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## 1. Wrap-up

RPS can generally be divided into three different types of usages: 1) ad hoc projects, 2) ongoing tasks and projects, and 3) general research (maintenance of expert knowledge).

The working processes and monitoring of the RPS normally differs from one project to another. Especially, the ad hoc assignments are not characterized by specific ways of cooperation or project management. However, the ministries are very often involved in the entire process, and larger research projects often have special committees to monitor and help the researchers conducting the projects.

In most cases, the researchers conducting RPS and the ministries are able to agree upon a reasonable solution when it comes to the connection between time, scope and resources. However, the researchers sometimes experience time pressure and they are thus not always able to deliver the best possible result given the timing.

In general, the researchers feel a high degree of research freedom. Though, they indicate that they in some situations experience that the research freedom has been limited in consideration of political concerns - e.g. when the publication of a report has been stalled or when a research project has been cancelled because the results are not convenient for the ministry. However, these types of problems occur only very rarely.

In general, the quality of RPS is regarded as satisfying by both the researchers participating in RPS and the representatives from the requesting ministries. The quality of the research rests on the connection between the scope, time and resources within which the researchers and the ministries make an agreement before starting the projects. Researchers point out that the quality depends on the funds granted for the general basic research, and that this is what differentiates RPS from private consultancy agencies.

In the survey, the researchers involved with RPS express that they feel the quality of RPS has become slightly worse as a result of the mergers. However, this was not the general perception in the qualitative interviews. Yet, given the circumstance

that things are always somewhat confused in the 'slip stream' of mergers, the slight degree of dissatisfaction could very well be a transitory phenomenon.

In general, researchers and ministries participating in RPS do not experience any major changes working together on RPS since the mergers between the universities and the GRIs. The survey shows that all the personnel at the Danish universities in general see a slight change to the better.

The universities' personnel generally believe that the mergers overall have strengthened the universities, and in addition they have positive expectations for the future. Yet, at a closer look the survey reveals relatively large differences among the Danish Universities on this matter. Furthermore, there is a tendency that researchers within humanities and social sciences to a higher degree than other academic disciplines perceive the mergers as having weakened the universities.

Accordingly, there are differences between the scientific and occupational titles, where the associate professors and senior researchers together with the professors are more negative towards the effects of the mergers for now and for the future than the other personnel groups.

As for whether the mergers have increased the possibilities for researchers to enter new research cooperation the picture is rather mixed. The professors generally perceive the possibilities more negatively than their colleagues with other scientific titles. A rather large share of the researchers, are neutral on this matter (or choose "don't know"). Again, the largest differences to this matter are found between the universities. This seems to make good sense as some of the universities are not involved in the mergers with the RPS.

## 2. Introduction

This report is part of the Danish University Evaluation and concerns research-based public-sector services (RPS). The report is build upon relevant parts of the survey that has been sent to all researchers at the Danish universities and the following interviews have been conducted in relation to this report:

- 2 focus group interviews with researchers from two institutions conducting RPS.
- 2 interviews with representatives from ministries using RPS.
- 2 interviews with individual researchers conducting RPS.
- 4 interviews with head of departments conducting RPS.

### 3. Definition of RPS

Research-based public-sector services (RPS) are based on a framework agreement between the ministry and the specific institution conducting the RPS. The framework agreement consists of a varying amount of funds. These funds in most cases make up a fundamental part of the total funds the department receives from the government. The funds are tied to a contract that states which assignments the institution is required to carry out.

The researchers distinguish between different types of usages of these funds. This means that some of the funds are targeted at some types of usages while others are targeted at other types of usages. The researchers as well as the representatives from the ministries identify three main types of usages:

- 1) Ongoing assignments (maintenance)
- 2) Basic funds for general research projects
- 3) Ad hoc projects

Ongoing assignments often consist of tasks repeated over and over again. An example of these types of tasks is tests related to control of animal husbandry. In these cases, the institution has a laboratory that is used by the related ministry. In other cases, the institutions are also responsible for the task of maintaining a constant state of preparedness in regard to certain threats to the Danish society. These types of projects are not included in all types of framework agreements on RPS.

