

**Meeting on: 13 November 2024 from 11.00**

**Place: 1447-025**

**PhD committee meeting**

**Minutes**

**Participants:** Simon Calmar Andersen (SOCSCIBUS), Sven Kunisch (BTECH), Dorthe Kirkegaard Thomsen (PSY), Birte Asmuß (MGMT), Susanne Kier (LAW, chair), Lasse Lindkilde (PS), Julia Hárune Nennstiel (PhD alternate, ECON), Marcus Ernø-Heising (PhD representative, PS), Dela Sawatzki (PhD representative PSY), Chengjiao Li (PhD representative, MGMT), Niels Mejlgaard (PhD School Head), Randi Groslier Bjælde (Aarhus BSS HR & PhD)

**Absent:** Eric Hillebrand (ECON), Katrine Bønneland Tølbøll (PhD representative, SOCSCIBUS, vise-chair), Rita Madsen (PhD representative BTECH),

Aarhus BSS HR & Ph.d.

Ref.: rgb

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**1. Approval of agenda**

**2. Approval of observer**

Amna Saeed Akkas (Observer, BTECH), was approved as observer.

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**3. Briefing on the enrolment and recruitment of PhD students following the round of applications in autumn 2024** by Niels Mejlgaard

A total of 306 applications were received for the autumn of 2024 open call, and 46 applicants were assessed as qualified. This time 30 candidates are recommended for enrolment with grants, distributed as follows: ECON (8), MGMT (4), PS (7), PSY (5), BTECH (3), SSB(1), LAW (2). 29,5 of these are financed by the graduate school. External funding covers the last 0,5.

Of the candidates offered enrolment, 13 are female and 17 are male. Approximately 30% are international candidates, and two candidates are offered enrolment in the 4 year scheme. Most of the candidates will be enrolled as per 1 February 2024.

The briefing on enrolment and recruitment in autumn 2024 was noted.

**4. Discussion about PhD teaching requirements** by PhD students, 20 min

*Motivation: PhD teaching obligations vary significantly across and sometimes within departments, leading to confusion. Securing teaching assistant (TA) positions often requires personal outreach to course leaders, which is particularly challenging for those who did not previously study at Aarhus University or within the specific department. Pre-arranged agreements between some PhD students and course-leaders further complicate the process.*

It was clear from the discussion that this subject is handled very differently at the individual programmes, as there are no general rules about this at the graduate school. Hence, the discussion should be taken locally.

The workload of 840 hours was brought up as part of this discussion. It was the general notion among the PhD students that this is too much. As the workload is part of the union agreement governing the employment as PhD student, this is not something the Graduate School can change.

#### 5. ECTS Approval Process by PhD students, 20 min

Motivation: *The current process for approving ECTS credits lacks transparency. Some departments offer limited PhD courses, forcing students to seek courses elsewhere within AU, in Denmark, or abroad. Converting these courses into ECTS credits is often complicated, and students may invest substantial time and resources for minimal credit recognition. This challenge is exacerbated when relevant courses are scarce, undermining the purpose of specialized education.*

The basic rules for course participation and ECTS acknowledgement at Aarhus BSS Graduate School were discussed. The Graduate School adheres to the EU standard that a workload of around 28 hours corresponds to 1 ECTS.

#### 6. Ethical Approval Process by PhD students, 10 min

Motivation: *PhD students are experiencing issues with the Ethical Approval Process, including:*

- 1. Infrequent deadlines and long processing times, which privilege those with experience applying or pre-planned data collection, and incentivise PhD students not to apply for ethical approval or to apply early in the process and revise the study later. The lack of clear processing time estimates further complicates the planning of data collection.*
- 2. An opaque and inconsistent application of ethical standards, whereby seemingly very similar applications/protocols receive widely different decisions. This results in highly unpredictable requests for changes and creates serious inequalities as comparable data collections are held to divergent standards.*
- 3. Uniquely strict standards regarding deception, out of line with those of similar committees at international universities, which limit our ability to make robust and valid scientific claims and put us at a significant disadvantage internationally.*

*In light of these concerns, we would like to seek ways towards more frequent application rounds and fast-track options for certain applications; consistent application of ethical standards; and a transparent definition of deception aligned with international standards.*

A lot has been done in the last couple of years to make the process of ethical approval more streamlined, this work is ongoing. Currently there are eight deadlines a year, the problem is the number of applications that need iterations.

The participants were encouraged to bring this discussion up in the local research committees.

**7. Written briefings enclosed on decisions made by the graduate school head upon delegation from the PhD committee at the constituent meeting in January 2024:**

Appendix 1a: dissertation assessment committee(s) appointed since last meeting

Appendix 1b: course(s) approved since last meeting

Appendix 1c: merit(s) approved since last meeting

There were no comments to the written briefing.

**8. Written briefing enclosed on current PhD numbers** by Niels Mejlgaard

Appendix 2: PhD numbers for Aarhus BSS Graduate School per 4 November 2024

It was commented that the PhD numbers are broken down by gender. AU has decided to track diversity. Currently that is mostly done by looking at gender and international vs. nationals as reflected in the PhD numbers.

**9. Any other business**

No other business.

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