

# Conditions of the Production of Knowledge Today

## Case Students' Minutes

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More than 30 years ago Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1979/1997 and 1986/1992) concluded from an examination of the circulation of knowledge that Western culture had entered the phase of Post-modernity and that the grand narrative of the Enlightenment project had died. We are here not concerned with this result of his examination, but rather with the subject of its method and its argumentation: epistemology. We are concerned with how knowledge is produced today, knowledge itself and its institutions, and under which conditions this production of knowledge takes place. In particular it is one branch of Lyotard's examination that regards "the relation between science, the nation and the State" (Lyotard, 1979/1997, p. 32) which we focus on. It is pessimism that permeates this argumentation to the point where Lyotard writes about "the scientists' demoralization" (p. 8), and he points out that "the State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the "people"". Citing the ideals of the Berlin or Humboldt University founded 1810 Lyotard refers to autonomous and speculative knowledge that in its disinterested pursuit of learning

serves no master but itself, and that “research and the spread of learning are not justified by invoking a principle of usefulness” (p. 34). This autonomous epistemological principle has become delegitimized. One of the causes of this is that the autonomy was never real. The State that should guarantee it could not do so without asserting some sort of control, and one agent in this system of control is measuring usefulness or performance. Lyotard writes: “The criterion of performance is explicitly invoked by the authorities to justify their refusal to subsidize certain research centers.” (p. 47) Yet, Lyotard also stresses that the narrative of legitimization of universities is political or democratic in the spirit of the Enlightenment Age. Universities have an epistemological obligation towards society and the people: “All peoples have a right to science. If the social subject is not already the subject of scientific knowledge, it is because that has been forbidden by priests and tyrants.” (p. 31)

The double position of epistemology as described by Lyotard above will be reflected in this article and its research questions. The article demonstrates how the Danish Bibliometrical system works and attempts to evaluate its effects. As an incentive does it motivate and encourage researchers? Does it further the communication and spread of their research? What effect has it had on universities? As will be seen from the article below only some answers can be given, and some of them are only partial answers, but we nevertheless find it pertinent to ask these questions, and our attempt at answering them will certainly not be on a national scale, but rather we merely discuss and describe the working conditions in the research groups we take part in, and we also focus on how the present research journal, *Academic Quarter*, has sought to meet the demands of the bibliometrical system and on the achievements of the journal within this system, locally, nationally and globally.

The article attempts an outline of what we perceive as the key conditions that have formed the knowledge and research available in *Students' Minutes*. We begin with the context of the Danish performance-based research funding system. We move on to what we consider to be a fundamental condition, i.e. BFI and to show how it permeates research and research management at Aalborg University, in particular the Faculty of the Humanities, the departments and the research groups. Then, we show how BFI paradoxically has given rise to the recognition of the very research activities it excludes in the form of what we see as the third condition, or BFI+.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, we

introduce the fourth basic condition of the present publication, i.e. a strategic initiative at the level of the faculty.

### **Condition no. 1: Performance-based Research Funding Systems**

In this article we show how a performance-based research funding system (PRFS) functions as a basic condition in the production of knowledge with reference to the Faculty of Humanities, Aalborg University. In other words, we demonstrate that PRFS has several unambiguous effects on research conducted here. Studies on the impact of performance-based research funding systems are often regarded as particularly pertinent, but also inherently problematic. For instance, on the basis of a review of the evidence on the subject of the effects of PRFS Jochen Gläser et al. (2002) argue that “[...] there is enough material to become suspicious about the effects of EBF [evaluation-based funding], but no conclusive evidence” (p. 4) mostly because of the relatively small number of studies and, more importantly, questions of methodology (p. 18). Consequently, they go on to suggest the framework of a full-scale research project investigating the effects of EBF (pp. 20-37). Eight years later, Linda Butler (2010) takes her point of departure in an almost identical situation concerning the absence of valid research on the subject. Thus, she holds that “[...] an understanding of the impact of any new, and existing, policy instrument is vital for its effective operation” (p. 129), but she points out that the assessment of the impact of performance-based research systems is “[...] a fraught exercise [...]” (2010, p. 128). Not only is there a “paucity” of authoritative literature on the topic, the studies of impact are largely conjectural and generally without “[...] concrete examples that examine the impact of PRFS in detail [...],” moreover. Consequently, echoing Gläser et al. (2002), she explicitly calls for studies that “[...] scrutinise these systems and publish more evidence-based assessments of their impact.” (p. 158) By providing evidence of the impact of BFI in the Faculty of Humanities, Aalborg University, this article is a small step towards filling the knowledge gap identified by Gläser and Butler. However, we are not social scientists. We work within the fields of textual and cultural studies and consequently our methods belong within our fields. Thus, after an introduction to PRFS and its Danish incarnation, BFI, we propose to track down its effects in the form of overt thematisations of bibliometrics. Throughout we bring

together and make connections between written and electronic documents in various shapes and forms: evaluation reports, hearing statements, research strategies at the levels of the Faculty of Humanities and its departments, guidelines for research evaluation, etc. But we also draw on anecdotal evidence, especially concerning the rise of *Academic Quarter*, since one of the present authors is one of its founding editors. Generally, we have attempted to establish a chronological sequence of events that document BFI and its effects as a basic condition of knowledge.

