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### Research Strategy

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

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Authors: Rolf Hughes, Ronald Jones, Louise Mazanti

### Introduction

The research strategy of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies is to envision and implement methodologies for research-based creativity and scholarship in the service of society,

culture and economy. The department will be distinctive for developing scholarship in *history, criticism and theory*, epistemologies of *practice*, and *interdisciplinary* and *transdisciplinary* research methods. The department's research strategy accordingly combines the pursuit of innovative interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research initiatives, while maintaining a deep commitment to existing practice-based research methodologies and research in the Humanities.

The department will continue to support Ph.D. degree work at peer institutions until such time as it can offer its own Ph.D. degree. The department currently hosts and supports three Ph.D. candidates and other post-doctoral research projects. Concurrent with its educational mission, it is developing relevant research programs in knowledge and technology transfer, and

research and consultancy services for business, public authorities, government departments and cultural institutions.

The Department of Interdisciplinary Studies is especially well suited as a centre for research as it:

- Delivers the research curriculum to every M.F.A. student throughout Konstfack through the mandatory courses *Research Perspectives* (course leader: Rolf Hughes) and *Perspectives from the Humanities* (course leader: Louise Mazanti).
- Includes the faculty and curriculum of art, craft and design history and theory.
- Holds a recognized faculty in art, craft and design research.
- Supports its own M.F.A. program in Experience Design.
- Provides Konstfack's Competency Center for the Stockholm School of Entrepreneurship.

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- Has sustaining relationships with other international institutions with strong reputations in research including Stanford's d. School, The Royal College of Art, London, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Design London, Think Tank. A European Initiative for the Applied Arts, Austria, the new design-led doctorate programme at the Sint-Lucas School of Architecture, Brussels & Ghent, The National Institute of Design in India, and CAFA in China amongst others.
- Has ongoing interdisciplinary research projects involving industry and university partners.
- Hosts a Ph.D. seminar
- Comprises faculty members who are highly-qualified, and hosts more Ph.D.s than any other department at Konstfack. The four professors within the department are internationally recognized scholars and researchers in their respective fields.

The department continues to cultivate research partnerships and strategic alliances with business,

industry and other cultural institutions. The department recruits students, faculty and researchers internationally, and in this spirit, the department is committed to the development of an international research community in all fields of its work. It will publish the findings and results of all of its research projects, host public symposia, conferences, and lectures for an international audience, and support its faculty and graduate students in delivering peer-reviewed papers and practiced-based projects at international conferences.

The future of innovative art, design and applied practices are based in three areas: the ability to think critically uplifted by deep seated historical and theoretical knowledge, highly refined skills in a specific art, craft or design discipline, and a robust knowledge of the humanities

and sciences. The department educates students in all these areas. Possessing diverse knowledge banks have become another essential talent for artists, craftpersons and designers.

The expectation is that they must be able to speculate *critically* in order to make transparent where original and relevant innovations are likely to occur. Innovation has always come with discovery, but discovery in our knowledge society is fueled by the exploratory nature of research.

This is why we have recruited faculty that are internationally-recognized leaders in the fields of practiced-based research, the humanities, and interdisciplinary studies.

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Driving our knowledge society are new technologies, the staggering expansion of digital media, an interdisciplinary culture, an unprecedented global economy, and the lightening speed of

communications, all of which have given art, craft and design a more influential place in the world than ever before. As a result, artists, craftpersons and designers have an even greater influence on the way we experience the world. But with this exceptional opportunity come new

and unprecedented expectations for the creative disciplines. In order that students fulfill these

expectations, they must graduate with the ability to think critically, possess deep and refined studio skills both traditional and non-conventional, and have a strong knowledge of the humanities, especially in theory and history. Further on they will need to be nimble at problem

solving, possess leadership skills, a confident and broad understanding of rapidly changing cultural, social, political and economic currents, and thus be able to think and work beyond the

boundaries of their discipline(s). These expectations are already being fulfilled at the Department

of Interdisciplinary Studies.

