DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY: RESEARCH STRATEGY 2017

1. Operating environment and its changes

The Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy (YFI) operates in a rapidly changing world. Political crises and growing inequality pose a threat to democratic societal development. Environmental problems test the limits of Earth’s carrying capacity, while population ageing and changes in working life endanger our welfare society and wellbeing. At the same time, new identities as well as new forms and structures of action, resistance and management arise and spread globally in real time through new communication technology. In a situation like this, we need critical social scientific and philosophical analysis more than ever.

Research at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy is multidisciplinary and of a high international level. The department has a unique research profile, and its combination of disciplines differs from other Finnish universities. The focus is on the following strategic core fields of the University of Jyväskylä (JYU): ‘languages, culture and communities in global change processes’, ‘physical activity, health and wellbeing’ and ‘information technology and the human in the knowledge society’. In addition, the department contributes strongly to the planning and implementation of JYU’s new emerging field ‘multidisciplinary research on crises and changes in society’, and it is a key actor in JYU’s new profiling area ‘crises redefined’.

2. Mission statement

Research at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy interprets and explains societal and political phenomena and crises, as well as interaction between the individual and society, and explores and solves essential philosophical problems. The research is interdisciplinary, methodically and conceptually strong basic and applied research that combines philosophical analysis with the diverse theories and methods of social and political sciences in an internationally unique way. In addition to conducting basic research, we use science to contribute to the creation of an increasingly equal, safe, tolerant, and open society.

3. Values and strengths

The department’s core values include maintaining an internationally high level and impact of research, an emphasis on critical thinking, and deepening its long-term educational mission. The department is also committed to highlighting the importance of basic research and scientific knowledge in society. Based on its extensive external research funding, the department is very research oriented. It hosts several internationally top-level research groups and projects, including FiDiPro Professor Niilo Kauppi’s Transformations of Concepts and Institutions in the European Polity (2015–2020), Professor Jari Kaukua’s ERC Advanced Grant project Epistemic Transitions in Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science (2016–2021), Academy Professor Sara Heinämaa’s project Marginalization and Experience: Phenomenological Analyses of Normality and Abnormality (2017–2021), and Professor Teppo Kröger’s Centre of Excellence in Research on Ageing and Care (2018–2025) funded by the Academy of Finland.
Overall, the department’s researchers and research groups have had excellent success in research funding applications. For example, in 2017 the share of external competitive research funding in the department’s overall funding was 48%, which represents national top level, and our strategic goal is to maintain a high level of funding. The department’s publishing activity is among the most successful within JYU as well as in comparison with other Finnish universities.

YFI’s three research focus areas:

**Traditions of philosophical and political thought**
The research groups in this strategic focus area study the individual, communal and historical nature of human experience and the basics of political and philosophical thinking as well as central conceptual and theoretical changes. The projects analyse and solve social, political, ethical, and cultural problems. The main research topics include the experiential and meaningful dimensions of being human, individuality and communality, and ethical and political agency. Themes of particular interest are changes in political institutions and in the exercise of power as well as the argumentative and rhetorical means of influence.

**Sustainable societies**
Research in this focus area examines the societal impact of social, cultural, technological, economic, and labour transformations, the tensions and conflicts these transformations create, and the organisation of civil society. Transformation research focuses on the perspective of sustainable development and citizens’ participation in the context of crisis and societal change management. Central research themes include the challenges and possibilities of an eco-social society, reacting to environmental risks, consumption and lifestyles, the forms and conditions of participation, cultural diversity, differences and inequality, sustainable work and employment, new forms of economy, digitalisation, and sustainable expert knowledge.

**Policies and politics of welfare and care**
This focus area explores the transformation of welfare policies, politics and service systems at local, national and international levels. The analyses examine the consequences of these transformations for citizens’ everyday lives, social security and rights as well as for gender and intergenerational relations. The transformations are viewed also from the perspectives of organisational structures, management, and professional work practices. In addition, the functionality of new engagement systems is studied from the perspectives of political participation and equal opportunities to influence. The main research themes include care policy and population ageing, welfare professions and professional practices, the transformation of service systems, digitalisation, the welfare of individuals and communities, violence in everyday life and in institutional contexts, citizenship rights, political participation, and opportunities to influence decision-making.
4. Vision

The department is committed to its traditional target, which is to provide all its researchers, teachers and students with excellent opportunities for high-quality work. In particular, the aim is to solidify the position of the department’s best research groups at the cutting edge of international research in the department’s three focus areas. Along with international research activities, the department has an important special commitment to participate in national debates on an academic as well as a general societal level. The department is actively involved in the planning and implementation of JYU’s emerging field ‘multidisciplinary research on crises and changes in society’.

5. Key objectives and their prioritisation

The Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy will provide optimal conditions for research by

**Allocating more time for research**
- Every academic year, a research period free of teaching and administrative tasks will be arranged for the department’s teaching and research staff.
- The time allocated for research will be taken into account when confirming work plans.
- The administrative duties of research and teaching staff will be reduced.

**Supporting research funding applications**
- Research support services and peer support for funding applications will be offered.
- When possible, time for the creation of funding applications will be arranged by reducing teaching and administrative tasks.
- Departmental synergies will be mapped for funding applications.

**Supporting researchers’ networking and mobility**
- In addition to participating in existing research cooperation, new international research networks will be actively built.
- The mobility of researchers will be promoted through, for example, existing internationalisation programmes.

**Recruiting the best talent and promoting research careers**
- Talented researchers will be recruited at each stage of the research career.
- Transition from one stage of the research career model to the next will be supported.
- Talented young researchers will be integrated at master’s level into research groups and doctoral training.
- International mobility will be supported and encouraged.

6. Evaluation of research activities and measuring the achievement of set objectives

The indicators of top research include high-quality international and domestic publications, participation in international research projects and networks, international mobility, and the
acquisition of competitive external funding. The achievement of the objectives is measured by the quality and quantity of publications as well as by their impact. One of the quality criteria is publishing at the Publication Forum level 2–3. Engagement in national academic and societal debate also requires publishing in Finnish in publications at Publication Forum levels of 1 and 0.