

# Impact assessment 2024

# The importance of assessing impact

The drive to make an impact on research, education and society is intrinsic to any higher education institution, and it is what we at the UiA School of Business and Law (hereafter, the School) aim for with all our activities. With our slogan "Regionally connected and globally engaged", we clearly define an identity according to which we strive to make a difference beyond the walls of our institution.

Reporting on impact is important for various reasons. On one hand, there is a need to justify our existence to stakeholders (e.g., financial bodies, accrediting institutions, external organizations, and students), while on the other it is a way of assessing our own progress and promoting continuous improvement.

How we assess impact is rooted in our vision and mission statement. For the strategy period 2021-2024 these are as follows:

**Vision: "Co-creation of tomorrow's knowledge"**

**Mission statement: "We educate innovative and responsible professionals and leaders with a global mindset."**

Given this framework, our focus is to contribute with strong academic and societal impact associated with the terms "innovative", "international" and "responsible". In addition to this, we strive to ensure that the knowledge created gets into use in society in general, but also that it is an important part of policy making regionally, nationally and internationally.

In our strategy, we are aiming to build a distinct profile in the Norwegian market for business education, offering a unique learning experience including closely integrated academic, pedagogical, and social offers,



cross-disciplinary approaches, as well as international and practical experiences.

We implement our mission by doing relevant research that allows us to collaborate with strong international partners, by interacting closely with businesses, organizations, public entities and civil society in our region and beyond to develop and disseminate knowledge, and by actively applying this research and new knowledge in the development of our study programs. This work is informed by our vision of co-creation of tomorrow's knowledge.

The concept of co-creation captures the mode of cooperation in many of our relationships with key stakeholders such as students, academic peers in relevant scholarly fields, businesses, and government entities. We see co-creation as the development of knowledge in close partnership with our stakeholders, and we place emphasis on creating knowledge that is useful and relevant for our partners and the wider society.

We bring several high-quality inputs to this effort, and here we can mention:

We are part of a modern and well-funded public university that offers faculty members designated time to do research and to engage with stakeholders. Our strong portfolio of faculty members has over the past years been bolstered by the recruitment of several high caliber national and international researchers. The high number of applicants to our courses ensures that the students who enter our school are bright and motivated.

Our long-standing and collaborative relations with several business and government stakeholders in our region and beyond.



# Defining impact

Impact assessments are commonly regarded as important tools to demonstrate and increase awareness of the value of academic activities. As part of numerous research communities, a provider of high-quality business education, and an engaged actor in our region there is no doubt that the scholarly, educational and outreach activities carried out at the UiA School of Business and Law have a certain impact. Through the Impact Assessment Report, we seek to both trace and visualize the impact of our activities.

As the focus on both academic and societal impact has become increasingly stronger during the past years, a common understanding of what it entails has emerged. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, provides a definition of research impact that seems representative of the understanding of the broader research community (ESRC, 2022 ):

- Academic impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes in shifting understanding and advancing scientific methods, theory, and application across and within disciplines.
- Economic and societal impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, and its benefits to individuals, organizations or nations.

The second part of the above-mentioned definition may be broadened to also include impact from educational and outreach activities. Based on this, the School

looks at how our research and other intellectual output contribute to the academic fields we operate in, as well as the difference our research, teaching and other activities make for businesses, government entities and the wider society.

When measuring the impact of scholarly, educational and outreach activities, one can draw a distinction between outputs, outcomes, and actual impact. Whereas the output (e.g., a public report, a workshop, or a peer-reviewed research article), and even the outcome (e.g., a political resolution based on a report) of activities are easy to identify, the actual impact is sometimes hard to pinpoint and measure. The activities may have direct and immediate impact, or they might prompt more long-term processes, leading impact to unfold at a later stage. We do also note that impact seldom follows a linear path from an output, and that it may be a consequence of a variety of outputs from several people's work. For this reason, we believe that we should be somewhat cautious when claiming the impact of our activities. However, we still believe that the co-creation approach, forming close relationships with external actors makes impact more likely, and we see some long-term effects from some of our long-term partnerships.

In this report, we will focus not only on impact, but also on outputs and outcomes, based on the assumption that the last two may, with time, lead to impact.

1 UK Research and Innovation, Economic and Social Research Council, website, consulted on 26 September 2023  
<https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/impact-toolkit-for-economic-and-social-sciences/defining-impact/>

## Structure of the report

The report follows a set structure where we describe how our scholarly, educational and outreach activities have had positive effects or contributed to changes or benefits for our stakeholders in areas associated with innovative, international, and responsible dimensions. Activities and visible impact from last year receive priority, but we will also use the opportunity to highlight impact stemming from activities prior to the year of reporting.

We believe that the best way to investigate the impact from our activities is to identify the interplay between these economic, social, and political processes. In addition to shorter, selected examples, we therefore present some more in-depth impact cases. In this year's

report, we present three different cases describing somewhat impact within the dimensions of Innovative, International and Responsible.

These examples are supplemented by some basic metrics related to our research, education and outreach activities. For educational data we use the university's large-scale quantitative survey of recent graduates, conducted every three years, which offers several indications on how our educational offering has had an impact on our graduates, as well as the impact they generate in their new professional roles. The impact assessment is intended to serve as a supplement to the Quality Report, which is submitted by the School of Business and Law to the university board every spring.



# Mission and impact

## Innovative

The School places strong emphasis on innovation. Around twenty percent of our faculty members have innovation or entrepreneurship as one of their main areas of specialization, and we have several centers and research groups in this field: Research center for studies of Innovation for Sustainable Transition (RIST), the Centre for Entrepreneurship, and the Centre for Crowdfunding Research, as well as strong research groups on Alternative Finance and Behavioral Economics. The School offers a variety of courses in innovation and entrepreneurship both at the bachelor's and master's level.

