

# Experiences and reflections from the PhD perspective

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Seminar on PhD Education  
Roxana Pop – UiODoc president

What could interfere with having  
a successful PhD?

# What could interfere with having a successful PhD?



## **Output:**

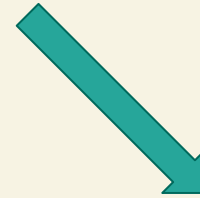
- PhD thesis
- Having the necessary skills and knowledge for the next step

# What could interfere with having a successful PhD?



## **Output:**

- PhD thesis
- Having the necessary skills and knowledge for the next step



**(Positive)  
Experience**

# Output: defending the thesis – UiO

Percentages of completed PhDs within **6 years** – by start year



*Taken from the materials provided for this seminar*

# Output: defending the thesis

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Why are so many PhD candidates not defending on time?

# Output: defending the thesis

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~40 respondents

# Output: defending the thesis

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## Potential issue:

- **Progress not** properly **monitored**

or

**remedial actions not taken**/not taken in time



# Output: defending the thesis

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## Potential issue:

- **Progress not** properly **monitored**  
or  
**remedial actions not taken**/not taken in time
- Supervision
- Mid-term evaluations, annual reports

# Progress monitoring – supervision

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Regulations for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) at the University of Oslo

The supervisors have a **duty**  
to **follow up** on *academic* matters which may  
cause delay in the research education,  
**ensuring** that it may be **completed** within the  
stipulated **time frame**.

# Supervision problems

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Survey done by UiODoc

- Data gathered: 2022-2023
- Number of participants  
(PhD candidates): **470**

# Supervision problems

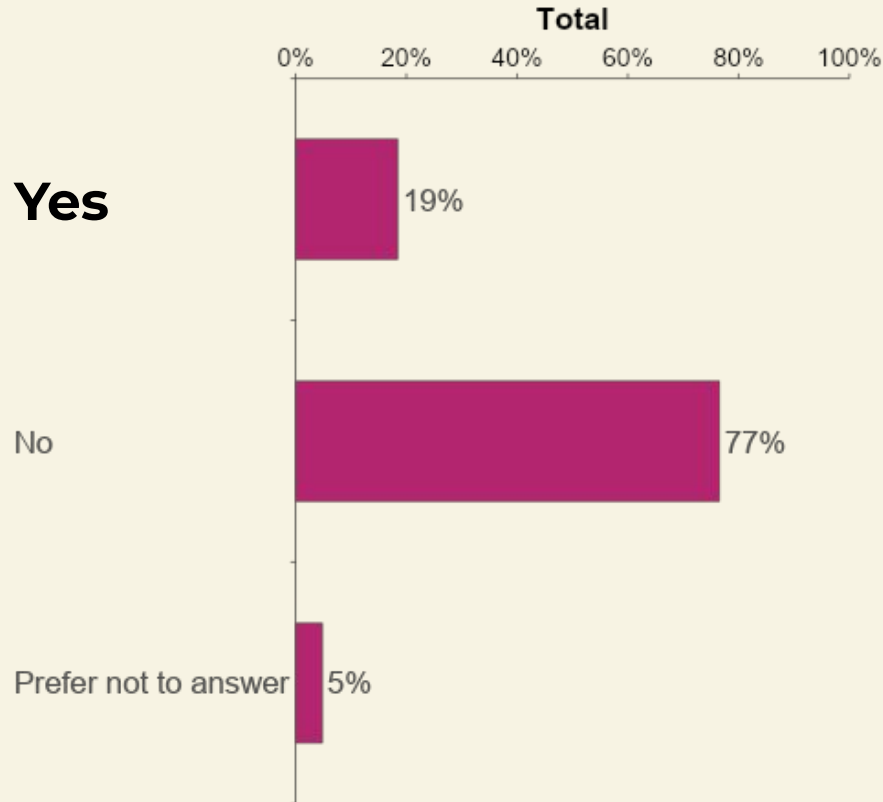
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*Have you ever encountered any **substantial** problems regarding supervision of your project?*

# Supervision problems



*Have you ever encountered any **substantial** problems regarding supervision of your project?*

# Supervision problems – following up

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- Supervisors should ***follow up*** on the academic matters and ensure that the PhD education ***can be completed*** in the given ***time frame***

Yet

# Supervision problems – following up

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- Supervisors should ***follow up*** on the academic matters and ensure that the PhD education ***can be completed*** in the given ***time frame***

Yet

- Recurrent issues
  - Supervisors not being available
  - Supervisors not offering feedback
  - Supervisors not offering guidance

# Supervision problems — following up

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“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor **takes the time to follow-up my progression** as a researcher and theoretician.”



# Supervision problems — following up

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“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to **follow-up** my progression as a researcher and theoretician.”

“My supervisor refused to discuss my ideas and **plans** with me [...]”

# Supervision problems — following up

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“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progression as a researcher”

“Problems were [...] having **little time for supervision**, reluctant to meet regularly, **never took initiative** to supervision and placed the onus entirely on me, [...] little individual supervision”

“My supervisor refused to discuss my ideas and plans with me [...]”

# Supervision problems — following up

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“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progression as a researcher and theoretician.”