From the basic funds, the institutions are supposed to update their background knowledge and research regarding their primary research subjects. Another part of the contractual assignments of the institutions is to participate in committees on different large-scale research projects in which they have a specific professional competence. It differs to what extent the ministry formally and in practice influence the definition of what subjects are relevant to investigate. Furthermore, the share

of the total funds targeted at general research differs (the lowest share being practically none).

Ad hoc projects generally make up the larger part of the funds. These projects in most cases have a clear and narrow scope and a fixed timing, and they often originate from political issues such as answering §20 questions posed to the Danish Parliament. An example of this is the Opposition demanding the Ministry of Environment to answer a question about the dangers related to new types of chemicals. In cases like that, the ministry consults the researchers, who provide the ministry with relevant information in an understandable and compressed form.

In other cases, the ministries put some larger research programs up for tender. The institutions are able to bid on the specific research program along with other actors as e.g. private consultancy agencies or other institutions. These projects are detached from the framework agreements, though.

## **4. The quality of RPS**

### **4.1. Time frames**

The concerns about timing differ between the different types of projects and tasks. The timing often has a huge influence on the quality though.

The representatives of the ministries explain that they often have to produce answers to specific questions within a very short time frame (as for instance §20 questions from the Danish Parliament). These types of projects are ad hoc based. In certain cases, this may exert an enormous time pressure on the relevant institution, which may result in somewhat simplified responses by the institution. However, this does not constitute a problem for the ministries as communication with the political level is often required to be short and simple.

Also, both parties express that the timing is usually settled in dialogue between the ministry and the institution. The ministry listens to the supplier in relation to what type of product is realistic to produce given the resources available i.e. time or manpower.

The researchers explain that it is always possible to deliver a product within the required time frame. However, the quality of the product most often reflects the time and resources available. As a result, simplified responses or products are sometimes delivered. Furthermore, an urgent assignment often results in other assignments being delayed and thus not finished on time.

### **4.2. Research freedom**

In general, the researchers involved with RPS do not feel inhibited in their research freedom. RPS sets natural limits as to what subjects the researchers can focus on, but this is only a natural condition that comes with the job. Overall, they feel respect for their work from the Ministry, while at the same time understanding the political processes that the ministries are part of. However, the researchers point out the discussion of research freedom in RPS that has lately been growing in Danish research circles. The researchers express different point of views on this

subject which is also partly influenced by their prior experiences. However, they all agree that it is very important to maintain a form of RPS with a certain degree of autonomy in methods and within the academic disciplines.

In some situations, the researchers have experienced problems maintaining research freedom. First, researchers working with RPS experience from time to time that the ministry exerts pressure in demands for timing of publication of certain results. In some cases, researchers have experienced to be charged with a long waiting time before publishing certain research results. The hesitation from the ministries to publish the results right away is often connected to a 'political need' to coordinate the publication dates because of the effects – positive as well as negative - it may cause in the public and especially in the media. This is sometimes considered somewhat problematic because of the specific demands for publications that the researchers need to produce every year.

Second, some researchers have experienced reports being cancelled because of the results found in the data collection phase of the project. However, such episodes only occur very rarely.

Finally, a few researchers have experienced a discrete encouragement as to argue for certain political priorities - not primarily based on research results, but on political interpretations of the results and for the use in political negotiations. However, this is again only something that occurs very rarely.

### **4.3. General quality of the RPS**

Regarding general quality of the research, a distinction between two perspectives must be made.

*From the perspective of the ministries,* the general quality of the RPS is regarded as good and the professional standards of the researchers are regarded as high. It is stated that the quality often depends on how well the ministry has specified the assignment to the institution. The quality of the skills regarding the procedural part of a given project varies. However, in general they fulfil the expectations.

*From the perspective of the researchers,* it is stated that they normally have sufficient means to produce RPS of a high quality. However, some reservations are made here. First, some researchers think that the often limited time frames impede

the quality of the research. Second, limited funding sometimes result in inferior quality as compared to the general quality standard. The last, but most significant problem is the fact that the basic funds for research are very limited. Thus, only limited resources are available for updating general knowledge on the specific research fields. This may in the longer run cause an inferior quality of the research projects.

