

# Forskerforbundet: Policy on PhD candidates

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## Our policy on PhD candidates

The PhD candidates represent the future of Norwegian research and higher education and are an invaluable resource for Norway as a knowledge society. Completing a doctorate is demanding and a major investment for the individual, but it also provides a unique opportunity to pursue professional interests and to develop specialist expertise in areas of great importance to society. PhD candidates are employed by several different enterprises in both the public and private sectors. Both authorities and enterprises must make good arrangements for the candidates to have equal conditions and be able to succeed in their doctoral work regardless of the sector in which they are employed.

### Forskerforbundet believes that:

- the enterprises must offer pay and working conditions that ensure good recruitment to PhD positions.
- all PhD candidates must be guaranteed equal rights.
- authorities and enterprises must take greater responsibility for the PhD candidates being able to complete their doctorate with high quality in the allotted time.

## Competitive pay

The companies must offer competitive pay and working conditions. Over time, Forskerforbundet has succeeded in raising the starting salary of the PhD candidates, but they still have low salaries compared to other groups with the same skills. PhD candidates must be guaranteed the opportunity to be paid according to their experience and competence, and not automatically placed on the minimum entry-level salary as starting salary.

Candidates who are already established in working life risk a significant drop in salary if they become a research fellow. The fact that many opt out of a PhD due to finances weakens recruitment to research and higher education.

### Forskerforbundet works to ensure that:

- all PhD candidates are offered a competitive starting salary and are guaranteed salary development during the employment period.
- the enterprises have a salary policy which ensures that PhD candidates are paid according to their competence, attractiveness, and experience.
- candidates who come from a higher paid position in or outside the enterprise are given a salary placement that reflects their previous salary.

## Predictable employment conditions

To succeed in their doctoral work, the PhD candidates must have good and predictable employment conditions. The PhD position is a fixed-term position with a standard appointment time. The regulations concerning appointment specify which rights and duties apply to both the enterprise and the PhD candidate. The regulations must ensure that the candidate has sufficient time and gives the right to an extension in the event of leave and unforeseen events. The goal is that the PhD candidate will have three years to complete the doctoral work itself. Forskerforbundet will work to ensure that the rights and duties include all PhD candidates, regardless of sector.

The employment period as a PhD candidate should normally be four years, including one year of career promotion work. The four-year period promotes the candidates' integration into the professional environment and has a positive effect on the candidates' completion time. However, the prerequisite is that such career-promoting tasks do not amount to more than one full-time year. Both the employer and the supervisor have a particular responsibility to ensure that at least three full-time years are dedicated to the doctoral work.

### Forskerforbundet works to ensure that:

- the institutions actively ensure that career promotion work is relevant to the doctoral education, and that the scope does not exceed the standard appointment time.
- the rights and duties following from the employment regulations also apply to healthcare institutions, private research institutes and other research organizations that employ PhD candidates.
- the rules relating to statutory absence/leave and extension are clear and ensure equal treatment.

## Good academic supervision

Good academic supervision and a good working relationship between supervisor and PhD candidate are important for a successful doctoral course. Supervisors must have the time, resources, and necessary training to fulfil the role well. In many places, this is not the case. There are also a number of PhD candidates who do not receive regular supervision.

It is important to protect doctoral candidates against pressure linked to co-authorship from more established researchers. Furthermore, the institutions must have good guidelines to prevent and deal with bad culture or power imbalance in working relationships. They must also be helpful with changing supervisors if necessary.

### Forskerforbundet works to ensure that:

- the employers set aside sufficient time and resources to fulfil the role of supervisor.
- the employers offer the supervisors training, have guidelines for what the supervision should contain and routines for dealing with challenges along the way and in the event of a need to change supervisors.

## Completion and entitlement to unemployment benefits

Doctoral education is an important investment for the individual and for society. Arrangements must be made for as many as possible to complete, preferably within the standard appointment time. Surveys show that only 15 percent have completed after three years. One in five PhD candidates has not completed their dissertation 10 years after starting. Further measures are needed to improve this situation.