“Problems were [...] having little time for supervision, reluctant to meet regularly, never took initiative to placed the onus entirely on individual supervisor”

“My supervisor refused to discuss my ideas and plans with me [...]”

“Difficult to get ahold of supervisors, **not regular meeting**”

# Supervision problems — following up

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“I [...] do not follow up my supervisor to follow up my research and

“Problem with supervision never placed

individual supervision”

“I have been getting a very poor supervision and have experienced a **complete lack of guidance** that cause **serious delays** in my project and mental burden

supervisors, not regular meeting”

supervisor refused to my ideas and with me [...]”

# Supervision problems — following up

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“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progression as a researcher and theoretician.”

“Problems were [...] no supervision, **serious delays** never took initiative to place the onus entirely on me, I get little individual supervision”

“My supervisor is **not available**, and does not give helpful supervision. The **administration** in my department has been **slow to help**”

“Difficult to get ahold of supervisors, not regular meeting”

# Supervision problems — following up

“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progression as a researcher and theoretician. “I have been getting a very poor supervision. The administration department has complete lack of guidance that cause help” “Problems were [...] having quite time for plans with me [...]” “My supervisor is not available, and does not give me My supervisor refused to discuss my ideas and serious delays in my project and mental

**“Little (in periods: to none) supervision, lack of feedback and interest in my project”**

“I little difficult to get ahold of supervisors, not regular meeting”

# Supervision problems — following up

“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progression as a researcher and theoretician. Problems were [...] having serious delays in my project and never took initiative to take (in the periods: entirely) supervision, lack of feedback interest in my project”

“My supervisor [...] I have been getting a very little supervision and have experienced a complete lack of guidance that cause me [...]”

“My supervisor refused to discuss my ideas and plans with me [...]”

“Difficult to get ahold of supervisors, not regular meeting”

**“Hardly any supervision”**

# Supervision problems — following up

“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progression as a researcher and theoretician. “My supervisor is not giving me supervision and administrative help”

“I have been getting a very complete lack of guidance that cause serious delays in my project and mental burden”

“Problems were [...] having little time to discuss my ideas and plans with me [...]”

“My supervisor refused to help”

“The department has no administrative help”

**“Hardly any supervision”**

**“Nearly no supervision at all. I rarely see my supervisor and feel very alone.”**

“Difficult to get ahold of supervisors, not regular meeting”



# Supervision problems — following up

“I [...] do not follow up on my research”

**“Absent supervisors, no clear path forward.”**

“Supervisor [...] gave very little supervision”

**“Hardly any supervision”**

“Problem [...] having quite a lot of serious delays in my project and supervisor, reluctant to meet regularly”

“My supervisor refused to discuss my ideas and plans with me [...]”

**“Nearly no supervision at all. I rarely see my supervisor and feel very alone.”**

“Difficult to get ahold of supervisors, not regular meeting”

# Supervision problems — following up

“I [...] do  
superv  
follow t  
research

**“Absent supervisors, no clear path forward.”**

**“Hardly any supervision”**

“Problem [...] having quite a bit of serious delays in my project and mental  
supervisor, reluctant to meet reg  
supervision  
“Difficult  
supervi

**“Nearly no supervision at all. I rarely see my supervisor and feel very alone.”**

**“Lack of supervision, being alone with the project”**

# Supervision problems — following up

**“I would prefer to receive a bit more feedback and guidance.”**

“I [...] do not feel that my main supervisor takes the time to follow up my progress as a researcher and to discuss my work.”

“Problems with supervision”

“Hardly any supervision available, and does not help”

“Nearly no supervision, lack of feedback and interest in my project”

“Difficult to get hold of supervisors, not regular meeting”



# Supervision problems – following up

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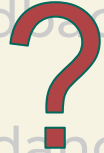
- Absent supervisor / little supervision
- Lack of feedback
- Lack of guidance / planning

# Supervision problems – what about...

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- **Absent supervisor / little supervision**

- Lack of feedback



Is 180 hours of supervision enough?

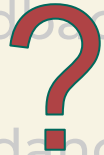
- Lack of guidance / planning

# Supervision problems – what about...

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- **Absent supervisor / little supervision**

- Lack of feedback



Is 180 hours of supervision enough?

- Lack of guidance / planning



How is it ensured that the supervisor actually has those 180 hours to spend?

# Supervision problems – what about...

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- Absent supervisor / little supervision
- **Lack of feedback**
- Lack of guidance



Are supervisors aware of the  
importance of feedback?



# Supervision problems – what about...

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- Absent supervisor / little supervision
- **Lack of feedback**
- Lack of guidance



Are supervisors aware of the importance of feedback?



Do supervisors have the skill to provide constructive feedback?

