



Alumni Relations Strategy

Strategy for Aarhus University's alumni relations efforts



Photo: Lars Kruse, AU



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Date: 23 September 2020
Ref: jeha

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1.0 Introduction

1.1/ Alumni engagement: potential and possibilities

History and background

In March 2020, the Business Committee set up a working group tasked with developing a proposal for a comprehensive alumni engagement strategy for Aarhus University. This document is the working group's proposal.

AU's alumni engagement efforts are currently extremely fragmented. There are major differences in the individual faculties' prioritisation of and approach to alumni relations, and no content is currently generated that is aimed at all alumni. For a number of years, AU offered all of its alumni free access to the Danish University Extension's courses (Folkeuniversitetet), but this was discontinued in 2019 and has not been replaced by other offers.

Potential and possibilities

The alumni represent untapped potential for AU in the university's relations with businesses and society in general. And for alumni, the university represents untapped potential for lifelong learning and value-creating relationships.

AU's *Strategy 2025* states that: In the eyes of the university, its students and graduates are the most important bearers of the university's knowledge. For this reason, it is important that they – along with the university's academic staff – take responsibility for bringing their knowledge into play and in this way contribute to a sustainable society and an informed democracy.

About one-third of all graduates with advanced degrees in Denmark are AU alumni; clearly, a close relationship to a larger proportion of AU's alumni could make a major contribution to the knowledge-based development of society – economically, socially and culturally. Only about 37,000 of potentially 170,000 AU alumni have joined the alumni network.

The working group's proposal is based on the double premise that intensified alumni engagement efforts have the potential to make a significant and valuable contribution to realising AU's *Strategy 2025*, but only on the condition that the university's alumni engagement efforts are integrated, expanded and professionalised.

Strategy 2025 contains a number of focus areas in relation to which alumni either are mentioned explicitly or in relation to which engaging alumni in the specified activities would be an asset.

The central focus area in this respect is AU's enterprise and innovation initiative, for which an enterprise and innovation strategy is currently being developed.

Selected focus areas from *Strategy 2025*:

Graduates for the labour market of the future: Alumni are not just potential employers of AU's graduates; in a variety of ways, they also have the potential to play a key role in the development of the graduates of the future. Alumni can also contribute to helping students build bridges between their studies and the labour market: for example, business-oriented Master's thesis projects, work placement and other career-promoting activities.

Contributing to society's development and welfare through research: As decision-makers, alumni are already included in the strategy, in relation to dialogue on how research can contribute to a knowledge-based democracy. In addition, alumni also have a role to play in relation to the establishment of concrete research agreements and collaborative projects with businesses and other external partners.

Development of a continuing education portfolio: Alumni are an important target group, in order to ensure the market potential of the portfolio as well as because many of the potential customers for AU's continuing education programmes are typically alumni. In addition, alumni can contribute to the recruitment of new customers, as ambassadors for continuing education and via their recommendations.

Entrepreneurship - Finally, the alumni will have profiles with relevant competencies that can play an important role in relation to AU's ambitious entrepreneurship initiative.

2.0 The vision for alumni relations work at AU

Our vision for alumni engagement is to establish life-long, mutually value-creating relationships between AU and alumni all over the world by offering them opportunities for life-long learning as well as professional and personal development. Through alumni engagement efforts, alumni will be offered different opportunities for interacting with AU and engaging in the development of the university.

Our vision is for alumni to always retain a special affiliation to AU and to serve as the university's ambassadors, both as private individuals and in a professional capacity. In collaboration with AU, alumni can contribute to increasing and promoting the university's contribution to society.

Our goal is to expand the alumni network, and to ensure that the university engages with its alumni proactively in relation to society's future needs. We aim to strengthen the alumni network to enable it to continue to serve as a platform for fundraising.



Figure 1. Mission, goals, sub-goals and initiatives

After the approval of the alumni engagement strategy, concrete actions to achieve the mission, vision, goals and sub-goals will be initiated.

3.0 Definition of the concept 'alumni' and membership of the alumni network

3.1 The concept 'alumni'

At Aarhus University, the term 'alumni' is generally used according to the generally accepted definition:

A former students who has taken a degree from Aarhus University.

3.2 Existing categories of membership

Anyone who falls within the above definition can join the alumni network.

In addition, there is an established tradition of offering other groups membership that will continue. This means that there are four categories of membership in practice:

1. Individuals who have completed an accredited degree at Aarhus University, for example BA/BSc, MA/MSc, professional Bachelor, a diploma degree programme, a professional Master's degree or a PhD.
2. Students currently enrolled in such degree programmes at AU.
3. Employees and former employees.
4. Current and former exchange students.

