AALBORG UNIVERSITY

Minutes from the employer panel meeting SSD 2025 on May 23, 2025

Participants: Markus Löchtefeld, Claus Brøndgaard Madsen, Amalia de Götzen, Luca Simeone, Flemming Løvenhardt Petersen, Lara Clare Casciola, Runa Munk Sabroe, Trine Dalsgaard

Unable to attend Anne Christoffersen, Begüm Becermen

Item 1. Welcome and updates since last meeting.
Head of Studies Markus Löchtefeld and Head of Study Board Claus B. Madsen

Claus B. Madsen (CBM) welcomed to the employer panel meeting for Service System Design.
Markus Löchtefeld (ML) presented updates since the last meeting in the panel. In June 2023, the government reached a broad agreement with several political parties on a reform of the master educations. It includes the introduction of new 75 ECTS master's degrees and an increased focus on professional master's programs (EKA), where students work part-time while studying. The goal for 2032 is for 20% of students to enroll in EKA programs and 10% in 75 ECTS programs.

For the IT educations at AAU, this entails that 14% of all students admitted in 2028 should be in professional master's programs and 8% in 75 ECTS programs. Aalborg University (AAU) must also reduce the number of study places by approximately 10% due to unemployment and demographic changes. New programs such as Software (launched in 2020) and Computer Technology (launched in 2021) are not included in UFM's calculations, creating significant pressure on the available spots for master's programs. In December 2024, a new "1+2" professional master's model was introduced: the first year at the university (60 ECTS) with student financial support (SU), followed by two years of part-time work while completing an additional 60 ECTS.

The Dean's Office has decided that all 120 ECTS master's programs must offer a professional master's option. Furthermore, six master's and two bachelor's programs will be discontinued, including Service Systems Design and Lighting Design, with the last intake in 2027.

ML points out that it is central that we keep a focus on that we still have student enrolled in the program the next 4 years. On the positive side, employment looks good for the most recent graduates.

Item 2. Presentation round

All participants introduced themselves

Item 3. News from the study/ research
Program coordinator Amalia de Götzen

Amalia de Götzen (AG) explained that the Service Systems Design (SSD) program is officially closing, with the last intake scheduled for 2027. At this stage, it remains unclear whether alternative opportunities will emerge. Looking ahead, the Dean has announced that the Copenhagen campus will focus on IT and sustainability, meaning SSD may potentially integrate into this framework in some form. However, no concrete scenarios have been established yet.
Key questions moving forward include: Is there interest among students in a 75 ECTS master's program? Are employers receptive to professional master's programs?

Despite the announced closure, there will be a strong focus on providing the best possible experience for the new students enrolled.

Item 4. Discussion
- Discussion of relevant topics and target audience
- Input for continuing education activities (EVU): Topics and target audience, AI competencies for SSD

Runa Sabroe (RS) expressed sadness over the closure of the SSD program and asked whether the decision could be reversed. ML confirmed that the decision is final. The lack of bachelor programs is a key factor, since other educations have both a bachelor and master program. The dean holds the authority to make this decision.

RS raised concerns about attracting students in the coming years and the impact on employees leading up to the program's closure in 2027. However, ML reported that the decision has not yet affected applications, with more than 200 applicants for 30 spots this year.

RS suggested using the employer panel to test potential scenarios, which could help refine potential educational options before any formal decisions are made. To test potential ideas with employers.

CBM asked the panel for their thoughts on lifelong learning (EVU) activities and possible structures. RS noted that it is difficult to relate to this topic without a concrete proposal. She increasingly seeks specialized expertise in candidates she hires but points out that it hard to determine the relevance of new ideas for EVU initiatives without a draft or format.

Lara Casciola (LC) agreed with RS and commented that the situation is challenging – also due to SSD's broad scope. She emphasized that the second year of the program today allows students to explore different aspects, while the first year may feel very specialized. It might be difficult for the students to find out what they want to work with in the first year. She warned against SSD becoming too focused on UX design, losing its broader perspective. It is crucial to maintain space for experimentation in any new educational structure.

CBM asked which other educational programs are competing with SSD, noting that companies will be hiring alternative candidates in five years. RS responded that ethnographers and anthropologists are likely competitors due to their strong user-centric approach.

CBM suggested analyzing these competing disciplines to clarify SSD's unique competencies, possibly creating a more focused "SSD Light" program.

LC inquired about a budget or timeline for the transition from a two-year master programme towards something else. ML explained that discussions on the 75 ECTS master's program and other EVU initiatives are ongoing. The 75 ECTS option appears promising, but identifying the right target group is essential. A commission will begin work at AAU in June, with faculty discussions starting in mid-September. ML welcomed another meeting with the panel on the topic.

RS suggested that the next meeting should explicitly discuss how to preserve SSD's essence within a new framework.

AG highlighted a major challenge with the 75 ECTS master's program: the lack of internship opportunities. Internships are critical for employers to familiarize themselves with the SSD education, and without internships, students may struggle to secure jobs. Additionally, there will be no overlap between student cohorts, which is valuable for networking.
RS agreed, emphasizing that student jobs and work experience are key factors in hiring graduates.

Item 4. Summary and conclusion
Head of Studies Markus Löchtefeld and Head of Study Board Claus B. Madsen

CBM summarized the discussion and thanked the panel for their participation and valuable input. While it is still early to discuss specific developments, the panel's willingness to engage with any new initiatives is greatly appreciated. Additionally, it remains crucial that students continue to be enrolled in the SSD program over the next four years.