

Programme for Education and Research

The Swedish Presidency 2018



Nordic Council
of Ministers



Programme for Education and Research
The Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2018

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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MINISTER'S FOREWORD

HELENE HELLMARK KNUTSSON

Education and research represent belief and hope for the future. Education has become accessible to more people, and research is finding answers to more and more questions, but at the present time we still face a troubled world and major challenges to our societies. In uncertain times like these, it is more important than ever to continue to invest in knowledge. This is fundamental to a sustainable democracy, and equips people to be active citizens in a changing society. Education and research also build strong societies and enable us to address challenges such as digitalisation and climate change. Research and research-based knowledge are key to meeting policy challenges and achieving sustainable development.

Addressing the challenges our societies face also calls for concerted efforts – something we have good experience of in the Nordic region and will continue to pursue. The similarities between us are greater than the differences, and working together on issues we are agreed on gives us an even stronger voice than we would each have on our own. Nordic co-operation is also something our citizens appreciate, an appreciation we must seek to safeguard.

The Nordic countries are a small region in the far north. To compete, we need to draw on our knowledge and skills, research and innovative capacity. By focusing on knowledge and working together, we can put our region on the world map. Further strengthening the Nordic region as a knowledge region is, moreover, a major aim of the Swedish Presidency.



PHOTO: KRISTIAN POHL/GOVERNMENT OFFICES OF SWEDEN

INTRODUCTION

Through its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2018, Sweden wishes to work for an **inclusive, sustainable and innovative Nordic region**. A Nordic region that is secure and open. In achieving those goals, education and research have a crucial part to play. To enable individuals and societies to develop, education has to be inclusive and accessible to all. The education we provide must be sustainable, but also capable of responding to the changes taking place in society. Research is one of the areas that need to be most innovative and dynamic of all, to offer answers to the major challenges which our societies face and which we share across the Nordic countries.

The Nordic region is in many respects a trailblazer, well known for its welfare systems, good education and innovative climate. The things that make our region unique we should seek to preserve, while not fearing change when that is what is required. For the Nordic region to retain its lead in knowledge, skills and competencies, we must constantly work together to develop and refine our systems of education and research. When we set out to develop and im-

prove those systems, we look in the first instance at what our Nordic neighbours are doing. This sharing of experience is a key component of Nordic co-operation, and one that we wish to strengthen and develop during the Swedish Presidency.

The Swedish Presidency also wants to strengthen Nordic added value. Nordic co-operation should focus on areas that are better addressed at a Nordic than, say, at a European or a global level. Another important starting point for the Swedish Presidency is the need for a long-term approach. That requires a clear focus on long-term strategic issues that will strengthen the foundations for Nordic co-operation in education and research.

Two questions crucial to the future will dominate the Presidency year. The first is our common Nordic research policy, the second the report of the High Level Group on the future of Nordic co-operation in education.

A COMMON NORDIC RESEARCH POLICY

Research policy co-operation under the Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) is one of the most extensive and oldest areas of collaboration within the Nordic Council of Ministers. In the 2017 financial year, Nordic resources devoted to it totalled some DKK 122 million, or around 13% of the Council of Ministers' overall budget, making this, in financial terms, one of the largest areas of co-operation under the Council of Ministers. The overarching aims of this co-operation are to help the Nordic region develop into a leading knowledge region, and for the research undertaken to promote the advances in knowledge that are fundamental to the development of society, and policymaking, across a wide range of fields and sectors.

Most Nordic Council of Ministers research initiatives are channelled through NordForsk, whose aims are to promote effective Nordic co-operation in research, research training and research infrastructure, thereby ensuring that the new knowledge produced is of the highest quality internationally. NordForsk is primarily a platform for collaboration between national re-

search funding agencies, the idea being that it will attract participation in and co-funding of joint research undertakings by those agencies.

A long-term view and Nordic added value should be guiding principles of NordForsk's work in the years ahead. That work must continue to offer clear added value, in relation to what is being done at both the national and the European level. To that end, the role and activities of NordForsk need to be defined more clearly. Significant Nordic resources are allocated to collaboration between funding agencies, at the same time as NordForsk has not entirely succeeded in establishing a collaboration process and a range of programmes that have attracted national funders to the extent intended. During its Presidency year, Sweden will continue to address these issues, in order to further clarify NordForsk's role and further develop its work in terms, for example, of Nordic added value, improved collaboration and a greater focus on quality. Following extensive deliberations, MR-U has agreed a research policy report to the Nordic Council, setting out its position on a number of questions relating to



Photo: Mads Pihl – Visit Greenland

Arctic research has an important place in Nordic co-operation.

research co-operation and the activities of NordForsk. The Ad Hoc Group on research co-operation, appointed in 2016, also presented a report on this area of co-operation in 2017. Implementing the positions adopted in these two reports, and in certain respects following them up with terms of reference for further work, as well as carrying forward the discussions at the summit held in conjunction with MR-U 02/17 on 6 November, will be important priorities of the Swedish Presidency.

