To the Rector and the Board

# AU Strategy 2020-2025 – Response of the Faculty Management Team

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The Faculty Management Team is grateful for the opportunity to discuss the draft of the AU strategy, and the chance to contribute to the consultation process. This response is based on consultations in our schools and discussions in the Faculty Management Team, the Faculty Liaison Committee (FSU), the Faculty Occupational Health and Safety Committee (FAMU) and the Academic Council.

The faculty agrees with the fundamental values of the strategy, and sets store by the fact that the strategy constitutes an extension of many years of academic development at the university stretching all the way back to its foundation. It is good to see that the strategy also contains the existing framework contract, even though this contract expires before the strategy does. The faculty also agrees with the six core tasks. The fact that the strategy is based on the desire to utilise the full academic and scientific scope of the university in the service of society is entirely consistent with the long-standing traditions of the university. After all, when Jakob Jensen, the Mayor of Aarhus, laid the foundation stone of the university in 1932, he stated that the university’s objective should be to serve and benefit the Danish people.

# Maintaining and strengthening the Faculty of Arts

Since the presentation of the AU problem analysis, the Faculty of Arts has experienced a number of difficult years, with major changes and academic and financial challenges arising (for instance) as a result of the government’s resizing initiative, cuts in education funding and the study progress reform. The faculty has been adjusting its activities successfully for almost five years, being supported in this process (like other faculties) by the university under the principle of profile adjustment and the notion of establishing a smaller but stronger Faculty of Arts – as expressed in the document on which the framework contract was founded. These initiatives have left their mark on the draft of the AU strategy, which still refers to the principle of profile adjustment. It is worth considering whether current initiatives such as profile adjustment should be included in a strategy whose purpose is to target the future. In our view, they have only been included because they represent the final phase in a process lasting many years which is now drawing to a conclusion. This is also reflected by the fact that the dean and the rector have agreed that the faculty’s future should be guided by the principle of maintaining and strengthening the Faculty of Arts. We believe that this constitutes recognition of the fact that the faculty has carried out **Dean’s Office, Arts Johnny Laursen**

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a long process of adjustment – largely by its own efforts, but also with the university in constant support. Among other things, the process of profile adjustment has resulted in a reduction in student intake of about 30%. The degree programme resizing initiative has reduced the number of enrolled students by 4,500 (or even more, if students on business language courses transferred from BSS to Arts are discounted), an ongoing strengthening of the faculty’s research profile (including the recruitment of new researchers, many of whom have an international background), the continuous development of the faculty’s pool of young researchers, and a major change of focus from education to research in the faculty’s activities. The faculty’s research has been strengthened, and the number of students has been reduced significantly. Incidentally, the reduction in student numbers has also helped to improve the balance of AU’s graduate competence profile. The Faculty Management Team is proud of the transformation that has been achieved in terms of collaboration with staff, students and the Senior Management Team; but we believe that the faculty is now approaching the end of this exceptional situation. Our staff and students are ready to participate in AU’s strategic initiatives.

# Sustainability and climate

The faculty is part of the AU working group on sustainability and attaches major significance to this initiative, which focuses on greater corporate sustainability. We are convinced that this work will help to strengthen the university’s contribution to the reduction of CO2 emissions, as well as increasing environmental sustainability. And we are determined to do what we can to achieve the university’s objectives in this area. We also want to underline that the faculty’s ambitions include making a significant contribution to the more academic aspects of sustainability in terms of education and research initiatives, which may also include the consideration of social and global sustainability among other things. We do not support the idea that a university should focus all its efforts on a single agenda. But nor do we see any contradiction between AU’s traditional pursuit of basic research and freedom of research on the one hand, and investing wholehearted and wide-ranging efforts in the notion of sustainability in its broadest sense on the other. In our view, sustainability is entirely in line with AU’s heritage, which is mentioned in the introduction.