Integration into the professional environment is of great importance for both well-being and ability to implement, but many PhD candidates feel that they are not part of the professional environment. Only half have regular appraisal interviews. Likewise, it is important to ensure that PhD candidates have good office facilities and access to research infrastructure and data.

PhD candidates who do not submit their thesis within the period of employment run the risk of being without work and income in the final phase of their doctoral work. They must be guaranteed the right to unemployment benefits so that they have the necessary livelihood while they complete their doctorate. There is an opportunity to receive unemployment benefits during education if you meet the requirement to be a genuine job seeker. This practice must also apply to PhD candidates.

### Forskerforbundet works to ensure that:

- the enterprises implement knowledge-based measures for better completion time and lower dropouts.
- the institutions have routines for how they welcome and integrate the PhD candidates into the academic and social environment.
- all PhD candidates have annual appraisal interviews with their immediate supervisor.
- all PhD candidates have access to suitable office space and the necessary research infrastructure.
- doctoral candidates, provided they meet the requirements of being a genuine job seeker during the day, are guaranteed the right to unemployment benefits without having to discontinue their research training and thesis work.

## Researcher mobility and international collaboration

Researcher mobility and international collaboration are important for promoting knowledge development. Surveys show that researchers benefit from secondments early in their careers. Both international research collaboration and researcher mobility require funding and facilitation from the Norwegian authorities. In addition, Norwegian institutions must conduct active exchange cooperation with institutions abroad. PhD candidates who wish to exchange or have a long-term research stay at home or abroad need help to establish relationships and networks, and to plan academically relevant stays. Arrangements must also be made so that PhD candidates with parental responsibilities can have a research secondment abroad.

For incoming PhD candidates, both employers and professional communities have a responsibility to contribute to good integration into the Norwegian research community. Many incoming and outgoing PhD candidates face challenges related to salary, taxes, social security, and other benefits, because the regulations are complicated, and it is difficult to get good advice. In addition, there are linguistic and cultural barriers. Forskerforbundet regularly offers courses on Norwegian working life for PhD candidates with a foreign background. It is a popular offer but does not relieve the employer and personnel managers of their responsibility to ensure that foreign PhD candidates have access to the necessary advice.

### Forskerforbundet works to ensure that:

- all PhD candidates, regardless of funding sources, are offered funds and mobility grants that enable stays abroad.
- there are good schemes for organizing and financing stays abroad so that PhD candidates with parental responsibilities can also travel abroad.
- the institutions ensure that the PhD candidates are offered advice on relevant stays abroad and make resources available through their operating budget.
- institutions have routines for how they receive and integrate incoming PhD candidates in the academic and social environment and offer the necessary advice.
- international PhD candidates who wish to do so are offered free Norwegian language training.

## Good career guidance

Most people who take a doctorate have ambitions and a desire to continue with scientific work and perceive the research training as very relevant. Only a small minority receive career guidance and follow-up related to a further professional career. The eye of the needle in academia is narrow and many are therefore aiming for a career outside the higher education and research institutions.

With the new regulations from 2024 concerning appointment, Forskerforbundet has gained approval for PhD candidates to have access to career guidance. In the same way that research training must emphasize generic skills, the career guidance must also consider the preferences of the individual PhD candidate and have an eye for future opportunities both in and outside academia.

The PhD positions are important to ensure that society's access to, and need for, research expertise is met. The scheme with earmarking of these positions was discontinued in 2023.

### Forskerforbundet works to ensure that:

- statutory requirements for career guidance are followed up and that good schemes are established for career planning.
- competence at doctoral level is valued both in and outside academia.
- earmarking of PhD positions in the university and college sector is reintroduced.



# FORSKER FORBUNDET

- Forskerforbundet er landets største og ledende fag- og interesseorganisasjon for ansatte i forskning, høyere utdanning og kunnskapsformidling.
- Forskerforbundet er tilsluttet Unio – hovedorganisasjonen for universitets- og høyskoleutdannede.
- Forskerforbundet arbeider for høyere lønn og bedre arbeidsvilkår for medlemmene.
- Forskerforbundet ivaretar medlemmenes interesser i forsknings- og utdanningspolitiske spørsmål.

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