# Onboarding new employees with teaching duties
# at the Faculty of Natural Sciences

**Background**

In March 2023, the NAT faculty management team decided to implement a new job structure for academic staff at Danish universities with focus on assistant professor mentoring and onboarding new employees.

In this document, onboarding new employees covers all academic staff (VIP) categories from postdoc[1] to professor, regardless of nationality. The onboarding description particularly focuses on introducing new employees to teaching and the teaching role and on the development of pedagogical/didactic competencies.

This document was made because the faculty management team wanted to investigate what is being done to ensure that new (international) academic colleagues are introduced to teaching tasks and that they acquire the competencies necessary to complete them. NAT is a workplace with many international employees, and the faculty hopes that increased focus on onboarding will provide additional support for this group of employees. The new job structure also ensures that research and research-based teaching are equalised, and it sets higher requirements for teaching competencies. The aim of this document is to help individual employees meet the new assessment criteria.

The document comprises recommendations and advice on how the departments can facilitate the introduction of new staff, particularly in relation to teaching. A great deal of work is already being done with respect to onboarding at individual departments, and good local examples will be highlighted throughout this document. The examples can help initiate or improve activities related to a department's onboarding new employees.

**Pre-onboarding**

The departments can integrate onboarding as early as in the appointment process (primarily for permanent academic positions), and this can help ensure early mutual alignment of expectations between a VIP candidate and the department's VIP group.

The Department of Chemistry (CHEM) has incorporated two site visits: the first in connection with the job interview and the second after the job offer/prior to the start date of employment (tenure track assistant professor positions and upwards). The first site visit consists of a two-day programme, which includes meetings with relevant people/groups and with AU's International Staff Office (international candidates), a guided tour, and an academic presentation or an example of teaching by the candidate.

The second site visit is for the candidate who is offered the job, and they can bring their partner/family. The aim of this site visit is to begin with a broad onboarding that includes meeting future colleagues within the relevant field, making agreements about laboratory conditions, meeting fundraisers, visiting kindergartens/schools, and experiencing Aarhus in a more informal setting.

---

[1] General information about postdocs as a target group in this document: Some departments have a large proportion of postdocs and can themselves assess whether the individual teaching assignments of (some of) these postdocs are significant enough to include the person in the target group.

**Onboarding**

When a person joins a department as a new employee, a lot of new information, impressions and meetings with new colleagues will naturally follow. Before the start date, the new employee might receive emails with additional information. The departments could consider limiting or prioritising the amount of information new employees receive during their first week and, as a minimum, let them know who their primary contact person or buddy is. Some departments have all this information compiled on a single webpage, for example [the welcome page for new colleagues at the Department of Computer Science CS](#).

Example of a department checklist prior to the arrival of a new colleague: [New_onboarding_process_BIO_UK.pdf (au.dk)](#)

Introduction programmes at the departments are organised on an individual basis. There is a fundamental expectation that onboarding should meet the needs of the new employee while also covering the department's most important functions as they pertain to the specific employee. To help ensure a good onboarding, it is advisable to include elements such as workplace culture and social and collegial events/networks/traditions.

**Onboarding in relation to teaching**

Within three months, new employees at NAT are expected to have gained a fairly good idea of how the department is organised via meetings with representatives from education committees, PhD programme committees, research committees, and meetings with department heads, etc.

Within three months, new employees should have had at least one meeting with the head of department and their immediate manager to gauge and match expectations regarding their new role at the department/within the group, and a meeting with the deputy head of department for education/head of degree programme. We recommend that the scope of an employee's involvement in teaching be settled during this period.

The deputy head of department for education/head of degree programme is responsible for introducing new employees to relevant key persons, teaching colleagues and education committees. We recommend that new members of staff with teaching responsibilities be gradually introduced to their teaching role in partnership with a more experienced VIP and on existing courses. We also recommend that new employees have at least one meeting with the course coordinator to review the objectives, learning outcomes, teaching elements and structure of the course.

Heads of degree programmes and/or heads of departments/immediate managers should introduce new employees (primarily assistant professors and upwards) to relevant courses at AU, i.e. supervisor courses, the University Pedagogical Programme and courses for research group leaders. The employee and immediate manager should gauge and match expectations and prepare a written agreement regarding the employee's participation in the University Pedagogical Programme. This can be done during SDD dialogues or in the career plans.

