

SiN Newsletter Winter 2024



President's Foreword
By Ingvild Bergom Lunde

SiN

Dear members,

This year had been marked by SiN becoming visible in the public debate with a focus on mental health issues for PhD candidates, power abuse and lack of complaint systems for early career researchers, still a need for national portal for PhD-courses, the Norwegian language requirement and the removal of tax deduction for the disputation dinner and the Movement of a Free Academia. For me it's been important to hold the university systems to account instead of the individual PhD candidate. We have also written several hearing statements, represented at meetings and conferences in Norway and Europe and held monthly board meetings and quarterly member meetings.

This autumn we have published SiN's position statement on the Movement for a Free Academia on our website. The position statement has been discussed at several board and quarterly meetings, and have been sent out to get feedback for your. We hope you read it, and also you can read the Gothenburg manifesto, and if you want to sign it, you can do so here:

www.freeacademia.org

In October I was invited to present SiN's position on how the language requirement and career promoting activities will affect early career researchers, and supervision and mental health at the research education conference in October at "Forskerutdanningskonferansen 2024: Tilbake til fremtiden – forskerutdanning for en ny tid | NMBU"

In early November I attended a panel debate on the future of academia arranged by Protest Pub at NTNU.



Photo: Participants at the AGM

In November we also had our AGM combined with a social evening the night before. We got to discuss several important issues on the AGM including the future of SiN, and, most importantly, we elected a new board! I am looking forward to follow the new board next year, and wish them all the best.

In December, I and Ole Kristian Dyskeland (SiN president 2023 and advisory board member 2024) attended the 20 years celebration of the KIF-committee, and I participated in a panel debate on diversity in academia for young researchers.

On midnight December 31st my term as president ends, and Karl Henrik takes over. On behalf of the 2024 board: thank you all for the past year! We have had the honour of representing all the member organisations, on behalf of all the PhD candidates, postdocs and early career researchers in Norway. I have really appreciated local leaders and other board members joining and sharing your experiences on our quarterly meetings, and also the contact you have made with us in between meetings – it's invaluable, a big thank you!

I have had a phenomenal board with great engagement and humour, I'd like to thank each and every one of them for their effort this last year.

Finally, I hope you have all had happy holidays, and I wish you well in the new years!

Kind regards,
Ingvild



Photo: SiN Board 2024

Consultation Statements and Meetings: Summing up

By Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås

An essential part of SiNs work is to be an active participant in governmental policymaking for promoting the interest of temporary scientific staff in Norway. There is a lot of meetings that is possible to attend, that can be of more or less importance in promoting our common interest as temporary scientific staff. An important aspect of being a Head of governmental relations, is to prioritize the most important arenas to be present at. This is especially important, in that being part of the SiN board does not give contract extensions and too much meeting attendance will contribute to less time for doing the research one is employed to do. Prioritize the most important meetings, delegate work and get the most out of meeting attendance is crucial to be the most effective in getting results.

Now as my period as a Head of governmental relations is approaching the end, it is time to look back on what have been done and which learning can be mined from the experiences along the way. During my period I have in collaboration with Ingvild, written five consultation statements. It has been very productive to have a person to discuss the content of the consultation with, and collaborate in the production and shaping on our views.

We have also sent out some of the consultation statement to the member organisations. Unfortunately, we usually do not receive that much of feedback on our consultation drafts, but it has been very productive to talk about the consultations with our member organisations in the quarterly meetings. Additional meetings with some members and stakeholders on different consultation topics have as well provided fruitful material and input in our consultation writing.

The scope of the consultations we are being invited to reply to vary a lot. For example, we did give a short statement in that we supported to reduce the bureaucracy to let the Housing bank take care of building of student housing instead of being instructed from the ministry of knowledge. On the other hand, the new regulations for employment in higher education institutions gave a lot of food for thought and debate with several dilemmas, i.e. what can be best to strengthen the career promoting activities and supervisions for PhD candidates.

