



Stipendiatorganisasjonene i Norge

**A National Survey on Compensation
Practices for PhD & Postdoc
Organisation Boards in Norway**

October 2025

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Executive Summary

Local interest organisations representing PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers in Norway play a crucial role in improving the academic and social environment for early-career researchers. These organisations are typically run by elected boards of PhDs and postdocs who invest substantial time and effort to organize events, advocate for their peers, and liaise with institutional bodies.

A national survey conducted by Stipendiatororganisasjonene i Norge (SiN) in March 2025 collected data from 13 Norwegian institutes to understand current compensation practices for board members. Findings reveal significant disparities:

- Four institutes offer no compensation at all.
- Most boards report 100–300 hours of work per term, often uncompensated.
- Institutes offering flexible schemes (choice between contract-based recognition or monetary benefits) report higher satisfaction.
- Under-compensation is a systemic issue and risks undermining the wellbeing of both board members and the wider PhD/postdoc community.

SiN calls for fair and flexible compensation nationwide to recognize this essential work, reduce barriers to participation, and strengthen local academic communities.



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1. Background

In Norway, local interest organisations representing PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers play a crucial role in improving the academic and social environment for early-career researchers (ECRs). Typically led by elected boards composed of PhDs and postdocs, these organisations make substantial contributions to resource sharing, community building, advocacy, and institutional development.

They are often the first and most approachable point of contact for early-career researchers, sometimes consulted before labour unions. Their contribution to the work environment and institutional culture is therefore significant. The typical duties of board members include:

- answering inquiries from PhDs and postdocs,
- representing in various institutional committees and decision-making bodies,
- participating in discussions and raising awareness of important issues,
- organising academic and social events to enhance community life.

These responsibilities require considerable time and effort. Nevertheless, the compensation policies provided by higher-education institutions to such board members vary widely across Norway. These differences influence not only the functioning and sustainability of the organisations but also the willingness of individuals to participate—and, in the longer term, the well-being and democracy of the ECRs.

To investigate the current landscape, SiN (Stipendiatororganisasjonene i Norge) initiated a national survey in March 2025 to collect data on the compensation and benefits provided to board members of these local organisations. Member organisations of SiN were invited to complete a Nettskjema survey that required Feide login for traceability. Participants consented to share their self-reported information anonymously; therefore, the results presented here do not disclose institutional names.

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The survey received responses from 13 organisations, offering a valuable snapshot of existing practices. In addition to compensation, the survey also asked about the size of each organisation’s membership, its operational budget, and estimated working hours for board members.

For clarity in this report, “Institutes” refers to Norwegian higher-education institutions. “Organisations” refers to the local PhD/Postdoc interest organisations within those institutes.

2. Survey overview

Among the nine institutes that offer compensation, two main forms emerge:

1. Contractual Recognition – such as contract extensions or counting board work as part of the candidate’s “duty work”, where applicable.
2. Monetary Benefits – including gift cards or additional allocations to driftsmidler (operational funds).

To enable quantitative comparison, we monetised all compensation based on the current PhD hourly salary of approximately NOK 300 (before tax).

Table 1 below summarises the statistics of collected answers. The organisations show large variations in membership size, operational budgets, and compensation practices—for instance, the largest organisation represents 44 times more members than the smallest one. Consequently, their day-to-day practices and needs are not always directly comparable.



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Table 1. Result summary

	Max	Min	Median	Mean	Normalized SD
Size of membership	2200	50	400.0	653.0	108.58%
Operational budget (kNOK)	430	15	97.5	132.7	92.11%
Budget per member (kNOK/person)	1.60	0.08	0.3	0.4	105.96%
Compensation (k NOK, leader)	90	0	17.0	27.4	115.01%
Compensation (k NOK, non-leader)	45	0	10.0	14.7	110.30%

