

PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

By INGVID BERGOM LUNDE

Dear members,

Dear SiN community, the SiN board 2024 is happy to update you on our progress during the first quarter of the year. We are actively engaged in Norway's research and higher education sector to promote and advocate for the need of PhD candidates, postdocs and other research staff in their early career phase.

This year the board works to change the PhD-experience from unnecessary adversity to inspiration. We will do this work in three ways: Raise awareness for PhD candidates about their rights, what they are responsible for and how they can help themselves; Lobby for other actors to reduce the other "symptoms" that may help PhDs deal with the negative prognosis for finishing on time (for example: better supervision, inspiring research environments, clarity on career opportunities outside and inside of academia and the unique vulnerability of international PhD candidates) and to identify areas of interest to post docs and other early career researchers. In order to achieve this we have the following working groups "make SiN visible", "mental health, harassment and the Movement for a Free Academia" and "careers after PhD".

Our newsletter provides an overview of the ongoing efforts and initiatives we are pursuing, and we are excited about the work which lies ahead of us and together with local organisations in the rest of the year! We appreciate input, comments and questions from members organizations, and we look forward to our continued communication and collaboration.

SiN's board 2024

At the general assembly meeting (AGM) of 2023, six new members have been elected and joined the board of SiN. We are happy to present each new member: President: Ingvid Bergom Lunde (UiO), Vice-President/Secretary: Claire Degail (UiT), EuroDoc Liaison: Dimitris Polychronopoulos (USN), Treasurer: Abdelrahman Abdelaal (UiS), Head of Government Relations: Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås (UiO), Head of Communications: Ali Hasan Saber Alkaraly (UiS). The next AGM will be at the end of 2024.

Ingvid Bergom Lunde:

I spent ten years living abroad, in Qatar, Yemen and New Zealand. In the past 14 years I have lived in Oslo, with longer research stays in Somaliland and Ethiopia.

While I am very happy to live in Norway now, I am self-diagnosed with incurable wanderlust and have recently rented out my flat in Oslo for a year so that I can live close to nature and mountains. So, I am "too much" Norwegian – skiing, hiking, waffles. While I want to leave academia due to its unhealthy conditions, I also have a love for people and curiosity for what we do not know about the world with a dash of idealism, and this passion I sense that I share with others PhDs, postdocs and early career research staff, and therefore it is worth to fight for healthy conditions for early career researchers!

Claire Degail:

I have been enrolled for the past two years as a PhD candidate at the Arctic University of Norway (UiT), often described as "the world's most northern univer-

sity". My research project is about care quality in child welfare services and health centres for children 0-5. Aside my work in Tromsø, I am involved in an environmental association and in the local association representing PhD at the UiT. I have also been taking advantage of my surroundings by going on cabin trips in the mountains, enjoying the midnight sun, having BBQs on the beach or evening picnics by lakes, or of course, cozy boardgames or yoga sessions inside.

Dimitris Polychronopoulos:

My PhD studies began in August 2021 in Drammen at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN).

The research project is in migrant entrepreneurship support in Norway and is a part of the Migrant Work Inclusion Project funded by the Research Council of Norway. I've been living in Norway since January 2014 and have enjoyed studying the language and travelling throughout the country. I have also visited all seven continents and more than 100 countries across the globe and enjoy contact with the many cultures across the planet. The SiN Board position of EuroDoc Liaison Officer is a two-year position which I am continuing until the end of 2024.

**Ali Hasan Saber Alkaraly:**

Hei Hei; I'm Ali. I'd like to call myself enthusiastic researcher who likes to have fun. I've joined University of Stavanger Doctoral Community (UISDC) in 2022, 2023 and then joined SiN

in 2024. I enjoy working with different people, making new friends, and helping others whenever is possible. In my free time I like to go hiking with my girlfriend and I teach swimming for kids weekly. Hopefully this year, I'll do my duty for UISDC, SiN, and hopefully finish my PhD



in time. Wish me luck.

Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås:

I have been active in student politics and gained experience from working with issues at the department, faculty, university and nationally level. Sometimes I wonder if I have spent too many hours on meetings instead of studying or doing other things, but to see that issues I have worked with promoting being realised is deeply satisfying and a booster for the motivation to continue being active and learn more about politics. I am also active in the doctoral organisation UiODoc at the University of Oslo, where I also work to coordinate and influence democracy in order to improve the situation of the PhD student and other temporary employees. I am usually a PhD student in health pedagogy and write about patient-health care professional's communication and training in coping strategies for patients with fibrosis.

In my free time I am involved in party politics and various interest organisations. I am also busy following the societal debate, so I try listen to Politisk kvarter and Dagsnytt 18 (debate radio programs) and watch the Dagsrevyen (news review television) everyday. Otherwise, I like to keep in shape and have developed a taste for swimming. I am looking forward to working with SiN this year and perhaps being able to contribute to making everyday life a little better for us PhD's and other temporary employees in academia.

Please get in touch if there are any issues you would like us at SiN to promote. It is important to me that you feel that we in SiN are there for you as member organisations.

Abdelrahman

Abdelaal:

I spent my early 10 years in Saudi Arabia where I was born and then moved to the sunny south of Egypt. For the past 10 years, I've been navigating the lively streets of Cairo, the bustling city that is home to a staggering 30 million people! I've got sociable vibes that



are both a blessing and a curse; I love good humor, whether it's cracking jokes or finding myself in funny situations. Anyone can catch me swimming, hiking, cycling, or enjoying my cooking skills. As someone who thrived in temperatures between 30-36 degrees, adapting to Norway's colder climate has been quite the adventure. But I admit that Norway has captured my heart with its unique charm and pure people. I made the move to Norway nearly 3 years ago, and I'm currently diving deep into the world of physics and material science, pursuing a Ph.D. in nanotechnology for the oilfield. I appreciate intelligence and am so an organized person— you can charge me with OCD, it is true, but I will deny : D.

Meetings and conferences attended by SiN

Kontaktkonferanse: Ingvild represented SiN on January 16th at the *Kontaktkonferansen for Forskning og høyere utdanning 2024* ([link](#)) hosted by the Ministry of Education and Research (in norwegian: *Kunnskapsdepartementet*) in Lillestrøm. The overall theme of the year's gathering was "Ten years ahead - The role of the higher education and research sector". The conference was closed with a dinner where SiN was able to discuss topics on higher education and research with the leaders of the National Union of Students in Norway (NSO), The Academy of Young Researchers (AYF), Universitets- og høyskolerådet (UHR), the then Minister of higher education and research Sandra Borch and the then State Secretary Oddmund Hoel, who is now the minister. The conference was a good opportunity for SiN to get in touch with the representatives of various organizations in Norway's higher education sector and to find cooperation partners to achieve the annual goals of the SiN board 2024.

Framework for Career Guidance for Early-Career Researchers: Claire attended a meeting on the Framework

for Career Guidance for Early-Career Researchers. Career guidance is one of the top five areas the Ministry of Education and Research wants to tackle in its Strategy for Researcher Recruitment and Career Development (2021). The idea is to establish a career guidance framework for early-career researchers, in a dialogue with researcher centres and universities. Different actors within the universities/research institutions could participate in career guidance, as well as external actors. The framework will be harmonized with European standards for career guidance. Here is **more information** about the project.

Kif committee: In 2022 a representative from SiN was appointed to the Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research (KIF) for the 2022-25 period. The committee is appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research and is mandated to advice institutions on policy towards better integration of equality and diversity aspects in higher education and research management. As this is a two year appointment in 2024, Nicolas Gibney is the SiN Representative, with Ole Kristian Dyskeland is his deputy. They report to SiN.

