Well-being in PhD Education
An Inspirational Catalogue
Every year, around 2,500 new PhD students enrol at Danish universities. Over a period of three to four years, they conduct research, convey knowledge, and write a dissertation that is an original contribution to their field of research. According to Statistics Denmark 9,750 PhD students were enrolled at Danish universities in 2021.

PhD students in Denmark are enrolled at a PhD school, and the majority of them are employed by the university on a time limited contract. Many are thus both students and employees at the same time, and those who are not employed at a university still have a double role as student and independent researcher. Even though PhD students in Denmark, as employees, are guaranteed better terms and conditions than PhD students in many other countries with similar educational systems, this double role can still lead to uncertainty around expectations and obligations, and PhD students are often poorly integrated in their collegial university community. This can be challenging for the many international PhD students who lack a strong social network and a well-developed understanding of what it means to be an employee at a Danish workplace. Several international studies point to PhD students experiencing a high level of work stress and poor well-being during their studies, in some cases of a more severe character. Danish studies show similar findings. Surveys conducted by The Danish Association of Masters and PhDs (DM) and the network for PhD associations at Danish universities, PAND, showed in 2021 that stress and loneliness affects many PhD students (Glæsner & Kvejborg 2022, Wichmann-Hansen 2021, Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2017). Therefore it is important to carefully consider the well-being of PhD students.

Danish universities have a long history of carefully monitoring and adjusting work environments with the aim of ensuring well-being. As part of this, university PhD schools have increasingly focused on the well-being of PhD students. Even though the universities share their knowledge and best practices on workplace well-being, there are still big differences in approaches across the sector. Universities Denmark and DM have therefore put together this catalogue with suggestions and concrete examples of initiatives that can improve the well-being of PhD students. This catalogue was assembled by the eight Danish universities and DM, after consultation with experts in the field. The catalogue provides inspiration for initiatives to promote well-being, and aims to strengthen the discussion of well-being within academic environments.

This catalogue is based on the presumption that well-being issues cannot be individualised—the focus should be on the overall work environment, the cultures in research groups, collegiality, and institutional frameworks. Solutions must therefore be based on engagement from PhD schools, research groups, and PhD students. Moreover, the starting point is that well-being issues are linked to the professional and scholarly development that forms PhD students into capable researchers. Well-being is not a part of the curriculum, but well-being and professionalism are interlinked.

The catalogue presents five themes that are central to PhD students’ well-being. Each theme includes examples which can be implemented at PhD schools and departments. An appendix to the catalogue provides additional examples of initiatives that have worked well at Danish universities.

The catalogue is intended for use by the Heads of PhD schools and PhD committees but is also useful for PhD students and others who work with and for PhD student well-being; for example, supervisors, department heads, PhD coordinators and administrative staff who are seeking inspiration on how to improve the well-being of PhD students at Danish research institutions.

We hope you enjoy this catalogue!

Universities Denmark and the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs
Core initiatives for furthering well-being

- Supervisor training
- Good on-boarding and introduction to the academic community
- Strengthen PhD students’ engagement and influence
- Matching expectations and tools for project management
- Introduction to teaching
- Early career planning
Good PhD supervision is a professional work relationship that demands mutual respect, trust, and understanding, as well as both parties clearly communicating their mutual expectations. The research institution preparing both the supervisor and the PhD student to enter into the relationship can support good supervision. At the same time, there is a need for organisational support around the supervisor relationship, for example in the form of clear, written expectations for the supervision, opportunities for dialogue, advice on careers, project-planning, etc., and last but not least, a visible system that steps in when severe issues arise.

Gitte Wichmann-Hansen
PhD, Senior Researcher at Aarhus University and consultant
Good supervisor-student collaboration creates a positive framework for work environment and well-being. Studies show that Danish PhD students generally have a good relationship with their supervisors (Glæsner & Kvejborg 2022, Wichmann-Hansen 2021). This is a good starting point, since a number of studies indicate that poor well-being is often related to poor supervision of the PhD student (Hazell et al. 2020, Sverdlik et al. 2018).

There can be challenges and tensions in the relationship between the PhD student and the supervisor. A part of the supervisor’s job is to prevent difficulties from turning into conflicts, as well as creating a framework for resolving differences and for conflict management, if this becomes necessary. Such conflicts can arise due to issues with collaboration, communication, deliverables, poorly aligned expectations, poorly defined supervisor and PhD student roles, and a desire for PhD student independence.

Because the supervisor relationship is complex, it is important that supervisors master the correct pedagogical tools, and that they are supported by an institution and culture, that is concerned with the well-being of PhD students.

Matching expectations between PhD students and supervisors

Many PhDs are uncertain about the quality of the scholarly work they must deliver. It is therefore important that there is clear and constructive communication between the PhD student and the supervisor on the direction and quality of the project.

Good supervisor-student collaboration starts with a dialogue that establishes professional and personal expectations of both the PhD student and supervisor(s).

This dialogue can cover the practical aspects of a PhD study—frequency of meetings, preparation for meetings, and how to talk about the project’s quality and the PhD process as a whole. The dialogue can also concern motivation, expectations for co-authorship, the supervisor’s experience with high-quality research, risks associated with the research work (which inherently does not always go as planned), and the general experience of working as a researcher. It can also be relevant to talk about limitations for the PhD student to freely choose their method and approach in a project. If the project is expected to produce commercial outcomes, it can also be relevant to introduce the PhD student to regulations concerning intellectual property, inventions, and licenses.

1 As an example of guidelines concerning authorships see KU: Microsoft Word – Kodeks for forfatterskab ENG final (ku.dk)
The PhD project plan, the “PhD-plan”, can be a good tool for managing expectations. The plan should outline plans for PhD supervision, the PhD project, the dissertation’s form, teaching tasks, the international/industrial stay, courses, and other topics relevant at the start of a PhD. Issues such as data management and publishing, an overview of milestones and deadlines for the dissertation, should also be considered.

The PhD plan can be a good starting point for discussing a leave of absence, and the return to work after a leave. For example, it is relevant to clarify if and how a research project will continue under a leave of absence.

Support a strong professionalism around supervisors
Training of supervisors promotes well-being, especially if courses include an explicit focus on well-being and the positive supervision relationship. A number of universities already have mandatory supervisor courses, including aspects of well-being.