Citing the literature on the subject, Butler finds four “conundrums” (p. 128) facing the researcher of the effects of PRFS. The first two puzzles concern the possibility of identifying causes and effects. The third problem concerns the evaluation of the effects or response to PRFS. Whether an impact is regarded as positive or negative depends very much on the interested party. Lastly, Butler mentions that responses to PRFS are mediated by the effects of other reward systems. In our article, we try to map out patterns of cause and effect where possible among the documents that we examine. We wanted very much to evaluate the effects, but the impacts we trace are clearly unintended and do not easily subject to evaluation. We do not deal with whether or how BFI interacts with other reward systems at Aalborg.

In her overview, Butler is concerned with outlining the evidence, or the lack of evidence, concerning “the most common impacts generally regarded as unintended outcomes that are attributed to PRFS” (p. 129), first and foremost. She offers the most systematic outline by far<sup>2</sup> and covers an impressive range of unintended impacts on funding (pp.133-37), human resource issues (p. 135), productivity (p. 137), quality (p. 142), teaching (p. 143), discipline mix (p. 144), research focus (p. 145), collaboration (p. 146), institutional management practices (pp. 148-51), place of publication (p. 151), and author behaviour. While we are wary of the distinction between intended and unintended effects, in what follows, we look particularly at what we find must be the unintended effects of BFI on funding, productivity, and management practices.

Within the Danish context BFI has been the subject of analysis and evaluation. In his Ph.D.-thesis *Kampen om basismidlerne - Historisk institutionel analyse af basisbevillingsmodellens udvikling på universitetsområdet i Danmark* (*The Struggle for Core Research Funding – A Historical Institutional Analysis of the Core Research-*

*funding System in Danish Universities*) Kaare Aagaard describes the development of the governmental funding system of primarily Danish universities since the late 1960s. He concludes that the outcome has been an uneasy balance between the classical ideal of independent research and a “socially robust” delivery of knowledge, which contributes to economic growth and societal development. (Aagaard, 2011, p. 9) He also stresses that this production of knowledge must be documentable and legitimizable both to the political system and the tax-payers in some form of an accountability system. Aagaard then asks the general question if at all and how such systems can function and at the same time consider the individual researcher’s motivation, dynamism and willingness to take risks. This article seeks to answer this question concretely and locally by describing how the present performance-based research funding system has affected the Faculty of Humanities at Aalborg University and its researchers. Already here at this point in the article part of the answer can be given, as we shall see below the governmental system has been adapted and modified internally by the institution.

The process leading to the present Danish performance-based university research funding system with its administrative superstructure of control and demands of accountability is influenced and shaped by two transnational tendencies as described in Aagaard and Mejlgaard, 2012. The first is the concept of the innovative knowledge society in the global knowledge economy, and the second are new public management methods with their top-down management system, which were implemented as a tool to adapt the universities to becoming a value-creating societal institution within this global context, an ambition which can be understood in the light of the universities’ epistemological obligation as it was expressed by Lyotard. One of the ambitions of this process was an improvement of quality as well as quantity of Danish research and the reformation of the core funding system with its BFI element is part of this research policy and so was the University Law of 2003 with its curtailment of university autonomy. Positively, this limitation of the universities self-government can be understood as an inclusion of the universities into society so that they were motivated to cooperate with business as entrepreneurial universities (Etzkowitz, 1983) with the slogan “From Thought to Invoice” (Regeringen, 2003). This view of universities as not just institutions of education and research, but as institutions that generated value in society was followed by sub-

stantial governmental investments and funds, and a system was built to audit and access these investments.

The reforms after around 2000 can be viewed in the light of a change of leading actors. In the Danish context the Humboldt or Berlin University-inspired model the state was represented primarily by the Ministries of Education, but gradually this role has been taken over by primarily the Ministry of Science and the Ministry of Finance (Aagaard and Mejlgaard, 2012a, pp. 334-335), and this development can be said to have been predicted in a much more general sense when Lyotard in 1979 wrote about the real governmental control of the production of knowledge in contrast to what was only an ideal of the autonomous university.