### Examples of innovative activities

#### **New Master's Program in Management and Business Development**

Throughout 2024, the new international Master in Management and Business Development has been developed with the intention of attracting more international students but also to offer graduating marketing students at the bachelor level a more adequate program on the master's level. In alignment with our international strategic goals, this program will give international students the opportunity to complete a full degree at our school. The program is also offered as a part time program with a separate admission process, to also include a more flexible set up. This is the first time the school has introduced a part time master's program, based upon the knowledge that many of our full-time master students have full time jobs and are in fact completing their masters as an additional workload for reasons like student finance or remote locations. According to professor and Study Program Manager, Kalanit Efrat, national applicants say that this program has attracted them because of the practice-oriented focus it offers compared to other programs. She further points out that it appears that the emphasis of business development and entrepreneurial perspective, with its focus on change factors within organizations, also makes this program stand out.

#### **Research on student use of MyLab**

At the Department of Finance and Economics, three of our faculty members have been working on a research study of their own students using the MyLab system, which is used as the teaching and learning platform throughout several business courses. They undertook a field experiment involving two information feedback interventions in two of our economics courses. The first intervention provided, treated students with information on the association between study time and final grade inspired by the paper of Rury and Carrell (2023). Primed with this information, students in the treatment group received a second treatment informing them on their own study time and the class-average study time on an online learning platform.

Using the entire sample, Eirin Mølland and her colleagues found that the first treatment did not affect time use in the subsequent two-week period. This might be because the treatment has no effect, or because opposing effects across different subgroups neutralize each other. When they focused on the students with high-school GPA below median, a strong effect on time-use was detected. The second treatment increased average time use in the subsequent two-week period for the entire sample and across all subgroup analysis. The novelty of the main intervention, the second treatment, was that the treated students get information on how much effort, i.e. time-use on the online learning platform, they have put in compared to the class average, and not on their relative performance. Building on the competitiveness model in Azmat and Iriberry (2010), Dobrescu et al. (2021) and Azmat et al. (2019) they have presented a theoretical model to analyze the possible mechanisms in the second treatment.



### Impact case on Innovative: Internship in Vesterålen

In 2024, a new innovative way of arranging internships for our business students have been tested and developed in a collaboration between the UiA CoLAB – a unit in the university Research and Innovation Department, and several businesses, amongst them a company founded by two of our graduates in the Shift master's program. The collaboration came about when graduates Benjamin and Jørgen reached out to the School, interested in creating something that they envisaged for later graduates. The objective of this pilot is to create an arena for co-creation and innovation for the Agder region by establishing a creative, social space where external partners, students, and staff meet across disciplines, faculties, and institutions to collaborate on societal challenges. The pilot was offered to students at the School and the Faculty of Engineering and Science. However, as project lead, Stine Øyna explains, this internship is suitable for all master students, across all subjects.

The first kick-off meeting took place in August, where emphasis was put on design thinking – both theoretically and from a practical perspective. This gathering also prepared the students for the trip to Vesterålen in the north of Norway, and what challenges and tasks that awaited there. In October, the students travelled to Vesterålen to work with local businesses, which laid out various student assignments as the starting point for the development of innovative solutions, using design methods. Along the way, CoLAB and partners supported the students through the internship with counselling and guidance until the end of the internship period in December, when they presented their work back at the UiA campus, whereas the cooperative partners joined digitally. The presentations and a written term paper report resulted in valuable feedback on how the students may take these projects further.

What has come out of this? In addition to obtaining credits, the students gain valuable off-campus experience with project management, design thinking, connection to practice and interdisciplinary work. The school benefits from additional internships, collaborations with other universities and industry, an increased curriculum relevance to working life - and this type of internship proves to entail a low administrative workload. The teaching syllabus was taken from an already existing, interdisciplinary course called SV-420, Co-creation and theory in practice, a course established in line with the strategy, mission and vision of the university.

As this type of pilot internship differs from the ordinary placement internship, there was no “cannibalization” of the ordinary application pool. Where the ordinary internship arrangement offers a traditional work training period, the internship in Vesterålen was more targeted at project work and consultancy training. As the consultancy industry is known to be popular as an aspirational career path among our graduates, this new internship caters to the demand for this type of practical experience and therefore may have direct impact on graduates' career possibilities.



# International

The School emphasizes international dimensions, where most of our staff conduct research with international relevance. Most researchers collaborate with international partners, and we publish most of our work through international channels.

It can be mentioned that a considerable share of our activities is directed at emerging markets, and that one area of thought leadership at the School is "microfinance and social entrepreneurship in emerging markets". In addition to studying management, finance, and economics in an emerging market context, we educate students from emerging markets, and we collaborate with prominent educational and research institutions in these markets.

## Examples of international activities

### Responsible use of digital cash-based assistance in refugee crises (DigCBA)

DigCBA is a research project that contributes to the responsible use of digital CBA, "cash-based assistance" in the refugee crisis. As digital technology, including mobile money, electronic vouchers, electronic cash, and recently blockchain-based systems, is transforming CBA, the technology has the potential to increase access to financial resources and services during times of crisis while increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of assistance. The research project was rewarded 10,3 million Norwegian Kroner by the Norwegian Research Council of Norway.

DigCBA aims to support the selection and the use of the most feasible and suitable digital technology for delivering CBA in the refugee crisis. The project, which concluded in 2024, attempted to correlate different potential technologies with:

- First, the contextual characteristics of refugee locations (for example, data infrastructure conditions) and the connection to the refugees' preferences, their technological access and digital literacy
- Second, the relative readiness and acceptance of CBA actors (such as donors, humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) to adopt, implement and use the technology in target locations.

