

Principles for employer panels at Aarhus BSS

According to the University Act, the universities must establish employer panels with a view to ensuring a dialogue between the employers and the university about the quality and relevance of the degree programmes offered. This includes constructive dialogue regarding the development of new or existing degree programmes and new teaching and exam methods.

Due to the individual degree programmes' diversity and varied contributions to society, Aarhus BSS has decided that it is most appropriate to set up employer panels at degree programme level. This means that one employer panel is linked to each degree programme or each group of academically-related degree programmes.

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Objective

The purpose of establishing employer panels is to ensure a systematic dialogue between the universities and the employers of the graduates within the individual academic fields. Engaging in systematic dialogue with the employers is intended to ensure that the content of the degree programmes matches the skills and competences that are in demand on the labour market so that graduates from Aarhus BSS have good employment opportunities.

As such, the employer panels act as dialogue partners for the programme and department management teams regarding the development of the relevant degree programme(s). They may, among other things, contribute to discussions about:

- the current quality and relevance of the degree programmes, including degree programme enrolment requirements, the graduates' qualifications and the degree programme's interaction with society
- the development of the degree programme's course elements, business-oriented initiatives (such as project-oriented courses and thesis collaborations) as well as teaching, exam and evaluation methods in relation to the skills that are in demand on the labour market, including the importance and need for internationalisation in the degree programmes
- the development of the degree programme's production of graduates and the potential labour market

- the development of collaboration models between the individual degree programme and the labour market
- the development of new educational initiatives, including the need for new interdisciplinary degree programme combinations as well as further and continuing education courses
- the development of the degree programme's alumni community.

As such, the employer panels must be included/consulted in connection with the development of new academic regulations or comprehensive revisions of existing ones for the degree programme(s) with which the individual panel is associated. Likewise, in accordance with Aarhus University's and Aarhus BSS' principles and framework for degree programme quality assurance processes, the employer panel must be given the opportunity to see and comment on the degree programme self-evaluation report. This report prepared by the director of studies in connection with the five-year degree programme evaluations prior to the dialogue meeting of the quality assurance process. The employer panel must also be notified about the development trends for the degree programme on the basis of the data presented and the dialogues that have taken place at the annual status reviews as well as of the subsequent actions taken.

The recommendations of the employer panels will be included in the strategic degree programme planning, e.g. when determining visions, competence descriptions, academic profiles and teaching principles for the degree programmes as well as when planning student and career counselling.

The employer panels not only serve as dialogue partners for the programme and department management teams regarding education and employment, but also as external ambassadors for the individual degree programme. In this way, panel members can help raise awareness of the graduates' skills and competences and contribute with establishing student places/internships, mentor schemes, lectures, company visits etc.

Composition and organisation

An employer panel consists of 6-12 representatives from private and public companies, organisations and institutions, depending on the academic scope of the panel's associated degree programme(s).

The members of each individual employer panel are selected on the following basis:

- As a group, panel members must have experience with and insight into the degree programme subject area and the relevant labour market for which graduates are prepared, nationally as well as internationally.

- As a group, panel members must represent companies and organisations of varying types and sizes.
- Panel members must have experience with employing degree programme graduates e.g. through close links to the recruitment and competence development work in their company/organisation.
- As a group, panel members must represent both the existing labour market and have an eye for future labour market trends that can impact the demand for graduates within new sectors or industries.
- Panel members must possess the personal qualities required to function as constructive dialogue partners in a collegial body.

However, panel members may not be recent graduates or students currently enrolled on the panel's associated degree programme(s). No panel member may serve on more than one of the school's employer panels at the same time.

Panel members are formally appointed by the Dean of Aarhus BSS by joint recommendation from the programme and department management teams. Each panel member serves for a period of three years at a time. Members are eligible for reappointment for two periods (and additional periods in special cases). The Executive Team continually approves new members based on recommendations from the programme and department management teams. A recommendation must include detailed reasons for recommending the person(s) concerned. The appointment takes place in direct continuation of the Dean's approval. The Dean's Office is responsible for updating the list of members on the relevant school website. Following the Dean's approval, the department handles any additional practical matters regarding the appointment and the member's activities.

An employer panel chair is appointed from among the panel members every third year in connection with the constitution of the panel. The position of vice-chair is performed by (one of) the relevant director(s) of studies from the panel's associated degree programme(s). The chair's role is limited to heading the scheduled meetings as well as acting as a dialogue partner for the vice-chair/director of studies, who is responsible for organising meetings, e.g. preparing agendas and ensuring follow-ups to panel discussions. In addition to the director(s) of studies, the head of department and the board of studies supporter (who is responsible for taking minutes) must also attend the panel meetings. Any other persons may participate if agreed upon.

Meetings

Employer panel meetings must be held at least once a year (usually twice a year) and are expected to last a couple of hours. Additional meetings are held as needed. Prior to the meetings, the chair and vice-chair must prepare an agenda, which must be distributed to the participants in advance. As the frequency of meetings will not always be aligned with the activities that might be up for discussion, written consultations and other written exchanges may occur. The regular meetings may also be supplemented by extraordinary meetings, workshops or items.

A panel meeting is based on a mutual exchange of information and discussion that take a starting point in the items on the agenda. It is a good idea to plan the meetings so that they coincide with other events at Aarhus BSS, e.g. school celebrations, business conferences or the like.

Documentation and evaluation

The director of studies and the department must notify employer panel members on an ongoing basis about initiatives and decisions relevant to the activities of the panel. Employer panel members are always welcome to contact the department if specific initiatives, decisions or topics require further clarification or discussion. The aim is to ensure an open, honest and constructive dialogue and communication both during and in between meetings.

The board of studies supporter takes minutes of each meeting. The minutes are submitted to the panel members, the board of studies and the Dean's Office. The Dean is responsible for ensuring an ongoing dialogue with all employer panels and for ensuring that the dialogue is used to develop the relevance and quality of the degree programmes. As such, the Dean is responsible for following up if minutes from the school's employer panels are not available.

The work of the employer panels must be evaluated no later than at the end of its three year term to consolidate the development of a satisfying outcome of the collaboration for all parties.