3.3 New membership categories for consideration

The working group recommends that an analysis of the possible advantages of including additional membership categories be performed. These are groups that do not formally belong to any of the existing categories, but with whom developing relations within the framework of the alumni network would be mutually beneficial.

Currently, exemptions from the requirement of a completed accredited degree programme are already granted, for example to persons who have completed an executive board member training programme at Aarhus BSS.

The following categories are under consideration:

1. Former professional Master's degree students who have completed a course but who have not completed the degree, as these persons are potentially valuable professional contacts corresponding to alumni.
2. Other contacts with special links to AU, such as members of employer panels and external mentors involved in The Kitchen.
3. Honorary professors, visiting professors and the like, who can be equated with (former) employees.

An expansion of the membership categories would require a thorough analysis of what would be required in order to handle such groups professionally in coordination with the other categories, strategically, operationally and in terms of IT systems support.

4.0 Creating value in alumni relations

There are many potential forms of value that can arise from strengthening alumni engagement. A number of concrete advantages of strong alumni engagement are presented below, both in general and in bullet form, for the alumni and the university respectively. This list is not exhaustive.

Value for AU	Value for alumni	Value for society
<i>When alumni speak positively about and engage with AU, they contribute in a general sense to increased admissions, more research collaboration and reduced graduate unemployment.</i>	<i>Alumni have an opportunity to develop both professionally and personally, while also making a difference for students, AU and society.</i>	<i>The value for AU and for alumni contributes to an informed democracy based on the lifelong learning, world-class research and external collaboration of alumni.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branding • Recruitment of students • Career input for students • Mentors • Ambassadors • Continuing education • Corporate relations and the development of courses • Research collaboration • Entrepreneurship and innovation • Data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge • Network and career development • Professional and personal development • Maintain contact • Offers • To make a difference by contributing to creating value for AU and for society • Recruitment of students and graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to a sustainable society and an informed democracy • This interplay ensures that the university's knowledge benefits society

Figure 2. Value-creation in alumni relations – for further details, see Appendix A

5.0 The alumni network of the future

5.1 The foundation – the minimum model

There is considerable variation in the traditions, conditions and needs in relation to alumni relations work across AU, and currently no common content is offered. For this reason, the alumni relations work of the future should strive to strike the right balance between uniformity and cohesion on the one hand and diversity and flexibility on the other hand.

The working group thus recommends that a general minimum standard for contact with and offers to alumni be developed. This minimum standard can be supplemented by local initiatives and activities at faculty and department/school level that can diverge in character and scope.

Such an alumni network, with room for diversity and flexibility, would require the support of a robust common database (AU CRM) developed and maintained centrally at AU (Eogf), in addition to a strengthened central alumni unit with the resources necessary to serve as the stable backbone of the network's development and operations.

The primary tasks of the central alumni unit would include:

- handling the administration of registration and withdrawal, updates and secure processing of consent and data. See section 7, System support, for more details.
- handle inquiries from alumni sent to the central alumni inbox.
- taking responsibility for the university-wide minimum level of contact with all alumni, including general newsletters and other general communication, as well as special offers relevant for alumni at all faculties. See section 5.2, Special offers and section 6, Communication.
- acting as the focal point for the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at special target groups. See section 5.3, Special target groups.
- responsibility for guidance and coordination across faculties in the form of a cross-disciplinary alumni committee with representatives from both the central and faculty level. See the terms of reference in Appendix 2.
- development of an annual planning cycle for communication with alumni in order to minimise overlap in communication from the different units.

Additional tailored offers from the different faculties, departments/schools, disciplines and independent alumni associations must be supported at the respective faculties to accommodate differences in priorities, resources and culture to the greatest extent possible. Offers and scope are decided locally but are coordinated with the central unit.

5.2 Special offers

As described above, the minimum model may include special offers that create value for both AU and for alumni that will require an organisational framework and involve the allocation of resources. The working group recommends that the following offers be considered. The list is in order of priority.