Most refugees live in environments where they have access to markets and services in the same way that local communities do. Providing refugees with CBA enables them to fulfil their needs in a dignified manner

and contributes to the local economy. The objective was to develop a set of evidence-based frameworks to assess the contextual characteristics, evaluate the readiness of actors and prioritize technologies for CBA. It takes a stakeholder-centered approach focusing on the needs of beneficiaries, policymakers and business partners. DigCBA is led and coordinated by our associate professor Hossein Baharmand, in collaboration with NTNU, Hanken School of Economics, WWU Munster, and Makerere University Business School. Hossein's research explores the intersection of technology and operations management, with a particular focus on the context of humanitarian aid. He is also part of the prioritized university multidisciplinary research group CIEM – Centre for Integrated Emergency Management, which conducts research on how technological innovation can improve emergency preparedness and management.

### SU-CCESS – Sustainable Communities & Crowdfunding Education Support – an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership

This Erasmus project aims to promote civic engagement within communities and create a sense of shared responsibility toward achieving sustainable development goals. Our team of researchers at the Research Centre for Crowdfunding, led by prof. Rotem Shneor, is a project partner. The project is structured around three thematic pillars - sustainability, civic action and crowdfunding. The project aims to raise awareness and promote sustainability within communities, while focusing on empowering communities to take an active role in achieving sustainability goals and promote the responsible use of civic crowdfunding.

In SU-CCES! three core activities are planned:

- A literature review with focus interviews on the role of civic crowdfunding in social engagement
- The development of pedagogical tools i.e., the creation of educational materials, training programs, and gamification
- The implementation of the training programs and pedagogical tools, which involves testing and implementing the developed tools and programs in real-world settings

The project is led by the IMC Krems University of Applied Sciences in Austria and be conducted in collaboration with a cross-disciplinary team from the University of Agder's School of Business and Law (Norway), University of Gdansk (Poland), Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Romania), BISER Baltic

Institute of Regional and Economic Affairs (Poland), and the IED Institute of Entrepreneurship Development (Greece).

### Impact case on International: Use of Cotutelles agreements

In 2024, the School's PhD cotutelle journey reaches ten years of international collaboration.

We have reflected on the development of our PhD cotutelle agreements at the School of Business and Law. A cotutelle is a bilateral agreement between two institutions for the joint supervision of a PhD candidate, with one supervisor at each institution. While not a formal part of the PhD program, it is highly desirable for candidates to participate in a cotutelle arrangement.

Cotutelle agreements play a vital role in internationalization strategies, fostering strategic partnerships and enhancing global collaboration. One notable success story is our partnership with RMIT, where two candidates participated in cotutelle programs in 2018 and 2021, leading to the initiation of EU-funded projects such as OpenInnoTrain and Dream+Plan. Cotutelle arrangements also offer significant benefits to candidates, including financial synergies that enable international mobility without extra costs. As of 2024, 13 out of our 45 PhD candidates (35%) are part of a cotutelle agreement. Through this model, candidates bring valuable insights and experiences from their home institutions, enriching our academic environment and supporting "internationalization at home."

Each cotutelle candidate follows an individualized study plan, which indeed involves an additional administrative

workload. However, the benefits of these agreements are highly valued, and our goal is therefore to further increase the number of cotutelle agreements with the aim of reaching 20 agreements per cohort. It is nevertheless important to find a balance as clustering candidates into a single cohort will present challenges. But, expanding cotutelle participation can also contribute to higher publication rates among faculty supervisors, and encourage collaborative research output. Additionally, cotutelle arrangements can also be a driver in promoting interdisciplinary research, leveraging the diverse backgrounds of supervisors.

Our cotutelle partnerships span various fields, including finance, innovation, organizational culture, and international business. Many of these agreements align with our strategic focus on thought leadership, reinforcing our commitment to staying globally connected. In 2024, the 500th defense held at the University of Agder, was in fact a cotutelle candidate from the Agder School of Business and Law, which symbolically demonstrates how the cotutelle agreement has had an impact in strengthening the university PhD program. During 2024, we have had 18 active cotutelle agreements at the School.



# Responsible

The School emphasizes themes associated with responsibility. We work with and understand responsibility in broad terms and define it as a much wider concept than sustainability. It includes, among other things, how businesses relate to and uphold their obligations vis-à-vis society, sustainability and the way climate change and resource scarcity matter for business, prudent and accurate management accounting, and sound financial investment strategies. Furthermore, our understanding includes the way businesses and citizens act responsibly by understanding and upholding national and international law. Using this broad conceptualization, we find that over one third of our faculty members work on responsibility related issues. We have a master's program in Accounting and Auditing, both a bachelor's and master's program in Law, a joint master's program in Sustainability Management in partnership with Gadjah Mada University and the ASEAN University Network, several executive education courses related to sustainability and considerable emphasis on ethics and sustainability across all our study programs.

## Examples of responsible activities

### DREAM+PLAN

Tor Helge Aas, who serves as a Full Professor at the School of Business and Law at the University of Agder and as the Director of the Executive MBA study program, is one of the senior supervisors in DREAM+PLAN, a project coordinated by RMIT University and co-funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation program. Prof. Aas' research field is innovation management, and his research concentrates on topics such as the organizational effects of innovation, innovation processes and capabilities, collaboration for innovation and management control of innovation. Regarding the project, he explains: "The EU's ambition is a zero-emissions society. Achieving this requires research from many different perspectives, and we will contribute with our expertise in innovation and management"

According to Professor Anne-Laure Mention, Chief Investigator & Academic Lead & Director at the Global Business Innovation Enabling Impact Platform at RMIT, "DREAM+PLAN will recruit early career researchers who will be united by a mission to create a positive impact towards a more sustainable, fair, inclusive, and thriving planet for future generations. Their research will be driven by the ability to withstand and recover from disruptions, the ability to repair or rehabilitate degraded ecosystems, and regeneration - fostering the renewal,

revitalization and replenishment of ecosystems and communities to address key societal challenges. Each successful candidate will benefit from DREAM+PLAN's cutting-edge training grounded in best practice, which will include both scientific training as well as the development of transferable skills to open up diverse career pathways."

