Self-Assessment Report

School of Communication and Culture
Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University

2024

Contents

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1.0 Introduction to the school

The school and its history

The School of Communication and Culture (SCC) was founded in 2011 as part of a major reform of Aarhus University (AU), in which the Faculty of Humanities, the Danish University of Education, and the Faculty of Theology were merged into a new Faculty of Arts (currently ranked as #41 on *Times Higher Education*'s world ranking of arts and humanities faculties). The faculty is divided into three large schools. SCC is the largest of these schools, and with 19 BA programs, 28 MA programs, and 310 full-time academic staff (including PhD students), it is in itself the size of many other humanities faculties. Physically situated in four locations in Aarhus, the school has nine departments, which together cover a wide range of disciplines (for a full list of the individual disciplines within the departments, please see this link):

- Department of Digital Design and Information Studies
- Department of Media Studies and Journalism
- Department of Scandinavian Studies and Experience Economy
- Department of German and Romance Languages
- Department of English
- Department of Linguistics, Cognitive Science and Semiotics
- Department of Dramaturgy and Musicology
- Department of Art History, Aesthetics & Culture and Museology
- Department of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric

While all nine departments are centered on education, some departments are congruent with individual degree programs, whereas others embrace several different programs. The research, on the other hand, is organized in eleven cross-cutting research programs (see section 7), of which some are closely aligned with a particular department or discipline, while others cut across many different disciplines and departments. Researchers can have both a primary and a secondary affiliation to research programs of their own choice, but they can also opt out altogether, since participation in a research program is not mandatory. In addition, the school is currently home to 43 research centers (see appendix 10), which are all formally linked to the research programs but are again of very different nature and sizes. The PhD area is organized independently in the Graduate School, Arts and suborganized in eight PhD programs, three of which are based at SCC (more on this in section 6).

Political and strategic discussions of the school's research take place in its research committee, which consists of representatives from the group of research program directors, three PhD program directors, and a representative of the heads of department. The school management is represented on the committee by the head of school and the deputy head of school for research, with the latter being responsible for planning and conducting the meetings. During the evaluation period (2018-22), the research organization has been supported by a single research consultant, but we have recently hired a second research consultant.

Over the past decade, Danish universities have undergone a series of large political reforms. While the reforms have primarily been aimed at the education side, they have had major economic and work-related consequences and have therefore also had a significant impact on research activities. A major national reform that proposes to restructure or shorten a large number of our MA degree programs waits in the immediate future and will have further significant economic consequences for the universities in general and for social sciences and the humanities in particular.

Finally, it should be noted that the evaluation period has been atypical due the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected research activities in many ways: While some colleagues were in a position to be more productive in their home office, many others had to take care of young children while familiarizing themselves with new digital teaching formats and accordingly experienced a significant drop in productivity. The data for the past five years are characterized by fluctuations that are difficult to explain in any other way.

Strategic highlights

SCC's strategy for 2020-25 focuses, among other things, on making visible the school's contribution to the challenges of global society across the entire range of disciplines; on using the research organization to strengthen publishing and building strong research groups; on supporting diversity and career opportunities by mobilizing a wider range of internal applicants, recruiting more international staff, and strengthening the gender balance; on working with better post-award support; and finally on promoting the recognition of a wider range of publication and dissemination formats. Additionally, the strategy singles out three areas in which SCC has "specific challenges and responsibilities and makes specific contributions to the AU strategy: foreign languages, digitalization, democracy and social cohesion."

The school has made substantial progress in most of these areas during the evaluation period. External funding has increased markedly (see section 4 for an elaboration), the gender balance at the school has improved in all job categories (with the most senior categories still lagging behind), and the proportion of international employees has increased. Moreover, the research organization has been evaluated and adjusted accordingly. On the other hand, the work on post-award support and the recognition of a wider range of publication formats have not progressed significantly during the period and will be an area of focus in the coming years.

The three areas singled out in the 2020-25 strategy have also been strengthened through, for instance, the establishment of new research centers, but topics such as the environmental and medical humanities have since emerged as other areas of strategic importance. Having said that, the present school management recognizes the importance of a strong and comprehensive portfolio of research areas and aims to ensure that all the school's disciplines are properly encouraged and supported.

2.0 Summary of the self-assessment

Self-assessment process

During 2024-25, each school at Aarhus University will undergo an international research evaluation. The preparation of SCC's research evaluation has been managed by a steering committee led by the deputy head of school for research. The steering committee has worked on the basis of guidelines from the faculty to ensure a comparable process across the three schools. The evaluation has largely been a bottom-up process. Data material (especially on publications and applications) has been sent to all departments, and this material has formed the basis for nine departmental workshops where the departments' employees have discussed the data and derived questions. These workshops have laid the groundwork for nine local reports, which are attached here (appendices 1-9) as supplementary information. The nine reports have been discussed in the steering committee, the research committee, and the school management with a view to identifying the most important recurring points and taking a more strategic view. These discussions have fed into the present report, which is written by the deputy head of school for research with support from the research consultants and the steering committee.

The report draws on data from 2018-22 in particular but also involves reflections on the current status of research at the school. The ideas in the European Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (CoARA), including its focus on quality and research environments, have shaped the perspectives and recommendations in this report. Throughout the report, emphasis is placed on analyses of cross-cutting tendencies, formative discussions, and suggested initiatives of general relevance for SCC as a whole. More elaborate presentations and discussions of the very diverse research environments at the school can be found in the nine local reports.

Summary of results

The evaluation process has testified to the remarkable strength and diversity of the school's research environment. Research from SCC is published by a broad range of high-ranked journals and publishers and thus has a significant international impact. In recent years, the amount of external funding has increased drastically, not least due to ongoing adjustments of our research organization, a pronounced tradition of collectivity, and a strengthening of our internal research support. Moreover, researchers at the school are actively engaged in various forms of outreach, and our collaboration with the wider society is on the rise. The many workshops and discussions that laid the groundwork for the present report have, however, also identified a number of important points to consider in the coming years. The primary learning outcomes of the evaluation are summarized in bullet form below and elaborated in the different sections of the report and in the concluding summary:

- The many local discussions testify to a desire and need for an even stronger focus on collectivity, both in relation to publications, idea generation, and applications.

