

Recipients:

Faculty Liaison Committee at Natural Sciences

Academic Council at Natural Sciences

Local Liaison Committee at iNANO

Local liaison committees at iNANO's three stakeholder departments (MGB, CHEM and PHYS)

Consultation: Proposed process for the phase-out of iNANO as a department-like centre, to be followed by a restructuring of the faculty's strategic efforts within interdisciplinarity, innovation and external collaboration

Summary

The faculty leadership team has a strategic ambition to strengthen the faculty's engagement in the development of society by fostering interdisciplinarity, external collaboration and innovation across all disciplines at the faculty. One of the steps we need take to achieve this ambition is to restructure the faculty's activities in the area: the faculty management team is planning to establish a unit at faculty level to promote interdisciplinarity, external collaboration and innovation across all the faculty's disciplines. The new unit will both take over and expand a function linked to the 'i' in iNANO under the current organisation. The faculty management team has decided, in order to advance this strategic development of the faculty, to initiate the phase-out of iNANO as a department-like centre as of 31 December 2026. As a consequence, all research and educational activities within nanoscience will be transferred to the faculty's departments. Note that the motivation for this proposal is exclusively strategic and structural, not financial.

Chapter 1 of this proposal describes the strategic considerations behind the faculty management team's planned decision. Chapter 2 describes the process for the planned phase-out of iNANO as a department-like centre, which is the central element in this consultation. According to the process proposed by the faculty management team, the phase-out of iNANO will take place concurrently with the development of the new unit in order to ensure that expertise from iNANO remains anchored at faculty level.

Chapter 1. For information: The strategic considerations behind the faculty's proposal to phase-out iNANO as a department-like centre

There are two primary motivations for the decision the faculty management team is planning to make:

1. The faculty management team has a strategic ambition to strengthen the faculty's engagement in the development of society by promoting interdisciplinarity, external collaboration and innovation across all disciplines, and is thus planning to restructure the faculty's activities in this strategically central area. At the same time, the faculty management team is also developing a concept for a dynamic, proactive unit at faculty level that will provide specialist support to interdisciplinary research teams whose excellent basic research has a particularly high potential to create value for society through collaboration or innovation. The new faculty-level unit will be developed through an inclusive process as part of the faculty's upcoming suite of strategic initiatives. These initiatives will both align with AU's new Strategy 2030 (see [AU news item](#)) and strengthen the faculty's position in a new geopolitical landscape characterised by ever-increasing expectations and hopes on the part of society that science, in particular the natural sciences, will supply the building blocks for solutions of the future. In light of these goals, central success criteria for the new faculty-level unit will be supporting research and collaboration activities from all of the faculty's disciplines and from all departments at the faculty, and that the portfolio of supported activities can be adjusted in line with the development of these activities and society's needs. The point of departure for the unit's activities will be the research conducted at the faculty's departments, which – with their individual core disciplines, deep basic research and associated educational activities – constitute a founding basis on which to establish limited-duration interdisciplinary initiatives at faculty level. The unit can be understood as a natural evolution of a function that has been primarily associated with the 'i' in iNANO until now. The plan is for this contribution to AU's Strategy 2030 to be made available for consultation at the faculty separately from the current consultation process in autumn 2025 as one of the faculty's coming strategic themes.
2. In the late 1990s, nanoscience emerged as a new research area within natural science, and at this time, development was primarily driven by groundbreaking experimental methods that made it possible to study molecules and materials at the nanoscale. On this basis, an interdisciplinary nanoscience centre, iNANO, was established at Aarhus University, in order to provide a framework for the establishment of the new research area and its methods at AU. Now, almost three decades later, nanoscience has become an internationally well-established discipline at the intersection of chemistry, physics and molecular biology, and correspondingly this field is now well-established and integrated into research activities at many of AU's departments. In recent years, the Dean's Office, the iNANO leadership team and the leadership team at the Department of Chemistry have discussed the focus and organisation of iNANO several times. The faculty management team has now concluded that it is no longer necessary to provide special support for the development of nanoscience methods by continuing to preserve iNANO's status as a department-like centre.

In conclusion, the faculty needs to create a new 'i-unit' that embraces all of the faculty's core disciplines in a dynamic way, while the faculty's nanoscience activities are now so

mature that they can continue as part of the seven established departments without special support from a department-like monodisciplinary centre. This will make it possible to restructure the organisation in a way that contributes to the faculty's strategic development towards 2030: a new 'i-unit' will be developed at the beginning of this period which, serving all of the faculty's disciplines, and in collaboration with the departments, will work to preserve and strengthen the existing culture of interdisciplinarity, external collaboration and innovation. Taken together, these are the considerations which led the faculty management team to initiate a process aiming at the phase-out iNANO as a department-like centre.

Chapter 2. For consultation: Proposed process for the phase-out of iNANO as department-like centre

The duration of the process outlined below is one year and three months: It is expected that the final decision on the process for the phase-out of iNANO as a department-like centre will be taken in September 2025, and that the process will be complete as of 31 December 2026. After the faculty management team's decision in September 2025, a detailed timeline will be drawn up, and the plan will be communicated to employees at staff meetings and through one-on-one dialogues.

A. Change of employment conditions for employees at iNANO

As a consequence of the phase-out of iNANO as department-like centre, it will be necessary to organisationally transfer employees currently working at iNANO to another unit. The majority of these employees will be organisationally transferred to one of the faculty's seven departments whereas a limited number of administrative staff members will be offered positions in the new faculty-level unit we expect to establish (see below under administrative staff).