In addition to an introductory supervisor course, it can be useful offer seminars and collegial feedback on supervision. The PhD school can initiate a supervisor network and create a framework for a peer-to-peer forum where PhD supervisors can obtain feedback from peers, while taking into account the confidentiality of the supervisor relationship. In small professional environments where there are few PhD students and supervisors, it is especially important to have a collegial space available for discussing experiences with good supervision practices and challenges. The collegial sparring should be carried out with consideration of ethics and confidentiality.

In PhD projects with a primary supervisor and co-supervisors, it is important that there is a thorough and ongoing dialogue about roles and responsibilities between the supervisors.

Clarify the framework for PhD supervision
It is important that PhD students gain knowledge of the organisational framework and available resources relating to supervision. This includes the financial aspects of the PhD project and the different resources that are available for the duration of the project. If the PhD project requires the use of special equipment or facilities, it is important to clarify access to these. The PhD student can also be introduced to the division of responsibility for supervision and management tasks between the supervisor, department heads and other employees/colleagues.

PhD students should be informed about the possibility and process for a change in supervisor from the time they start their PhD project. Including the possibility to change or add co-supervisors and the advantages and disadvantages of such changes.

Create a strong and visible system around the supervisor
It is important that the university provides support and that the supervisor is aware of the different options and can refer the PhD student to the right place for assistance. Supervisors should not be solely responsible for advising on career paths within or outside universities, or offering psychological help. The supervisor’s primary task is to advise PhD students on research activities. Career advice, research support functions, administrative support, opportunities for skill development, as well as knowing where to turn when under stress, are important aspects of good PhD support, but it cannot be expected that the individual supervisor be responsible for these tasks alone.

Prepare the PhD student for collaborating with a supervisor
An important skill for PhD students to learn is how to establish and maintain good collaborations, especially with a supervisor. It is therefore important that PhD students are prepared to discuss the terms of their own role and responsibility through good communication and expectation management. This can be obtained
through a course on supervision for PhD students, or via an introductory conversation with the PhD student by the Head of the PhD school. It is also important for the student to know which colleagues or leaders to turn to for assistance related to challenges with supervision or the supervisor.

Examples of initiatives relating to the framework for PhD supervision

- At Roskilde University, several PhD schools hold 1-2 seminars per semester for PhD supervisors. The goal is to improve supervision processes and research standards through collegial dialogues and sharing experiences. At the meetings, short supervision examples are presented which can be used as a basis for discussing good practices. Specific topics can be considered, for example, the quality of PhD dissertations, collaboration issues, cooperation between multiple supervisors, and supervision geared toward finishing on-time. The supervisor seminars can be initiated and driven by PhD supervisors, or a programme leader can be responsible for its organisation.

- DTU has developed a dialogue tool to help PhD students and supervisors navigate all aspects of the PhD process and make clear otherwise implicit expectations. The dialogue tool is customised to each student study plan and the students biannual report with topics that are relevant to the PhD project at particular points in time. For supervisors and co-supervisors a tool for clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of supervisors is also provided.

- At Aarhus University (Arts) the course Introduction to PhD supervision for PhD students is required for all PhD students. It is 0.5 ECTS and covers different roles and challenges related to PhD supervision, including the connection between the writing process and types of feedback.

More examples can be found in the appendix.

2 https://ced.au.dk/en/courses/arts-introduction-to-phd-supervision-for-phd-students
PhD students step into a career and work culture with high pressure and a number of new rules and expectations that can be difficult to decode. Therefore, it is important that institutions establish a good framework for scholarly work, academic work life, and the work environment at the university.

Yun Ladegaard
PhD, Psychologist, Postdoc at the Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen
An inclusive professional environment is central to both well-being and professional progress (Herrmann & Wichmann-Hansen 2017). It is therefore important to focus on integrating the PhD students into both the professional and collegial community, both through an on-boarding process and throughout the course of PhD study. International PhD students often have a greater need for support and clarification than PhD students with a Danish background, since they are starting a complicated PhD process as well as entering a new society and work culture, giving them a greater need for building relationships and networks.

A central aspect of an inclusive and pleasant work culture and professional environment is that there is more emphasis on the work being done and deadlines met, than on how long one is at the office or in the lab. For those who have not previously worked in Denmark, it can be especially important to show that work-life balance and a good work environment are a priority in the research group and at the university.

**Give the PhD process a good start**

It is important to introduce organisational, professional, and social communities to ensure that PhD students obtain a good start at their new workplace. A welcome package or introductory seminars are key factors in a good start.

The onboarding of a PhD student should clarify the formal framework and obligations associated with their employment. This can include information about the terms of the PhD process, including the Danish law about PhD studies, collective agreements and rights, obligations and processes regarding leaves of absence, sick-leave, and PhD extensions. As a new employee it is relevant to become familiar with resources such as the practice committee, the union representative system, local union representatives and work environment representatives. The PhD student should be aware that they can approach the local union representative with questions about employment terms and working conditions. An introduction to these rules and systems are particularly relevant for international PhD students, but are also needed for Danish students, since this is a first job for many.

A presentation of institutional working life is also beneficial: department culture, PhD communities, annual calendars, research organisation, PhD committee, unions and associations, and other organisational units can all be relevant for the new PhD student. Furthermore, it is essential that PhD students understand the department’s division of labour, administration, and support functions.
that are relevant for their employment – for example, knowing who conducts the annual performance reviews which PhD students must have with their closest leader.

In order to create a good institutional framework and system to welcome PhD students, it is important that the task of onboarding PhD students be prioritised and clearly established among the relevant employees. Some universities have good experience with buddy-arrangements to facilitate a more informal role in introductions, and to help address questions that might arise during the first three months of employment.

Create an inclusive and respectful research group culture
A PhD project requires participation in collective fora such as research groups and seminars, where senior and junior researchers meet for professional discussions and feedback. Participation in a respectful research community provides an arena for PhD students where research methods can be refined, research cooperation can be developed, and good collegial relationships can be formed.

Examples of initiatives relating to an inclusive organisation

• Many universities systemize good welcome practices and onboarding of new PhD students. One example of this is from CBS, where PhD student representatives have established an on-boarding programme to inspire best practice at all departments. In addition to this programme, the PhD school also arranges an introduction day for new PhD students twice a year together with the student organisation PAC.