- There is a need to review the format of our biennial assessment of individual researchers so that it better reflects the diverse research traditions and types of peer-reviewed publications at the school and places more emphasis on quality.
- To ensure a continued high level of research activities through external funding we will a) try to encourage even more colleagues to apply by supplementing the focus on applications with a focus on motivations and the development of research ideas; and b) map the funding landscape more thoroughly and strengthen our proactive dialogue with selected funding bodies.
- To secure coherent time for research there is a need for an increased focus on time management for individual researchers as well as long-term strategic planning: The use of individual research plans appears to be a good prioritization tool in an increasingly complex research environment.
- While the diversity and overall gender balance of the school have improved during the evaluation period, the proportion of female professors (currently 36 %) is still too low.
- Our internal research organization that cuts across departments presents both opportunities and challenges, which require ongoing adjustments and dialogues between departments and research programs.
- By working with broader merit criteria, including further recognition of diverse outreach activities, clearer career paths can be created for a wider proportion of the school's researchers.

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3.0 Publications

Publication patterns

The research output of SCC is as diverse as its portfolio of disciplines, each of which has different traditions of publishing. Despite the diversity, the school's publication profile is characterized by a prevalence of English-language peer-reviewed journal articles. A significant factor behind this trend is the Danish Bibliometric Research Indicator (BRI), which was introduced in 2009 as part of a result-based redistribution of funds between universities, and whose point system particularly rewarded journal articles (which relative to their size received more points than for instance monographs and book chapters). The BRI was abolished in 2022, but its guidelines still influence publication practices and have no doubt contributed to increasing our international visibility and impact. At the same time, the system may have streamlined our publication practices too much. The one-sided focus on journal articles (and the related metrics of the H-index) derives from the natural sciences, where journal articles are the dominant form of publication, and where co-authorship is the norm. A similar trend toward co-authorship can be observed at SCC during the evaluation period, and in some departments, international co-publication has become the new normal, while other disciplines still have a majority of single-authored publications. However, the types of publications in the humanities in general and at our school in particular are much more diverse than the single- or co-authored journal article: The second most common type of publication in the evaluation period is book chapters. In the BRI, book chapters were not valued highly, but in certain disciplines, anthologies can define a field as much as or more than a collection of journal articles. In other disciplines, such as information science, conference proceedings tied to large and highly competitive peer-reviewed conferences are the golden standard of publication, and yet other disciplines, such as comparative literature or Scandinavian studies, have a strong tradition of single-authored monographs. Finally, it should be noted that the range of publication types include more unusual formats, such as peer-reviewed video essays (media studies) or more practical and artistic contributions.
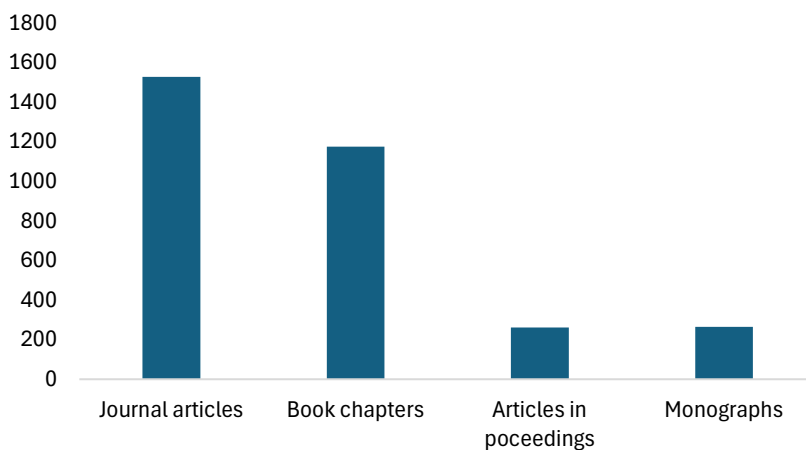

Figure 1: Frequency of four different types of research publications (2018-2023)

All this indicates the importance of acknowledging the diversity of publication forms in our internal evaluation procedures, and to be fully aware that different disciplines have different traditions and benchmarks, especially at such a diverse school as SCC. Thus, there are significant differences in how many citations the average article receives in different subject areas, so a good citation score in one discipline may be unsatisfactory in another. Moreover, in some departments, co-authorship is actively encouraged, while other departments emphasize the importance of single-authored publications. Such entrenched norms are challenged as interdisciplinary exchanges increase, however, so in line with the recommendations of the CoARA, metrics must be used with caution, and the core of research evaluation should be the qualitative assessment by peers.

In addition to the above-mentioned range of research publications, the school has a solid tradition of publishing research communication for broad audiences to establish a strong dialogue with the surrounding society. A crucial point here is that the distinction between research and dissemination is not always easy to uphold, even though PURE, our system for registering publications, enforces this very distinction. For instance, Tænkepauser (a bestselling series of small books from Aarhus University Press) are peer-reviewed and often draw on many years of research, while more traditional research publications are sometimes read by both peers and a wider public.
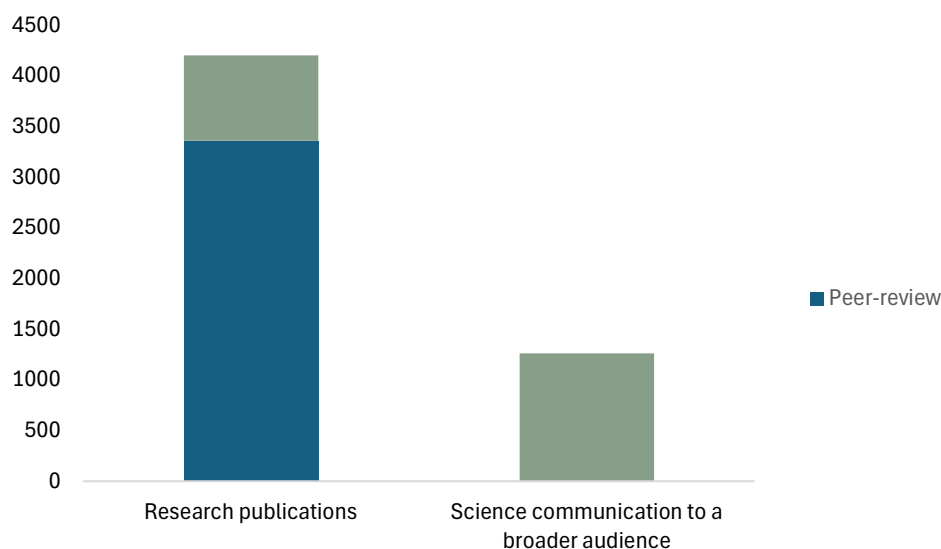
Figure 2: Research publication and science communication (2018-2023)
During the period, researchers at SCC have published 4204 research publications out of which 3362 were peer-reviewed. In the same period, they also published 1262 publications as science communication for a broader audience.