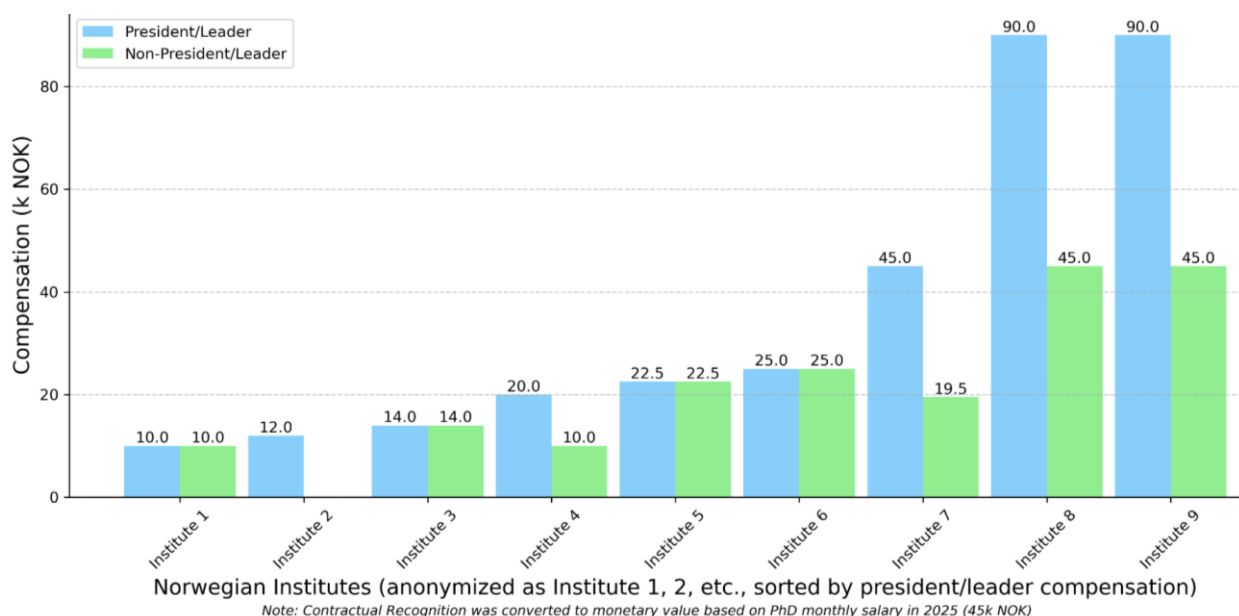


Fig. 1 - Existing compensation policies in Norwegian higher-education institutions for PhD & postdoc organisation boards. Four organisations offer no compensation, and thus, are not shown in this plot.

Figure 1 illustrates the range of compensation policies across Norwegian institutes. In some, all board members receive equal compensation regardless of their role; in others, leaders or presidents receive higher remuneration, reflecting their typically heavier workload.

A positive correlation exists between operating budget and number of members (Figure 2). However, the budget per member still varies considerably. One

organisation in Oslo reported difficulty obtaining detailed budget figures from its affiliated institute, underscoring persistent challenges in financial transparency.

