

**Know your
employment
conditions**

As part of the collaboration between PAND and DM we aim to raise awareness among PhD students at Danish universities about the rights and obligations that follow from your employment conditions at a Danish university.

In particular many international PhD students can benefit from knowing the basic regulatory framework for their employment as Danish PhD programs differ in a number of crucial ways from comparable doctoral education in countries like for instance The United Kingdom, United States or Germany.



How is doctoral education structured in Denmark?

According to the PhD order in Denmark, a Danish PhD program must contain a number of elements. The central elements are:

- 1) An independent research project under supervision
- 2) PhD courses or other relevant activity equivalent to approximately 30 ECTS
- 3) Active participation in research environments both at your local university and through a visit at a university abroad.
- 4) Attainment of teaching experience and experience with dissemination of scientific knowledge
- 5) A defended PhD thesis

The framework that regulates your PhD

Doctoral Education at Danish Universities is regulated in different ways. Three frameworks are particularly important for you to know.

- 1) The structure of your PhD is regulated by the Danish PhD Order. This order details the contents of the enrolment as a PhD student; the PhD program, supervisor(s) and supervision, the role of the assessment committee, the thesis and the defence and more.
- 2) Most PhD students are employed at the university, along with the enrolment in a PhD school. As an employee at a university, your employment is subject to the Collective Agreement for Academics in the State between the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations and the Danish Ministry of Finance (the AC Agreement). The AC Agreement contains a base pay scale, and you will be placed on a pay grade according to your education and seniority as well as rules on working hours. It regulates their rights related to pension, maternity/ paternity leave and illness etc.. A separate protocol for PhD fellows is attached to the Agreement

You can also be employed under the Collective Agreement for Academics in the Municipalities, the Collective Agreement for Academics in the Regions or under an individual contract depending on where you work.
- 3) Local practices at individual universities will frame for a lot of your work. How to report progress on the PhD plan, how much you will teach or how to change supervisor if necessary are all examples of processes that the individual institution will determine.

1: The basics of employment as a PhD student at a Danish university

In Denmark a PhD involves enrolment at a PhD programme and typically an employment at the university. This employment is time limited - usually for a period of 3 years. The employment ends automatically at the end of this period - while enrolment in your PhD programme might continue.

Should you finish your dissertation before the employment period runs out, it will automatically end.

Payment as a PhD student

While your PhD will often be referred to as a scholarship - "stipendium" - the majority of PhD students in Denmark are salaried employees of the Universities and NOT students on a scholarship as in some other countries' university systems.

Your salary is made up of three elements. 1) A base pay where the starting point is decided by your level of seniority when you enter your PhD. 2) A pre-defined supplement as part of your salary.

Furthermore, the payment structure allows for 3) a negotiated individual supplement in case you have very special qualifications compared to other PhD students. While the individual supplements are unusual for PhD students, your local union representative can help you assess whether it makes sense for you to try to negotiate the individual supplement.

The base salary gives a pension of 17,1%.

Always check your paycheck thoroughly to make sure that you understand everything it says and that you get the right amount paid out.

If you are a member, you can contact DM to have us help you understand your paycheck.

Termination

As an employee of the university you can be terminated from your PhD position. Reasons for premature termination can be failure to follow your

PhD plan - or even extended periods of illness. Misconduct can also be a cause for ending your employment prematurely.

Be aware that the PhD Statute in the collective agreement states that PhD students can not normally be dismissed with the justification of funding shortages.

Also be aware that you cannot be dismissed because of pregnancy or the fact that you are going on parental leave.

Should the university wish to dismiss you from your position as a PhD student, a process must be followed that involves consulting you and informing your union representative.

We strongly advise you to contact your union representative if you are a member and if you are afraid that your position will be terminated.

Working hours and 840 hours requirement

As an employee at a university your work week is 37 hours on average. While PhD students generally have a lot of flexibility in planning their everyday work life, there are certain requirements set out in the PhD protocol in the collective agreement that creates a framework for your work.

As a PhD student employed at a university, you are obligated to perform assignments for the university in accordance with its instructions, to an extent which over a three-year period corresponds to up to a total of 840 working hours. The scope and nature of the work are to be finally and mutually agreed upon on a semester-by-semester basis and the planning must be done appropriately throughout your enrolment period

Many PhD students will teach as a part of the 840 hours, but the work can also consist of other kinds of dissemination, research activity or library work. The activities should help you gain experience with teaching and dissemination related to your project. This means that you should not be asked to do work completely unrelated to your project as part of your fulfilment of the 840 hours requirement.

Make sure that you keep track of your working hours. If you are in doubt of whether the workload asked of you is in accordance with the framework, address the issue with your PhD school or seek advice from your union representative.

It is possible to apply for a reduction or a complete exemption of the 840 required working hours. If granted this will result in a proportionate reduction of your salary.

You can ask yourself

How do I plan the 840 hours so it fits with other activities in my PhD plan?

How much preparation time should I expect per hour I teach?

2: Leave during a PhD, illness and part time work

Parental leave

As an employee at a university you are covered by the parental leave agreements specified in the collective agreement. This applies whether your salary is paid by the university or you are externally funded. Be aware that if you are not employed under the collective agreement but employed e.g. as an industrial PhD in a private company, it is your individual contract that defines your rights related to parental leave.