However, Produktivitetskommissionen (The Productivity Commission) has recently been set up by the government in the face of the fact that Danish productivity has been seriously losing ground in comparison with other wealthy countries since the mid-90s (Produktivitetskommissionen, 2012), and this despite the public spending of around 20 milliards Danish kroner for research in 2012 (Produktivitetskommissionen, 2012, p. 16). Among the terms of reference of the Productivity Commission is to seek “to throw light on companies’ and businesses’ use of knowledge and education as well as the allocation of these resources in the economy” (Produktivitetskommissionen, 2012, p. 17)<sup>3</sup>. It seems in other words that to some extent the governmental focus is now shifting from the production of knowledge on the part of universities and their productivity to the employment of this knowledge within business, e.g. innovation and entrepreneurship, and to the flow between business and universities. In line with this the Productivity Commission intends to examine whether “private businesses should be prompted to research and develop even more?” (p. 16)<sup>4</sup>

The explicit political demand that Danish universities fulfil societal needs (the so-called Third Mission) as well as the two traditional obligations of education and basic research is reflected locally in the official research policy statement of Aalborg University:

An important objective of our research at Aalborg University is to make it accessible and useful for as many people as possible. This means that AAU research results will not only be useful within university walls. AAU research and research results will also be communicated to relevant

parties in the surrounding society, so that the research may contribute as much use-value as possible to society. This is secured through close cooperation with the business world, organisations and educational institutions. (Aalborg Universitet, 2012a)

### **Condition no. 2: BFI**

We now turn to the current Danish incarnation of PRFS. A significant amount of research at Danish universities is propelled by core funding or a block grant from the Danish State. According to the Danish Agency for Science, Technology, and Innovation a portion of that core funding, the so called “new core funding,” is distributed according to a model that rewards the level of “quality” that each university achieves in four designated areas: education, external funding, research, and Ph.D.-production (Styrelsen for Universiteter og Internationalisering, 2012). Research quality is measured according to a principle of bibliometry, more particularly, according to the bibliometric research indicator (“Den bibliometriske forskningsindikator” or BFI). To the question “what is BFI?” the Danish Agency for Science, Technology, and Innovation answers:

The bibliometric research indicator is a method of assessing and measuring scientific publication activity. The channels of publication are the crank in the publication activities of the researchers. The indicator, therefore, builds on the so-called lists of authority covering series (journals, book series and conference series) and publishers. The indicator plays a part in the model of funding that distributes the new core funding to the universities. Moreover, the indicator is intended to motivate researchers to publish in the most recognised and prestigious channels of publication.<sup>5</sup> (Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation, 2012a)

What springs immediately to mind in this definition of BFI is the underlying analogy employed by the Agency to conceptualise knowledge and research. The key metaphor is that of an engine, more particularly, an internal combustion engine in which a crank or crankshaft is responsible for the conversion of one kind of energy or movement into another and more useful kind. Research, according to this fundamental image, is useful only if transformed by the crank-

shaft of publication. Without this transformation, research is basically a useless bang in a defective engine and, consequently, a waste of resources. The first function and intention, of BFI, then, is not really to *assess*, but to *create* and *perpetuate* a particular mental picture or idea of research and the value of research and knowledge, i.e. the notion that real, legitimate knowledge is knowledge that performs. The creation of a particular image of research is the key component of the model. Without an idea of legitimate knowledge firmly in place, the state would be unable to invoke criteria of performance in relation to funding.

So, from this most vital aspect of the model the remaining three interrelated functions and intentions of BFI in relation to knowledge and research follow: *measurement*, *reward* and *encouragement*. First, it is a gauge or a yardstick that is capable of computing accurately the different degrees of useful knowledge construed as scientific publication activity. Its quantifying principle is based on a ranking of the channels of scientific publication, for instance, periodicals, publishers, and book series according to lists that assign degrees of value in terms of BFI-points. Secondly, because it is capable of quantifying research performance, yearly readings of the points universities have produced according to the index are used in the calibration of their funding.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, the index is intended to form an incentive for researchers, spurring them on to publish their findings in the most prestigious channels of publication with the aim of securing academic capital or respect for themselves.

It is outside the scope of this article to discuss the usefulness of conceptualising research through analogies of energy conversion that belong to the industrial age rather than the experience economy. Similarly, we won't address the question if research ought to be measured according to its channels of publication, or if rewards based on annual index readings ought to affect the funding of research, or whether the effect of BFI on individual researchers really is one of encouragement and motivation.<sup>7</sup> Since the BFI-model is in place and will remain so in the foreseeable future, we simply want to document how its four functions *work* in the production of knowledge and research. As our case we have taken our own situation at Aalborg University, and we don't propose that our findings are valid outside Aalborg since Aalborg appears to be the Danish university that has shown the greatest keenness in legitimising knowledge and research in terms of BFI-performance.