#### **4.4. Quality control of the RPS**

Several mechanisms are in place to secure the quality of the RPS both at the institutions and in the ministries. First, the product is often subject to external peer review from international forums of researchers within the same field like other academic publications. These external reviews make the institution uphold academic standards. The role of committees also contributes to quality control regarding the process as well as the outcome.

Another mechanism of quality control is the fact that some technical expertise exists in the ministries. This expertise is not only a quality control mechanism but also functions as a forum for upholding professional standards.

#### **4.5. Quality and the mergers**

In general, none of the interviewed (researchers as well as representatives from ministries) have experienced significant differences regarding the quality as a consequence of the university reform and the subsequent mergers.

However, almost all believe that the new structure in time will create synergy effects between different research fields that may enhance the quality of the RPS. Furthermore, the researchers add that the degree of internationalisation in their work will strengthen now that they are part of a university.

At the same time, some of the old institutions have been charged with teaching after the mergers. The researchers argue that this takes up a lot time from their primary tasks - time that they are not compensated for. Thus, this might affect the quality of the RPS in a negative way.

Table 1 shows results from the survey regarding the experiences of the quality and cooperation in RPS. The questions concentrate on the perceived differences before and after the mergers. The questions have only been asked for persons participating in RPS.

Table 1. Research quality. PDI-score. Only persons participating in RPS.

	Has the quality of the research become better or worse since the mergers?	Has the quality of the RPS become better or worse since the mergers?	Has the cooperation between researchers and the requesting Ministries become better or worse since the mergers?	N
Aalborg University	-16	-10	-15	67
Aarhus University	-3	-3	-16	275
Technical University of Denmark	-6	-6	-11	254
University of Southern Denmark	-9	-3	-5	76
PhD scholar/ research ass.	-1	-7	-5	84
Postdoc./assistant prof./researcher	-5	-5	-4	83
Associate prof./senior researcher	-5	-6	-15	396
Professor (incl. wsr)	-15	-8	-17	109
Humanities	-10	3	-1	70
Social science	-13	-14	-17	127
Health and medical science	-5	-4	-8	113
Technical science	0	3	-2	130
Natural science	-4	-7	-17	308
Seniority 0 - 5 years	1	-1	-2	135
Seniority 6 -15 years	-9	-8	-13	254
Seniority 16 years or more	-7	-5	-18	283
All	-6	-5	-16	672

Note: Calculation of PDI:  $PDI = ('much\ better' + 'better') \text{ minus } ('worse' + 'much\ worse')$ .

The table shows that, according to the respondents, the quality of the research, both RPS and the ordinary, has become worse since the mergers. In general, the respondents assess a relatively negative attitude towards this topic. This concerns both the perceived quality of the research, the perceived quality of RPS and the cooperation between the researchers and the ministries.

The majority believes that the quality has become worse since the mergers, which is indicated from the negative PDI-score at -6 concerning the regular research quality and the PDI-score at -5 concerning the quality of the RPS. Furthermore, the majority of respondents also say that the cooperation between researchers and the requesting Ministries has become worse since the mergers (PDI-score at -16).

Hence, the negativity is slightly higher on this topic compared with the topic of research quality.

Looking closer, the table shows relatively moderate differences in the opinions between the different groups. However, some differences can be observed and are worth mentioning.

First of all, when comparing the different Danish universities, Aalborg University stands out. Persons from Aalborg University participating in RPS are somewhat more negative, especially in relation to the quality of the research and the quality of the RPS. Thus, researchers from Aalborg University to a greater extent believe that the quality of the research in general has become worse since the mergers.

Secondly, looking closer at the academic titles, the results show a slight tendency towards the higher the level in the academic hierarchy, the more negative attitudes towards the influence of the mergers. Researchers participating in RPS with a higher academic title find the negative influence of the mergers even greater. This is especially clear in relation to the quality of the general research and the cooperation with the ministries. E.g. the PDI score for PhD scholars on the question of the quality of general research is -1, while professors give this question the PDI score -15. Regarding the question of the quality of RPS, there are no significant differences. The same tendency shows (however less clear) in relation to seniority; the more years of seniority, the worse perception of the influence of the mergers.

In relation to the different academic disciplines, researchers from social science participating in RPS stand out as being more negative towards the influences of the mergers and they have the most negative PDI score on all of the three questions in table 1 (with a PDI between -13 and -17).

