

INFLUENCE FROM DAY ONE

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Helene Frederiksen and Anja Holm-Petersen are among the first on DONG Energy's graduate programme. They feel they have a say in the content of their course, and are challenged from day one.

At her job interview, Helene Frederiksen was surprised that DONG Energy was so interested in her German skills gained in her degree in business, language and culture. She expected them to focus on her thesis about bioethanol facilities, which involved DONG Energy in Southern Denmark.

"They were, of course, interested in the thesis, but I never imagined that my German skills would be that interesting. But DONG Energy wants to focus internationally, including on the German market", says Helene Frederiksen, who graduated from the Copenhagen Business School this spring with an MSc in International Marketing and Management.

Helene Frederiksen, who is 26, was determined to become a graduate in a large company. So was Anja Holm-Petersen, 25, who holds an MSc in Marketing Communications Management from the Copenhagen Business School.

Along with 17 other recent graduates, they started on DONG Energy's graduate programme on 1 September.

For the next 24 months, both will be focusing on the marketing and branding of DONG Energy. Anja Holm-Petersen will be spending the first eight months in the business-to-business marketing department, then in business intelligence, and finally in international branding.

Helene Frederiksen will start in international branding, continue in CSR, and after that she will decide for herself, in consultation with DONG Energy, where to spend the last six months.

"We have had a fair amount of influence on the structure of our course, which we already discussed at the interview where they listened to our wishes and requests", says Anja Holm-Petersen, who is already working on tasks such as coordinating a climate conference and planning a campaign for a new product.

Helene Frederiksen has been involved in an advertisement for a trade show on wind energy in Britain, a new branding platform, and coordination of marketing activities with DONG Energy internationally.

"You're challenged from day one, because the attitude is that you have to have authentic tasks and participate with the others on an equal footing, not just look over their shoulders," says Helene Frederiksen.

The profile is decisive

HR consultant Søren Daugaard Hansen, who is in charge of the company's graduate programme, stresses that there is an emphasis on tailoring the course to suit the individual graduate.

"We do a lot to plan the course on the background of each person's profile and to ensure that it takes place on the initiative of the business areas that will be employing the candidate. It's not meant to be a HR project, so each business area chooses how to approach it, and for that reason our graduate programmes can vary greatly," says Søren Daugaard Hansen.

DONG Energy has graduates in finance, marketing, IT, engineering and technology alike.

So far the 19 graduates have been through an induction and they will meet up again later to be introduced to the company's mentoring scheme, where each will be assigned a mentor, who is a manager from outside their own department. Along the way there are a number of set components, such as courses in project resolution and presentation skills.

Despite having only been employed for a few weeks, Anja Holm-Petersen and Helene Frederiksen already feel that they benefit from their new inter-graduate network, although they are spread around DONG Energy's departments all over the country. Amongst other things they benefit from being in contact with others from completely different educational backgrounds. It allows them to become familiar with parts of the company's activities that they do not deal with on a daily basis.

Permanently employed from the beginning

Anja Holm-Petersen and Helene Frederiksen are in DONG Energy's second group of graduates, since the organisation only came into being two years ago following the merger of six companies. According to Søren Daugaard Hansen the graduate programme is to be considered a significant factor in the task of building one company with a shared culture.

"Our graduates are some of the first who are employed as multidisciplinary DONG Energy staff, and they will be involved in creating synergy and knowledge throughout the new organisation, and they will also help us focus on mobility within the company. This is why we want to do something special for them and show them that we have faith in them. They are offered training courses, and we have

also chosen to make them permanent staff from day one," says Søren Daugaard Hansen.

Some companies employ graduates on two-year contracts, and the individual is not secured a job in the company after completion of the programme. According to the HR consultant, the 'cost' of a graduate programme is that the graduate has to accept no increase in salary for the duration of the programme.

While a candidate would normally be subject to the annual salary adjustment from the beginning, this does not apply to the graduate programme, says the HR consultant. On the other hand, they receive a corresponding salary boost once they complete the graduate programme.

Permanent employment is important to both Helene Frederiksen and Anja Holm-Petersen.

"It makes you feel more part of the company," Anja says, and Helene Frederiksen adds,

"I feel as if I've been chosen for something they see as having a future, and for that reason you're more committed. You want to do well, because you know it will continue."

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But neither of them expected to be handed a career. On the contrary, they chose the company because they can have a say. "It's considered an asset if you have thought about what you want. In some companies you just have to fit into a pre-defined pigeonhole, but what I see here are opportunities on offer, which I can choose between and influence," says Anja Holm-Petersen. This is consistent with the view of the HR department. "They are permanent staff, but we expect them to be proactive during their graduate programme and to seek out opportunities themselves," says Søren Daugaard Hansen.

The popularity of graduate programmes

Many large Danish and international companies have graduate programmes. Among them are Arla Foods, Carlsberg, Danfoss, DONG Energy, KMD, Nordea, NovoNordisk and TDC. Graduate programmes are typically offered to fresh graduates of economics, marketing, HR or technology. The programmes last between one and two years (the majority are 24 months long) and consist of several modules of typically six to eight months, where the graduate works in different parts of the company. Part of the training often involves a stay at a

foreign department or subsidiary. Along the way, training courses and activities with the other graduates at the company are offered. The terms of employment are either employment on a contractual basis or permanent employment from the beginning. Read more at www.graduateguiden.dk, which has just launched a collaboration with C3 students. Here students can find inspiration from companies offering graduate programmes and see what they involve, as well as application deadlines. Most companies hire for their graduate programme in the spring and commence on 1 September.