That BFI already forms an important condition of knowledge and research in Denmark in general is clear from Gunnar Sivertsen and Jesper Schneider's evaluation of the model (2012). According to *Evaluering av den bibliometriske forskningsindikator/ Evaluation of the Bibliometrical Research Indicator*, BFI is used as a management tool at seven out of eight Danish Universities (p. 29), but with very different degrees of enthusiasm. Aalborg University and the University of Southern Denmark have gone furthest in implementing the model and introduced a redistribution of a portion of their research funds to the faculties that in part depends on the distribution of BFI-points (p. 29). This act of redistribution then forms the point of departure of using the index for various purposes on lower levels of research administration: "At Aalborg University and the University of Southern Denmark the universities have implemented a local redistribution of the globalisation funds to the faculties which is partially based on the distribution of BFI-points. Here it is the point of departure for a self-imposed use of BFI for more purposes at lower levels."<sup>8</sup> (Sivertsen and Schneider 2012, p. 29) Specifically about Aalborg University, Sivertsen and Schneider state that BFI is used "actively at more levels as part of the foundation of information for further distribution of resources. The individual researcher's research resources can in this way be dependent on a minimum of research activity expressed as BFI-points."<sup>9</sup> (p. 33) The centrality of the BFI-model at Aalborg University is also clear from the hearing statement to the Sivertsen and Schneider evaluation: "At Aalborg University the BFI-model is used for internal analyses and for distribution of means to the individual main areas, and in this way the indicator plays a major role in the research management of the university."<sup>10</sup> (Aalborg Universitet, 2012)

At Aalborg University, then, BFI forms an important managerial tool in the production of knowledge, and research management involves the distribution of research funds between faculties according to the index. In practice, research funds are allocated to the faculties on the basis of the index in two stages. First, only if researchers produce knowledge in a manner that is registered by the index do their respective faculties receive the core funding for their research time. Researchers who fail to meet the university's minimum index specific requirements,<sup>11</sup> then, are not recognised as researchers. Thus, at the top level of research management, the creative function of the index is employed in making a fundamental

distinction of kind between researchers and non-researchers. Secondly, the university also measures and rewards research collectively and has implemented a policy by which not just core research funds, but also an amount of extra money is allocated between the faculties on the basis of the number of BFI-points their researchers have succeeded in producing. Currently, the faculties receive a handsome sum in the five figures for each BFI-point.

At the level of the faculties, more particularly, the Faculty of the Humanities, which produced 360 BFI-points last year, the centrality of the BFI-model is maintained in the management of research. Research requirements are formulated squarely in terms of BFI-points. The faculty reiterates the university's basic condition that research staff produces a minimum of .25 BFI-points in order to qualify as researchers (Holmfeldt, 2011). The faculty's long term "aims" and "expectations" for each researcher are also formulated in terms of the index. Over a four year period, the faculty expects each researcher to produce a specific number of BFI-points. Similarly, among the wide range of the strategic initiatives announced by the Faculty, one, "Målsætning om forskning på Hum/Objective of research at Hum," targets research publication in relation to the index specifically and allots extra funds to the departments to stimulate and support publication. In the same way, some of the specific incentives for the research groups, which constitute the individual departments at the Department of the Humanities, are formulated in terms of BFI.

### **Condition no. 3: BFI+**

While the Faculty of the Humanities continues the use of the index and maintains its basic assumptions concerning the nature of legitimate research, we shall later show that the idea of managing research solely on the basis of BFI-performance is also supplemented by a range of other strategic initiatives, among others one that next to BFI, forms the other basic condition of *Academic Minutes*. Returning to the use of BFI as a key condition of knowledge at Aalborg University, the attention to the index is continued at the level of the individual departments at the Faculty of the Humanities. In the following we look at one of the three departments, i.e. the Department of Culture and Global Studies. At the departmental level, research administration involves maintaining the principles of the index and, at the same time, recognising its deficiencies. Thus, attention to the production of BFI-points forms one of eleven "strategies" identified

by the *Strategi: 2012-15* for the Department of Culture and Global Studies: "To ensure continued supply of resources for the institute's research activities in the shape of scientific positions and economic means it is the target to increase the average BFI production with at least 25 % in the period until 2015."<sup>12</sup> (Institut for Kultur og Globale Studier 2012, p. 3). Again, the argument is economic and linked to maintaining the funding of research in the department's future.

However, on the level of departmental long term planning, the focus on the production of BFI-points is counterbalanced by a commitment to improve the everyday conditions of the production of knowledge. For instance, the strategy preceding the one quoted above aims at facilitating research as a *process*: "The institute works to improve the possibilities of the employees for research absorption through continuous research time in order to advance productivity and creativity."<sup>13</sup> The creation of continuous time for research, for instance, is a strategic aim that is different in kind from the one dealing in BFI. The former involves looking at the processes that further research, the latter focusses solely on points produced by research.

