

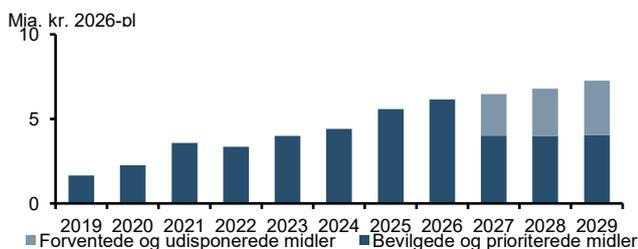
Denmark can benefit more from multiannual investments in research and innovation

The Agreements on Strategic Priorities for Research and Innovation 2026–2029 mark a welcome paradigm shift in Danish research and innovation policy (R&I policy) by introducing multiannual funding for selected priority areas. This creates opportunities for strategic and long-term investments in the build-up of research capacity and infrastructure. DFIR assesses that the funds could be deployed more effectively through the development of concrete and transparent implementation plans within the overarching political priorities, rather than through open calls and lobbying. The process could be based on a systematic approach involving a broad range of stakeholders.

In the political agreements from November 2026, it was decided to allocate DKK 12.3 billion for multiannual R&I priorities in 2026–2029, distributed across three themes: 1) Denmark's security: critical technologies and defence research, 2) Responsibility for the green transition, and 3) Health and life science. Each theme comprises a number of priorities, with annual allocations ranging from DKK 1 to 300 million.

Just over half of the multiannual funding will be allocated by Innovation Fund Denmark, while Independent Research Fund Denmark (DFF) will allocate one fifth of the funds. The remaining multiannual funding will be allocated by individual ministries, the EU DP, or directly to research institutions, selected centres, and the European Space Agency (ESA). In addition to the multiannual funding for the three thematic areas, universities will receive nearly DKK 4 billion for research and innovation over the period 2026–2029.

Figur 1 Udviklingen i forskningsreserven, 2019-2029, mia. kr. 2026-pl.



Kilde: Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, Finansministeriet og egne beregninger.

It is positive that policymakers are assuming responsibility. This sends a clear signal of political willingness to commit to long-term investments in R&I and enables a strategic build-up of research capacities and infrastructure. Now it is up to the responsible ministries and funds to set a direction

within the framework of the broad multiannual political priorities. It could be supported by systematic processes focused on concretising strategic priorities and involving stakeholders from Danish R&I environments and sectors.

However, Danish experience in this area is limited. The catalogues FORSK2015, FORSK2020, and FORSK2025¹ sought to identify future research areas, and for several years formed the basis for political priorities in the research reserve. The catalogues were, however, too generic to effectively support political prioritisation and have therefore been phased out. Innovation Fund Denmark has also gained experience in developing roadmaps with shared plans for how Danish R&I can contribute to achieving the four green missions launched in *Future Green Solutions*.² The process of developing the four roadmaps was characterised by initial challenges, but in DFIR's view has contributed to a shared understanding and direction across public and private actors. In addition to national experience, Denmark can draw inspiration from international practice.

International experience and models

The OECD's *STI Outlook 2025*³ highlights a number of international examples. In DFIR's view, the development of a Danish model should be based on three dimensions: the purpose, format, and institutional anchoring of the process.

Purpose. First, the overarching purpose of the process must be defined. As with the aforementioned roadmaps, the purpose may be to establish a plan for how Denmark builds capacity and networks in politically prioritised areas or areas critical to Denmark's security and autonomy, such as AI, space, and defence technologies. Alternatively, the purpose may be to further strengthen existing positions of strength, for example in life science and welfare technology. Such a purpose may involve a shorter investment horizon that supports deep specialisation. Lastly, the purpose may be to identify future potentials, which requires a long-term horizon for investments in infrastructure and capacity building.