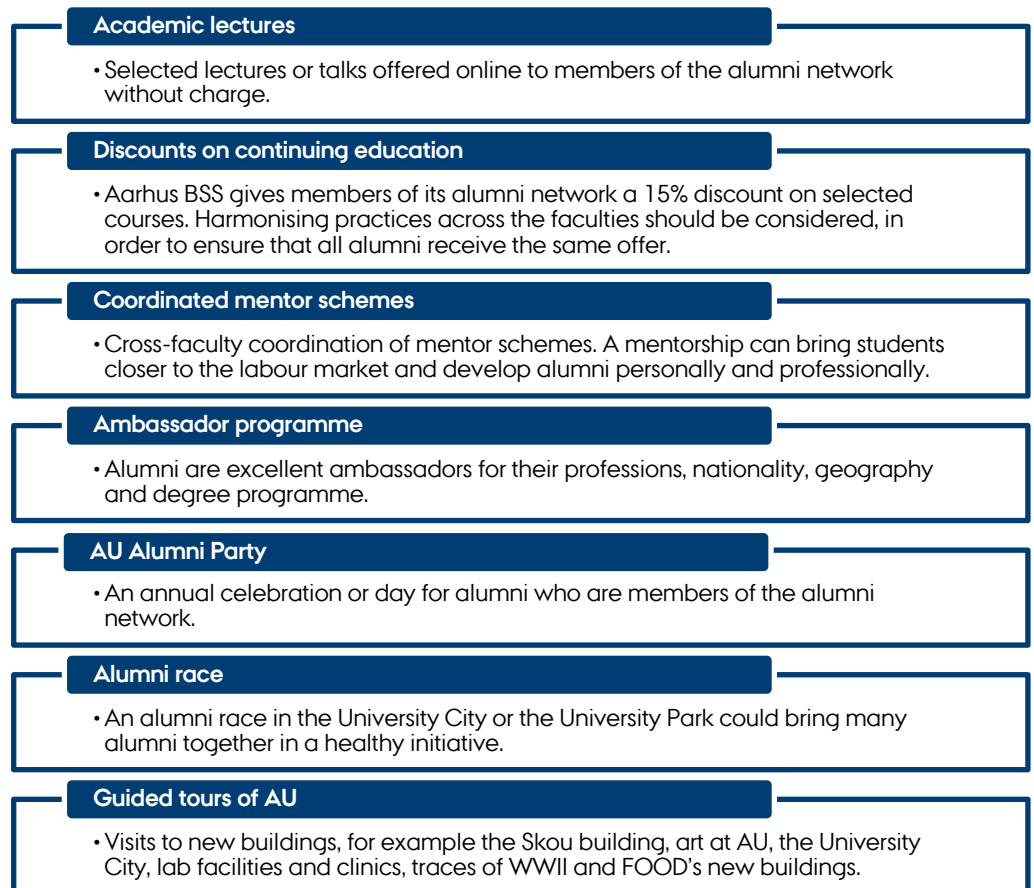


Figure 3. Special offers for alumni

Some of these proposals would require earmarked funding, such as the alumni party.

53. Special target groups

On the background of the decision regarding the composition of a university-wide minimum model, there should also be a focus on special target groups going forward. Working with these special target groups should be seen as a supplement to the offers described above and can be added where resources permit.

These target groups have been selected on the basis of an assessment of which alumni segments have the greatest potential influence on AU's core activities, education, research and collaboration with business and industry.



Figure 4. Special target groups for alumni engagement efforts

5.4 Recruitment is essential

For the model described here to succeed, a targeted recruitment effort is essential. The working group recommends that structured recruitment efforts aimed at students and graduates be initiated while they are still affiliated with the university, as it can be difficult to make contact with alumni later on.

In addition, we recommend targeted recruitment efforts aimed at the subject areas which are most underrepresented in the alumni network, and/or the subject areas in which strong alumni relations can provide the greatest and most immediate benefits.

Recruitment takes place at different levels: AU level, faculty level and/or department/school level and local level. The local level is comprised of the subject-specific alumni networks/independent alumni associations and initiatives that already exist. The aim of the initiative must be to ensure that active efforts are made at all levels to ensure that both new and existing alumni join the alumni network.

Recruitment of members who belong to a local alumni group who do not see any obvious advantages to joining a larger network presents special challenges and requires a special communication effort. Similarly, there is a need to demonstrate the value of membership in the alumni network to employees who administer their own local subject-specific alumni groups.

This task will be important for alumni staff at the faculties; the Faculty of Arts in particular, where there are many subject-specific groups, has already begun addressing this.

6.0 Communication

There will be three central communication channels: a newsletter, a website and social media.

AU alumni newsletter

AU used to have an alumni newsletter, but it was discontinued during a period of major cut-backs in the communications area. The working group would like to revive the newsletter as one of the central channels of communication in the alumni network. This would be a digital newsletter/direct mail sent out to the members of the network 2-4 times a year.