# Supervision problems – what about...

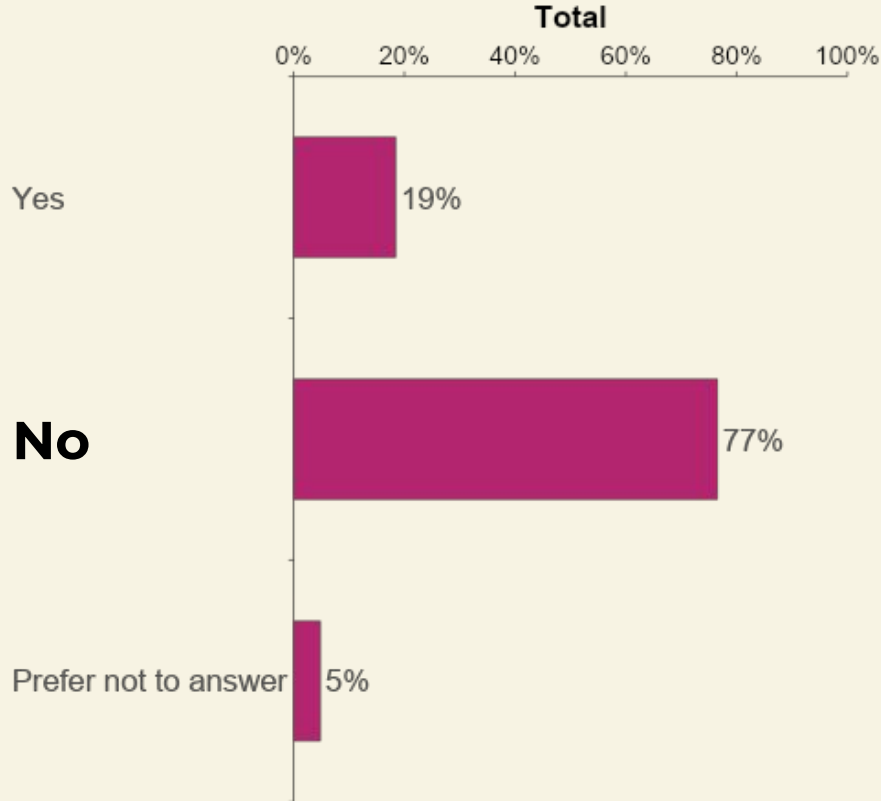
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- Absent supervisor / little supervision
- Lack of feedback
- **Lack of guidance / planning**



Do supervisors have people management and planning skills?

# Supervision problems



*Have you ever encountered any **substantial** problems regarding supervision of your project?*

# There are good supervisors out there

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“Fellows will tell a supervisor about what they are proud of. But if there are periods when I **don't hear anything**, I **knock on the office door**. “

Khrono article: [She knocks on the door of the fellows if they don't make a sound](#)

# Output: defending the thesis

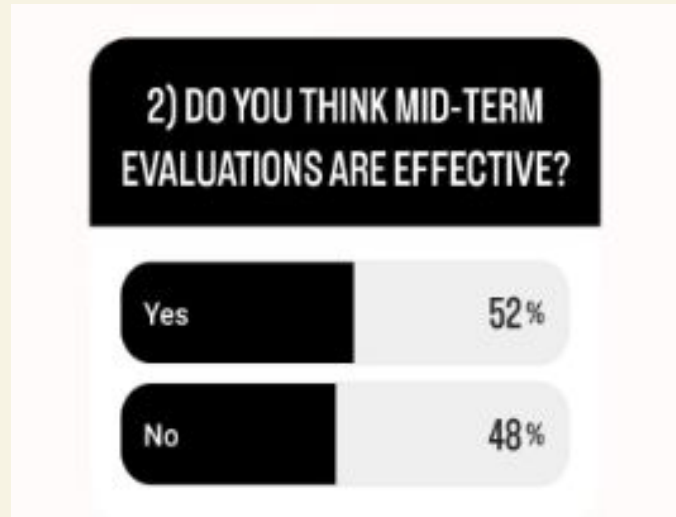
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## Potential issue:

- **Progress not** properly **monitored**  
or  
**remedial actions not taken**/not taken in time
- Supervision
- **Mid-term evaluations, annual reports**

# Mid-term evaluations

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# Annual progress reports

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**Do you think annual  
progress reports are  
effective?**

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Yes

19%

No

81%

# Evaluation strategies

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What makes mid-term evaluations so much more effective than annual progress reports?



# Output: defending the thesis

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## Potential issues:

- Progress not properly monitored or remedial actions not taken/not taken in time

# Output: defending the thesis

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## Potential issue:

- Progress not properly monitored or remedial actions not taken/not taken in time
- Lack of resources in gaining the necessary expertise: supervision, courses

# Supervision problems – expertise

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“Lack of **technical supervision** [...]”