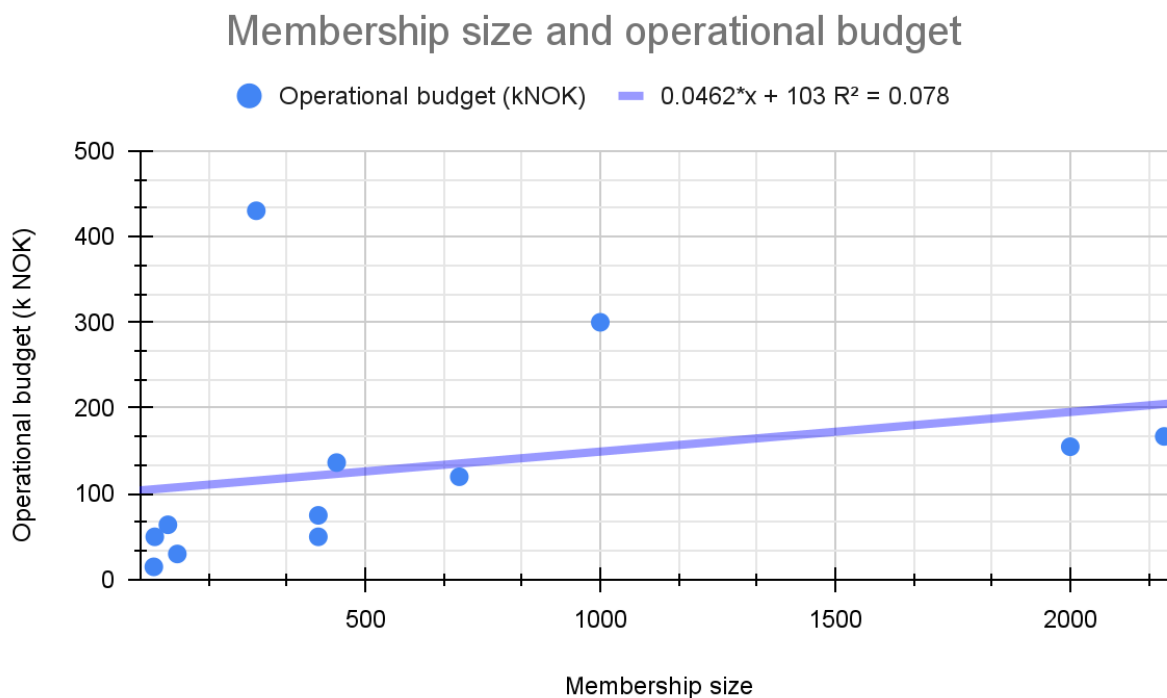


Fig. 2 - The larger organisations usually receive more budget, but the amount per member can still vary substantially.

3. Findings

3.1 Most local boards are under-compensated

Board members reported dedicating 100–300 hours per term to their board duties, yet many felt that their contributions were not adequately recognised. Four institutes provide no compensation at all, relying entirely on voluntary effort. One organisation compensates only its president, leaving the rest of the board without remuneration.

A representative from one such organisation described the challenge:

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“Currently, the voluntary operations make it difficult to ask board members to do much work and, as a result, our contribution to the overall university and to improving the PhD experience is very limited.”

Only three organisations reported that the amount of compensation was satisfactory; however, one of them stated that they were dissatisfied with the form in which compensation was provided.

3.2 Those with heavier workloads receive lower or no compensation

Several organisations found it difficult to precisely estimate the working hours required but nonetheless highlighted the significant responsibilities involved. Based on estimates provided by nine organisations, the relationship between working hours and compensation was examined (Figure 3).