### **History of Art and Design Research**

The historical precedents for art and design research are numerous: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's work at the Bauhaus in the 1920s, Henry Dreyfuss' study *Designing for People* conducted

in the 1950s, and, more recently, the Royal College of Art's Sir Christopher Frayling's work in the 1990s. Frayling's 1993 paper "Research in Art and Design" adopts three different prepositions to denote different relationships between research and design. Research *for* design is

generally applied to investigations oriented towards a design application; research *into* design denotes historical and theoretical studies of design; whereas research *through* design regards design processes as constituting the research methodology itself, or at least the greater part thereof. This latter category is what we usually have in mind when using terms such as *practicebased* research, *practice-led* research and so forth<sup>iii</sup>. These and other historical models for art, craft and design research help to form essential foundations for the curriculum and research at the department. But it is also true that new and original methodologies and categories for art, craft and design research must be under continual development. For example, artists and designers are re-defining their practices, out of desire or necessity, from an emphasis on individual practice towards creation inside productive collaborations that function like cultural hothouses. To appreciate the significance of this cultural transition one might consider the historical influences

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of Charles and Ray Eames to the recent success of Intellectual Ventures. The department may be characterized as an organization where the traditional fields of art, craft, design, history, critical theory and research have a strong rooting, as a point of departure for being productively blurred.

### **Practice-based Research**

As a foundation for research in the design disciplines that incorporates the specific expertise of art, craft and design practitioners, practice-based research has attracted increasing interest over recent years in the Nordic countries, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, and increasingly throughout Europe (dating from the Bologna Process in 1999 and subsequently; Lisbon 2000; Prague 2001; Berlin 2003; Bergen 2005)<sup>1</sup>. Practice-led research involves an attempt to make a claim for epistemological significance based on insights available to practice, supported by the critical tools of history, theory and methodological self-reflexivity. At one level (that of “reflective practice” in Donald Schön’s term), practice-based research is distinguished by an experiential component that is communicable to others, a challenge at the limits of our capacity to communicate that highlights important ontological, representational and ultimately epistemological questions, and suggests a *performative* knowledge that shifts focus from the artefact, collection or archive (library or database), towards how an artist or designer *actualises* – performs or expresses – their expertise *in practice*. This may well include an element of interpreting, adapting and applying information stored in various collection systems (historical, methodological, educational or technical archives), but it equally makes testing demands on our capacity to communicate successfully a research outcome of epistemological significance. We can characterize this form of research activity in terms of its relation to disciplinary identity.

Gibbons and his co-authors of “The New Production of Knowledge” (Gibbons et al. 1994)

contrast the traditional disciplinary production of knowledge (“Mode 1”) to a new, quite different form of knowledge production (“Mode 2”) within university research. They characterize the Mode 1 type of knowledge production as follows: “In this issue the term Mode 1 refers to a form of knowledge production – a complex of ideas, methods, values, norms – that has grown up to control the diffusion of the Newtonian model to more and more fields of enquiry and ensure its compliance to what is considered sound scientific practice. Mode 1 is meant to summarize in a single phrase the cognitive and social norms, which must be followed in the production,

<sup>1</sup> For an overview, see:

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/tempus/doc/bolognaslides.pdf>

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legitimizing and diffusion of knowledge of this kind. For many, Mode 1 is identical with what is

meant by science. Its cognitive and social norms determine what shall count as significant problems, which shall be allowed to practice science and what constitutes good science.

Forms of

practice which adhere to these rules are by definition scientific while those that violate them are

not.” (Gibbons et al. 1994, pp. 2-3). Mode 1 knowledge is discipline-specific and

homogenous

and is “owned” by a particular sub community; Mode 1 problems, they observe, are both raised

and solved within academic research community contexts, and Mode 1 quality control occurs through peer review within a single research community. Against this, they contrast Mode 2, defined as “Knowledge production carried out in the context of application and marked by its: transdisciplinarity; heterogeneity; organizational hierarchy and transience; social accountability

and reflexivity; and quality control, which emphasizes context- and use-dependence.” Their definition foregrounds *transdisciplinarity*, a form of learning and research practice addressed to

complex, real-world problems that involves co-operation between different sectors of society and

academia; “A practice-oriented approach, transdisciplinarity is not confined to a closed circle of

scientific experts, professional journals and academic departments where knowledge is produced.