The evaluation period saw an overall decline in peer-reviewed research outputs per employee in the school (from 3.0 in 2018 to 2.1 in 2021 and 2022). While the latest numbers still fall within the stated expectations of the school (see below), it is worth dwelling on possible explanations for the decline: Covid-19 and the resultant backlog have undoubtedly affected the productivity of many colleagues, and the lower figures in 2021-22 are in all likelihood derived effects of the pandemic, but it should also be noted that the decline in publication numbers coincides with a higher application activity (see section 4). Regardless, the discussions and figures above indi-

cate the importance of continuing the intentions in SCC's Strategy 2020-25, namely, to recognize a broader spectrum of publication and dissemination formats in our internal research assessment and merit structures.

Academic and international impact of the school's publications

As far as journal articles are concerned, the data material testifies to a wide distribution across different outlets. The list of journals frequented by each department usually shows a few favored (and sometimes locally edited) journals, but all departments also have a long tail of publications in a diverse range of journals. Among the school's publications we find articles in some of the best journals in various fields, just as monographs and anthologies by the school's researchers are often published by some of the most prestigious and selective international university presses. Publication in these esteemed venues creates a high degree of visibility among academic peers, and the Faculty of Arts performs exceptionally well in terms of the number and quality of citations on *Times Higher Education*'s ranking list (on the same level as Harvard University, and better than Cambridge University). Accordingly, many of our publications have a high academic and international impact, but a considerable proportion of our publications are still published in somewhat less esteemed outlets. Since we are in competition with the best researchers globally, not everyone can always publish in the best journals or with the best publishers, but there might still be room for improvement (see reflections on this in the next subsection).

The BRI featured a (sometimes quite random) list that in the humanities divided journals and publishers into two tiers: Tier 2 consisted of the top 20%, and Tier 1 of the remaining 80%. After BRI's closure in 2022, many researchers have asked for more knowledge about what constitutes the best and most relevant journals in their field. Some disciplines are already oriented towards international ranking lists such as SCOPUS, Web of Science, and Google Scholar Metrics, but not everyone is familiar with these lists. Of course, there is not necessarily a 1:1 relationship between a journal's ranking and the quality of its individual articles, but on the whole, highly ranked journals contribute to greater visibility and therefore higher academic and international impact.

Although there is an increasing prevalence of English-language publications at the school, three departments still publish more than half of their articles and books in Danish. In some cases, such as Nordic Studies, many important peers within the subject area are Scandinavian, so publications in Danish will therefore reach a significant number of relevant readers. Formalized research collaborations with local or national institutions such as museums also result in many Danish research publications. Moreover, many researchers are concerned with communicating their research to the surrounding Danish society to uphold the university's important role role as a national institution. In any case, it is pertinent that we even in an increasingly globalized research environment recognize that publication languages other than English continue to have their justification. On the other hand, it is equally important that individual researchers continuously reflect on where their research can have the most impact, and sometimes a Danish journal article means that a research result does not reach as many peers as it has the potential to.

Organization

The faculty's internal biennial research assessment is based on an expectation that all permanent academic staff publish two peer-reviewed articles or equivalent per year (while taking into account, for example, extraordinary teaching loads, application activities, or administrative tasks). This expectation has been a theme in many departmental reports, which mention that it provides a clear benchmark, but which also point out certain undesirable consequences, including that it potentially makes researchers less inclined to devote the extra time and care that excellent research publications in leading international outlets call for. To meet the expectation of two peer-reviewed articles per year, not all researchers feel that they can afford to invest this extra time, so it would be prudent to revisit the formulations in the research assessment, e.g. by highlighting a larger spectrum of publication types and by acknowledging that publishing in the best channels usually requires more time and work. Such adjustments would also be in line with the recommendations of the CoARA, which emphasize quality over quantity. Furthermore, adjustments in the wording can help to ensure that the guidelines better reflect the range of different traditions and types of peer-reviewed publications at the school.

To support the movement towards increased quality, many researchers ask for more collectivity in various aspects of the entire publication process. Some research environments at the school reserve weekly time slots where researchers get together with the expressed purpose of writing. But there is also a pronounced desire for sharing even more aspects of the process, including idea development, writing methods, reading each other's drafts, exchanging information about relevant journals, discussing negative peer reviews, etc. Such collegiality takes time, and some will probably prioritize their precious research time differently, but there is little doubt that a more targeted effort to create collectivity around the entire publication process would have beneficial consequences. Due to the widely differing traditions across the school, such collective formats are probably best situated in the context of research programs or departments rather than at the school level. Finally, in order to support not only the writing of publications, but also the infrastructure that lies underneath and constitutes a necessary prerequisite for our publication efforts, it is imperative that our merit structures acknowledge and reward all the editorial work, peer-reviewing, and other forms of academic citizenship that constitute a significant part of many colleagues' research efforts.

4.0 Research ideas and applications

Developments in applications and funding patterns

While SCC is funded by government funds, which in 2023 amounted to approximately 398 million DKK, external funding provides welcome opportunities for the school to build new research collectives and maintain a high level of diverse research activities. Various structural conditions, including dwindling youth cohorts and the reduction of humanities programs, mean that educational income is declining and that the school is increasingly dependent on external funding in order to maintain strong and active research environments. Fortunately, SCC has managed to increase its external funding significantly in the evaluation period. The contributions from external funding bodies in 2018 amounted to DKK 66.2 million, and in 2022 they had increased to DKK 102 million.
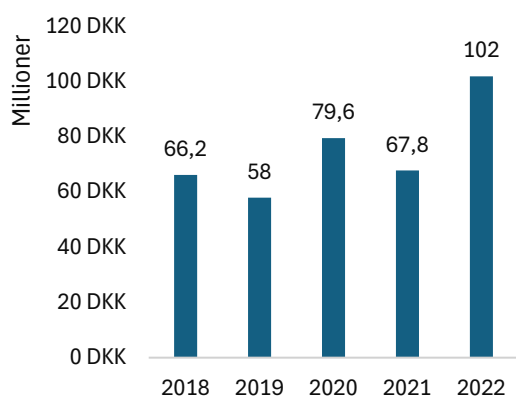
Figure 3: External funding 2018-2022

In comparison, the average funding from 2013-17 was DKK 51 million. This doubling of external funding of course corresponds to an increase of applications – the following figure shows the number of applications above DKK 500,000 in the evaluation period:
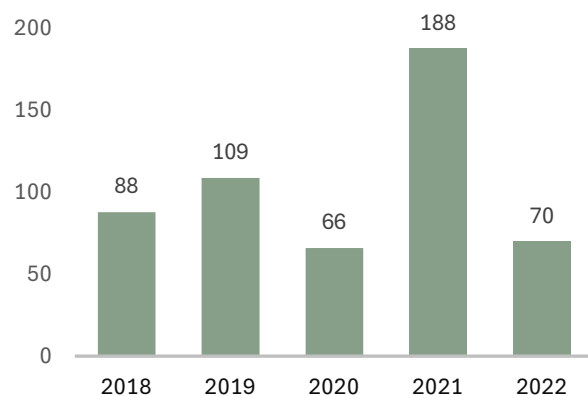

Figure 4: Number of applications at SCC, 2018-2022
Despite fluctuations and a marked peak in 2021, the overall trend is positive.

