

University of Copenhagen Research Assessment 2022-2024

Rector's Executive Summary



This Executive Summary presents the key findings and the Rector's reflections arising from the University of Copenhagen's comprehensive research assessment, conducted from 2022 to 2024. This assessment, based on reports from peer review panels that evaluated research quality, impact, and environment across all departments and faculties at the University, identifies critical strong suits and opportunities for development.

Main findings

Research at the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) is excellent or world-class in most areas and world-leading in some, according to the 2022-2024 research assessment reports. This aligns with the University's position as number 32 in the 2024 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), confirming its standing as a leading research institution globally.

A key message is that UCPH is distinguished by its significant scientific and societal impact and outreach, both nationally and internationally.

Furthermore, researchers at UCPH engage in extensive collaboration within the University and across scientific communities worldwide, as well as with external partners and businesses. UCPH maintains a strong focus on academic excellence and enhancing opportunities for mobility and interdisciplinary collaborations.

The research assessment reports also highlight that UCPH has been highly successful in securing competitive external funding from both Denmark and abroad. The University's excellent research quality is evident in the numerous highly competitive grants it has received.

Three critical strong suits of research at the University of Copenhagen

PAGE 2 OF 8

The research assessment reports identify several factors contributing to the enhanced quality of research at UCPH since the 2016-2018 assessment. Three critical strengths were particularly emphasised across the University.

High scientific and societal impact of research

UCPH researchers produce extensive high-impact scientific output, measured both in terms of publication volume in prestigious journals and impact factor, as well as research topics of high societal relevance with strong impact or clear impact potential. Several research clusters and centres have been very effective in supporting the development of new public-facing research initiatives with external partners that promote societal and scientific impact.

Across the University, the research assessment reports noted researchers' strong and relevant engagement in outreach and societal impact, building on existing community and institutional links and opening new areas of cross-sector collaboration. This high impact is reflected in their breadth of activities, including participation in projects and public commissions of considerable societal significance, Danish political/public committees, and their ability to directly influence public policies. Many UCPH scholars have high public visibility and are frequently sought by media and public debates, with a solid societal impact on public opinion and political decision-making processes in Denmark.

Significant and increasing external funding

UCPH has been highly successful in securing competitive external funding, with significant and increasing numbers of external grants and awards from both Denmark and abroad resulting from many departments working strategically to consolidate their already impressive success.

The high quality and excellence of research at UCPH is reflected in the many highly competitive grants awarded to its researchers, including those from the Danish National Research Foundation, EU grants such as ERC and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and major research awards that are among the most prestigious nationally and European-wide. The research assessment reports also note that departmental research committees support researchers with their grant applications in relevant ways, reinforced by strong research support.

This success is supported by the high quality of research infrastructure available to UCPH researchers, which several panels highlighted as an important factor in obtaining external funding. However, the reports also

noted the crucial need to maintain this infrastructure through ongoing investment to ensure its continued strength. Furthermore, securing external funding to support basic, independent, curiosity-driven research and bottom-up initiatives remains a priority. This enables the production of research, education, and innovation at the highest scientific level and societal relevance across UCPH. The research assessment reports noted the importance of addressing the balance between internal and external funding across departments.

At the departmental level, the reports recommended developing clear long-term research strategies, including funding strategies. Drawing on their experience with other research institutions, the assessment panels observed that success in securing external funding requires ongoing alignment between research funded by external grants and the University's research strategies, determined by the academic community. This alignment is crucial to securing more basic funding to facilitate excellent and interdisciplinary research unlikely to be supported externally. This includes strategically prioritising funding for underfunded research areas and PhD positions, while also supporting foundations' focus on specific strategic research areas at UCPH.

Strong interdisciplinary and international collaboration

Collaboration is extensive across UCPH, both internally and externally, encouraged by a bottom-up research culture that enables excellent research output across the University. Overall, UCPH collaborations are internationally competitive, with a good range of partnerships with research-intensive institutions worldwide, and faculty highly engaged in high-quality research collaborations nationally and internationally.

The evaluation panels noted that UCPH has extensive publication collaboration, with researchers co-publishing within well-established international networks within and beyond Scandinavia, most notably in Europe and the United States. They observed high levels of international collaboration reflected in UCPH researchers' involvement in international research networks and collaborative research efforts, publications co-authored by scientists from institutions outside Denmark, and participation in international high-level conferences.

The research assessment reports emphasised UCPH's strong collaborative research environments, with many collaborative projects across disciplines, and excellent examples of close collaborations with non-academic partners, ranging from health professionals and clinics to NGOs and government agencies to local and international private industry partners. Notably, the high number of donations from external grants encourages partnerships with external collaborators and foster strong cooperative environments. In some

departments, research could be strengthened, and additional funding opportunities opened up, by more cross-departmental and cross-faculty collaborations, just as there is room to deepen international collaborations.

The research assessment reports highlighted that UCPH is highly active in interdisciplinary research and collaborations, both nationally and internationally, which contribute significantly to its high research quality. However, the panels noted the potential for more interdisciplinary research, with some UCPH departments engaging in more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary collaboration. They suggested that encouraging further collaboration between disciplines while maintaining a balance between interdisciplinary and disciplinary demands could be achieved through strategic changes, such as creating interdisciplinary research centres and clusters.

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Rector's reflections on opportunities for further development

The research assessment reports highlight the University's achievements: excellent, world-class, and even world-leading research; immensely successful attraction of external funding; pervasive interdisciplinary and international collaboration; and high societal and scientific impact, both nationally and internationally. This high standard of research across the University provides an enriching environment where researchers can observe and be inspired by world-class scholarship, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development.