# The AU Centre for Sustainability

In our view, the climate and sustainability agenda influences the university’s responsibility for the future in ways which require new forms of collaboration between the university’s departments. A lot of the technologies we need are already available – but they will have to be combined into a unified approach to the issues at stake. And the dramatic nature of the effects of climate change, as well as the technological and social efforts needed to cope with them, will challenge our democracy, culture and social order. We believe that the Faculty of Arts can make a major contribution in this area in terms of research and education – alongside the university’s other departments and faculties. In our view, a cross-faculty, interdisciplinary centre should seek to collect and combine the existing areas of knowledge at AU with a view to achieving the best possible results to serve and benefit the Danish people. This is the best way of ensuring that the joint efforts of AU in this field have the strongest possible impact.

# Digital competences

The faculty feels that it has an obligation to make a special effort to develop digital competences at AU and in collaboration with the university’s partners. We have a strong digital academic environment at Katrinebjerg in particular, which we want to develop in

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collaboration with the other digital expertise which is to be found at the Katrinebjerg campus. We have also witnessed the way in which the use of digital tools and methods has developed in other fields at the faculty such as history, comparative literature and the study of religion. We regard this as one of the dominant academic and international development trends at present – particularly within the humanities and social sciences – and we have therefore focused on this area in our recruitment and competence development efforts. We have established a Centre for Humanities Computing, as well as taking part in the university’s educational IT initiatives. Based on these initiatives and with the support of the faculty’s Centre for Teaching Development and Digital Media (CUDiM), we want to contribute to AU’s digital agenda. In our view, one of the particular contributions that the Faculty of Arts can make to the AU strategy relates to digital empowerment and the democratisation of digital technologies – including the proliferation and democratisation of digital literacy for all genders and social groups. The draft strategy underlines the importance of current efforts in terms of expanding the field of IT, and we can identify completely with this ambition.

The core competences of the humanities are important when it comes to understanding and developing the digital solutions of the future. There is a need for people who can understand and analyse digital technologies. So the strategy should include the strengthening of all the faculty’s digital initiatives. The American professor Joseph Dumit (UC Davis), who has visited AU on several occasions, has asked the managers of several major high-tech companies in Silicon Valley about the kind of skills they are looking for in their employees. They say they need people who can ask the right kind of critical questions about modern technology instead of simply finding technical solutions.

**The 0-18 age group**

Another current initiative which is mentioned in the draft strategy is the focus devoted to the 0-18 age group. This is the concern of the Danish School of Education in particular. Everyone knows that this is a highly politicised field. However, following the merger with the Danish School of Education, AU and the Faculty of Arts have assumed responsibility for this area, which contains major perspectives in the Danish education sector for 0-18 year-olds. We believe that the Danish School of Education should continue to live up to its particular nationwide responsibility for higher education, research and research-based consultancy in this vital sector of society. The goal of the Danish School of Education is to support everyone working with the education of children and young people in Denmark, based on the greatest possible diversity and quality in terms of research and methods. We will continue to pursue this goal, even though the current initiative targeting 0-18 year-olds will expire before the end of the period covered by the draft strategy.

# Talent and career development

The resizing of degree programmes in the humanities in Denmark has resulted in an increase in admission requirements for the faculty’s degree programmes. And our hard-working students and researchers have made great efforts to maintain high standards in terms of academic expertise, motivation, learning and the study environment. This is an area on which the faculty wishes to focus even more in future, and in which we believe we can make a contribution to AU’s strategic initiatives. For the sake of good order, we should add that our efforts to improve the ratio between students and academic staff are largely dependent on the external framework within which we have to operate. We are also anxious to strengthen the link between research and education, and we want to intensify our efforts in terms of talent development with a view to maintaining our focus on the generation between Master’s and PhD level.

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In continuation of the change in profile in recent years, leading to an increase in the degree to which our research is funded by external sources and creating an extremely strong talent environment at PhD and postdoc level, the faculty will seek to strengthen the links between education and talent recruitment, including work and career opportunities for young researchers.