This balancing of product and process reappears on other levels of departmental research management, for instance, in the departmental guidelines for the monitoring and motivation of research. In a paper entitled "Forskning, monitorering, og incitament/Research, monitoring and incentives," Head of Department Henrik Halkier outlines the procedures behind the department's monitoring of and incentives for research. The principles sketched out at the level of the Faculty of the Humanities are copied and individual researchers are supposed to match those demands and expectations (2012, pp. 2-3). Again, the argument is an economic one: By fulfilling the long term goal the research staff creates the condition of departmental growth. "The employees' fulfilment of the longterm target contributes to strengthening the economic situation of the faculty and in this way it creates the foundation of continued development of activities at the department."<sup>14</sup> (p. 3) However, at this level of research administration, BFI is also regarded as an inaccurate gauge of research and a defective incentive. The preamble to the guidelines we quoted above continues:

However, it is also obvious that other activities of publication and research exist. Recognising their importance in relation to the long term development of the department's

research and research environments is crucial. A new department based system, BFI+, will address the most significant flaws in the national BFI-system. (p.1)<sup>15</sup>

A second and more finely tuned system of measurement, called "BFI+," is required to counterbalance what this level of research administration identifies as the inherent defects of the original BFI-model. If not supplemented by a second system of quantification, the full range of activities behind the production of knowledge escapes recognition. Briefly, BFI+ does its supplementary work in two ways on the level of departmental research management. First, by identifying other research activities such as, for instance, editorial work and peer reviewing as important aspects in the production of knowledge. Secondly, "BFI+" corrects the measurements of the index, for instance, by recalibrating the value assigned by BFI to the channels of publication levelling out the differences between the ones already in play and allowing for new ones. (p.7) You could say that while this level of research administration maintains the analogy of the combustion engine it also realises its limitations and the necessity to identify other components which, like the crank, play key roles without which the production of knowledge would fail.

The bibliometrical system is also reflected in the way that research groups, i.e. the level of research management within individual departments, work. One such group is MÆRKK. It is dedicated to research within the field of market communication. The research group is situated at the Institute of Communication at the Faculty of Humanities, Aalborg University. The members of this large research group publish extensively, also internationally and also in *Academic Quarter*. With an eye to the bibliometrical system the research group has had a book series bibliometrically approved. The actual titles of the monographs and anthologies had already been planned before the BFI initiative of book series was made public, and in a few cases manuscripts were underway, but for the reasons of the calculations of point, the book series was initiated because articles in an anthology in an authorized book series give more points than articles in books not registered in an approved series. In this case, it may be asserted that the framework of the bibliometrical system is nothing but an external framework; but it also demonstrates that researchers have to navigate within a system of control of performance, so that the financial foundation of the

groups research is not jeopardized, or in Lyotard's words: "The criterion of performance is explicitly invoked by the authorities to justify their refusal to subsidize certain research centers." (Lyotard, 1979/1992, p. 47) Though this kind of pragmatic navigation takes place, the plan of strategy of the research group is also idealistic as it has as some of its aims for instance to combine research and teaching, internationalization of its work through research networks, and a close relationship between its research and the surrounding society through cooperation with external partners and through communication of its research, also through mass media.<sup>16</sup>