Professor Tor Helge Aas will be supervising two doctoral research fellows. Candidates pursuing their doctorates through the initiative will also receive a double degree, as they must complete at least one year at a partner university. UiA collaborates with RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. "The exact topic of their doctorates hasn't been predefined. However, we have created some overarching project outlines that the candidates can choose from. All projects will focus on how businesses can transition to become more sustainable," says Aas.

### Transformational Leadership - a new executive module for industry

As part of our executive education offer, a new set of modules in transformational leadership had its first students enrolled in the fall of 2024, led and taught by Professor Hans Christian G. Johnsen and Associate Professor Stina Torjesen – supported by the Research Centre for studies of Innovation for Sustainable Transition, RIST. These four modules, developed in collaboration with the EYDE cluster, are designed to educate business leaders in how to tackle new challenges in industry and business caused by constant development of technology, increasing sustainability requirements, as well as international regulatory frameworks. The modules can be taken separately or as a full package, awarding the students with ECTS credits through an examination. The leadership package is targeted at a wide spectrum of industry leaders, ranging from frontline leaders to top management, and offers continuous enrolment. Modules one and two were arranged at local businesses within different industries, whereas modules three and four were held at campus.

### Impact case on Responsible: BLUEREV – Revitalizing the blue economy and local communities

Researchers from the School of Business and Law at the University of Agder have taken a leadership role in the Work Package 4 (WP4) of the EU Horizon Project BlueRev by developing sustainable business models for the blue bioeconomy. By integrating Design Thinking (DT) with the Sustainable Business Model Canvas (SBMC), the team from the Department of

Management and Innovation has been able to facilitate the creation of actionable and context-sensitive models that address regional challenges. These methodologies empower stakeholders to work together in crafting innovative, practical, and sustainable solutions, ultimately contributing to broader systemic sustainability transitions.

Several best practice business models have been identified in fish by-product valorization across pilot regions. In Denmark, an innovative approach is the development of an Omega-3 enriched functional beverage targeted at the Chinese market. Inspired by the dairy industry's product diversification, this model transforms fish processing waste into a high-value, consumer-friendly product that supports the circular economy while generating local employment and benefiting public health. In Greenland, small-scale producers are pioneering the conversion of fish waste into high-value pet food. Drawing inspiration from successful practices in the Faroe Islands, this initiative addresses the challenge of managing 45,000 tons of unprocessed fish waste each year by empowering local communities with sustainable practices. Estonia's model leverages the abundant red algae, *Furcellaria lumbricalis*, to create products for the nutraceutical, cosmetic, and bioplastics sectors. This approach not only promotes full resource utilization with a low ecological footprint but also supports job creation in traditional harvesting and modern product innovation. In Sicily, the revitalization of a traditional Mediterranean product known as *ritunnu salatu*, made from *menola* (*Spicara smaris*), exemplifies how cultural heritage and modern technology can merge to reduce food waste, support local fishers, and create new economic opportunities.

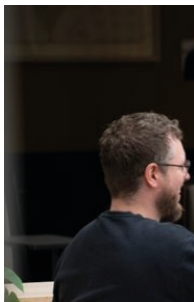
Collectively, these initiatives illustrate how aligning sustainability with market potential can drive innovation, support circular economic practices, and generate substantial social impact. By gathering detailed insights through stakeholder engagement and collaborative workshops, the UiA team is not only laying the groundwork for practical, sustainable business models but also devising best practice guidelines that may serve as blueprints far beyond the pilot regions. These efforts are paving the way for local economic growth, enhanced governance structures, and community revitalization based on the full utilization of available resources. The ongoing dialogue between industry, academia, and local communities is shaping a future where sustainable use of fish by-products, and the

innovative solutions they inspire, become a cornerstone for economic resilience and environmental stewardship.

The UiA team has committed significant efforts to analyze and synthesize baseline data with the aim of uncovering sustainable business opportunities within the blue bioeconomy across various pilot regions. This deep-dive process involved examining a range of potential business ideas to assess their viability for building sustainable models. In doing so, the team evaluated critical factors, including customer segments, value propositions, distribution channels, resource availability, cost structures, revenue streams, and key partnerships, while also considering eco-social impacts. These analyses have revealed both opportunities and challenges in transforming traditional bioeconomy into innovative, sustainable ventures.

Adding to these initial insights, two co-creation workshops were organized in 2024 by Food & Bio Cluster Denmark in Aalborg (Denmark) and Nuuk (Greenland), where representatives from the fishing industry, food companies, organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders came together for in-depth dialogues. These workshops generated rich conversations that examined challenges and brainstormed solutions from diverse perspectives. In Greenland, participants discussed issues such as logistical hurdles, insufficient production facilities, and labor shortages, questioning whether there is enough raw material (side streams) to justify investments in processing equipment. There was also a debate on whether processing practices should be modified from the outset to produce fewer side streams, and if reducing overall output would meet customer expectations. In Aalborg, discussions centered on understanding the varied uses of side streams in distant export markets. Participants recognized that a clear and detailed description of individual side streams is essential to assess their value, given that different markets have unique preferences and traditional uses.

