Centre of African Studies
Advisory Board

Minutes from meeting

Time: Monday 5 November 2014, 16.00-18.00
Venue: Centre of African Studies, Købmagergade 46, 4.
1150 København K., Room 455.
Note taker: Julie Oxenvad

Present: Steffen Frølund Thomsen (Consultant), Mette Müller Kristensen (Bestseller Fund), Laurits Holdt (Journalist Ulandsnyt.dk), Amanda Hammar (Director, CAS), Kirsten Busch Nielsen (Dean, Faculty of Theology), Jesper Tang Nielsen (Head of Studies, Faculty of Theology) and Julie Oxenvad (Head of Administration, CAS)

Agenda:
1. Welcome by director, Amanda Hammar
2. Approval of minutes from the last meeting in the Advisory Board
3. Open discussion of the Board’s role
4. Dimensioning policy
5. CAS’ current work
6. Reflections
7. Any other business
8. Date for next meeting

1. Welcome by director, Amanda Hammar
Amanda Hammar welcomed the present members of the Advisory Board. All participants at the meeting introduced themselves.
2. **Approval of minutes from the last meeting in the Advisory Board**

The minutes from the last meeting held on 31 March 2014 were approved.

3. **Open discussion of the Board’s role**

Mette Müller Kristensen suggested that the Board meets two times a year instead of one so that it becomes more actively involved and can make more qualitative contributions. All present at the meeting agreed that it was a good idea as it will strengthen the dialogue between CAS and the Board and allow for more support regarding the MA programme and regular operations of CAS.

Steffen Frølund Thomsen followed up on a discussion from last meeting in March regarding the link between CAS students and the private sector. The questions related to how CAS might feed into the private sector, in terms of what the private sector need from CAS and our graduates. At the same time, the public sector is also a significant employer/potential employer of our graduates. With ‘Africa’ increasingly on the agenda, which growth sectors should CAS be aware of in relation to the job possibilities for our students? Amanda Hammar suggested we need to be more effective at promoting the (analytical, interdisciplinary) comparative advantages of our graduates. Kirsten Busch Nielsen informed the Board that the Faculty had made a map of Theology’s big stakeholders, and she wishes to develop a similar map to discover CAS’ big stakeholders too. The Board agreed that it is a good idea to explore those sectors and become more proactive.

4. **Dimensioning policy**

Kirsten Busch Nielsen informed about the ‘dimensioning’ plan from the Ministry of Higher Education and Science that was published in autumn. Overall the plan compares the number of students admitted to Master programmes under Higher Education in Denmark against statistics of unemployment numbers for each programme (in the second year after graduation). As a result the Ministry has asked the universities to reduce the intake number of students for some Master programmes.

The MA programme at CAS is one among many other programmes which has to reduce the intake. According to the statistics from the Ministry (Statistics Denmark) students from CAS have a notably high unemployment rate among graduates (in the second year after graduation).

Until the day before this meeting the Ministry had laid out two models for how to reduce the intake number. The second model was a bit modified and had minor changes made in relation
to the first. The consequences of the second model were still that CAS had to reduce the intake number by 30 percent in the next coming years 2015-2018.

On 4 November the Ministry then introduced a third model, as a compromise between the Ministry and the universities, which is different from the first and second models. This model distinguishes between Bachelor and Master programmes. It focuses first of all on the intake for Bachelor programmes from 2015 and to adjust it in relation to unemployment, and then after some years it will involve reductions in the Master programmes from 2018-2020. CAS will still have to reduce the intake number but the process is deferred for some years. Kirsten Busch Nielsen said that the Faculty does not know the exact outcome of the third model. The agreement is only about the basic principles of the model and the specific content has to be developed and agreed on later. Kirsten Busch Nielsen explained that the Master programmes are divided into groups and with the third model it has become more flexible for the universities to decide on where to cut within each group.

The Board discussed the plan. The Board agreed that the dimensioning plan relates to two different discussions; one about the quantity of the programme and the other about the quality. In relation to quantity, it was agreed that it was crucial to maintain a critical mass of students at CAS of over 30 new students per year on average. This is possible even with the proposed cuts. The Board’s job is primarily to discuss the quality of the programme, but the members were also aware of the possibility that if CAS improves the quality more candidates will be employed. Jesper Tang Nielsen informed that the plan and the unemployment numbers will be evaluated, so an improvement of the unemployment numbers in the forthcoming years could have an impact on how much CAS has to cut in intake.