The positive trend is partly the result of a targeted effort at the school, where collective efforts such as application workshops, knowledge sharing on relevant calls, systematized feedback on applications, and the establishment of clearer internal procedures have all contributed. Most of the departmental evaluation reports acknowledge that the school's research consultant has likewise played a key role in supporting this effort. Recently, the school has hired another research consultant, and this strengthening of our research support will naturally make it possible to further direct the support where it is most needed.

Grants and applications are centered on a relatively limited number of foundations, of which the seven largest are shown in the following graph:
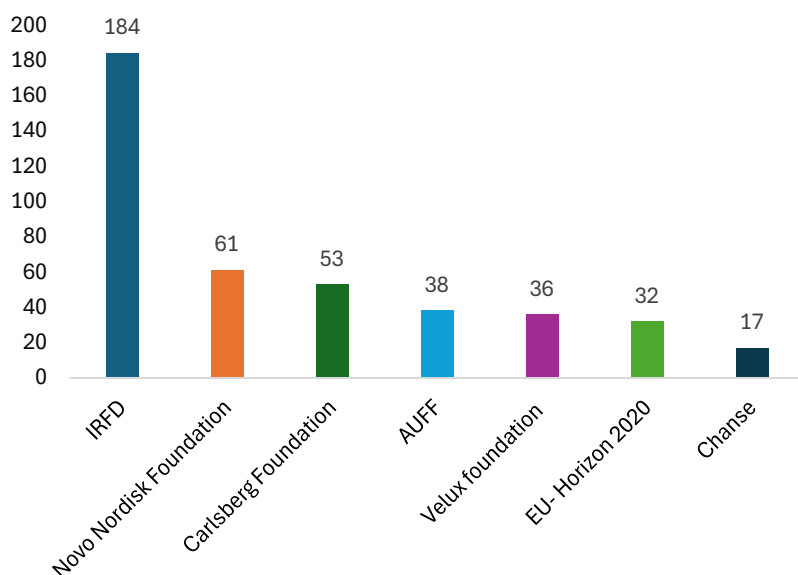
Figure 5: Top grant-awarding bodies applied to at SCC
Public grant-awarding bodies: IRFD (Independent Research Fund Denmark), EU-Horizon 2020, Chanse. Private sector grant-awarding bodies: the Novo Nordisk Foundation, the Carlsberg Foundation, AUFF (Aarhus University Research Foundation), the Velux foundation.

Many of the foundations belong to the private sector, and there is indeed an increased tendency to seek funding from this sector. This trend undoubtedly opens new doors, but concerns have also been raised that the private sector is gaining a still larger influence on the topics in which researchers are engaged. In fairness, it should be pointed out that a number of private foundations also have open, non-thematic calls, just as the national Independent Research Fund is increasing its number of thematic calls. However, the trend has entailed one particular challenge, namely that some of the private foundations have so far included little or no administrative overhead in their grants. While the many private grants have enabled excellent research, they have thus also been expensive for the school to house. To meet this challenge, Aarhus University has been at the forefront of reaching an agreement with some of the largest private foundations to increase their contribution to administrative costs.

Behind the remarkable growth in funding, we can find significant differences between the nine departments at the school. The average funding for individual researchers during the evaluation period thus ranges from DKK 412,000 in one department to DKK 3,7 million in another department. While these differences are partly due to exceptionally large individual grants in certain

departments, they can also to some extent be explained by different opportunities for different disciplines. For instance, a discipline such as art history is blessed with a wide range of foundations dedicated to studies in the visual arts, while other more technical disciplines have the opportunity to apply for earmarked funds from, for example, IT Vest or Innovation Fund Denmark. But different opportunities are not the whole explanation, and the local reports testify to different application cultures in the departments. In some departments, writing applications is a natural part of everyday life as a researcher, while colleagues in other departments are more likely to devote their research time to other activities with greater guarantee of success. While the school has seen a marked positive trend in the number of applications and the amount of external funding, there seems to be a potential for spreading the application activities over an even larger number of employees and departments. The evaluation process has suggested different ways to achieve this, which are discussed below.

Collective pathways to ideas and funding

First and foremost, discussions in most departments indicate that the focus can advantageously be divided between the application process itself and supporting the development of research ideas. The latter is of course a prerequisite for the first, and focusing on the initial development of ideas will be motivating for many researchers. Similar to the increased collectivity surrounding the publication process described in section 3, in the following years we will thus endeavor to strengthen the collective processes surrounding the development of research ideas even further. Many departments are already working purposefully to place greater emphasis on collegial conversations about research, and in order to bolster the research dimension, some disciplines (such as media studies and art history) have developed their own research strategies or visions. The general desire for greater collectivity applies not only to the development of ideas but also to the actual work of writing applications, including once again the importance of sharing defeats as well as victories. Some of the most successful environments at the school have already developed such sharing practices that others can be inspired by.

Several local evaluation reports attempt to identify what motivates people to apply for funding, and recurring points include the following four partially overlapping motivations: 1) To have the opportunity to conduct exciting research (here it is important to remember that grants are the path to good research rather than vice versa); 2) To help younger colleagues in their career by creating jobs for them in collective projects; 3) A sense of loyalty to the school and department, and a wish to contribute to their academic position of strength and finances; 4) Individual career advancement. Working with these types of motivation is perhaps a good way to increase application activity. An addition to this is to create more openness about the fact that even applications that are unsuccessful still succeed in other ways, e.g., by creating new collaborations or giving rise to new publications or knowledge. An increased awareness of such derived results of writing applications (which can be strengthened by the use of individual research plans, see section 6) may increase the motivation to apply for funding despite low success rates.