As a general rule, employees who are organisationally transferred to a department will not experience a change in work responsibilities the physical location of laboratories, etc. For staff members who become employed in the new faculty-level unit, however, there may be some changes in their work responsibilities.

Academic staff

Senior academic staff (professors, associate professors, tenure-track assistant professors and assistant professors) employed at iNANO will be asked to clarify their wishes with regard to their future departmental affiliation in consultation with the dean or the vice-dean for career development and innovation as well as relevant head(s) of department. The final decision on future organisational placement rests with the dean. As a general rule, other academic staff, including postdocs and PhD students, will be affiliated to the department where their immediate manager (supervisor) already is, or will be, employed. As a general rule, the research and teaching responsibilities of academic staff will not change as a consequence of their organisationally transfer to a different

unit, but their interactions with their colleagues and management at their new department will generate opportunities for the development of their work responsibilities and tasks on an equal footing with other staff at the department.

Technical staff

As a general rule, technical staff who work at iNANO will be transferred to the department that takes over responsibility for the laboratory/equipment/infrastructure the respective technician primarily supports and operates (see section B on infrastructure below). This will be clarified in connection with the process for senior academic staff describe above.

Administrative staff

Administrative staff employed in the iNANO secretariat on permanent contracts will either be assigned new tasks in the new faculty-level unit we expect to establish or at a department secretariat. The latter option will predominantly apply to staff whose tasks are primarily related to HR processes or iNANO's degree programmes and PhD programme.

As a general rule, administrative staff on time-limited contracts will be organisationally transferred to the same department as the academic staff member who holds the grants that finances their employment.

For both groups of administrative staff, clarification of their future role and place of employment will take place through a dialogue with each staff member led by the vice-dean for career development and innovation in collaboration with the director of iNANO, the head of the iNANO secretariat, and the head of the relevant department (where applicable). The final decision rests with the dean.

Special functions

As a general rule, iNANO employees who, in their personal capacity, serve on committees or in forums at faculty and university level will remain in these functions. However, as a general rule, iNANO employees who perform centre or faculty functions on behalf of iNANO will step down from these functions in connection with the phase-out of iNANO as a department-like centre. The management at the department, to which an employee who performs a function of this kind on behalf of iNANO will be organisationally transferred, is obliged to explore possibilities for the employee to be considered for a similar or related function at the department or the faculty.

B. Research infrastructure

Research infrastructure located in the iNANO building will as a general rule not be relocated. Instead, responsibility for the infrastructure will be transferred to a department. As a general rule, responsibility for equipment will be organisationally transferred with the academic staff member whose grant has funded its purchase. At the same time, a task force headed by the Dean's Office will investigate the possibility of organising some of the larger equipment with a broad user base in a 'core facility' or 'shared research lab'. This possibility will be explored with the involvement of relevant academic staff and department heads.

C. Degree programmes and PhD programme

Responsibility for iNANO's BSc and MSc programmes will be transferred to the Department of Chemistry, but as a general rule, the current composition of the programmes' educational committee will remain unchanged. This also applies to members of the degree programme committees who might be employed at a department other than the Department of Chemistry. Other existing cross-departmental degree programmes will serve as a model for the necessary agreements between the Department of Chemistry and the other relevant departments with regard to the operation, development and finances of the degree programmes.

The nanoscience PhD programme will be discontinued, and iNANO's PhD students will be transferred to the programme offered by the department where their supervisors are or will be employed. It is expected that admissions to the nanoscience programme will be closed in early 2026 or when all supervisors have been reassigned to other departments.

The transfer of the degree programmes and the discontinuation of the PhD programme will be supported by the relevant vice-deans.

D. iHouse

When senior academic staff and their research groups are transferred to a new department, responsibility for the laboratories and office space in building 1590-1593 (here referred to as iHouse) of which they are the primary users will be transferred to the same department. The Department of Chemistry will take over responsibility for the occupational health and safety organisation in the iHouse as well as for facilities used by departments at faculties other than Natural Sciences.

A task force headed by the dean's office will be appointed to handle drafting of cooperation agreements between the Department of Chemistry and the other units that have activities in the iHouse. These agreements will cover operational support for the iHouse in relation to purchasing, secretarial functions and post/goods delivery, among other things.

E. Financial consequences

Some departments will grow as a consequence of the redistribution of activities currently under iNANO, but it will first be possible to quantify these effects in the course of the phase-out process. However, the reassignment of employees and responsibility for buildings and facilities is in principle budget-neutral, as all finances related to a given activity will be transferred from iNANO to the receiving department. The specifics of the financial implementation will be handled by a task force headed by the Dean's Office with the involvement of relevant heads of department and Nat-Tech Finance.

F. Receiving departments

Departments to which employees from iNANO are to be organisationally transferred must develop a plan for onboarding. At a minimum, the plan must address:

- How the departments plan to embed the new research fields, including infrastructure, in their organisation and support structures.
- Reporting relationships for new employees, to ensure that each of them knows who their immediate manager is and who is responsible for conducting their staff development dialogue (SDD).
- Onboarding in relation to the department's organisation, policies and traditions, infrastructure and facilities, relevant forums, PhD programme, etc.
- The new employee's functions and committee positions.
- The new employee's teaching responsibilities.
- Where relevant, adjustment of the department's organisation (committees, structure, occupational health and safety, etc.) to accommodate new employees and students as well as new buildings and research facilities.