

# **Forskerforbundet: Academic Salaries in Norway**

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## 1. Introduction

In general, higher education institutions are deeply affected by their political, social and cultural environments. Situated in a social-democratic society, Norwegian universities and colleges have stronger traditions for implementing egalitarian institutional policy measures than in many other countries (Vabø and Aamodt 2009). Probably, this also applies to academic salaries, but over the last two decades market considerations have increasingly affected wage policies. While all professors earlier had the same salary independent of discipline, seniority, research performance, and market value, there is now much more leeway for individual differentiation. The rationale for this policy change and the outcome of this change process will be discussed after the presentation of some contextual information on the Norwegian higher education system.

Norway has a binary higher education system which broadly can be divided into a university and a college sector. The university sector is composed of seven public universities and eight specialised university institutions (economics and business administration, veterinary science, sport and physical education, music, architecture, and theology), of which three are private. 22 state university colleges primarily providing professional and vocational training at a bachelor's level, but increasingly also at a master's level and 7 other specialised public colleges constitute the college sector. In addition, there are 21 small private higher education colleges. In 2008, Norway had about 215,000 students of which 190,000 were enrolled in public universities and colleges, and 25,000 in private institutions.

Since 1999, the colleges have had the possibility to establish PhD-programmes if some specific criteria are fulfilled. Even though few programmes have been established, the binary system has come under pressure from colleges with university ambitions, and at the turn of the millennium it was discussed whether the binary divide should be abolished. In 2004, the government decided that colleges which fulfil certain minimum standards could apply for accreditation to university status, and two of the colleges attained this status in 2005 and 2007. Many of the other colleges are discussing how they can obtain university status; either by themselves, by merging with other university colleges to create larger entities, or by merging with a university (which one college did in 2009).

Since 1996, public universities and colleges have been regulated by a joint act, which provides a common framework for the organisation and governance of these institutions. Since 2003, this act also encompasses private institutions.

In 2008, the public universities and colleges had about 10,500 academic staff members in full-time permanent positions, of which non-tenured staff amounted to more than 5,000 (primarily PhD students with a contract and post docs). Private institutions had about 800 staff members in full-time positions.

## 2. Academic Career Structure

Since 1995, universities and university colleges have essentially practiced a common academic career structure, but two different career tracks; a research-oriented and a teaching-oriented track (see Table 1). The research-oriented academic positions are *associate professor* and *professor*, while *lecturer*, *senior lecturer* and *docent* are teaching-oriented positions, but with the possibility of doing research. The *docent* position is a newly established top position for senior lecturers. The post of *assistant professor* was removed in 1995, but those still having this title are entitled to use it. *Lecturer* and *senior lecturer* are positions that are not widely used in the university sector. The position as *college teacher* is used in practice related professional programmes, mainly in teacher training and health education, and the holders of this position do not have a master's degree. In addition, the universities have some positions for full-time *researchers*. Three types of temporary positions are found: *Research scholar* (position for doctoral students), *research assistant*, and *post doc*.

Criteria for appointment and promotion to teaching and research posts are laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research. For appointment as an associate professor, the normal requirement is a Norwegian doctoral degree in the subject area concerned, or a corresponding foreign doctoral degree recognized as equivalent to a Norwegian doctoral degree. However, also competence at a corresponding level documented by academic work of the same scope quality as a doctoral degree may be accepted. For appointment to lecturer and senior lecturer, a master's degree is the minimum requirement.

In total, 84 percent of the professors in public higher education institutions hold a doctorate. Formal research qualifications of academic staff in the colleges are generally low compared to those of university staff. In 2008, 20 percent of the permanent teaching staff in the colleges had a doctorate. Only 6 percent were full professors, while more than 70 percent had the status as lecturer or teacher (Table 1). In contrast, more than 40 percent of the permanent academic staff in the universities was full professors.

