

November 8, 2024

Memorandum

Title: Hearing memorandum

Reference: The Faculty Management at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences

Memo sent to: Academic Council, Liaison Committee, Study Boards, Heads of Department and Heads of Administration at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences

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Reading guide

This memorandum reviews and comments on the hearing responses¹ regarding the restructuring of programmes at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences. The hearing responses are reviewed in summary headings.

Initially, the faculty management's final decision will be presented. General comments are then addressed, after which the decisive criteria for the decision are specified. The faculty management has prioritised preparing an unfolded hearing memorandum which – in addition to qualifying the faculty management's decision – also includes the number of constructive proposals from the hearing parties in relation to the further work on the programme portfolio at the faculty. These are presented in the concluding section.

Decision

The faculty management would like to thank you for both appreciative and critical comments on the proposal for implementation at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences as a whole and the proposal for the reorganisation of degree programmes, as well as the constructive adjustment proposals that have been expressed through the submitted hearing responses.

The faculty management's decision is to restructure the following degree programmes:

- a. Master of Laws – partial restructuring
- b. MSc in Economics and Business Administration – partial restructuring
- c. MA in Journalism (cand.public.) – full restructuring
- d. MSc in Business Economics and Auditing (Master's degree programme for working professionals) – full restructuring (has already been restructured)

¹ [SAMF's website about the Master's degree reform.](#)

In addition, the faculty management's decision is that programmes not being restructured will, as a starting point, be reduced by 15% in terms of capacity by 2028. This general reduction in capacity will free up approximately 52 120 ECTS places, which will be proportionately allocated to the Master of Laws, which in 2028 will have approximately 54, 120 ECTS places, and the MSc in Economics and Business Administration, which in 2028 will have approximately 202 120 ECTS places. These additional places mean that the restructuring rate for the two programmes will decrease from the initially stated 72% to approximately 65%.

The consideration to reduce the restructuring task for the affected programmes therefore outweighs the need to precisely determine the expected capacity figures for 2028 currently. The capacity figures will henceforth be determined on an annual basis based on Bachelor's admissions and other framework conditions for dimensioning. The framework for SDU's and the Faculty's future capacity management will be further described on the website.

Background

On 1 October 2024, the faculty management submitted a *hearing regarding the restructuring of programmes at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences*. The Academic Council, the Liaison Committee and the Study Boards at the Faculty, as well as Heads of Department and Heads of Administration, have been invited to qualify the faculty management's decision regarding the future Master's landscape based on the limited number of 120 ECTS places. The hearing deadline expired on 22 October 2024.

The following parties have submitted comments on the hearing material:

- Academic Council
- Liaison Committee
- Study Board of MSc in Economics and Business Administration and MSc in Business Economics and Auditing
- Study Board of Law
- Study Board of BSc in Economics and Business Administration
- Study Board for of the Professional Master's Programmes at SDU BSS
- Study Board of Political Science, Sociology, Journalism, and European Studies
- Study Board of Journalism
- Head of Studies for MSc in Economics and Business Administration
- Department of Law
- Department of Business and Sustainability and Department of Business and Management

General comments

The restructuring requirement of 51% of the master's degree places follows from the distribution between the faculties at SDU, for which the faculty management has had to find the best possible solution. The hearing process has helped to shed light on several different aspects, which are reviewed below, and which are important to keep in mind in the forthcoming implementation process.

Academic skills and quality in all programmes

At the outset, the faculty management wishes to emphasise that the decision does not change the fact that all activities undertaken at the Faculty are based on both SDU's and SDU BSS' strategy, and that quality, solid research-based teaching, and a high level of professionalism in all our study programmes continue to be a top priority. We are facing a major task in supporting this in connection with the upcoming programme restructurings.

In some hearing responses, it is argued that the proposed restructuring will result in the creation of an A-team and a B-team, where students who obtain a 75 ECTS degree will be at a disadvantage in the labour market, and where some academic disciplines will be undervalued, which could challenge the cohesion of the Faculty.

We acknowledge the concerns about cohesion and the creation of A- and B-teams. However, it is expected both in the political agreement and from the faculty management that, in connection with the programme restructuring, *new* research-based degree programmes will be developed. These programmes, in their own right and with strong research-based foundations, will qualify students for the labour market. At the same time, it is expected that these new shorter programmes will lay the foundation for relevant continuing and further education opportunities, thereby taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the reform. The future master's programmes (75, 75+45 and 120 ECTS as well as a Master's degree programme for working professionals) must all be defined within the Danish Qualifications Framework's level 7², but naturally with different learning objectives in terms to breadth and depth. This may present challenges in terms of differentiation, but also new possibilities in relation to lifelong learning.

