

## Simplified Governance of Danish Universities

There is broad political support for the universities' work in research, education, innovation, public-sector consultancy and knowledge dissemination. At the same time, politicians expect universities to meet other, often conflicting, goals such as regional development, social mobility and increased labour supply. This political attention has resulted in political overreach with limited coordination across initiatives. DFIR assesses that greater autonomy and cross-sector coordination of the core tasks can strengthen the overall societal value of the universities' contribution.

Following discussions with the research spokespersons of six parties about their visions for the societal role of the Danish universities, DFIR examined whether the governance and funding structure supports the four core tasks, namely research, innovation, education and dissemination, including public-sector consultancy. The Department of Accounting at Copenhagen Business School contributed a background report that maps how universities' societal tasks are currently governed and funded<sup>1</sup>. The analysis shows that different tasks are governed through different regimes and logics. Education is governed through central regulation, reforms and performance management, research through competitive funding, and public-sector consultancy through detailed work programmes. Innovation and dissemination are largely governed internally by the universities with limited or no direct funding. The latter has been partially addressed through the 2026 Research Reserve agreement.

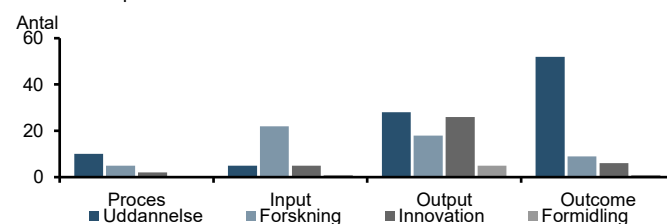
### Framework contracts, reforms and strategies

The universities' strategic framework contracts contain around 25 performance indicators across the four societal tasks and are expected to function as steering tools in the institutions' internal prioritisation. However, only 1.25 per cent of total education revenues is reassigned based on an overall assessment of the universities' fulfilment of the framework contracts.

Most indicators relate to education, followed by research, innovation and dissemination. Education is primarily governed based on societal impact such as graduate unemployment (outcome), innovation on results such as the number of research agreements (output), and research on activities identified by external funding attracted (input), cf. Figure 1 on page 1. In education, the indicators are largely identical across universities, whereas they are mainly institution-specific in research and innovation. The weighting of the indicators is not disclosed, even though

they vary significantly in relevance for the core tasks. Some indicators appear peripheral, such as the number of website downloads, which is difficult to see as a meaningful indicator.

**Figure 1** Performance indicators in the strategic framework contracts by process, input, output and outcome indicators for each core task. 2022–2025, percent.



Source: Skinnerup (2025).

The Ministry of Higher Education and Science intends the framework contracts to support strategic dialogue between the Minister and the university boards. Indicators should therefore reflect each institution's strategies, challenges and strengths, but universities use the contracts unevenly in their internal monitoring and strategy implementation.

Most reforms of the university sector since 2010 have concerned education. These reforms have regulated completion times, student composition and the quality, content and relevance of programmes. Several have temporarily or permanently introduced performance indicators for outputs and outcomes, some of which are included in state funding or in the framework contracts.

In contrast, the distribution of the Research Reserve is often implemented through competitive calls, and political strategies targeting research and innovation rely on broad ambitions, partnerships and co-creation rather than direct regulation.

### Political overreach in the university sector

Politicians expect universities to accommodate several, often conflicting, aims in their core tasks, including regional development, social mobility and increased labour supply in addition to research excellence, educational quality and innovation impact. This ambition is legitimate, but it has resulted in political overreach that can be seen in the complexity of governance instruments, the frequency of reforms and the extent of detailed regulation.

The complexity of governance instruments is reflected in the number of identical indicators across universities, which must balance conflicting priorities when allocating

education and basic funding. Frequent reforms introduce continuous procedural and organisational requirements and have in recent years been implemented with limited dialogue with the sector. Governance tools and reforms have resulted in detailed regulation, for example in programme dimensioning, the restructuring of Master's degrees and the government's work programme reallocating resources between research activities and administration. Some administrative and organisational adjustments made to meet documentation and audit requirements may be self-imposed interpretations of legislation, but these fall outside the analysis.

Political overreach may negatively affect the universities' performance of the four core tasks. First, it diverts resources away from core activities through increased administrative costs and organisational adjustments required for new procedures and requirements. Reform implementation costs are not included in reform budgets and must be financed through basic grants. Uniform use of identical indicators across the sector may intensify competition between universities instead of supporting their distinctive strengths.