Yet another way to encourage more colleagues to get involved in the application process is suggested in many local evaluation reports, namely a desire to have the application work made visible in the biennial research assessment described in section 3. The writing of large applications is already taken into account when assessing the research activities of individual researchers, but in the suggested revision of our assessment procedures, the recognition of application writing can no doubt be stated even more clearly.

An additional factor here is that it is difficult for many researchers to secure coherent time for research. While permanent academic staff nominally have 40% of their working hours allotted to research, teaching and administrative tasks fragment the working life of many, just as the stated publication requirements can make it difficult for some researchers to find time to write applications. Some departments work purposefully (through, for example, limited meeting activity and long-term planning of and fixed principles for teaching) to create coherent research time for employees. This institutional support can be coupled with knowledge sharing on individual time management.

In continuation of this, seed funding is highlighted by certain departments as a valuable tool to secure time and focus to work on projects that can develop into something bigger. Not all departments have the financial scope to offer seed funding, but those that do clearly demonstrate that smaller grants can also create excellent value and constitute steppingstones to larger projects. In the data packages that were prepared for the departments to support their self-evaluation, only grants above DKK 500,000 were included for pragmatic reasons. This has (rightly) been problematized by several departments, so an important learning point must be that grants below DKK 500,000 should also be included in the data material for the next research evaluation, both to recognize the value of smaller grants and to provide a more accurate picture of the application activities. A more complete registration of application activities could also provide a map of a broader landscape of relevant funding bodies. As can be seen from Figure 5, the large applications tend to cluster around a relatively limited number of foundations. International employees and younger employees in particular are asking for greater knowledge about and help in navigating the Danish foundation landscape, but it is also important to distribute application activities across even more funding bodies. To make this happen, the school's research management must a) strengthen knowledge of the national and European funding landscape; and b) identify the best strategies for actively reaching out to funding bodies in order to pitch ideas.

In summary, despite Covid-19, there has been a significant improvement in application activities and external funding during the evaluation period. If this positive trend is to be maintained or even improved, we need to consolidate our research support and strengthen collectivity around the entire process from idea development to application writing. Moreover, an increased awareness of the various motivations for applying will likely be a fruitful approach. Recognizing the importance of smaller grants, including seed funding, is similarly important, as is a more elaborate mapping of the funding landscape and a more active dialogue with private foundations and public funding bodies.

That said, it must be emphasized that not everyone always has to apply for funding. Ideally, every researcher at SCC should have the time and opportunity to develop research ideas both individually and collectively, but this can lead to many different results besides applying for funding, including publications, innovative teaching, and various knowledge exchange activities, which is the topic of the next section.

5.0 Societal and political impact

Increased interaction with society generates new knowledge and other forms of value for both the university and our partners. In recognition of the importance of engaging with external partners, SCC has formed a Business Committee, which is largely congruent with the school management, and which undertakes strategic discussions of how to further strengthen the interactions between the school's research and teaching activities and the surrounding society. Such interactions are increasingly important at a time when universities, not least the humanities, are under political pressure.

Impact in itself is a broad concept, and the importance of an inclusive understanding of impact is stressed in the CoARA. In continuation of this, the school's research committee has prepared an internal memo which proposes a multidimensional and multidirectional approach that divides impact into the following partly overlapping categories; **1)** impact as a contribution to academic fields; **2)** impact as immanent influences through research collaborations; **3)** impact as research-based interventions and problem solving; **4)** impact as research-based teaching and further education; **5)** impact as communication, dissemination, and debate; **6)** Impact as influence on policy development.

All departments at SCC engage in a broad spectrum of activities with significant academic, societal, and political impact. In addition to **1)** the academic impact described in the section on publications, examples of the different categories include the following:

> **2)** The project Danish in the Making collaborates with teachers and students of Danish as a second language to establish new pedagogical methods; and the Center for Cultural Evaluation undertakes commissioned analyses of selected cultural activities, investigating their impact and modes of engaging participants.

> **3)** The National Knowledge Center for Digital Technology Understanding has resulted in the creation of an entirely new subject in primary and lower secondary schools; and the Recreational Fear Lab's scientific investigation of frightening leisure activities and their practical applications has attracted attention from *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

> **4)** The daily teaching of cohorts of students from ordinary MA programs and professional MA programs in e.g., Rhetoric, Curating, and Conference Interpreting provides students with up-to-date research-based knowledge that informs and develops their careers.

> **5)** A considerable proportion of the school's researchers are actively engaged in a broad range of dissemination activities, including interviews in printed media, radio and television, public lectures at Folkeuniversitetet (The People's University), participation in debates at public meetings, and publications with a wide appeal.

6) Researchers from the school participate in and frequently head various national councils, boards, and committees, including the Danish Media Council, the Danish Language Council, and the Ministry of Culture's Book Panel, and thus actively influence policy making at the national level.

An important reflection in relation to the broad concept of impact sketched above is that all departments can rightly say that they are actively engaged in creating diverse types of impact. At the same time, the reports indicate that it is difficult to be more precise than this somewhat general claim. This is partly due to the fact that impact is notoriously hard to measure, and partly because the available data material is inadequate. Far from all outreach activities are registered in PURE, either because they are not covered by PURE's categories, or because the academic staff has reached the conclusion that outreach activities and knowledge exchange are not adequately rewarded in the current systems of merit. For the next research evaluation, we will therefore ensure better data on outreach activities.

It must also be emphasized that the concrete impact of even the many activities that have been registered in PURE is difficult to measure, perhaps especially in the humanities. How much impact does a lecture for 80 people, a newspaper article, or a radio appearance have, and what contributes most to the democratically informed conversation? What is the state of problem-solving research on IKK? Exactly how much have research-based interventions in councils and boards influenced political decisions? While concrete answers can be provided in some cases, in others it is more difficult. Recognizing that impact eludes precise measurement, some international universities have begun to measure pathways to impact rather than impact itself (the

activity of arranging a course for high school teachers is easier to measure than the actual effect of the course in high schools), and we will do the same.

Building on these reflections, the wish for more specific knowledge of the range and effect of our knowledge exchange activities would seem to call for the development of new metrics (an initiative that was also proposed by the Academic Councils as a prelude to the current research evaluation). An important related question, however, is whether we really want new metrics to measure impact: On the one hand, the work of employees is already measured on many parameters, but on the other hand, measurement inevitably signals recognition, and colleagues generally point out that this important dimension of our work is not adequately recognized (while our teaching and research efforts are continuously evaluated). Therefore, a crucial point in most local reports is the necessity of developing broader merit structures that recognize and reward a broader range of activities (a point that also appears in CoARA).

