

KØBENHAVNS UNIVERSITET



Tackling the

Teaching paradox

UCPH **FORWARD**

Talent Programme
for Excellence in Research

What is a university?

“[An] institution of higher **education**, usually comprising a college of liberal arts and sciences and graduate and professional schools and having the authority to confer degrees in various fields of study.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica

What is a professor?

“[A] **teacher** especially of the highest rank at a college or university”

Encyclopaedia Britannica

Teaching at the University of Copenhagen

According to *Strategy 2030*, we are deeply committed to providing outstanding academic education through research-based teaching. As Kristian Cedervall Laut, Prorector for Education puts it:

“Our students are our finest research product”

The backbone of our degree programmes is providing high quality research-integrated teaching, and we consider it essential that all tenured academic staff are actively engaged in this endeavour.

...but do we practice what we preach?



The premise

In January 2025, the Rector of the University of Copenhagen invited us to provide input on how we can solve the “teaching paradox”. Specifically, how research and teaching can be better integrated, and how teaching can be recognized on par with research at UCPH.

We collected data on how the leadership across Departments and Faculties views, organises, and evaluates teaching. You can read more about our methods at the end of the booklet.

Based on this study, we propose **suggestions** and **future-oriented** tools to resolve the teaching paradox and better value the world-class research-based education that UCPH offers:

- Taking responsibility for teaching
- Distributing teaching responsibility
- Qualifying teaching
- Assessing faculty members
- Becoming professor
- Recognizing world-class teaching

This booklet provides potential tools to promote a needed culture change – how to value teaching more, and to practice what we preach.

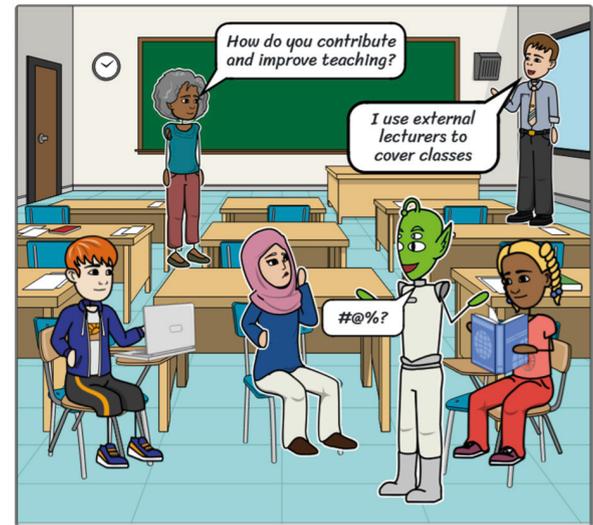
Taking responsibility for teaching

Present

In principle all faculty members have teaching responsibilities. However, as teaching is not prioritized on par with research, faculty members get creative with including many activities to count toward teaching obligations.

Instead of spending time in the classroom, teaching is sometimes outsourced to external lecturers who may not carry out research-based teaching.

Since there is little time or recognition for developing and co-teaching innovatively, faculty tend to stick to the tried-and-true in an everyday work-life.



Future

Teaching is prioritized on par with research, so all faculty members teach and are happy to take responsibility for developing their own practice.

Course leaders integrate their research into teaching, continuously develop their courses and pedagogical tools, and ensure all lectures are aligned with learning objectives and program progression.



Distributing teaching responsibility

Present

Across faculties and departments, tales of opaque distribution of teaching responsibilities emerge: Some are bought out of teaching, some count PhD supervision as teaching, and some are simply expected to teach less than their peers.

This inconsistency risks undermining motivation, collegiality, and shared ownership of our educational mission.



Future

All faculty members contribute actively to education, from classroom teaching to the development of educational programmes. Naturally, teaching roles vary, and responsibilities can fluctuate over time.

UCPH has clear norms for different faculty positions, which serve as a point of departure. Teaching hours and deviations from the norms are transparent to all staff.



Qualifying teaching

Present

UCPH does not have a formal approach to assess teaching quality and corners are often cut in everyday life.

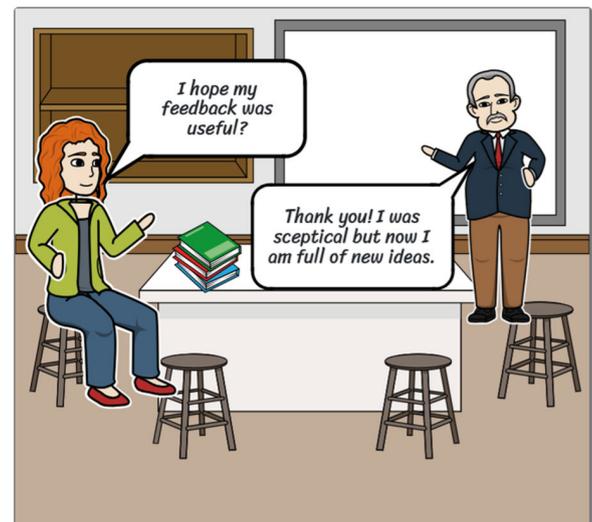
Teaching is largely assessed via self-reports and student evaluations, which is prone to bias. For example, those teaching difficult and demanding courses tend to receive poorer evaluations. Therefore, there is a reverse incentive for lecturers to make the course content easier to receive better student evaluations.



