



## **Consultation Committee Meeting October 24, 2024**

Location/Time: FRB7H 2.405 and Teams 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Participants: Kim Lambertsen Larsen, Kristian Bering, Niels Thomas Eriksen, Sara Jellesmark, Teis Søndergaard, Kasper Tolborg and Sergey Kucheryavskiy.

Casper Donneborg and Anders Ægdiussen participates under the item 3, 4 and 5.

Unable to attend: Morten Korsgaard and Susanne Remmer Bielidt

Minute taker: Kathrine Nielsen / Louise Bak Søndergaard

### **Minutes:**

#### **1. Approval of agenda (KLL)**

The agenda was approved.

#### **2. Approval of Minutes from previous meeting (KLL)**

The minutes were approved with the remark that there should continue to be an option to indicate if someone wants to ensure that something is written down in the minutes.

#### **3. Economy status 2024 (AWI/CD)**

Anders Ægdiussen presented the Department's finances for 2024. Overall, the Department's budget goal of -5.8 million DKK for the current year was adjusted to 0, as the strategic funds were removed. The budget goal was later changed again to +2 million DKK. Currently, we expect to reach -4.5 million DKK.

This is partly due to a salary increase of 2.6 million DKK and a lower STÅ income (-2.5 million DKK). Additionally, there are extra rent bills resulting from a misallocation of -1.5 million DKK in a central department, which has shifted some expenses. The Department has also incurred extra costs due to the strategic investment in TTA positions, which were not covered by the faculty as expected. Due to the budget goal, there is currently a limited spending freeze.

The Department has found several ways within its framework to improve the result. It was asked if the next step would be staff reductions, and it is currently not expected to be necessary, as management will only use this as a last resort. The faculty has accepted that we will not meet the budget goal. We are not interested in creating a deficit, so we are working hard to reach 0 million DKK. The faculty is aware that we have not received the agreed strategic funds. It still does not appear that we, as a department, can have our own savings, but the faculty is aware of surpluses and deficits.

At the meeting, the declining STÅ income was particularly discussed. It was explained that while teaching was previously paid per hour, we now receive payment based on passed exams, which will cause more fluctuations. There are fewer students choosing to take exams, and this affects us. This is not about a single course but a general problem. In total, we have 7 million DKK in potential income from students enrolled in a course but not

passing the exam. It is expected that there is potential in the 7 million DKK. It was asked who made the decision to switch from hours to passed exams, and it was clarified that the decision was made at the university level, and it is now a framework condition that we only receive money for passed exams and not teaching hours. At the faculty level, STÅ income levels out somewhat – at the Department level, it will cause greater fluctuations, as 1 student year is 76,300 DKK in income for the Department.

It was noted that it is important to be able to adjust and predict STÅ, and there was discussion about why it can be difficult to predict. Among other things, the corona effect, difficult courses, and the quality of high school education were noted. It was also noted that some income might come in January if many pass exams then. It is also considered whether there could be an effect from the removal of some group rooms.

Previously, we could continuously monitor STÅ, but we can no longer do so due to the transition from Click-View to PowerBI, and this has been communicated.

There has always been a challenge with graduating students not completing their studies, but this is not because they do not receive good guidance. We need to dive into the numbers. There were several who had problems in the third semester of chemistry, which could have later significance.

It was agreed that at an upcoming SU meeting, we should look more closely at missing STÅ and see if there could be a connection with group rooms. It should also be discussed whether the expectations we have are reasonable.

#### **4. Specification of use of department strategic funds for 2024 so far (institutpuljen) (AWI/CD)**

Casper Donneborg Roed provided a status update on the Department's budget pools as of October 21, 2024. Overall, the spending looks good. There are remarks on specific items, such as the Head of Studies pool being over budget, while the study board chairman pool is under budget. Additionally, the Ph.D. pool is budgeted based on the estimated number of Ph.D. defenses. Both the summer seminar and bread/fruit pools are expected to be less than budgeted.

Regarding Department cars, it was noted that there is an extra "income" in the pool this year due to the allocation of kilometers driven on projects, which will continue in the future. However, it is currently unclear what the effect of the university's decision to acquire some cars will be. We expect a decrease in income from car rentals to other Departments in the coming years.

It is being considered whether the license pool, etc., should be divided into several pools.

The Department pool is used to pay for unforeseen expenses, with approval from Kim and Anders. In 2024, the pool has had approximately 600 transactions. The committee reviewed the transactions and noted that there were expenses of 203,000 DKK to Ninolab, which need to be followed up on. There are also scholarship stipends in pools, which are actually given centrally but which we have to pay for ourselves – this needs to be investigated and possibly moved to the study leader pool. Additionally, it was noted that we have ended up paying for the installation and foundation of the greenhouse.

The primary items in the Department pool are those that are not budgeted, which vary from year to year, and it is also aimed to move larger expenses to other budget pools. It was proposed at the meeting that, for example, repairs be moved out. However, it currently appears that we will be centrally required to have fewer analysis numbers. There is concern about some of the expenses in the pool, and it was agreed that some expenses be moved to other pools so that the Department pool is smaller for the annual accounts.