• At one of SDU’s PhD schools in Odense, a joint luncheon for all of the faculty’s PhD students is held on the first Tuesday of every month. Moreover, the Head of the PhD school goes to Campus Kolding 1-2 times per semester for informal lunch meetings.

• Similarly, ITU holds PhD school luncheons approximately four times a year focusing on different topics; for example, meeting the PhD committee, management of media contact, research support, and resources for PhD students, as well as career workshops, Open Entrepreneurship, and meetings with the Head of HR and Pro-Rector.

More examples can be found in the appendix.
The Danish Young Academy

The Danish Young Academy, which in 2022 gave an award for the year’s best research environment⁴, has described a number of characteristics found in the good research environment. Below are some examples:

- Regular professional-social events with relevance for research and career.
- Clear articulation of prioritising the positive working tone in professional criticism.
- Team spirit—an understanding that it is not necessary to be friends but it is necessary to be good colleagues. Joint celebrations of victories and joint ownership over losses.
- Good channels of communication with clearly defined goals.
- The role of chairman and those responsible for the organisation of meetings rotates in the research group, for example pairs with junior researchers and senior researchers.
- Support the international network. External guests can be invited by all, and “meet and greets” for all guests can be arranged, where people can sign up for a short meeting with the presenter on a one-to-one basis.
- Openness around challenges and detours—especially from senior researchers.

³ Årets Forskningsmiljø (youngacademy.dk)
A PhD student will learn many new skills in the course of their PhD project: teaching, presenting for peers, and of course the scholarly writing process—all activities which can be difficult to master. Therefore, it is important that PhD students are supported in the development of the right skills, both the purely scholarly, but also the less obvious, for understanding, planning, and completing a large and complicated project.

Nina Nørgaard
PhD, Associate Professor and PhD coach, Faculty of Humanities, University of Southern Denmark
A successful PhD project requires the acquisition of appropriate skills. Good project management skills on the planning and execution of scholarly activities and on progress evaluation are especially important, as are understanding barriers and how to deal with failing to meet goals. Training in these skills can contribute to promoting well-being by reducing uncertainty in the PhD process and its professional quality. PhD schools can strengthen these skills in a number of ways, through counselling as well as courses and workshops, which PhD students can use to improve the planning and management of the PhD process.

**Strengthen time and project management skills**
Planning and prioritisation are two of the key tasks in a PhD education, and it can be challenging if a student misses a deadline or is unable to reasonably distribute the workload over the course of the PhD process. Courses and seminars in project management can provide insight and tools for understanding the framework and timing of the PhD study, and prioritising tasks and resources that are available during the process. This can help give an overview and sense of security in the completion of the PhD project, as well as contribute to a set of skills that can help the PhD student in their further career.

**Provide didactic feedback when the PhD student teaches**
As part of the PhD education, there is a requirement for teaching and communication, and the completion of this can be a demanding task. Courses and the establishment of student groups, where experienced teachers can discuss and provide feedback on teaching plans, learning processes, and professional issues, can contribute to a positive outcome of the teaching task. An early matching of expectations on teaching plans is appropriate; including how the PhD student’s qualifications can complement the departments’ teaching tasks and how much preparation time is allocated to each lecture.

**Focus on writing through workshops**
In many cases, PhD students can benefit from courses that target the task of structuring and writing text for the dissertation. Many universities provide writing workshops in different formats and with different goals, often facilitated by experienced PhD supervisors and writing consultants. They consider journal publishing, analysis of data and empirical evidence, proof-reading of monographs or article based dissertations, the use of intensive writing retreats, as well as “shut up and write” seminars. The goal of such workshops is to strengthen the PhD student’s writing skills, give them different writing tools, and increase their understanding of the writing process, challenges,
and products. Moreover, writing is collectivised and demystified, and by sharing experiences, writing is lifted out of the individual space. Such a collective space can also be used for dialogues on good collaboration practices and on how PhD students can constructively and equally contribute to joint publications.

**Support progress on the thesis**

In order to ensure and evaluate progress, quality, and research results throughout the PhD process, a number of milestones and initiatives can be made available to the PhD student. A halfway evaluation or a Work-in-Progress seminar serves the purpose of allowing PhD students to present their research work and get qualified feedback from senior researchers. A pre-defence can evaluate the upcoming PhD thesis quality and the readiness of the product. A seminar on the a good PhD defence can also give insight into the PhD defence goals and nuances. These milestones and efforts can be part of a continuous evaluation of the project, product, and progression. In addition to these targeted initiatives, PhD students can benefit from presenting their work as it progresses, for example through annual seminars, conferences, research retreats, or as part of internal seminars at the department or within a research group.

### Examples of initiatives on PhD student project management skills

- **At Aarhus University (NAT),** a new on-boarding programme has been developed which includes a number of relevant workshops, including some on research integrity, “Becoming a scientist,” “Well-being and work-life balance,” international mobility, “Getting the most out of your PhD—a career perspective,” and “Literature, data management, and publishing.”

- **Teaching is an important part of the PhD process.** At ITU, PhD students who teach are required to take an ECTS course on university pedagogy.

- **At KU, the HR department at SCIENCE recommends that PhD students do not teach before they have co-taught with an experienced VIP.** This provides the PhD student with tips and tricks, as well as collaboration in planning the PhD student’s teaching.

More examples can be found in the appendix.
As a PhD student, one is often the only person working on the project and therefore the student can end up feeling left alone with all the ups and downs that come over the course of the three years. Here, other PhD students can be one of the most important resources in relation to well-being, since they can share their challenges, experiences, and advice with each other and thereby feel less uncertain and alone.

Line Roager
PhD student, Technical University of Denmark

As a PhD student, one is confronted with an exciting but also hard and, for some, unclear career path. Clarity about the demands and opportunities in a career could potentially reduce the stress that comes with the uncertainty of whether one’s work is good enough.

Federico Jensen
PhD student, Copenhagen Business School
Many young researchers benefit from discussing research and work life with colleagues outside of the supervision space. This can happen through a peer network, mentor programmes, or events with themes on work life in academia. Moreover, supervision and reflection on career paths for researchers can be relevant both early and later on in a PhD process. The pressure on a PhD student to be able to “make it” within the academic system and the uncertainty that is connected with a change to a career outside the university sphere can create frustration and problems, and requires a targeted effort.

