



## Principles for career progression for early-career academic staff at AU

### *Introduction*

Aarhus University (AU) is committed to offering academic staff in both permanent and fixed-term positions good employment conditions.

These principles for academic career progression at Aarhus University have been adopted in order to set out guidelines on how fixed-term appointments are to be used in the early stages of a research career.

### *Background*

The proportion of external research funding is steadily increasing at universities. As a consequence, more academic staff are being hired, often in positions that are both temporary and at the same time serve to advance the individual researcher's career. For example, postdoc positions are often a crucial step in an academic career, both with regard to professional development and career goal clarification, in addition to providing sought-after qualifications for a career outside academia.

Ideally, an academic career progression should include few consecutive short fixed-term appointments, and should offer plenty of opportunities for career planning along the way. At AU, career planning should include exploring opportunities for pursuing an academic career internally at AU and at other universities as well as for non-academic careers. We consider this crucial to the well-being and motivation of early-career researchers.

### *Objective*

The senior management team has established three principles for career progression to promote good employment trajectories for academic staff and to limit the inappropriate use of short-term appointments for early-career academic staff at AU.

These principles are intended to help make AU an attractive workplace for early career-researchers that offers them career-planning support and develops their competencies to qualify them for permanent positions over the course of their fixed-term appointment – if not a position at AU, then elsewhere within or outside academia.

These principles also aim to promote the use of the types of positions included in the academic job structure (the Danish state classification of academic ranks and titles. Ideally, an academic career progression at AU for an individual staff member should include few post-doctoral positions of longer duration and more assistant professorship/researcher positions, so that the majority of staff progress to an associate professorship/senior researcher position by way of an assistant professorship/researcher position.



*Principles*

Three principles for career progression for early-career academic staff at AU:

- 1) **As a general rule, the university must limit the number of fixed-term appointments for individual academic staff.**
- 2) **Only a few PhDs students and postdocs at AU will subsequently be offered a position at Aarhus University and the majority should expect to use their academic qualifications to build careers outside the university. Career development dialogues must take place early on in a postdoctoral appointment, and PhD students must be offered career development and planning during the second half of the PhD programme. The qualifications gained in postdoctoral appointments are necessary for many positions in knowledge-intensive companies. For this reason, AU must ensure that this career option is also factored in.**
- 3) **Early-career academic staff must be invited to career development dialogues by their manager – at least once a year and additionally as needed (for example, in connection with SDDs). The purpose of the career development dialogue is for managers to support and assist staff by aligning expectations with regard to career prospects and limitations. In the event that an academic staff member (excluding PhD students) is appointed to a third fixed-term contract, their realistic career prospects must be discussed and clarified by that time.**

*Part of an open and systematic approach to career planning and development*

These three principles are conjoined with a university-wide, multi-year initiative to promote a more systematic, open approach to career planning and development for AU employees. The intention is for the university to offer all staff an opportunity to discuss and align expectations and prospects regarding internal and external career opportunities with their immediate supervisors. In this connection, it is important to stress that under the ministerial order on academic job structure, the university has an obligation to clarify the career prospects available to its academic staff, including staff on fixed-term contracts. AU's *Action plan for gender equality, diversity and inclusion 2023-25* also applies to this issue.

A dialogue about career prospects can take place in connection with the SDD and will depend on how the requirement to provide career guidance is implemented at unit level.



During the alignment of expectations between manager and staff member, the manager should make the following conditions clear:

- The PhD is the conclusion of a PhD programme that qualifies graduates to conduct research. It is not necessarily the beginning of an academic research career.
- A postdoc is a fixed-term position that may lead to an assistant professorship and, in some cases, to a permanent academic position at AU.
- An assistant professorship/researcher position, which provides important teaching qualifications, is generally considered the first step in research career at the university.

Developments in the number of short-term appointments will be monitored by the senior management team, which will also follow up on the broader career initiative as well as 'systematic career dialogues for academic staff on short-term contracts', cf. *The action plan for gender equality, diversity and inclusion 2023-25*.

*Facts about fixed-term appointments*

AU's own HR data (from 2022) shows that 24 per cent of all postdocs at AU have held at least four different positions after completing a PhD at AU. The statistics include new positions, extensions of contracts and transition to a different type of position. The data also reveals that this practice is widespread across the faculties.

In 2022, there were 968 postdocs employed at AU, corresponding to 18 per cent of all academic staff.