Finally, there are no significant differences as to whether or not one has management responsibilities; whether or not one is member of a decision-making or advisory board; and regarding gender. Thus, these figures are not reported.

To sum up, the table shows a mildly negative attitude towards the consequences of the mergers on the research quality, and especially the relationship between researcher and the requesting Ministries. The results show that persons participating in RPS in general believe that the mergers have meant only minor changes in the quality. However, the changes are generally assessed negatively.

## **5. Working process and cooperation in RPS**

### **5.1. Working processes and monitoring**

The working processes and monitoring of the RPS normally depends on the type of project or task. The ongoing assignments are typically carried out in a rather independent manor, and with a minor degree of direct involvement from the ministries.

In the ad hoc projects, there are no common denominators for the working process. However, in the cooperation on specific projects there seems to be a tendency to involve the ministries in the entire process. In larger projects, a committee is usually set in place to monitor the progress and quality of the project.

Some researchers state that these committees only seldom get involved in the specifics of the projects, while other researchers point out that they are often included in assessing the quality and relevance of the research questions that the ministry wishes to investigate. In this way, the relation between the ministry and the institution cannot be regarded as a simple principal-agent-relationship, but as one having a somewhat more circular and interdependent characteristic.

### **5.2. Cooperation between the Ministry and the Institution**

Regarding the attitudes towards cooperation between the two actors in the RPS, it is necessary to separate the two views. On the one hand that of the ministries, who commission the work, and on the other hand that of the institution that carries out the work.

*From the point of view of the ministries, the cooperation is well-functioning. The cooperation is based on dialogue and the institutions are flexible in regards to the special nature of the needs of the political system.*

*From the point of view of researchers, the cooperation with the ministries is also good. However, it involves a few problems. In a few cases, the researchers experience that the ministries push the limits in regards to the institutions' contractual obligations with the ministry. The ministry often requires more work than is actually agreed upon. This puts pressure on the financial situation of the institution.*

Furthermore, at the universities a general notion exists that RPS-work is not as meriting for the researchers as the more 'core research' traditionally conducted at the universities. This might be a consequence of the lower (and non-English) publication rate in relation to the RPS-work, and this is a latent threat to the recruiting of researchers to RPS, since some researchers may be reluctant to be working with RPS due to the meriting drawback. This point of view is supported by several researchers, who have experienced that their work has been regarded as inferior compared to those conducting traditional research at the universities.

In general, none of the respondents in the qualitative interviews observe any substantial difference regarding the cooperation between the institutions and the ministries because of the mergers. However, table 1 above showed a slight tendency towards the perception of a worse cooperation since the mergers. Yet, as pointed out by the interviews, given the circumstance that things are always somewhat confused in the 'slip stream' of mergers, the slight degree of dissatisfaction could very well be a transitory phenomenon.

## **6. Future development of RPS**

### **6.1. Relationship between the RPS and the organizational goals of the universities**

No respondents have experienced any problems in relations to the fact that the institutions now have to live up to the universities' research strategic framework. Several researchers state that one of the reasons why there have not been any discrepancies between the objectives of the university and the demands related to the RPS services is that the universities' research strategic framework normally is described in very broad terms.

Another reason is that even when the institutions were Government Research Institutions (GRI), they were subject to the same academic requirements as at the university. Thus, there are no major changes in demands compared to prior to the mergers.

### **6.2. Tender of RPS in the future**

Regarding the tender of research projects, the perspectives of the two different actors must again be separated.

From the *perspective of the ministries*, it is often not worth the effort to put a research project up for tender. It is time and resource consuming to produce tender documents and to manage the bidding process. Another reason is the usually high quality of the existing RPS. Furthermore, by putting projects up for tender, one might be concerned as to whether or not the research based element will be sustained. E.g. private consultancy companies have no basic scientific research, and therefore principally deliver an inferior product when it comes to complex assignments. However, the ministries state that they put projects up for tender if the institution is not considered strong (enough) within the relevant field.

From *the perspective of the institutions*, it is stressed that their largest disadvantage, compared to private companies, is price. The private companies are often much cheaper. It is also stated that if the funds for basic research are further reduced, the institutions will be forced to more aggressively compete about the projects put up for tender. This produces a concern that this mechanism would generate a situation where the RPS is reduced to research as in the consultancy company i.e. without basic research expertise.