[NAT's core values for education](#) describe the faculty's core values within the field of education, and both new and experienced employees who work with teaching should be familiar with these values.

At AU, the [Centre for Educational Development](#) (CED) can spar with departments on topics such as university teaching, learning technology, teaching and education. In connection with onboarding new

employees, CED can collaborate with a department – or several departments together – on facilitating local onboarding/intro meetings for (future) teaching staff, i.e. a broad introduction to teaching, including teaching practice.

As a minimum, new employees should be introduced to the following[2]:

- What is the teaching practice here?
- Who can you spar with in relation to teaching duties?
- Introduction to the formal framework and guidelines for teaching
- Introuction to the quality assurance system/processes and handling teaching evaluations
- Courses: Information regarding requirements for course content, development and revision of course programmes, possibilities for creating new courses, how to merge new courses with existing ones. We recommend that a senior colleague helps you with this
- Practical and technical information: Introduction to different systems, Brightspace, the Digital Exams system and process for exams, course descriptions, LMS, AU Educate, access to computers etc. for teaching, licenses for programs, local expectations regarding "tools" (Python vs Matlab), purchase of textbooks
- Introduction to development courses at CED and meeting with CED to discuss digital opportunities in teaching
- Introduction to the teaching culture in Denmark: The informal teaching situation and flat hierarchy can surprise new, and especially international, teaching staff. To address this, it can be helpful for new employees to observe their colleagues in the lecture hall or classroom, either by letting them shadow a skilled/experienced lecturer or by offering them peer-to-peer training with the course coordinator, for example. CED also offers the online course [Teaching@AU](#), which is aimed at new employees and international teaching staff.

**Successful onboarding**

To make it easier for new employees to settle in and integrate into the teaching environment at NAT, the departments must ensure that the employee and their immediate manager gauge and align expectations regarding teaching as early as possible. The alignment of expectations should be in writing (e.g. in the SDD form or career plans) to ensure the best development for the employee.

**Individual plan for course participation in relation to pedagogical/didactic competencies**

Relevant courses include the University Pedagogical Programme, PhD supervisor courses, courses for research group leaders, possibly Danish courses or the International Staff Office's events for international staff.

New employees and their immediate managers should align expectations regarding the employee's responsibilities within 3-6 months of recruitment. A course plan centred on strengthening the pedagogical/didactic competencies of the employee can be tailored to the employee in terms of content and duration. An assistant professor who wishes to remain at AU might therefore need a course plan centred on preparing for the role as a lecturer. A newly appointed senior VIP with teaching experience on the other hand may need a course plan with fewer didactic courses.

---

[2] Whether this is done by the deputy head of department, head of degree programme, course coordinator, a representative from the education committee or another depends on the organisation of the department and the division of tasks internally.

The alignment of expectations and any tailored course plan should be initiated at the first SDD dialogue or during the career development dialogue for new employees.

**Individual plan for teaching activities, etc.**

Relevant activities can include teaching or other non-research-related tasks, e.g. committee work.

In connection with the preliminary meetings after appointment, it might be necessary to discuss plans or expectations for teaching activities, i.e. align expectations with the immediate manager to act as a kind of benchmark for a (new) employee. This will give the employee an idea of when they are expected to be involved in teaching activities, and how they are expected to balance research and teaching tasks. It can be helpful to explain to international staff that they earn credits by participating in teaching activities, and that teaching helps them gain exposure and meet students, and this will be helpful when recruiting Bachelor's and Master's degree students for their research group.

Meetings about specific tasks should be held during the early stages of the employment e.g. at the first SSD dialogue or the career development dialogue for assistant professors.

**Conclusion**

NAT wants to be an attractive place to work, where all employees continuously develop their competencies and achieve new learning. This applies to both academic and personal competencies so they become better at their own work and at learning new things.

| THE TEACHER ROLE | COLLEAGUES |
|---|---|
| Communication skills | in relation to teaching |
| Learn and be inspired by shadowing experienced teaching staff | Sense of community and sparring |

**New employee**

| STUDENTS | COURSES |
|---|---|
| Informal and flat hierarchy | Development of academic competencies |
| Questions and criticism | |
| Course evaluations | Framework and planning |