Gothenburg-symposium: The establishment of the Movement for a Free Academia: Since October, Ingvild has been active in the development of the establishment of the Movement For a Free Academia (formerly named Free Scientist Movement). The former Danish PhD candidate, and now independent scientist Maria Toft together with a range of researchers in the Nordic countries work towards establishing an academic system and culture built on care and trust. Ingvild attended the symposium on 5-7th April in Gothenburg where around 20 researchers from different fields, ages and titles wrote the manifest of what such an academic system and culture would look like. Ingvild and Maria Toft also held a joint keynote entitled "The Yearning of Something Else – The Perspective from Young Scientists". If you are interested to learn more, or would like to sign the manifest, it is available [here](#).

Norwegian

language requirement:

A main part of the beginning of the year has revolved around the Norwegian language requirement. We know that most international researchers want to learn Norwegian, we encourage this, and SiN is cheering for the regulations to be changed from requirement to right to language training. Legislating the right to Norwegian courses would be a better alternative for temporary employees who want to learn Norwegian. To require that temporary international employees must take 15 credits in Norwegian without provision for an extended contract period, visa extension, financial support to attend courses or reduced work tasks is a stress factor that can result in delay or non-completion of the doctorate. Further, the requirement that temporary international employees must take 15 credits in Norwegian, while employees who has Norwegian as a mother tongue can choose not to, SiN views as a discriminatory treatment that may go against an inclusive working environment. In the worst case scenario, Norway is in danger of not being chosen as a country by young researchers, and Norway could lose significant research talents and becomes poorer in terms of scientific knowledge. SiN is very concerned with what will happen if the law is passed. We encourage our member organisation to keep lobbying on this topic in their local organisations, institutions and media while SiN will also do this, and that we also work together. If you want you can share and sign the petition on SiN's consultation note by clicking: [here](#).

Norwegian language requirement and mental health:

The newly passed Universities and Colleges Act, effective in August, mandates the use and strengthening of Norwegian as an academic language, requiring teaching to be conducted in Norwegian or Sami unless justified otherwise. Additionally, an action plan proposes stricter measures, currently under consultation, including a requirement for international staff to attain a B2 level of Norwegian proficiency within three years, as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Furthermore, PhD candidates and postdoctoral fellows from abroad must complete 15 course credits in Norwegian. In response, Ingvild Bergom Lunde, president of the Association of Doctoral Organisations in Norway (SiN), expressed concerns about the added burden on PhD researchers, referencing a study showing only 15 percent completing their PhD within the standard three-year timeframe between 2010 and 2016.

SiN had several activities in the regard of the matter of mental health. SiN leader, Ingvild Bergom Lunde, in her talk with UA, underscores the stress inherent in doctoral work, noting studies indicating higher rates of mental health issues among scholarship holders compared to the general population with higher education. Lunde emphasizes the need for academia to shoulder more responsibility for addressing this issue, stressing the importance of prioritizing the mental health of research fellows for the benefit of Norway's research future. Data analysis from the Joint Student System reveals a low completion rate of doctoral education within the stipulated time, with significant dropout rates after ten years, prompting Lunde to criticize the current model's brevity given the high proficiency demands. She offers various suggestions for universities to better support scholarship holders, including fostering positive supervisor relationships, emphasizing mastery over daily deliveries, addressing conflicts from the fellow's perspective, combating loneliness through community-building, clarifying post-doctoral career opportunities, prioritizing support for international scholars, accommodating personal crises, and improving framework conditions for the doctoral period.

Consultation note

By far the most important consultation we in SiN have worked on so far this year is the new regulation for appointments to teaching and research positions in higher education. There has been great engagement in the proposal for a requirement for Norwegian courses for students whose mother tongue is not Norwegian. It is important for us at SiN to make this commitment visible through our response to the consultation. In particular, we would like to thank everyone who has made contact and helped find sources and suggested wording. These inputs have been invaluable and have contributed to us having the opportunity to give a good and thorough response to the consultation.

Although consultation responses are important, it is nevertheless also important to recognize that relatively few people read consultation responses. Therefore, it is also important to be able to lift points and ideas from the consultation response into the public debate. We at SiN have tried this, but many thanks also to all of you member organizations who have worked on the matter at your own institutions and in the public debate. Together we are strong!

