



10  
pieces  
of advice

when receiving  
international  
employees

# Reception of international employees at UCPH

This leaflet is intended for departments that have recently received a new international colleague and who would like advice and ideas about how to make them feel comfortable at UCPH and make sure that they can participate in department activities alongside their Danish colleagues.

## Language

“Do I have to learn Danish?” is a recurring question with no definite answer. It depends on where the international employee is going to work, for how long they will be working in Denmark and on the requirements set by the specific faculty or department. A piece of advice for your new international colleague is that there is no harm in learning Danish, also considering the fact that Danish lessons are free during the first years of living in Denmark. You can help your international colleagues to learn Danish by speaking Danish with them on a daily basis.

International employees who learn Danish will not only be able to participate equally in the social life at your department or faculty, but with time, they will also be able to join committees such as study boards or academic councils. Moreover, if the position involves teaching, the international employee will be able to contribute on equal terms with their Danish colleagues. Lastly, daily life in Denmark is without a doubt easier when you speak the language. The Center for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use (CIP) at the Faculty of Humanities offers Danish lessons and can help answer any questions about Danish language training.

## 10 ideas

Most departments at UCPH have joined or developed initiatives that can contribute to ensuring that international employees and their families are well received. For inspiration, we have gathered some of the best ideas in this leaflet. If you are interested in more information, the abbreviations of the respective departments are mentioned alongside each idea. You are also welcome to contact International Staff Mobility (ISM) for more information. We hope this leaflet will inspire you and that you get the chance to try some of the ideas in practice.



*Social events are a great way to integrate new employees. They create a relation that is not only based on forms and complicated systems, but also on mutual understanding and shared experiences.”*

Anette Studsgård  
Administrative Coordinator  
Niels Bohr International Academy  
(NBIA)

# 1

## Welcome email

(ICMM, IGN, IKK, IKVH, ISM, LAW, MATH, NBIA)



Much of the knowledge and information Danes have about Danish society is implicit knowledge. When international researchers come to Denmark to work and live, they will not have the same understanding of Danish work culture and values as Danes do. Most newcomers are not familiar with the concept of union representatives, trade unions, unemployment funds, PDR meetings etc. All of this information is important to pass on to international employees.

When an international researcher is employed at UCPH, they receive a welcome email from the University with general information about registration in Denmark and the terms of employment. Most of the departments also send out a welcome letter. The researchers end up receiving a lot of information, which is why it is important that the information is consistent and not repetitive. In this regard, the departments should focus on local conditions such as campus information, administration, rules regarding sick leave, information security etc.

# 2

## Welcome meeting

(ICMM, ISM, MATH, NBIA)



First impressions are important in terms of how UCPH is perceived as a workplace and whether the researcher will thrive here. It is therefore important to consider how to make international researchers feel welcome. A good way to start is by inviting the new employee to a welcome meeting where they get the chance to meet their colleagues and learn about their new place of work. It is a good idea to have both Danish and international staff members present at this meeting.

### Head of Department or Dean bids welcome

Many international researchers come from countries with a more hierarchical working culture and authoritarian management than that found in Denmark. Therefore, many internationals will appreciate being welcomed by the department head/dean.

### Local guided tour

Every faculty and department has something particularly interesting to introduce to a new colleague. It can be a historical landmark, stories about the buildings, practical information or something typically Danish, like a 'hyggelig' conversation over a cup of coffee.

### Danish food

Taking in a lot of new information can be overwhelming, which is why it is a good idea to incorporate breaks. During breaks, Danish food or snacks are a good way to learn more about Danish culture, and can work as a good topic of conversation.



# 3

## Remember the family

One of the most important factors in terms of retaining international researchers is that their families and spouses also thrive in Denmark. It is crucial that we make an effort to include and invite the partner/spouse of an international researcher to a welcome meeting or a social event in order to make them feel welcome. Remember to refer to the ISM Dual Career ~ Spouse Network where spouses are offered free individual meetings, job coaching, networking activities etc.



5

## Welcome dialogue

(IKK, ICMM)

## Start PDR

(TORS)

As described earlier, the first impression is important. When first arriving to Denmark, the international researchers and their families have many questions. They are unsure about rules, expectations and requirements from Danish authorities and from UCPH as a workplace. Many express an uncertainty as to whether they have remembered to ask the important questions. An individual welcome meeting (IKK), a start PDR – Performance and Development Review – (TORS) or a welcoming committee (ICMM) are good ways of structuring a conversation about different financial, practical and administrative conditions.