The newsletter will contain a mixture of news, knowledge, information and portraits, as well as offers and invitations. The common denominator for all content will be 'Aarhus University'; thus the content must have wide appeal and relevance regardless of what faculty or degree programme the individual members are from. More targeted, degree programme-specific content for alumni should be produced through local alumni activities and initiatives.

The editorial content plan and production and publication of the newsletter will be handled by a small group of employees affiliated with the central alumni relations unit. This unit will be supplemented by a cross-faculty group that will include representatives from the five faculties and relevant administrative units. The cross-faculty group will assist with planning, coordination, idea generation and content collection. It will also be involved in the development of an annual planning cycle for communication, in order to ensure coordination of communication at the university and local levels in regard to content and timing.

Websites

The website alumner.au.dk will continue to function as a university-wide landing and registration page that describes the network's structure, advantages and concrete activities and offers in an accessible manner.

The working group recommends that alumner.au.dk be upgraded: the page should reflect the new AU alumni strategy, advertise its advantages more clearly and make joining the alumni network seem appealing. After the upgrade, maintenance of the website will be minimal.

Social media channels

Several alumni associations are active on social media platforms, just as 'alumni' is one of the defined target groups on AU's LinkedIn page, which is handled by a SoMe editorial team under the Rector's Office. The working group does not recommend the creation of a new, independent alumni profile on one of AU's social media channels.

On the other hand, we recommend that the alumni editorial group offer relevant alumni-related content to AU's SoMe editorial group, and that the cross-faculty group also offer alumni-related content from the newsletters to local alumni associations with activities on social media.

7.0 System support and consent

System support and user consent are key preconditions for the realisation of the alumni strategy.

The entire member network is based on AU's CRM as the central database in which interactions with alumni are also registered – newsletters, event participation, etc. A newsletter module and the event system Conference Manager are connected to the CRM.

The strategy in relation to system setup is thus inextricably linked to the ongoing 'CRM for external relations' project (AU IT project 829) as well as the ongoing implementation of Conference Manager across the university.

Today, some of the faculties have developed their own consent process in connection with their offers to alumni. This complicates cross-faculty activities, and will no longer be appropriate after the new alumni strategy is adopted.

To address this, the working group recommends transitioning from a faculty-based approach to obtaining consent to a university-wide consent with flexibility in regard to the faculties, which would give alumni the option of getting involved across the university depending on their current interests, profession and needs.

This will require that 1) a new structure for consent is designed, whereby alumni give their consent to both membership and processing of personal data (including receiving emails) in connection with registration and 2) a number of system and data-related changes in relation to being able to segment and engage with the greatest possible relevance and impact.

Overall, we believe that this one-tier network will support AU's strategy in the best possible way going forward, but we acknowledge that it will be a complex operation to make these changes in a complex organisation. It will thus be necessary to allocate resources to this process.

8.0 Summary

An overview of the organisational structure for the division of responsibility for tasks/activities between university, faculty and degree programme levels.

Organisation of tasks	Tasks
Degree programme/department/school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of academic news • Alumni events • Local recruitment initiatives • Involvement of alumni, for example in employer panels or as guest lecturers • Any special initiatives, for example local mentor programmes
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordination and involvement of alumni in, for example, career development opportunities • The faculty's own recruitment initiatives • Individual strategic direction and resources • Alumni events • Special initiatives, for example the Aarhus BSS Summer Festival, Alumni Day Nat/Tech, mentor programmes • Co-ordination and support for degree programme/department/school alumni initiatives • Any faculty-specific communication
University level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General newsletter 2-4 times a year • Development and maintenance of new alumner.au.dk site • General alumni recruitment initiatives • Handling enquiries from alumni • Development of new consent structure-streamlining of GDPR compliance • Network administration – registration and withdrawal, updates • System support for handling member data and consent (CRM) • An open palette of member offers – development and operations • Responsible for cross-university committee for AU's alumni relations and annual planning cycle • Knowledge of and analysis of alumni and other member groups • Any initiatives in relation to specific target groups • Any special initiatives

9.0 Collection of initiatives

An evaluation of the various interdisciplinary focus areas from the central unit and each of the faculties should be submitted annually. The cross-university committee for AU's alumni relations sets KPIs, which can be measured from year to year in order to follow developments. In addition, KPIs for shorter projects may be set in the year in question. KPIs must include cross-university initiatives with respect for the differences between the faculties in regard to approach and resources allocated to alumni engagement.