**Table 1.**  
**Academic staff in permanent positions in public universities (including specialised university institutions) and in state university colleges in 2008, by rank**

Rank	Universities		University colleges	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Professor	2,301	43	322	6
Associate professor	1,706	32	948	19
Assistant professor	168	3	75	1
Docent	9	-	30	-
Senior lecturer	174	3	570	11
Lecturer	723	14	2,488	50
Other tenured staff	240	4	135	3
College teacher	38	1	487	10
Total	5,359	100	5,055	100

Source: NIFU. Research Personnel Register

Since 1993, associate professors in both universities and colleges can apply for promotion to full professor on the basis of their research competence (Olsen, Kyvik, & Hovdhaugen 2004). This reform made it possible to become a full professor in three different ways: (a) by applying for a vacant professorship in open competition and becoming appointed as the best qualified applicant, (b) by applying for a vacant professorship in open competition, being found competent but not the best qualified by the evaluation committee and then being promoted to full professor at his or her department, and (c) by applying for promotion to full professor on the basis of their research competence and being found competent by a unanimous peer review committee. The latter strategy has now become the most important way of becoming a full professor, while few are appointed to an ordinary professorship due to few vacant positions.

### 3. Academic contracts

In public higher education institutions, hiring procedures of academic staff are strictly regulated by the Ministry of Education and Research and the individual institutions. Professors, associate professors, senior lecturers and lecturers are permanently appointed unless there is statutory authority for a temporary appointment. Accordingly, Norway does not have a tenure track system, and the contracts do not specify expectations of research output. Appointments of temporary staff to permanent positions are permissible if no qualified applicants are available during a period of 3.5 years following appointment.

The contract with individual institutions is for twelve months per year. Academic staff is subject to the same regulations as other state employees. This includes the right to salary during sickness, maternity and paternity leave, and occupational injury. The general retirement age is 67, but employees can retire from the age of 62, and must retire by the age of 70. The official working week for academic staff is 37.5 hours, the same as for all public employees. Academic staff in the universities (not in the colleges) may normally apply for a sabbatical year after six years' duty.

Vacant posts shall normally be publicly advertised. In connection with the advertisement a resolution shall be passed concerning the content of the post, any qualifying period, the description of the post, and whether the post shall be advertised nationally and/or in the Nordic countries and internationally.

A review committee is set up to evaluate the applicants and make a recommendation to the institution of who should be appointed to the vacant position. Normally, applicants for professorships should be assessed with respect to (a) academic qualifications, (b) other professional qualifications, (c) pedagogical qualifications, (d) achievements in dissemination of research and in contributions to societal debate, and (e) qualifications for management and administration. According to the Central Collective Agreement for the Civil Service, if two or more applicants are deemed to have approximately equal qualifications, a female applicant shall be ranked before a male applicant.

As a supplement to the evaluation by the committee, the highest ranked applicants shall also be assessed with a view to their personal suitability for the post, e.g. in relation to collaboration with colleagues and abilities as teachers and supervisors of students. Therefore, as a general rule, the applicant shall be called for interview, and the faculty may further determine that trial lectures and other tests may be conducted.

Normally, private higher education institutions now follow these hiring procedures, partly because private institutions are included in the common act on higher education, partly because many of the private colleges receive state subsidies, and partly because private establishments want to appear as proper higher education colleges. This process can be regarded as a case of normative isomorphism; the socialisation to predominating values in the higher education system in order to attract career-minded staff, and to be acknowledged as legitimate and reputable institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

As a rule of thumb, professors and associate professors in public higher education institutions should teach five hours a week (supervision not included) and use as much time for research as for teaching. Surveys of the use of academic staff time indicate that university staff spend on average about 30 percent of their total working time on research, a similar percentage on teaching, and less than 15 percent for supervision of graduate students (Kyvik & Smeby 2004), while state university college staff use on average 20 percent for research and development and 55 percent for teaching (Kyvik & Larsen 2009). The government has made it clear that undertaking research is neither an individual duty nor right, but an institutional responsibility. It is the institution that shall determine the distribution of time resources among the staff according to certain constraints laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research when determining the annual work programme for each individual. In general, research competent staff shall have the opportunity to undertake research, while others should concentrate on keeping themselves abreast of recent research relevant to the skills students are to be taught.

## 4. Academic salaries

In Norway, academic salaries are basically determined in annual collective negotiations between trade unions and state authorities. These central negotiations regulate the general pay rise and the sum to be bargained in local negotiations. Every second year revisions of the agreement that regulates working conditions in the state sector besides salaries are negotiated. This collective agreement contains regulations of working hours, salary during sick leave and maternity leave, overtime, pension rights, etc. The trade unions play an important role in the system of wage negotiations, and have more than 80 percent of the academic staff as members. Local negotiations take place at each institution between the institutional management and the local trade unions representing their members.