These dynamic workshops not only sparked creative debates but also led to the formation of three groups that each proposed new products based on predetermined parameters. The process demonstrated the power of bringing together people with diverse skills, as their collaboration quickly led to innovative ideas that could be built upon in new market contexts. This collaborative spirit is at the heart of our research team's broader mission.



# Alumni portrait

## Alumni Activities

The School of Business and Law continuously emphasizes increasing the focus on Alumni activities, with yearly gatherings in both Oslo (January/February) and Kristiansand (May/June). Both current and former students are showing their interest and turning up to the alumni events, which are of immense importance to the School. However, we see the need to further improve the work to engage even more of the former graduated alumni to join the network. As of today, the School has more than 1600 members of the Alumni network, and there is ongoing work to both increase and strengthen this network.

**You chose to apply for and complete a Master's Degree in International Business at the School of Business and Law at the University of Agder, graduating in 2024 - can you elaborate on your choice to do this degree and what impact you think it has had on your time after graduating?**

My decision to apply for the Master's in International Business at UiA was initially influenced by personal circumstances that brought me to Norway and came together rather quickly. Ultimately, it opened the door to pursue both personal and academic goals, and looking back, I'm very happy with the choice I made.

UiA offers a blend of characteristics that create a special atmosphere, one of which is the size of both the city and the faculty. Being smaller compared to larger universities makes for a more personal and engaging environment. You can build close relationships with professors, staff, and fellow students, while learning in a very hands-on way. The network I built is something I truly value and continue to benefit from to this day, so I would place that at the forefront of the impact UiA had on me. This is a big part of what makes the learning at UiA effective, you can have good contact with the faculty and professors, all you must do is knock on the door or send an email and you get a quick response with a room for follow up. What also stood out to me was the practical orientation of the learning, which made it meaningful during the program and highly useful after graduation.

It's often said that Norwegians are more reserved and that it can be harder to connect with people. And while I believe that this is true to some extent, the smaller city vibe of Kristiansand makes it easier to meet and engage with others. The university has an active office for international students that organizes events and even offers Norwegian language courses.

**How would you describe the student experience at our school and campus, and what are the positives you would like to highlight from studying at our business school and university?**

Coming from Prague, my first impression of Kristiansand was that it felt quite small. However, after a while, I really started to appreciate it and, in many ways, even preferred it. Kristiansand has everything you may need, but at the same time, it offers a more relaxed and accessible lifestyle, and much of the city is within walking distance. The UiA campus itself is modern, well-equipped, and welcoming. It has a good cafeteria, great study areas, places to hang out with friends, and even nice dormitories nearby. One of the absolute highlights is the spring and summer season when Kristiansand transforms completely, becoming vibrant, full of life, and rich with outdoor activities.

While I wasn't part of a student union, I was involved in other ways such as through the CrossFit gym and community in Kristiansand, made a great friend group with my classmates, and worked part-time both at PwC and as a research/teaching assistant at the business

## Jan Kerbach

Master's Program in International Business

Current Position: PhD Candidate, University of Bergen



school. The size of the university and the way it works became even more visible to me when I took on a student representative role. Through regular meetings with the faculty, it was clear that they cared about student input, and real changes were made based on student feedback. I believe this proactive environment taught me valuable lessons that I have carried into life after graduation, and most importantly, the confidence to speak up and contribute when appropriate. The program also strengthened my international outlook, critical thinking, and ability to work across cultures, which are skills that continue to shape my professional path today.

### **To what extent do you believe that this master's program has had an impact on your choices and career opportunities going forward?**

As for my work experience, throughout my studies I worked part-time as a risk management consultant at PwC, in a team providing risk expertise and tools to banks and financial institutions. In addition, during my master's studies at UiA, I worked as a research assistant with Professor Kalanit Efrat, focusing on Born Globals and entrepreneurial ecosystems in small and open economies, and served as a teaching assistant for the Entrepreneurship and Innovation course led by Professor August Jr. Kjerland. In my last semester of the program, I also worked part-time with a venture capital firm based in Tanzania, operating in the emerging markets of Southeast Africa. After graduating in 2024, I continued working as a risk management consultant in the Financial Services Risk Advisory team at PwC. My latest career development is closely connected to the master's thesis I wrote together with Sarah

Baumgärtner, under the supervision of Professor Rafael Heinzlmann. Our research explored the implications of New Work adoption, a flexible and autonomous way of working, on the design and use of Management Control Systems, where traditional preconditions typically include visibility and presence, in the context of Norwegian startup settings. This ties back to where I first mentioned I benefit from UiA's network until today as with Professor Heinzlmann we continue exploring the topic in pursuit of publishing as an article in a journal. In addition, he helped me explore other research topics in this area and guided me through the application process for PhD programs, leading to my admission to a doctoral position at the Norwegian School of Economics in Bergen.

I believe this Master's program has had a significant impact on both my career opportunities and personal development. The two-year structure, with one year of core mandatory courses, followed by a semester of electives or a semester abroad, and finally a semester of writing the master's thesis, offers a nice framework while also providing flexibility to tailor your own path. Another strength of the program is that it equips students with critical thinking skills and the ability to collaborate.

My one piece of advice for future students is to be proactive and curious, especially in today's competitive job market in Norway. Make the most of the opportunities around you, whether that's through internships, research projects, student initiatives, or simply getting to know people both within and outside your major. In my experience, it's these practical experiences that make the difference and can give you an edge when transitioning from university to the workplace.

# Key parameters

In this section, we present some basic metrics and tables that illustrate impact stemming from our core activities, research, education, and outreach. Some of these metrics are direct evidence of impact, while others are more indirect. Some metrics demonstrate

links and contact with key stakeholders, strengthening the possibility of generating positive effects on society.

We start by providing an overview of impact on scholarly communities before we present metrics related to educational impact and outreach.

