



AARHUS UNIVERSITET

AU Distinguished Senior Innovator *Programme description*

Aarhus University is now gearing up for the next phase of strengthening the innovation culture across all faculties.

As of 2025, AU will introduce an academic innovation, "AU Distinguished Senior Innovator." It is a programme for experienced, highly regarded researchers who, strongly anchored in the academic environment and with an interest in working with innovation in Aarhus University's entrepreneurial hub "The Kitchen," will act as bridge-builders and catalysts for innovation. To this end, each faculty will appoint one or more researchers to become "AU Distinguished Senior Innovator" from January 1, 2025.

Do you want to join?

AU Distinguished Senior Innovator – a driving force for innovation and entrepreneurship at Aarhus University

In the programme, each AU Distinguished Senior Innovator will be appointed to advise and support projects that can create a positive change in relation to promoting the innovation and entrepreneurship agenda at each faculty.

Each Innovator must carry out research at the individual department and drive academic innovation based on the Innovator's own research/expertise. The framework for the innovation work will be AU's central innovation-hub, The Kitchen. Each researcher is expected to be involved in developing a range of different business ideas or innovative solutions to societal problems in collaboration with colleagues in their field, with the aim of developing new solutions and strengthening the innovation culture at Aarhus University in general. Each researcher in the programme will maintain their academic title at their own department combined with the title of AU Distinguished Senior Innovator.

The programme is divided into two pillars – "AU Distinguished Senior Innovator" and "Distinguished Junior Innovator." The former are experienced researchers with academic weight, who are appointed as of January 1, 2025. Additionally, "Junior Innovators", who are younger researchers, will be appointed later in the programme.

Throughout the programme, the younger researchers will be linked to one or more projects, and the AU Distinguished Senior Innovators will serve as mentors and inspirators for the younger researchers. Junior Innovators will also have the opportunity to establish their own project under the programme.



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Background information about AU Distinguished Senior Innovator

A group of five (or more) AU Distinguished Senior Innovators must be appointed as of January 1, 2025 – one (or more) from each faculty – following an open, internal application process. Each Innovator will continue to report to their current Head of Department but must allocate their working hours equally between tasks at the department and the innovation work. The salary of each Innovator will be fully covered by Aarhus University during the programme period.

The department must provide the necessary facilities for the researcher (Innovator) to conduct their research activities on an equal footing with the other researchers at the department. Researchers cannot be assigned teaching assignments or other tasks by the department during the programme period which would undermine the researcher's ability to conduct research and deliver a full-time effort in the role of AU Distinguished Senior Innovator. The terms of employment of researchers in the programme will not be further affected.

In order to improve each researcher's opportunities to focus on research and innovation, the programme includes:

- Facilities (office space, access to laboratories).
- Access to external expertise.
- Access to funding support (dedicated application support for the provision of external funding, e.g., Proof-of-Concept funds).
- Access to investors; Specially tailored models for access to investors for researchers who need it.

Additionally, there is a facilitation-track which supports the innovation work in the programme. This includes workshops, business development, and facilitated peer-to-peer processes that create community and inspiration across the group of Innovators.

Appointment process and the researcher's profile

If you want to be appointed as an AU Distinguished Senior Innovator, you must apply. This is done through the presentation of a well-described innovation project that can be unfolded within a three-to five-year framework. An innovation project can, for example, be a commercial spinout, but it could also be a solution to a societal problem, innovation in relation to an NGO, cooperative, or a non-for-profit organization. Common to all innovation projects is that they contribute positively to societal development and help to solve challenges – whether they are small or large.

In addition to the innovation project, it must, among other things, be clearly demonstrated how the project – and your role as an Innovator – will contribute to spreading the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship across your faculty. Among other things, emphasis will be placed on the ability to involve younger researchers later in the programme period. Furthermore, emphasis will also be placed on academic experience and experience or interest in engaging in innovation work.



The researcher's profile – AU Distinguished Senior Innovator (DSI)

- Professor or equivalent excellent researcher.
- Proven innovation experience.
- Must be a driving force for innovation at the respective faculty and department and serve as a facilitator and ambassador for the initiative.

Each faculty sets up an internal forum to assess potential Innovators, in which a representative from Enterprise and Innovation also participates. Representatives from external partners may also be included. Each faculty is free to choose their own methods, however, each department must nominate up to several potential Innovators to the respective forums at the faculties, which will evaluate the described projects.

Based on the recommendations from the individual faculties, a committee appointed and led by the Director of Enterprise and Innovation and The Senior Management team will decide which researchers will be appointed to the programme.

Term of Appointment

Each AU Distinguished Senior Innovator is appointed for a period of three years effective from January 1, 2025. The period can be extended for up to 2 years after the initial three years. However, the term may vary according to each faculty's wishes and needs. Methodological freedom is provided to reflect the potential variation in the length of innovation processes across the academic fields. The estimated duration of the proposed project should be stated in each researcher's application.

If you want to join the programme, please submit your application and other relevant materials by August 9, 2024, to your faculty forum. The deadline is stated in each faculty's own posting. The final decision regarding the appointment will be made in mid-October 2024.

For further information about the program, please contact Head of Innovation Jeppe Dørup Olesen (jdo@au.dk, phone +28 99 20 95) or Team Leader Vegar Lein Ausrød (vlaus@au.dk, phone 93 50 87 43).