

Summary of the HRS4R Workshop, 5 March 2025

Input to the Revision of the HRS4R Action Plan (2025–2028)

On 5 March 2025, the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) - workshop was held at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN). The purpose of the workshop was to gather input for the next Action Plan as part of the HRS4R renewal process through dialogue between university management, researchers, postdoctoral researchers, doctoral candidates, the health and safety organisation, and administrative support functions. With reference to The European Charter for Researchers, the central question discussed was which measures USN should consider to further strengthen the framework conditions for researchers during the period 2025–2028.

Participants took part in group discussions focusing on four key themes: psychosocial work environment, career development, research mobility, and broader framework conditions for research.

It should be noted that the group discussions were intentionally framed around identifying areas for improvement rather than highlighting existing strengths and good practices. Consequently, the observations presented below should be interpreted as development opportunities rather than a comprehensive assessment of current conditions at USN.

1. Psychosocial Work Environment

Key observations

Participants highlighted that experiences related to onboarding, inclusion and follow-up may vary between faculties, departments and research groups. Several challenges were discussed, particularly in relation to doctoral candidates and researchers in the early stages of their careers. These included:

- Unclear roles and responsibilities between supervisors, line managers, PhD coordinators and programme management.
- Variable integration into research communities and research groups.
- Limited networking opportunities across organisational units and campuses.
- Low physical presence on campus.
- Challenges faced by international researchers related to language, access to information and integration into the working environment.
- A perceived need for stronger support structures during the initial phase of employment and doctoral education.

Suggested measures:

Participants proposed a range of measures aimed at strengthening inclusion, well-being and support for researchers, including:

- A more systematic and tailored onboarding programme for doctoral candidates.
- Clearer expectations and role clarification between managers, supervisors and doctoral candidates.
- Improved information regarding rights, responsibilities and available support services, provided in both Norwegian and English.
- Buddy schemes, mentoring arrangements and designated contact persons for doctoral candidates.
- Enhanced Norwegian language training and practical support for international researchers.
- Increased attention to cohort-based activities, social meeting arenas and researcher networking opportunities.
- Regular employee development dialogues for all doctoral candidates.
- Strengthened follow-up of working environment surveys and increased focus on supervisor development and support.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of ensuring predictable and easily accessible support systems for doctoral candidates and other early-career researchers.

2. Career Development

Key observations

Participants acknowledged that uncertainty regarding future career opportunities remains a challenge for many researchers, particularly doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers. Several participants emphasized that awareness of career paths both within and beyond academia could be further strengthened.

Additional challenges identified included:

- Limited access to structured career guidance.
- Variable implementation of career planning and career discussions.
- Concerns regarding the balance between teaching, administrative responsibilities and research activities after completion of a doctorate.
- Limited opportunities to acquire competencies that are valued both within academia and in other sectors.

Suggested measures

The workshop generated considerable support for strengthening career development support through measures such as:

- Systematic career guidance throughout the research career.
- Training and workshops focusing on both disciplinary and transferable skills.
- Increased awareness of career opportunities inside and outside academia.
- Career events, job-search training and stronger engagement with employers in the public and private sectors.
- Expanded access to university pedagogy courses and relevant teaching qualifications.
- Mentoring schemes for researchers in the early stages of their careers.
- Increased availability of postdoctoral positions and clearer academic career pathways.
- Mechanisms that help safeguard research time during the transition from doctoral studies to more senior academic positions.

Several groups also discussed the possibility of longer qualification pathways, including extended doctoral contracts or additional qualifying periods after completion of the doctorate, to facilitate career development and skills acquisition.

3. Research Mobility

Key observations

Participants generally viewed research mobility as an important element of researcher development and international collaboration. At the same time, several barriers were identified, particularly in relation to funding and administrative support.

Among the challenges discussed were:

- Limited financial support relative to the actual cost of international mobility.
- Administrative complexity associated with mobility applications and arrangements.
- Family-related constraints affecting opportunities for longer stays abroad.
- Limited flexibility within some mobility schemes and programmes.

Suggested measures

Participants proposed several actions to strengthen researcher mobility, including:

- Earlier planning of mobility activities within doctoral education.

- Increased and more predictable funding opportunities.
- Centrally managed mobility funds ensuring equal opportunities across faculties and doctoral programmes.
- Enhanced administrative support for applications, funding opportunities and practical arrangements.
- Information sessions, courses and individual guidance related to mobility opportunities.
- More systematic involvement of international co-supervisors.
- Improved support for international visiting researchers.
- More flexible mobility formats, including shorter stays and secondment opportunities.

4. Other Framework Conditions for Research

In addition to the three thematic areas, participants identified several broader issues relating to research conditions at USN.

These included:

- Improved access to relevant training courses without affecting the operating budgets of doctoral candidates.
- Greater protection of research time and long-term investment in research capacity.
- Continued institutional commitment to research during periods of financial pressure.

Main Messages from the Plenary Session

During the final plenary discussion, participants highlighted a number of issues that had been discussed in the groups:

- The importance of ensuring yearly appraisal interviews and career planning for all early-stage researchers.
- The need for more systematic follow-up of career plans and research time allocation.
- Stronger role clarification and support during the onboarding phase for doctoral candidates.
- More coordinated support structures for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers.
- Increased financial and practical support for research mobility.
- Consideration of mechanisms that allow researchers additional time and opportunities to acquire competencies relevant for future careers both within and beyond academia.

Overall Conclusions

The workshop demonstrated broad agreement that further efforts should focus on strengthening support for researchers in the early stages of their careers, improving clarification regarding roles and responsibilities, enhancing opportunities for career development and ensuring equitable access to research mobility opportunities.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of an inclusive research culture, accessible support systems, information about different career pathways and adequate framework conditions as key factors for implementing the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and for continuing the development of USN as an attractive institution for researchers at all career stages.

Methodological note: The findings presented in this summary reflect inputs and perspectives expressed during the workshop discussions. This is not a formal institutional assessment but constitute valuable stakeholder input to the development of the USN HRS4R Action Plan for 2025–2028.