

# DION NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022 - MARCH 2023



Pictures: Left and bottom: Gjøvik's Secret Santa. Top Right: DION's board julebord in Trondheim

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## PREFACE BY THE PRESIDENT OF DION

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## COVID-19 SURVEY: PROJECT DELAYS, CONTRACT EXTENSION APPLICATIONS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND WELL-BEING

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## EVENTS

*Upcoming.* Ski course,  
Mediation and Yoga, Språk  
café, Mentoring,  
Entrepreneurship,  
Transferrable Skills, Grants,  
AGM

*Recent.* Open Discussion,  
Movie night, Christmas  
Socials, Secret Santa, Glogg  
party, Internationalization  
conference, Vision  
Engineering Workshop

Dear colleagues,

first of all happy new year! We would like to thank you for the last year: for your inquiries, for your participation in our events and for your valuable feedback. Looking back at last year, we are happy and proud to say that DION has a higher outreach than before. At all 3 NTNU campuses, we have organized many popular events like the Mental Health and Awareness Month, expanded existing collaborations, e.g. with NIRS, and started new projects, e.g. with Startup Migrants. For the new year (rather for the remaining three months of our board term), we have a lot planned, so stay tuned!

I would like to take the opportunity and use the pre-word to introduce you to the national organization for temporary academic employees of which DION is a part. As some of you may have already guessed, I am talking about Stipendiatororganisasjonen I Norge (SiN). SiN is as an umbrella association of interest organizations for PhDs, PostDocs and other temporary academic employees at Norwegian universities. SiN is a place where the member organizations share their experiences, discuss existing problems and best practices. SiN plays an important role on a national level expressing the joint opinion of its member organizations on political issues concerning education, research and other questions of interest to the member organizations. The SiN board 2023 was recently elected and includes three members from NTNU (Anum Masood, Friederike Schäfer and I). SiN's priorities for the new year are e.g. mental health of temporary employees and strengthening skills beyond your research expertise, known as transferable skills.



We are very much looking forward to the new year with you. If you have any suggestions or ideas, please let us know. Otherwise, as usual, happy reading!

Regina Matveeva  
President DION

## COVID-19 Survey

In the spring of 2022, SiN has re-examined what consequences the pandemic has had for PhDs and postdocs working in Norway. The results point to the fact that there is still potential for improvement in the institutions' communication work.

The results confirm the extensive delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing that the majority of doctoral students surveyed needed an extension to complete their doctoral project.

- It is worrying that a significant number of respondents still do not know whether they were offered an extension, which was also a challenge among those asked in the previous report. This raises questions about the institutions' ability to communicate effectively enough about these issues, says Nicolas Gibney, head of SiN.

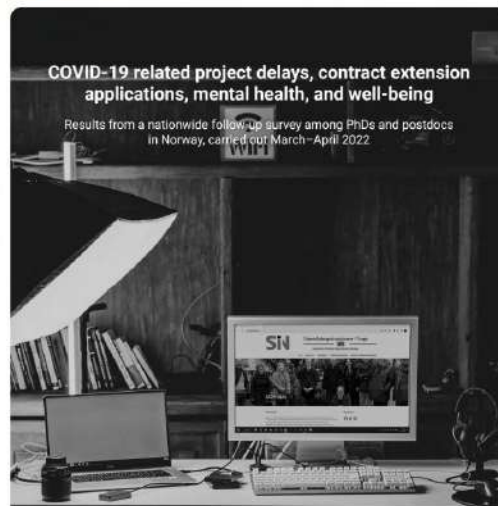
Some possible explanations for this lack of information can be found in respondents' comments. They report on differences between institutions, faculties and institutes in terms of procedures, guidelines, eligibility criteria, information availability, deadlines and length of extensions.

Survey: <https://stipendiat.no/2023/01/covid-19-related-project-delays-contract-extension-applications-mental-health-and-well-being/>

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- A total of 1260 responses were collected of which 1028 were completed and 234 were partially completed. PhD student responses represented the higher proportion of the total with 86% (1085), postdocs 11% (143), and other positions represented 2% (32).
- The highest number of responses corresponded to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) with 33%, followed by UiT with 11%, and 19 % for UiB (figure 1).
- The majority (71%) of respondents have reported delays in their projects due to COVID-19. Of the respondents that suffered delays, reported either delays before the first survey 68% (August 2020) or after 79%.
- A high number of respondents (60%) reported the possibility to apply for extensions in their institutions, 14% reported that their institutions did not offer extensions, and 26% have no information regarding extensions. When extensions were offered, 44% of the respondents reported that these were applicable before August 2020, while 57% were applicable after

**SiN** The Association of Doctoral Organisations in Norway



August 2020, and 28% of the respondents reported that the applications were open during this survey (April 2022).

