

# AAURA – The AAU Research Academy

The AAU Research Academy AAURA is a program for building the research competences for young researchers at AAU. The program targets researchers who have obtained their doctorate (PhD) no earlier than ten years before joining AAURA activities. AAURA is part of AAU's competence development strategy, and it maintains strong links with the departments and sections of AAU. AAURA provides a range of modules and activities, and participants may choose one specific module or participate in a range of activities.

The AAU Research Academy aims to strengthen participants' competences in:

- Career development planning
- Fundraising for research and/or commercial projects
- Project management
- Professional communication
- Personal leadership

Besides the formalized training, AAURA also serves as a framework to support cross-faculty cooperation and networking by offering seminars, workshops and social events focusing on the challenges and needs of a young researcher.

This document is the detailed operation manual of the AAU Research Academy for the use of the steering committee and the providers of courses/services/activities. It will be supplemented by information materials aimed at participants (young researchers) and their sponsors (departments etc.).

The document describes:

- The rationale for setting up the AAU Research Academy
- The six activities that the AAU Research Academy will initiate in its first two years of operation
- The governance set-up and standard operating procedures of the AAU Research Academy

# RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

## Ambition

AAURA offers training and networking opportunities for young researchers at Aalborg University. Having demonstrated high-level research skills in their academic field by completing their doctorate, postdocs/adjuncts and young lecturers need to acquire additional organizational and personal skills in order to prosper in academia or industry.

AAURA offers systematic training in organizational and personal skills for young researchers at Aalborg University:

1. Individual career planning and résumé building
2. Fundraising for research projects and/or industrial/commercial projects
3. Project management
4. Professional communication and networking
5. Personal leadership
6. Networking events for young researchers

In this way, AAURA will help to increase research-related competences that allow young researchers to achieve their full potential, whether at AAU, at another university, or in industry.

AAURA has been established as part of the implementation of the AAU strategy *Knowledge for the World*. In its first two years, participants in courses will be co-funded by AAU strategy funds through AAU Competence Development in order to facilitate departments investing in continued competence development for young researchers.

By setting up AAURA, Aalborg University moves beyond the traditional informal way in which these skills have been acquired, e.g. participating in research projects and observing senior colleagues. In practice, however, the informal approach to competence development for young researchers meant that:

- Many young researchers do not have a career development plan which guides them to invest their human resources in the right direction and for a deliberate choice. Issues to cover could be internationalization, publication plans, how to demonstrate independence, collaboration with industry partners, etc.
- Applying for project funding is a competence that cannot be taken for granted, and at the moment the development of these skills often depends primarily on the research group in which young researchers belong.
- Successful applicants face project management and personal leadership challenges, and again these cannot be taken for granted.
- In all these processes, communication and relational competences play a key role when the young researcher enters the global research village. Networking plays a crucial role both in terms of joint efforts for e.g. a scientific paper but likely even more when consortia are formed to apply for e.g. EU funding.

## Objectives

The objective of AAURA is to take a strategic approach to develop the competences of young researchers in order to help them reach their full potential. The program targets junior researchers who have obtained their doctorate no earlier than ten years before joining AAURA activities, but individual activities may also be offered to more experienced researchers with specific needs with regard to e.g. project management or professional communication.

## Activities

The six key activities of the AAU Research Academy are listed below and described in detail in the following pages. The number and order of the listed activities are optional.



1. **Individual Career Development Planning** is helping participants to focus their efforts on reaching their goals
2. **Fundraising** through applications for external funding in open competition, or through collaboration with industrial/commercial/organizational partners
3. **Project management** is important in ensuring the success of research grants and collaborative partnerships
4. **Professional communication and networking** are the keys to building relations in academia, industry and society at large
5. **Personal leadership competences** complement the more generic project leadership skills in that they develop the competences of young researchers to make the most of their individual strengths
6. **Network building** makes course participants benefit from dialogue between young researchers through a series of events, directed by the AAURA steering committee and drawing on inputs from participants in AAURA activities.

## Participants

The participants are ambitious young researchers who would like to receive formal training in essential elements of becoming an established research leader. Participants must have support from their department or research group.

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# ACTIVITIES

## 1. Career Development Planning

**Content:** Vision preparation; Analyses of steps to be taken; Long term planning; Detailed plan for year 1 and 2; Individual coaching.

**Aim:** An individualized career development plan should be established jointly by the participant and the supporting team, ensuring that the development plan includes the relevant aspects etc. that can support the career development and training of the researcher. Both short and long term goals are identified, and a plan to reach those goals is described in detail such that the plan supports making the right decisions. For those aiming at a university career it is particularly important that independence of the research talent can be demonstrated in the résumé and list of applications. For those aiming at a career in industry, building networks and understanding the needs of potential external partners will be crucial.

**How:** Over the first 1-1½ months a plan is developed in steps. The first objective is to form a short-term career development, and towards the end of the formalized course, a long-term plan is developed via experiences gathered in the first part of the training.