Along the same lines, the national organization Universities Denmark has recently (2023) developed a Framework for Meriting Knowledge Exchange, but while the framework contains many promising ideas, it has yet to be implemented broadly at Aarhus University. While we wait for a promised central initiative from the university management, certain local initiatives could be implemented fairly easily. A very concrete way to acknowledge the importance of knowledge exchange is to make it even more visible in our job advertisements, recruitment, and promotion politics. Many researchers are driven by a passion for the field and are already widely engaged in knowledge exchange, but it seems likely that even more colleagues would be motivated to engage in outreach activities, if such activities were more visibly valued in the evaluation of their work. Creating better support for knowledge exchange activities could also strengthen this aspect of the school's activities. This could be done, for example, through the establishment of informal collegial forums in the research programs for exchanging knowledge on outreach, but it could also be effected through more formalized media training, which is an expressed wish in some departments. The recently hired communications officer at the school could profitably be responsible for such training.

The somewhat paradoxical conclusion of this section must therefore be that on the one hand, all departments are actively engaged in creating various forms of impact, while on the other hand, there is a general wish among the school's researchers for better support and further recognition of their diverse outreach activities. This wish for a broader set of merit criteria will also be addressed in the next section.

6.0 Talent development and merit

The PhD area

Graduate School, Arts is organized as an independent entity headed by the faculty's vice dean of research, and it houses eight thematic PhD programs, three of which are based at SCC (Art, Literature, and Cultural Studies; ICT, Media, Communication, and Journalism; Language, Linguistics, Communication, and Cognition). Graduate School, Arts has by far the largest proportion of humanities PhD students in Denmark, and as a result, many young talents from other universities apply for PhD scholarships in Aarhus. Recruitment largely happens through open calls, but some PhD students are also recruited through strategic calls or as part of larger research grants. Graduate School, Arts both has a 5+3 scheme and a 4+4 scheme – the latter is a program where talented MA students are admitted to the PhD program before handing in their MA thesis. The Graduate School underwent a separate international evaluation in 2021 and will therefore not be further assessed in this report, which will instead concentrate on the talent development that takes place in the school's departments.

Significant differences can be observed in the departments' success (or lack of same) in attracting PhD students. The number of PhD students attracted by the school's departments during the past decade thus ranges from 9 and 10 in some departments to 49 and 51 in others. Some of the departments with few PhD students suggest a possible bias in favor of certain types of PhD projects as part of the explanation (pointing out, for example, that practice-oriented or business-oriented projects have more difficulty attracting PhD scholarships in the faculty's open calls). To ensure future recruitment, these departments have a clear desire for more strategic PhD scholarships devoted to specific disciplines. At the same time, it seems likely that part of the explanation is that different disciplines have quite different traditions for spotting and helping talented young researchers applying for PhD scholarships. Therefore, there is a clear need for greater sharing of experiences between departments on best practices in relation to PhD applications and recruitment. This does not only apply to the environments that find it difficult to attract PhD students: In some of the successful departments, PhD students tend to cluster around relatively few supervisors, and more collegial exchange on best practice can also help ensure a wider distribution of supervisors and aid younger permanent staff in attracting PhD students.

In relation to ensuring the best and broadest possible recruitment, the current strict credit transfer rules for 4+4 PhD students make it difficult for promising talents from other universities to enter this program and thus discourage mobility between universities. Similarly, official rules on residence permits practically prevent us from retaining talented PhD fellows from non-EU countries. Neither from a research nor an economic perspective does it seem rational to provide young international talents with a research education and then send them out of the country quickly after the end of their scholarship.

PhD students have a complex affiliation (to departments, PhD programs, research programs, centers, etc.) that both provides good opportunities for collaboration and can be confusing for

scholars at the beginning of their careers. It is therefore important that both the Graduate School and the local academic environments provide guidance on what it means to be a part of an academic workplace. It is equally necessary that PhD students receive career guidance. Although unemployment rates for PhD graduates are practically zero, for the environments that attract many PhD students, it is a given that the majority of these young researchers cannot obtain permanent academic employment at Aarhus University. Many departments therefore pay particular attention to career guidance for young researchers (PhD students and postdocs). In spite of this, the young researchers themselves are asking for both more supervision on the academic craft (publishing, applications, etc.), and for more qualified guidance on non-academic career opportunities. In meeting the latter wish, we could profitably take more advantage of the career guidance opportunities available at Arts Career (the faculty's locally embedded career center).

Early career scholars, international recruitment, and diversity

The increased share of research grants creates a greater flow of postdocs and other temporary employees, and we strive to secure good working conditions for all of these colleagues. Onboarding and offboarding of (especially international) postdocs are therefore an ongoing concern, particularly in the departments that attract a lot of external funding.

Our many valued international staff members contribute with important new insights and inspiration, but Aarhus University's recruitment processes and our local implementation of them are occasionally criticized for being too slow and opaque for international applicants. There are more than a few examples of strong international applicants withdrawing their candidature during the process for this reason, and we are therefore continually working to optimize and streamline the recruitment process. In the many cases where we do succeed in hiring some of the strong international applicants, it is occasionally a challenge to retain them. This may partly have something to do with the difficulties for international colleagues in familiarizing themselves with the Danish university system, and while many resources are dedicated to integrating international colleagues, not all choose to stay. The language factor is another possible explanation. The Danish language is notoriously difficult to learn, and while free language courses are provided for new international colleagues, acquiring sufficient Danish remains an obstacle for many. Accordingly, there seem to be certain contradictions between our desire to attract the best international researchers and the (politically dictated) nationally oriented teaching landscape, where it is a requirement that most of the teaching takes place in Danish. The best integration of new international colleagues therefore happens in degree programs with a considerable proportion of English language courses and many other international members of staff.