## Impact from scholarly activities

In academia, there still is high emphasis on publications in high ranked journals and citations. One could therefore argue that the School's publications in high impact journals on level 3 and 4 in the Academic Journal Guide (AJG), as well as at level 2 in the Norwegian Cristin system, represent a scientific impact. In turn, such publications might also lead to societal impact, either by utilization of knowledge directly into various activities or by being important input to policy making, or by other means.

### Research output and quality

One way to illustrate the quantity of the School's research is to look at the average number of yearly publications per employee (converted to the equivalent of full-time faculty FTE). This is a basic indication that our research gets published and, therefore, contributes to academic communities. We also present numbers on peer-reviewed journal articles in more detail, including an overview of the top-tier journal articles at the AJG list and in the Cristin system, indicating high quality. We start with a brief description of the AJG and Cristin.

### The AJG list

Most high calibre business schools use the Chartered Association of Business Schools' Academic Journal Guide (AJG) as their reference. The AJG is a guide to the range and quality of journals in which business and management academics publish their research, with a range from 1 to 4\*, with level 3, 4 and 4\* defined as high quality publications.

### The Cristin system

Cristin is the research classification system used in the Nordic countries. Typically journals such as Journal of International Business Studies, International Business Review, and Journal of Business Research are listed at the highest level, i.e., level 2, along-side high-ranking journals from other fields, including for example Science and Nature. It is important to display the results in the Cristin system for two reasons: While the AJG list by and large captures well which journals are particularly relevant for our institution, there are still some themes that are not well covered in the AJG list, especially law related subjects. Moreover, the Ministry of Education measures the School's performance in the Cristin system, where our score in Cristin has had an impact on future government funding. We therefore need to keep track of, and reward, a strong performance on the Cristin ranking.

The table below presents the development in publications from 2019 to 2023, where the overall result is an increase in both quantity and quality over these years. Over the last years, the School of Business and Law has been among the top three schools with the highest number of publication points per FTE, and the last three last years the highest. Also, the quality measured by AJG and Christin has increased over the years, and in 2023 30,5% of the School's publications were at Level 2 in Christin and 39% of the journal articles were on level 3, 4 or 4\* at the AJG list. These results are part of a long-term strategy to increase the amount and quality of research, including facilitation of research environment and infrastructure to enhance research activities among existing staff, but also recruitment of new scholars.

## Research output 2017-2021

|                                                    | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Output</b>                                      |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Publication points (total) <sup>2</sup>            | 111,13 | 105,21 | 166,59 | 146,93 | 162,36 | 118,94 |
| Publication points per full time faculty (FTE)     | 1,30   | 1,23   | 1,78   | 1,61   | 1,76   | 1,49   |
| Total number of scholarly publications             | 89     | 118    | 199    | 166    | 153    | 129    |
| Total number of journal articles                   | 72     | 86     | 179    | 151    | 141    | 114    |
| Journal articles (% of total no. of publications)  | 81%    | 69,2%  | 90%    | 91%    | 92,2%  | 88,3%  |
| % of journal articles at level 1 in Cristin system | 78%    | 92%    | 83%    | 76%    | 69,5%  | 80%    |
| % of journal articles at level 2 in Cristin system | 22%    | 8%     | 17%    | 24%    | 30,5%  | 20%    |
| % of journal articles in AJG (ABS)                 | 65%    | 62%    | 75%    | 74%    | 64,5%  | 78%    |
| % of journal articles at AJG level 3/4/4*          | 28%    | 16%    | 35%    | 38%    | 39%    | 37,7%  |

Over the latest years, the School has maintained a steady increase in the number of publications in recognized scientific journals, as well as anthologies published by renowned national and international publishers. The quality of our research measured by publication points is evaluated as strong in 2024. Recognizing the natural fluctuations in publication activity in academia is essential, and the fact that publications in fact represent the culmination of multiple years of work emphasizes the need to look at the longer-term trends and averages. This year represents a lower number of publications; however, the level of quality is higher than in previous years. Some of our researchers are now focusing on publishing more articles in 4 and 4\* AJG-listed journals, which takes more time to develop.

The number of publication points per academic full-time equivalent (FTE) represents one of the former national performance indicators established by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The School of Business and Law at the University of Agder has consistently ranked at the top in terms of publication points per academic FTE over the past four years, compared to other Norwegian business schools with which meaningful comparisons can be made. (University of Agder Quality Report, 2024). Initiated in 2004, the Centre for Research on Social Enterprises and Microfinance (CERSEM) founded at UiA and led by Prof. Roy Mersland, has become one of Europe's foremost research centers in Microfinance and Social Enterprises. This status is further advanced by close collaboration between the School and Centre for European Research in Microfinance (CERMi) at Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management (at Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB). CERSEM has produced a significant number of publications

in the area and has contributed to the education of approximately 30 PhD candidates in years 2012-2024, many of them from Africa. Around 80 percent of the intellectual contributions produced by CERSEM have been in PRJs at level 3-4 in AJG-ranked journals and/or Cristin level 2 journals. Prof. Mersland currently holds a position amongst the top 10 global scholars in the specialized fields of 'Hybrid Organizations' and 'Microfinance,' as well as nr. 1 out of 6000 researchers in Microfinance in ScholarGPS (2024), based on number of qualifications and how often he is cited. He has also contributed to shifting microfinance studies from the niche area of development economics studies to the broader scope of studies in finance and business management. Publications are PRJs in Banking and Finance, Journal of World Business, Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice, and the Journal of Management Studies.

