

## Vision and Strategy 2015-17

### Vision

The discipline of sociology seeks to understand the complexities of modern societies, and sociological knowledge and analyses make important contributions to contemporary societies' ability to understand and govern themselves in a highly dynamic world. The Department of Sociology at the University of Copenhagen works to develop and strengthen the discipline of sociology and disseminate knowledge for the benefit of society. We believe that sociology graduates in possession of specialist knowledge, as well as the methodological and reflective skills to employ this knowledge in a responsible manner, are valuable assets for society.

The Department of Sociology is a dynamic and innovative powerhouse for sociological research and education in Denmark; within our fields of expertise, we are recognised for playing an agenda-setting role among sociology departments in Europe.

All our research is internationally recognised, and in selected areas we measure up to the best in the world. We are known as a dynamic and innovative research environment which attracts leading scholars from around the world. Similarly, our faculty are actively sought by and involved in cooperation with leading scholars and research institutions abroad.

We train highly qualified students and PhDs on a robust research foundation. Our graduates acquire strong knowledge and skills in the discipline of sociology and qualifications that allow them to successfully enter the Danish or international labour markets.

In the provision of services, the administration balances efficiency, legality and user satisfaction.

Researchers and administrative staff work constructively together to realise the University of Copenhagen's core objectives.

The department is a well-managed, supportive and inclusive place of learning and work for students and staff at all levels of employment. All members of the department thrive in their working lives, and the department helps them to achieve their professional aspirations. We speak openly about the pressures and dilemmas facing a department like ours and its staff, and we strive to address those challenges in a constructive and pragmatic manner.

Our vision focuses on four interrelated, strategic areas:

1. Research
2. Teaching
3. Outreach to society
4. Administrative support

## Research

The Department of Sociology must maintain and continuously strengthen its contributions to Danish and international sociology in the form of theory development, empirical research and methodological innovations. Our research must be of the highest possible quality and originality, whether 'basic' or 'applied'. When relevant, we are keen to engage in interdisciplinary research collaboration.

The latest international evaluation of research (2011) concludes that the Department of Sociology is generally performing well in its research activities. However, the evaluation also suggests that it has the potential to undertake more research at the highest international level, and to foster more internationally recognised research groups. The present strategy aims to realise this potential.

In the coming period, we will focus on the following areas in particular:

- Attraction of external research funding
- Explication of our core research strengths to be developed further
- Update of the research group organisation
- Internationalisation of research outputs
- Internationalisation of recruitment of researchers at all levels
- Career development for PhDs and post docs

As basic funding declines, external funding is becoming increasingly important to maintaining an ambitious volume of high-quality research. We therefore must attract more external funding.

In the past, the department has successfully won smaller research grants, in particular individual post doc grants. The efforts to obtain this type of funding must continue, as post docs make valuable intellectual contributions to the department and constitute an important source of recruitment for senior positions. The department has had some success in attracting larger grants to fund research groups and centres, including the long-running FAOS research centre on labour market studies. However, in the years to come we must step up our efforts to attract funding for large-scale projects involving groups of scholars working together, either within the department or in collaboration with external partners. All senior members of staff are expected to involve themselves in these efforts on a continuous basis. Within its budgetary framework, the department will earmark seed money to support the preparation of larger grant applications.

The efforts to attract research funding must not dictate our intellectual agenda; we are obliged to also promote basic research with more uncertain intellectual pay-offs in the incipient phases. Therefore, our work must be rooted in a clear disciplinary identity and awareness of our comparative advantages. For this end, we must explicate our core strengths by identifying a (limited) number of focus areas in which to concentrate our efforts in the years to come. In identifying these focus areas, we must take account of our current staff and future recruitment possibilities. We will focus on societal issues and challenges, where our specific sociological insights can make a positive impact, while simultaneously considering the long-term teaching needs of the department. Our strengths must be identified through dialogue within the department and through exchanges with our research partners at the University of Copenhagen and beyond.

Compatibility with our core research focus areas and teaching needs, as well as the ability to attract external funding, will be important criteria in future recruitments.

We have recently reorganised our research groups, and the new groups will play a key role in clarifying our core strengths and clearly profiling the department in the relevant academic communities and in society in general. The research groups will also play an important infrastructural role in the daily academic life of the department, helping to ensure the alignment of its research and teaching activities. For this end, all members of faculty must participate in at least one research group.

However, the research groups will not be the only way of organising our research activities. We will continue to form (and disband) project groups and research centres to support specific research agendas at the department. Project groups and research centres may be formed when a group of scholars wishes to collectively pursue a particular research agenda more intensely for a period of time. Such project groups and research centres may involve members of existing research groups or external partners. Consequently, they can be of a permanent or more temporary nature.

Internationalisation of research is today an essential requirement for a department like ours. In the years to come, the department will maintain a strong focus on internationalisation, while at the same time not forgetting its obligations as a publicly funded Danish university.

Here, internationalisation refers to three factors in particular: international publications, international collaboration and international recruitment.

All research conducted at the department must contribute actively to the ongoing scientific discussions within the various relevant fields of research. Therefore, all faculty members are expected to continuously publish their work through reputable, English-language, peer-reviewed outlets. Not necessarily exclusively, but consistently throughout their careers. PhDs and post docs must be assisted in publishing their results through the best achievable international outlets.

With a view to strengthening our ties with the international sociological community, and further developing the department's international image and profile, we must strive to constantly attract researchers from abroad for shorter and longer visits. We must also encourage our own staff – at all career levels – to visit research environments abroad.

