

Stipendiatorganisasjonene i Norge

Quarterly meeting

Date: 26.11.2020

Time: 17:00

Place: Zoom

Agenda

1. Short introduction of SiN and its current work.
2. Corona related prolongation of PhD-contracts (information and discussion)
3. Issue brought up by TODOS, UiT: What if your supervisors "steal" your research ideas?
 - a. Open discussion of the problem and attempts for solutions
4. Various, local organizations are encouraged to bring up questions or share problems they have encountered.
 - a. How do the local organizations approach communication with their university's leadership? (Margret Veltman, UiODoc)
 - b. How do the local organizations get compensated? (Margret Veltman, UiODoc)

Attendees

- SiN board: Yannik, Ingvild, Camilla (OsloMet), Margret (UiODoc), Idd (DION), Bikal, Grace, Enrico, Hui (arrived late)
- Local leaders: Camilla (OsloMet), Margret (UiODoc), Idd (DION), Anatolijs Venovcevs (UiT), Runa Wolden (UiT), Damiano Maggi (NHH), Victoria Schröder (NHH), Sinziana Rasca (UiA), Rieska Mawarni Putri (UiS), Immanuel Reim (UiB, arrived late)

Minutes

Meeting start: 17:01

1. Introduction round

Everyone introduces themselves and which local organisations they represent

2. Corona relation prolongations of PhD and postdoc contracts

Yannik mentions that we are invited to a meeting with the ministry of education next week, where we can present our view of how covid-19 has affected early career researchers, and urges everyone to speak up if they want us to address issues on their behalf at that meeting. He hands over the word to Ingvild and Margret to give a quick summary of the survey results and the next steps. Ingvild raised the concern again with UHR as well, who wanted to know costs for the local organisations, but they haven't put it on the agenda yet. The next meeting with UHR will be in February. Margret says that the results of the survey will be published very soon and that they will be sent to all local organisations to aid in their discussions with university leadership.

Sinziana asks whether we already have any data on which extensions were granted. UiA did a follow up survey to ask about whether people were successful in their application, and one finding was that many people were confused about the form. For example, there was no question on the application form that specifically asked how many days were lost. Margret says we need to ask ourselves whether the burden of proof should even be on the students to quantify how much time they lost, because there could be non-tangible reasons that are difficult to quantify, and a blanket extension for everyone may be more suitable. Camilla mentions that the survey also exposes some of those non-tangible reasons for delay. Sinziana adds that beyond a possible blanket extension for everyone, there should be special accommodations for people who have delays beyond these 1-2 months due to cancelled lab work or other conditions. Rieska adds that UiS has a special system for logging how much hours were lost and argues that there should be a national system for that. Many people at UiS already got extensions according to this system, and they were quite satisfied with that process. Yannik confirms that some universities were very quick with these solutions, whereas others have been rather slow.

Idd asks if we are still planning to write a media statement, as was discussed during the conception of the survey in July. Camilla reiterates that a preview of the results was published in Khrono and that Forskerforum will publish a piece simultaneously with the release of our report, tentatively scheduled for Friday. Rieska advocated for some sort of central resource allocation based on a fairness principle. Yannik explains the problems with this, namely there will always be some people that feel left out of such a solution and that no central resource allocation can be one hundred percent fair.

Sinziana asks if SiN will also write a position statement to accompany the report, because this could be easily taken over by the universities. Margret says the report contains a discussion section that makes some future recommendations, which could be interpreted as a position statement and could potentially be copy (along with some sections from the introduction) onto the website.

Yannik asks how it works when people are home with sick kids or when daycare is closed. Camilla explains that these things are usually registered in the HR system of the universities (SAP). Ingvild adds that any sick leave that lasts less than 14 days will not lead to a prolongation of contract. Idd mentions that many internationals may not be aware of the Norwegian welfare system and may have trouble navigating these rules. Sinziana adds that UiA holds special meetings where they explain all these things to new PhDs, and proposes that we can easily do this once or twice per semester for larger groups. Yannik confirms that's a good idea.