The Board agreed that it will be a good idea to look into the reasons why CAS graduates don’t get a job and if there are enough jobs for our students, and at the same time focus on what CAS can offer, the content of the MA programme and the students’ profiles. Overall, CAS needs to make sure to educate strong candidates.

5. CAS’ current work

Amanda Hammar informed about CAS’ current work and priorities. CAS especially focuses on ensuring the high quality of the education programme. Inevitably, there are always aspects that CAS tries to and can strengthen. CAS also emphasises the research environment, including a focus on review of research applications, strengthening the research platforms, connecting PhD
students in Denmark working with Africa-related topics, and giving more attention to publications and the visibility of Africa seminars. Overall, quality and coherence is what CAS focuses on. CAS also works with the teaching/pedagogic methods, evaluations, and use of external examiners to ensure the quality of the programme.

In relation to the Study Curriculum, Amanda Hammar said that CAS might consider the core structure of the programme, including reducing the number of compulsory courses to three, where potentially Economic Development could shift to become an optional course. The space created in the second semester would be for a number of optional courses to be offered, taught primarily by internally employed staff (with the exception of Economic Development). Students would have to choose one or two optional courses that semester (depending on length/number of ECTS points) to fulfil their required 30 ECTS points per semester. Together with introducing a mentoring/tutoring programme, this will help students to focus and specialize during their studies at CAS.

The Board discussed and asked questions based on Amanda Hammar’s presentation. All members were very supportive of the focus on improving the quality and to help students to specialize and get a stronger profile upon graduation. It was suggested that CAS can draw attention to potential directions and specializations for the students to choose. These might include specialized areas such as gender, security, human rights. Kirsten Busch Nielsen suggested that mentoring the students at the outset could be a way of helping them in relation to developing profiles for where they are aiming. This system could help to ensure that CAS produces stronger candidates overall. Mette Müller Kristensen encouraged CAS to consider producing an information leaflet/brochure for the students about career profiles and possibilities (that could include brief testimonies/portraits of former, now-employed, students).

Steffen Frølund Thomsen pointed out that the new Study Progress Reform puts pressure on the students and limits the time for them to consider their direction and to develop new ideas. CAS’ role in guiding the students has become more important now. Furthermore, the students have less time for student jobs which, together with internships, are very important in relation to getting employed after graduation, in the Board’s view. It was further noted that the demands of the reform are problematic for student internship options. The Board proposed trying to pressure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to try and plan ahead more for the positions at embassies. Also, many student internships are with NGOs, and the Board could assist CAS and
its students to think more creatively about options in this sector, linked to thinking more openly and creatively about the relevance and employability of CAS students more broadly.

Amanda Hammar also informed that the number of employees at CAS has been noticeably reduced this autumn as two post-doc appointments expired in August and October. However, CAS has advertised a new position of Associate Professor and the deadline has just passed. This means that in the 2015 CAS will have three full-time researchers (and one partial staff member based in Church History).

The Board discussed the use of external guest lecturers versus permanent researchers at CAS. As a former student, Laurits Baad Holdt was of the opinion that external lecturers had a lot to contribute and are great for the students. Kirsten Busch Nielsen said that as the MA programme is a research-based programme the lecturers must have a research base especially for the core courses. Amanda Hammar stressed that as the academic curriculum for the programme is very broad it will be impossible for three fulltime staff to cover the entire field. These are among several reasons why Amanda Hammar plans to develop a strategic plan for CAS in spring 2015. The Board supported this and suggested that an initial draft for the plan could be presented to the Board at next meeting.

6. Reflections
The Board agreed that this item has already been discussed.

7. AOB
Mette Müller Kristensen asked what the Board could do to effect the decision in regard to the final agreement about dimensioning and also in a long term perspective. Kirsten Busch Nielsen said that good stories in the media are of importance. CAS already has a strong visibility but the Board can help in branding the programme and its students. Amanda Hammar agreed that the Centre of African Studies is important, but we need to work more on our visibility/PR, which relates to the discussion above about mapping CAS’s stakeholders and focusing on what CAS can offer.

8. Date for next meeting.
The members agreed that it will be suitable with a meeting in late April (possibly 29 April) or early May (possibly 4 May).