

Norwegen: Einer von von vier Forschern aus dem Ausland

02.12.2010

Forschungsaufenthalte in Norwegen werden bei Forschern aus dem Ausland immer beliebter. Der englischsprachige Artikel des Norwegischen Forschungsrats resumiert diesbezüglich die Erfahrungen und Meinungen verschiedener Forscher, die zum Teil selbst aus dem Ausland kommen.

Short or longer-term research stays in Norway are popular among international researchers. Recent years have seen a significant rise in the number of doctoral fellows and other academic staff who come from abroad.

According to new figures from the Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU STEP) a quarter of researchers in Norway are foreigners. The figures show that one in four doctoral fellows, one in seven academic staff not working on a doctoral degree, and one in six of all academic staff in the university and university college sector are citizens of countries other than Norway.

Improving the quality of research

Suzanne Lacasse, Managing Director of the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI) believes new expertise from abroad is essential to ensuring the quality of Norwegian research. Dr Lacasse is originally from Canada. She is a qualified civil engineer who has specialised in the field of geotechnics ' in particular the distribution of risks associated with the danger of landslides in various areas in Norway. She has headed NGI for several years and describes Norway as an excellent place to work.

"Some 25 per cent of all NGI employees come from abroad. Several came to Norway as postdoctoral fellows with funding from the Research Council and have chosen to stay on after completing their programmes," Dr Lacasse explains.

In total, NGI has employed over 350 non-Norwegian postdoctoral fellows and researchers over the past 60 years.

"At the moment we have 30 different nationalities at NGI. There is a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and languages represented here, and everyone works together very constructively," she says.

Liked it so much she stayed

Dr Lacasse came to Norway 32 years ago. At the time she was planning to come for just a short visit, but she ended up not going back. Today she feels more Norwegian than Canadian. Norway has become her home.

"Why do researchers choose to remain in Norway? Many of them find a sound academic environment here that they value highly. They increase their competence which in turn allows them to progress within their chosen field. Norway's spectacular natural surroundings are also a bonus, and there are many different outdoor activities to enjoy here. Norway also has a very family-friendly culture, which is a great advantage for young researchers who want to both work and have children."

Dependent on foreign researchers

According to Dr Lacasse Norway is completely dependent on foreign researchers, particularly in the areas in which the country does not have a strong research tradition.

"At our own institution we constantly invite researchers to work with us who can enhance our expertise within various fields. Hydrodynamics, which involves the study of how large quantities of water behave under certain geotechnical conditions, is one such field. Norway has little experience in this area, so we have invited experts from Switzerland, the US and Canada to come and work with us," she says.

NGI makes a point of ensuring that funding is always available over the budget for foreign researchers to come to Norway. Even if researchers come for short stays, they still leave behind them ideas that provide the basis for further research.

Change ways of thinking

"By recruiting international researchers Norway is investing in its own future. At the same time this is part of the process by which Norway is increasingly opening itself up to Europe and the rest of the world," says Farrokh Nadim, Director of the International Centre for Geohazards (ICG), which has been granted status as a Centre of Excellence under the Research Council and is hosted by NGI.

"It has become much easier to work at the international level," he remarks. "The presence of foreign researchers helps to create a new research culture in which global problems and issues are addressed. This is crucial in earthquake research, for example, which is the area I work in. Our research is by definition highly international," says Professor Nadim, a qualified civil engineer, who is originally from Iran. He came to Norway with a fellowship from the Research Council and after a while decided to stay here.

"I head a department with 12 permanent employees. We also employ many people on temporary contracts. Most of them come from abroad, and we have a great need for their knowledge," he explains.

Feel welcome

Sanne Boessenkool is from The Netherlands and has worked in Norway for two years. She is completing her post-doctorate at the University of Oslo (UiO), analysing DNA in soil from the polar regions, including Svalbard. Her project is a part of a larger-scale collaborative effort with geneticists in Denmark and France. The aim is to reconstruct a picture of the biological diversity that existed in the Arctic many millions of years ago.

"My husband and I chose Norway for several reasons: it is a good place to live, with lots of outdoor activities, and we are not very far away from family and friends in Amsterdam. Norway has a well-established research community, which means that we can both find good jobs in our respective fields here."

Ms Boessenkool likes living in Norway, feels fully integrated here and has felt welcomed into the university community. "A good working environment yields good work results," she says. "We have been treated well by everyone here. I have not experienced any difficulties at all and really feel that I am part of the international team."

Sanne Boessenkool took her Master's degree in biology and DNA analysis in The Netherlands and studied for her doctorate in New Zealand. But it was Norway she chose in the end.

"We basically want to settle here for good and have even bought a house," Ms Sanne explains. "I am assuming my expertise will be needed in the future too. At the same time I know that I have to improve my Norwegian. You have to be able to speak the language to really become part of society."

All research communities becoming more international

"Research is an area where international cooperation really helps to bridge the distance between countries and cultures," says Arvid Hallén, Director General of the Research Council. "International research cooperation is being strengthened day by day, and many countries are using considerable amounts of funding on projects that entail active scientific cooperation across national boundaries."

"It is crucial that Norway can provide a research environment that is attractive to foreign researchers, not least those who wish to stay in Norway permanently or for long periods of time," Mr Hallén continues. "High quality research groups and an up-to-date infrastructure are two key factors that can increase our appeal to researchers from abroad. We are very pleased that many of the centres that we fund under the schemes for the Centres of Excellence, the Centres for Research-based Innovation and the Centres for Environment-friendly Energy Research have succeeded in this respect," he concludes.

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