## 7. The effect of the mergers on the universities

In this section, results from the survey on the influence of the mergers, will be presented. The results give answers as to what extent the whole personnel at the universities (not only persons involved with RPS) perceive the mergers as having strengthened or weakened the Danish universities. Thus, the perspective of this section is broader than the prior parts of the reports which primarily focused on the consequences of the RPS.

Table 2 below shows the results of two questions about the influence of the mergers between the universities and the GRI on the Danish universities in general – now and in the future respectively.

Overall, the table shows that the personnel in general see the mergers with the GRIs as positive. The results of all the personnel show that they in most cases believe the mergers have strengthened the universities, and that they on the above parameters will be even stronger in the future. For all the parameters, the PDI score is more positive in connection with the question of the expectations for the future than that of the presence. This indicates that the personnel see high potential in the synergies of the mergers in the future. Only in relation to the parameters 'organisationally' (PDI score -11) and 'economically' (PDI score -10), the researchers believe that the mergers have weakened the Danish universities. However, this tendency does not characterize the perceptions of the future.

A closer look at the table reveals that relatively large differences can be seen among the Danish universities. In general, Aarhus University and the Technical University of Denmark are more positive than the total of the personnel. Personnel from the Technical University of Denmark particularly believe that the Danish Universities have been strengthened academically, and that they will be even further strengthened in the future. Personnel from the IT University of Copenhagen and Roskilde University are the most negative towards the mergers' influence on the Danish universities.

	Have the mergers of universities and universities and GRIs strengthened or weakened the Danish universities...?	Will the mergers of universities and universities and GRIs strengthen or weaken the Danish universities in the future...?	N
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Table 2. Mergers' influence on Danish universities now and in the future. PDI-score

	Academically	Organisationally	Economically	General image	Image in relation to attracting students	Academically	Organisationally	Economically	General image	Image in relation to attracting students	
Aalborg University	7	-9	-7	-1	2	10	-3	0	4	6	923
Aarhus University	18	-9	-10	12	17	27	5	3	17	23	2023
Technical University of Denmark	33	-10	-13	20	23	41	10	4	28	30	1616
Copenhagen Business School	2	-4	1	1	3	7	2	7	2	4	435
IT University of Copenhagen	-4	-12	-2	-7	-6	1	-10	-3	-2	-3	110
University of Copenhagen	12	-12	-12	8	8	19	1	0	12	14	3007
Roskilde University	-13	-17	-9	-12	-4	-9	-15	-5	-8	-4	385
University of Southern Denmark	13	-8	1	4	9	18	2	8	10	13	980
PhD scholar/ research ass.	14	-8	-6	8	11	18	2	4	13	15	1337
Postdoc./assistant prof./researcher	12	-11	-10	2	7	15	-3	0	8	12	917
Associate prof./ senior researcher	6	-17	-16	-1	5	11	-6	-7	2	9	2529
Professor (incl. wsr)	3	-18	-18	-2	4	6	-9	-12	-2	5	890
TAP HK & others	22	-4	-3	15	16	31	10	10	24	25	2.014
TAP AC	26	-5	-3	23	20	40	15	14	28	28	1.792
Humanities	-3	-20	-14	-10	-5	-3	-12	-8	-9	-3	1036
Social science	-2	-15	-11	-6	3	0	-9	-5	-3	4	1252
Health and medical science	11	-8	-12	7	11	17	1	-4	9	12	987
Technical science	21	-10	-8	10	13	26	4	0	15	18	893
Natural science	14	-16	-17	5	9	20	-3	-5	11	15	2151
Persons participating in RPS	19	-11	-12	10	14	30	3	0	17	23	1343
Persons not participating in RPS	14	-10	-9	7	10	20	2	2	13	16	8136
All	14	-11	-10	8	11	22	2	2	14	17	9479

Note: Calculation of PDI: PDI = ('highly strengthened them' + 'somewhat strengthened them') minus ('somewhat weakened them' + 'highly weakened them').