Several note that the decision to restructure the programmes is less supported by data and knowledge about consequences. The faculty management must acknowledge that there is no data available, either in the reform itself or in the subsequent work, that can further qualify the decisions. We simply do not know the preferences of future students or businesses and organisations in a completely new national education landscape. We will work to ensure that SDU generally works very thoroughly on building up data in this area, and we are very open to further discuss the need for this. Similarly, and in line with our strategy, we will focus on strengthening interaction and engage with the surrounding society through, among other things, strategic partnerships, with the aim of being able to meet society's needs to an even greater extent, focusing on the opportunities in the new educational formats.

In several hearing responses, it is mentioned that the proposed restructuring will disproportionately affect departments and campuses. However, in view of the diversity of considerations which we are trying to address with the assessment criteria used, a balanced distribution has not been possible or a goal in itself. In the final distribution, it is the faculty management's desire to delegate the allocation of places between the involved campuses and departments to the affected parties

² https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/other-qualifications-frameworks/danish-qf-for-higher-education/?set_language=en

(departments and the Business School), based on considerations of academic quality and campus distribution.

Prioritisation of SDU Business School and AACSB accreditation

The faculty management wishes to emphasise that the proposed restructuring *does not* change SDU Business School as a core priority of the Faculty. SDU Business School will continue to bridge and strengthen the interaction between the business economics programmes and the business community and society. The realisation of this ambition is first and foremost linked to engagement with societal institutions regardless of whether it involves 120 ECTS programmes or other shorter educational programmes. We will work hard to succeed within the given framework, to create a new and attractive range of study programmes in the field of business economics in collaboration between academic environments and the business community.

It should therefore also be emphasised that the Faculty continues to strive for and work purposefully towards achieving the AACSB accreditation. AACSB focuses on how we, based on our mission and strategy, constantly and systematically develop and improve the quality of teaching, research, and societal impact. The expectations for our programmes are not directed towards a specific ECTS value, but towards the content and its contribution to the business community and society. Within a range of global standards, AACSB encompasses a wide variety of educational formats and thus also includes accredited business schools with study programmes of different structures and scopes. The Faculty Management therefore sees no contradiction between the ambitions regarding AACSB and the proposed programme restructurings. The faculty management's most recent meeting with AACSB confirmed this assessment.

Finances and administration

Specifically in relation to the MSc in Economics and Business Administration, it is pointed out that the proposal for restructuring has not sufficiently considered the negative economic implications of restructuring a large and highly sought-after programme. It is correct that finances have not played a prominent role in the preparation of the proposal. However, the assessment from the beginning has been that calculations of financial consequences would be based on a number of assumptions, premises, and factors that are difficult to isolate to individual programmes (including estimation of applications for new programmes, including international students, the society's response to recruitment, etc.). Considering the large external restructuring requirement, it has not been practically possible to navigate around the large programmes.

Decisive assessment criteria for maintaining the decision

A number of comments have addressed the assessment criteria used. In the following section, these will be elaborated upon to hopefully provide a better description. However, as mentioned in the hearing material and in the many hearing responses, there will continue to be inherent dilemmas in the application of the criteria.

Simplicity and flexibility in the educational portfolio

The faculty management has not chosen a general "lawnmower method", where all study programmes are subject to restructuring, due to a desire for simplicity in the educational portfolio, which was also presented in the hearing material. Partial restructuring of small programmes will

challenge the simplicity of our portfolio, as we will thus have parallel offerings on many degree programmes, as it is a clear expectation that the restructuring of programmes will be developed as *new* research-based degree programmes. This results in a decision that the relatively small degree programmes are therefore either *completely restructured* or *retained* as 120 ECTS.

This decision is also linked to the desire for long-term flexibility in the further development of the education portfolio. By restructuring the aforementioned relatively small programmes, they would have to be fully converted to 75 ECTS or Master's degree programme for working professionals, making it difficult to offer 120 ECTS at a later stage if we wish to and obtain more 120 ECTS places. By restructuring the faculty's largest programmes, the Master of Laws and the MSc in Economics and Business Administration, we can work with partial restructurings, where the specific weighting of 120 ECTS, new 75 ECTS, and new Master's degree programme for working professionals can be adjusted continuously.

Simplicity in relation to the restructuring task itself has not been considered, and it is acknowledged that it will be a large and complex task for the affected programmes. Therefore, it is also important that the final solution attempts to reduce complexity for the students and in communication regarding both degree formats and especially for the MSc in Economics and Business Administration, including profiles.

Multidisciplinarity (heterogeneous bachelor's background and interdisciplinary educational profile)
For programmes where the argument about *heterogeneous bachelor's entries* has been used as a criterion (Population Studies, MOISL and MA in Journalism (cand.mag. i journalistik)), it concerns bachelor's entries across scientific main areas, and where we are obliged by programme regulations to ensure through the curriculum that the education builds on the academic level that the students have achieved through their qualifying education.

Similarly, the argument of retaining programmes of 120 ECTS when it comes to *interdisciplinary education profile* is used based on the consideration of achieving sufficiently high academic quality in programmes where students must acquire competencies from *several* disciplines (MSc in Business Administration and Commercial Law, ERM, Mathematics-Economics, MOISL, Population Studies).