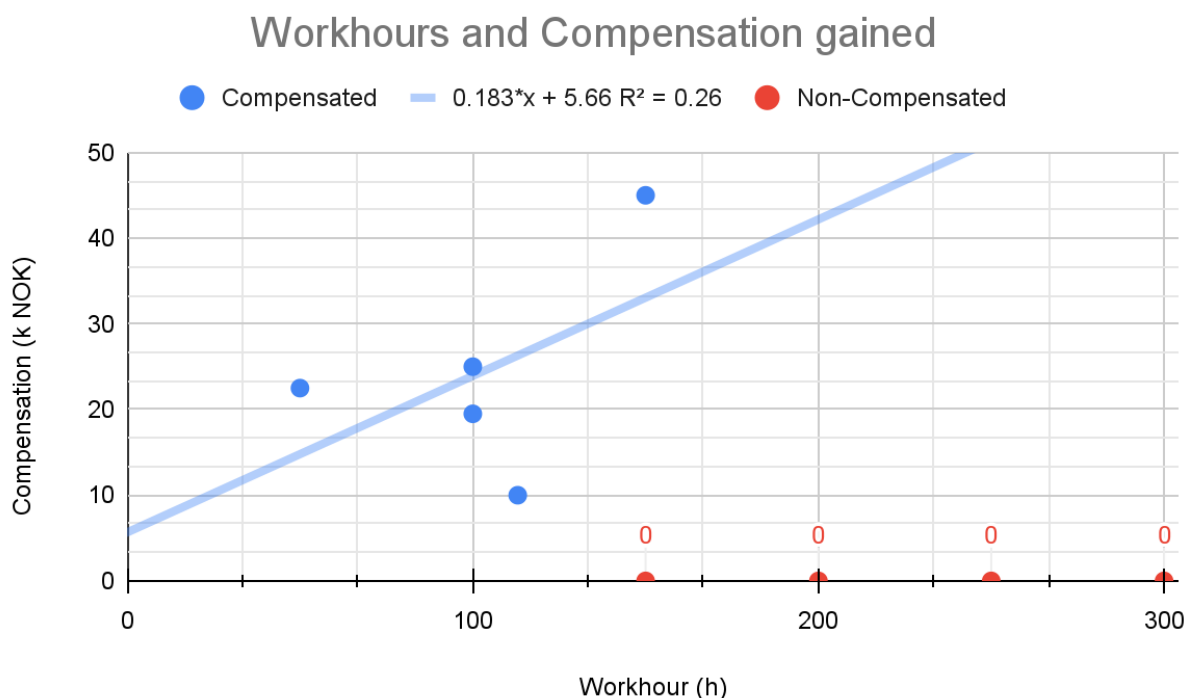


Fig. 3 – Organisations operating entirely voluntarily typically have the highest workload.

The analysis showed that organisations without any compensation often face the highest workloads. Among those receiving compensation, a positive correlation was observed between the number of work hours and the amount of compensation received. Here the relationship between working hours and the size of membership were not considered, suggesting that smaller organisations may still require substantial time and effort to function effectively.

3.3 Flexible compensation is preferred

Most institutes provide only one form of compensation—either contractual recognition or monetary benefits—with contractual recognition being more common. However, some institutes have adopted flexible schemes, allowing members to choose the compensation form that best suits their circumstances.

Examples of differing preferences include:

- ECRs with rigid schedules, such as laboratory-based research, often prefer contract extensions for lost research time.
- Others with more flexible work hours tend to prefer monetary compensation.
- Differences in contract length—e.g., three-year vs four-year PhDs—also affect preferences, as duty-hour allocations do not apply uniformly.
- Some institutes impose a compensation cap for re-elected board members.

Institutes that offer flexibility generally report higher levels of satisfaction and motivation among board members, underlining the importance of adaptable policies.

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3.4 Lack of transparency

Beyond compensation, survey responses highlight a broader issue: critical information about board operations and institutional support is often unclear or inaccessible.

Several respondents emphasised these challenges:

“There are no formal guidelines on how PhD/postdoc organisations should function or what resources are available to us. We often have to navigate bureaucratic systems blindly.”

This lack of transparency results in:

- Uncertainty about rights and available resources, discouraging potential candidates from running for board positions.
- Inconsistent policies across departments or faculties, creating inequitable experiences.
- Time wasted on administrative guesswork, diverting energy away from advocacy and community-building efforts.

3.5 Altruism vs incentivization risks

One concern raised in the survey is that compensation might attract individuals motivated primarily by financial gain rather than genuine commitment to the community. Because in most cases, compensation is determined by the affiliated institutes, leaving little influence to the board members themselves.

While the concern is valid, it should not overshadow the importance of fairly compensating dedicated and hardworking board members. To reduce risks of misuse, institutes could implement safeguards such as:

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- mandatory time-tracking documentation, and/or
- a peer-review system to ensure that compensation remains merit-based rather than automatic.

Such measures help strike a balance between fairness and accountability, rewarding genuine contributors while discouraging opportunistic participation.

3.6 Inequality stems from under-compensation, not over-compensation

The survey is based on self-reported data, meaning some figures—particularly reported working hours—may involve estimation errors or subjective bias. Despite these limitations, the findings clearly indicate that a majority of respondents feel under-compensated and undervalued.

Moreover, the data reveal significant disparities in board working conditions, driven largely by systemic under-compensation rather than over-compensation. **Importantly, these results should not be interpreted as justification for reducing compensation at any member institution.** Fair and equitable remuneration remains essential to recognising the contributions of board members.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Local interest organisations work to improve the well-being of early career researchers (ECRs), while their board members are themselves PhDs and postdocs facing stringent research deadlines and temporary contracts. The work undertaken for these communities should be regarded as legitimate compensated labour, not left entirely to voluntary service.

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As many respondents—and the SiN board from our first-hand experience—attest, board responsibilities often require diverting time and mental energy from primary research tasks, frequently during normal working hours for administrative duties.

The lack of proper compensation risks:

- lowering the quality of boards,
- undermining the well-being and representation of ECRs, and
- burdening the research careers of volunteer board members.

SiN therefore calls for fair and flexible compensation policies for all local interest-organisation boards nationwide. Appropriate recognition of this board work is essential to attract motivated individuals, sustain effective advocacy, and strengthen the well-being of ECRs across Norwegian institutes.



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