Establish a space for dialogue with other PhD students
It can be rewarding for PhD students to share knowledge and experiences about the PhD process. Some institutions have positive experiences with PhD cafés, network seminars, or PhD days at the departments. Spaces for dialogue and the sharing of experiences can be created by setting aside time in the programme for peer-to-peer discussions at already existing events. Permanent events such as research retreats, thematic days at the departments, or other relevant occasions where PhD students are gathered can provide opportunities for knowledge sharing.

Create a space for career reflection and a focus on skills
In order to reduce uncertainty about the future for younger researchers and provide a broader career perspective, universities can offer career counselling and seminars where PhD students have the opportunity to hear about various career paths after a PhD project is completed. Both specific skill courses and competency assessments, as well as inspiration or networking events can help jump-start career considerations. Career counselling can both consider an on-going career in academia including the requirements and milestones, as well as counselling on careers outside the university (in both the public and private sector) with a focus on transferable skills and networking. There is an advantage to making career counselling and guidance available early in the PhD process, since at this point students benefit from knowing which demands exist for different career paths, and which skills and networks can be helpful to develop.

A mentor programme for PhD students can facilitate peer-to-peer learning and experience sharing. A mentor relationship can contribute to an introduction to the university culture, set the scene for personal and professional considerations, inspire possible strategies for research work, and provide an opportunity for career considerations.
The mentor process can be initiated at the beginning of the PhD process and function as part of the introduction, or later in the PhD, in order to provide insight into different themes and topics that may pop up along the way. Mentors can be found broadly among alumni, researchers from other groups, centres, or even other departments, and can be both younger and more experienced researchers. Mentors can also come from outside the university in companies and institutions that hire PhD students. Supervisors should pave the way for PhD students’ professional networks

As a researcher, it is important to have a good professional network, and a supervisor plays an important role in establishing the PhD student’s network. The supervisor should provide young researchers with the opportunity to participate in relevant conferences, and ensure that they can get feedback and knowledge from other researchers within their field. An example of this is the possibility to book one-on-one meetings with guests, collaborators, and presenters when they are visiting for meetings or conferences in Denmark, as well as other places, like conferences, whenever it is possible.

When the university supports spaces for dialogues about well-being, it can help signal that challenges in our work lives are taken seriously. It is pivotal for well-being, to gain a mutual understanding and to prioritize the most important issues—and that action is then taken to resolve them.

Kristoffer Ibsen PhD student, Aarhus University

Examples of initiatives relating to work life as a PhD student and subsequent careers

• At KU SUND, the course *Finishing your PhD and Planning Your Future Career* is offered. Every semester the *PhD Student Career Talk* is offered, where previous PhD students are invited to discuss their career paths as inspiration for current PhD students. The topics switch between academia, industry, and the health sector. KU’s career counsellors in the central HR administration also counsel PhD students and Postdocs on a one-to-one basis.

• Aalborg University has collected experiences from their various initiatives about career paths and well-being in a *career model* for all PhD students. The initiatives include a career course geared towards individual departments, inclusion of the alumni network, a mentor programme for PhD students that supports career choices and the development of a network, a varied offering of case studies/portraits of alumni as inspiration, the possibility for coaching; as well as a number of other initiatives that support different career paths, for example, courses on entrepreneurship, support for funding, and publication strategies. The greatest challenge is to create a permanent awareness among PhD students about the different possibilities and resources.

More examples can be found in the appendix.
Even though the professional interest and motivation are high, PhD students can easily end up alone with their problems and feel that the institution does not see them. Therefore, it can be important for an institution to show the PhD students that their work environment and well-being is a priority.

Janne Gleerup
PhD, Associate Professor, Department of People and Technology, Roskilde University
A number of well-being initiatives are already available and communicated to PhD students at Danish universities. It is important that these initiatives be organisationally and economically well-established in order to ensure their continuity and quality, and that the initiatives are available and known to the PhD students.

**Clarify responsibilities and organisational roles**

Efforts to develop well-being require a good framework, that the necessary resources are in place, and that the correct actors are included and integrated with the institutions’ organisation and goal-setting. It is a good idea to develop a clear division of responsibility on which well-being tasks should be assigned to the supervisor, the PhD school, and the department, as well as how relevant well-being initiatives can be included in the PhD students’ everyday life, making them easily accessible and effective.

**Provide PhD students with opportunities for inclusion and influence**

PhD students should know where and how they can gain influence in their workplaces, and whom they can approach with suggestions. The Danish Ministerial Order on the PhD Programme describes the roles and responsibilities of the PhD committee and the Head of the PhD schools, and opportunities for PhD student representation on the school committee. There are also other forums for decision-making where PhD students have a role. Active participation can be time consuming, and the establishment of a merit system with the possibility to register these hours as work for the department, could be a way to increase engagement. Moreover, it should be ensured that PhD students have a genuine influence in the forums in which they are encouraged to participate. At the institutions and departments where PhD associations, professional clubs, or similar groups exist, it is ideal to include these in the dialogue on well-being and other relevant topics.

**Make the institution’s well-being efforts visible**

Surveys among English PhD students show that the majority feels that poor well-being is a normal consequence of being a PhD student (Hazell et al. 2021). This is likely to be the case in Denmark as well. Therefore, it is beneficial if research institutions clearly communicate that well-being and good institutional support is a priority, and that everyone are expected to contribute to an inclusive and pleasant work environment. It is also important to have continuous communication on existing well-being resources to make them known to the PhD students who need them.
Examples of visible and well established support for well-being

• At SDU, a PhD school contacts the supervisor three months into the PhD programme in order to follow up on recruitment and establish grounds for stepping in if there is a need for adjustments.

• It can be relevant to collect knowledge and resources in relation to well-being. One example of this is Aalborg University’s one stop shop, where all offerings for PhD students at AAU that relate to well-being and career development are gathered on the AAU PhD career HUB. This will be anchored at the PhD schools and will ensure easy and manageable access to available resources.4

More examples can be found in the appendix.

4 AAU PhD Career HUB
References


Hazell, C.M., Chapman, L., Valeix, S.F. et al. (2020). Understanding the mental health of doctoral researchers: a mixed methods systematic review with meta-analysis and meta-synthesis. Systematic Review. 9, 197


In this appendix a number of examples of well-being initiatives at various Danish universities have been collected. The examples do not cover all initiatives across the various Danish research environments but are presented to supplement the examples in the catalogue. The appendix text is divided into the same themes as the catalogue, even though many initiatives and practices address more than one theme.

In the appendix the universities are referred to by the following abbreviations: KU (University of Copenhagen), AU (Aarhus University), SDU (University of Southern Denmark), RUC (Roskilde University), AAU (Aalborg University), DTU (Technical University of Denmark), CBS (Copenhagen Business School) and ITU (IT University of Copenhagen).
Clarifying expectations and continuous evaluation
At KU SUND, it is a requirement that PhD students and their supervisors clarify their expectations of each other and fill out a written agreement on these expectations at the latest three months after the beginning of the programme. Moreover, it is required that PhD students have three regularly scheduled evaluations during their PhD process. The first and last of these take place as meetings. For the second evaluation a meeting is optional and can be held if necessary. A guide for the dialogue between supervisor and PhD student has been developed and can be used during this process.

SDU holds annual evaluation meetings between PhD students and Heads of PhD schools, where a number of well-being related topics can be discussed, for example, the supervisor relationship, delays due to concrete reasons, the possibility for trial defences, etc. The evaluations and discussions with the Head of the PhD school can be confidential, and PhD students are also invited to contact the Head of the PhD school afterwards, if necessary.

Twice a year RUC organises intro-seminars for newly enrolled PhD students. The prorector and research support team welcomes the PhD students at the seminar and informs them of the general framework for doctoral education and the PhD courses offered. The PhD schools run intro-courses in the departments with presentations of the research groups, rules on supervision and code of conduct. Some PhD schools hand out booklets with answers to the most common questions.

Support a strong joint professionalism around the supervision process
PhD schools across the country are organising supervisor training and courses as a part of skills development for PhD supervisors. Often there is a focus on dialogue tools, expectation management, guidelines for the PhD education at the specific faculty, the supervisor’s responsibility and obligations towards the PhD student, the PhD Order, stress prevention, conflict negotiation, cooperation, constructive feedback, as well as facilitating the PhD student’s writing.

Below are further examples from the various universities:

ITU has a three-day course for new PhD supervisors and, supervisors at all PhD schools at SDU are offered PhD supervisor courses.

DTU’s supervisor education has focus on, among other topics, the PhD supervisor’s leadership roles. DTU’s tool for supervisor dialogues has been integrated into the supervisor training.
At RUC the further education unit offers a master call for PhD supervisors in three modules. Module A introduces supervision and the requirements of the PhD order. In module B a research-based approach to PhD supervision is presented to support reflection on their own practice among supervisors. Module C consists of collegial input in small groups.

KU SUND has a new optional course called “PhD Supervision: next level” for 1.5 days with an off-campus overnight stay for experienced primary supervisors. At KU SUND three required courses are offered for supervisors:

- A requirement that all primary supervisors complete the course PhD Supervision: rules and regulations (online). It takes approximately 2 to 3 hours and is an introduction to the rules and requirements of the PhD area, and how these are implemented at SUND.
- A requirement that all new primary supervisors, and all primary supervisors who have not supervised a PhD student as primary supervisor in the past five years, should take the course PhD supervision: advice, tools, and practices, a three days course, spread out over one month.
- A requirement that all primary supervisors take the course Responsible Conduct of Research for Academic Staff, which takes three hours.

Often, clarifying and matching expectations in the community around a PhD student is also important. Many PhD schools articulate the expectation that primary supervisors and co-supervisors decide on expectations with each other regularly throughout the PhD process without the participation of the PhD student. DTU and KU SUND are examples of schools that make a tool available for supervisors to decide on roles and responsibilities.

At DTU, the requirement for a co-supervisor is in place to ensure that the PhD student has more than one go-to contact. It is also a recognition of the many aspects within supervision, and it cannot be expected that one supervisor is strong in all parts of the supervisor role. At DTU, the co-supervisor function is seen as significant in relation to career reflection.

DTU emphasises that there should be clear and equal rules and principles which relate to changing supervisors. This is especially relevant in situations where the assigned primary supervisor has received funds on the basis of which the student is enrolled.

For many supervisors it would also be worth having access to collegial feedback and the ability to share experiences in a professional setting. This is supported at a number of universities by initiatives that both develop the skills of supervisors, as well as provide a network to discuss supervision with colleagues.

KU SUND conducts PhD supervisor talks with external presenters on PhD supervision and other relevant topics twice a semester for primary supervisors and others who are interested. Moreover the website on Successful Supervision provides “10 tips for a good start.”

**Cooperation skills and knowledge of the framework for PhD supervision**

ITU’s PhD school has a two-day ECTS-points symposium for PhD students that addresses supervision as well as project management in the PhD programme. Similarly, DTU has good experiences with seminars for PhD students on the supervisor-student relationship.

KU SUND provides information on the framework for PhD supervision through courses targeted towards supervisors and courses targeted towards PhD students. The information for both groups is also conveyed through the website as well as communicated via email and phone from the PhD school. Moreover, the 22 heads of researcher education programmes and the PhD committee are important actors in the communication of this information.
At CBS, a half-day course on supervision with an experienced coach is offered, which can be especially interesting for new PhD students. A group coaching course as well as individual coaching for PhD students is also offered— the latter is also available for PhD students who are not employed at CBS (private students and industrial PhD students).

PhD schools at RUC run a yearly seminar with relevant academic talks that creates a networking opportunity between the PhD students. A seminar on challenges in the PhD process is also offered to the PhD students, touching on topics such as imposter syndrome, stress and nervousness in relation to teaching.

Case: PhD vision project at KU SCIENCE

Over the course of the last year, a larger PhD vision project at KU Science has focused on a number of topics related to well-being. The vision project is concerned with being able to offer the best possible PhD education to PhD students, and not solely focused on well-being. The assumption is if PhD students get the education that makes the most professional sense to them and where they can develop their skills as young researchers, they will have the greatest chances for thriving as PhD students.