The far most engaging aspect of the consultation writing work have been the same consultation, where the introduction of language courses requirements for temporary scientific staff was suggested. Even though a united sector were very negative to the new language courses requirement, we was unfortunately not listened to. A grain of hope was although revealed in the minister of research and higher education, Oddmund Hoel's statement that if the evaluation of the new language requirement showed that there will be a reduction in recruitment of international temporary staff to needed academic areas, he would be willing to change his mind. To keep an eye on the evaluation will thus be crucial. A complaint for the unfairness for international PhDs and PostDocs is underway, which certainly will be important to follow up.

Another aspect of being a Head of governmental relations is to attending regularly in the executive board of the unit for research in Universities Norway, the umbrella organisations for higher education institutions. There prominent research leader at different institutions meet to discuss relevant issues regarding research politics in Norway. For example, a national portal for PhD courses have been discussed and worked with. Right now there seems to be a window of opportunity to get the portal accomplished. There is just about 1 million in financing that is needed to could establish the course portal that could make the availability of courses more visible both nationally and internationally, so PhDs can find more relevant courses and institutions can attract PhDs more broadly.

Two times a year the research unit in Universities Norway arrange a unit meeting, where different stakeholders and more institutions attend. At the last unit meeting now in November, the overarching topic was what threatens the internationalization in Norway higher education institutions. I held a short talk about our work with the language course requirements, and we had fruitful discussion on how to continue a welcoming and including sector that is open for internationalization even if both Norway and other countries in the world are taking a more nationalistic path.

To sum up, there has been a lot of important issues to work with this period. To prioritise is essential to have the most impact, despite the fact that us a Head of governmental relation you have to due 100 percent research while taking care of the position. Thing takes time to change in academia, so having stamina, endure resistance and accept that one year is too short to make large change, is advantageous characteristic to possess to thrive in the position.

Upcoming UHR events are Kontaktkonferansen on 21st of January in Oslo. SiN's president 2025, Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås, and UHR representative, Kamil Piotr Szura, are going to attend this event.



Photo from a Khrono debate attended by Karl Henrik on the boundaries between research and security and how one actually conducts sensitive research in a challenging security climate.

Two Years as the EuroDoc Liaison Officer: A Reflection

Having had the honour and privilege to serve as EuroDoc Liaison Officer on the SiN Board throughout 2023 and 2024, and to have attended the Eurodoc Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Conference in both Uppsala, Sweden (2023) and Ljubljana, Slovenia (2024), as well as participating in bi-monthly online meetings for national associations, I have witnessed first-hand the significant evolution of key areas within Eurodoc over this period. These conferences and the ongoing discussions through online platforms have provided an invaluable opportunity to reflect on the progress made in doctoral education, particularly regarding the challenges and opportunities faced by early-career researchers, the focus on sustainable research careers, and the financial and institutional structures that support doctoral candidates across Europe. Moreover, the camaraderie and engagement experienced during the 2023 Christmas Zoom party exemplified the collective spirit that defines Eurodoc and its commitment to improving conditions for early-career researchers across Europe.

Evolution of Key Themes: 2023 to 2024

The Eurodoc conferences have provided a platform for crucial debates surrounding the professional development of doctoral candidates, with significant shifts in focus between the two years.

1. Doctoral Mobility and Career Progression. In 2023, the focus on mobility in doctoral education was strongly emphasised, highlighting how cross-border collaboration and academic exchange can enrich doctoral candidates' experiences. The 2023 AGM in Uppsala featured discussions on how international mobility could foster stronger academic networks and career prospects for young researchers. There was a sense of urgency in addressing the barriers to mobility, such as financial constraints, visa restrictions, and institutional limitations that hindered the full participation of researchers from less affluent backgrounds or regions.