During the evaluation period, there has been an ongoing effort to ensure better diversity at the school, and the gender balance as well as the number of international colleagues have improved during the evaluation period (the latter from 43 in 2018 to 70 in 2023). While the gender balance is significantly better at SCC and the Faculty of Arts than in other faculties (the overall gender balance at the school is roughly 50/50), it is still skewed in certain of the school's departments, just as there is still a notable difference in the most senior job categories. For instance, in 2018 only 28 % of the school's full professors were female, while the corresponding number in 2022 was 35 %. There is thus still a clear need for improvement, and we are continuously attempting to improve the balance through our recruitment processes.
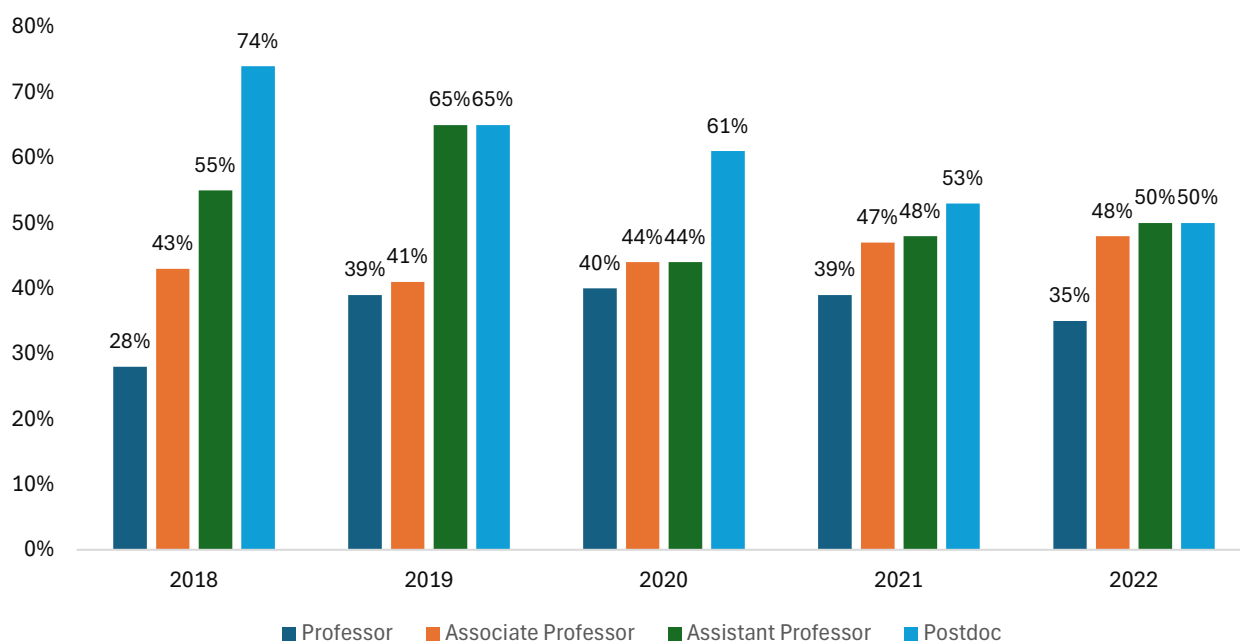
Figure 6: Percentage of female staff in research positions

Here it is relevant to point out that there are major differences in the number of qualified applicants for different positions. Aarhus University has a goal that each academic job advertisement should attract at least three qualified applicants, and in the vast majority of cases, SCC has no problems living up to this goal. However, as in most aspects of this report, there are still major internal differences within the school. Some positions attract more than a hundred qualified applicants from all over the world, while other positions have to be reposted because the initial pool of applicants was not large or diverse enough. In such cases, the work of search committees is intensified in an attempt to ensure a broader, stronger, and more diverse group of applicants.

Career development and merit

In the latest workplace assessment (WPA) from 2022 and in the departmental evaluation reports, permanent staff members generally emphasize that it is a privilege to work at SCC. Moreover, they express satisfaction with their freedom to pursue their own research interests, although many colleagues are concerned about an increased trend towards strategic initiatives that single out certain themes and subject areas as particularly important. The school's necessary strategic focus on urgent topics such as AI and climate change must therefore be balanced with a respect for individual freedom of research.

For the permanent staff, a recurring theme in most reports is that the promotion opportunities for well-qualified associate professors do not seem sufficient. Since 2018, the proportion of full professors at the school has increased significantly (from 13 full professors in 2018 to 44 full professors in 2023), not least through a large round of promotions in 2018-19. Moreover, in 2022-23, the school selected nine associate professors to a promotion program, with expected promotion to full professor within a few years. Opinions were divided about this program, but it nevertheless gave many ambitious and well-qualified associate professors something concrete to aim for, and after the faculty decided to put the program on hold again, many colleagues have expressed a need for clearer career opportunities. It should of course also be noted that possibilities for promotion are to some extent reliant on the school's available salary budget, and that

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the option to promote more colleagues to full professor should be weighed against the possibility of hiring new colleagues.

Pertaining to these reflections on career advancement, several departments express a desire that the institution becomes clearer about the criteria needed for promotion. As noted in the previous section, the school can advantageously employ a broader range of merit criteria in its evaluation procedures. A straightforward way of doing this would be to take the faculty's existing (Danish) assessment criteria (which require broad qualifications in both research, teaching, knowledge exchange and organizational work) even more seriously. Assessments actually based on a broader set of qualifications would again be in harmony with the intentions from the CoARA and the Framework for Meriting Knowledge Exchange.

In the past few years, many departments have systematically introduced individual career and research plans as a way to help employees work more strategically with their career, including research (and its relation to other core tasks). This is done, among other things, at the annual Staff Development Dialogues. Such individual development plans can supplement the departments' more general focus on research strategy. At the same time, it is important that research plans are not experienced by colleagues as a control mechanism deployed by the management but rather as a useful tool to help the individual researcher prioritize and make visible the synergy (or possible lack thereof) between different work tasks.

Finally, many colleagues have a clear desire to develop their competencies in the area of research management – primarily through individual research management courses, which many colleagues have already attended. This both strengthens the individual research leader's competences and contributes to creating better conditions for the younger researchers in the research projects – an important aspect of the post-award efforts that are a stated goal in the school's latest strategy.

7.0 Interdisciplinarity

A recurring feature of the nine departmental reports is that all departments regard themselves as very interdisciplinary and also sometimes as more interdisciplinary than everyone else. In any case, interdisciplinarity is for many colleagues a basic condition of their everyday working lives rather than something they actively have to seek out. A simple glance at the lists of journals in which the school's researchers publish their articles confirms that interdisciplinarity is the rule rather than the exception. The lists testify to a great academic breadth in most departments, which extends far beyond the boundaries of the disciplines in which the researchers are employed.

This trend also continues in many collective research projects where researchers work across disciplines and sometimes across the two cultures that C.P. Snow famously delineated in his 1959 book of the same name. A few examples include the interdisciplinary research center SHAPE, which under the heading Shaping Digital Citizenship combines research from information studies, medical science, pedagogy, and aesthetic disciplines to promote democracy and participation in a society characterized by data and algorithms. Another example is the Center for Child Research (funded by the Tryg Foundation), which is co-directed by a researcher from SCC and has more than 60 associated researchers from disciplines such as economics, pedagogy, psychology, political science, criminology, children's development, and language. Yet another example is the budding research field of the medical humanities, where humanities researchers collaborate with hospitals on the connection between aesthetic experiences and well-being or on the language used to address patients. A fourth example is the research program Environmental Media and Aesthetics (more about the research programs in the next subsection), where researchers from, for example, media studies, information studies, aesthetics and culture and rhetoric discuss how art and digital media reflect on climate change.