The goals have been:

• To move PhD enrolment as much as possible in the direction of having PhD students employed on formal PhD stipends. Currently, around half of them are employed.

• To strengthen the educational aspects of the PhD education, for example by providing stronger incentives for the offering of relevant PhD courses, creating good models for changes of research environment (both international residencies, but also models that support placement in a company or early entrepreneurship), and creating a good framework for how the up to 840 hours as a PhD student can be used for work at the departments.

• To establish a clear, simple, and effective organisational framework for the PhD education.

• To re-organise the PhD administration so it supports the PhD schools’ central values and the above goals as best possible, including a perspective on resource efficiency.

One of the many results of the PhD vision project is that a 10 ECTS points required PhD course will be developed. In this course the PhD student will join a group of approximately 30 other PhD students. The course will be taken in modules over the span of the PhD education and will touch upon many of the themes that are included in the inspiration catalogue on well-being in PhD education. Many of these themes are already included on an ad-hoc basis in the offered PhD courses at SCIENCE. But this required course will on many fronts strengthen the PhD education and ensure that all PhD students have their skills developed in a coherent, continuous process.
A good start to the PhD process

Universities are working with systemising good welcome practices and on-boarding of new PhD students.

AU NAT has developed an on-boarding programme consisting of 7 workshops to be run twice a year. Some topics of the workshops are well-being, supervision, career skills, research ethics. Some are mandatory, others voluntary. The PhD students can earn up to 4 ECTS points by following the programme.

KU SUND organises welcome meetings for newly hired associate professors and professors, as well as new introduction workshops for PhD students. They plan to expand the current, short introduction to the PhD education in the course Responsible Conduct of Research 1: An Introduction, to a workshop of 2 to 3 hours. In addition, each researcher education programme will conduct an introduction of new PhD students in different ways (for example a welcome email, smaller introductory meetings as well as larger meetings and workshops).

At KU SCIENCE, goals set at the faculty level and at many of the departments focus on good on- and off-boarding of young “researchers in transit,” i.e., PhD students and Postdocs.

There is a large difference in the size of the PhD schools and therefore differences in which initiatives might be possible and relevant. At many of DTU’s PhD schools there are, for example, introduction courses for PhD students held in a retreat format.

At SDU, welcome meetings and on-boarding seminars are held by the PhD schools or departments early in the PhD process and ideally with the participation of many PhD students. There are different formats and themes for the meetings, but there can be, for example, a presentation on the most relevant elements in the PhD education, an opportunity to meet other PhD students, opportunities to meet the Heads of PhD schools, and a chance to ask questions. Some departments have PhD coordinators who arrange an on-boarding process. There is continuous experience sharing between PhD coordinators from different departments.

Some of SDU’s PhD schools hold special welcome events for international PhD students, where there is an emphasis placed on presenting the elements of the PhD education in Denmark which separate them from other foreign PhD educations. Furthermore, an introduction page can be found of one faculty’s PhD school website, which is geared towards newly-started PhD students.
An inclusive and respectful research group culture

The PhD schools at AU have agreed upon establishing preventative well-being initiatives which can support the enrolment of new PhD students and their introduction into the research environment, as well as ensure that more experienced PhD students are supported and experience being a part of the research environment. All the activities have been developed in collaboration with the local research environments and the PhD committee. Below are some examples from the faculties:

- NAT has planned two well-being workshops: Well-being and Work-Life Balance and Efficient Writing for PhD students.

- SUND has planned two workshops with a focus on well-being at the end of the PhD process, where the primary challenges to well-being tend to arise: a project management course and a career course geared towards university careers. With this goal in mind, the PhD school has hired a course developer. The courses have been developed in 2022 and will be held in 2023, after which they will be evaluated.

- The PhD school at BSS has made funds available in 2022 for well-being activities after requests from PhD students and AUPA. Funds for workshops offered locally at individual programmes as well as across AU and a writing retreat (both of which have well-being as a focus) have been applied for. Funds can also be applied for in 2023.

- The PhD school at Arts has also released funds for 2022 for well-being activities after requests from PhD students. All the events have a professional focus and facilitate the possibility for social gathering and networking.

Some PhD schools or researcher education programmes at SDU designate a “buddy” (ideally a member of the PhD committee if possible). The buddy should promote the professional and social environment, for example by taking initiative to invite students for coffee, cake, or lunch meetings within or across various research or education programmes. They can also arrange thematic meetings with guests from outside the university or with the participation of Heads of PhD schools, coaches, or others. The meetings have an informal format, where meeting minutes are not taken. There are ideally 2 to 4 meetings per semester. There are buddy programmes in place at several universities, for example at ITU.

The PhD school at CBS continuously supports department initiatives that are organised by PhD coordinators or by the PhD students themselves. There are for example lunch meetings, PhD seminars, or PhD days, often with a combination of professional content and information on career counselling, academic rules, effective publishing strategies, and other topics. These events also often have a social component and support the establishment of a good community at the department.

There are several PhD schools that support PhD student driven events, for example, PhD students at ITU hold a monthly breakfast with professional content. At DTU, certain PhD students have the task of independently arranging a group of seminars on cooperation, as well as a required PhD symposium (1.5 ECTS) where they decide on the topics themselves.

At one of the PhD schools at RUC, PhD students organise cafés as a space for both social activities and academically relevant talks.
Focus on project management, writing and good work practices

Supervision, courses, and workshops prepare PhD students for the successful completion of a PhD programme. The skills the individual PhD student wishes to strengthen can vary, and therefore it is important that a good framework exists for customising one’s own process, as well as continuous supervision that enables reflection on one’s choice of courses, etc. Below are some examples.

At SDU, the HR department offers courses which are specifically geared towards PhD students. These can be, for example, courses on “Getting started on your teaching,” or courses on project management/leadership. At some PhD schools it is also a requirement to take courses in project management, grant writing, and academic writing courses. RUC and SDU offer joint courses in project management.

The Young Researcher Training Program at DTU is a programme developed and implemented in different variations, both centrally and at individual departments. The goal is to train young researchers in relation to presentation techniques, CV workshops, MBTI workshops, peer to peer dialogues on well-being and doubt, career workshops, and so on.