# Internationalisation

If we want to make AU one of Denmark’s best institutions for talented young students and researchers, we need to ensure that we have good international collaborations, good educational activities conducted in English, and research environments that maintain close contact with the leaders in their respective fields. We appreciate the extent to which these areas of concern have been acknowledged in the strategy, and we undertake to contribute to the achievement of goals in this respect. It would be an advantage to underline the importance of the global agenda and AU’s role in terms of contributing to global solutions.

# Social challenges

For some time now, the Faculty of Arts has been discussing today’s worrying upheavals in the international order, the foundations of modern society and the dominant technologies of the present day – as well as the interests and power structures that lie behind these phenomena. We feel that we have a particular obligation to ensure that our researchers and their colleagues at international universities and research institutions make a special contribution to the university’s strategy with respect to social cohesion, democracy and the framework within which democracy has to operate in a high-tech society. It is essential that these areas of research are developed in line with the long-term development of the academic environment and the fundamental principles of freedom of research. But as with sustainability and climate initiatives, we do not feel that the two are incompatible. Our research environments have a great number of concrete ideas that they look forward to putting into practice.

# Original basic research and academic expertise

The preamble of the strategy refers to academic expertise, a concept which resonates with the Faculty Management Team, who also emphasise the importance of AU’s ongoing efforts to protect the fertile environment provided for new research ideas and a broad knowledge structure as the foundation of original research projects and academic innovation in the future, instead of focusing on winner-takes-all initiatives. We feel that this commitment to broad, independent basic research should be stated more clearly in the strategy. We also wish to underline that in the university of the future, the concept of expertise will also apply to the professional technical and administrative staff on whom all our research and education depends. In our view, the university’s strategy should focus just as much on AU’s technical and administrative initiatives as on our other initiatives. More than ever before, research projects and education depend on smooth interaction between our academic staff, technical and administrative staff and students.

# Study and working environment

A similar initiative, which is not mentioned separately in the draft strategy, concerns collaboration and a good study and working environment. Following the great uncertainty and painful staff cuts that have been made at other universities in Denmark in recent years, the Faculty of Arts wishes to underline that

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collaboration and the greatest possible degree of stability in terms of employment and working conditions are essential aspects of being a top-ranking research and education institution. We should like this to be acknowledged more explicitly in the strategy. A related theme, which also contains important prerequisites for research and education at the highest international level, is the issue of diversity among staff and students. We value the fact that equal opportunities in terms of gender occupy a strong position in the strategy; but would like to underline the need for a broader understanding of the challenge of diversity comprising other forms of inclusion, for instance emphasising the inclusion of staff and students with an international background.

# Collaboration with the rest of society

The draft strategy talks about extending the thesis period, which must reflect the special rules applying to degree programmes in the natural sciences and not to degree programmes at the Faculty of Arts. Having said that, we do support the idea that Master’s theses should be produced in collaboration with the business community in the broadest sense, which in our case would include public-sector institutions, institutions of culture and education etc. We support AU’s ambition of achieving greater contact with business and industry – in the broadest sense, again, and definitely including private-sector employers – and will do our utmost to help achieve this goal. This will mean maintaining our traditional collaboration with educational institutions, museums and institutions of culture throughout Denmark, as well as continuing to strengthen our collaboration with players in the private sector.

In connection with the core task of contributing to the development and welfare of society, a great deal of focus is placed on innovation and entrepreneurship, and on the need to provide students and researchers with better opportunities to convert their ideas into concrete spinout companies. In this respect it would also be a good idea to widen our understanding of entrepreneurship to comprise not only the start-up of new enterprises (spinouts), but also more generally the idea that students should acquire entrepreneurial competences which can be used throughout the labour market for humanities graduates.

And finally, we should like each initiative to be framed by a clear explanation of why it has been chosen. This is because the connection between the general goals and the individual initiatives is not always apparent.

We should like to thank you for an extremely interesting draft strategy, and look forward to contributing to the final design of the new AU strategy.

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