Such collaborations, which often have mission-driven research as their heading, are usually characterized by what many reports highlight as crucial for successful interdisciplinary research, namely that they are more focused on problems and themes than on the meeting between disciplines in itself. The same thematic focus drives other types of interdisciplinary collaboration that are not mission-driven to the same extent, working for instance more historically (or even prehistorically). This applies to a research project on the anatomical theater that includes colleagues from art history, comparative literature, and the medical sciences; or an ERC project involving cognitive scientists and archaeologists on how human symbolic behavior evolved during the late Middle Paleolithic.

Organization
Whether they draw on other disciplines in their own research or collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines, many colleagues at SCC thus work across or between research areas, and our research organization is designed to encourage such interdisciplinarity. As described in the introductory section, the school is organized in a matrix model, where nine education-centric

departments (often consisting of several degree programs) are accompanied by eleven cross-cutting and frequently interdisciplinary research programs organized around specific themes or methodological approaches. The model of free-floating, cross-cutting programs was first introduced in 2012 and has since developed organically. Most recently, the department's research organization was revised in 2022-23, with a view to strengthening collaboration between departments and programs and clarifying the responsibilities of research program directors. The establishment of new programs was, as before, primarily a bottom-up process, where employees were asked to propose programs, of course with strategic attention to whether the roster of proposed programs provided a sufficient degree of coverage without too many overlaps. All of the eleven new proposed programs were established and are listed below:

- Arts, Aesthetics and Communities
- Communication in International Business and the Professions
- Cultural Transformations
- Cultures and Practices of Digital Technologies
- Environmental Media and Aesthetics
- Historical Studies of Art, Literature and Culture
- Interaction Design
- Linguistics, Cognitive Science and Semiotics
- Literary Cultures
- Media, Communication and Society
- Language and Communication

While some of the programs are closely aligned with particular departments, the main trend is interdisciplinary programs that cut across several programs (at our sister School of Culture and Society, the default is the opposite). There is a remarkable tendency towards shared management of the programs, and this trend aligns with the overall movement toward collectivity observed in most aspects of this report. In addition to the programs, SCC houses 43 research centers (see appendix 10) that in the new organization are anchored in the programs, but which in their thematic focus often cut across both departments and programs. While the programs are comparable entities despite their varying sizes, the centers range from small and loosely organized units to large and financially strong entities, and in the latter case significant effort is put into creating better synergy between them and the research programs.

The strength of our interdisciplinary organization is, of course, that it facilitates new insights and research breakthroughs through collaboration between different areas of the school, and many departmental reports emphasize the value of this. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the potential challenges of our research organization, including its potential weakening of the internal cohesion of the departments' research environments. The collaboration between colleagues inside most departments centers on education and teaching, while research is frequently conducted either across departments, schools, and faculties, or with colleagues from other Danish or international universities. For some departments, as mentioned, there is a great deal of congruence between the department and the research program, while other departments' researchers are spread across 9-10 programs. The latter departments in particular are keen to develop a stronger internal collaboration on research – not to replace, but to supplement our cross-departmental research organization. This also speaks to the importance of continuing and strengthening the close dialogue between departments and research programs, for

instance through regular meetings between department heads and program managers. Some of the proposed initiatives in the previous pages would be well placed in the programs, others in the departments, and it requires continuous coordination to find the best solutions.

Another important reason why heads of department should be involved in the ongoing dialogues about research is that participation in the research programs is not mandatory and that a number of staff members are not members of (or actively participate in) the programs for various reasons – it may be that they do not see themselves represented in any of the existing programs, that they have many collaborative relationships already and do not want to increase the complexity of their research life, or finally, that they prefer working solo. The research efforts of these colleagues should of course still be encouraged and supported by the school.

The most important conclusion of this subsection is accordingly that our research organization provides strong opportunities for collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, but that it does not automatically result in a high level of activity or a large degree of interdisciplinarity, and that ongoing coordination and dialogue between departments and programs (facilitated by the school management and the research consultants) is of the essence.

Photo: Lars Kruse, Aarhus University

8.0 Summary

The preceding pages have hopefully shown that the School of Communication and Culture is home to a vibrant, active, and remarkably diverse research environment. While the nine departments are characterized by very different traditions and opportunities within for instance publishing, external funding, talent development, and recruiting, our cross-cutting research organization ensures rich possibilities for collaboration between researchers from different departments and disciplines. During the evaluation period, the amount of external funding has increased significantly, and even though the number of publications has decreased in the past few years (probably partly due to Covid-19), the proportion of international peer-reviewed publications has increased. Moreover, researchers at the school are actively engaged in a wide variety of outreach activities with various types of impact, and the overall gender balance and the number of international staff has improved during the evaluation period. The many workshops and discussions that laid the groundwork for the present report have, however, also identified a number of important points to consider in the coming years.

- The many local discussions testify to a desire and need for an even stronger focus on collectivity, both in relation to publications, idea generation, and applications. The research programs will often be the natural forums for developing such collective practices, but the departments may also play a part.
- There is a need to review the format of our biennial assessment of individual researchers so that it better reflects the diverse research traditions and peer-reviewed publication types at the school and places more emphasis on quality. Moreover, the value of writing applications and editorial work can be more explicitly stated.
- To ensure a continued high level of research activities through external funding we will a) try to encourage even more colleagues to apply by supplementing the focus on applications with a focus on motivations and the development of research ideas; and b) map the national and European funding landscape more thoroughly and strengthen our proactive dialogue with selected funding bodies.
- To secure as much coherent time as possible for research there is a need for an increased focus on time management for individual researchers as well as long-term strategic planning: The use of individual research plans appears to be a good prioritization tool in an increasingly complex research environment.
- While the diversity and overall gender balance of the school have improved during the evaluation period, the proportion of female professors (currently 36 %) is still too low. The active use of search committees should therefore continue in the coming years.
- Our internal research organization that cuts across departments presents both an opportunity and a challenge, which requires ongoing adjustments and dialogues between departments and research programs in order to fulfill its potential.
- By working with broader merit criteria and further recognition of diverse outreach activities, clearer career paths can be created for a wider proportion of the school's researchers.

9.0 Appendices