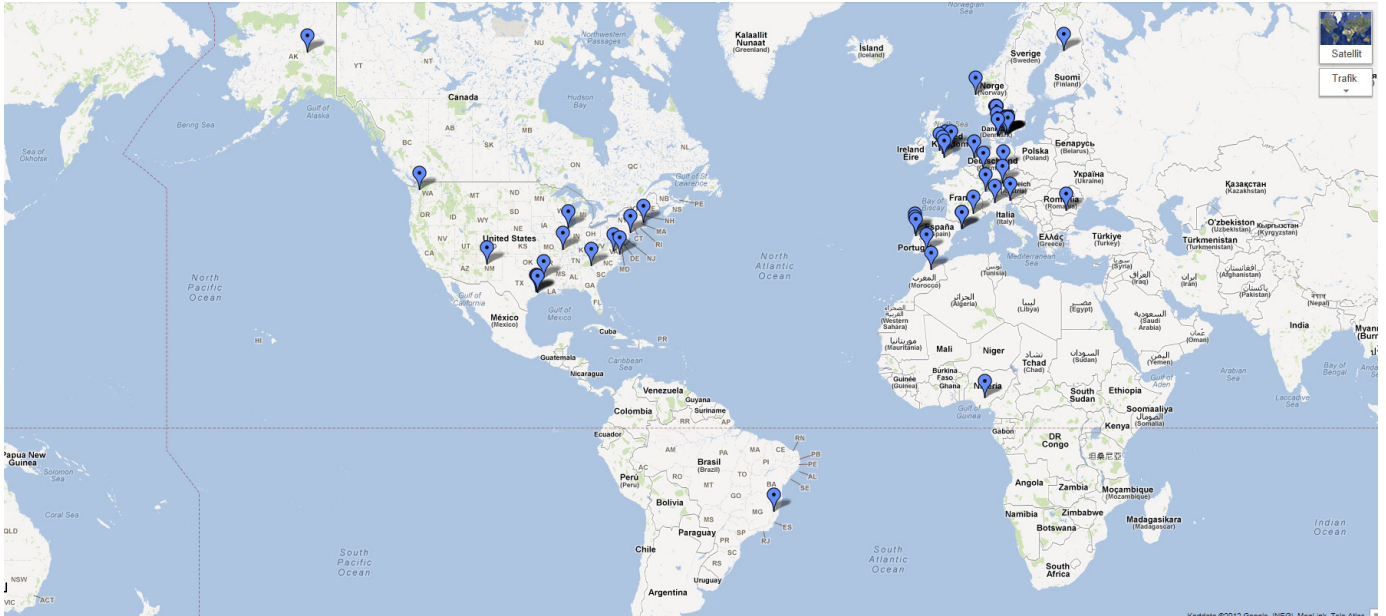
### **BFI and *Academic Quarter***

In the above we have mapped out the implementation of BFI at Aalborg University using a variety of print and electronic documents. Our outline identifies a series of effects caused by BFI and there can be little doubt of the omnipresence of its impact. We now turn to an example of *Academic Quarter*, and here a simple pattern of cause and effect cannot be established. Nevertheless, BFI turns out to play an important role in the history of the journal. It significant that *Academic Quarter* defines itself as primarily a means of research exchange between international scholars in its colophon, but also that it so to speak invites the public to be informed of current and recent research, as the journal is published online and part of the open access policy of Aalborg University, where the journal is physically situated. The journal totally meets the demands of the bibliometrical system through its external, blind peer review procedure with a large panel of reviewers, half of whom are international. The international scope of the journal can be seen from the map (September, 2012) below on which the contributors to the journal have been located:

The number of visitors to the online journal is monitored and counted on a daily basis, and this fact reflects the way points are quantitatively calculated in the bibliometrical system. In a year (October 2011 – September 2012) there were 11,176 visits to the online journal. This large number demonstrates the value of open access and it relates well to Lyotard's concept of the Enlightenment principle that "All peoples have a right to science. If the social subject is not already the subject of scientific knowledge, it is because that has been forbidden by priests and tyrants." (Lyotard, 1979/1997, p. 31)

Where does an online research journal such as *Academic Quarter* stand in relation to the Danish bibliometrical system? *Academic*

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*Quarter* fulfils the three demands about peer review that the review must take place before publication, and that at least one reviewer of an article must be external in relation to the institution, and that reviewers must be researchers at Ph.D.-level.<sup>17</sup> There are no demands that reviews are “blind” or anonymous, and no demands that a certain percentage of reviewers are international. As the journal fulfils these criteria it has been given access to the so-called list of authority at level 1 “the normal level”, which gives an article 1 point, but not the more prestigious level 2, “the high level” with 3 points. However, in the case of *Academic Quarter* the road to bibliometrical authorization was long and not very even. Well before the first issue was published in 2010 the editors applied for admission to the list through the relevant research subject group, which readily endorsed the application to the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation. However, due to a (documented) clerical or system error *Academic Quarter* did not appear on the authority list itself, and despite inquiries from the editors and from the research subject group to the Agency, the error could not be corrected due to work routines. This meant that the authors of the issue, who had expressed anger and frustration, did not receive points for their work, so the editors spent much time and resources to get this error rectified. Finally, after a year’s struggle and with the energetic help of a local research librarian the Agency found the pragmatic solution that the articles in the issue could belong to next year’s calculation as *Academic Quarter* had been authorized for that year

without problems. Positively, the Agency seems to have become more flexible through time, as it only took one email to correct another error. In the authorization list of journals and book series for 2012 *Academic Quarter* first appeared as a book series, but this was easily corrected. A sense of insecurity and a lack of confidence in the bibliometrical system have unfortunately remained among editors and contributors.

On a more positive note the effect of *Academic Quarter* at Aalborg University seems to have been that researchers use the journal to publish their new and recent research, so that the journal in itself and an awareness of it may have added to the productivity of researchers within the humanities. The fact that there is a locally based journal with a global on-line reach and with an already large international network of other contributors and reviewers has motivated researchers to consider publication of their work as a routine of it. In this sense *Academic Quarter* facilitates research work. An issue often has more than 10 local contributors, and there is a pattern of contributors returning to each new issue with new articles. This fact suggests that the announcement of a future call with its theme may have an inspirational effect on researchers, and the editorial panel of *Academic Quarter* with its international network may help suggest innovative research ideas in this way. Recently, local research groups and cross-institutional research groups with local members have suggested theme issues of the journal, e.g. humanistic leadership research and bestseller and blockbuster culture: books, cinema and television. All in all, through a journal such as *Academic Quarter*, which operates as a crank shaft functioning well within the bounds of the Danish bibliometrical system and as part of the system of performance-based research funding with a clear awareness, good or bad, of the system of calculation of points, there are indications that research productivity – or performance – has prospered under this system. (VBN-redaktionen, 2012)

#### **Condition no. 4: Strategy**

So far we have outlined three important conditions of knowledge of this publication. We have made it abundantly clear how PRFS, and BFI in particular, permeate research management, strategies, policies, and decision making from top to bottom at Aalborg University. We now turn to another major factor determining this particular issue of *Academic Quarter*, *Students' Minutes*. In the beginning of

