

Summary

The expert group was tasked with identifying, prioritising and analysing the extent and degree of significant problem areas related to the administrative and managerial support of the university as well as the organisational and managerial structure of the main academic areas. Issues related to accessible management, the inclusion of staff and students in decision-making and administrative support were the primary focus of the problem analysis.

By way of introduction, it is important to emphasise that the university has undergone major changes. Some of these changes have been triggered by external conditions, while others have resulted from the academic development process. The 2011 mergers created a new Aarhus University, and maintaining the status quo was not an option. Rethinking the university - including its academic and administrative organisation - was a necessity.

Aarhus University is a large organisation with an extensive portfolio of activities related to teaching, research and public sector consultancy. At the same time, the university covers a wide geographical area, with activities on 19 campuses. Variation in the extent to which the different parts of the university are affected by these changes is therefore to be expected. For this reason, it would be misleading to describe the effects or evaluations of the change process in uniform terms.

The expert panel's analysis identifies centralisation and standardisation as common denominators of the university's problems in relation to accessible management, inclusion and administrative support.

There has been extensive centralisation, and great emphasis has been placed on standardisation, joint initiatives and the presentation of the university as a unified whole. The survey shows that the university's employees have not accepted this strategy and the initiatives derived from it as the best responses to the challenges the university faces. The change process is perceived as the management's project, and the university's employees feel very little sense of ownership over it. As a consequence of centralisation and standardisation, it has been difficult to derive the full benefit from the university's considerable diversity as a strength, especially in relation to campuses outside Aarhus. Insufficient space has been allowed for the expression and development of professional, academic and functional differences.

Under the University Act, the managerial structure of Danish universities is hierarchical. But at the same time, the Act places crucial emphasis on the importance of student and employee inclusion and co-determination. The expert group's survey reveals that employees and students at Aarhus University feel that the university only honours this requirement to a very limited extent. An independent survey indicates that a lack of student and employee inclusion and co-determination is a particularly serious problem at Aarhus University as compared to other Danish universities. When the solutions that have been adopted by management are not perceived as matching the situation and tasks facing the employees, a sense of powerlessness and frustration develops in the organisation. And interestingly, this sense of powerlessness and frustration can be observed at all the levels of the organisation that the expert group has studied. This indicates that the problem is due in part to certain structural conditions at Aarhus University.

The survey also shows that the change process has underestimated the significance of professional identity and inner motivation for both academic and technical/administrative staff members. The university's new

organisational structure has not resulted in units that are perceived as meaningful collegial groups in all areas. A number of departments have to incorporate major differences, and a large proportion of academic staff members at the departments in question do not regard the current structure as appropriate. Presumably, this reflects the fact that meaningful shared objectives and aims have not developed. At the same time, with the formal separation of academic and administrative staff, central, meaningful collegial networks were dissolved. This dissolution was justified with reference to an extremely narrow view of administrative quality as 'professional specialisation'. While this is an important dimension of administrative quality, the centrally significant aspects of accessibility, coordination, the exchange of information and adaptability have been overlooked. As a consequence, the changes have taken insufficient account of the significance of 'co-production' involving academic and technical/administrative staff in a number of core activities. The institutional distinction between academic and technical/administrative personnel has widened the divide between 'us' and 'them' as seen from both sides, and it has decisively reduced the potential for shared ownership of shared successes. The expert group has registered considerable scepticism regarding the organisation and dimensions of the resources allocated to administrative activities among employees and students. The analysis shows that there are a number of problems associated with the administration's new structure. For example, it is difficult to establish flexible, efficient processes in new situations, especially where several administrative divisions are involved. Such situations will arise constantly at any well-run university, and the administrative organisation should provide the necessary support to handle them rather than working at cross-purposes.

According to the expert group's survey, many employees and students agree that it is important for the university to be presented as a unified institution. At the same time, employees and students have little understanding of the current strategy. This summarises the central conclusions of the internal problem analysis. But it also reveals one possible way forward. A unified university is the product of the interplay between centrally defined visions and goals on the one hand, and strong, meaningful local units on the other hand. Through this interplay, the university's core activities - research and public sector consultancy, education and talent development - can be strengthened; and a motivating collaboration between academic, technical and administrative competences can be created.

The report's diagnosis of the problem points towards a number of possible solutions. These proposals are all aimed at decentralising power and resources within a framework of centrally determined goals and requirements and the existing overall managerial structure. The focus of the proposals is the establishment of meaningful units and strengthening identity and motivation for all staff groups. Proposals to ensure that the university's core activities receive competent, user-oriented support are also presented, including suggestions for changes in how decisions regarding the dimensions of administrative activities are to be reached.