Framework and principles for competency development at Aarhus University

In accordance with the staff policy, Aarhus University's goals are:

- for all employees to continually develop their own competencies in order to perform their job responsibilities at the university.
- for the university to work in a systematic, targeted manner to ensure that all employees have relevant competency and career development opportunities.

Competency development is also part of the staff policy's norms for daily working life at Aarhus University which establish that the university and all members of staff must:
1. Respect and support freedom of speech and freedom of research
2. Contribute to a cohesive, collaborative university
3. Contribute to creating openness, trust and timely communication at all levels
4. Demonstrate mutual respect and decency
5. Experience good management and good relations with colleagues in their daily work
6. Value diversity among colleagues
7. Respect the balance between work and private life
8. Prioritise personal and professional development

The framework and principles for competency development are based on AU's strategy and development contract with focus on the employees' ability to perform and support the university's core activities within research, education, talent development and knowledge exchange.

In addition, competency development at the university is also defined by the Circular on the Agreement on Competence Development (*Cirkulære om Aftale om Kompetenceudvikling*). (http://www.kompetenceudvikling.dk/sites/default/files/filer/Kompetenceaftalen%20020-15.pdf)

Framework and principles

1. Competency development at Aarhus University is the **development of research competencies, teaching competencies, general/supplementary competencies, administrative competencies and managerial competencies** and takes place at many levels with very different contents and perspectives.

2. Competency development can be **defined** as '**development of knowledge, skills and/or attitudes**' in relation to current and future work challenges. This means that competency development is not limited to courses.

3. Competency development is **a managerial responsibility**. The managers at the university's departments (Aarhus BSS, ST, HE)/schools (Arts), centres, sections and administrative units are responsible for clarification and identification of local competency development requirements and needs. The clarification process must be based on strategies and focus areas at AU level, faculty level, department (Aarhus BSS, ST, HE)/school (Arts) level and centre level. The clarification process should take place in the form of dialogue with the employees and in close collaboration with the liaison committee system, which also determines the principles and guidelines for staff development dialogues (SDDs). The responsibility for ensuring competency development which answers to AU's needs as well as the employees' individual and professional development is shared by managers and employees. In this context, competency development of employees who have been dismissed is a special case.

4. Competency development **is decided, planned and financed locally**. This means that the local management is responsible for ensuring relevant competency development and for ensuring **transparency** in relation to the funding allocated to finance the approved initiatives, including courses and training.

5. The **liaison committee organisation at AU** defines the criteria for prioritising the **funding which is allocated in accordance with collective agreements** and which the university receives from the Competence Fund.

6. Locally, the liaison committee system must discuss the previous year's competency development initiatives **on an annual basis**. At the same time, the competency development needs for the coming year must be discussed.

What is competency development?

Competency development involves all activities which challenge, develop, train, bring up to date and maintain the individual employee's knowledge, qualifications and skills in relation to the employee's current and future work challenges. This means that competency development involves more than courses and training programmes. For example when an employee takes on new tasks, receives feedback at work or becomes part of new teams or project groups, this contributes to the development of the employee's competencies. Below, some of the various forms of competency development are listed:

External formal/planned learning: Courses, supplementary training, E-learning, virtual meeting forums, networks, specialist groups, conferences, after-work meetings etc.
Internal formal/planned learning: Internal networks/knowledge sharing, peer-to-peer training, job swaps, visits, exchange programmes, coaching/collegial supervision, group development dialogues, feedback, mentor schemes, new tasks, specialisation, project/team organisation, etc.

According to the Competence Agreement, managers and employees have an obligation to prioritise competency development which answers to AU's needs as well as the individual and professional development of the employees. Agreements concerning competency development can be made at the annual staff development dialogues as well as on an ongoing basis as needed.

Effective competency development

According to the Agency for Competence Development in the State Sector (*Kompetencesekretariatet*), one of the common pitfalls when employees take courses or participate in other types of training programmes is that what they have learned is only used to a limited extent in practice, and this means that it does not have an effect in the organisation or for the employee.

The manager and the employee are jointly responsible for ensuring effective competency development. They must work together to ensure a high level of preparation and balancing of expectations before the competency development activity starts, and that follow-up and knowledge sharing take place when the competency development activity is completed. In order to ensure effective competency development at AU, it is recommended that the following themes are taken into account:
a) Clarification and balancing expectations with employees in relation to the need for competency development, the type of activity (peer-to-peer training, courses etc.), the expectations in relation to outcome and time frame, subsequent knowledge sharing with colleagues, etc. This clarification will often take place in connection with staff development dialogues and group development dialogues.
b) Ensuring that the employee has the necessary time to participate in the competency development activity, and that time is set aside for the employee to prepare for the activity and subsequently for trying out and using the new knowledge.
c) Follow-up within the first two weeks after the employee has completed the competency development activity. What was the outcome? How does the employee expect to bring this new knowledge into play? Has an agreement on knowledge sharing been made? Etc.

Strategic and systematic competency development at AU

Strategic and effective competency development of AU staff is a prerequisite for realisation of AU's strategy as well as the local strategies, action plans and objectives.

In order to make optimum use of the employees' and the managers' competencies and resources, it is important that competency development matches the concrete needs of the organisation. A *systematic* approach to competency development ensures that development programmes and activities are planned, carried out and followed up on continuously, which ensures that they have an effect and generate new results locally. The annual staff development dialogues (SDDs) and continuous SDD follow-up, e.g. through individual dialogues, group development dialogues and follow-up in the local liaison committees, are elements in systematic competency development at AU.

Competency development at AU should be *strategic* which means that initiatives should be based on the goals and tasks of the local units and thereby interact with AU's overall strategy and the local strategy and action plans.

The role of the liaison committees and the senior management team

In accordance with the Circular on the Agreement on Competence Development (*Cirkulære om Aftale om Kompetenceudvikling*), the role of the **Main Liaison Committee (HSU)** is to:
– establish the principles and guidelines for competency development at AU,
– discuss the need for development activities,
– establish the principles and guidelines for staff development dialogues (SDDs), and
– evaluate the overall competency development initiatives annually, including the effect of staff development dialogues.

The senior management team then decides on the development activities recommended by the Main Liaison Committee and on any related funding.

Like the Main Liaison Committee (HSU), **the Faculty Liaison Committees and the Administration Liaison Committee (FSU/ASU) and the Local Liaison Committees (LSU)** may discuss and evaluate competency development locally and establish principles for competency development within the framework set by the Main Liaison Committee.

Management ensures that the liaison committees have sufficient and accurate information in order to evaluate the competency development initiatives, including the use of resources.

The joint union representatives and AU HR meet every six months for a dialogue meeting about the need for competency development, including general/supplementary competencies, administrative competencies and managerial development. The required range of courses and training programmes for staff will also be discussed.

Annual cycle for competency development

The liaison committees discuss competency development initiatives in January/February (at this meeting, the committees also discuss the previous year's SDDs). At the meeting, the committees evaluate the competency development initiatives of the previous year and review the need to prioritise competency development in the future. The respective committees'

representatives on the Main Liaison Committee can then bring AU-wide themes to the Main Liaison Committee meeting in March.

The Competence Fund

The Competence Fund is a government fund which is allocated in connection with the central collective bargaining negotiations. Aarhus University usually receives DKK 1.4 million per year. The liaison committee organisation at AU defines the criteria for prioritising these funds.

The website http://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/organisational-learning-and-development/competencedevelopmentfunds/competencefund/ contains AU's principles for allocation of funds, application deadlines etc.