STRATEGY FOR THE STUDY ENVIRONMENT
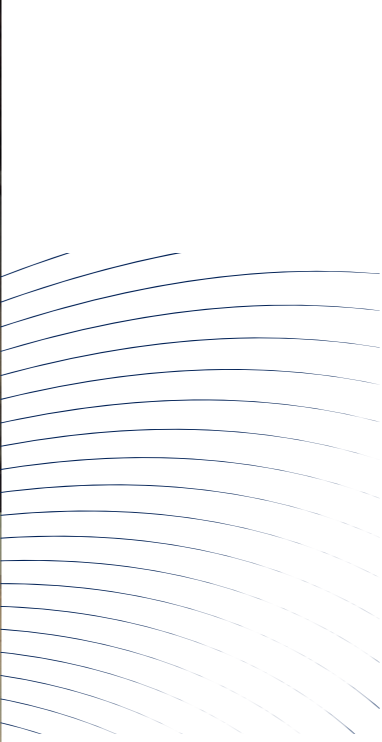
Part of Aalborg University's 2016–2021 strategy "Knowledge for the World"

INTRODUCTION

Aalborg University's 2016-2021 strategy "Knowledge for the World" identifies the study environment as a key focus area. As part of its strategy, Aalborg University (AAU) has appointed a Study Environment Committee to ensure that AAU's study programmes are based in an attractive study environment which is supportive of problem-based and project-based learning.

The Study Environment Committee is responsible for the strategic, long-term development of the study environment and also for the preparation of this strategy. The strategy for the study environment will contribute to the implementation of AAU's general strategy in the study environment area:

"An attractive and learning-supportive student environment with an operational centralised student environment set-up will be established. This will be af supplement to the decentralised student environment initiatives and will ensure the active inclusion of the students in the shaping of the student environment across the university." (AAU's strategy "Knowledge for the World" 2016-2021).

The study environment strategy has been prepared in cooperation with the students. The strategy is based on the results of the study environment survey conducted in 2016 as well as on the focus areas selected by the Study Environment Committee as top priorities in the next few years.

FACTS

WHAT DOES 'STUDY ENVIRONMENT' ENTAIL?

A study environment consists of three dimensions: The physical, the psychological and the aesthetic dimensions.

AAU is responsible for the physical and aesthetic framework and also for the psychological and social environment in which students are working. In addition, AAU is responsible for including students in the development of a good study environment, focusing on the students' possibilities of studying and receiving instruction which is relevant for their studies.

The *physical* study environment includes such issues as health, ergonomics, indoor climate and security.

The *aesthetic* study environment involves how students perceive and are influenced by the rooms and spaces surrounding them as well as how these may help support the activities, learning, behaviour and social wellbeing of students.

The *psychological* study environment involves student wellbeing, i.e. their relationships with fellow students and lecturers as well as their perception of the academic demands and opportunities for development in their study programmes. In a positive psychological learning environment, a sense of community, security, motivation, variation and challenges contribute to positive identity formation and academic development.

Source: Danish Centre for Educational Environment (DCUM).

THE STRATEGY'S FOCUS AREAS

The strategy focuses on three areas:

- Student workspaces
- Digital learning support
- Communication with students

The strategy differs from other strategies at AAU in that it is largely based on initiatives in which students contribute with their perspectives on the challenges faced by AAU. Students are involved in all initiatives through development projects, analyses, interviews, workshops, etc. This provides basic knowledge which can be translated into concrete action at all AAU faculties and in Shared Services.

The study environment strategy applies to the period 2016-2021. Mid-term evaluation will take place in 2018.

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> **An attractive and learning-supportive student environment with an operational centralised student environment set-up will be established.**
>
> (AAU's strategy "Knowledge for the World" 2016-2021).

Focus area 1:
Student workspaces

AAU offers a wide range of diverse student workspaces which in various ways are supportive of the academic and social environments on campus.

AAU's physical premises are used efficiently, and students have easy and flexible access to student workspaces.

Student workspaces accommodate student learning and motivation and contribute to high study intensity and physical presence on campus.

Good student workspaces supportive of the academic and social environments on campus are important elements of a good study environment and in the learning processes of the students.