During the Swedish Presidency, the discussions from the Norwegian Presidency in 2017 will be pursued further, with a view to establishing, at MR-U 01/18,

a clarified statement of direction that will give NordForsk a clear basis for its activities over the next three years. At the end of that period, an evaluation of its work should be undertaken.

Conference on Arctic research

The Arctic is a geographical region on which there is a growing focus. It is central to a great deal of climate research, offering as it does particularly favourable conditions for studying many aspects of climate change. At the same time, the geopolitics of the Arctic are rapidly changing, for example as new mineral deposits and new potential trade routes are explored. The Nordic countries, with their geographical

proximity, have a clear link to the Arctic region, and research on the Arctic therefore has a natural and important place in Nordic co-operation, offering clear Nordic added value and helping to make the Nordic region a leading one in terms of knowledge.

A conference focusing on Arctic research is planned during the year, providing an opportunity for Nordic researchers to present the results of current work in this field. Arctic researchers from beyond the Nordic region will also be invited. Other aims of the conference will include identifying opportunities for collaboration, promoting dialogue and interdisciplinary partnerships, and strengthening the base for 'science diplomacy'.

Open science conference

'Open science' refers to a process or business model whereby, among other things, research results are made openly available, researchers share their knowledge in new ways, and there is an endeavour to involve citizens and the wider society more closely in research. In general, the governments of the Nordic countries have welcomed this

approach, and several of the countries have adopted policies promoting open access research, albeit in somewhat varying forms and with partly differing starting points, for example in terms of intellectual property rights. A number of the countries have endorsed the EU Competitiveness Council's conclusions on open science.

Several Nordic countries are thus addressing open science issues. Greater sharing of knowledge and experience in this field could help to enhance the quality of such efforts. Key drivers of scientific output and within open science are incentives and reward systems. Questions arise, for instance, about how different open science systems could affect the incentives for scientific output, and how scientific findings could be used. Other questions relate, for example, to the Open Science Cloud and relevant infrastructure. During its Presidency, Sweden will hold a conference on open science, to increase understanding of such issues, further develop work in this area, and promote the development of the Nordic region as a leading knowledge region.

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF CO-OPERATION IN EDUCATION

In 2017 the Nordic Council of Ministers appointed a High Level Group to carry out a strategic review of how future Nordic co-operation in education could be strengthened and renewed, and to help provide concrete answers to present and future challenges.

The High Level Group presented its report in November 2017, making a wide range of recommendations in several different areas. During the Swedish Presidency, the report and its recom-

mendations will be followed up, beginning with a seminar in a hearing format early in the year. The seminar, aimed at stakeholders in the Nordic countries who are affected by the report's recommendations, is intended to gather responses to the proposals prior to further follow-up within the Committee of Senior Officials for Education and Research (EK-U) and MR-U.

The report provides a good starting point for an ongoing discussion about future co-operation in education. The hope is that the seminar will thus help to secure solid support for this area of Nordic co-operation, in both the member countries and the autonomous territories. The ambition is that, based on the High Level Group's report, it will be possible at MR-U 01/18 to adopt clear guidelines and priorities for further work by the Council of Ministers on educational issues in the coming years.





PHOTO: FLICKR/NORDIC INNOVATION

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

High standards in higher education are one of the keys to the Nordic region remaining competitive in a rapidly changing world. The Nordic countries face similar challenges and are able to benefit from each other's experiences and discuss common solutions. In the light of this, the Nordic Council of Ministers appointed an Ad Hoc Group in 2014 whose remit included submitting proposals on how Nordic co-operation on quality in higher education might be deepened.

In 2016, the Ad Hoc Group, which includes representatives of ministries, public agencies and higher education institutions across the Nordic countries, presented its report, Student-centred approach from a Nordic perspective. On the group's initiative, the Finnish and Norwegian Presidencies (in 2016 and 2017, respectively) held one-day conferences on quality in higher education. Attracting around a hundred delegates, these conferences provided a forum for a broad target group in higher education, from ministries, public agencies, universities and stakeholder organisations.