Photo of EuroDoc AGM attendees in Ljubljana, June 6th and 7th

Fast forward to 2024, and the issue of mobility remained central, but with a more nuanced approach under the theme of brain circulation. The 2024 conference in Ljubljana addressed not just geographic mobility, but also career mobility, career shifts, and the importance of flexibility in career progression. The panel discussion on “Brain Circulation Hybrid Panel” exemplified this shift, stressing the need for research institutions to accommodate a broader range of career paths for doctoral candidates. The shift from a purely geographic focus to include career flexibility demonstrates a deeper understanding of the diverse trajectories early-career researchers may take, both within and beyond academia.

2. Sustainable Research Careers. The question of sustainable research careers evolved significantly from 2023 to 2024. At the 2023 AGM in Uppsala, there was a growing emphasis on addressing precarious work conditions, the financial struggles of doctoral candidates, and the challenges of securing stable employment in academia. Early-career researchers were presented as a vulnerable group, facing the threat of precarious contracts, long-term job insecurity, and limited career progression. These challenges were compounded by the increasing reliance on short-term contracts, which affected not only job security but also career satisfaction and professional development.

By 2024, the discussion had expanded to consider broader strategies for ensuring sustainable research careers. The panel on Sustainable Research Careers in Ljubljana brought forward key discussions on how research institutions and policymakers can address these concerns. Notably, there was a strong argument for offering more stable career options for early-career researchers, with the debate extending into the difficulties of transitioning between academia and industry. There was a marked shift towards recognising the need for stability in research careers as part of the broader structural changes that are required to make academic careers more attractive and sustainable for the next generation of researchers.

3. Institutional and Financial Challenges. Institutional and financial challenges continued to dominate the Eurodoc discussions throughout 2023 and 2024. In Uppsala, the conversation was largely about the need for increased funding for research and the impact of external economic factors on doctoral education, such as the growing defence budgets across Europe. These economic pressures were seen as contributing to the funding constraints that doctoral education faced, particularly in less-funded academic fields.

In 2024, the financial challenges became even more pressing. During the plenary session with Gregor Majdič, Rector of the University of Ljubljana, the issue of reduced funding for academic research was discussed in light of geopolitical tensions and the prioritisation of defence spending. This concern was also reflected in the detailed financial discussions at the AGM, where Eurodoc's leadership, including the newly elected President Pil Maria Saugmann, emphasised the need for greater transparency in financial matters. The evolving understanding of financial sustainability within the academic sector was a key outcome of these discussions, with a renewed commitment to ensuring financial resources are allocated effectively to support doctoral candidates and their professional development.

The Role of Eurodoc in Shaping Policy and Practice

Eurodoc's ongoing work has highlighted the importance of fostering not only dialogue but also action. Through regular online meetings for national associations, the sense of collective engagement and shared purpose among members has been palpable. The ability of Eurodoc to bring together representatives from across Europe ensures that a broad spectrum of issues is discussed and that local, national, and European policies are aligned to support doctoral candidates effectively.

At the 2024 AGM, Eurodoc's focus on quality assurance within doctoral education was further strengthened, with clear mechanisms for assessing and documenting the progression of doctoral candidates. The discussion on the holistic approach to quality assurance in doctoral education underscored the need for institutions to consider factors beyond research output, including the professional development of researchers and their involvement in broader societal contexts. This aligns with the broader mission of Eurodoc to support doctoral candidates in becoming well-rounded professionals, capable of succeeding both within academia and in other sectors.

Moreover, the election of a new board, with experienced figures such as Pil Maria Saugmann (President) and Nicola Dengo (Vice President), signals Eurodoc's continued commitment to ensuring that the voices of doctoral candidates are heard at the highest levels. The introduction of an advisory board consisting of key figures such as Miia Ijäs and Beata Zwierzyńska is an important step in broadening the expertise available to Eurodoc and ensuring that its work remains informed by diverse perspectives and experiences.

