

# **INDEPENDENT RESEARCH IN A CHANGING WORLD**

**STRATEGY 2024-2026**



**DANMARKS FRIE  
FORSKNINGSFOND**  
INDEPENDENT RESEARCH  
FUND DENMARK



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## ABOUT THE FUND'S PURPOSE

# Mission

**The mission of Independent Research Fund Denmark (DFF) is to develop and strengthen the quality of Danish research.**

DFF achieves this by allocating funds for independent research within specific research activities based on the researchers' own initiatives, as well as funding thematic research where the themes are politically determined.

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Additionally, DFF provides advice to decision-makers and stakeholders on research-related issues. DFF also has an obligation to strengthen the dissemination of research and thereby promote the understanding of the role and significance of research in society.

In order to fulfill the fund's mission and vision, DFF focuses on sound management and efficient operations, by continuously adjusting its organization and processes to meet the needs of the fund and the outside world.

# Vision

**DFF's vision is to ensure the best possible conditions for conducting research freely.**

The fund aims to ensure that all talents are put to use, and that researchers are given the opportunity to test their best, most original ideas. By doing this, the fund lays the groundwork for breakthroughs that help us understand more and shape future society.

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As for the fund, this means continuously working on developing its tools and evaluation processes by focusing on the good idea. Furthermore it is a central ambition for DFF to keep the researchers' perspectives in mind, both in designing the fund's evaluation and application processes and in its other activities.

In the coming years, the fund will focus on three main areas in order to help carry out this vision:

- **DFF in a changing research funding landscape**
- **Danish research of world-class quality**
- **Independent research in a changing world**



# DFF IN A CHANGING RESEARCH FUNDING LANDSCAPE

## The role of the private and public funds in the Danish research funding landscape

Private and public funds' funding of Danish research now constitutes a significant part of university budgets. The fund considers it positive that researchers at Danish research institutions have easy access to funds to pursue ground-breaking research ideas. However, the fund believes it is crucial that all researchers and research areas have fair opportunities to apply for and obtain funding. DFF plays a central role in this regard, as, compared to many private funds, it has a broader research profile covering all fields despite having fewer funds.

### The fund will

To ensure that DFF remains well-positioned in the research funding landscape, the fund will explore whether larger research areas in the current landscape fall between private and public funds and thus have difficulty obtaining funding. In addition to this, the fund will engage in dialogue with public and private funds to explore opportunities for joint calls and other collaborations.

## Independent and thematic research

DFF is tasked with funding both independent and thematic research. Both independent research and research where the themes are politically determined have their place and justification in the research funding landscape. The fund finds it very positive that there is a high degree of trust in DFF's ability to fund both. Independent research and the researchers' own ideas are already a part of solving the challenges which the strategic research funds target. When funds are allocated for strategic research, it is, however, also important to ensure a wide scope, both thematically and financially, to promote researcher creativity for the purpose of contributing to the knowledge and solutions that society seeks.

### The fund will

The fund prioritizes good dialogue with the political system regarding the framework for both independent and thematic research so that all good ideas come into play. At the same time, the fund sees a need to differentiate between independent and thematic research, as many applications are submitted as both. Therefore, DFF will investigate whether the fund has the right tools and evaluation criteria.

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## The council members are the Fund's most important Asset

Every year, the fund is entrusted with managing millions of taxpayer money for research. The only way to ensure a responsible distribution of these funds is through transparent research assessment processes. The fund's 75 members are among Denmark's top researchers and play an indispensable role in Danish research as the foundation for the fund's peer review process. However, the fund also experiences challenges with a peer review system where peer review work

is not merited in line with other academic activities. This impacts the fund's ability to recruit and retain the best researchers.

