Our opinion as an organization on different topics: Mental health

Relationship with supervisors
Power struggle (Naheeda done)
Lack of updates (Naheeda done)

PhD candidates are required to attend introductory courses together with their supervisors. These sessions are extremely beneficial, as they cover essential information about PhD regulations, university requirements, and recent updates. However, it has been reported by several PhD candidates in Norway that supervisors often do not attend these courses.

This results in supervisors being unaware of important procedural changes. Consequently, when candidates raise these issues, often midway through their PhD, supervisors may disagree with the statement and even fail to verify the information, even when it is clearly stated on the university's website. For example, some of the universities are no longer accepting literature reviews as part of the PhD thesis. Many supervisors are unaware of this change, leaving those candidates who focused on reviews in a difficult position.

Moreover, it would be highly beneficial for supervisors to attend mental health awareness sessions designed for PhD students. As in many cases, supervisor behavior has been identified as a major source of stress and mental health challenges among candidates.

-Refer to the data from DION on supervisor relationships (Davit - done)

The conflict with a supervisor can be a source of substantial mental health challenges. PhD candidates experience conflicts with their supervisors of personal and academic nature. Due to the temporariness of their position, they are in a vulnerable condition and often afraid to speak up. What aggravates the situation is the lack of clarity and knowledge on how to act in such situations. A vivid illustration of this is a survey conducted by our member organization at NTNU, which we believe can generalize to other institutions nationwide to a large extent. In 2023, DION, our member organization representing Norway's largest university NTNU, conducted an anonymous survey over three NTNU cities (Trondheim, Gjøvik, and Ålesund) on problematic relationships between PhD candidates and their supervisors. The results were alarming. 30% of the PhD respondents reported that they had experienced problems with their supervisors, which often included both personal and academic matters. Two thirds of all participants were not aware of any guidelines for handling such situations. Therefore, more than half of those who faced the conflicts did not contact anyone on this matter. 33% mentioned that they did not know whom they could contact, while 27% were afraid to speak up due to possible negative consequences. Only one in every five PhD candidates who experienced the conflict resolved it on their own without any need for external involvement.

The survey was conducted in the context of ongoing discussion whether there is a need for an impartial stipendiatombud - omdpudsperson for PhD candidates and other temporary scientific

employees, and DION proposes creation of such position as one of the solutions, which is largely supported by the survey's respondents as well. Only 5% of the respondents said that an ombudsperson is not needed.

-Where to seek support? Lack of resources or knowledge thereof (Davit-done)

It is of utmost importance to have a substantial institutional infrastructure for supporting mental health of the early career researchers: both for prevention as well as supporting those already facing the problems. The problem on the institutional level can be bifold: the lack of resources or the awareness thereof. It should be obvious where one should seek support. Support should be a low threshold contact point known to all incoming individuals. The nature contact points can be diverse, cooperating and complementing each other: occupational health services, designated mental health professionals, support groups for employees with disabilities, support groups for minorities, campus chaplain – to name a few. Besides, safety representatives should explicitly concern themselves with mental health as a significant factor of a safe work environment, in addition to physical safety.

Oftentimes, such infrastructure exists, but early career researchers are unaware of the existence of the support mechanisms. We believe that getting familiar with the support mechanisms should be part of the onboarding process complemented with annual dissemination activities. A brilliant example of this is the Conference on Mental Health Resources organized by our member organization DION at NTNU, where different support groups and professionals presented themselves to the temporary scientific community. According to DION, the majority of the attendees were unaware of such resources being available, indicating the necessity of proactive dissemination and visibility.

-Imposter syndrome (Davit-done)

There is ample scientific evidence of increased mental health concerns in academia. For instance, a study in 2018 reported that in comparison to the general population average, depression and anxiety are six times more common among graduate students. [ref] Impostor syndrome is one of the most prevalent mental health challenges in academia, affecting academic accomplishments and mental-wellbeing alike. Impostor syndrome is a psychological phenomenon, when a person feels fraudulent and questions their abilities and accomplishments, despite all the evidence indicating that this is not true. [ref] It is especially prevalent among doctoral and other graduate students. According to the meta analysis of the literature, different studies demonstrate that 50% to 75% of early career researchers experience moderate to severe imposter syndrome. [ref] This is expressed in low self-esteem and recurring anxiety of their work being worthless and fear of being exposed to being incompetent. This is nurtured by high publication pressure, competition for funding, and facing rejections in academia.

