



Mandate for an Expert Committee to Assess How Future Doctoral Education Should Meet Society's Need for Research Competence

January 2026

Background and Purpose

The expert committee will assess how doctoral education in Norway should be developed to meet future needs in research, working life, and society. The committee will provide recommendations to authorities, research institutions, and both private and public sectors on measures that can strengthen quality and relevance.

Research competence is important for value creation in society. We are facing a period marked by major challenges, transformation needs, and resource constraints. It is therefore crucial that research competence benefits society in the best possible way, both within academia and across the wider labour market. The number of annual completed doctoral degrees has increased from approximately 400 in 1990 to 1,850 in 2024. Low completion rates remain a persistent challenge; between 60 and 70 percent of candidates complete within six years of starting, while approximately 20 percent never complete. A significant proportion of doctoral graduates find employment outside academia. There is considerable variation in current doctoral education. In recent years, various funding schemes have been introduced to better align doctoral education with the needs of the labour market. At present, we do not have sufficient knowledge about how current funding schemes and frameworks for doctoral education address future needs in academia and across society more broadly.

Research competence includes both specialized subject expertise and broader skills, such as critical and creative thinking, methodology, analysis, and data management. Relevant research competence for society is not only about the competencies we know are needed today. Society requires workers with research competence across a wide range of disciplines, including both curiosity-driven basic research and more applied fields where research questions arise from identified needs.

Fiscal space in the national budget is expected to become more limited in the years ahead. At the same time, a shortage of labour requires that we manage human resources with a holistic perspective, based on society's overall need for skills at different levels as a fundamental premise.

Issues to Be Considered by the Expert Committee



The work of the expert committee shall cover the four research-performing sectors: the university and university college sector, the institute sector, industry, and the public sector, including the health trusts. The expert committee shall be based on a broad knowledge base and shall assess the current framework for doctoral education and its overall contribution to society. Furthermore, the committee shall provide advice on concrete measures to shape future doctoral education so that research competence benefits society to the greatest possible extent. Recommended measures may include further development of existing instruments or new measures. The expert committee's assessments shall follow the requirements of the official Norwegian guidelines for impact assessments (*utredningsinstruksen*), including consideration of different alternatives and measures, as well as their economic and societal consequences.

Quality in doctoral education shall be a guiding principle in the work of the expert committee. Doctoral education and research competence cover a broad spectrum and must address needs across different academic fields and sectors. It is therefore essential that the expert committee's work adequately reflects these different fields. The expert committee shall conduct assessments and recommend measures separately for the three overarching academic fields: (1) health, (2) social sciences and humanities, and (3) technology and natural sciences. Where there are significant differences in conditions within these fields, these should be highlighted in the report, such as differences in needs for research infrastructure and facilities. Regional differences shall be taken into account when assessing both the relevance of doctoral education and labour market needs.

The expert committee shall consider specific issues outlined in this mandate but shall also, in accordance with the first question of the impact assessment guidelines, discuss the broader challenge landscape more openly. The expert committee shall assess measures and provide recommendations based on the overall set of challenges.

1) Framework Conditions for Doctoral Education

Doctoral education shall maintain a high level of quality. It should be carried out within predictable and realistic frameworks that support strong career pathways both within academia and in the labour market outside academia. The majority of doctoral candidates pursue their education as PhD fellows. Regulations stipulate that at least three full-time equivalents of the total fixed-term employment period for fellows must be dedicated to doctoral work. At present, it is not permitted to appoint PhD fellows for a fixed term of less than three years or more than four years.

The expert committee shall assess what can be defined as the external framework conditions for doctoral education. This includes the length of the PhD fellowship period, which, among other things, determines the possibilities for including other career-enhancing activities, as well as the conditions for completion within the prescribed time. The external framework also includes regulations governing the rights and



obligations of PhD fellows and institutions, as well as the design of research tracks and various funding schemes for doctoral education.

Most candidates undertake researcher education as PhD fellows employed by research institutions. An increasing number of candidates pursue researcher education through various work-oriented funding schemes administered by the Research Council, such as the Public Sector PhD and Industrial PhD schemes, the centre schemes SFI and FME, as well as Research Institute PhDs (STIPINST). These create different framework conditions for doctoral education. The Ministry assumes that a strong affiliation with the academic environment at the degree-awarding institution is central to the quality of doctoral education.

Both the length of the PhD fellowship period, the various funding schemes and sources, and the legal regulations governing employment in PhD positions constitute framework conditions for doctoral education that the expert committee shall assess.

2) Need for Research Competence Across the Labour Market

There is broad agreement within the research sector on the need to strengthen collaboration between academia and the wider labour market. Doctoral education can play a more active role in building bridges between sectors.

The expert committee shall assess the need for research competence across the labour market, as well as instruments to promote collaboration and co-financing between academia, private industry, and the public sector. The committee shall take society's needs as its point of departure, with particular emphasis on areas facing major transformation needs and challenges. The committee shall assess and highlight best practices in models for collaboration between academia and the private and public sectors, as well as evaluate effective co-financing models to promote cooperation and incentives for strengthening researcher recruitment in areas with particular needs. The Ministry assumes that parts of the labour market facing major transformation needs may also have a particular need for employees with research competence.

At the same time, the expert committee shall assess academia's need for researchers within academic communities. In this assessment, the need for a good balance between staff in recruitment positions and permanent academic staff shall be emphasized. Permanent academic positions provide continuity and strategic direction, while recruitment positions contribute dynamism and innovation. A good balance requires sufficient supervisory capacity and academic leadership. The right balance between staff in different academic positions ensures an adequate recruitment base for employees with research competence across the labour market, including academia, good conditions for long-term high-quality research, and the best possible conditions for academic career development.

3) National and International Recruitment



Norwegian academic communities are competitive in recruiting international talent to doctoral education, and internationally mobile research talent is a strength for both Norwegian and international research communities. At the same time, barriers are reported for completed doctoral graduates who wish to remain in Norway and pursue further careers within or outside academia. Institutions and professional organizations also report weak national recruitment in certain academic fields. This poses challenges on several levels, including for the increasing need of Norwegian undertakings to access researchers who can obtain security clearance.

The expert committee shall assess the extent to which Norwegian undertakings outside academia facilitate the recruitment of international employees with doctoral degrees, and possible measures to strengthen recruitment capacity where it is weak. At the same time, the expert committee shall assess the need for measures to strengthen the ability of Norwegian academic environments to recruit national candidates to doctoral education. This is important both to ensure a strong link between education and research and to meet the need to educate workers with research competence who can work in parts of the labour market requiring security clearance.

Composition of the Expert committee and Framework for Its Work

The expert committee consists of nine members who collectively possess broad expertise in the research sector, doctoral education, and Norwegian and international labour markets. If a member must withdraw from participation in the expert committee, a new member will be appointed to ensure that the committee's overall competence is maintained. Members do not represent their own institutions or organizations, but participate based on their personal expertise and experience.

The expert Committee shall anchor its work and gather input from the research sector and relevant parts of the labour market throughout the process. The committee shall hold 1-2 open seminars during its work. The Ministry will establish a broadly composed reference group based on input from relevant stakeholders. The expert committee shall involve the reference group in its work.

The expert committee shall submit its assessments and recommendations in a report to the Ministry of Education and Research by 1 March 2027. The report shall include concrete recommendations for authorities and research institutions, as well as for private and public sector organizations.