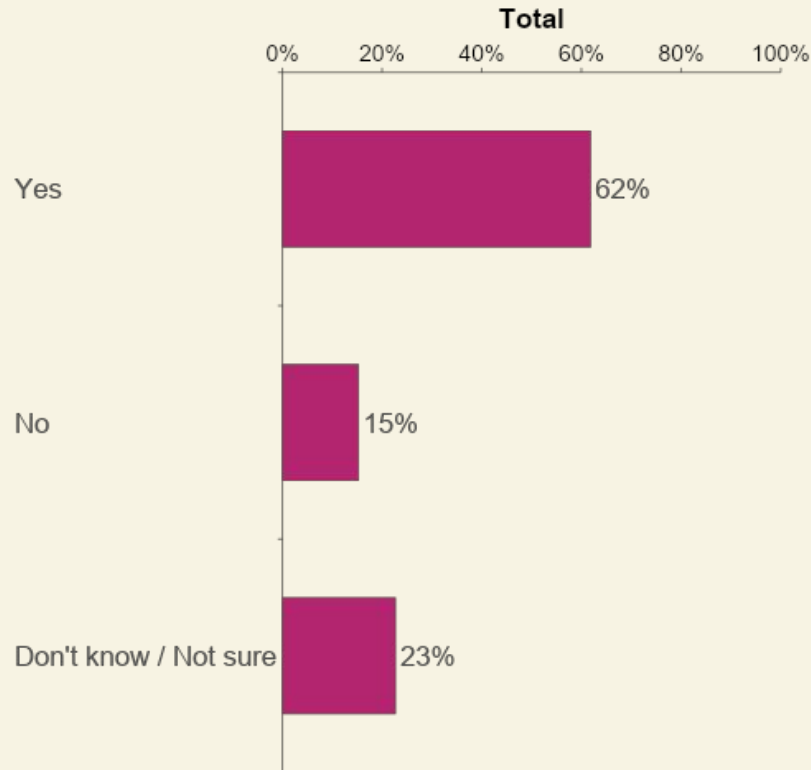
“My supervisors **lack the expertise** needed to offer assistance in most aspects of my project.”

“ [Supervisor] A person **without knowledge of my field**”

“My supervisor works in a **very different field** and with very different methods from mine, and she is the only one available so I can't switch”“

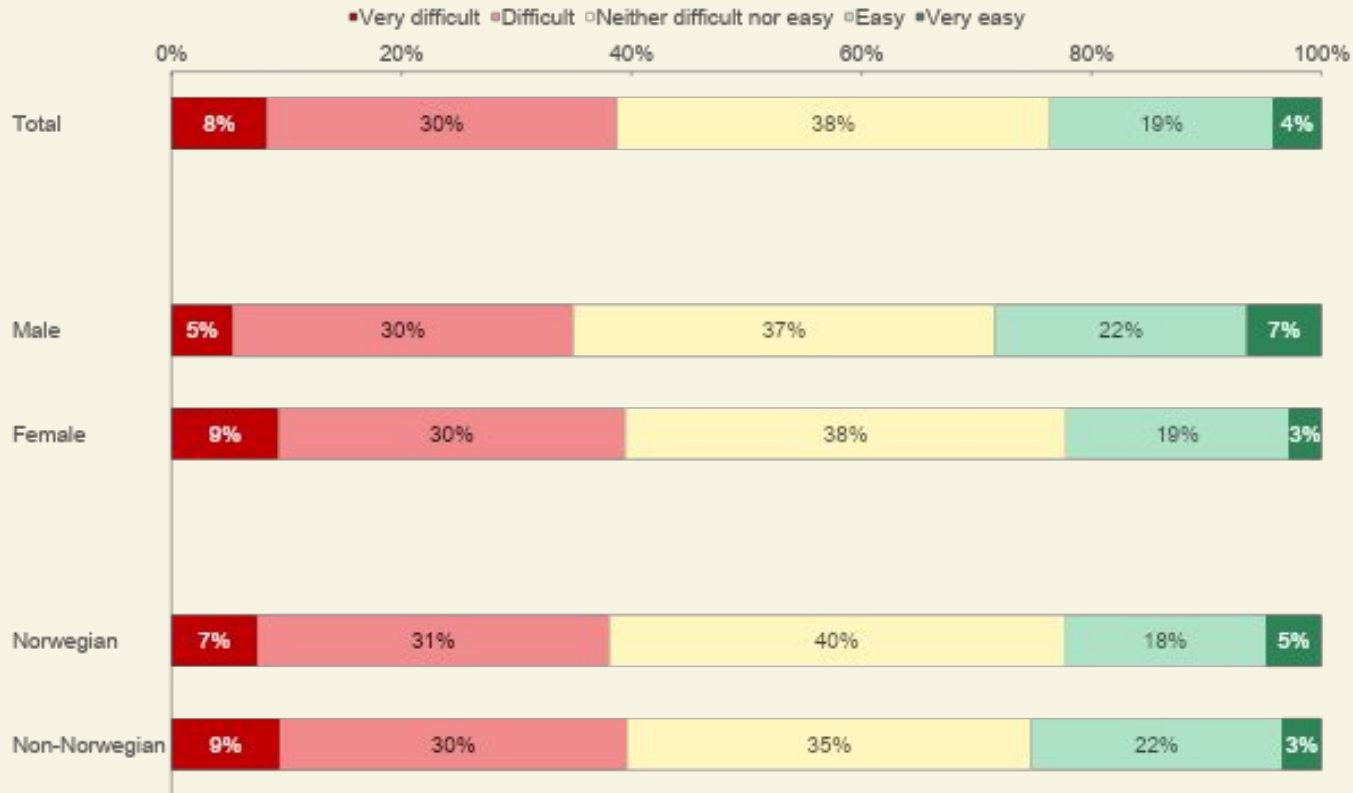
# Courses problems – expertise

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*Do you have access to the  
**necessary training** to  
remain up-to-date in your  
research field?*