2011, the Dean of the Humanities invited researchers to forward project proposals in response to her strategic effort at boosting “the integration of research, teaching and knowledge interaction” (Holmfeldt, 2011, p. 1) across the faculty. The idea of *Students’ Minutes* was proposed by the present editors, accepted by the dean, and allocated funds. This special issue, then, attempts to facilitate the conversion of the energy present at the interface of research and education at universities into legitimate and BFI-recognized research. The call for the issue describes it as “consisting of articles which are edited and rewritten projects and theses from our students from all study programmes at the Faculty of Humanities”, but emphasizes that the supervisor of the projects and theses becomes responsible as an active co-author, who must guarantee the scientific level of the articles:

You must make sure that they fulfill the demands of research quality and communication, as the articles are subject to normal, external and anonymous reviews. So you must tell the students about the conditions of research that their articles can receive review feedbacks based on these questions: Can the manuscript be published as it is? Can the manuscript be published with minor adjustments?, Can the manuscript be published with major adjustments?, or Should the manuscript be rejected?

It is obvious that the students whom the researchers and supervisors encourage to publish academically even under these strict conditions may feel tempted to pursue a researcher career, and this is one of the motivations for the special issue. There is also another motivation connected to the system of performance registration: “You become a co-author of the article. For your extra work, you, and your research group, earn any research points allotted by the Danish bibliometrical system.”

### **Conclusion: Much ado about nothing?**

The knowledge contained within *Students’ Minutes* is the result of several conditions that together form two shaping forces, then. First, the demand that research is converted into legitimized knowledge in terms of BFI-points and, secondly, the strategic aim that research, teaching and knowledge interaction are integrated.



In this article we have added to the literature on the effects of PBFS and BFI specifically. By focussing on their effects *within* a specific institution and organisation – areas of impacts that are usually played down in studies because a lack of empirical evidence (Sivertsen and Schneider 2012, pp. 35-36 and Aagaard and Schneider 2012, p 255) – we have shown that the impact of BFI is substantial here. Thus, we maintain that we are not dealing with a situation that can be easily summarised with reference to Shakespeare's comedy of manners which the title of Aagaard and Schneider's (2012) artikel "Stor ståhej for ingenting" (Much ado about nothing) suggests. Rather than a great fuss about something that is really insignificant, which is the meaning they isolate from the pun in Shakespeare's title, we have shown the considerable significance of BFI for the production of knowledge here at Aalborg.<sup>18</sup>

The implementation of BFI at Aalborg has resulted in a series of effects that must necessarily be described as *unintentional* since BFI was only intended to redistribute funds between universities, not within them. Whether those unintended effects – ranging from the creation of a distinction between research active and teaching active staff, to the rise and recognition of *Academic Quarter* as a new publication channel, to the development of policies that legitimise research activities excluded by the BFI-system and its attempt to focus solely on the cranks of publication as a measure of quality, and the allocation of not insignificant sums of money to the Faculty of Humanities – are positive or negative will depend very much on the eye of the beholder. For instance, if you're part of the Faculty of Humanities at Aalborg, it would be perverse not to regard the allocation of *more* funding as necessarily *more* attractive than less. On the other hand, if you believe that research within the hard sciences are greatly underfunded as does the Confederation of Danish Industry (Rønne and Eriksen 2010), you're not likely to agree.

Making available to a world-wide readership new knowledge from the interface of research and teaching, *Minutes*, the journal that you're reading, demonstrates an idealistic manner of engaging the bibliometrical system quite in the spirit of the model of the Humboldt University in a pre-Lyotardian sense, and, at the same time, suggests one of the modes of working within the performance-based research-funding system with its bibliometrical measuring tool, which will constitute an important condition of the production of knowledge in the foreseeable future.

## Notes

- 1 The recent evaluation of BFI in Denmark (Sivertsen and Schneider 2012) does not take into account points of view below the level of the faculty. Aalborg University was represented by its deans and rector. This article offers a corrective to the evaluation.
- 2 Earlier studies on impact tend to categorize a smaller amount of impacts in less systematic ways. For instance, Boston et al., 2005 concerns impact in terms of changes in funding and in terms of unintended changes in the behaviour of scientists. Basing their suggestions on British experiences with PRFS, they claim that social scientists “are likely to take the PBRF into account in determining how they allocate their time between their many and varied responsibilities. A key issue will be whether a particular activity or output is thought likely to “count” under the assessment methodology used in the Quality Evaluation. Activities deemed to “count” will become more attractive; those that do not “count” will become less attractive (inverted commas original) (p. 81). Also, they hold that PRFS are likely to influence scientists in their choices of topics of research and channels of publication in terms of what counts and what doesn’t (p. 82). Lastly, they point out that while PBRF increases “the overall volume and quality of research output” (p. 82), some of the “improvement” merely reflects the growing ability of academics to manoeuvre within the system. Dealing both with the effects of the interaction between university and industry and the introduction of PBRF systems, Aldo Geuna (2001) shows “that the short-term efficiency gains resulting from the quasi-market incentive structure [...] could be counterbalanced by long-term disadvantages arising from unintended outcomes.” (Genua, 2001, p. 607) Among the “negative unintended effects” Genua identifies are the “disproportionate incentives for short-term research” (p. 623) threatening the core university activity of engaging in long-term and potentially path-breaking research and decreasing “the probability of scientific novelty, potentially reducing the new knowledge base from which technological innovations can emerge.” (p. 623). Ben Jongbloed and Hans Vossensteyn also call attention to the “undesired side effects” of performance based funding such as such as “risk-avoiding behaviour” among academics where “only outputs that are easily attainable are produced” (2001, p. 29). Along the same lines, they mention that a focus on research volume may tempt academics “to turn out large numbers of mediocre journal publications instead of releasing fewer, more original ones.”