We believe a more healthy academic culture can substantially mitigate it. Peer support and open discussion are invaluable in this case. When we do not speak about it, an individual believes it's just them, but in fact, almost all of us have experienced an impostor syndrome at some point in our life. It is important to speak openly about it. For an early career researcher suffering from the

imposter syndrome, it is important to hear that even those people who they admire and consider competent and non-fraudulent, have also experienced the impostor syndrome on their own. The supervisors and experienced and successful researchers can play a vital role in this process. A research published in Frontiers in Psychology last year [ref] reports that there is a significant negative correlation between the supervisor's empathy and impostor syndrome - the more empathetic the supervisor, the less severe is an impostor syndrome. Frequent acknowledgement of doctoral student's accomplishments and sharing personal experiences of impostor syndrome may help to cope with it. Furthermore, impostor syndrome implicitly questions other's abilities too, assuming they consistently fail in detecting one's fraudulent nature. If many colleagues acknowledge our skills, we should perhaps ask ourselves: how likely is it that all of them are deceived?

Overwork/abuse from supervisors (Kamil)

In academia, excessive workloads and pressure have long been accepted, but for many PhD candidates and postdocs, the boundary between excessive demands and unhealthy expectations is frequently crossed. Supervisors may, consciously or unconsciously, promote a culture in which working on the weekends, in the evenings, and even when ill is accepted as the new norm. Sacrificing personal time is too frequently expected rather than discouraged, especially when taking into account that early researchers' work contracts do not state the monthly working time and as such do not pay for overtime. Unrealistic deadlines, ambiguous expectations, or tasks beyond the scope of the study can quickly accumulate, leaving researchers exhausted and a sense of being worthless .

Early-career researchers often feel powerless to resist because supervisors frequently control contracts, funding, publications, and recommendations for future opportunities. It can feel risky to refuse or even to ask for clarification. The disparity in power becomes particularly damaging when it results in verbal abuse, humiliation, or disregard for one's own boundaries and welfare.

The isolation is what exacerbates the situation. When they feel overburdened or mistreated, many researchers are not sure who to turn to. There is a genuine fear of reprisals and unclear reporting channels. Consequently, issues remain unsaid until individuals burn out, quit, or leave academia completely.

This is more than a personal battle. Attention is required because it represents a systemic problem.

What happens when there is a conflict (Stipendiatombud?) (Karl Henrik)

user- friendliness of systems to report a conflict (Karl Henrik)

Time shortage, low amount of phds finishing in time (Karl Henrik)

Loss of data, unusuability of data mid project (Karl Henrik)

-Loneliness, not being part of the team when the project is finishing and no new fundings coming (Karl Henrik)
In research education and other early career research positions, you are often supposed to be self-reliant and independent. This can at first sight look like a good ideal to stretch for. However, if this ideal is emphasized too much, it can create a toxic environment, where people do not dare to ask for help or show their, often unavoidable, reliance on other people. Especially in research education, you, of course, should be supposed to have certain skills and competences when starting, but, on the other hand, the research education it self, should be a developing arena, where you should be allowed to not knowing everything beforehand. Thus, to foster an environment where people feel comfortable asking for help and looking at mutual dependencies and exchanges of support, is crucial, to create a healthy and developing arena where it is real chances of making successful careers.

When thinking about creating a healthy and developing academic environment, it is also important to be aware of and recognize the, sometimes, harshly competitive climate that surround especially early career researchers. It should be safe to share one's ideas with other colleagues, and it is important to recognize the person who come up with new ideas. However, thinking and idea generating processes in academic endeavors is often collectively done, where it is possible through dialogue, reaching new insights, that would not have been possible to reveal alone. To highligh this important academic collective, where one help each other in developing their own career, lay the foundation for a productive collaboration.