Looking at the AJG level 4 and 3 journals; Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of World Business, International Business Review, and Journal of International Management, the School has published 24 articles from 2010 until 2023. Compared with other Norwegian business schools; NHH published 10, BI 46, and NTNU 5 articles in these journals and this period (out of 90 from Norwegian institutions). From this selection, the School has 27% of the publications, and according to this measure it is among top two in the field. From this, one could argue that the School has a national position in the field of International Business, and it also has an international position in the same field. In addition, the School has several publications in the level 3 journal Management International Review.

<sup>2</sup> The following categories of publications are included: Journal articles, anthology articles, monographs. All the School's departments are included, also the Department of Law

# Impact from educational activities

## Nordic Case Challenge 2024

UiA Case Club, along with five other case clubs, is part of the founder committee of the Nordic Case Challenge (NCC), an invitational business case competition, founded in 2022 by six Nordic universities. The NCC gathers students from Nordic business schools to solve real-life business cases from companies focusing on innovation and sustainability. The competition aims to cultivate core business skills like complex problem-solving, innovative thinking, and data-driven approaches by challenging teams to develop solutions within a tight timeframe.

In April 2024, the competition was hosted by Tampere University, Finland. The competition included two case rounds, with the first focusing on sustainability in the Vietnamese forestry industry and the second on integrating AI into autonomous drones by the Finnish tech company Unikie. In addition to this, our case club also competed in the NHH International Case Competition in Bergen, Norway.

## Kandidatundersøkelsen 2022

A large share of the School's impact on business and society comes from our graduates. We want our graduates to draw on and apply the advanced skills they have acquired as part of their education at our school

in jobs that are relevant to their education. Moreover, our mission compels us to stimulate the growth of responsible professionals with a global mindset and an innovative attitude.

UiA commissions a large survey every third year where graduates respond to a broad range of questions about their education and their subsequent career. The next survey will be in 2025, where we have pushed for more questions regarding international exposure for our students and graduates, and specifically graduate recruitment internationally.

## PhD public defenses in 2024

The School of Business and Law has a robust PhD program with intake in cohorts and students from a variety of countries. The School has some internally funded and some externally funded PhD students, in addition to a substantial number of Cotutelle-agreements in collaboration with other business schools. On average, the School continuously has approximately 40 PhD students in the program and in 2024 ten of these PhD students defended their thesis.

| Candidate's name                | Dissertation title                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nooria Yari                     | Cross Cultural Competencies and Diversity in International Teams: A Comprehensive Exploration                            |
| Yan Zhang                       | The impact of free cash flow on performance in microfinance institutions and its moderators                              |
| Daniel Berliner                 | Essays on Investors' Decision-Making in Equity-Based Crowdfunding                                                        |
| Maria Magdalena Aguilar Velasco | Navigating the Dark Side of Projectification: Strategies and Resources Shaping the Overall Well-being of Project Workers |
| Emelie Langemyr Eriksen         | Towards New Avenues for Regional Industries: A Study on Regional Industrial Restructuring                                |
| Sebastian Kussl                 | From Asphalt to Algorithms: Digital Transformation in Road Construction                                                  |
| Terese Birkeland                | European Commission Battery Policy-Making                                                                                |
| Anaëlle Petre                   | Essay on financial inclusion: the case of informal savings groups                                                        |
| Francesco Perotti               | Collaborate or Perish: Harnessing Strategic Drivers to Navigate the Circular Economy Transition                          |
| Sachin Kumar Raut               | Adaptive Performance and Conflict Management in Multicultural Teams                                                      |

# Impact from outreach activities

The School puts great emphasis on external activities, both to disseminate research and spread knowledge, but also to connect well with the outside world to ensure relevance in what we do. A part of this outreach is to arrange international conferences but also taking part in public debates and being active in media are important elements in the outreach activities.

## Examples of outreach activities

### Hybrid work and creativity

New research reveals that while digital tools can enhance individual creativity, they may simultaneously weaken relationships and collective idea generation. Through his PhD project, Øystein Tønnessen explored how flexible work arrangements, particularly remote and hybrid work, affect collaboration, creativity, and the sharing of knowledge in the workplace. Through 2024, Øystein has continuously appeared in the media giving comments on hybrid ways of working. Tønnessen is an Associate Professor and researcher at the School of Business and Law at the University of Agder (UiA), as well as a consultant at Egde Consulting. Previously, he was an industrial PhD candidate through a collaboration between Egde Consulting and the School. In 2023, he defended his doctoral dissertation titled Creativity in Remote and Hybrid Work Environments. His key findings and management food for thought in terms of management were:

- Physical meetings are crucial during the early stages of creative processes
- Hybrid meetings work best when the team is already established
- Digital platforms can improve focus and individual idea development but may hinder informal, creative interactions

Tønnessen concluded that digital transformation must balance employees' needs for meaning, belonging, autonomy, and sustainable work practices. Organizations that achieve this balance will ultimately be better equipped to face future challenges. The emphasis on the importance of facilitating deliberate meeting structures, foster psychological safety and create strong platforms for sharing and connecting still applies—even in a hybrid work environment. Leaders should also remain curious, experiment, and focus on the needs of both employees and the organization. It's all about finding a harmonious balance between physical and digital collaboration.

### Case Club 2024: UIA case club at NHH International Case Club Competition in October 2024

UIA Case Club, consisting of four business students from our school, travelled to Bergen to participate with 14 other international case clubs from all over the world. The cases they were faced with involved strategic challenges within international company marketing and digital transformation. The students reported back that they were grateful for the valuable experience and the chance to network with others. NHH, arranging the event, explains how these types of meetings offer students an exclusive international experience with the possibility of gaining a completely new perspective. Also, working through real life business scenarios means contributing to impactful, real strategic solutions, with a great opportunity to experience success as a team effort and test leadership capabilities.

