

Aalborg University and local companies join forces to retain international students in the region after graduation

For the second consecutive year, the International Business Centre Office (IBCO) at Aalborg University is running a mentoring programme for Masters Students at Department of Business and Management - "AAU International Business Mentor Board". The mentoring programme works partly as an initiative for getting Masters Students faster in jobs, and partly as an initiative to retain the international students in Denmark, especially in the North Denmark region.



Employment statistics shows a low rate of employment among new graduates, especially among new graduates with another nationality than Danish. Aalborg University and IBCO has actively responded to this challenge by introducing a mentoring programme. In 2017, KMP+ House of Mentoring played a part in establishing and facilitating the first mentoring programme for 25 first-year Masters Students from the Department of Business and Management (as they could see that the new graduates tended to leave North Jutland when they graduated). The mentoring programme was aimed at the international students. Furthermore, they have experienced that the organisations from northern Jutland tend to turn down applications from international students because they cannot speak Danish and therefore lessons in Danish is also an activity within the programme.

"As an international student, it's very difficult to build a professional network outside your academic/social life. The programme is not only providing tools for building a network; it also gives you the opportunity to meet top managers, who want to give advice and share their experiences and friendship. Furthermore, the programme also gave me some tools to become closer to myself with regard to my willingness to collaborate, and my competencies and working methods." – Mentee, Aalborg University

The mentors are specially selected experienced managers from local organisations in North Jutland. Aalborg University believes that the mentors can help the international Masters Students to be more connected to Denmark by giving them an insight into the local working opportunities and helping them create a larger network.

"The problem is the challenges of integrating the international students while they're in Denmark. For example, it may be difficult for them to find internships and such things, therefore it's difficult to



retain them when they graduate. But it's obvious that it doesn't happen spontaneous. Therefore, I think it's a commendable initiative that Aalborg University comes up with." - Christine Lunde, Mentor, CEO in MARCOD

Due to inexperience with mentoring programmes, IBCO chose to collaborate with KMP+ House of Mentoring during the establishment of the programme. KMP+ House of Mentoring contributed with professional knowledge about the organisation, facilitation and evaluation. IBCO knew KMP+ House of Mentoring from the AAU Alumni mentoring programme, which KMP+ House of Mentoring has previously helped. KMP+ House of Mentoring has also been part of establishing the second mentoring programme for IBCO, which started in the autumn of 2018. In this programme, the Danish Masters Students from the Department of Business and Management were also invited to participate with the aim of increasing the rate of employment among the Danish new graduates in North Jutland as well.

Activities with a high professionalism help increase the benefits

During the mentoring programme, KMP+ House of Mentoring contributes with three mentor/mentee workshops with the aim of creating and maintaining an optimal learning alliance between mentor and mentee. In addition, KMP+ House of Mentoring, in collaboration with IBCO, tailors the facilitated workshops so they encourage a good mentor/mentee relationship and comply with relevant topics such as internships, exchanges etc. All the topics are aimed at "the way to the job".

"It is the method used by KMP+ House of Mentoring during the workshops – the stories they can tell, their approach to the participants, their ability to engage people – that is why I think we chose to work with KMP+ House of Mentoring. It's the combination of knowledge and experience!" – Valeria Gulieva, Programme Coordinator, Aalborg University

The Mentor+Game is a central part of the mentoring programme, and together with the physical materials that every mentor/mentee-pair are supplied with at the kick-off workshop, they ensure quality and results and increase the benefits of the conversations between the mentor and the mentee. Alone, the Mentor+Games gives time for reflection, constructive discussions and exchange of experiences among the mentors and mentees with the aim of creating a deeper understanding of themselves and what learning opportunities there are in the mentor/mentee relationship.

"The organised activities ensured a structure in the programme. In addition, it has been a great platform for exchanging experiences and opinions with other mentees, and establishing a network with other mentors. I would like to mention that I really enjoyed the activities during the various workshops, and I think they were all relevant." – Mentee, Aalborg University

The mentoring programme contributes with strong network relations across the programme

This year, Aalborg University and IBCO hope for changes in the employment statistics. 2019 is the year the first mentee group graduates. The mentoring programme has already generated a positive feedback from the mentors and mentees. For example, the programme is praised for being network-creating – not only between mentee, mentor and mentor's organisation, but also between mentees and mentors, since mentees and mentors, during the workshops, are given the opportunity to talk with each other. Several of the mentor/mentee pairs have also facilitated shared mentor/mentee meetings.

“I liked the programme more than expected. First, I thought it would be uncomfortable to share thoughts and ideas with a mentor with more experience than me and with another nationality, but it’s actually the opposite. From a social aspect, I also liked the programme.” – Mentee, Aalborg University

Furthermore, the mentoring programme is praised for that the mentor also acts as a contact person, who mentee has the opportunity to contact if he/she needs professional advice, or as a door opener to other organisations in relation to internships etc.

“The mentors are able to act in different roles in one person. The mentors also have many opportunities to help the mentees, through their large professional network, to get in touch with organisations regards to semester projects – this happened to me – and even student jobs or internships.” – Mentee, Aalborg University

The mentors also show a great commitment to the mentoring programme because of the underlying learning potential that exists when you have the opportunity to talk with a young person. The mentors also get an understanding of the generation and what motivates them. IBCO also experiences that several of their mentors publish the mentor title on LinkedIn, which has increased the attention of the programme among other managers in North Jutland who wish to contribute.

“It actually surprised me how much I would get out of it myself. I was expecting to give a lot, and I was also prepared for it, but I also got a lot out of it myself.” – Christine Lunde, Mentor, CEO in MARCOD