In some hearing responses, it has been highlighted that the MSc in Economics and Business Administration admits students from several different bachelor's programmes. However, the faculty management argues that there is a common feature that the qualifying bachelor's degree programmes contain business economic competencies with specific requirements for course content. Additionally, when applying for admission based on other degree programmes, there is a minimum requirement of 75 ECTS within specific business economic disciplines.

The competitive situation (programmes that are large nationally, but small at SDU)

In our use of the term "competitive situation", we have not been precise enough. Regardless of how our master's landscape looks in the future and which programmes need to be restructured, the competition for young people is intense across universities and sectors (business academies and university colleges). What we have referred to as the "competitive situation" in this context

focuses on ensuring that programmes that are small at SDU but large at the national level (MSc in Economics and MSc in Political Science) are retained at 120 ECTS, because the size of the programmes – cf. the principle of simplicity – requires either full restructuring or none at all. Offering these programmes as 120 ECTS degree is considered crucial for competition with other universities, where we expect these programmes to continue to be offered as 120 ECTS and possibly also in other formats. The nuances regarding the competitive situation are blurred by the fact that we do not yet have a complete overview of the national master's landscape, but at this point, we know that Aarhus University plans to maintain the MSc in Political Science and MSc in Economics as 120 ECTS programme and to restructure the MSc in Economics and Business Administration and Master of Laws.

The faculty management acknowledges the challenges and uncertainties associated with the restructuring of the Master of Laws and the MSc in Economics and Business Administration in terms of being as complete as possible nationally, including in relation to the recruitment of international students (especially for the MSc in Economics and Business Administration). As a Faculty, we must focus on maximising the opportunities in relation to the english-taught places. However, no decision has been made at this time on the allocation of these places at SDU. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the shorter educational formats can also contain both national and international recruitment potential. We do not know the preferences of future international students in relation to the new educational formats, and the opportunity to complete a bachelor's and master's degree in just 4 years may seem attractive to someone who wants a faster path through the education system. The same could apply to Danish students who have so far opted out of the university due to the length of their education.

Further work on the programme portfolio

The final announcement from the Rectorate regarding SDU's future educational landscape is expected on 18 December. This will likely include a specification concerning the report from the Committee for Master's Degree Programmes.

As far as the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences is concerned, the hearing responses have contributed with a number of good remarks and suggestions for the continued work on implementing the reform. The faculty management greatly appreciates this. Specifically, among the received remarks and suggestions for the continued work on the reform, the following points can be highlighted:

- *Quality*: With the prospect of offering programmes in several formats at the same Master's level, it will be relevant to have an updated discussion and stance on what quality in each programme entails.
- *45 ECTS supplementary programmes/specialisation and nano modules*: The new educational landscape opens the possibility of offering supplementary and specialisation modules as an extension of a 75 ECTS programme, which is assessed to have significant potential for establishing new growth and revenue areas. We do not yet have a clear picture of the future preferences and behaviours of students or the business community, but it is likely that there will be some interest in supplementing a 75 ECTS master's degree with an additional 45 ECTS specialisation after completing the degree and possibly a few years in the

workforce. For the business community, this can be seen as an attractive continuing education opportunity for younger employees, provided that the offerings are sufficiently attractive. In this context, current experiences with online learning and nanomodules can be utilised to ensure the highest possible degree of flexibility for all parties involved.

- *Interdisciplinarity – increased collaboration between academic environments*: The work on new educational formats can be greatly strengthened through collaboration between academic environments both within and between departments and faculties. This is in particular true for 45 ECTS programmes, which, based on current needs in the business community, can bring new transdisciplinary perspectives into play. At the same time, this can help fuel the general interdisciplinary work at the Faculty, which was mentioned in a single hearing response as being at risk of being weakened in light of the proposed programme restructurings.
- *Integrated education portfolio*: The Master's Degree Reform places a much greater focus on lifelong learning than before. With the new master's programme formats and increased focus on Master's degree programmes for working professionals, full-time and part-time programmes will effectively move closer together, necessitating a sharper focus on the portfolio of continuing and further education activities to ensure they remain attractive.

Overall, we at the Faculty will continue to work on developing our programme portfolio in the coming years with the principles of quality, relevance, and sustainability as the foundation, and in this context seek and seize the opportunities that the reform inherently contains. This work will, as before, take place in close interaction and ongoing dialogues with the study boards (and other councils, boards and committees), the Heads of Studies, the departments, the administration, students and other relevant units at SDU.

Initially, however, it will largely be the management and employees at the Department of Law, the Department of Political Science and the departments under SDU Business School, who, with the involvement of students, employees and external stakeholders, will work on proposals for specific restructuring into new educational formats. Their work will have a significant impact on the continued work broadly across the Faculty.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the faculty management will monitor capacity closely, so that in connection with the annual capacity determination, it is possible to adjust both in relation to the number of places offered and the distribution between programme types on the partially restructured programmes. This also includes the allocation of english-taught places, for which we do not yet know the model. The ambition is to ensure the best use of allocated places.