Camaraderie and Collective Spirit

One of the most rewarding aspects of attending Eurodoc events has been the sense of camaraderie among the doctoral candidates and early-career researchers. The 2023 Christmas Zoom party was a perfect example of this spirit, where despite the challenges and stresses of doctoral education, participants were able to come together to share experiences, reflect on the past year, and look forward to the future with optimism and solidarity. These moments of connection help to build a supportive community within Eurodoc, where members can learn from each other, celebrate successes, and offer mutual support in the face of shared challenges.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the Eurodoc events of 2023 and 2024, it is clear that significant progress has been made in addressing the issues facing doctoral candidates across Europe. From the growing recognition of the need for sustainable research careers to the expansion of the discussion around doctoral mobility, Eurodoc continues to be at the forefront of advocating for the rights and professional development of early-career researchers. The opportunity to engage with Eurodoc's work, both in person and online, has been an enriching experience, and it is evident that the organisation's efforts to enhance doctoral education are having a meaningful impact. Looking forward, Eurodoc's continued advocacy and policy work will be vital in ensuring that doctoral education remains relevant, inclusive, and supportive of the diverse needs of the next generation of researchers. A big thanks to Friederike Schäfer, the EuroDoc Liaison Officer for SiN in 2022 for assisting in the transition as the new EuroDoc Liaison Officer for the past two years and congratulations and a warm welcome to Naheeda Hamza, who is taking over as the EuroDoc Liaison Officer for 2025 and 2026.

Ensuring Fair and Safe Academic Environments: Addressing Retaliation Risks for PhD Students: by Ali Alkaraly

In Summary, PhD students are critical in advancing research and innovation in Norwegian academia. However, the current system lacks adequate protections against retaliation when students raise complaints against their supervisors, particularly when supervisors control project funding. This power imbalance leaves students vulnerable to career setbacks, academic delays, and personal distress. This proposal outlines the problem, its wide-ranging consequences, and actionable solutions to establish a safe, fair, and transparent academic environment. By implementing clear anti-retaliation measures and independent complaint mechanisms, universities can better protect PhD students, uphold ethical research standards, and foster trust within academic institutions.

The PhD-supervisor relationship is central to academic success, but the problem of a significant power imbalance often marks it. Supervisors have considerable influence over a student's research progress, access to funding, and career opportunities. This dynamic becomes even more pronounced when the supervisor secures project funding, as they control essential resources. In such cases, students may hesitate to voice concerns about mistreatment, academic misconduct, or harassment due to fear of retaliation. Retaliation against PhD students can manifest in various ways, including project delays, exclusion from research activities, funding loss, and damaged professional networks. While adhering to broader labor laws, Norwegian academic institutions currently lack specific anti-retaliation policies designed to protect PhD students. As a result, students face an unfair choice between remaining silent about serious issues or risking harm to their academic and professional futures. Trust in institutional fairness erodes without formal protections, and ethical concerns may remain unresolved.

The consequences of unaddressed retaliation impact individuals, institutions, and the broader academic culture. For students, retaliation can cause significant psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and burnout. It often disrupts academic progress, delays degree completion, and harms career prospects through funding loss or weakened recommendations. Failure to address retaliation undermines trust in governance and complaint-handling systems for institutions. High attrition rates among PhD students can result in poor reflection on the institution's ability to support early-career researchers. Reputational damage and ethical lapses further compromise the institution's commitment to academic integrity. On a cultural level, unresolved retaliation issues create a culture of silence where mistreatment, misconduct, and power imbalances persist. This undermines ethical supervisory practices, discourages accountability, and limits academic innovation by stifling open communication.

To address these challenges, this proposal recommends a series of potential solutions to protect PhD students and ensure institutional fairness. First, universities must implement clear anti-retaliation policies that explicitly define retaliation, such as unjustified funding cuts, exclusion from projects, or project delays. These policies should outline penalties for supervisors or institutions engaging in retaliatory actions. Second, independent complaint mechanisms must be established to ensure impartial handling of student concerns. Universities should create PhD-ombudsman offices or oversight bodies to investigate complaints transparently and confidentially. Anonymous reporting mechanisms and third-party investigations should be available for serious allegations.

