

Health PhD Committee (Health PhD Committee  
meeting)

04-09-2023 15:00 - 17:00

Jens Baggesens Vej 53, bld. 5220, room 014 (basement level -  
lunch room)

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## Punkt 1: Meeting information

Additional absence: Jeppe Prætorius.

## Punkt 2: The AU Health/AUH strategy for health-scientific research

Thomas Vorup-Jensen attended the PhD committee meeting in his role as part of one of the implementing groups in the AU/AUH health-scientific research strategy collaboration. As the only AU(-based) representative in the group, he has a strong focus on bringing in the perspectives of PhD students.

The committee discussed aspects of the transition from PhD to a research career, including the 'long road ahead' towards an ass. prof. position (approx 5 appointments per year). The staff shortage at the hospital was considered a heavy obstacle for the allocation of more time for research - even though (external) funding can be obtained. So a focus point in this work is to find a way to secure the time for research.

The committee also touched upon the challenges following different combinations of affiliation, e.g. who has access to AU resources to be used in research, and who is accountable for/can take credit for the research when the researcher(s) hold double/more affiliation(s) (e.g. during the medical "hoveduddannelsen" or 'spare time'-research).

The committee highlighted the issue with lack of access to data sources and other AU resources when ending the PhD programme, and it was discussed whether it would be fair to grant a 6 month post-PhD access for the PhD to secure own data and paper/review/other research work. To this it was noted that the Faculty management is currently working with offboarding of all research staff, including data issues.

The implementing group in question meets quarterly (ish) for a 5-year period. On behalf of the group, Thomas Vorup-Jensen appreciates input/suggestions from the committee - especially from the PhD students - per email ([vorup-jensen@biomed.au.dk](mailto:vorup-jensen@biomed.au.dk)). At a later PhD committee meeting, Thomas Vorup-Jensen will re-visit to give an update on the group's work. The PhD committee will be regularly updated on what is on the agenda for the implementing group's meetings in order to contribute to the work (Thomas Vorup-Jensen will either share the agenda with Louise Nygaard on an ongoing basis or make the agenda accessible to all PhD committee members).

## Punkt 3: Career opportunities for PhD students at Health

The PhD committee went through the list of career activities for PhD students. Most PhD students could recognize the listed activities, especially the courses.

It was discussed when would be the best time to consider career plans during the PhD programme. Many PhD students find the most appropriate time to take courses in the beginning of the PhD programme, but not generally with a career perspective in mind when choosing courses. Academic staff members encourage PhD students to attend career-related/-clarifying activities as early as possible, and to discuss career with the supervisor(s) at the midterm evaluation and adjust courses to this.

Some PhD students find it difficult to talk about career with the supervisor(s) (e.g. if the supervisor is not interested in discussing the topic), but consider the midterm evaluation as a good opportunity to discuss career perspectives with the entire supervisor group. It was

suggested to extend the career-item in the midterm evaluation to not only be a 'tick-off box, but to demand a description of the main points of the talk between the PhD student and supervisor(s) in order to make sure that both parties have reflected on the PhD student's career opportunities (e.g. research or not (post doc), how to use the research environment stay in connection with career perspectives etc.).

It was noted that Vibeke Broe, PhD Career Consultant at AU, did a good job in introducing the opportunities for career support (individually or in groups/via events and workshops) at the Welcome Day. Vibeke also offers PhD courses at Health on career perspectives. This led to a discussion of how to make the career courses more available to/prioritized by PhD students - e.g. to allow PhD students to pass the "10 ECTS per semester" limit for career-related courses in the PhD course management system.

It was highlighted that the alumni network should also be included in the communication about career activities.

#### **Punkt 4: Well-being initiatives for PhD students at Health**

The PhD committee was briefed about the last meeting in the wellbeing committee, which focused on career clarification. It appeared that PhD students feel uncertain about their career despite a high employment rate. At the meeting, it was concluded to focus on raising awareness of current activities rather than coming up with new activities.

The midterm evaluation was discussed as a fixed point during a PhD programme to bring up if the PhD student do not expect to finish on time (a discussion point that is included in the midterm evaluation at Health), which is also being mentioned at the "Welcome Day". It can however worry PhD students to bring up this difficult topic (in case of extension - how about financing?), as it can be poorly met by the supervisor.

Next meeting (27 October at 13:00-14:30) in the wellbeing committee will focus on international PhD students, and international PhD student representatives are invited to contribute to the discussion by presenting their views on potential issues/barriers for international PhD students - both during and after finishing the PhD programme - via the local PhD student representative (Mojdeh Mansoori at Health).