Through mutual learning, the knowledge of all participants is enhanced, including local knowledge, scientific knowledge and the knowledge of concerned industries, businesses, and

non-governmental organizations. The sum of this knowledge will be greater than the knowledge

of any single partner. In the process, the bias of each perspective will also be minimized” (Klein

et al. 2001:7).

The tripartite research constellation described in this document should be seen in this light: humanities-related research instils a stable educational training and a sense of disciplinary identity (Mode 1); practice-based research, as well as interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research, (Mode 2) demands the ability to co-operate with experts from other fields and to address

problems in a complementary way. Both modes (1 and 2) of knowledge production are important in society, as Gibbons notes, and should achieve a mutually enriching balance. Our commitment to practice-based research additionally indicates an ongoing engagement with the relationship between *theory* and *practice*, or "creative" and "critical" modes of inquiry, as well as an interest in drawing the contours of new "hybrid" research practices and forms of communication. Seeking epistemological validation, practice-based research not infrequently focuses on meta-reflective concerns in art, craft and design such as; knowledge and its representation; skill and its transfer; reflection and its articulation; as well as the forms, processes,

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methodologies and outcomes of practice-led research. As stated above, such concerns are important at one level in terms of reflective practice, at another level in terms of legitimising the chosen practice-based research approach when attempting to engage with complex, real-world, and ultimately trans-disciplinary areas of concern.

### **Humanities Research**

According to Frayling's distinction, *research into art and design* is the most straightforward and the most common research paradigm of the three mentioned. It encompasses critical studies that form part of art and design practice by situating these in their respective historical and intellectual contexts. Approaches are often inspired or directly derived from a humanistic research tradition, which means that research standards and methodologies are well established and clearly defined.

In the context of an art education and research institution where new research approaches are constantly tested, this research tradition provides a solid base for developing new forms. Research in this tradition is characterized by critically analyzing art and design practice, and by developing theoretical definitions that locate practice in its intellectual and societal contexts. For that reason, a humanistic approach to art and design is essential in the way it mediates the meaning of practice and interprets its influence on society.

Cultural definitions and interpretations of practice create a discourse that is highly influential on practice by labeling and pointing out what is considered as being 'innovative', 'necessary' and 'valuable' art and design. It places practice in the web of economic, social and artistic needs and interests, and stimulates the valuation of specific art forms and products.

Historical consciousness is created by profound knowledge of lines of development; societal and intellectual developments and responses to economic, political and intellectual conditions. This situates art and design as an active player in the development of society beyond the intentions of an object that might be apparently pragmatic or personal.

Considered as a part of this wider picture of mankind's evolution, art and design practice is better

equipped for taking social responsibility. Precisely this point is important as a vector in contemporary society where new technologies provide unforeseen possibilities, and where environmental sustainability and ethical sensitivity are more vital than ever.

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This reinforces the need for a humanistic, critical tradition. Following philosophy's pursuit of valid ways to understand reality, a critical tradition offers techniques to constantly measure and

deconstruct established conventions. Deconstruction was deployed as postmodernism's most

important tool for sundering modernism's hegemonic truths. It nurtured such rich critical discourses as post-structuralism, post-colonial studies, gender and queer studies, material culture

studies, social constructivism and others - approaches that have in common a rigorous questioning of established systems of knowledge and power structures. All have heavily influenced the way aesthetics is conceptualized. Art, craft and design theory has – from different

perspectives – developed new modes of discourses. In common they have a new engagement

with societal issues, which can be seen as an ongoing self-reflection combined with a deep commitment to socially defined micro-systems of meaning.

Across so many different perspectives, humanistic research towers as the provider of systematic

theoretical approaches that assure consistency and validity. Via its clear Mode 1 approach it forms an essential backbone of an artistic research and educational environment. The models for

understanding reality provided by the humanities are vital for artistic interpretation; both are intertwined in a common experimentation with expressions of human life, but humanities have a

clear methodological approach that supports inquiry in other areas.