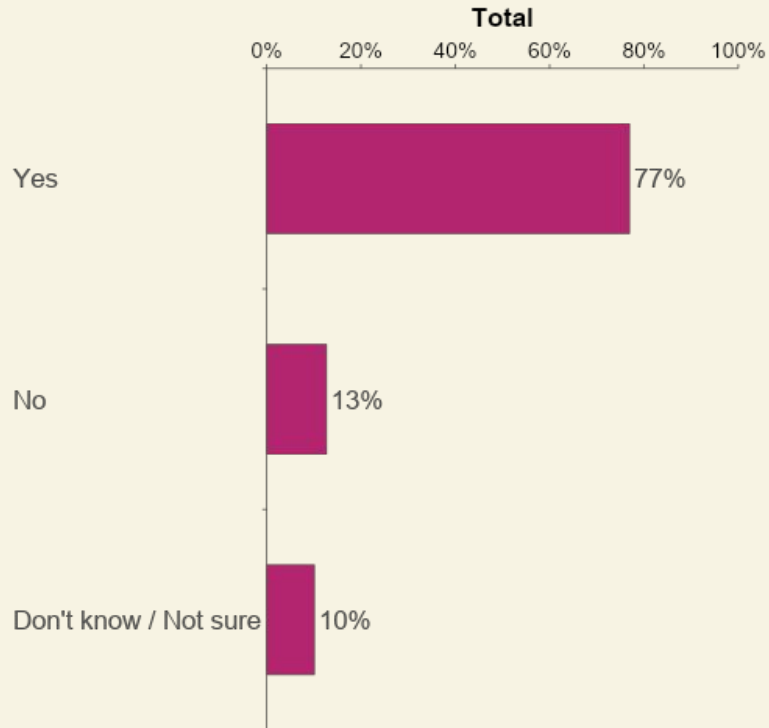
# Courses problems – expertise



*How easy do you find it to find **relevant courses**?*

# Courses problems – solution?

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*Would you consider taking  
courses at **other**  
**institutions** or universities  
in Norway?*

If only we had a national-level PhD portal...

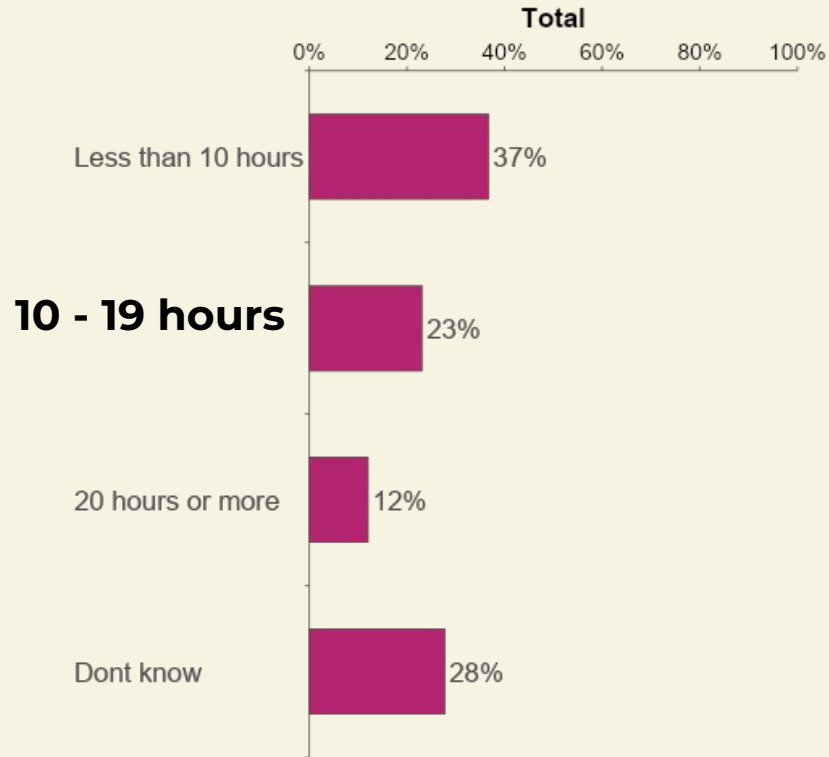
# Output: defending the thesis

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## Potential issues:

- Progress not properly monitored or remedial actions not taken/not taken in time
- Lack of resources in gaining the necessary expertise: supervision, courses
- Other activities interfering with research