-Dealing with rejection (Fei-done)
-Receiving and giving feedbacks (Fei-done)

Dealing with Rejection

Rejection is an unavoidable part of academic life—whether in journal submissions, grant proposals, or job applications. While often discouraging, it is important not to take rejection as a personal judgment. Many outcomes are shaped by external factors: reviewer preferences, limited funding, or changing priorities in research agendas. Rather than seeing rejection as a denial of one's value, it helps to recognize it as part of a complex system. Building resilience in research means understanding that rejection reflects circumstances, not personal worth.

Receiving and Giving Feedback

Constructive feedback plays a crucial role in academic and professional development. Effective feedback should aim to support improvement, offering specific and respectful observations rather than judgment. A culture that values learning over criticism creates space for growth and innovation. Whether giving or receiving feedback, the focus should remain on the work—not the person—and on fostering mutual progress rather than assigning blame.

-Temporariness in academia (in the research part of academia especially, even when you have a

permanent position) (Kamil)

One of the most enduring obstacles to pursuing a career in academia is the reliance on temporary contracts throughout the early stages of adult life. For many early-career researchers, it can be deeply discouraging to continue on the academic path when doing so frequently requires relocating between institutions, cities, or even countries every few years. Feeling at home anywhere is extremely difficult with this kind of lifestyle.

Beyond the practical inconveniences, there is a significant personal cost. In your late 20s or early 30s, when most people are attempting to establish stable lives with a partner or start a family, academia often demands the opposite: constant mobility, uncertainty, and flexibility. Asking a partner to uproot their own career repeatedly, or making long-distance relationships the norm, adds emotional strain to an already precarious existence. And all the while, there's a looming question: *What happens when this contract ends?*

While long-term stability is still out of reach, there can be an unending sense of pressure to publish, teach, network, and apply for the next opportunity. Even for those lucky enough to secure a permanent position, especially within the research track, continued employment often depends on winning external funding. This means that uncertainty and stress rarely disappear; they just take on a different form. In addition to having an impact on mental health, this ongoing transition drives bright researchers out of academia entirely.
Institutions need to recognize that temporary contracts are a structural issue with major human repercussions, not just a financial one. Crucial steps include providing more defined career pathways, enhancing contract security where feasible, and developing stronger support networks for family planning and dual careers. Academics must begin to view permanence as a need rather than a luxury if they hope to retain talented, driven researchers.

Compensation (Davit and Fei - other contribute with their experience)
-Survey data reported in more objective manner more or less ready - end of June at the latest
-Follow up where people come with their personal experiences - end of August
-Some universities have none
-Compensation not enough compared to amount of work
-Talk with UiB - big university with no compensation
-TODOS, UiODoc, DION
-Even when compensated, we work more than we are compensated for
-Freeriders and how to counteract them (e.g. peer review, documenting hours) - this is also pointed out in the compensation survey; documenting hours is challenging and extra work on its own. And hard to validate.
-Dilemma: you have to reward people who work, but you don’t want to attract freeriders who join just for the sake of money

Positive things in academia in Norway (Claire)

Working as a PhD candidate in Norway comes with several notable advantages, particularly in terms of financial support and workers' rights. Unlike in many other countries, PhD candidates in Norway are typically regarded as employees of the university and receive a regular salary. For the period 2024–2026, the annual salary for PhD candidates is set at 550, 800kr a month. For comparison, the annual salaries for other academic positions in Norway are as follows: 559,400 NOK for a university librarian, 527,400 NOK for a university lecturer, 636,200 NOK for an associate professor, and 701,700 NOK for a university professor. This places PhD candidates' salaries slightly above those of roles typically requiring a master's degree but below those requiring a PhD.

Crucially, this salary is not classified as a scholarship. It is subject to taxation, which grants PhD candidates access to Norway's comprehensive social security benefits. For example, after submitting their thesis, PhD candidates are eligible for unemployment benefits. Additionally, candidates are entitled to contract extensions following sick leave, even if the leave lasted less than two weeks. Norwegian universities also work on creating a supportive working environment and PhD candidates can report unwanted incidents. Furthermore, external organizations like The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority are available to provide additional support in case of conflict or regulation breach.