In addition, it is important to stress Konstantin's crucial role as a producer of knowledge in society, forging discourse related to its core fields; visual art, craft and design. All three fields (but particularly craft) need to be clearly defined and persuasively articulated. Mazanti's work provides examples of the way humanities-related discourse may be developed –

strengthening

cultural definitions of craft activities (see References). This approach not only enhances the level

of education offered to the students, but also helps create the professional environment in which

they will act after graduating.

### **Interdisciplinary & transdisciplinary research**

From all indications, significant segments of contemporary culture continue to move from a tradition of specialized knowledge towards the creation of hybrid knowledge often referred to as

interdisciplinary or even trans-disciplinary knowledge. This means that we will see fundamental

changes in the way research is conducted and knowledge and creativity produced at the

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university. Mark C. Taylor characterizes this change in his *New York Times* article "The End of

the University as We Know It” as follows: “The division-of-labor model of separate departments is obsolete and must be replaced with a curriculum structured like a web or complex adaptive network. Responsible teaching and scholarship must become cross-disciplinary and crosscultural.”

A major share of the kind of teaching and scholarship Taylor describes will take place at institutions like the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies because the department’s unique grouping of competencies and innovating research methodologies which position students and

faculty to play defining roles in the creation of this new cultural relevance. The fact that the department collaborates with every institution at Konstfack, as well as institutions and industries

partners strategic to the University’s overall educational goals makes the department the natural setting for interdisciplinary research.

Interdisciplinarity has become nearly ubiquitous in university systems, which is odd, because we

are only beginning to see the first research results that tell us how effective it actually is. This current research tells us that as the distance between disciplines in interdisciplinary work increases, the overall quality of innovation falls, or in other words, more creativity results more

often from the conventional siloed-discipline approach. But Lee Fleming of the Harvard Business School also points out that the same research shows that creative breakthroughs that do

arise from interdisciplinary work “are frequently of unusually high value – superior to the best innovations achieved by conventional approaches.”

Indeed, Fleming’s research goes on to tell us that the most valuable innovations only occur as the

result of interdisciplinary projects. It is on the promise of producing original research-based innovations of a value superior to the conventional single-discipline approaches that the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies was originally founded.

Interdisciplinarity is a term often used vaguely, but there are historical and critical differences between monodisciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research methodologies. This begs the question of what interdisciplinarity is, and here the confusion often

begins. General agreement on what constitutes interdisciplinarity and how it functions at an advanced level is yet to arrive in cultural quarters. For example, interdisciplinarity is consistently

confused with multidisciplinary. Even Fleming uses “multidisciplinary work” to describe what is manifestly interdisciplinary. The Department of Interdisciplinary Studies has developed a working methodology for producing research as it takes place across disciplines.

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Monodisciplinarity is the application of one creative discipline; easel painting, the epic poem, and

so on and so forth. Where two or more disciplines are involved in a single creative enterprise the

door to multidisciplinary opens. “Multi,” which comes from the Latin *multus* meaning “many,” is straightforwardly the application of two or more disciplines to one theme or subject, but without the expectation that the disciplines will encroach on one other. Where multidisciplinary

is concerned, there is no expectation of the adoption or integration of concepts, methods, or

theories across disciplines. Ask a game theorist and a city planner to design the traffic flow for a dense urban environment as a multidisciplinary exercise and the results will be two distinct plans, one based on game theory and a second on city planning. Multidisciplinarity is designed to functionally compare and contrast results, and is capable of generating great insight, innovation, and early conclusions about anticipating or solving difficult problems. Operationally, interdisciplinarity is exceedingly difficult to achieve, as Fleming's research tells us. Interdisciplinarity is collaboration between two or more disciplines where actors from each discipline *begin* by adopting and integrating each other's concepts, methods, theories, and even epistemologies in the creation of a reciprocal-hybrid practice. This does not mean that disciplines eclipse one another, but rather merge along their outer precincts; each discipline remains as distinct as the hybrid is explicit.