However, the reports also identify valuable opportunities for further developing the University's research environment and ensuring continued progress and excellence. Building on UCPH's identified strengths, the following three domains represent key areas for enhancement across all departments and faculties. The three domains are all in line with the UCPH Strategy 2030.

International engagement and impact

UCPH conducts world-class research that benefits society both in Denmark and abroad through collaboration with the public sector, industry, and the international research community. However, the research assessment reports note that the University could achieve a more significant international impact by leveraging its high research quality and world-leading expertise to further enhance collaboration inside and outside academia. Achieving stronger international visibility requires a focused effort, and UCPH will further prioritise its international engagement.

Attracting more prestigious international funding, particularly from European sources such as ERC grants, was identified as a potential growth area across much of UCPH. Some departments are doing extremely well while others have untapped potential. The research assessment reports recognise UCPH's strong research support structures and the allocation of necessary time and flexibility for researchers to prepare for large EU funding calls and participate in research consortia, while balancing research and teaching responsibilities. Further initiatives could include researchers taking on prominent editorial roles in leading academic journals, hosting and coordinating more international conferences, and nominating more researchers for prestigious awards.

While the societal impact of UCPH research is very good within Denmark, there is considerable potential to drive a much greater impact globally. By leveraging its strengths and expanding its reach, UCPH can influence international scientific communities and address global challenges more effectively, leading to broader recognition as a research leader. To achieve this, UCPH will support researchers' active participation in international research communities, with due consideration for their other responsibilities, and provide the necessary resources and flexibility for international collaborations, conferences, and networking. This supportive environment will enhance UCPH's global impact and reputation.

Recruitment and retention of early career researchers

Attracting and retaining talented researchers is essential for UCPH. The research assessment reports acknowledge UCPH's ability to recruit highly qualified national and international staff, yet also highlight challenges for some departments in recruiting and retaining research talent due to a lack of transparent career paths and tenure-track options for talented early career researchers.

The University will focus on further enhancing its ability to create rewarding and clear career pathways for skilled researchers, making UCPH an attractive choice for early career researchers. UCPH further aims to offer start-up packages as an additional incentive to attract outstanding early career researchers, particularly those from abroad. These packages will be especially crucial in disciplines with high infrastructure and personnel costs, such as those necessitating laboratories, specialised equipment, and research teams. Recommendations in the research assessment reports include developing more comprehensive career development strategies for PhD students, including leadership training, and more transparent systems for internal promotion and career paths. Dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive research and work environments are considered crucial in attracting the best international talent. While UCPH's career development plans are recognised

as a strength, onboarding and ‘next-boarding’ processes can be further developed to enhance early career researchers’ well-being and career options.

Diversity, equality and inclusion

The research environment at UCPH is strong and collaborative, yet the research assessment reports also highlight the need to address faculty composition imbalances across the University. Identified disparities in gender and nationality representation call for further efforts to strengthen diversity at all career stages, from the recruitment of PhD students to professorial level.

UCPH is committed to ensuring a more diverse and inclusive composition of staff and student bodies across multifaceted diversity. The University will reinforce its work to address and bridge gender and diversity gaps at all levels of the academic career path to foster more equitable and supportive environments for all researchers. This commitment will build upon UCPH’s strategic focus on inclusion and diversity, which aims to promote the University as an attractive and diverse workplace and learning environment.

Background and objectives of the research assessment 2022-2024

Between 2022 and 2024, the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) conducted a comprehensive research quality assessment at the departmental level. This was the second such assessment, the first having been undertaken in 2016-2018. Each department, or equivalent unit within faculties without departmental structures, was evaluated by an external peer review panel appointed by the Rectorate.

The research quality assessment had three primary aims:

1. *Documentation of past performance:* To provide evidence of the quality of research produced within individual departments, based on assessments against internationally recognised academic standards.
2. *Development of current research practices:* To critically reflect on strengths and challenges to promote research excellence within individual departments.
3. *Strategy and benchmarking:* To establish a tool for enhancing research quality at UCPH, based on a systematic assessment of each department's research strategy and performance.

The research assessments were studied and analysed by the UCPH leadership to identify strategic themes, common challenges, and focus areas for future development. They also served as a valuable tool for departments and faculties to discuss and reflect on departmental priorities and practices.

The primary focus of the assessment was internal, enabling critical reflection on current practices, fostering learning, and identifying areas for potential development. The secondary focus was external, providing a description and documentation of UCPH's research quality for use in discussions with stakeholders, including politicians, public and private foundations, and wider society.

Peer Review and Assessment Process

The 2022-2024 UCPH research assessment was based on a modified version of the 2016-2018 assessment, with a joint protocol developed by UCPH deans and the Rectorate. A simplified template was used, and the panels were formally appointed by the Rectorate.

The external peer review panels were selected from a comprehensive list of potential candidates proposed by the Heads of Departments and approved by the Rectorate. 161 panel members, 42% of whom were female, from 22 countries participated in the peer reviews. The panels ranged in size from 3 to 7 members.

To assess research quality within each department or faculty, the panels were provided with the following documentation:

PAGE 8 OF 8

- Departments' strategy and self-assessment report (UCPH template)
- Bibliometric data and facts and figures about the department
- Brief CVs and list of publications by all academic staff, with selection of publications exemplifying the department's research
- Site-visits (from 1-3 days), including separate meetings with management, research groups, faculty, postdoctoral researchers and PhD students

Research quality was assessed within four categories:

1. Quality and international impact of the research (including interdisciplinary research)
2. Alignment between research and educational activities
3. Private and public collaborations, innovation and societal impact
4. Governance and organisation (including resources and capacity)

Each panel submitted its report to the Head of Department. Based on these reports, the dean of each faculty prepared an executive summary of the department peer review reports, which was then submitted to UCPH's Rector.