



## Minutes from PhD Programme Committee meeting

**Time:** Tuesday, 21 November 2023

**Schedule:**

09.00 – 10.00: Dialogue meeting with GSNS

10.00 – 11.00: PhD Programme Committee meeting

11.00 – 12.00: Admission meeting – November call

**Place:** Universitetsbyen 81, 1872-547

**Participants:**

Ditlev Egeskov Brodersen, Head of Programme; Daan van Aalten, Anni Hangaard Andersen, Christian Kroun Damgaard, Knud Erik Larsen, Pia Møller Martensen, Jan Trige Rasmussen and Helle Homann (minute taker).

*At Dialogue meeting, in addition:* David Lundbek Egholm, Head of GSNS; Mie Meulengracht Christensen, PhD Partner for MBG; Rikke J. Ljungmann, Head of PhD Administration, NAT and TECH.

*At Dialogue meeting and PhD Programme Committee meeting, in addition:* Anna Hvarregaard Christensen, Rajlakshmi Sawale.

**Absent:** Nanna Birkmose.

| Item | Minutes   |
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| 1.   | <p><b>Dialogue meeting with GSNS</b></p> <p>The Graduate School of Natural Sciences (GSNS) is on tour during November and December visiting the individual PhD programmes at the faculty, including MBG. The aim of the dialogue meetings is to obtain valuable feedback from the Programme Committee members and to facilitate discussions about problems or concerns if any.</p> <p>The dialogue meeting with GSNS started with a short introductory round. In this connection, David Lundbek Egholm (DLE) mentioned that even though he resigned as vice-dean for research at the Faculty of Natural Sciences by 1 August 2023, he will continue as Head of the Graduate School until the new vice-dean, Ole Bækgaard Nielsen from Department of Public Health, is ready to take over. The exact date has not been agreed but it will be in the beginning of 2024.</p> <p>Afterwards, DLE presented the latest updates from GSNS:</p> <p>For the first time, PhD students from all eight programmes at GSNS are now represented in the NAT PhD Committee after the AU election last week. This is a very positive development. It is</p> |



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|           | <p>important that the PhD students are made aware of the opportunity to become a member of the PhD Committee and have important influence on their studies at this level.</p> <p>Well-being continues to be a major challenge for PhD students. Several surveys, including an international review and workplace assessment (APV), have shown that PhD students deal with problems such as stress, insecurity and loneliness. One of the reasons for the lack of well-being is the fact that PhD students are very busy. The Danish PhD education is short by international standards and contains many compulsory study elements (teaching, research, environment change and 30 ECTS of coursework). In order to improve well-being, GSNS has, among other things, launched a new onboarding programme which will introduce new PhD students to various work tools relating to the process of doing a PhD project. By participating in the programme the PhD students will also be offered an insight into handling ups and downs during their PhD – and get ECTS while doing so.</p> <p>However, teaching is still a challenge for the well-being of our students and is often perceived as a burden. Generally, students are satisfied with the content of their teaching, but not with the extent of it. PhD students at AU NAT hold the record in the number of teaching hours which is out of balance with the other study elements. This is a problem that needs to be dealt with.</p> <p>Despite the various challenges, DLE stressed the fact that there are also many positive elements in the PhD study to build on in the future. Our PhD students are for example very satisfied with their supervisors and appreciate the possibility of studying abroad during their PhD.</p> <p>In conclusion, DLE touched upon the subject of recruitment of PhD candidates. Several programmes report that the number of qualified candidates has gone down in recent years. Therefore, it is important to explore new recruitment strategies and ways to attract talented PhD candidates, and GSNS welcomes input from the individual programmes on this issue.</p> <p>The subsequent discussion focused mainly on the question of teaching workload. In this connection, Ditlev Egeskov Brodersen (DEB) stated that he supports the viewpoint that the amount of teaching hours is a challenge. However, he also sees teaching as an integral part of academic life that yields important experience. Therefore, it would help if teaching was talked about in a more positive manner. A change of mindset could be beneficial in this respect, so we stop talking about teaching as a “burden”.</p> <p>Anna Hvarregaard Christensen (AHC) also mentioned that the teaching workload potentially could have a negative impact on recruitment of talented PhD students. When choosing a PhD programme, students might tend to gravitate towards Health rather than NAT because the teaching workload is more moderate at Health.</p> <p>Finally, DLE pointed out that the dissatisfaction with teaching can only be solved by the departments and that the various PhD Programme Committees play a crucial part in facilitating a solution.</p> |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>PhD Programme Committee meeting</b><br><i>Feedback from the Sandbjerg PhD Conference:</i>   |



AHC gave a recap of three of the subjects that the PhD students had discussed during the PhD Conference in October: 1. ECTS points, 2. Hybrid defences and 3. Management training for supervisors.