At KU SUND, PhD students can take a course in “Scientific Project Planning,” which is geared towards first-year PhD students, as well as “Finishing Your PhD and Planning Your Future Career,” which is geared for PhD students in their final year. The focus is on training time and project management skills.

ITU’s PhD school has in recent years focused on the establishment of a teaching portfolio geared towards academic practice and craftsmanship. Examples of ECTS coursework in the portfolio are courses such as “Literature Management and responsible research practice” (three modules), as well as PhD symposiums with the titles: “Into the academic Weekend—the craft of writing and preparing for publication,” “Designing and communicating your work for different audiences in different formats,” and “Navigating your PhD study: turning over the leaf.”

An important part of introducing good research practices consists of developing the PhD students’ understanding of research ethics and integrity. Below are some examples from the universities.

At KU SUND, it is required that PhD students take the courses Responsible Conduct of Research 1: An Introduction, which takes one day, and Responsible Conduct of Research 2: Getting Ready for Submission, which takes four hours.
The university library at SDU offers courses on responsible conduct of research, research ethics, and research integrity. The courses are targeted to PhD students and offered in different versions that are customised to the various faculties.

At ITU, the course Research: Code of Conduct is offered while at RUC, PhD students are enrolled in the mandatory course "Research Integrity and Research Ethics".

Preparing PhD students for teaching
Communication, including teaching, is an important part of the PhD process. Below are examples of how universities are working to strengthen pedagogical skills.

At DTU, there is a required course on teaching for PhD students who have not taught before, with pedagogical feedback and support in communication tasks. The PhD student’s role in teaching can vary, but should be made clear, and a fair time allotment for preparation should be ensured. This support is not necessarily found in the supervisor but fosters a close collaboration between heads of teaching, the supervisor, and the PhD school.

At some of SDU’s PhD schools it is required to take courses in pedagogy. At KU SUND, it is recommended that interested PhD students take the course “Introduction to university pedagogy at KU Science.”

At RUC the Unit for Further Education offers a number of courses available to PhD students on teaching, problem-based project supervision and pedagogical approaches at RUC among others.
Spaces for dialogues about PhD work life
PhD schools at multiple universities (for example at KU, AAU, and SDU) have mentor programmes. The mentors can be, for instance, previous PhD students.

Numerous PhD schools across the country offer coaching to help with stress and other well-being issues. For instance, some PhD schools at SDU have a coach who PhD students can consult as necessary. Another example is KU SUND’s coaching programme, where PhD students can receive up to five sessions with a certified coach who holds a PhD themselves, as well as experience coaching PhD students.

A five-week community-based online programme was offered to all PhD students at DTU in 2020 and 2021 with a focus on mental health and well-being as a young researcher within academia. The programme invited the individual PhD student into a facilitated online community of peers. The programme was not formalised at DTU with expectations of reporting to leaders/supervisors, which meant that every individual participated “as themselves.” This in and of itself made conversations around mental health easier to participate in for many. The programme’s strength lay in that it could be upscaled online to include as many as possible at one time. Altogether, the evaluations of the programme have been very positive across all three groups of 150 PhD students each. It has been especially valuable for students to meet others in the same situation and talk with each other in a professionally facilitated room.

Supporting career reflections
Several universities offer career services for junior researchers. KU as an example, has both a career counsellor at the central HR-department as well as career advisors at individual faculties like for instance at NAT.

At SDU, career counselling is included in the continuous evaluations during the PhD education and at annual performance reviews. Below are some examples of initiatives from the PhD schools.

- Some PhD schools and departments offer career consultations to PhD students and Postdocs.

- Workshops are given on skills assessments, as well as presentations by researchers or previous PhD students who are employed at research institutions or in private companies. Workshop/thematic days are held at some departments with a special PhD and Postdoc focus. There has also been a thematic day held on psychological safety with SDU’s employee psychologist.
• Some PhD schools arrange an annual PhD day in collaboration with the faculty’s PhD association. Thematic days in recent years have been “Career opportunities inside and outside academia,” “Tools to work efficiently and still maintain a work-life balance,” and “Competency assessment”.

Case: The PhD career model at AAU

As mentioned in the catalogue, Aalborg University has collected experiences from their various initiatives related to career paths and well-being into a career model for all PhD students at AAU. The initiatives include among others:

• A career course customised to the individual faculties. A focus on raising awareness among the PhD students that they, already under the PhD process, should make active decisions in relation to their subsequent careers.

• An alumni network of previous PhD students, which, among other things, contributes to including employers in events for current PhD students with inspiration for careers in different sectors.

• A mentor programme for PhD students that supports career choices and networking.

• A varied offering of case studies/portraits of alumni as inspiration.

• The opportunity to have a DISC profile developed, and a follow up feedback session with a certified employee. DISC profiles provide awareness and knowledge on what can be motivating and, perhaps just as important, what can be stressful for the individual PhD student. This is relevant in relation to the PhD programme as well as, to a large degree, the subsequent career.

• PhD plans and progress reports are required elements and updated with a new section on careers. PhD students must therefore reflect on which thoughts they have for their future career and as a result discuss it with their supervisor.

• A number of other initiatives, which are meant to support different career paths, for example, courses on entrepreneurship, support for funding, and publication strategies.
**Theme 5**
Examples of initiatives aimed at creating visibility and good organisational frameworks

**Make well-being initiatives and opportunities for influence visible**

The PhD Committees at RUC often discuss questions concerning well-being and work environment. One current topic that has been brought up by a PhD student is the #pleasedontstealmywork campaign. One of the PhD schools has focused on PhD students’ working conditions and has facilitated a discussion involving PhD students and supervisors of possible initiatives. External consultants were also involved to ensure a specialist perspective.

RUC’s four PhD schools are organised in different ways, but the PhD students can influence the topics of PhD courses available in their school. In one of the PhD schools, it has been a priority to formulate and present the local well-being strategy on the intranet - thus making it available for PhD students to see.

At KU SUND a page on the website about well-being support for PhD students has been developed. This has been shared with all PhD students, supervisors, researcher education programme leaders, and PhD committees. A corresponding page for supervisors has been made, and this has also been broadly shared.

At KU SUND, PhD students can assert influence via the PhD committee. This is communicated about to the entire faculty via the website, videos, news, etc. PhD students can also exercise influence over their education through the steering committee in their researcher education programme. This is conveyed by the researcher education programme leaders locally. Moreover, there are also other forums at some departments and centres where PhD students can be active. This is also communicated locally.

