
ACADEMIC COUNCIL

2023

UNIVERSITY OF
COPENHAGEN

Recommendations for assessment committees

One of the core tasks of the Academic Council is to submit recommendations to the dean concerning the assessment committees appointed in connection with the filling of academic positions, including tenure track, associate professor and professor positions.

The departments propose members for the assessment committees, which the Academic Council then assesses and approves. This year, the Academic Council has recommended 75 assessment committees, and in several cases asked the departments to reconsider the composition – typically because of a non-representative gender distribution, or because the reasons given for the committee's composition have been too general and not clearly represented the research area in question. This year, the division of roles between HR and the Academic Council was determined so that matters of impartiality, including academic impartiality, lie with the dean. This has resulted in the Council changing the procedure, so that the departments now submit brief but precise reasons for the choice of members for the assessment committees.

Reform of UCPH administration

At several meetings in 2023, the Academic Council discussed UCPH's work regarding the administrative reform. In April 2023, this led to strong criticism from the Council of the surveys that were conducted as part of the analysis work. As a follow-up, University Director Søren Munk Skydsgaard and Agnes Boldsen from the programme secretariat attended the meeting of the Academic Council in June. There has also been concern on the part of the Council whether the need for proximity, which has been highlighted by all the analyses, can be served through centres, which could, in fact, drive a wedge between academic staff and technical and administrative staff. In addition, the Council has expressed concern that the restructuring, including the establishment of centres, will be costly and will create a heavy and rigid structure.

Instead, the Academic Council has called for the implementation of structures that allow for continuous evaluation and improvement based on employee feedback. Moreover, the council members have called for the step-by-step implementation of the reform with pilot projects and small-scale projects in order to avoid disrupting the entire administration and making mistakes at scale.

The students are concerned that there will be no access to programme-specific guidance and knowledge, and that a lack of student counselling services close at hand will lead to uncertainty among the students.

Last but not least, there is concern about the reform leading to a staff exodus. Many people feel unsure about the process and involvement/influence, the new frameworks for the administration as well as the data on which the stated goal of identifying savings totalling DKK 300 million a year is based.

The Council has called for regular and increased communication from the management to minimise this uncertainty. In November 2023, information meetings were held. The Council will continue to keep an eye on these matters in 2024.

From our own world: How can we make sure that we are doing the right thing?

SCIENCE and UCPH regularly initiate new projects. Examples in recent years include KUPA, the joint room administration, the job and project database, PhD Planner, NIMBUS, the merger of IT departments in University IT, the centralisation of HR, the merger of Campus Service and now the administrative reform. Some projects appear to be quite successful, others not so much, which is very frustrating both for the employees who are supposed to be supported by the projects, and for the employees who are supposed to provide a service that is not working. How can we establish effective structures for evaluating and correcting mistakes and inexpediencies, to ensure that em-

ployees get the intended support and are not prevented from being able to perform their work satisfactorily?

The item was used to test the Council's new approach to handling major items on the agenda. The process involves three steps:

1. First, time is allocated for the proposer to introduce the item, for the Council to define a framework, and for discussions to be held about how the item can be qualified via relevant background material and by drawing on invited guests with knowledge of the area.
2. At the next meetings, plenty of time is allocated to shedding light on the item.
3. As a third step, the Council finally evaluates its consideration of the item.

During the first step, it was decided to start with a presentation of SCIENCE's project model, and that more light could be shed on the item with a presentation of how the faculty director had followed up with University IT on how to improve the level of satisfaction with their services.

This led to many interesting discussions about how a lot of work is already being done to organise, implement and assess new projects following their completion, but also revealed that it takes time to find a common language for the challenges depending on where you are located in the organisation. In future, putting the items into some sort of framework will be even more important to ensure that each item is handled correctly and as the proposer intended. One important point was that the faculty is also responsible for ensuring that the services that are supplied centrally are satisfactory. It was therefore decided to revisit the topic of how to ensure that we are doing the right thing, as the topic remains highly relevant – not least in light of the current administrative reform.

Student representatives on the Academic Council

The Council discussed how best to involve student representatives in the Academic Council and at SCIENCE in general. More proactive efforts are needed with regard to items on the agenda of particular relevance to students and should come from both students and from the academic staff and the faculty. The Council has a unique opportunity to gain the students' insight into – and to voice their opinion on – the various issues which are being and can be considered by the Academic Council.

The Council also discussed the possibility of working actively to invite the students to join councils and fora where they are sometimes not represented, but where their participation is greatly valued, for example on the employer panels. The student representatives on the Council are also suggesting greater alignment in future of the issues discussed by, for example, the Dialogue Forum and the Academic Council. This includes weighing up which agendas of particular relevance to the students the Council should continue to work on, and which ones are best left to other councils and boards. Finally, the Council agreed on a joint transfer of duties from the outgoing student representatives to the incoming representatives, with the help of the Council chair.

Tenure and academic co-determination

Based on the report Universities for the future: Twenty years of the University Act, which was published in Danish in May 2023 by the Danish Council for Research and Innovation Policy, and a follow-up article in Information on 23 May 2023, the Academic Council has discussed possible recommendations for addressing the universities' challenges in relation to tenure track and academic co-determination.

The University Act has existed for 20 years, and the idea was that, with a university board as the supreme authority, in future the universities "would contribute to promoting growth, welfare and development in society".

Today, this has put the democratic environment and academic freedom at the universities under pressure. The Universities for the future report raises a worrying problem for the universities, in that 50 percent of university researchers are either fearful of, have been threatened with or have been directly subjected to reprisals because they have been voicing their opinions about management decisions. Of the 24 per cent of researchers who work with socially controversial topics, 71 percent fear or have been directly threatened with or subjected to reprimands.

The Academic Council believes that the University of Copenhagen should take this issue very seriously, and in this context has also discussed the concept of tenure at Danish universities. In most countries, tenure means that you are a permanent employee, and can only be dismissed in the case of serious misconduct of an economic or social nature. These conditions of employment no longer apply at Danish universities, neither in theory nor in practice, as expressed above. The Academic Council believes that one of the solutions is for university appointments in Denmark to be placed on an equal footing with appointments in other countries in this key area.

The co-determination of researchers at all levels at the universities is another important agenda that has dominated this term of office. A change in the University Act is probably not high on the political wish list, but the Academic Council believes that new initiatives involving researchers in the decision-making processes can happen within the scope of the existing act.

Academic Council in figures 2023

Ordinary meetings

5

Extraordinary meetings

1

Doctoral degrees awarded

3

PhD degrees awarded

276

Assessment committees

75

Distributed on:
Tenure track assistant professors: *22*
Associate professors: *30*
Professors: *23*
Vacant positions: *14*