Overreach may also create uncertainty and mistrust in political governance among staff. The frequency of reforms makes evaluation difficult, and this decouples political decisions from the actual implementation costs and from intended and unintended effects.

### **Proposals for autonomy, simplification and coordination**

DFIR assesses that there is societal value in granting universities greater autonomy and coordinating core tasks through dialogue and collaboration across the sector. Universities compete internationally and nationally at both institutional and individual levels. Through national coordination, Denmark and Danish researchers can strengthen their international competitiveness.

Such a process may involve simplifying, coordinating and strengthening the framework contracts based on an overall strategy, while significantly reducing the frequency of reforms and the scope of detailed regulation. The strategic framework contracts can be simplified into a smaller set of general indicators focusing on central elements of the shared core tasks that require coordination across the sector, combined with a smaller set of long-term, strategic, institution-specific indicators based on each university's strengths and mission. In this way, the political ambition for

universities to address tasks such as social mobility and regional development can be aligned with their strengths.

The role of the framework contracts as a steering tool can be reinforced by linking them more closely to the Finance Act appropriation or to a strategic fund within the Research Reserve. This may reduce the need for new reforms and detailed regulation. It should be supported by a requirement that future reforms include new funds to cover estimated implementation costs. There is still a need to streamline current regulation.

The strategic framework contracts are agreed between the Minister and the university boards. The chair of the board is responsible for the contracts and for ensuring that the university serves societal interests. The role of boards as representatives of society should be strengthened, for example through board training that improves their understanding of the sector. It could also be considered whether the Minister should have the authority to dismiss the board chair if societal interests are grossly neglected.

DFIR's proposals will require willingness and capacity among universities to collaborate on questions such as which programmes and which research each university can and should maintain. This should be decided with regard to regional balance and national economic return. It may include assessments of the geographical location and excellence of research fields, while the location of programmes should be based on evaluations of the size and quality of the learning environment and on students' programme choices, in short on the universities' strengths and distinctive profiles, cf. Annex 2.Y

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> [Skinnerup, T.H. \(2025\), Styringen af de Danske Universiteter - En analyse af styringsredskaber og -paradigmer](#)

## Bilag 1, 25 års reformer

Fokus	Reform	Årstal
Governance	Indførelse af udviklingskontrakter	2000
	Ændring af universitetsloven	2003
	Styringseftersyn af rammekontrakter og bestyrelser	2017
Uddannelse	Indførelse af Ny Fælles Kontoplan	2018
	Uddannelsesakkreditering	2007
	Forenkling af taxametersystemet	2007
	Indførelse af aftagerpaneler	2007
	Institutionsakkreditering og prækvalifikation	2013
	SU-Reform	2013
	Fremdriftsreform	2013
	Internationaliseringsstrategi	2013
	Ledighedsbaserede dimensionering	2014
	Talentindsats	2014
	Justering af fremdriftsreformen	2015
	Uddannelsesloft	2015
	Omprioriteringsbidrag på taxametermidler	2016
	Nyt taxametersystem	2017
	Begrænsning af internationale studerende	2018
	Aftale om fleksible uddannelser. Erhvervskandidat	2018
	Institutionsakkreditering 2.0	2019
	Omprioritetsbidraget på uddannelserne fjernes	2019
	Nyt talentprogram	2019
	Uddannelsesloft fjernes	2020
Udflytning af studiepladser vedtages og igangsættes	2022	
SU-Reform	2022	
Kandidatreform	2023	
Forskning	Oprettelse af Det Frie Forskningsråd	2004
	Globaliseringsstrategien	2006
	Ph.d.-reform	2006
	Resultatmodel for basisbevillinger	2009
	Ændring af resultatmodel for basisbevillinger	2021
Innovation	Oprettelsen af Rådet for Teknologi og Innovation	2002
	Teknologioverførelseslov og oprettelse af Det Strategiske Forskningsråd	2004
	Oprettelse af Højteknologifonden	2005
	Forskerpatentloven	2009
	Oprettelse af Innovationsfonden og nedlæggelsen af Højteknologifonden, Det Strategiske Forskningsråd og Rådet for Teknologi og Innovation.	2014
Myndighedsbetjening	Fusioner af forskningsinstitutioner	2007

## Bilag 2, Universiteternes styrkepositioner og særkende

### Københavns Universitet (KU)

KU blev grundlagt i 1479 og består i dag af seks fakulteter, 36 institutter og mere end 200 forskningscentre. KU har gennem tiden haft ti Nobelprismodtagere tilknyttet. Klassisk Humanboldtsk tradition. KU er bl.a. medlem af International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU) med 11 af verdens førende forskningsuniversiteter.