Several of the subjects had been suggested by DEB prior to the conference, and AHC stated that it worked really well to be given subjects in advance and that this should be repeated for next year's conference. Therefore, it was decided that a discussion about subjects for the PhD Conference in 2024 is put on the agenda for the programme meeting in August.

#### 1. ECTS points:

GSNS has presented a new catalogue of activities other than regular courses that are eligible for ECTS credits: [ECTS credits for PhD activities other than regular courses at GSNS, AU](#). Following a discussion about which activities should yield ECTS points in our programme, the PhD students made the suggestion that supervision of bachelor students should be added to the list of activities presented in the catalogue.

#### 2. Hybrid defences:

GSNS strongly recommends that all members of the assessment committee are present on-site during the PhD defence as this gives a much better experience for the students. Therefore, hybrid defences, where one or even both of the opponents participate online, will need approval from the Head of Programme. Nevertheless, at the conference the PhD students concluded that they generally have a positive view of hybrid defences. It is not really a problem that opponents do not participate physically. What is important is that the PhD students are given the opportunity to discuss if they want a hybrid defence or not. The decision about how the PhD defence is conducted should not be based solely on the supervisor's preferences in regard to suitable opponents.

According to the PhD students, the only concern in respect to hybrid defences is the technical challenges that there can be. It can be difficult to handle the equipment and making sure that the Zoom connection is working on top of preparing for the PhD defence. Therefore, the PhD students would prefer if the technical side of things was not their responsibility. In this connection, Jan Trige Rasmussen (JTR) suggested that some sort of technical support should be available for PhD defences. Possibly from AU IT.

DEB will present the programme committee's view on hybrid defences at the next PI meeting and communicate that the format still needs to be approved but that the PhD students see certain advantages in the hybrid form. For that reason, it should be discussed between student and supervisor how the defence is best conducted. Furthermore, DEB will look into the question of technical support for PhD defences and ask AU IT if it's possible for them to provide any kind of help.

#### 3. Management training for supervisors:

Many PhD students have independently suggested that there should be some sort of mandatory management training for supervisors on a regular basis. The training should aim to ensure that supervisors have a solid basis for supervising PhD students in relation to both professional and



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|           | <p>personal development. Ideally, this also could play an important part in ensuring well-being among PhD students as well as helping to create the framework for a more uniform supervision.</p> <p>According to DEB, this subject will be debated further in connection with the scheduled discussion about well-being talks later at the admission meeting.</p> <p>Moreover, DEB remarked that it is important to bear in mind that a good relationship between supervisor and PhD student is a key factor for a successful and productive PhD study. The scientific work is not all that matters. Personality and communication style also play a huge part.</p> <p>Daan van Aalten (DvA) added that students should be offered some kind of information about how to choose the best supervisor. Furthermore, the responsibility for making things work in the best way always lies with the supervisor - not with the student.</p> <p><i>Offers for PhD students from other programmes:</i></p> <p>Next item on the agenda was the question of how to ensure that PhD students from other programmes studying at MBG get the same offers as regular PhD students at MBG, for example well-being talks and invitations to the PhD Conference.</p> <p>At present, an overview over the number of external PhD students at MBG is lacking. Information about external PhD students is not sent to the department or to the PhD Programme Committee. Usually, the secretariat does not know about the arrival of such students before they show up to have their picture taken for the website or to get keys and access cards.</p> <p>Helle Homann (HH) will discuss the subject with her colleagues in the secretariat and investigate how it might be possible to obtain information about the external PhD students in an effective way in order to make sure that they are sent emails about relevant offers and activities.</p> <p>It was agreed that DEB is to be informed about the arrival of external PhD students regularly.</p> <p><i>Advisory committees – how are they best organized?:</i></p> <p>A discussion of advisory committees and the best way to organize them was postponed to the next programme meeting in February.</p> |
| <b>3.</b> | <p><b>Admission meeting</b></p> <p><i>Nomination for the AUFF PhD Award:</i></p> <p>After assessing the candidates for the November Call, the committee members discussed possible candidates for the AUFF PhD prize 2024. There will be five awards in total, and prizes are conferred in recognition of particularly outstanding PhD projects at AU. The committee next decided on two prioritised suggestions, among all PhD graduates of 2023, one female og one male, which will be nominated before the deadline on 18 December 2023.</p> <p><i>Well-being talks – a discussion of how to best conduct well-being talks:</i></p>  |



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|           | <p>This item was postponed to the next admission meeting in February.</p> <p>Before this meeting, the committee members will revise the list of topics discussed during the alignment of expectations meetings as well as the guidelines for the well-being talks. The comments and corrections will be discussed at the upcoming meeting.</p> |
| <b>4.</b> | <p><b>Changes in the PhD Programme Committee</b></p> <p>Knud Larsen (KEL) is standing down as PhD Programme Committee member. Hence, the meeting on 21 November was his last meeting in the committee. KEL has been part of the committee for ten years and will be replaced by Kasper Røjkjær Andersen in January 2024.</p>                   |