4

## Three-month evaluation

After the first intense weeks of new information, many international researchers still experience that they have unanswered questions. By offering a standard three-month evaluation, you can ensure that the new employee has an opportunity to ask further questions – keeping in mind that not all researchers come from a culture where questions are often asked. During a three-month evaluation meeting, you can also make sure that the information which was provided earlier has in fact been understood. Additionally, you can use this occasion to introduce less urgent information such as the system around unemployment funds.

7

## Cultural meetings/ workshops

(ISM, TORS)

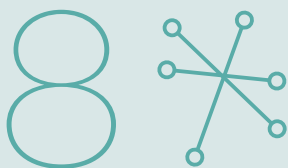
Cultural meetings and workshops focus on an understanding of Denmark in general, Danish culture and on how to help improve intercultural skills in order to prepare all employees for any challenges that might occur when you have people from many backgrounds working together. During these meetings, the focus will be on the culture of the workplace and it is important that both internationals and Danes are present as participants and presenters. ISM offers to organise tailor-made cultural workshops at your department.



## Cultural lunch

(IGN, SNM)

Many departments have a tradition of inviting their international researchers to a monthly get-together with their colleagues, which includes eating together. There are many ways of doing this - like Thursday cake (IGN) or monthly breakfast meetings (SNM). Usually there will be no official agenda, but the main theme will be (Danish) culture. The main point is to gather international and Danish employees to share a meal together and create a social network.



## Networking through social and academic events

Many international researchers wish to meet and network with Danes. A questionnaire-based survey (> 200 international researchers) that ISM has made confirms this, and emphasises that:

*“39% of the respondents replied that social networks are difficult for them to establish in Denmark. When it comes to friendships, a large percentage of international researchers and families (73%) agree that it is difficult to form friendships with Danes. Many note that they find Danes hard to approach and connect with socially. They also find that Danes in general do not have a positive attitude towards newcomers and that they are quite private.”*

Social and academic events in English can be a good way for international and Danish researchers to meet in an informal manner. During such events, researchers will have the opportunity to create both social and professional networks in which their families also get to participate.

The annual Christmas party (julefrokost) is a good occasion to gather all staff at a department or faculty. It is, however, important that the concept is properly explained to new colleagues from abroad. Cultural evenings with focus on a particular country (ISM) is another good opportunity to invite both Danish and international colleagues to come together.

Another suggestion is to organise excursions (ISM, NBIA) where international researchers and their families have the opportunity to experience sights like Copenhagen Zoo, Kronborg Castle or the city of Roskilde. During such outings, participants will get a guided tour or an experience that is organised for the purpose of the event. Organising excursions demands quite a few resources, which is why a cross-faculty excursion can be a good idea. Events organised by ISM are always open to all international researchers and their families.

## Mentor programme

(IVA, DIKU)

Another good way for internationals to get to know a (Danish) colleague is by starting a mentor or buddy programme. A local mentor can help an international researcher integrate and provide assistance in practical matters at their new workplace. It can be carried out in multiple ways, depending on the needs of the international colleague and the available resources. ISM has collected best practices from universities abroad, where they have tested different mentor programmes. One of the most important findings is that in order for the mentor programme to succeed, it will need local support, especially from department management.



## Social junior faculty club

(ICMM)

Some departments have initiated a faculty club for international employees. The user-driven initiatives seem to be functioning well. A specific example from ICMM shows that young researchers (both Danish and international) are organising numerous activities that are well attended. Examples of social junior faculty events are ‘SCIENCE and cocktails’, going to the theatre, ice cream making and participating in some of the many festivals in Copenhagen.

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN  
NØRREGADE 10

PO BOX 2177  
1017 COPENHAGEN K

SHARED HR  
HR-INFO@ADM.KU.DK

INTERNATIONAL STAFF MOBILITY (ISM)  
INTERSTAFF@ADM.KU.DK

# Departments and faculties at UCPH

This leaflet is made by ISM, as a follow-up of a General Collaboration Committee (HSU) seminar on internationalisation.

In addition, several employees from UCPH's departments and faculties have shared their input.

<b>CIP</b>	Center for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use
<b>DIKU</b>	Department of Computer Science
<b>ICMM</b>	Department of Cellular and Molecular Medicine
<b>IGN</b>	Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management
<b>IKK</b>	Department of Arts and Cultural Studies
<b>IKVH</b>	Department of Veterinary Clinical and Animal Science
<b>ISM</b>	International Staff Mobility
<b>RSLIS</b>	Royal School of Library and Information Science
<b>LAW</b>	Faculty of Law
<b>MATH</b>	Department of Mathematical Sciences
<b>NBIA</b>	The Niels Bohr International Academy
<b>SNM</b>	Natural History Museum of Denmark
<b>TORS</b>	Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies