

Summary of Key Recommendations: Target Group Interviews (Input to Action Plan 2022–2025)

Basis: 14 target group interviews: 4 PhD candidates, 4 PhD coordinators, 1 professor, 1 associate professor/research group leader, 1 vice dean for R&D, Rector's staff, and the Sections for Research and for Recruitment.

1. Recruitment and attractiveness as an employer

- **Strategic, targeted recruitment:** advertise by research field rather than by study programme, avoid split teaching/research posts, use the right channels, and base staffing plans on the intended research environment.
- **Differentiated position structure:** more pure research positions with lower Norwegian-language requirements, and a clearer international profile for selected areas of excellence.
- **Visibility:** English-language job ads and websites, with intranet content opened to the public. Present USN's strengths abroad, including through **PhD ambassadors** (paid, as part of work duties) and a possible overseas USN office.
- **Honest, competitive offers:** state clearly how much research time international recruits will get, and offer a start-up period with reduced teaching.
- **Support for external funding routes:** for example MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships, with a position or permanent post for Seal of Excellence holders.
- **Practical barriers:** simpler visa and residence permit procedures, and clarity on security and export-control restrictions in collaboration with some countries.

2. On-boarding and training of new staff

- **Structured introduction programme:** an introduction day, a dedicated buddy/mentor, and a "new employee package" covering systems, policies, research ethics, IPR and risk-country rules.
- **Separate tracks** for international and Norwegian staff, including Norwegian courses, Norwegian working life, rights and duties, and a central Q&A page.
- **Clear expectations** and coordinated information from HR, finance, supervisors and coordinators.
- **New permanent academic staff** should be treated more like postdocs. They should get a soft start of at least one year, generous research time, an expectation to apply for external funding, and supervision training.

3. PhD candidates: inclusion and retention

- **Real integration** into the actual academic environment, not just research groups on paper: offices with colleagues, regular meetings, and informal academic and social spaces.
- **A PhD association** and more social events across programmes, with focus on international candidates.

- **Qualifying duty work:** duty tasks that are well suited and supported, and that count towards permanent employment.
- **Post-PhD prospects:** more postdoc positions, earlier identification of talent, a mid-project postdoc application seminar, and clearer routes to permanent employment.
- **Stronger supervisor competence** and management follow-up.

4. Career development

- **Career dialogue:** career plans and conversations, with at least one career meeting with the supervisor during the PhD.
- **Career day:** a joint event with alumni from different sectors, plus courses in English on CVs, applications and interviews.
- **Talent development:** a career or talent development programme, seed funding, and long-term, predictable research time.
- **Mentoring:** senior staff given formal responsibility for following up early-career researchers.
- **Fewer temporary positions,** and information about both academic and non-academic careers.
- **Reward criteria** that go beyond publication points, for example commercialisation.

5. International mobility and collaboration

- **Funding:** easy, fast and visible funding for travel, stays abroad and inviting international colleagues, plus a conference participation expectation.
- **Structure:** a clear catalogue of partnerships and a roadmap for non-partner institutions. Link the mobility team, internationalisation and PhD programmes.
- **Information:** regular webinars on deadlines and options, and experience-sharing from candidates who have been abroad.
- **Sabbaticals and research leave** to work at other universities, and a broad collaboration with selected partner universities.
- **Support for incoming researchers:** practical help, welcome and buddy systems.
- **Climate goals:** one respondent asks for clarity on the tension between climate goals and the need for physical mobility.

6. Research leadership

- **Training for research group leaders,** who currently have none: leadership without formal authority, team and culture building, diversity and trust-based leadership.
- **Research management topics:** research integrity, funding strategy, portfolio analysis and external collaboration.
- **Heads of department** as a key target group, to ensure understanding of research needs and long-term planning.
- **Roles:** clarify the roles of research group leaders and heads of department.

- **Format:** short generic leadership programmes open to non-managers, run centrally.

7. Cross-cutting observations

- **Administrative support:** researchers with large grants report heavy administrative burdens, such as contacting immigration authorities, and ask for better support services.
- **Cross-faculty coordination:** several respondents ask for stronger coordination and information flow across faculties and programmes.
- **Resources:** support units need time and resources to build the arrangements.
- **Diverse needs:** PhD candidates have diverse backgrounds and goals, so measures should be differentiated.
- **Dissenting views:** one view is that “the best” can only be identified after a trial period, and another that no extra mobility measures are needed beyond easy access to funding.

Priority Recommendations

1. A **structured on-boarding programme** with buddy/mentor, differentiated for international staff.
2. **Active research environments** with co-location, regular meetings and a PhD association.
3. **Career planning and development:** dialogue, career day, mentoring and a talent programme.
4. **Postdoc positions and clearer routes** to permanent employment.
5. **Easy, visible mobility funding** and a clear partnership catalogue.
6. **Research leadership training** for group leaders and heads of department.
7. **Visibility and recruitment:** English-language communication, PhD ambassadors and targeted advertising.