- Due to the long delays, most of the respondents have applied for extensions (73%), but 27% have not applied.
- Most respondents that have applied for extensions have got 2 month extensions. Yet, there is great variation in the length of the extensions, from one week and up to 10 months.
- Sick leave related to COVID-19 was the case for 35% of the respondents.
- A total of 679 respondents are non-Norwegian residents, from which 163 (24%) have experienced difficulties in issuing VISA/residence permits in connection with COVID-19
- Regarding workspace, the great majority of respondents have shared offices. Nevertheless, there were 17 respondents (2%) that mentioned not having a desk at work.
- During the pandemic, 75% of the respondents did not get help to set up an appropriate home office workspace.
- Physical discomfort such as neck or back pain was an increasing discomfort during the home office for more than half of the respondents (56%).
- Mental health stroke many people during the pandemic, and feelings of loneliness/isolation increased quite a lot or to a high degree for 45% of the respondents. Similarly, feeling of stress and anxiety were reported by 54% of the respondents, and feelings of sadness and depression were reported by 40% and 30% of the respondents respectively. 18% of the respondents reported an increase in other mental health issues. As a result, 21% (229) of the respondents have sought professional help.
- Among the participants who wrote comments regarding the general situation along the pandemic reflect the efforts that institutions, departments, and supervisors did during the pandemic to ameliorate the situation of PhDs students. However, there are many PhD students that shared their concerns regarding the time lost, the effect on their final dissertation, and their future careers.
- There are many respondents who expressed their discontent with the way extensions have been assigned. Thus, the uncertainty about whether they will finish on time is an additional worry to the already challenging situation for many PhDs.



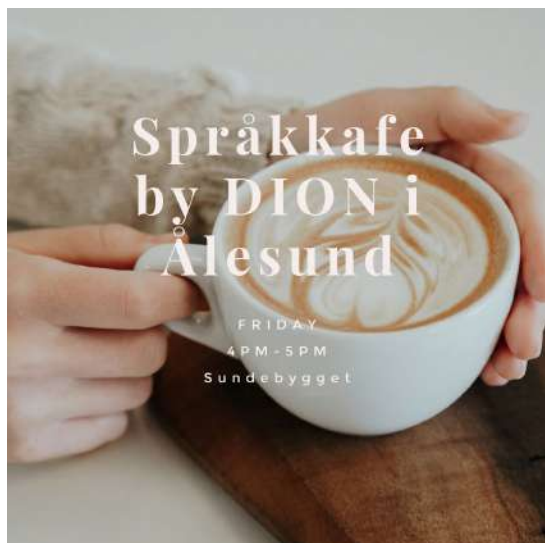
## Upcoming Events

### SKI COURSE (TRONDHEIM)

On the 28th of January, Trondheim Skiklub will give a 1.5-hour cross-country skiing course. The participants will be divided into different groups depending on their level. We will also recover the energy with a waffle and coffee in Skistua. Registrations closed.

### MENTORING (TRONDHEIM)

The K.G. Jebsen Center for Genetic Epidemiology is honored to virtually host Dr. Cathryn Lewis, Professor of Genetic Epidemiology at King's College London, on Monday, January 30th. Her scientific seminar is 12-13 in ØHM11 and on Zoom. A mentoring meeting follows at 13:15. This is an opportunity for early career researchers, PhD students, Master's students, and Postdoctoral fellows in life sciences to ask questions, discuss professional development topics, and learn from our guest speaker's career trajectory. Refreshments are funded by a DION grant. Please register for in-person (<https://forms.office.com/e/0wYvpRFbbW>) and online attendance (<https://NTNU.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJEIf-qprDopHtxXOD0ub5FKtti4A-c6HEIm>) as space is limited to keep the conversation informal and so everyone has an opportunity to ask questions.



### LANGUAGE CAFÉ (ÅLESUND)

Start the weekend with a language exchange: “Språkkafe” in the Sundebygget building on the Ålesund campus now recurrently on Fridays! The idea is to meet each other and practice basic Norwegian; bring your coffee and DION brings cake!