Now there will eventually be a hearing on the research system, which is about the organization of research in Norway. It can also be important for PhDs and other temporary employees. We in SiN will participate in an oral hearing on 12 April 2024.

Otherwise, SiN will also participate in the University and College Council's working committee for research. There, among other things, we have worked with supervisor training and relationships for supervisors. If you have input on this or anything else, it is most welcome.

Annual report

On March 14th, we submitted our annual report for 2023, it is soon available on [stipendiat.no](#). The 2023 board was

very active both in public and internally. They conducted a **survey** on transferable skills and an internal survey on supervision, both we aim to continue working on. In addition they have delivered multiple media commentaries in form of interviews and opinion pieces, commentaries on consultation notes, representation and participation in meetings and conferences, and other important work. Internally, the 2023 board spent considerable time and resources making changes to the way SiN operates and improving the financial situation. While SiN is engaged, SiN recognised that the funds are limiting our work. The 2023 board together with 2024 board applied for three future forms of funding for the 2025 board: keep the funding as it is, increase the funding, increase the funding and restructure SiN to a new structure with 100% employment for one person (can be divided between a general secretary and elected president).

Quarterly Meeting

SiN held its first Quarterly Meeting on the 4th of March. Leaders (and deputies) from the local organisations attended the meeting. The main topics were the new language requirements for PhDs/postdocs and permanent employees, the extension for short term sick leave, the creation of the Free Scientist Movement (now named Movement for a Free Academia), as well as the AGM 2024 and the communication between SiN and local organizations. The representatives raised concerns on topics such as the financing and availability of the Norwegian courses, the lack of communication around the extension for short term sick leave in some campuses,

and about how to deal with conflicts between supervisors and PhD candidates. We thank you for your input! SiN will hold its second Quarterly Meeting for leaders of local organizations on the 27th of May. We kindly ask you to inform us about the new composition of your board if your organisation holds an election in February/March/April/May. This way we can invite the relevant participants and have as many representatives of local organisations as possible at the meeting.

Please communicate with each other and the SiN-board!

We are all a bit stretched on time, but we would love to do our best to promote the interest of PhDs, postdocs and early career staff this year! We have three yearly quarterly meetings and the AGM were we discuss with our member organisations, please let us know if there is anything you want on the agenda for these meetings. If you have any matters in between these meetings, please let us know, Claire is the main contact for member organisations, but we are all here to get feedback from you. Your feedback helps us understand what is important for PhDs, postdocs and early career staff.

Last, but none the less equally important, we encourage the local organization to use the slack channel to get in touch with the other member organisations. This is meant as an informal channel for you to ask questions, discuss and share experiences. You can also tag

anyone in the board if you want us to contribute or just raise our awareness. P.S. If you change boards or know someone is missing out; let us know so we can update our mailinglists!

SiN in media

The year has started off with quite a lot of news in the media where SiN has been given to opportunity to contribute. Ingvild did an **interview** on her PhD and postdocs experience, the ongoing complaint cases for PhD candidates in Norway and her vision as president for SiN in 2024. SiN has also had the opportunity to comment on **mental health and PhDs**, the **national sexual harassment survey** among PhDs in Denmark, and the **end of tax reduction** for cost related to the disputation. Our local organisation at NTNU, DION, did an **interview** on the survey on supervision and found that only 2 in 3 candidates know what to do when they experience difficulty working with their supervisor. Together with lobbying from some of our local organizations we have actively tried to get media attention to the Norwegian language requirement, while not successful in Norway quite yet, it did end up as global news in **Times Higher Education!** The 2023 Vice president and secretary Regina talked about **high fees for scholarship holders from countries outside the EEA**. Ingvild has together with the independent researcher and former PhD candidate Maria Toft and professor Jan Helge Solbakk spoken about the Movement for Academic Freedom and its value for researchers in their early career phase **in a Khrono-interview**.