Future

UCPH has developed an evaluation framework where teaching is assessed via both student evaluations, external reviewers and more importantly peer feedback from other faculty members.

Receiving and given peer feedback is mandatory. Peer feedback often results in more collaboration and co-teaching, which both motivates and allows for more flexibility without relying on external lecturers. It also inspires the development of shared research ideas among colleagues.



Assessing faculty members

Present

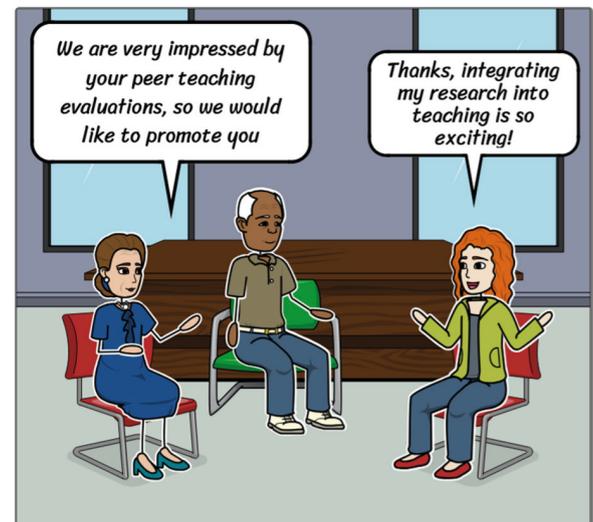
Research is prioritised over teaching when assessing faculty members for employment decisions. While research output is routinely quantified with established metrics, the teaching portfolio is a checkbox exercise, and the quality of teaching is not truly evaluated in hiring, promotions, and terminations.



Future

Being a great researcher is still a basic requirement but teaching contributions and teaching quality are significant considerations. For example, a “**scout badge**” system has been introduced for recognising diverse teaching efforts and contributions.

For **transparency and fairness**, research output is evaluated in light of teaching load and quality. For example, research outputs for those who teach 50% is not be compared to those who teach 15%.



Becoming professor

Present

If you obtain funding at the highest level, have shown originality in your research, and publish widely – teaching is not important for your career development. Teaching excellence and research-based teaching is a criteria that does not translate to practice in hiring, firing and promotion.

Future

To become an assistant, associate, or full professor at UCPH, you must teach and both your research and teaching must be world-class.

An excellent researcher who does not teach is not a Professor, but a **Senior Researcher**. This reflects the respect awarded to research-based teaching and supervision as integral to the *raison d'être* of the University.



Recognising world-class teaching

Present

Research and teaching are both celebrated, but the recognition is not equal. Research awards carry greater prestige, attract more media attention, and offer far larger monetary rewards.



Future

Research and teaching excellence are celebrated equally, in terms of recognition, prestige, and rewards. Initiatives such as a “scout badge” system, collaborative teaching efforts, and ongoing professional learning ensure that excellence in teaching is recognised and rewarded on par with research.



Ensuring world-class teaching

In the future, we at UCPH can provide a world-class research-based university education by:

Providing **transparency** in what counts as teachings, distribution of teaching responsibilities, and how much faculty members should teach. Faculty of Law has experience here and can serve as inspiration.

Developing a new **evaluation framework** including peer-evaluation of teaching instead of relying solely on student evaluations.

Recognizing **excellence in teaching** is as essential as excellence in research when employing and promoting faculty members. Research output is evaluated in light of teaching load and quality.

All assistant, associate, and full professors contributing actively to education, including **giving and receiving peer feedback**. Faculty of Social Science and Humanities can serve as inspiration here.

Insisting that Faculty members who do not teach are Researchers or **Senior Researchers** and not professors.

Motivating a culture of excellent teaching via a “**scout badge**” system where one’s teaching achievements can be readily seen.

Using our largest stages and biggest megaphones to **celebrate excellence** in both teaching and research.

Methodology & acknowledgements

First, we conducted desk research of local guidelines for teaching allocation.

We then made semi-structured interviews with leadership across HEALTH, SCIENCE, SOCIAL SCIENCES, HUMANITIES, and LAW:

- Heads of Studies at six Departments.
- Associate Deans for Education and Research across faculties.
- Prorector for Education.
- A convenience sample of staff from all faculties.

We would like to thank all interview participants for their time and valuable input, and the UCPH Forward IV cohort for their support. We would also like to thank the UCPH Forward leadership for their financial support for the production of this booklet.

Cartoons were prepared with Storyboard That by the authors.

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Teaching is a core activity of UCPH. However, most funding bodies strongly value research excellence as the prime qualification, and so does UCPH to some extent (e.g., promotion, salary negotiations), despite the emphasis on teaching in the merit criteria.

How do we integrate teaching alongside the other core activities (in particular research and outreach)? Why is teaching so essential for the university? Should teaching be made more attractive? Should every employee have similar teaching rights/duties?