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If "multi" implies many, "inter" meaningfully denotes *between, in the midst, reciprocal, derived from two or more, between the limits of, and carried on or existing between*. In interdisciplinary

practices disciplines interpenetrate, intervene, and become intercommunal at their outer edges,

producing crossbred methods and research practices and, when everything goes right, results not

otherwise within reach of a single discipline.

Rarer even than flourishing interdisciplinary practices is the creation of a transdisciplinary discipline. Transdisciplinarity occurs when an interdisciplinarity hybrid is no longer served by being reciprocal, but transcends the limits of the original collaborating disciplines to create a third

unforeseen and therefore, entirely new practice.

If an alloy is an appropriate analogy to interdisciplinarity it is because interdisciplinarity is a homogeneous mixture of two or more disciplines which, in turn, makes transdisciplinarity like a

compound: recognized as having different assets - properties and language - from the constituent

disciplines from which it transcended. An example of a transdiscipline would be psychological

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economics for which Daniel Kahneman was awarded the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. The citation for Kahneman's prize credits him for having "integrated insights from psychology into economics, thereby laying the foundation for a new field of research."<sup>11</sup>

Kahneman succeeded in so deeply fusing two disciplines with low alignment – economics, a hard

science, with psychology, a soft science - that a third unconditionally original innovation resulted.

Psychological economics represents one of the breakthroughs that Fleming's research observes.

Arising from interdisciplinarity, it is an extremely rare occurrence, and one of unusually high value.

However, as transdisciplinary practice and research originates from the increasing demand for relevance and applicability of the fusion of academic, art, craft and design research to the challenges of our complex society, some prefer to center the definition around societal challenges rather than strictly on academic research. Increasingly, it is recognized that transdisciplinary research is particularly suitable for solving complex societal problems, as it integrates knowledge from different art and design disciplines and knowledge from other sources. This makes it especially appropriate for art, craft and design research as well as research in the humanities. In the context of the increasing urgency for the transition towards a sustainable society, we need to gain more insights and experience in the epistemology, methodology and management of transdisciplinary research and processes. The use of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research methodologies at the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies offer students the means to develop and utilize their skills and creativity in research and development environments integrated with students and faculty across disciplines and institutions. This kind of forward-looking research is called for by students, by industry, by faculty, by the culture at large, and it realistically reflects the ongoing integration of practices between designers, artists, researchers, educators, and scholars. Moreover, an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research-based curriculum, contingent on history, criticism and liberal studies, amplifies the studio practice in ways otherwise unavailable. It allows for existing corridors of creativity in art, craft and design to be integrated with a diversity of disciplines, including science, technology, liberal studies, public policy, entertainment, and education.

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## **Conclusion**

These different but complementary research methodologies at the department helps our students

and faculty meet new challenges, fulfill expectations, expand our knowledge of art, craft and design as we create innovative methodologies and categories for research. As mentioned previously, the tripartite research constellation described in this document should be seen in this

light: humanities-related research instils a stable educational training and a sense of disciplinary

identity (Mode 1); practice-based research, as well as interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research, (Mode 2) demands the ability to co-operate with experts from other fields and to address

problems in a complementary way. Both modes (1 and 2) of knowledge production are important

in society, and should achieve a mutually enriching balance.

The department is devoted to re-imagining art, design and craft's relationship to our history, culture, society and economy. What makes this curriculum and research program distinctive - even original - is that our students, researchers and faculty will use applied criticism, theory and

the history of art and design, as well as the Humanities and Sciences to inform the creative practice of art and design thus leading it towards original, relevant and historically conscious,

and, where appropriate, practice-centered investigations. It is the integration of history, criticism, theory and the Humanities and Sciences within the studio practice that makes the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies uniquely positioned to support and initiate high quality research of national and international significance. The ability for historical and critical reflection is essential to a successful art, craft and design research practice. It allows artists, craftpersons and designers, who are conducting research through their creative practice, to produce work that is intended to address a larger set of questions beyond their individual practice.