In addition to research visions, this plan comprises the researcher's training needs in view of their career goals, including planning for publications, teaching and participation in conferences/workshops, anticipated research management activities, grants written/applied for/received, anticipated networking and partnership opportunities, internationalization including stays abroad and other international networking, and knowledge collaboration with external stakeholders in order to strengthen the impact of research. These training needs may be met by other AAURA activities, or by other external providers.

**Who:** AAU Competence Development has contracted with a specialist external consultant to deliver the training. Each participant identifies a mentor, the external consultant acts as the process facilitator regarding the career development plan, and the head of department approves and subsequently supports the plan.

**Commitment:** The participant must confirm that he or she will invest the time needed to fulfil the plan. The mentor must be committed to do the mentoring intensively in the first year and be available for further input if needed later. The department agrees to support the plan once approved by the head of department.

## 2. Fundraising

**Content:** Individual research funding plan, targeting either university research grants or industry partnership development; PBL-based training program in proposal writing; evaluation training; Interview training (if appropriate); individual coaching for providing one-two proposals for external research funding.

**Aim:** The participants will develop skills that enable the participants to make strong research funding applications with the purpose to attract external funding either in open competition or through industrial/commercial/professional partnerships. Attracting external, competitive funding improves the résumé of the participant, and at the same time gives the participant the freedom to build or consolidate his or her research group.

**How:** Each participant must provide a résumé and a focused 1-page abstract on their planned research and identify the general target of proposals. The abstract must include a short background, three most relevant scientific papers, and a clear description of the novelty. The F&P office proposes two-four ideas to where and when to apply based on each project idea and the former funding and publication history of the participant and his/her career plan. F&P provides a timeline for the proposal writing, which will minimize the competition to deadlines and funds between the participants in this year's group. When agreed on the timeline, the participants will participate in a PBL-based training program organized by F&P in cooperation with experienced proposal writers. The program will run over three ½ day sessions and individual coaching. The participant writes and submits a proposal during the training, evaluates other participants' proposals, and is trained specifically if called to an interview with their project.

**Who:** The training will be performed by the F&P office and a number of experienced researchers who have proven success in attracting external funding from prestigious funds and industrial/commercial/professional partners. The individual coaching will be done by a supervisor (domain expert) and a professional officer from F&P.

**Commitment:** The participant must be committed to submitting at least one proposal according to the timeline set up in the individual plan. The program responsible person approves submission. The F&P office will help participants draft individual funding plans in collaboration with the participants, run the training 1-2 times every year and provide relevant individual coaching to the participant as well as proof reading for two additional submissions by participants over the first year.

### 3. Project Management

**Content:** Managing projects with external funding and collaboration with other researchers/institutions/stakeholders.

**Aim:** Participants will develop competences with regard to planning and project execution, e.g. ensuring progress, planning submission of results (both on individual and collective projects) and stakeholder management. Participants will be able to apply the project management tools to their own research project immediately after the course.

How

Module A: Fundamental project tools.

Focusing on fundamental project management tools, the course will strengthen participants' awareness of the different roles of the people involved in the project as well as help choosing an appropriate form of communication. In the case of "single man projects", academic staff often holds multiple roles within the project, one of which is her/his involvement as a researcher. The course is relevant whether participants are project managers of "single man projects" or managers of a research group.

Module B: The project manager and the group

The course will train the participants' ability as project managers to plan and co-ordinate the project group's work, including methods and techniques to engage the team members and achieve common ownership.

Topics covered during the project management course include:

- The project working method - drivers for project success
- Setting the objectives - project description
- Stakeholder management
- Milestones for planning - The Planning Poster
- Activity planning and estimation
- Risk management
- Project organization
- Communication and effective working methods
- The many roles of the project manager

**Who:** AAU Competence Development has contracted with specialist external consultants to deliver the project management course.

**Commitment:** Participants must be willing to engage actively in coursework and preparation, and to contribute their own experience with project management, as project managers or project members.  
**Prerequisites:** In order to attend module B participants must have completed module A.

## 4. Professional communication and networking

**Content:** This activity is quite broad and covers all relational aspects of acting effectively as a researcher in relation to potential sponsors and collaborators, as well as the public at large.

**Aim:** To increase the communication and networking competences of participants in order to improve their ability to relate effectively to colleagues, sponsors, and collaborators and thereby form professional relationships that will further their research work.

**How:** This activity comprises individual courses in:

- a. Elevator pitching of research projects/aims
- b. Interview techniques and preparation
- c. Stakeholder interaction
- d. Dissemination to a wider public
- e. Efficient networking and small talk for building professional relationships

**Who:** AAU Competence Development offers a series of workshops, using a range of providers specialized in each of the topics.

**Commitment:** The participant selects one or more areas that will be the focus of his/her involvement in this activity. The main objective for the participant is to adapt and develop skills that in different ways relate to how the young researcher interacts with others. These competences are crucial because they greatly influence the quality of networks, co-authors, industry partners, etc. that researchers are able to engage with.



## 5. Personal Leadership

**Content:** Young researchers will often have to provide leadership, either in their own research group or when involved in larger research networks or other professional activities. This makes it crucial to know something about their own style of leadership, strengths and weaknesses, and which basic tools are at their disposal.