KPIs must be set for the following areas:

- Recruitment of alumni as members of the alumni network
 - Engagement of alumni who are members of the alumni network. This includes engagement quantified in terms of newsletters, ongoing offers, presentations and/or events,
 - the development of projects aimed at special target groups or projects aimed at special strategic areas.
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10.0 Funding/budget

In connection with the approval of this strategy, the initiation of the proposed activities and the establishment of a stable organisation with shared operational targets, clarified division of responsibilities, clear functional descriptions and internal communication channels, it will be necessary to allocating dedicated resources, particularly to the central unit.

At the faculties Arts, Aarhus BSS, Nat and Tech, there are already staff members who are either completely or partly dedicated to alumni engagement. In these cases, only minor adjustments will be necessary, depending on the strategy adopted by the faculty. At Health, no resources are currently allocated to this work, so a minor adjustment will be necessary, depending on the faculty's level of ambition.

At all of the faculties, increased efforts at the university level will decrease the alumni relations workload to some degree and will ensure that all alumni receive the same level of service.

11.0 Appendices

11.1/ Appendix 1: Overview of the value of alumni relations for AU and alumni respectively

Value for AU	Value for alumni
<p>Branding Alumni can serve as ambassadors for AU and advocates for their particular degree programmes.</p> <p>Recruitment Alumni can function as a network for recruiting students, both nationally and internationally as well as in relation to specific subjects.</p> <p>Careers The experiences of alumni provide a source of insight into different career paths at the same time as they are employers of our students.</p> <p>Mentors Alumni show a high level of commitment as mentors for students and help current students with professional and personal development.</p> <p>Ambassadors Alumni can contribute as ambassadors for their company, municipality, region and country.</p> <p>Continuing education Alumni can continue their professional development through continuing and further education programmes and courses at AU.</p> <p>Corporate relations and the development of courses Alumni can contribute to graduate surveys, employer panels, market surveys, as guest lecturers, presentations at events, as external examiners, by offering internships/student jobs in their companies/organisations, etc.</p> <p>Research Alumni and their companies can get involved in research collaboration.</p> <p>Data Knowledge about alumni job conditions and engagement with AU is important in relation to both Danish and international accreditations.</p>	<p>Knowledge Alumni get academic knowledge and research news through newsletters, online articles and other digital platforms.</p> <p>Networks Alumni get an opportunity to nurture their professional networks through events and digital platforms, among other things.</p> <p>Professional and personal development Through events, mentor schemes, ambassador schemes, career counselling, presentations and continuing education, alumni develop professionally and personally.</p> <p>Stay in contact Alumni want to stay in contact with AU and fellow students and to show their pride in their affiliation with AU.</p> <p>Offers Discounts, offers and exclusive access to knowledge and events.</p> <p>Contribute to AU Alumni have the opportunity to give back by contributing as ambassadors, through employer panels, surveys, inspiration through presentations, potential donations, etc.</p> <p>Recruitment of students and graduates Close ties to AU give alumni easy access to collaborating with students and later recruiting them as employees.</p>

11.2/ Appendix 1 – Terms of reference for the cross-university committee for alumni relations

1. Purpose

The purpose of the cross-university committee for AU's alumni relations is to coordinate efforts in connection with the recruitment, retention and development of AU's alumni engagement work, both at degree programme level and across the university.

2. Background

At the Business Committee meeting on 25 March 2020, it was decided to set up a working group with the aim of drawing up proposals for a strategy for alumni engagement efforts across Aarhus University's faculties. This working group's proposal was approved at a meeting of the Business Committee on 5 August 2020. On the basis of this decision, a cross-university committee will be established to coordinate alumni relations at AU, the purpose of which is described in the previous section.

3. Tasks

The cross-university committee's task is to coordinate solutions to the initiatives and projects that have been proposed and approved in relation to AU's alumni strategy. Some of these tasks are:

- Annual planning cycle for alumni activities at degree programme and university-wide level
- The AU alumni newsletter
- Recruitment activities in relation to graduates
- Further delimitation of the target group for the alumni network
- Offers to all alumni
- Development of offers for special target groups
- Advice and support
- Coordinate and present proposals to the Business Committee regarding outstanding issues in the alumni strategy

4. Composition of the committee

The committee will be composed as follows:

- Representative, alumni employee BSS
- Representative, alumni employee Arts
- Representative, alumni employee Nat
- Representative, alumni employee Tech
- Representative, alumni employee Health
- Representative (s), Office of Business Collaboration, Eogl. Eogl has chair and administrative support.

5. Meeting frequency

The Working Group meets at least four times a year. The meetings are coordinated in relation to the annual planning cycle to be developed.