The results also show differences between the scientific and occupational titles. In general, associate professors or senior researchers and professors are more negative towards the effects of the mergers. Personnel from 'TAP HK and others' and 'TAP AC' are in general more positive towards the influence of the mergers with the GRIs than the total personnel.

In relation to the different academic disciplines, personnel from humanities and social science in general perceive the mergers to have weakened the Danish universities to a higher degree than the total personnel. This tendency is opposite for personnel from technical science, as they in general perceive the Danish universities to have been strengthened.

Furthermore, the table also shows notable differences between personnel participating in RPS and personnel not participating in RPS represented in their opinions. The results in table 2 show that there are significant changes between the two groups. Personnel participating in RPS are generally a bit more positive towards the mergers; however the differences are not remarkable.

Finally, there are no significant differences as to whether or not one is member of a decision-making or advisory board; whether one has been employed for less than 5 years, 5-15 years or 16 years or more; and regarding gender. Thus, these figures are not reported.

Table 3 beneath shows the distribution of the answers on whether the mergers have strengthened the possibilities to enter into new research cooperation. The question has been posed to all researchers in the survey. The results are shown in percentages agreeing or disagreeing with the statement: "The mergers have strengthened my possibilities to enter into new research cooperation".

Table 3. To what extent do you agree or disagree on the following question: "The mergers have strengthened my possibilities to enter into new research cooperation"? Researchers only. In percent.

	Agree to a high extent/ agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree to a high extent/ disagree	Don't know	N
Aalborg University	8	33	32	27	579
Aarhus University	17	35	33	15	1.201
Technical University of Denmark	27	33	21	18	1.051
Copenhagen Business School	2	24	14	60	221
IT University of Copenhagen	7	28	23	42	43
University of Copenhagen	15	35	30	19	1.815
Roskilde University	3	26	28	44	240
University of Southern Denmark	11	34	29	26	523
PhD scholar/research ass.	15	30	14	41	1.337
Postdoc./assistant prof./researcher	19	33	26	22	917
Associate prof./senior researcher	15	34	33	18	2.529
Professor (incl. wsr)	15	36	39	10	890
Humanities	12	34	32	22	1.036
Social science	11	30	29	31	1.252
Health and medical science	14	38	24	24	987
Technical science	21	32	25	21	893
Natural science	19	33	30	18	2.151
Persons participating in RPS	24	35	28	13	941
Persons not participating in RPS	14	33	29	25	4.732
All	15	33	29	23	5673

In general, the table shows a relatively widespread distribution of answers from the researchers. 33 pct. of the researchers neither agree, nor disagree that the mergers have strengthened their possibilities to enter new research cooperation. 29 pct. disagree with the statement, while 15 pct. agree. Thus, there is a modest tendency that more researchers disagree than agree. In addition, it is worth noticing the relatively large share stating 'do not know' to this question.

When one looks at the different Danish universities the results reveals large differences in the attitudes towards this statement. At the Technical University of Denmark, a larger part (27 pct.) of the researchers agrees that the mergers give them better possibilities to enter into new research cooperation. At the IT University of Denmark, Copenhagen Business School and Roskilde University, the majority of the researchers have answered that they don't know. This is not

surprising given the fact that these three universities were not involved in the mergers.

Furthermore, researchers with different professional titles in some cases have different opinions about this statement as well. The results show a tendency that the higher the scientific level you are at, the bigger the chance of disagreeing with the statement – also the lesser the chance that you have answered 'don't know'. E.g. 14 pct. of the PhD scholars and research assistants disagree compared to 39 pct. of the professors.

Within the different academic disciplines, technical science and natural science stand out. Researchers from these areas agree a bit more (19 pct. and 21 pct.) compared to the total (15 pct.). Also, researchers participating in RPS agree more with this statement than persons, who are not involved in RPS. However, the differentiation is equalized as a larger part of the persons not involved in RPS have answered 'don't know'.

Finally, there are no significant differences as to whether or not one is member of a decision-making or advisory board; whether one has been employed for less than 5 years, 5-15 years or 16 years or more; and regarding gender. Thus, these figures are not reported.

To summarise, the results show a relatively divided group of researchers. Some believe that the mergers have strengthened their possibilities to enter into new research cooperation's, others do not. In addition, a relatively large share of researchers is neutral to this or does not know.