### Aarhus Universitet (AU)

AU blev etableret i 1928 som et privat initiativ og blev først anerkendt ved lov som selvejende institution i 1931. AU består i dag af fem fakulteter, 32 institutter og mere end 100 forskningscentre og har haft to Nobelprismodtagere tilknyttet. AU er medlem af europæiske alliancer som Circle U., Coimbra Group og Utrecht Network.

### Syddansk Universitet (SDU)

SDU blev etableret i 1966 som Odense Universitet, der fusionerede med Handelshøjskole Syd, Ingeniørhøjskole Syd og Sydjysk Universitetscenter i 1998. SDU består af fem fakulteter, 24 institutter og 50 forskningscentre. SDU har en stærk regional forankring og fokus på bæredygtighed. Universitetet er medlem af European University Alliance (EPICUR).

### Aalborg Universitet (AAU)

AAU blev grundlagt i 1974 gennem fusionen af flere institutioner, herunder Handelshøjskolen, Teknikum, Den Sociale Højskole og Danmarks Ingeniørakademi. AAU består af fire fakulteter, 18 institutter og flere centre. AAU har fokus på problem-baseret læring, tværfaglig forskning og regional forpligtelse og har ind til for nyligt været del af European Consortium of Innovative Universities.

### Roskilde Universitet (RUC)

RUC blev etableret i 1972 efter "Lov om Danmarks Fjerde Universitet" og består i dag af fire institutter med tilhørende fagområder. RUC har fokus på kritisk tænkning, tværfaglighed samt socialt og demokratisk engagement og er et anerkendt medlem af Critical Edge Alliance og European Reform University Alliance.

### Danmarks Tekniske Universitet (DTU)

DTU blev grundlagt af H.C. Ørsted i 1829 som en polyteknisk læreanstalt og blev et selvejende universitet med eksternt bestyrelse og bygningseje i 2001. DTU består af 16 institutter og 6 centre med stort fokus på innovation, entrepreneurskab og virksomhedssamarbejder. DTU indgår i EuroTech, EuroTeQ Engineering og Nordic Five Tech.

### Copenhagen Business School (CBS)

CBS blev grundlagt i 1917 som Købmandsskolens Handelshøjskoleafdeling og består i dag af 11 institutter. CBS er internationalt anerkendt for en bred profil med fokus på business in society. CBS er medlem af Global Alliance in Management Education og Partnership in International Management.

### IT-Universitetet København (ITU)

ITU blev grundlagt i 1999 som IT-Højskolen og blev anerkendt som universitet med universitetsloven i 2003. ITU er et monofakultært universitet med en tværfaglig tilgang til studiet af informationsteknologi og består af 3 institutter. ITU har en samling IT-uddannelser, som er søgt af en kønsdivers population af studerende.

Tabel 2.1 Nøgletal for de danske universiteter. 2024

	STÅ	VIP	TAP	Indtægter	Statstilskud
<b>Københavns Universitet</b>	27.874	5.751	4.523	11,2 mia.	5,9 mia.
<b>Aarhus Universitet</b>	25.714	4.677	3.715	8,5 mia.	4,7 mia.
<b>Danmarks Tekniske Universitet</b>	9.857	3.476	2.761	6,6 mia.	3,0 mia.
<b>Syddansk Universitet</b>	15.370	2.173	1.755	3,9 mia.	2,4 mia.
<b>Aalborg Universitet</b>	14.670	1.834	1.401	3,3 mia.	2,3 mia.
<b>Copenhagen Business School</b>	12.983	660	722	1,7 mia.	1,3 mia.
<b>Roskilde Universitet</b>	5.140	471	377	0,9 mia.	0,7 mia.
<b>IT-Universitetet København</b>	1.909	222	181	0,4 mia.	0,3 mia.

Kilde: Danske Universiteters statistiske beredskab, 2024