*Since the meeting, it has been clarified that the expenses related to Ninolab involve equipment, and the income to cover this expense was obtained from the faculty, but due to an error, the income was not placed in the same location as the expense. Thus, the expense is 0 DKK for the Department.*

## **5. Presentation of the department's budget for 2025 (AWI og CD)**

The budget settlement has been postponed to November 11, so it was agreed that when there is a concrete proposal for the 2025 budget, it will be presented to the Consultation Committee at the next meeting.

Currently, the 2025 budget is conservatively planned, as the Department still lacks strategic investments and faces increased salary costs, including expected new salary increases in 2025. We expect a slight decrease in the so-called 'Other Income' in 2025.

The proportion of those paying bench fees is declining, as more major funds pay 250,000 DKK in overhead instead. Additionally, we no longer receive co-financing for equipment from the faculty, but the agreements already made will be honored.

Operating expenses are budgeted at 8.5 million DKK (in 2024, it was 10.115 million DKK). Purchases on projects under 1 million DKK will generate immediate income, which gives the budget item 'Clearings' 0.94 million DKK in income. Depreciation is budgeted with expenses of 4.8 million DKK, as depreciation comes down from the faculty level. Depreciation means we will pay a smaller faculty contribution.

There have been a few changes regarding budget pools – for example, an increase in the examiner pool (including exam rooms) due to increased costs for exam rooms. It was mentioned whether exam sandwiches should be maintained, but this topic belongs to the Department Council.

The Head of Department's pool for, among other things, travel has been reduced, while most other pools remain relatively status quo. It is uncertain whether a budget of 0.8 million DKK for the Department pool is sufficient.

All budget pools and research accounts constitute a budget of 8.5 million DKK.

It is budgeted with buyouts of 38 million DKK and 8 million DKK for VIP and TAP (both technical and administrative staff). There are very few postdocs and Ph.D. students who are actually on the operation. It is also noted that all employees are hired on the operation, and then we use buyouts, which balances many positions.

There are two VIPs whose employment was promised that the Department would cover the costs of a Ph.D. student, which the Department would like to accommodate when possible – however, this requires that we realize the strategic investments from the faculty.

The committee requested that TAP salaries be divided into technical and administrative staff as well as management (including section leader allowances). This could, for example, be done with a note going forward.

The budgeted TAP buyout is expected to be realistic – including buyouts in the secretariat. It must be accurate buyouts. There is no budgeted high increase in external revenue, and VIP buyouts are estimated based on guesses and data on projects where there is still the possibility of employment.

There will be a rent increase in 2025 – it was noted that this has happened repeatedly before. For example, it costs if we book rooms in other buildings. We pay rent if we are the main user of a room. The contribution to common services and the innovation contribution will increase next year – the former is partly due to the new study administrative system. It was also noted that we buy more teaching than we deliver to others – including costs for math and PBL courses.

Result-wise, UK10 (operation) is expected to be -9.3 million DKK, and UK90 (external revenue) is expected to be 1 million DKK. Our result goal for 2025 is currently 0, but we have been promised 6 million DKK in 2025 regarding the strategic investment, so we are budgeting for that. Kim is working on a plan for the strategic funds, which total 25 million DKK.

The Consultation Committee thanked for a detailed presentation, and it was agreed that budgets will be sent out when they are cleaned of minor items.

## **6. Discussion of future consequences for the department's budget for 2025 (KLL)**

Overall, it can be said that we are "keeping our heads above water." The Department has been promised strategic funds in 2026. The employee side notes that they expect an increase in salaries and central contributions again. Generally, it is a problem if we cannot streamline buyouts, as increased external revenue does not add to the bottom line unless we can move it to buyouts.

Over the next few years, the previous project budgets will be replaced by new ones, and there is an expectation of better coverage. There is also an expectation that the Department will grow, but it is difficult as we can hardly accommodate more people in the building, and the Department does not want to be limited by our current buildings. We will also need to hire more administrative staff if we grow in terms of VIP positions to match. In recent years, we have been in a significant growth period with, among other things, 8 TTA positions – and overall, the professor-lecturer-assistant professor (PLA) staff has increased by 20%. It is noted that there may be some retirements in the coming years.

The Department is pressured by the fact that we bring in such a large share of external funds compared to what we get from STÅ income. One could say that we cannot afford to increase external revenue. However, a possible solution is that if ENG brings in over 350 million DKK in revenue, no contribution to the university needs to be paid for revenue over 350 million DKK. It is being discussed in the faculty leadership how we can best contribute to a new budget model from 2027.

The Consultation Committee encourages a conservative approach to next year's budget. It is mentioned that VIPs in Esbjerg share offices – if something similar happened in Aalborg, it could alleviate the need for space. This has been discussed before, but at that time, there was no support for sharing offices in Aalborg.

## **7. Department Strategy: Orientation about Department Strategy Process.**

Kim informed that the Department's strategy is the responsibility of the Department Council. Louise Bak presented the process for developing the new strategy. The committee expressed enthusiasm that all employees have received an email with the opportunity to contribute and make suggestions for the upcoming strategy.

The Consultation Committee noted in conclusion that they would like to accept the offer to receive a draft for written consultation.