**Organisation of initiatives**

At AU the five faculties have established a joint well-being committee with representatives from all five PhD committees. The five PhD school heads are permanent members of the committee. The forum is used to discuss common challenges, coordinate initiatives and suggest new activities.

Every fourth year AU conducts a survey titled *Quality in the PhD Process*. The survey has a well-being focus, and the results are discussed in PhD committees among department managements. The latest survey resulted in a revision of the well-being action plans.

DTU ENERGY has had positive experiences with final evaluations for graduated PhDs, which provide useful information and knowledge about the general situation at the PhD school.
At SDU, a well-being survey is carried out among PhD students. The results are discussed with the PhD committee and used in the development of well-being strategies, as well as in the planning of well-being and motivation-promoting initiatives.

At SDU, initiatives are also organised within libraries and PhD associations:

- SDU’s University Library has established special facilities for PhD students. There are conversation pods, which can be used for interviews or supervisor meetings, a lounge area, and an open area, which can be used for presentations and similar events (for example, if PhD students wish to practice a presentation before the PhD defence). A PhD Café is also being arranged with presentations, ideally with external guests.  
- PAUSD, the PhD Association at the University of Southern Denmark, is an inter-faculty interest organisation run by PhD students. The organisation arranges social and professional events, and represents SDU in the national PhD organisation PAND.

In 2021, the PhD school at ITU carried out the survey “Quality in the PhD education at ITU” followed by workshops held with PhD students and supervisors. The PhD school and HR department have also, as a new initiative, organised a weekly meeting time where PhD students can show up and discuss everything from help filling out an application for an international residency to questions about leaves of absence, conversations on well-being, etc.

DTU has implemented a PhD reform which should, among other things, increase well-being among PhD students, including by making clear where PhD students can assert their influence. One of the goals of the reform at DTU is that students can in fact gain more influence. Previously there were five cross-departmental PhD committees, whereas today there is one PhD committee per PhD school. The previous PhD committees dealt with a large amount of case management, whereas the new PhD committees to a greater degree concentrate on development and initiatives at the school level. Here, the students’ perspectives are significant. DTU’s PhD association is included in different development initiatives at DTU and is financially supported in relation to its operation and activities.

One research group at DTU with many PhD students has designated one researcher as responsible for ensuring the PhD students’ integration, arranging talks, and networking among other research groups and PhD students. This role rotates within the group.

At KU SCIENCE there is a PhD coordinator at every department. A large part of their job is to get to know the PhD students, so they function as both mentor and ombudsman in relation to PhD students and their research groups. There is a large difference in implementation among the different departments and there is a goal to streamline the practice of the PhD coordinator function to fit the greatest common denominator.

HR at KU SCIENCE recommends the creation of coordination groups at all departments, which can organise different events for the department’s PhD students. The coordinators can, for example, facilitate meetings between the PhD students who have just taught and those who are about to teach.

At SUND, there are also PhD coordinators who are attached to the researcher education programmes or placed at hospitals. Some of these function as coordinator and support the steering committee, while others also function as advisers for the PhD students. At KU SUND, the PhD school is currently working on ensuring all PhD students gaining access to the PhD coordinator/adviser regardless of which researcher education programme they are attached to.

RUC recently revised its five-year PhD strategy that includes a focus on well-being and working conditions as a priority for the development of all PhD schools.
Well-being in PhD Education

Appendix

1. Alignment of expectations between supervisor and PhD student - University of Copenhagen (ku.dk)
2. Three regular assessments: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/supervision/assessments/
4. PhD supervision: next level: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/for-supervisors/phd-supervision-next-level/
5. PhD supervision. Rules and regulations + PhD supervision. Advice, tools and practices: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/phd-supervision-courses/
7. Alignment of expectations among supervisors: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/supervision/information/Alignment_of_expectations_among_PhD_supervisors.pdf
8. PhD Supervisor Talks: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/for-supervisors/supervisor-talks/
9. Successful supervision: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/supervision/supervision_recommendations/https://en.itu.dk/Research/PhD-Programme/PhD-Courses/PhD-courses-2021/PhDSymposium----Navigating-your-PhD-study----turning-over-the-leaf/
10. Graduate programmes: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/about-the-graduate-school/graduateprogrammes/
11. PhD study board: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/about-the-graduate-school/boards-committees/
14. PhD Courses/PhD-courses-2022/November/Literature-management---autumn---module-1
15. https://en.itu.dk/Research/PhD-Programme/PhDCourses/PhD-courses-2022/October/PhD-Symposium---Into-the-academic-Werkstatt---the-craft-of-writing-and-preparing-for-publication
16. https://en.itu.dk/Research/PhD-Programme/PhDCourses/PhD-courses-2021/PhDSymposium----Designing-and-communicating-your-work-for-different-audiences-in-different-formats
17. https://en.itu.dk/Research/PhD-Programme/PhDCourses/PhD-courses-2021/PhDSymposium----Navigating-your-PhD-study----turning-over-the-leaf
18. https://en.itu.dk/Research/PhD-Programme/PhD-Courses/PhD-courses-2022/November/PhD-Course---Research-Code-of-Conduct
19. https://en.itu.dk/Research/PhD-Programme/PhD-Courses/PhD-courses-2022/October/PhD-Symposium---Designing-and-communicating-your-work-for-different-audiences-in-different-formats
20. Introductory to University Pedagogy på Science, KU: https://www.ind.ku.dk/English/course_overview/iup/
21. Faculty of Engineering information om coach for ph.d-studerende
22. Coaching for PhD Students: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/support-for-phd-students/coaching-for-phd-students/
23. Support for PhD students: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/support-for-phd-students/
24. For PhD Supervisors: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/for-supervisors/
25. PhD coordinators: https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/support-for-phd-students/coordinators/
26. PAUSD – PhD Association at the University of Southern Denmark
27. Philotek og Ph.d.-café at Universitetsbiblioteket, (see list of previous events).

Notes

Please note: The universities’ websites are dynamic, e.g. subpages can be moved or deleted. If a link doesn’t work, the material can be requested from the relevant university or faculty.