The department recognises its obligation to accommodate in-depth research activities, and we intend to uphold the principle of allowing tenured faculty to take regular sabbaticals. We will support staff in arranging sabbaticals abroad, if compatible with their personal circumstances.

Compared to our fellow departments at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Department of Sociology has few international faculty members. In future, targeted efforts, e.g. through the establishment of active search committees, will be made to advertise and network internationally to recruit the best candidates in the global market. We must thus be prepared to receive new colleagues from abroad. When recruiting Danish scholars, international experience will be regarded as a positive qualification.

The department recognises the value of having a gender-balanced faculty. Therefore, targeted efforts will be made to attract applications from both men and women at all career levels.

It is a high priority for the department that our PhDs and post docs successfully secure good positions for themselves, whether they continue their career at our department or elsewhere. This calls for a strong focus on career planning and development, both individually and for these groups collectively. The department will step up its efforts to provide career support for young scholars.

For post docs, this primarily consists in building strong academic CVs and networks that will enhance their career opportunities in research and teaching. For PhDs, this should additionally also include guidance on how to pursue careers outside of academia.

## Teaching

The BSc and MSc programmes in sociology are very popular among Danish youth and attract highly qualified students every year. This is a significant asset for the department. The department must maintain this favourable position in the Danish higher education system. Therefore, we must work to uphold and systematically improve both the high quality and the societal relevance of our study programmes.

In the coming period, we will focus on the following areas in particular:

- Continually raising the quality of our teaching and programme design to achieve the highest possible academic level among our students
- Ensuring that our graduates' high scholarly standards translate into successful employment
- Ensuring a clear alignment of the department's teaching and research activities
- Attracting full-degree students for the MSc programme from abroad

We have recently revised our MSc programme in order to ensure greater coherence and closer links with the research being conducted at the department. The effects of these changes will be monitored closely in the years to come, leading to any necessary adjustments being made. The BSc programme will be updated in 2015-16.

Also, we will maintain our strong focus on the faculty's teaching qualifications and the provision of continuous feedback to students on their learning

Our graduates are academically very strong. In recent years, labour market entry has unfortunately been less smooth for too many of our graduates. We are working to change this. Traditionally, sociology graduates have primarily found jobs in the public sector. We expect the public sector to continue to absorb many of our graduates, but we must initiate a dialogue with relevant parts of the private sector to promote the qualities of our graduates and explore exactly what specific qualifications – if any – are in particular demand from sociology graduates seeking private-sector employment.

We need to work systematically to reduce the completion times of our graduates. We will closely monitor the effects of the stricter study progress reform, which have been introduced across the University, as well as our own initiatives to cut completion times.

To ensure that our teaching is indeed research-based, we must clearly align the department's teaching and research activities. Therefore, the research groups must be involved in designing and continually updating programme profiles.

The department wants to gradually increase the number of international full-degree students at MSc level from its present very modest level. This may require adjustments to the admissions procedure as well as marketing efforts.

## Outreach to society

We believe in the intrinsic value of scientific knowledge production. However, we also believe in the value and relevance of sociological knowledge for society, and that we are obliged to reach out to society to ensure and demonstrate this value through dialogue with a variety of stakeholders. Relevance can mean many different things, and outreach activities can take many forms. In the coming period, we will focus on the following issues in particular:

- Media presence
- Stakeholder relations
- Public policy strategy

Most importantly, we make a difference to society through the quality of the graduates we produce, and we must ensure that their qualities are clearly communicated to potential employers in the various sectors of society.

Other important outreach activities are the appearance of our researchers and their research results in the mass and social media, either when requested to appear as experts commentators pronouncing on issues of contemporary interest or in researcher-driven communication of new research findings. The presentation of sociological research in the media is paramount for the public standing of our discipline and for our ability to continuously attract high-quality students as well as external funding. This also applies to our faculty's participation in various types of science communication, such as blogs, public lectures etc.

Other outreach activities take the form of collaboration with various stakeholders, such as public-sector organisations, NGOs or private firms. These stakeholders are interesting for us, both as prospective employers of our graduates and as research partners. We must therefore identify stakeholders that are of particular relevance to our activities and nurture more long-standing relations with them.

Likewise, we must work to ensure that our research is communicated to all relevant policy makers and practitioners. All these outreach efforts must be coordinated with the central initiatives at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

## Administrative support

Administrative support is provided at many levels at the University of Copenhagen. Locally, we have a secretariat shared between the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Sociology.

In the coming period, the secretariat will focus on the following areas:

- Establishing high-quality support for research and research applications
- Preparing for a stronger internationalisation of the department
- Strengthening the career guidance service for students to ease their transition into the labour market

- Enhancing collaboration with administrative staff across the Faculty of Social Sciences to strengthen the service

It has been a long-standing ambition of the department to offer better support for research applications. In 2014, there was a gradual increase in the services provided, and these services will be developed further in 2015-17 to embrace scouting, research strategies for individuals and research groups, and feedback and practical assistance with all applications. The aim is to attract more external research funding, to diversify the sources of external funding and to attract at least two major grants.

With a clear ambition of attracting more researchers, with no Danish skills on arrival, to the department in the future, we must ensure that the department is adequately prepared to facilitate their arrival and integration. This is the joint responsibility of the academic hosts and the administrative functions at the department as well as the University of Copenhagen's International Staff Mobility office.

The study administration will support the career guidance activities and the dialogue with alumni, organisations and companies in the private and the public sectors. The aim is for all graduates to find employment shortly after their graduation.

Since administrative support is supplied at many levels at the University of Copenhagen, it is the responsibility of the administrative staff to ensure internal collaboration with other administrative staff, especially across the Faculty of Social Sciences but also with the central university administration, to enhance service levels.