- 3 "Kommissionen får til opgave at (...) belyse virksomhedernes anvendelse af viden og uddannelse, samt allokeringen af disse ressourcer i økonomien."
- 4 "Skal vi tilskynde de private virksomheder til at forske og udvikle endnu mere?"
- 5 "Den bibliometriske forskningsindikator er en metode til at opgøre og måle videnskabelig publiceringsaktivitet. Publiceringskanalerne er krumtappen i forskernes publiceringsaktiviteter, og indikatoren bygger derfor på de såkaldte autoritetslister over serier (tidsskrifter, bogserier og konferenceserier) og forlag. Indikatoren indgår i finansieringsmodellen til fordeling af universiteternes nye basismidler. Desuden skal indikatoren være med til at motivere forskere inden for alle områder til at udgive i de mest anerkendte og mest prestigefyldte udgivelseskanaler."
- 6 Fully implemented in 2012, the model now distributes 25% of the new core funds according to achievement within the area of research. BFI is also going to play a role in the allocation of research money in 2013-2018 in Denmark. On the basis of an evaluation undertaken by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education in the spring of 2012, Danish Parliament has decided to continue the model according to a press statement from the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation 2012b).
- 7 The effect of BFI on individual researchers and their work environment is difficult to assess, but the workplace evaluation (APV) undertaken every three years at Aalborg University should give some indication of how individual researchers have received the model, how it has impacted on their workplace and on the relationship with their colleagues.
- 8 "Ved AAU og SDU har universiteterne innført en lokal viderefordeling av globaliseringsmidlerne til fakulteterne som delvis er basert på fordelingen av BFI-poeng. Her gir dette utgangspunkt for selvvalgt bruk a BFI til flere formål på lavere nivåer."
- 9 "aktivt på flere nivåer som en del av informasjonsgrunnlaget for videre ressursfordeling. Den enkelte forskers forskningsressurser kan således være afhengig av et minimum av forskningsaktivitet uttrykt som BFI-poeng."
- 10 "På Aalborg Universitet anvendes BFI-modellen til interne analyser og fordeling af midler til de enkelte hovedområder, og indikatoren spiller således en central rolle i universitetets forskningsledelse."
- 11 Currently (October 2012) the minimum requirement for qualifying as a researcher is the production of .25 BFI-points over a two year period.
- 12 "For at sikre fortsat ressourcetilførsel til instituttets forskningsaktiviteter i form af videnskabelige stillinger og økonomiske midler er det målet at

forøge den gennemsnitlige BFI-produktion med mindst 25 % i perioden frem til 2015.”

13“Instituttet arbejder på at forbedre medarbejdernes mulighed for forskningsmæssig fordybelse gennem sammenhængende forskningstid med henblik på at fremme produktivitet og kreativitet.”

14“Medarbejdernes opfyldelse af den langsigtede målsætning bidrager til at styrke fakulteternes økonomiske situation og skaber dermed fundamentet for fortsat udvikling af aktiviteterne på instituttet.”

15“Samtidig er det imidlertid også klart, at der herudover er andre publicerings- og forskningsaktiviteter, som det er vigtigt at anerkende betydningen af i forhold til den langsigtede udvikling af forskningen og forskningsmiljøer på instituttet. Et nyt institut-baseret system, BFI+, vil tage højde for de vigtigste mangler i det nationale BFI system.”

16<http://www.maerkk.aau.dk/>, 1.10.2012.

17<http://www.fi.dk/viden-og-politik/tal-og-analyser/den-bibliometriske-forskningsindikator/fagfaellebedommelse/fagfellebedommelse.pdf>, 1.10.2012.

18On a personal note, the authors of the present article want to make clear that they receive one BFI-point to be shared between them. Moreover, the author who is employed at the Department of Culture and Global Studies is allotted a number of BFI+points in recognition of his contribution to the article *and* his editorial work on this issue so that the production of knowledge can be integrated into the organization and its daily work. In this way, BFI+ and the research activities it recognizes as legitimate are the paradoxical consequence of the BFI-system and the attempt to focus solely on the cranks of publication as a measure of quality to the exclusion of all other research activities.

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