Additionally, funding transparency must be ensured to protect students' rights. A student's access to funding and research resources should not be contingent upon supervisory relationships, and contingency plans should be implemented to safeguard project continuity in conflict. Strengthening support services is also essential. Universities should expand access to counseling, legal advice, and advocacy groups for PhD students. Training programs can help students understand their rights and navigate conflict resolution mechanisms effectively. Simultaneously, supervisors must be held accountable through mandatory ethics and conflict resolution training and performance evaluations incorporating student feedback.

To have an effective implementation plan, universities, funding agencies, and student advocacy groups must collaborate. Universities should draft and approve anti-retaliation policies within six months, establish independent PhD-ombudsman offices within a year, and introduce funding safeguards within the same timeframe. Expanding student support services and implementing supervisor training programs should be ongoing processes, supported by HR departments and student unions.

Ensuring the success of these measures requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Universities should publish annual reports on student complaints and their resolutions, ensuring confidentiality while promoting transparency. Anonymous surveys can help assess the fairness and safety of academic environments. Policies and systems should be reviewed and refined annually based on feedback and outcomes, ensuring continuous improvement.

In conclusion, addressing retaliation risks for PhD students is essential for fostering an ethical, inclusive, and fair academic environment in Norway. Implementing the proposed solutions will protect vulnerable researchers and strengthen institutional trust, uphold ethical standards, and promote a supportive research culture. This approach ensures that Norwegian academia remains a global academic excellence and integrity leader.

SiN in Media Autumn 2024

On behalf of SiN, [in Khrono](#) in October Karl Henrik criticized the Medical Faculty at University of Oslo's refusal to evaluate the work of a doctoral candidate who had published one of her papers in Norwegian language in "The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association", a peer-reviewed international journal. It is unfortunate the individual candidate needs to take the burden of systemic failure. In November Ingvild wrote [an opinion piece](#) in Khrono to explain why she left current institutional academia, and why she is a free scientist due to her decision, and she shared her experiences with bad mental health by [commenting on a new research article on emotional labour among female academics](#), and she also reflected on 2024 and 2025 in a [Christmas interview with Khrono](#). The [SiN 2025 board was presented in Khrono](#). Lastly, the 2024 and 2025 boards and advisory boards, and SiN president 2023 and 2022, has written an opinion piece where we argue that young scientists need initiatives like Movement for a Free Academia, Protest Pub and KIF-committee in order to challenge the university as a monolithic structure, it will soon be published in Khrono.

The new Member Organisations from the 2024 AGM

During the AGM, we have welcomed one new member organization: ØUC phd-forum, from Østfold University College. The 2024 AGM was attended by two delegates from Østfold University College. Joan Pla Vivoles from Østfold University College is also becoming part of SiN advisory board.

In addition, VIDDoc (VID Vitenskapelige høyskole) is becoming a provisional member. VIDDoc plans to finalize their statutes by January, which is a condition to become a full SiN member, alongside having an elected board, statutes, and being connected to a higher education institution in Norway offering a doctoral programme.

These developments are part of our commitment to strengthening the network of doctoral candidates and enhancing the support structures available to them. We look forward to the contributions that both ØUC PhD-Forum and VIDDoc will bring to our community, and we are eager to support their integration and growth within SiN.

Elected Board 2025

- President: Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås (UiODoc)
- Vice-president: Claire Degail, (TODOS)
- Head of Government Relations: Kamil Piotr Szura (UiSDc)
- Head of Communications: Davit Gigilashvili (DION)
- Treasurer: Fei Song (DION)
- EuroDoc Liaison officer: Naheeda Hamza (UiODoc)

Advisory Board 2025: Dimitris Polychronopoulos, Joan Pla Vivoles and Ingvild Bergom Lunde.
[Read the press release](#)



Elected board 2025