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novo nordisk fonden

Profile Feature as seen in *Nature* 5th November 2015



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## profile feature

novo nordisk fonden

**Birgitte Nauntofte**, CEO, Novo Nordisk Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

*With net profits up 5% in 2014 and predicted to rise, Novo Nordisk is outperforming most other large multinational pharmaceuticals. This is not the only way the world's leading supplier of diabetes medicines stands out from the crowd. It also has an exceptional ownership structure, with the Novo Nordisk Foundation having the controlling interest in Novo Nordisk through its holding company.*

*And for the Foundation, it's not only about the bottom line, but also about the values expressed in the Foundation's charter. In addition to providing a stable basis for the companies in the Novo Group, its other objective is to support scientific and humanitarian purposes. Current strategic goals for the Foundation include promoting high-quality research, innovation and education, as well as making positive societal and humanitarian contributions.*

*In 2014 the Foundation made US\$125 million in grant payments, with the majority funding scientists in biomedicine and biotechnology at public institutions in Denmark and the other Nordic countries. This was three times more than in 2009, when Birgitte Nauntofte took over as CEO. The Foundation recently announced plans to continue its rapid growth in activities, doubling grant payouts again by 2018. Nauntofte spoke with Nature about the Foundation's new international PhD programme and why it's investing so heavily in luring foreign talent to Denmark.*

### **Q: What is the Novo Nordisk Foundation?**

We are what we call an independent foundation with corporate interests. Our history began more than 90 years ago when the physiologists August and Marie Krogh came back to Denmark from North America with the permission to make insulin for the Scandinavian countries.

From the start, August Krogh and the company co-founders declared that profits from the sale of insulin would be spent on scientific and humanitarian purposes and placed their company within a foundation structure. Although there have been small changes, this founding vision of twin commercial and societal aims remains intact today.

### **Q: Can the Foundation be truly independent when it has commercial interests?**

The Foundation obviously has commercial interests because it owns large stakes in Novo Nordisk and Novozymes. As an independent organization however, it has its own separate board of directors and it has substantial income from diverse assets, apart from the Novo companies for its granting activities.

Our grants are primarily for independent research at public institutions, mainly universities and hospitals. We would not, and could not, support work which directly benefits our companies. You could say the companies have indirect interests in what we're doing because they also want to develop a well-educated population, good candidates to employ and a vibrant research environment in Denmark.

### **Q: How does the Foundation promote research and innovation?**

We have a large number of different grant types related to research and innovation that scientists can apply for, such as our laureate research grants for outstanding established scientists and our young investigator awards for early- to mid-career researchers. We have supported the establishment of four large centres carrying out research on proteins, metabolism, cell-based production and basic stem cell biology. The Foundation also regularly awards grants for high-quality research and education activities, ranging from smaller projects to complex programmes. Every year we award a number of prizes to honor individuals and communicate their successes.

The Foundation also has innovation programmes that allow researchers to apply for funding to explore and develop the commercial potential of research findings.

### **Q: Why are you increasing the number of long-term grants?**

Our strategy is to identify the best researchers and to make sufficiently large and long-term awards available to them, so that they can focus on ambitious, high-risk and groundbreaking work. Our laureate and young investigator grants are for a minimum of seven years, and the larger grants we offer for research centres are for 10-year periods. We want scientists to spend more time doing research and less time applying for funding.

Denmark is a small country, so we want to reward those who come here with really good conditions. On top of this, to ensure we're funding

high-quality research, the Foundation only makes grants for projects that have been through a rigorous peer review process.

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### **Q: How and why does the Foundation support education?**

We need young people to have an interest in natural and biomedical sciences, and we know we have to start early if we want to educate the next generation of researchers. That's why we support exciting science competitions and other educational projects for both primary and secondary school pupils.

We already support PhD students in this country, and now we are also establishing a new international programme to recruit up to 16 elite foreign students per year to do their PhDs in one of our four large research centres in Denmark.

### **Q: Why is it important to attract foreign talent to Denmark?**

We know that outstanding research is best achieved in an international environment. If calls are open to international applicants it means you have more talent to select from. More than half of the researchers in our research centre cluster are from abroad, and we have seen that bringing in new people with different skills and ideas creates exciting, vibrant research environments. The exchange of ideas from different cultures in the research environment creates new types of interactions and can generate novel ways to solve problems.

We also run conferences twice a year at which top international researchers share their knowledge before returning home, hopefully with new ideas to inspire their own research. This mixing of cultures and exchange of knowledge is especially important for a small country such as ours.

# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

ENABLING TODAY'S  
SCIENTIFIC LEADERS

## **Novo Nordisk Foundation Laureate Research Grants**

Call for applications – biomedicine & biotechnology

For outstanding established scientists to come to Denmark to strengthen their leading research programs

Applicants have directed their own independent groups for 7 or more years in total

### **GRANT FUNDING**

- Individual grants up to **DKK 40 million** over 7 years
- Grant holders can apply for continued L.R.G. funding, up to DKK 35 million over 7 additional years

### **APPLICATIONS**

December 4, 2015 - January 14, 2016

SUPPORTING TOMORROW'S  
LEADING SCIENTISTS

## **Novo Nordisk Foundation Young Investigator Awards**

Call for applications – biomedicine & biotechnology

For outstanding younger scientists to come to Denmark to expand their leading research programs

Applicants have directed their own independent groups for less than 7 years in total

### **GRANT FUNDING**

- Individual grants up to **DKK 20 million** over 7 years
- Award holders can apply for further funding from other eligible Novo Nordisk Foundation programs

### **APPLICATIONS**

December 4, 2015 - January 14, 2016

CONNECTING FRONTIER SCIENTISTS

## **Copenhagen Bioscience Conferences**

World-leading researchers and young talents discuss the latest scientific results and hottest topics within biomedicine and biotechnology.

- Top-level debate and knowledge sharing in a unique setting
- Speakers and participants of all career levels selected for their scientific accomplishments and motivation
- Registration fee and accommodation covered by the Novo Nordisk Foundation

### **APPLY FOR**

- **The Stem Cell Niche**. May 22-26, 2016  
Application deadline: January 2016
- **Protein Signaling**. October 2-6, 2016  
Application deadline: June 2016

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION  
OF SCIENTISTS

## **Copenhagen Bioscience PhD Programme**

The programme offers talented students from outside of Denmark an opportunity to launch their careers in the vibrant research environment of the Novo Nordisk Foundation Research Centre Cluster.

The Novo Nordisk Foundation will fund up to **16 students** to be enrolled in the 4-year PhD programme after the summer of 2016.

- Selection will be based on academic achievements, research experience, references and interviews
- Interviews will take place in Copenhagen, April 18-19, 2016

### **APPLICATIONS**

January 4 – February 29, 2016

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

To learn more about these opportunities and the Novo Nordisk Foundation, please visit

[www.nvonordiskfoundation.com](http://www.nvonordiskfoundation.com)

