

## Types of scientist positions at AU Natural Sciences

Postdoc, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor are the four most common positions for researchers holding a PhD at AU Natural Sciences (NAT). Here, we describe these positions, in accordance with the legal framework of the Danish “Memorandum on Job Structure for Academic Staff at Universities” (in Danish: [Bekendtgørelse om stillingsstruktur for videnskabeligt personale ved universiteter](#)).

### Postdoc

A postdoc position is time limited, and the most common next step for researchers who continue working in academia after completing their PhD. The main duty of a postdoc is research, and postdocs typically work on a specific research project under guidance of a more senior scientist. The postdoc can be leading the research project, as is the case for most projects supported by postdoc grants, or be part of a larger collaborative research project. Besides research, postdocs are often involved in other tasks, such as teaching and supervision of graduate students.

By far the most postdocs are employed at NAT in only a relatively short period. Keeping the postdoc employment between typically two and three years is in accordance with studies emphasising that postdocs gain important competences and skills in the first few years after their PhD (LERU, 2018), while prolonged postdoc employment without a major change of direction often adds little to the postdoc’s career opportunities (DFIR, 2019). In line with this, postdoc employment is in Denmark limited to at most four years at the same university.

Due to the temporal nature of a postdoc employment, career development from postdoc to next employment is a primary focus for both the postdoc and their leader. Clarification of career goals, career planning and competency development are therefore important aspects of a postdoc period. Accordingly, NAT strongly encourages and supports postdocs in reflecting upon their individual professional ambitions and talents, and to match these with career opportunities in the private or public sector in Denmark or elsewhere. In addition, NAT strives to secure the time and peace of mind necessary for this development by means of an adequate duration of postdoc employment.

Senior positions at universities are few, and NAT acknowledges that not all members of NAT’s postdoc community should pursue a university research career. However, there is a strong demand for researchers in natural sciences by both the private and public sector in Denmark. It is in this spirit, that NAT offers access to a wide range of career counselling and skill development measures, both with respect to careers inside and outside academia.

### Assistant Professor

Similar to a postdoc position, an Assistant Professor position is time limited. However, unlike a postdoc position, it is reserved for researchers pursuing a university career by qualifying for an Associate Professor position. A position as Assistant Professor is therefore an important steppingstone from PhD or postdoc to a tenured university position as senior scientist. The main tasks of an Assistant Professor are research and research-based education. NAT uses this set of entry criteria to assess candidates for an Assistant Professor position: [Nat's criteria for evaluating candidates for scientific positions](#).

Assistant Professors are more independent researchers than postdocs typically are, and most of them are hired after having developed qualifications and scientific independence during some years as a postdoc, although this is not a formal requirement. At NAT, they usually establish their own research unit and collaborative network, both within academia and beyond (e.g., with the private sector).



Many of them succeed in winning prestigious career grants from either national or international funding bodies.

Assistant Professors teach, supervise graduate students, and supervise PhD students in cooperation with a more senior colleague. Developing educational skills is a major career development goal for Assistant Professors (cf. section on Education and Teaching in [Nat's criteria for evaluating candidates for scientific positions](#)), and all newly appointed Assistant Professors at NAT enrol in AU's University Pedagogical Programme.

For Assistant Professors without tenure track, employment at NAT is limited to at most four years, whereafter they often continue their career at another research institution. Tenure track Assistant Professors at Nat can - after a rigorous external evaluation with positive outcome - continue their career as Associate Professor at NAT (cf. [NAT's tenure track framework](#)).

NAT supports Assistant Professors with and without tenure track in planning, shaping, and advancing their careers, and career planning is a mandatory part of the employment as Assistant Professor. Their career development plan can include, but is not limited to, international mobility, mentoring, competency development, recognition of teaching and supervision activities.

### **Associate Professor**

An Associate Professor position is a senior and by default a tenured position, with research and research-based education as main responsibilities. Associate Professors are fully independent researchers, and they usually lead their own research unit including supervision of PhD students and postdocs. Associate Professors independently teach and examine their students and cooperate with colleagues and students in developing their own teaching and supervision competencies, as well as new courses and educational programmes. Compared to a Professor position, an Associate Professor position typically involves fewer and less heavy management tasks, and the entry requirements, in particular with respect to leadership in research and education, are lower. NAT uses this set of criteria to assess candidates for an Associate Professor position: [Nat's criteria for evaluating candidates for scientific positions](#).

NAT supports Associate Professors in developing their skills and career opportunities. This includes a leadership programme for research managers, training with respect to coordinating major EU grant applications, and more. Besides, a selected small group of Associate Professors enrolls in NAT's [professor promotion programme](#) promotion every year.

### **Professor**

A Professor position is a senior and by default a tenured position. The main responsibilities of a Professor are research and research-based education, combined with a strong focus on research leadership and management. This implies leadership for their own research group, and beyond. Professors thus contribute to their department's general development and management, and often lead larger research consortia. They take the lead in developing teaching, and educational programmes. They have tasks in representing and profiling the department and university, and communicate science to the public and external stakeholders, e.g., by involving themselves in public debates. They often have formal roles that serve the local, national or international scientific communities. A Professor position demands the highest entry qualifications of all types of scientific positions [Nat's criteria for evaluating candidates for scientific positions](#).

NAT supports professors in developing their skills, in particular with respect to advancing the career of more junior researchers in their group, and in their own professional development.

*Delivering talent: Careers of researchers inside and outside of academia*, League of European Research Universities (LERU) position paper, 2018

*Karrierer i forskningen - Sammenhæng og fleksibilitet i forskeres karriereveje*, Danmarks Forsknings- og Innovationspolitiske Råd (DFIR), 2019