### YOGA, MEDITATION, AND DINNER (TRONDHEIM)

After your valuable feedback from the Mental Health and Awareness month, there will be an event of Meditation and Yoga, with dinner! The event will be hosted by Trondheim Meditasjon&Yoga on the afternoon of the 11th of February. The registration will be open and announced in innsida soon.

## START-UP PRESCHOOL TRONDHEIM



Join a 3-day crash course in entrepreneurship!

<https://www.forskole.no/en/event/3-5th-of-march-startup-preschool-trondheim-3/>

Registration form:  
<https://forms.clickup.com/8503977/f/83gn9-26502/WFWSB633REM8LB9KZA>

These events are covered by a grant from the Innovation Council.

If you are in Gjøvik and would be interested in attending, please answer the questionnaire <https://forms.gle/7X5E8ecgt52KHVam6>

DION in cooperation with SiN, NIRS, Startup Migrants (and this is still not a final list!) is organizing a Transferable Skills Day. Transferable skills are the skills that you take with you from your PhD or PostDoc into your next career stage, whatever it will be, academia, industry, startup, public sector, or something else! Transferable skills include for example the ability to communicate, present and pitch your ideas to others, solve unexpected problems, or work well in teams. Throughout the Transferable Skills Day we will offer you a few workshops, which will help you to develop these skills further and to uncover the skills that make you unique.

The preliminary date for the Transferable Skills Day is March 17th. The event will take place in Trondheim, with some of the workshops being streamed to Ålesund and Gjøvik. During lunch time you will have an opportunity to connect with PhDs and PostDocs from other departments. Pizza or bread and spread will be served. More detailed program will follow. Stay tuned!

## TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS DAY



## DION'S AGM - CHANGE OF STATUTES

DION's board is working to propose a few changes in the statutes. The changes are aimed to securing the election of board members in the three cities, aligning the elections period with the budget, or revising the Norwegian proficiency requirements for applicants. All temporary employees are welcome to attend and vote during the Annual General Meeting on April 18th.

## SPRING GRANTS: TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS

We are happy to release 3 grants of up to 2000 NOK each! Events connected to transferrable skills will be prioritized, although social events are also accepted. The deadline for applying is 10th February, to be arranged before Easter. Application form: <https://org.ntnu.no/dion/>

## Recent events

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### OPEN PANEL DISCUSSION: TEMPORARY WORK IN ACADEMIA: TOWARD A LABOR THEORY OF PEDAGOGY

An open discussion about temporary work in academia in Cafe Sito (Dragvoll, 13<sup>th</sup> Jan).

The panel was introduced by visiting PhDs from the University of California, Berkeley, giving short presentations of their research on academic temporary work and temporary labour practices from the perspective of the PhD student in US higher education. They also reported their lessons learned from the recent strike among temporary academics in California.

The presentations were followed by invited brief comments on the transferability & relevance to the NTNU/ Norwegian context of higher education by representatives from trade unions and temporary employees' organizations and finalized with an open discussion.

### VISION ENGINEERING WORKSHOP (TRONDHEIM)



Ronja Lappe and Ursula Enzenhofer received a winter grant to take a group of PhD/PDs on an artistic and meditational journey. A cosy evening with dinner, relaxation and meditation by journaling, painting, or live music to visualize career and personal goals.

### CHRISTMAS MOVIE NIGHT (TRONDHEIM)

Family-friendly gathering to get into the best Christmas mood by watching “Elf”.



## SECRET SANTA (GJØVIK)



## GLØGG PARTY WITH NIRS (TRONDHEIM)



## CHRISTMAS SOCIAL AND JULEBRUS TASTING (TRONDHEIM)

Line Rønning, supported by a winter grant, organized a fun event sharing the Norwegian advent traditions for the temporary employees of the department of psychology.



## MAHJONG GAME (TRONDHEIM)



Yue yu, PhD at the physics department arranged this evening to share how to play the Chinese board game Mahjong, supported by one of DION's autumn grants.

## NTNU 2ND INTERNATIONALIZATION CONFERENCE

Rethinking international knowledge cooperation in a changing world 6th-7th Dec. Trondheim, Ålesund and streaming.

Session: International researcher careers – how and why to invest in mobility.

Tor Grande, Trude H. Flo, Nils T. Ekman and Anette Moen from NIRS and Regina Matveeva from DION contributed by sharing practical information and advice on how to go about planning and carrying out international mobility and diverse research mobility experiences and reflections.

<https://www.ntnu.edu/internationalization-conference/internationalization-conference>



Thank you for reading this newsletter, if you have questions or feedback get in touch!

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