**Aim:** The personal leadership course provides participants with basic leadership tools and creates a solid foundation for personal leadership.

**How:** The course creates a learning environment that prompts participants to take substantial responsibility for their individual development as leaders. It gives participants insights in their strengths and weaknesses as leaders (both in relationship to academic and other staff) and provides understanding of different kinds of leadership tools. This helps participants to lead and set direction, create better ways of working together as a team, and thereby achieving even better professional results.

Elements will include:

- Leadership profiling
- Situation based leadership
- Assertion
- Handling of conflicts
- How to influence others
- Coaching techniques

**Who:** AAU Competence Development has contracted with specialist external consultants to deliver the personal leadership course. It is expected that the course activities take around 3-4 months and will involve assignments.

## 6. Network Building

**Content:** Networking events involving short keynotes, debates or interviews.

**Aim:** The post doc/adjunct/early lecturer stage is the gateway to career decisions. AAURA wishes to provide a platform for young researchers to meet and share experiences about e.g. job opportunities/career tracks, spanning from entrepreneurship and industrial/professional employment, to teaching and academic research. All these options involve personal and practical challenges in terms of e.g. family, culture, and mobility requirements.

**How:** AAURA will support social activities where young researchers have the opportunity to talk to others in a similar situation. Networking will take place around short keynotes delivered by speakers invited by both AAURA and the participants. AAURA networking events take place four-six times a year for two hours.

The meetings are organised by the AAURA steering committee drawing on input from participants in AAURA. The meetings are planned six months ahead.

**Who:** The program of events is organized by the chair of the AAURA steering committee in collaboration with the steering committee and participants, and administratively supported by the project manager (programming) and AAU Competence Development (practical event management). AAURA network building events are open for both present and former participants in AAURA courses.

**Commitment:** Participants in AAURA courses are encouraged to participate in networking events and to suggest topics and speakers.

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# ORGANISATION

AAURA has been established following the AAU Strategy *Knowledge for the World*, as part of the efforts to strengthen competence development across and throughout Aalborg University. As the director responsible for competence and leadership development at AAU, Dean Henrik Halkier chairs the steering committee responsible for overseeing the activities, assisted by the steering committee and his support staff, and AAU Competence Development. Courses are administered by AAU Competence Development.

## Steering committee

Members:

- Chair: Director responsible for AAU's competence development strategy (Henrik Halkier)
- Senior users: Three vice-deans (Søren Kristiansen, Ole Kæseler) and one Head of Department (Tine Herreborg Jørgensen)
- Senior supplier: Head of AAU Competence Development (Kaveh Shamshiri-Petersen)
- Observers: AAU Competence Development (Tine Corfitsen), AAU Talent Programme (Lasse Panny Pedersen), F&P (Charlotte Pedersen Jacobsen)
- Secretariat: Project manager assisting the chair of the steering committee (Katrine Meller Jørgensen)

The steering committee has the following tasks:

- Monitor and assess the portfolio of courses and adjust when necessary.
- Ensure that activities are evaluated and that the feedback is used actively to improve the quality of the activity in question.
- Initiate relevant new activities and abandon activities that do not meet the expectations of the committee.
- One ambition considered very important is to gather participants from various faculties to increase awareness of cross disciplinary research possibilities.
- The steering committee meets at least once every quarter of the year. The chairman is responsible for the agenda and all members of the steering committee may contribute with items for the agenda. Minutes are written and submitted to the steering committee once approved.

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## Participants

The main target group for AAURA activities are young researchers who have obtained their doctorate (PhD) no earlier than ten years before joining AAURA activities. Participants can sign up for one or more courses, and AAURA encourages young researchers to combine general courses (career planning, personal leadership) with more technical courses (fundraising, project management, professional communication).

By recommending a young researcher as participant in AAURA courses, the department agrees:

- That the participant will be allowed to use the time necessary
- To appoint, if required, a domain expert that can provide scientific feedback to the participant as a scientific supervisor. It is the participant's task to suggest a suitable supervisor.
- To appoint, if required, a mentor from another area/department, which has general but not domain expertise. This mentor contributes with two main aspects: 1) advice in a coaching capacity which may ask all the good questions in relation to career, handling of challenges, development as a leader etc.; and 2) to read and provide feedback for the application with the eyes of a non-domain expert. It is the participant's task to suggest a suitable mentor.

If course activities have spare capacity, researchers who have obtained their doctorate more than ten years ago may be able to participate on the basis of full funding from their department.

## Evaluation

As AAURA is a new initiative, it is essential to collect data during program implementation, including for example the number of participants, systematic evaluation of individual courses, the quality delivered by mentors, expected scaling of the program, acquired funding etc. This will allow us to learn from the trial program such that future participants meet a continuously improved program. Monitoring is undertaken in collaboration between AAU Competence Development and the chair of the steering committee.

## Funding

AAURA is part of the AAU Strategy *Knowledge for the World*, and in 2018 and 2019 course participation fees will therefore be reduced for young researchers who have obtained their doctorate no earlier than ten years before joining AAURA activities.

Researchers who have obtained their doctorate more than ten years ago are not eligible for the reduced course participation fee.