#### **Punkt 5: Research stays abroad**

The following barriers/issues were mentioned in relation to stays abroad:

- PhD students with families find it difficult to leave their family for a whole month, or to afford their spouse taking time off from work. It is observed that PhD students are planning a stay abroad because they "have to" (a formality) rather than being sincerely motivated for the stay. It was noted that it is possible to apply for funding (via external sources) to cover expenses for e.g. nursery/children.
- Some observed a negative feedback mechanism from the supervisors perspective on research stays abroad, as a supervisor might want to reduce the stays to keep the PhD student on campus (for direct contribution to the project) - and thus, the supervisor invests less effort to contribute to the stay (planning etc.). A counterargument to this is that PhD students' stay abroad might add to the supervisors network and thus be advantageous for both the PhD student and the supervisor.
- PhD students report a general confusion about whether it is mandatory to go abroad. It was clarified that a stay abroad is *preferable* and advantageous for the

PhD student ('s career and network, e.g. as postdoc or ass. prof.), but that the graduate school - according to the Ministerial Order - can accept a research environment change nationally, if it is not possible for the PhD student to go abroad. Thus, a change of research environment is mandatory.

The Ministerial Order encourages a stay of 3-6 months duration, but the graduate school only demands a stay of 30 days/4 consecutive weeks. It was mentioned that it could be beneficial to divide the 30 days into 2 x two week stay. As this differs from the general rule (see [Change of research environment \(au.dk\)](#)), the graduate school will be able to assess this combination for a research stay only upon application for exemption. Exceptions from the general rule *cannot* be financed by the graduate school).

- The website [Research Professional - Home](#) (<https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/home>), where you can find inspiration for means of funding, is considered difficult to navigate. In general, the financial aspect of a stay is considered difficult (e.g. prices differ depending on which country to visit re. housing and living expenses, and another issue is the period with double rent).

It was suggested to add links to the most commonly known financing sources (e.g. Carlsberg, Lundbeck, Novo Nordisk) to the website in order to inspire PhD student on where to apply for funding of research stays. Also, the website could contain good advice on how to get the most out of the stay (e.g. meet up with collaborators beforehand, rules for credit cards, funding for spouse/family etc.). Supervisors should be made aware of these advantages/good advice, e.g. that a research stay abroad is an investment in your career, and that it will be more difficult to go abroad during e.g. a postdoc position in terms of funding sources.

Fernando Bitencourt will share link to helpful information on funding etc. with Louise Nygaard (lnk@au.dk).

PhD students found the columns of PhD students regarding a research stay abroad inspirational and encouraging.

It was noted that all PhD students are asked to state their plans and expectations for a research stay upon application for enrolment as well as in the first evaluation. The graduate school encourages PhD students to discuss the theme with their supervisor on an ongoing basis.

## **Punkt 6: Briefing from the chair**

N/A

## **Punkt 7: Briefing from the PhD Association**

The PhD association informed about its collaboration with AUPA in regards to events to avoid overlap and to recruit more participants, as it is currently very difficult for the PhD Association to get PhD students to attend activities - both social and professional, as well as board members of the association. General Assembly to be held on 21 Sept 2023 (during working hours) where a new chair will be appointed. Right now, the board lacks a broad representation and 'young' PhD students.

The PhD association has a short introduction talk on the Welcome Day and is available for a talk at the 'walk and talk'-session afterwards.

It was discussed how to motivate PhD students to be part of the PhD association. The committee identified many advantages, e.g. possibility of influencing conditions at the graduate school, career and network advantage.

It was suggested to 'compensate' the PhD students in the PhD association for their work in planning academic workshops/events etc. - e.g. as dissemination hours\* or ECTS. The graduate school will discuss this, but highlights the issue of assuring democracy (i.e. payment is not an option).

\* [Teaching experience \(au.dk\)](https://au.dk)

## **Punkt 8: Briefing from the advisory committees**

### Course Committee:

Based on a few comments regarding the courses planned for 2024, the committee supported the course portfolio. The rest of the PhD committee are not to assess the course portfolio (this job has been delegated to the advisory committee), as the final assessment will be done by Head of graduate school Helene Nørrelund (in collaboration with the Heads of GP).

Regarding the former ECTS model, which in some cases resulted in a decrease in the ECTS value, it was informed that the graduate school will be able to dispense for (potential) lacking course ECTS for PhD students who are at the *final* stage of their PhD programme and will not be able to reach the 30 ECTS by the end of their enrolment.

As courses are planned one year ahead (spring/summer), it was noted that some course leaders (fall courses, in particular) are asked to submit suggestions (ECTS calculation, budget, course description) for their courses for the coming year, before having finished the same course in the current year.

### Committee for Credit Transfer and Dispensation:

Since the last meeting, the committee has assessed three applications (mainly based on a 1 year master), of which one has been approved and two have been declined.

## **Punkt 9: Briefing from Head of Graduate School**

Helene Nørrelund gave the PhD committee a short status on the scientific programmes. Currently, we are awaiting research networks to hand in applications with the deadline 1 November 2023. A new briefing will be given at the next meeting (December).

## **Punkt 10: Briefing: AU Elections 2023**

The committee agreed that it was preferable with a mix of new members (both PhD students and academic staff members) and current members taking on another period.

The new committee will constitute itself on a meeting around 1 February 2024.

## **Punkt 11: Any other business**

It was put to question whether PhD students can include (peer) review work as part of their dissemination activities. The graduate school will discuss this and address it at the next meeting in the PhD committee (December).