

Report from the seminar: “Challenges during doctoral education”

Organizers: TODOS and SiN

Date: 4th May 2012

Place: Auditorium 1, Teorifagbygget, UiT

In connection to the Annual General Meeting of SiN, that took place on the 3rd of May 2012 in Tromsø, TODOS and SiN co-organized the seminar “Challenges during doctoral education”. The seminar was mainly funded by TODOS, but also was partially sponsored by Forskerforbundet and NTL.

Around 50 people attended the seminar, among them PhD students from the University of Tromsø, but also administrative and academic personnel from the University of Tromsø. Very important and active was the participation of the SiN members that attended the AGM the previous day.

The day started with the welcome and introduction from Melania Borit, that also coordinated the whole seminar. First speaker was Ricardo Rosado who presented the work of SiN and Eurodoc, but also offered his personal way to and through the PhD education. Next speaker was Curt Rice with his presentation “Don’t skinny dip with a snapping turtle: People and their careers in academia”. One of the points of his presentation was the attractiveness of the academia before and after the completion of PhD, and the gender differences that are related to the issue. A very interesting discussion was triggered, with comments on the level of equality reached in Norway, and the steps taken by UiT to improve the career opportunities of the academic and research personnel. The next speech was by Jon Iddeng representing Forskerforbundet with the title “Know your rights! A crash course for PhD candidates”. The presentation covered key rights of the PhD candidates and also common PhD candidates’ problems from the union’s experience. The seminar continued with the presentation by Elina Halttunen from the High North Academy. Her topic was “Why do PhD candidates need transferable skills courses?”, where she analyzed the need for transferable skills courses and discussed the approach of High North Academy to this issue. Jarle Breivik succeeded Elina, with the presentation “The changing power and managerial structure of doctoral education – should we resist or lead the way?”. In his presentation, except from his support to the work of SiN and the member organizations, he discussed about the role of doctoral education today, the changes that happened the last years, and are still happening, the importance and the impact of doctoral education. During the lunch break that followed, the audience was encouraged to visit the info-square that was organized outside the amphitheater. The following parties were represented with a stand at the info-square: SiN & Eurodoc, Department for research – UiT, Department for Communications – UiT, High North Academy, ReCO, Forsker Grand Prix, Forskerforbundet, NTL, Akademikerne, UnivPed and Biostruct. Many of the stands received visits from participants, but the number of participants in comparison to the high number of stands, affected the number of visits per stand.

After the lunch break, the seminar continued with the presentation of Torill Nustad that tried to answer the question “Why should a PhD student be a member of a trade union?”. In this speech, the benefits from being a member of a trade union for a PhD

candidate were analyzed. Ellin Kollerud from The Research Council of Norway presented the topic “The EU Charter and Code - enhancing the quality of doctoral education?”. Her presentation covered the main points of the EU Charter and Code, pointing out the work of The Council and the Norwegian Universities in promoting and conforming to it. The possible role of SiN in the promotion of the EU Charter and Code was also discussed. After a short coffee break, Siri Johnsen presented her topic with the title “Money talks: The pay appraisal interview – the right place to discuss your qualifications, responsibilities, salary and career”. In her speech, she covered extensively the process of salary negotiations and the opportunities of the PhD candidates to increase their salary and she discussed the use of those salary talks as feedback and career discussions. Jana Weidermann was the last guest presenter and talked about “Challenges during doctoral education – a Ministry of Education perspective”. In her presentation, she offered an insight to the vision of the Ministry for the doctoral education and she discussed with the audience the role of SiN and its members. Melania Borit closed the seminar with her final remarks and by thanking the participants and the organizers of the seminar.

Some feedback from the participants of the seminar:

“Thanks for holding such an important information- and networking-wise event. As it seems to me, lots of doctoral students are uninformed by their rights and even Your existence, so I think it's very important to have these meetings and make all departments aware of Your existence, so that these - especially foreign students - can find their way to TODOS. Moreover many are afraid to report of bad supervisor-student relations due to fear of reprisals + that many come from a culture where being part of a union equals losing one's position. So I believe one needs to work on the information gap, and maybe try to compile a short survival book for the newcoming PhD-student with all the most important contents - some of which You touched upon with this seminar.”

Nanna Jørgensen

“...I have no suggestions for improvements, as I think your program and the organisation of the event was perfect. So, just keep on to see if you can copy your concept next year.

Biggest potential is probably connected to the role SiN can play in the development of doctoral education as well as the development of structures facilitating career development of early stage researchers. Research career is a field involving many stakeholders at the moment and nothing is written in stone, which means SiN could have impact on these processes.”

Ellin Kollerud

“I think it was a good seminar, and I think it is very important that SiN takes such initiatives. Of course PhD students need information on a lot of issues, and it is difficult to include them all in one seminar. What you could consider, is to invite the Association of Norwegian Higher Education institutions, and ask them to tell how they look at the issue of PhD students and how they could support your work.”

Jana Weidermann

“I was there in the morning and enjoyed the presentations – especially Curt Rice. But I think you need to recruit more doctoral students to actually participate in the meetings. This was really for them.”

Marit Westergaard

“... I found the seminar interesting, with some exciting political perspectives about recruitment of women versus men, and other aspects. The only negative thing is that so few doctoral candidates were there, I think the talks of both Forskerforbundet and NTL had deserved a bigger audience of candidates/students (I am in doubt whether Ph.D. student or Ph.D. candidate is the preferred term for those who are studying to obtain a Ph.D.)

In any case, I liked the seminar and found it interesting.”

Trygve Johnsen