Format. It is crucial to determine the format of the process, including its frequency and the degree of involvement of actors in the R&I system. Frequent iterations reduce the risk of disconnected priorities and allow for continuous strategic adjustment. New and immature technologies can be incorporated quickly, while technologies that fail to meet expectations can be phased out. Longer processes, by contrast, enable deeper analytical grounding

and a focus on long-term investments and visions. Processes may also vary in terms of stakeholder involvement, ranging from more superficial scans without engagement of the R&I system to in-depth analyses involving a broad range of stakeholders. *Scanning of scans* provides low-intensity overviews based on similar analyses from other countries, offering breadth but limited analytical depth and limited linkage to national needs and actors. *Horizon scanning* includes analyses of national and international publications, patents, investment trends, and political signals. This approach is used, for example, in the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany, where technology radars are updated frequently and form the basis for systematic policy briefings. More in-depth analyses are based on engagement with actors across the R&I system. *Strategic foresights* involve the development of plausible future scenarios, risks, and dependencies. In addition to trend analyses, it includes workshops with knowledge institutions, companies, and innovation support actors, where the field of identified scenarios, technologies, and development trends is narrowed. This also contributes to establishing a shared understanding, direction, and networks across the R&I system. Strategic foresight is used, for example, in the EU's Foresight-on-Demand, which supports the European Commission's strategic R&I policy decisions, as well as in Finland, where strategic foresight forms part of government policy development and the portfolio management of implementing authorities.

Anchoring. Finally, the institutional anchoring of the process affects how the results are applied. Anchoring responsibility in the central administration can ensure transparency in national priorities and support political mandate. It largely ensures political direction and signals political willingness to follow up with investments. Decentralised anchoring, by contrast, strengthens the translation of insights into coordination and partnerships across sectors. In Finland, processes are anchored both in the central administration and at the operational level. Within the central administration, the foresight unit cuts across several ministries and supports the development of government R&I policy. At the implementing level, Business Finland has gained experience with a model in which strategic foresight is closely linked to funding allocation and portfolio management. This provides clearer guidance for funding, partnerships, and development pathways with feedback between strategy and practice, but requires continuous updating and resources.

National anchoring of strategic priorities

In Denmark, Innovation Fund Denmark could, for example, develop investment strategies for the DKK 6.6 billion that the fund will allocate over the next four years within the overarching, politically defined themes, in close dialogue

with R&I environments. These strategies should place Danish investments in an international context to ensure the best conditions for international positioning as well as European and Nordic cooperation. The fund could draw inspiration from Business Finland and from its own experience in developing roadmaps for the green missions. International experience suggests that such an approach can strengthen the quality of decision-making, contribute to capacity and infrastructure building, and support the establishment of partnerships and coordination across R&I environments and sectors. At the same time, it can ensure agility in investments, as programme development can be closely monitored in dialogue with R&I actors. In the longer term, the process could be integrated into the central administration as a basis for political prioritisation in future negotiations on the research reserve. This could also enhance transparency and limit the particular interests previously highlighted in critiques of research reserve negotiations.⁴ The approach could also be applied in the development and updating of Denmark's sector strategies, for example a strategy for the Danish defence industry.

It is, of course, crucial that such processes do not remain a bureaucratic exercise that merely reproduces existing knowledge without providing real guidance on priorities. The process could therefore be complemented by strengthened coordination of universities' research and innovation activities along Dutch lines, as previously proposed by DFIR.⁵ Together, these initiatives could increase coordination and reduce internal competition, thereby strengthening Denmark's international position.

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Notes

¹ UFM (2017). [FORSK2025 – fremtidens løfterige forskningsområder](#).

² UFM (2020). [Fremtidens grønne løsninger](#).

³ OECD (2025). [Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook 2025](#).

⁴ DFIR (2025). [DFIRbrief 58: Forenklet styring af universiteterne](#).

⁵ DEA (2024). [Forskningsreservens størrelse og struktur over tid](#), KDVS (2024). [Dansk strategisk forskning – nu og i fremtiden](#).