## **8. Communication Strategy**

Last year, communication tasks were centralized in AAU Communication and Public Affairs. The central department developed a strategy to focus on a specific topic, which would be elevated communication-wise, and then shift focus to another topic. Initially, AAU Communication focused on the topic of water and wishes to continue with this theme. However, the Department wants to be known for other topics as well, so it is desired that the

water theme transitions to operational status, and a new overarching theme is initiated. BIO is the first Department where a theme will transition to operational status with AAU Communication and Public Affairs.

The management committee discussed an upcoming communication strategy for the Department on October 23, 2024. It was proposed that "food for the future" could be the next major theme to work on. However, the management committee agreed that multiple communication themes should be worked on in parallel. Communication will not be able to support all themes simultaneously, so they will need to switch between themes periodically. In addition to "food for the future," led by Mette Lübeck, "biodiversity" led by Majken Pagter and "fungi" led by Jens Laurids Sørensen were also highlighted. These three are responsible for setting up a working group for each theme, which will span across sections. The working groups will contribute to these communication themes and discuss communication initiatives.

It was noted that running communication themes in parallel can present challenges when they cannot receive support simultaneously. One solution could be to provide tools to all working groups so they can operate independently when AAU Communication and Public Affairs are not supporting the theme. Additionally, AAU Communication and Public Affairs could help with overarching principles for each theme, so the communication strategy is tailored to the topic and target audience, as it can vary whether communicating to the general public, businesses, or the political system. The management side acknowledged the suggestion and will consult AAU Communication and Public Affairs to see if it is feasible.

From the employee side, it was asked if there was a theme on materials. The management side responded that there is a working group led by Jens Muff, focusing on contributing to Aalborg University's mission regarding "A Sustainable Danish Energy System" with a material focus.

There was also a question about whether there are target figures for the communication effort. It was answered that AAU Communication and Public Affairs strive to be as data-driven as possible.

In conclusion, the members of the Consultation Committee noted that they support the proposed communication strategy.

## **9. Knowledge for the World and Research Indicator "Målaftaler"**

Kim informed that the goal agreement is more focused on the faculty this year than it has been in the past. This means that there will not be a workshop on the goal agreement this year, as there was last year. The management committee has discussed the goal agreement and contributed what we expect to implement next year. The various selected topics were then briefly reviewed. For example, it was highlighted that there is a new goal regarding AI Labs, where the Department aims to participate. The call will come in the summer of 2025, but in the meantime, it would be beneficial to consider potential collaboration partners at other AAU Departments.

Regarding the goal agreement for the research indicator, we previously received some funds based on BFI points. The funds are now allocated using a different method, and in this context, VBN registrations are crucial.

## **10. Worktime registration**

Teis Søndergaard informed that attitudes towards worktime registration vary from Department to Department. Some Departments are in favor of time registration, but at BIO, there is a predominant preference for self-scheduling.

## **11. Evaluation of the SU's cooperation and working methods**

The members of the Consultation Committee were satisfied with the work. It was noted that there is a challenge in that some matters cannot be discussed at the meeting due to confidentiality. As a follow-up, it was clarified that personnel aspects can be discussed at a general level, but it is correct that individual cases cannot be discussed.

## **12. Establishment of meeting plan and annual calendar for 2025 (KLL)**

In 2025, four meetings of three hours each are suggested (held physically in Aalborg and via Teams).

### **Meeting 1: Week 7**

- Presentation of the annual report 2024
- Evaluation of the past year's competence strategy and focus areas
- Status on competence strategy and focus areas
- Evaluation of the performance and development reviews (MUS) held in second half of 2024
- Status on the department's code of conduct
- Well-being and working environment

### **Meeting 2: Week 19**

- Economy status (1. periodeopfølgning)
- Presentation on work environment
- Presentation on sick leave statistics
- Status on competence strategy and focus areas
- Well-being and working environment

### **Meeting 3: Week 38**

- Orientation regarding salary negotiations 2025
- Evaluation of the SU's cooperation and working methods
- Economy status (2. periodeopfølgning)
- Well-being and working environment

### **Meeting 4: Week 45**

- Presentation of the department's budget for 2026, 2027 og 2028
- Discussion of the work-related consequences of the Department's finances
- Discussion of theme suggestions for the 1st quarter 2026 development and performance reviews (MUS)
- Establishment of meeting plan and annual calendar for 2026
- Well-being and working environment

The employees pointed out that the regular agenda item "well-being and working environment" is missing from each meeting. It was agreed that it will be added to all four meetings in 2025. Additionally, it was noted that the timings need to be adjusted to fit the financial calendar, so the meeting times for the four meetings were changed after the meeting.

## **13. Any other business (KLL)**

Kim informed that a Working environment and Well-being Workshop will be held in all sections of the Department before the end of the year or at the beginning of the new year. The workshop is based on the results from



AAU's Well-being Barometer, which was sent to all employees in December 2023. The results for our department showed a challenge in balancing tasks and resources, including work-related stress. Therefore, the management committee has prioritized conducting the well-being workshop throughout the organization to foster a good dialogue about our work environment and collective well-being.