### The fund will

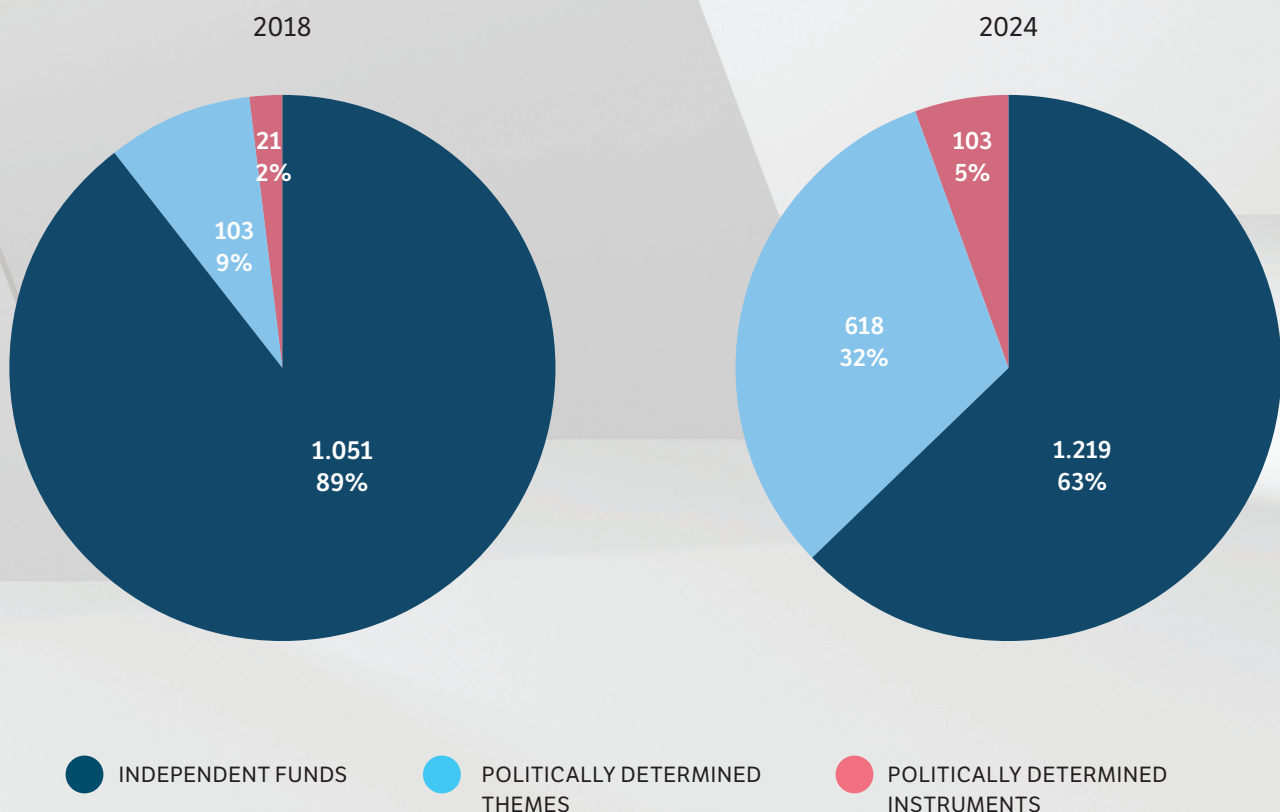
Therefore, the fund will seek dialogue with the research sector regarding the recruitment base and the importance of recognizing the significance of peer review work, in order to ensure that DFF and the Danish research funding landscape can continue to recruit the right researchers in the future.

*"The fund can elevate both independent and thematic research to benefit the quality of Danish research. The fund already has an infrastructure and organization that supports the two tracks through the independent research councils and thematic committees. However, we must also work to clarify the boundaries between the two, so that the differences and similarities are fully apparent."*

Søren Serritzlew  
Chair of Independent Research Fund Denmark

#### CHANGED BALANCE: ALLOCATION TO THE FUND ON NATIONAL BUDGET IN 2018 AND 2024, MILL. DKK

The scope funding of strategic, thematic research within DFF has increased year by year since its introduction in 2018. In 2024, politically determined themes and instruments account for approximately 40 percent of DFF's total budget.



# DANISH RESEARCH OF WORLD-CLASS QUALITY

## The ideal success rate

Denmark delivers world-class research. This position is a result of Denmark's tradition of free, independent research. The fund's primary aim is to ensure that researchers across disciplines have the best possible conditions to conduct innovative research. However, the fund receives far more high-quality applications than it can accommodate. This means that too many researchers commit their resources to writing proposals that do not get funded. This also poses a challenge for the fund as its workload increases with the rising number of applications each year.

### The fund will

The fund believes the best working conditions for researchers are ensured when working hours are spent conducting research – not applying for funding. Therefore, the fund aims to raise the success rate and is exploring tools to achieve this goal. This requires setting carefully selected, relevant, and clear criteria for applying to DFF.

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## Diversity in research

Research prepares us for the future and to ensure that Danish research maintains the highest academic standards, DFF contributes to creating the best conditions for supporting excellent researchers at all career stages in Denmark. The broader the range of people attracted to research, the larger the potential talent pool among researchers.

### The fund will

Future solutions require that all talents come into play. Therefore, the fund works on promoting diversity and inclusion in the research environments.