Academic rank is the primary determinant of salary level. Assistant professors, university and college lecturers, and college teachers are paid according to a scale based on seniority, but other criteria may also be applied. For the other positions, individual salaries are negotiated between the unions and institutions within the limits of the pay scale according to a set of different criteria of which the applicant's productivity in research, publishing and market value are the most important. Most salaries for these latter positions tend to be at the lowest level or close to this, but in recent years, universities and colleges have increasingly applied the range of the pay scales to reward staff members, and also to attract staff from abroad.

Table 2 displays the distribution of monthly salaries for academic staff in public higher education institutions by October 2008. The entrance level as defined by the official pay scale was 42,892 Norwegian kroner (NOK) and the maximum level was 85,000 NOK. On average, a professor earned 52,700 NOK, while the median salary was 50,858 NOK.

A survey among academic staff shows that by December 2008, 5 percent of the professors had a monthly salary of 44,440 NOK or lower, and 5 percent earned more than 63,750 NOK (Forskerforbundet 2009). These figures indicate that the top of the scale is rarely used (if at all), and that the mean salary for professors is about 23 percent higher than the entrance level. To this can be added that the mean age of professors in 2008 was 56 years of age, indicating that the economic compensation for pursuing an academic career is relatively modest.

**Table 2. Monthly salary (Norwegian kroner) for academic staff in public higher education institutions by October 2008. (Sources: Statistics Norway and the Norwegian Association of Researchers)**

Rank	Average monthly salary	Scales within ranks	Monthly salary*
Professor	52,700	Top of scale	85,000
		Median	50,858
		Bottom of scale	42,892
Associate professor	41,300	Top of scale	52,175
		Median	40,592
		Bottom of scale	36,308
Senior lecturer	40,900	Top of scale	52,175
		Median	41,358
		Bottom of scale	36,308
Lecturer	38,600	Top of scale	45,308
		Median	39,058
		Bottom of scale	29,925

\* Top of scale represents the highest possible monthly salary, bottom of scale the entry level, while the median is the most frequent salary level according to wage statistics.

Although the pay scale is similar across all institutions and disciplines, professors have higher salaries in some disciplines than in others (see Table 3), but differences are relatively small. A survey among academic staff shows that by December 2008, 5 percent of the professors in economics had a monthly salary of less than 46,500 NOK and 5 percent had more than 67,500 NOK; less than 5,000 kroner more than the 5 percent best paid professors in the humanities (Forskerforbundet 2009). Data are not available for professors in law, but presumably, this group has higher salaries than those shown in Table 3 due to the comparably high salaries in the private sector (Hægeland and Møen 2007).

Data on monthly salary in private institutions are only available for one large specialised university institution in economics and business administration. The bottom level for professors is not that different from public institutions; 5 percent had a salary lower than 49,200 NOK and median monthly salary was 51,250 NOK. However, 25 percent of the professors earned more than 95,800 NOK per month, giving a mean of 81,000 NOK. Most of the other private institutions have a religious affiliation and salaries compare probably to that of public colleges (Source: The Norwegian Association of Researchers).

**Table 3.**  
**Monthly salary (Norwegian kroner) for professors in public higher education institutions by December 2008. Distribution by field. (Source: The Norwegian Association of Researchers)**

	5 % of professors earned less than:	Median monthly salary	Mean monthly salary	5 % of professors earned more than:
Humanities	43,683	48,992	50,791	62,750
Natural sciences	44,442	50,858	52,289	63,750
Medicine	44,333	53,483	54,697	65,417
Economics	46,518	53,483	55,649	67,500

In general, academic staff in public higher education institutions has salaries that are slightly lower than those of civil servants with comparable competence and seniority, but considerably lower than their counterparts in industry and the business sector are. Moreover, these differences have increased over time (Røed and Schøne 2005). Nevertheless, an academic career seems to be attractive in those subjects where a position in the public sector would be an alternative. Exceptions are subjects such as medicine, dentistry, technology, economics, and law, where the job-alternatives offer notably higher remuneration. Graduates possessing a higher degree and employed in industry or the business sector for some years after leaving university normally have higher salaries than their former professors do. In some disciplines, it is therefore a problem that some of the most talented graduates are not interested in a university career.