Yannik asks for input regarding the effect of covid-19 on research. Sinziana suggests we address the issues experienced by foreign researchers, because PhDs are the most international employee group and they are an especially vulnerable group right now. For example, many people are not even able to go home for Christmas. Ingvild argues against doing this, claiming that we will benefit from presenting ourselves as a unified group. Sinziana agrees that Norwegians also suffer, but does maintain that the follow up survey from UiA shows that internationals report more mental health issues than Norwegians.

Enrico adds to this that postdocs are also facing unique challenges and that it is especially difficult for people on short term contracts who are finishing soon. Anatolijs says that covid-19 amplifies pre-existing vulnerabilities, so it exacerbates all the things that are already difficult about the positions of PhDs and postdocs. Norway is an extremely competitive research environment because it pays really well, so it draws a lot of international workers. All that international talent is now put under extra stress due to covid-19.

Yannik thanks everyone for their input.

3. Supervisors stealing research ideas

Anatolijs elaborates on the topic, which started as a message to TODOS and which he will forward to the participants in today's meeting. The question is how to protect PhD students and postdocs from having their research ideas stolen by their supervisors. One of the solutions could be to have a written agreement about co-authorships and who was responsible for which research ideas. The problem is that ownership of ideas is murky territory. Patents are legally protected, but research ideas are less well defined. Yannik stresses that it is important to indicate in your PhD proposal or contract which ideas are your own and which are your supervisors. Idd says that any sort of written document, including notes and presentations, can count as proof that someone was developing a research idea before the supervisor uses it for any grant applications. Yannik asks for personal experiences with this problem. Enrico shares a case of having a research idea stolen, where a supervisor published the work done by one of his PhDs without telling the PhD student in question. This person just went back to their home country and nothing happened. Some more personal stories are shared.

Yannik emphasises that when problems like these arise, it is especially difficult to confront the supervisor about it, because PhDs and postdocs are in vulnerable positions. They are not well equipped to defend their interests, because they are still dependent on their supervisors for future recommendation letters and publications. Sinziana adds to this that there is another risk: reputation damage. If supervisors spread rumours about their previous students, other people may no longer want to work with them. One of the biggest problems is that there are no explicit guidelines for how to deal with these problems. Students often don't even know what to look for in a relationship with a supervisor. At UiA, Sinziana and their team are trying to train students and make them aware.

Anatolijs asks practically where we go from here. Idd proposes that there could be some sort of workshop or training where people with relevant work experience can provide some insights, for example the ethics officer at NTNU. There are also patent offices who specialise in intellectual property rights and technology transfer office. Enrico proposes to write a quick statement on the SiN website. Margret urges caution in publishing statements without sufficient backup, as the only evidence we have right now is anecdotal. Workshop with stakeholders would be very useful, though, and we could write a summary about the outcome of the workshop and perhaps put that on the website instead. We can also refer to guidelines for research. It is also suggested that the opinions of research deans are interesting regarding this matter.

Sinziana proposes to ask all local organisations whether they know of any cases where PhDs or postdocs had their intellectual property stolen and who might be willing to participate in this kind of workshop, to share knowledge and experiences. Sinziana knows of a case at UiA that turned into a legal case. It will be important for the success of the workshop to find people who actually went through this and know the process.

4. Any other business

Association for teacher education: SiN has to send two delegates (a main and a deputy) to the association for teacher education. Yannik will send out an email to the local organisations to spread the word, people who are interested in volunteering for these positions should contact Yannik.