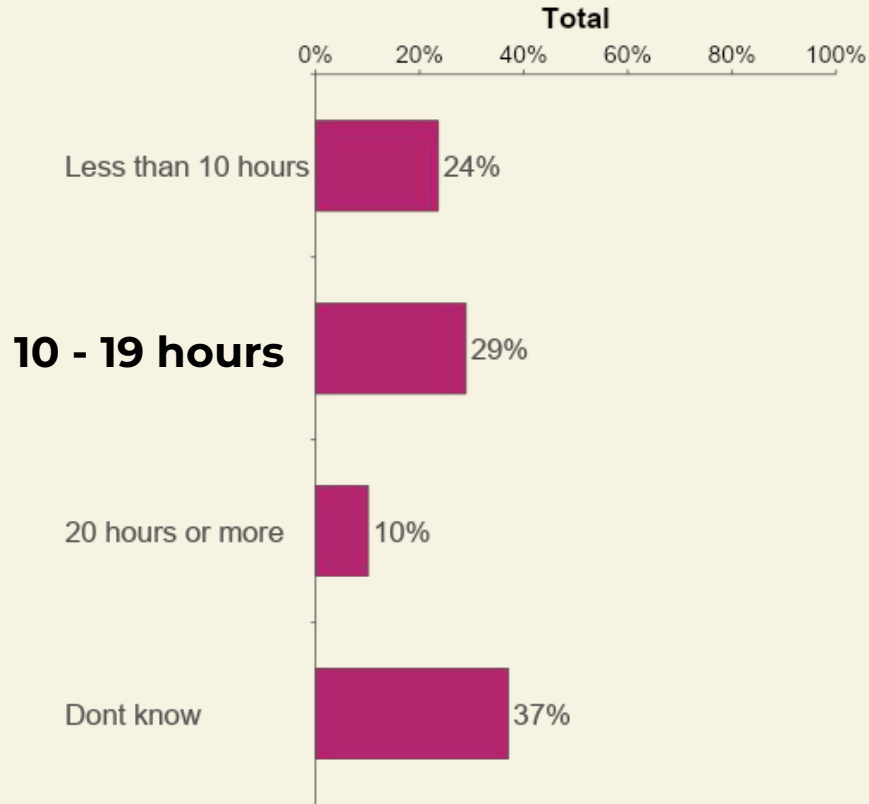
# Non-research tasks



*How **many hours** do you spend on **non-research tasks** per week? (categorised)*



# Teaching workload



*How many **hours** do you spend on **teaching duties** per week? (categorised)*

# Language requirements

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What will happen with international PhD candidates if Norwegian training becomes mandatory?

# Language requirements

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What will happen with international PhD candidates if Norwegian training becomes mandatory?

SiN's Consultation response to invitation to give input to "Proposal for regulations on teaching and research positions and recruitment positions"

# Output: defending the thesis

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## Potential issues:

- Progress not properly monitored or remedial actions not taken/not taken in time
- Lack of resources in gaining the necessary expertise: supervision, courses
- Other activities interfering with research

# Output: prepared for the next step

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Does defending a thesis mean the PhD candidate is ready for the next step?

## Output: prepared for the next step

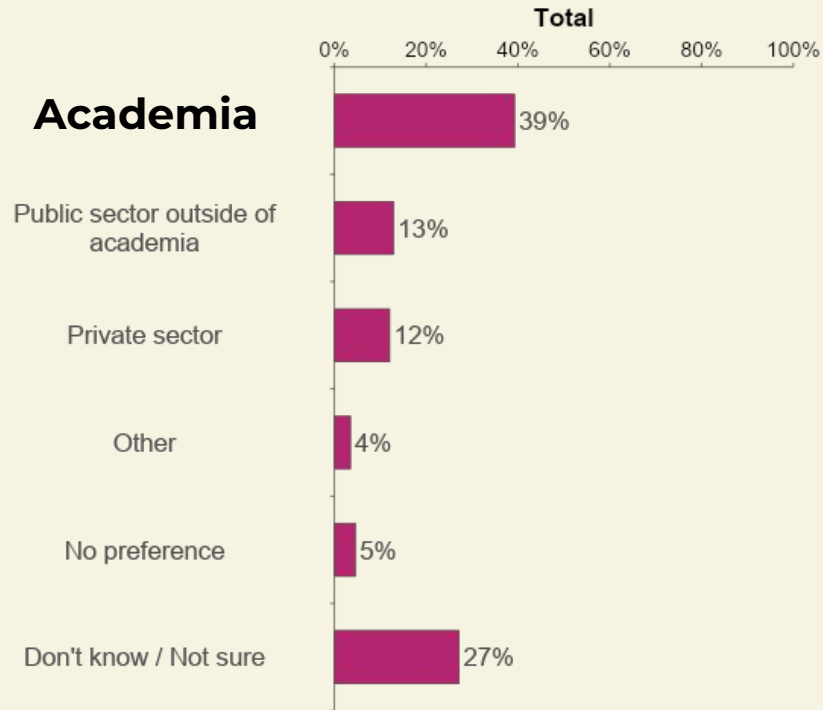
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Does defending a thesis mean the PhD candidate is ready for the next step?