### FORTHEM Entrepreneurship summer school in Finland 2-6th of September

The 2024 annual summer school in within the FORTHEM alliance was hosted by the university of Jyväskylä, and our professor Bjørn-Tore Flåten and Associate Professor Prince Baah-Peprah, together with other lectures taught a class of 25 students from 9 alliance universities on the topic of lean startups. The core goal of the practical and intensive one week course was to gain increased understanding of how emergent innovations translate into commercial reality and might transform society. The students worked in teams to analyze an opportunity and create a business model to solve a market-based problem.

### First Volume of the Journal of Alternative Finance Out

The newly minted Alternative Finance Research Center has also hosted several research partners from the University of Gdansk (Poland), IMC University of Applied Sciences (Austria), Audencia Business School (France), and University of Strathclyde (UK) for series of meetings concerning joint projects and co-authored papers. Current projects include cross-country studies on Mapping Public Sentiments towards the concept of Civic Crowdfunding, antecedents and implications of Crowdfunding awareness, and the development of Crowdfunding Literacy Scale.

### EFMA and EURAM secured for 2026

In the latter part of the year, the School was able to secure the approval to arrange two large conferences. European Financial Management Association (EFMA) and European Academy of Management (EURAM), are both scheduled for June 2026. EURAM forecasts 2000 participants and will be the biggest conference the School has arranged. The application for EURAM was sent in by the institute of Management and Innovation and professor Kalanit Efrat. Both these conferences are of strategic importance for the School.

### Prof. Roy Mersland deemed most productive researcher within the field of microfinance (Beg, K., Shajar, S. N., Ahmad, M. M., & Faiyyaz, A. G., 2024)

The ranking is done by ScholarGPS, which has ranked over 6000 researchers in the field of microfinance. This ranking is based on the number of publications, but also the quality through a so-called H index, measuring the number of citations. The field of microfinance is the largest bank market worldwide in terms of clients and Professor Mersland is especially devoted to disseminating knowledge outside the typical western research environment, and particularly to African students at bachelor and master level, studying microfinance.

### Intellectual Property Workshop collaboration

From our Department of Law, Assistant Professor Siri Helen Egeland arranged a workshop together with co-author Enrico Bonadio at the City Law School, City University London on the 22nd of July on Artificial Intelligence and Intellectual Property. Egeland has always been interested in intellectual property law and is currently working on a PhD project focusing on copyright, visual art and technology.

### Best Paper Awards

Professor Rotem Shneor and Associate Professor Prince Baah-Pepurah won the Best Paper Award at the SSONEBB Business and Society SIG, EURAM 2024. Prof. Shneor also won the Best Paper Award at the International conference on Alternative Finance held in Austria.



### A selection of media appearances as examples:

- Øystein Tønnesen was featured in the management journal "Ledernytt" in an article about his PhD thesis topic hybrid work and creativity
- Prof. Ellen Katrine Nyhus talks about the 2024 'Lille norske leksikon' and her engagement for children and youngsters to learn more about economy and finance on the radio in Sørlandssendinga (27.01.2025)
- Prof. Ellen Katrine Nyhus contributes to an online news article on Christmas gift shopping and how many people feel compelled to purchase expensive gifts above their budgets (<https://www.forskning.no/finans-jul-penger/mange-foler-at-de-ma-kjope-julegaver-de-ikke-har-rad-til/2432763>)
- Prof. Jon P. Knudsen wrote a chronicle on the future of our region Agder in the regional newspaper Fædrelandsvennen (<https://www.fvn.no/mening/kronikk/i/gw4x90/nye-felles-maal-for-agder>)
- Associate professor Tor Geir Kvinen comments on a local news story on Nrk.no ([https://www.nrk.no/sorlandet/vipers-sjokket\\_-\\_overraskende-at-belopet-er-sa-stort-117085522](https://www.nrk.no/sorlandet/vipers-sjokket_-_overraskende-at-belopet-er-sa-stort-117085522))
- Anders Ørtenblad advocates the need to remove letter grades at university level in an article in Khrono: <https://www.khrono.no/det-er-pa-hoy-tid-a-vurdere-a-droppe-karakterer/895071>
- Prof. John A Hunnes writes about interest cuts in a chronicle in Fædrelandsvennen (<https://www.fvn.no/mening/kronikk/i/alj2OE/det-blir-ikke-rentekutt-denne-gangen-heller>)
- Associate Professor Hossein Baharmand published a chronicle on "A nuanced approach to assessing aid" in the trade magazine Panorama Nyheter: <https://www.panoramanyheter.no/fungererbistand/nyansert-tilnaerming-for-a-vurdere-bistand-ja-takk/372199>
- Prof. Trond Randøy writes about board membership in the leading national business newspaper Dagens Næringsliv: <https://www.dn.no/innlegg/styrearbeid/styreleder/kvinner/alle-bor-tenke-seg-om-for-de-gar-inn-i-et-bedriftsstyre/2-1-1608867>
- Associate Professor Dag Jørgen Hveem comments on increasing prices in the housing market in the national newspaper Verdens Gang: <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/i/RGwGMa/nikolai-37-og-maya-35-tok-boliggrep-foeles-lurt-naa>

A large part of our faculty members actively disseminates their research to the wider society, through channels such as newspaper articles, radio interviews and invited speeches at private businesses. For the year 2023, we count over 150 such activities carried out by one or more of our faculty members. We know that in addition to this, many of our staff carry out activities and receive awards and appointments that are currently not registered in our systems. However, we are currently looking at how we can improve our data management and furthermore be able to enhance our researcher activity data.



**University of Agder**

Postbox 422, 4604 Kristiansand, Norway

Phone +47 38 14 10 00 [post@uia.no](mailto:post@uia.no) [uia.no](http://uia.no)

---

**ISBN: 978-82-8427-399-0**