Exchange about communication with leadership and compensation for local organisations:

- Margret brought up the topic because she is experiencing some resistance being invited to meetings with the Forum for Forskerutdanning as well as the rectorate at UiO. UiODoc used to be present at those meetings in the past, but in recent years some of these privileges have been revoked. She would therefore like advice on how to approach these central university bodies and get a feeling for what is normal and to be expected at Norwegian universities. She is also experiencing that UiODoc is taking much more time to run than what is compensated for. Right now, board members equally divide 40% of their annual budget, which amounts to roughly 70,000 NOK per year and in most cases less than 1000 NOK per person on the board.
- DION has a permanent seat in the research council at NTNU, which has monthly meetings that are attended by the president. They are also invited to deans' meetings when there is a particular topic on the agenda that affects temporary employees. The president gets a two month contract extension and other board members get a one month extension per year on the board.
- UiA has only been around for three years and is therefore relatively new. They have been working towards getting compensation and being invited to meetings with university leadership this year. SiN could really help these new and struggling committees by giving recommendations to universities on how to treat their local interest organisations for PhDs and postdocs. Theoretically, the temporary staff representative in the central university board is an ex officio member in the board of UiADoc as well, but in reality this depends on the motivation of the representative in question.
- Damiano has the same issues, as he is just starting out a local organisation at NHH.
- At UiT board members of TODOS get two weeks of contract prolongation per year, and they are present in various research boards, that have a legal obligation to represent the people who do the actual research. Margret has heard the word research council come by several times in this round, and is wondering if that is the same as a meeting for faculty deans. Yannik answers that their research council consists of deans that give recommendations to the rector. Anatolijs adds to this that TODOS is also represented in the ethics committee, and that the representatives for temporary staff regularly meet with the TODOS board.
- Camilla explains that when it comes to having a seat on different boards, student democracy is formalised by law. The organisation that most closely represents a group of people that is essential to the matters being discussed on a council, has the right to be evaluated to become a member on that council. OsloMet gets compensated for all hours they work on behalf of their local organisation, which are automatically added to their contract each semester.
- According to Hui, board members of UiS get two weeks of contract prolongation per year, and they are also invited to meetings with university leadership.
- Grace says that the SiN liaison in SODOC is only compensated for the hours they attend the SiN meetings. The president gets one month contract extension per year, the other board members a bit less. SODOC also gets invited to the meetings with academics and research meetings.
- Immanuel is the only person who continued from the executive committee of UiBDoc of last year. Back then, they had a discussion with the university about whether they should have monetary compensation. The original proposal was to take the compensation out of their annual budget, but that was denied. UiBDoc is relatively new as well, they have been around for two to three years. They have been trying to get invited to meetings with the university leadership, but this has not been fruitful. Not being compensated is for many board members a reason to quit, because being an executive member is time

consuming, which is why UiBDoc has been struggling to retain members. Because they are not compensated for their time, there is also a limit to what they can realistically achieve.

Attracting members to events: Immanuel explains that it has been difficult for them to draw people to their events, especially Norwegians. Sinziana has some strategies for attracting Norwegians: don't organise events on a Friday, and do it at 4:30. They also had a successful event which was co-hosted by the Young Academy and worked out nicely, so she recommends people try this out too. Camilla adds that from her experience, Faculty PhD forums seem to be a strong tradition in Bergen, so it might be a good idea to get in touch with them to collaborate. Margret observes that a lot of the Faculty boards and representatives appear to be Norwegian, whereas the university level interest organisations are primarily composed of international members. Sinziana stresses that it is important to establish a good communication flow from the ground up, starting at the departmental level. This is why UiA is pushing for democratic elections of representatives in the respective PhD programme committees. Immanuel confirms that communication is the main problem they experience. For example, there is no emailing list for all PhD students at Bergen.

Time is running out and Yannik asks as a closing remark whether the local leaders are satisfied with the format of this meeting and would like to continue having these quarterly meetings with SiN. Everyone agrees. Sinziana also suggests that it should be possible to call for a quick meeting if something urgent happens, and not have to wait three months. Yannik says that of course this is possible, and if anything ever comes up she can just send an email.

Meeting end: 19:02