... maybe if they want to stay in academia? (though arguable)

# Output: prepared for the next step



*Which sector would you like to pursue a **career** in the future?*

# Prepared for the next step – transferable skills

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- In 2023, SiN designated a working group on transferable skills acquisition for PhD candidates:
  - [Working group report](#)
- Major differences between universities/faculties
- Most courses aimed at careers in academia, though less than half of the PhDs want to continue in academia



# Prepared for the next step – transferable skills

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- In 2023, SiN designated a working group on transferable skills acquisition for PhD candidates:
  - [Working group report](#)

## SiN suggestions:

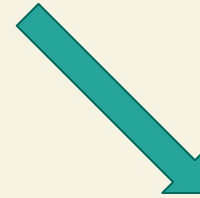
- Transferable skills courses as part of mandatory training
- Simplify credit transfer process
- Expand scope of courses (to support career outside of academia)

# What could interfere with having a successful PhD?



## Output:

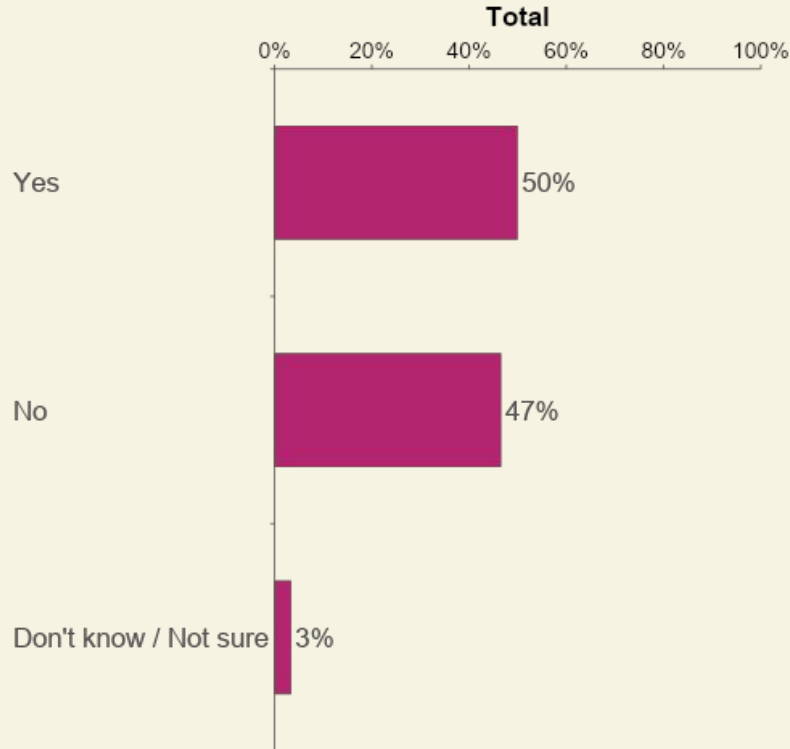
- PhD thesis
- Having the necessary skills and knowledge for the next step