Student workspaces must inspire learning and increase the time students spend studying (study intensity) by accommodating some of the diverse needs of students as regards learning space types, e.g. reading spaces, group rooms, common rooms and informal gathering points.

**INITIATIVE 1.
BRAINS NOT BRICKS
– LEARNING SUPPORTIVE
USE OF AAU'S BUILDINGS**

1.1 GOOD STUDENT WORKSPACES

What characterises good student workspaces at a university employing problem-based learning? The study environment survey 2016 provided us with an insight into the wishes expressed by students as regards student workspaces, but we still need to clarify and visualise these wishes. A task force for student workspaces will launch a campaign asking students to submit photos of inspirational learning spaces and social gathering points on campus, as well as examples of 'dead' spaces which are not currently functional, but which have untapped potential. The best-practice material submitted by students will be compiled in a catalogue of ideas for inspirational student workspaces/gathering points. The catalogue will be submitted to the faculties and Shared Services, who will include the ideas in their efforts to rethink their respective spaces. Worst-case examples will be used to inspire discussions at the faculties and Shared Services as to how these 'dead' spaces might be transformed to become vibrant gathering points and workspaces for students.

Strategic funding will be allocated for student-run projects aimed at creating inspirational learning environments in selected 'dead' spaces. This will take place in collaboration between students, members of staff and Campus Services in the individual AAU campus. The task force may wish to consider other initiatives to promote focus on and knowledge of good student workspaces.

1.2 EASY ACCESS TO STUDENT WORKSPACES

Based on the experience from the existing booking systems, ITS will develop a similar system for students to use when booking rooms. The system must be user-friendly, easily accessible and developed in dialogue with the students.

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Since AAU focuses on problem-oriented project work, we might need more areas which are geared to group work and cooperation.

(Student comment from the
study environment survey 2016)

Focus area 2: Digital learning support

VISION FOR DIGITAL LEARNING SUPPORT

AAU continuously develops its digital learning support. Digitisation of learning resources, teaching and supervision motivates students, increases study intensity and expands feedback opportunities.

Digitisation must support the learning processes of students – in course activities, during supervision and when students are cooperating among themselves.

At the same time, digitisation must enhance student preparation activities, including their (project) work between scheduled course activities.

INITIATIVE 2. DIGITAL LEARNING SUPPORT – FROM A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

According to AAU's strategy "Knowledge for the World", IT must form an integral part of problem-based and project-based learning at AAU. But what wishes do students express as regards IT-based learning platforms, and what platforms are they currently using? A task force for digital learning will cooperate with students from all AAU faculties to prepare a catalogue of student ideas as to how digitisation might support course activities, supervision and peer learning. The catalogue will be submitted to the faculties and Shared Services and serve as inspiration for the development of digital learning support at AAU.

For a variety of reasons, recordings of lectures would be a good tool for students to have at their disposal.

(Student comment from the study environment survey 2016)

Focus area 3: Communication with students

VISION FOR COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

When welcoming new students to the University, we provide relevant and clear information on AAU and individual study programmes to the new students. We offer digital solutions which accommodate student needs, and students receive thorough introduction to their digital lives at AAU.

All written communication between AAU and our students is digital.

Various platforms are used for communicative purposes, e.g. Moodle, Facebook, AAU's website, etc.

Communication between AAU and our students must ensure that students receive the information they need to conduct their studies.

INITIATIVE 3. CLEAR AND EXPLICIT COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

Students are often asking for clear, explicit and easily accessible information concerning their day-to-day life at Aalborg University. But what does clear, explicit and easily accessible information imply from a student perspective? A task force for communication will look into the input provided by students and prepare an analysis to clarify where and when students experience specific challenges in their communication with AAU. It may be beneficial for the task force to approach the students of relevant AAU study programmes and ask them to explore this issue in their student projects.

On the basis of the analysis – and any possible input from student projects – the task force will compile a catalogue of ideas on how to enhance communication between AAU and our students concerning their studies, the University's governing bodies and our pedagogical working methods.

The catalogue of ideas will be submitted to Shared Services and the faculties with a view to implement concrete suggestions at both centralised and decentralised levels at the University.

Photo: Svenn Hjartarson, Studio 03

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