In an international perspective, Norway is attractive for PhD students, because they are appointed to temporary posts for three or four years and salaries commensurate with the first appointment in the public sector for candidates holding a master's degree. In addition, salaries for post docs are competitive on the international academic market. However, salaries for professors are regarded to be relatively low compared to those of professors in the major scientific countries in the Western world, especially in subjects like medicine and technology.

## **5. Non-salary benefits and supplementary employment**

In Norway, fringe benefits are not offered as part of academic remuneration at individual institutions, but all academic staff members are entitled to benefits like public health services, five weeks vacation and public pension.

With respect to pension, all academic staff members are compulsory members of the National Insurance Scheme and entitled to retirement pension, disability pension and other services. Academic staff employed in state higher education institutions has mandatory membership also in the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund and are entitled to additional retirement pension. Mem-

bership in the latter fund implies a two percent deduction of the gross salary (a pension fee). In addition, the employer contributes substantially to the pension fund, and the percentage of the gross salary of an employee has been increasing over the last years due to an ageing population. Thus, for the purpose of international comparison, membership in the latter pension fund can be regarded as a kind of fringe benefit equivalent to at least 10 percent of the gross salary. The combined retirement pension for academic staff adds up to two thirds of the salary at the time of retirement.

Many academic staff members have some kind of additional employment, but detailed statistical data on volume and earnings are not available. A professor or lecturer is entitled to take additional employment, but the upper limit is 20 percent of a full-time position.

Various surveys conducted among academic staff provide, however, some information on the scale of additional income and supplementary employment. According to their own estimates, in 2001, staff members in the university sector had an average working week of 49 hours including 5 hours for activities that were not part of their duties as university employees (Kyvik and Smeby 2004). In the college sector, in 2005, the average working week was 43 hours including 3 hours for external work (Larsen and Kyvik 2006). These activities include teaching and examination work at other institutions, consultancy and professional practice as a lawyer, physician, dentist, etc, but also participation in professional associations, research councils, and work for journals as editor and referee. It is thus difficult to provide exact information on the scale of additional income based on these time survey data, but in the university sector 3 hours on average a week might be a qualified estimate, and in the college sector 2 hours a week.

In a survey undertaken in 2007/2008 among academic staff in universities and colleges as part of an international comparative study (The Changing Academic Profession), one third of the staff members reported that they had some kind of additional employment (see Table 4), varying between one fourth in the humanities and half of the staff in medicine and technology.

However, most academic staff has some additional income even if they do not have additional employment. This may include examination work at other institutions, honoraria for lectures, royalties for book publishing, etc.

**Table 4. Percentage of academic staff in public higher education institutions that in 2007/2008 worked for an additional employer or did additional remunerated work, by field. (Source: The Changing Academic Profession Project)**

	<b>Another higher education institution or research institute</b>	<b>Another employer outside academe</b>	<b>Self-employed</b>	<b>No other employment</b>	<b>Total</b>
Humanities	7	3	12	78	100
Social sciences	22	5	6	67	100
Natural sciences	16	8	3	73	100
Technology	23	12	11	54	100
Medicine	17	17	18	48	100
Total	16	7	9	67	100

(N = 939)

## 6. Conclusion

In the Norwegian higher education system, career opportunities and pay raise based on research achievements have improved considerably over time. In the 1990s, changes in the reward structure encouraged achievements in research. From 1993 on, associate professors have been entitled to apply for promotion to full professor based on their research competence irrespective of vacant professorships. Furthermore, the former central negotiation system of fixed salaries for professors regardless of research production and scientific reputation was changed into a system of combined central and local negotiations. The basic purpose of local negotiations is to consider market value and to reward productivity and quality in research. These changes most likely have enhanced the research orientation due to a closer link than earlier between research achievements, career development and pay increase.

However, in many ways, international reports of increasing differentiation of the academic profession and increasing diversification of working conditions of academic staff do not fit very well with developments in Norway. Egalitarian aspects of the Norwegian higher education system still prevail and have counteracted international trends and state initiatives to diversify working conditions among academic staff. At the system level, with the passing in 1995 of a common Act on Universities and Colleges, a process of homogenisation (organisation and management principles, funding structures, personnel policies, etc.) across the sectors was initiated. The academic profession has become more homogeneous, with regard to both career structure and working conditions. Nevertheless, individual salary differences have increased due to a stronger emphasis on market value and research performance.

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