*"As part of working with ARRA, the fund will ensure both general capacity building in quality assurance of evaluation practices, with a particular focus on diversity in research, and the use of qualitative indicators."*

DFF CoARA Action Plan 2024-2026, workpackage 6, "Training of assessors and administration".





## New paradigms for peer review

Breakthroughs in research have never been more necessary. The world of tomorrow requires solutions unlike anything seen or conceived before. This sets high standards for the fund's members when conducting peer reviews. It's crucial to recognize a good idea, whether presented as basic research, interdisciplinary research, practice-oriented research, or as a bold idea.

High quality in the fund's evaluation practices is therefore central. It is essential for the fund to ensure that research proposals undergo an assessment characterized by consistency, conscious choices, (for example, concerning the use of quantitative bibliometric indicators), and an increased level of transparency.



In 2022, DFF became part of the Coalition on Reforming Research Assessment (CoARA). As a signatory of the agreement, DFF aims for the assessment of research and researchers to recognize the diverse outcomes, practices, and activities that maximize the quality and impact of research.

*"We will work extensively with the elements of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment in the coming years. The way we evaluate research and the tools we use have a direct impact on researchers. As a public research fund, we have a responsibility to ensure that our research assessment is conducted in the most appropriate way, ensuring that the best and most groundbreaking research projects are funded."*

Søren Serritzlew  
Chair of Independent Research Fund Denmark

## The fund will

Therefore, a core task for the fund will be to implement the pan-European framework regarding research assessment, Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. Implementing this should provide the fund's members with the necessary tools to ensure that innovative research can be identified and funded and that a broad and inclusive understanding of the term excellence creates space for a diversity of questions, theories, and methods.



# INDEPENDENT RESEARCH IN A CHANGING WORLD

## International research collaboration in a new geopolitical reality

International research collaboration is a key element of the fund's mission to promote world-class Danish research. For example, the fund incorporates an international perspective when evaluating all proposed projects and uses international peers in application assessment. The fund also contributes to Nordic, European, and global collaborations. However, the world is undergoing rapid change these years. The changed geopolitical reality raises several important questions that funds, researchers, and research institutions actively have to address concerning the challenges that international collaboration can entail for research security, ethics, and integrity.

### 🌀 The fund will

It is important for the fund to focus on how it can strengthen and encourage good international cooperation based on mutual agreements, trust, and security in a changing world. Therefore, DFF actively participates in debates in international forums and national committees. As part of this, the fund continues its international engagement, exploring opportunities to enter into new international collaborations and research programs.

## DFF's participation in research policy forums

DFF is involved in a number of national and international committees and thereby helps shape research policy development, including the **Committee on Guidelines for International Research and Innovation Collaboration (URIS)**, which has developed concrete recommendations for international research and innovation collaboration, and the **Forum for International Coordination and Collaboration (FIKS)**, which aims to support members in implementing the guidelines.

DFF is also represented in the **Committee for Updating the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**, which is tasked with updating the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity with a focus on international issues, open science, and artificial intelligence.

In the European context, DFF is represented in Science Europe, and DFF also participates in Nordic research cooperation within NordForsk.

## Opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence

The spread of generative artificial intelligence is currently receiving much attention in the research funding landscape as it provides researchers with several new tools that can enhance the quality of research and save time. It is therefore natural that many researchers will use artificial intelligence. However, using artificial intelligence also presents factual, ethical, and legal challenges to the goal of supporting original and innovative research, for instance, as a threat to the validity of the peer review system.

### The fund will

As artificial intelligence will play a central role in the future, the fund will explore opportunities to both follow and influence the development of international guidelines and standards. In this context, the fund will consider how to handle using artificial intelligence in DFF applications. At the same time, the fund will explore opportunities to integrate artificial intelligence into its work without compromising academic integrity and ethics.

## Open Science and Open Access

Open Science is a movement within science that seeks to promote transparency in science and make knowledge accessible to everyone in society. Open Access and free access to research results are prerequisites, in the fund's view, if research is to reach a broader audience and contribute to creating change for people, society, business, and the political system.

### The fund will

DFF is therefore working to integrate Open Science and the FAIR principles in a way that is appropriate for both applicants and the research community, so that research becomes '*as open as possible and as closed as necessary*'.

## FAIR Data

FAIR research data (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) is a branch of Open Science, which requires that data must be findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable. As part of the EU's Open Data Directive, it is mandatory for research institutions to implement FAIR. In Denmark, both a steering group, which coordinates the implementation of FAIR in Denmark, and a number of working groups have been established. DFF is involved in both.



Findable



Accessible



Interoperable



Reusable

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