PhD students employed at a university have the right to extend their employment and enrolment by the period during which they are on parental leave.

DM gives our members advice on the general guidelines for parental leave, as well as on the right to extension.

Illness

Unfortunately, some PhD students experience periods of illness during their studies. Delays in your project timeline related to illness differ from delays related to parental leave as there

is no right to extension due to illness. However, the PhD enrolment and employment period may be extended in cases of prolonged illness when this has demonstrably delayed the study. This means that the university is obligated to assess your application but is not necessarily obligated to grant you an extension. A rejection of your application must rest on reasonable arguments made by the university. This provision only applies to PhD students who are employees at a university.

Therefore, if you get sick it is very important that you remember to notify the university and to see your doctor in order to get documentation for your sickness. This documentation can be crucial in order to have your employment extended. In many cases it will be possible for you to have your enrolment in the PhD programme extended, without an extension of your paid employment.

DM gives our members advice in case of illness, and on applications/rejections on extensions due to illness. If you suffer from a prolonged illness and cannot work, be sure to contact your union representative.

Part time work and leave of absence

Reduced working hours can be negotiated with the university on an individual basis- often by reducing the 840 working hours - along with a corresponding salary reduction.

Unpaid leave may be granted subject to agreement between the PhD student, the educational institution and the appointing authority.

You can ask yourself

How do I plan the 840 hours so it fits with other activities in my PhD plan?

How much preparation time should I expect per hour I teach?

3: Vacation

As an employed PhD student in Denmark, you are entitled to vacation during your employment.

You earn 2.08 days of vacation per month in the period from September 1st to August 31st which totals 5 weeks per year. If you are employed at a university, you are also entitled to 5 days of special holidays per year, which is a special agreement between the state and the unions.

Vacation planning should be in dialogue with your manager in accordance with the procedure agreed locally at your university. Your requests for when you want to take your vacation should be met as well as possible. You are entitled to three consecutive weeks of vacation in the period from May 1st to September 30th.

You are entitled but also obligated to take your yearly vacation. In some cases, universities ask PhD students to spend their remaining vacation in the final months of their employment. If you experience this or are in doubt about your rights, you can contact DM as a member.

We are aware that some universities have a practice of giving PhDs notice demanding that all vacation that is not spent should be spent before the employment terminates - that is typically in the final and crucial phase of writing before handing in the thesis, which means that vacation is not an option. Please contact us if you are subject to that kind of practice. We will contact the university.

You can ask yourself

Am I required to take vacation in a way that interferes with my research work?

Do I know the rules around vacation days at my institution and do I take all my vacation days?

4: Supervision

Doctoral education in Denmark requires a senior researcher supervising your project while you develop your own scientific work. The PhD Statute's Section 8 regulates the relation to the supervisor. In principle, the institution appoints the first supervisor, meaning that the supervisor must be employed at the institution and affiliated with the PhD school that enrolls you.

The rules that frame supervision differ from institution to institution. This means that it is important that you clarify expectations between you and your supervisor early on in terms of research output, availability of supervisor, types of feedback, etc. - and share your experiences in doing so with your fellow PhD students.

Should a situation arise where you wish to change supervisor, there are certain rules that apply according to the PhD Statute, but is it also a specific process that varies from PhD school to PhD school. Familiarize yourself with the rules and make sure you know your university and PhD school guidelines. You can also consult your head of department or PhD school leader when relevant, or talk to your union representative.

As a member of DM you are welcome to consult us regarding issues with your supervisor.

You can ask yourself

Do I communicate clearly with my supervisor about, for instance, expectations and needs?

Do I know my institution's rules around mediating or changing supervisors if necessary?

5: Working environment and MUS

As an employee at a Danish workplace you are protected by a set of general working environment regulations. This means that there are certain standards for the physical environment, including safety standards, that should be met. It also means that your university must perform recurring workplace assessments.

The university is also obligated to ensure that you are offered yearly employment performance and development reviews. These are called MUS and are held every year. The topics of these meetings can range from your well-being and workload, to career development plans. Be aware that the university should use the reviews to raise awareness of career prospects for the academic staff employed, especially for the fixed-term employees. One of the ways this is achieved is by regularly discussing potential career paths for individual employees inside and outside the university.

As a rule, the MUS should not be held by your PhD supervisor.

With the network organization for PhD associations (PAND), [we have written recommendations for how you should prepare for your yearly review.](#)

If you wish to have influence on the way your institution organises your MUS, get in touch with your union representative, who can take your input to management through the local collaboration council.

You can ask yourself

Do I know the rules for my working environment?

Do I know who to talk to if I see a problem with my working environment?

Am I being invited to a yearly MUS and do I know how to prepare for it?

6: Your union representative

Your union representative knows your local conditions, and this is always a good place to start if you have questions about obligations, employment conditions or work environment. The union representative is in close contact with the DM secretariat.

It is also the union representative who has the right to negotiate and make agreements in terms of determining your salary, both at the time of hiring and at the annual salary negotiations. If your workplace does not have a union representative, the DM secretariat will assist you.

If you want to know more about employment conditions or are interested in the work we do at DM, contact your employee representative or DM at phd@dm.dk

You can ask yourself

Do I know who my union representative is and when to involve the person?

Do I know if there is a union club at my workplace and when it meets?

DM