

# Summary of PhD Candidate Interview – USN Charter & Code Review (April 2022)

**Basis:** 11 completed responses (Sent to approx. 120 PhD Research Fellows) Recommendations for the HRS4R internal review and development of Action Plan 2022–2025.

## 1. On-boarding

- **Structured introduction:** workshop with supervisor/department on duties, responsibilities and expectations; introduction meeting and campus tour.
- **Orientation for international candidates:** information on facilities, systems (e.g. DFØ), campuses and libraries; basic Norwegian course.
- **Buddy/mentor:** a named contact person to explain the university, publishing and conferences.
- **Clear research scope:** early clarity on topic, scope and laboratory facilities.

## 2. Academic inclusion

- **Include PhDs in** department and research group meetings; inform about relevant courses, conferences and external meetings.
- **Active research groups:** several describe groups that exist only on paper, with no meetings and PhDs placed in different buildings. Proposed: dedicated spaces, co-location and regular meetings.
- **More seminars and talks,** internal and external, and more opportunities to present and discuss work.
- **Collaboration over presentation:** more cross-disciplinary projects and co-authoring.
- **Open communication** on expectations and progress plan.
- **Funding and industry links** raised as a core need.

## 3. Social inclusion

- **Regular social events,** with a few respondents preferring only one or two a year.
- **Inclusion in staff social settings** (lunches, arrangements); PhDs should be treated as colleagues.
- **Language barrier:** the monthly PhD social meeting is held in Norwegian, excluding newcomers; Norwegian classes requested.
- **Office placement:** PhDs are scattered across campus, hindering contact with peers.

## 4. Training priorities

- **Publishing:** journal rankings, when and how to publish, publication strategy, co-authorship.
- **Research skills:** methods, literature management, programming (Python, MATLAB).
- **Professional skills:** project management (with real industrial case studies), pedagogical training.
- **Networking:** academic networking and knowledge sharing within and between departments.
- **Applied/industrial topics,** e.g. applied engineering domains.

## 5. Career paths

- **Information on career routes:** post-doc and professor positions, clear future roles, and job application requirements from the start.

- **Career dialogue:** twice-yearly meetings on career plans and networks.
- **Exposure:** presentations of staff and PhDs; industry project managers and senior researchers sharing experience.
- **Industry collaboration** and training/counselling.
- **Contrasting view:** no extra measures needed if USN offers a strong research environment with industry links.

## 6. International mobility

- **Agreements** with other universities and planning support (travel, accommodation).
- **Supervisors' networks** as the main facilitator.
- **Timely completion of internal courses** to free time for exchange.
- **Encouragement** of study abroad and international conferences.
- **Constraint:** COVID-19 currently limits mobility; one respondent considers it not important.

## 7. Attractiveness of an academic career

- **Reduce temporary employment** years.
- **Teaching responsibility** and contact with students.
- **Show progression routes**, with senior researchers sharing experience; networking and coaching.
- **Attractive research environment** (repeated theme).
- **Motivation factors:** research opportunities, industry collaboration, salary.

## 8. Attractiveness as an employer

- **Transparent hiring:** open communication, clear guidelines and more transparency in decisions.
- **Working conditions:** research facilities, flexibility, growth opportunities, language support.
- **Profile and reputation:** highlight USN focus areas and research quality; host conferences; co-authorship and cross-pollination with other universities; “big” events.
- **Benchmarking:** learn from NTNU, UiO, SIT, MIT.

## Key Takeaways

1. **Research environment is the dominant theme:** active research groups, co-location, regular meetings and collaboration, especially at Porsgrunn.
2. **International candidates face barriers:** Norwegian-language social events and a lack of orientation and language courses.
3. **Structured on-boarding and a mentor/buddy** are requested.
4. **Career transparency:** clearer information on career paths, hiring and temporary employment.
5. **Industry links and funding** are seen as key to both research quality and attractiveness.