**(Positive)  
Experience**

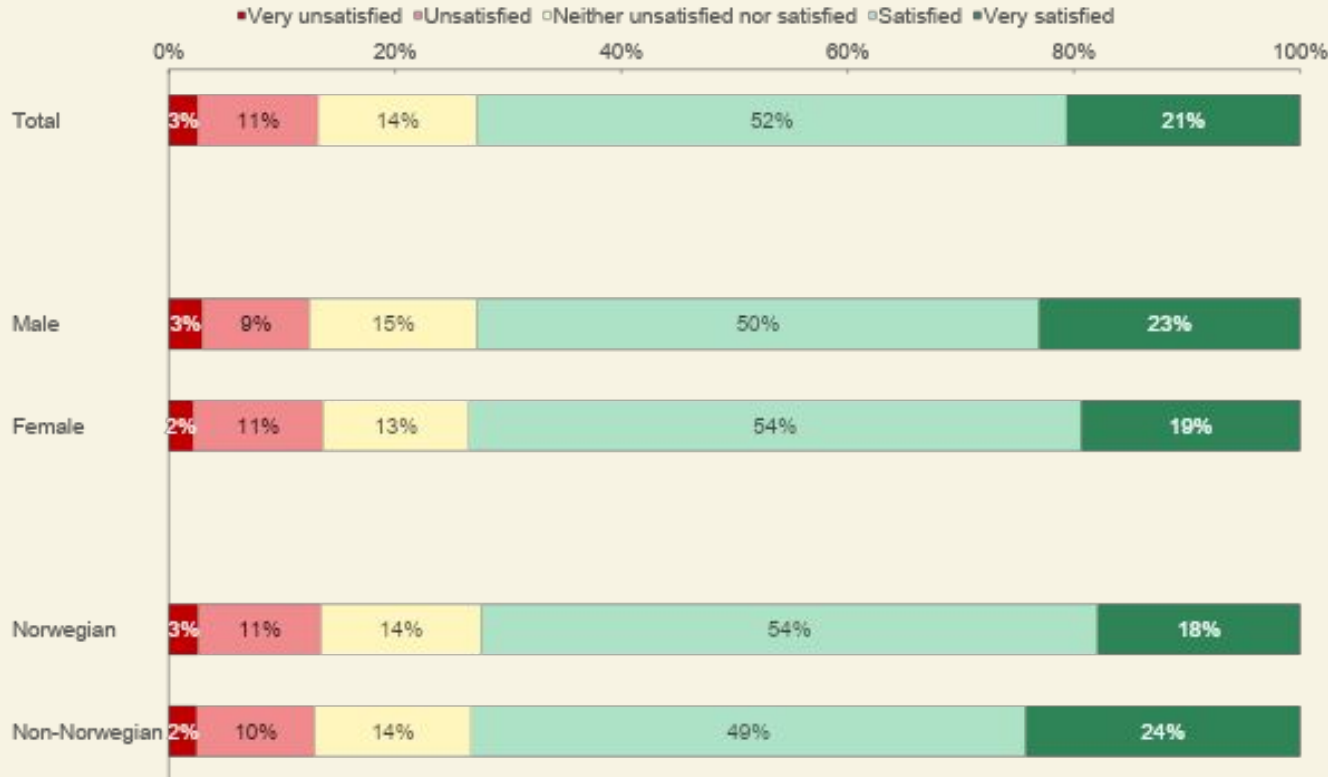
# PhD experience: mental health

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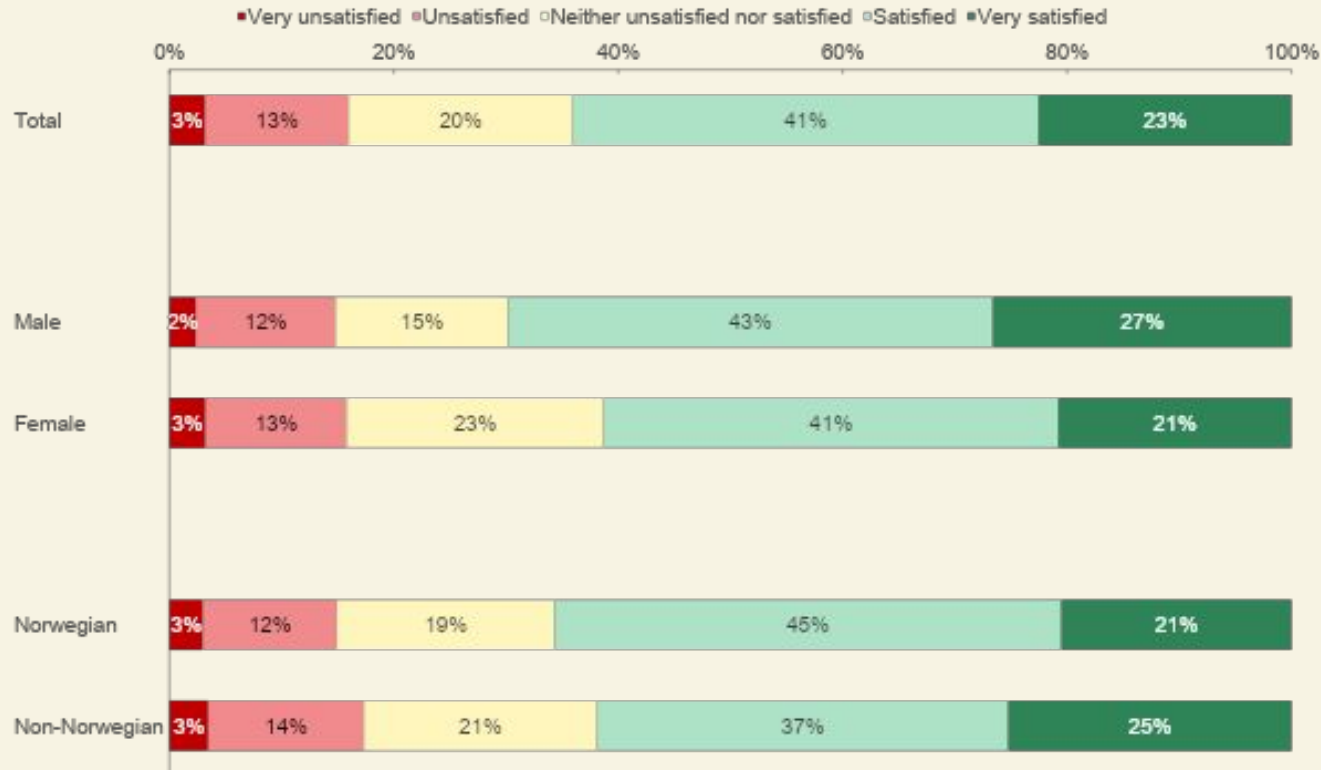
*Have you considered consulting/consulted a **mental health professional** during the last 12 months?*

# PhD experience: position satisfaction



*How **satisfied** are you with the overall experience in your **current research position**?*

# PhD experience: social integration



*How satisfied are you with the **integration** in your **social work environment**?*

# PhD experience: social integration

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Would mandatory Norwegian training help international PhD candidates with integration in the social work environment?

# PhD experience: social integration

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*“I am employed in a research center attached to the X department, but my education is handled by Y department. As a result I usually interact only with researchers in my center and not in the university departments. Although I **did try to reach out it is difficult when I don't know any people and multiple mailing lists, some of which reach my inbox only occasionally, is difficult to manage. It would have been great if onboarding included integration with "mother" departments at UiO**”*

# PhD experience

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“Supervisors should follow up on the **academic** matters”

Who is doing the follow up on **non-academic matters**?

Especially for PhD candidates not clearly associated with one department/employed by the university...

***And how much of this could be improved by better onboarding and clear contact points?***



How...



## Ending questions

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How can we make sure that supervisors have the **time** and **expertise** to guide their students?

How can we make **PhD success less** about the **supervision**?  
How can the **monitoring** and **interventions** from UiO be improved?

How can we make PhD candidates feel **less alone**? Are perhaps community and support groups part of the answer?