Data on the career outcomes and satisfaction of PhD graduates in Norway also highlights the benefits of pursuing a doctorate in the country. At the largest Norwegian university, NTNU, 93% of PhD graduates from the 2019–2021 cohort reported being employed in 2022. Nearly all of these positions were full-time, with an average monthly salary of 733,661 NOK. Furthermore, 87% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their current roles.

Website

-Front page: make static, brief introduction of SiN + social media to follow updates
-Button or list for the list of the member organizations
-Career opportunities can go under Userful Information
-Remove Tags
-Move Ukrainian Support under Userful Information since it's not being maintained
-Update minutes
-Add Upcoming Meetings/Events
-Update consultation statements (they are all on Drive)
-Add subsection - SiN in media
-Update AGM minutes under Protocols - move all protocols under Minutes - label as AGM
-Hide working groups
-Possible to integrate LinkedIn with latest posts? Check
-Add more photos (our photos, Unsplash)
-Representatives in external organs - UHR-Forskning - Kamil; Eurodoc - Naheeda; KIF - Ingvild
-Nasjonalt fagorgan for ph.d.-utdanning innen lærerutdanning - Vacant
-Contact Nasjonalt fagorgan for ph.d.-utdanning innen lærerutdanning if we can have an observer and if there are any requirements(Fei)

-Write that we have 13 organizations on the Member Organization page and we represent about 90% of them; PhDs who are employed by or affiliated with our member institutions.

Internal topics

Voting on how much each board member should be compensated? Not really an ideal option
Reflection in September/August - general thought is to have full compensation by default unless there is very serious deviation from what was expected from you. In the latter case, you should be given notice in advance to catch up.

Fei / Budget:
September quarterly meeting 50k, 1000 NOK hostel stay for overnight (6 university)
Grants 15k (3x5K), by oct 1st
Update budget in September
New list for travel reimbursement
List and product for merch

Planning the physical meeting with the local organization

-10 to 4 to accommodate flights. Lunch included + some coffee and sandwiches.
-Location: UiO Blindern
-Date will be decided at the quarterly meeting in June
-Program:
-Icebreaker (45 minutes) (Fei)
-Organization presentations (1.5 hour)
-Open networking with lunch (1 hour)
-SiN: presentations why to come AGM, what we do, where we need their input (45 minutes)
-Coffee break (15 minutes)
-SiN: consultation processes (1.5 hour) - including open discussion
-Wrap up / buffet (15 minutes)
Total: 6 hours

Eurodoc

-Two voting: Salzburg Recommendations and Doctoral Training
-Two more are being drafted: one on salary and one on equitable conditions.
-What we need from Eurodoc? What opportunities?
a)General things: Eurodoc can stand for academic freedom, advocate for democracy;
b) try to represent us in EU organs even though we are not EU;
c) networking/workshops and info on European grants.

The recruitment of the new board / AGM election

-Discord people can be interested;
-At physical board meeting, we can encourage them to run;
-UiB;
-Board candidate must be tax resident of Norway since SiN is a Norwegian organization (approved requirement)

Network for representatives in university boards

→Informal group meeting and discussing
→For elected employees representing temporary employees in university boards

Outline:
-Network among university board representatives, forum, area, meeting place - where we get to know each other and they update us.
-Set up zoom meeting, online meetings where we can invite them and update
-Recommandation for now? Next board? Could be in place even next semester
-Board members represent temporary staff at university level
-Send an email and see how many are interested

1-First ask if there is any interest in joining such a network
2-Find common dates

Claire writes outline of email

Hello,

We have identified that you are representing temporary employees at X. I am contacting you on behalf of SiN, an interest organization for doctoral candidates and/or early career researchers at Norwegian higher educational institutions. We are considering the creation of a network for university board representatives of temporary employees. This network would consist of online meetings where board representatives can exchange best practices and difficulties, as well as connect with the rest of the SiN board.

If you are interested in joining such a network, you can send your answer to this mail. We will then update you further on the creation of the network.