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## **APPENDIX I**

## People

Research at the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies will be lead by the prefect and Professors who will serve as advocates for the highest levels of research-based creativity , scholarship and responsibility. The Prefect reports directly to the Rector and works in close collaboration with Professors, faculty and students. A Research Group made up of select faculty and Ph.D. students will serve as the educational and research leader and consensus-builder for the department's faculty, researchers and students, and will help link different constituencies to the department as these relate to Konstfack's educational mission.

An Advisory Council of leading international professionals in art, craft and design research as well as research in the humanities will counsel the Prefect and Professors as to the overall goals of the department, potential areas for research, as well as help to evaluate the results of its research.

An Advisory Panel on Intellectual Property will be established by the Prefect. Within the laws and ethics governing matters of intellectual property the Panel will help to establish Konstfack's policy on intellectual property. Chaired by a Professor, the Panel will oversee ongoing matters of intellectual property and advise the Prefect on related questions that arise. The Panel is composed of four members and a Professor from the department, two of whom must be attorneys specializing in intellectual property law.

Members are appointed by the Prefect every two years. Members will hold office for a two-year period. In the event that a member vacates office prior to the conclusion of their term, then an election will be conducted by the Panel for a replacement to serve the remainder of the term. The

Panel can invite individuals to provide additional, appropriate expertise as necessary.

The Advisory Panel on Research Ethics is composed of 9 members drawn from across art, craft and design and other disciplines relevant to ethics in teaching and areas of research at the department. The Panel represents a wide spectrum of expertise and experience in the ethics of

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teaching and research, ethics review, research administration; research in the health, natural and social sciences; the humanities, engineering and law, as well as a lay perspective.

The Advisory Panel on Research Ethics reports directly to the Prefect. The Panel is chaired by a

Professor or Senior Researcher at the department appointed by the Prefect. The Panel is always to

be consulted when a research project involves cooperation, collaboration, and funding from a private or industry partner or to report on any matter referred to it by the Prefect. Students, faculty or members of the administration at Konstfack may petition the Prefect to request the Panel to offer a recommendation regarding ethical questions that may arise over any ongoing or potential research project at the department.

In general, a research project which will involve cooperation, collaboration, and funding from a

private or industry partner is initiated by inviting the potential partner to submit a menu describing possible areas of research that are of particular interest. The Professors at the department review the menu and where a research topic has pedagogical value and will further the creative and scholarly goals of Konstfack, our society, culture and economy, an agreement can be reached where the partner funds the research project. Such an agreement must specify the terms concerning intellectual property as related to the research project, and all parties must agree in writing before the project is undertaken. The original members of the Panel are appointed by the Prefect. After that, members are elected by the outgoing members every two years. Members will hold office for a two-year period. In the event that a member vacates office prior to the conclusion of their term, then an election will be conducted by the Panel for a replacement to serve the remainder of the term. The Panel can coopt where needed any members required to achieve or maintain gender balance, where the membership does not include at least three women and three men. The Panel can invite individuals to provide additional, appropriate expertise as necessary. Working in collaboration with and drawing support from expert groups, the Panel will add to the substantial base of ethics knowledge and ability that will already exist at Konstfack.

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## **APPENDIX II**

### Guidelines for Periodic Review of the Department's Research Strategy

In addition to annual reviews, the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies should undergo comprehensive reviews, at intervals not to exceed every five years, by a body consisting of a meaningful proportion of disinterested outside experts with a view to the following:

- A comprehensive evaluation of the department, including the performance of its Prefect, Researchers and Professors, and an assessment of its intellectual, aesthetic and other contributions to the mission of Konstfack;
- An assessment of the breadth and intensity of senior faculty participation, to ensure that the viability of the department does not depend either intellectually or financially on a single individual;
- An assessment of the financial and administrative soundness of the department's research projects;
- An assessment, at the time of the review, of the ongoing relevance of the department's work to the mission of Konstfack;
- A written report containing findings and recommendations for improvement or change, as appropriate.

Reviews aimed at assessing the above-stated objectives should also be conducted on an ad hoc

basis at the direction of the Rector, when there is reason to be concerned about the ongoing ability

of the department or its research programs to meet academic, financial, or operating criteria.