The chance to receive a high-quality education, regardless of where you live, is fundamental to young people having wider choices, and to people later in life being able to continue their education, develop new skills and competencies, and adapt to new and changing times. It should be possible to study in every part of a country and throughout one's life. This is a challenge all the Nordic countries share. In June 2018, therefore, Sweden will be hosting a one-day conference focusing on the quality of lifelong learning.

The recommendations made by the High Level Group include suggestions for more extensive co-operation on educational data and statistics. In 2018, the Ad Hoc Group will consequently be carrying out a survey of statistics and indicators of quality in higher education in the Nordic countries.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AMONG THE ADULT POPULATION

Does the adult population meet current and future needs in terms of knowledge and skills? That is a question which the OECD programme PIAAC¹ has been studying. The first results of its International Survey of Adult Skills were published in 2013.

With funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers, researchers, statistics producers and experts from national adult education institutions in the Nordic region have been able to establish

a Nordic PIAAC Network. This network has, among other things, produced a Nordic PIAAC report and created a Nordic PIAAC database, incorporating variables from the survey and from national registers.

The Nordic PIAAC report, published in 2015, showed that, in general, the Nordic countries had good results when it came to the knowledge and skills of the working population, but that there was also a relatively large proportion of people aged 16–64 with low levels of knowledge. Several Nordic analyses based on PIAAC survey data have been performed in recent years.

At the end of 2018, an expert seminar will be held at which the results of these Nordic analyses will be presented and discussed. It will be co-hosted by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Employment of Sweden.



¹ Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies.

IMPLEMENTING CURRICULA IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – WHAT WORKS?

The preschool curriculum is a highly topical issue in the Nordic countries. Both Norway and Finland are currently implementing new curricula for early childhood education, and Sweden is about to embark on a similar process. The Nordic Network on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)² therefore provides an important arena in which the countries can share experience and knowledge about effective implementation. During the year, a network seminar will be arranged, focusing on questions such as implementation methods, evaluation of implementation outcomes,

and how the wordings of curricula can be achieved in practice. The seminar will also explore the possibility of creating data in national evaluations of implementation that can be used at a transnational level. In addition, the European Commission's quality indicators for early childhood education and care will be presented.

² The Nordic Network on ECEC has met once or twice a year since 2007. Covering the five Nordic countries and the three autonomous territories, it draws its members from government ministries and agencies responsible for preschool education.



THE DIS NETWORK

During the year, the DIS Network, initiated in 2015 as part of the Finnish Presidency project Democracy, Inclusion and Security, will be carried forward. On a basis of Nordic co-operation and exchange of experience, and building on the democratic mission of schools, the network seeks to strengthen the role of education in countering violent extremism. The focus during the Swedish Presidency will be on research and higher education, with the theme 'Education for Democracy in Troubled Times'.

As part of this theme, a conference is planned in the autumn for researchers, policymakers and practitioners. The aim is to create greater Nordic consensus on the part education has to play in democracy. In addition, there are plans for a Nordic anthology on how teacher education in the Nordic region prepares teachers for a democratic role amidst the growing challenges of populism, extremism and fake news.



SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTH IN THE NORDIC REGION

The Nordic Council of Ministers' vision is that the Nordic region should be the best place in the world for young people – a vision reflected during the Swedish Presidency in the Presidency project *Social inclusion of youth in the Nordic region*. The project sets out to make visible, and seek to reduce, inequality and segregation, and to increase young people's participation in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

On completion of this project, the aim is to have established an overall picture of current Nordic knowledge about the social inclusion of young people, guided by a youth perspective. Young people are to be actively involved in delivery of the project, which is being run by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society. Assisted by researchers, public officials and other experts, and in the light of young people's own accounts of their experience, the Agency will develop approaches, structures and policies designed to address and prevent the problems that give rise to social exclusion.

A conference on the social inclusion of young people is planned for the later part of 2018, bringing together experts, researchers and young people from the Nordic countries.



WORKING ARRANGEMENTS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

One ministerial meeting is planned during the year. The arrangements for these meetings have been discussed for some time, and Sweden's intention is to make them as relevant as possible to the ministers attending. First, there will be better consultation with ministers prior to meetings on the themes to be discussed. Second, meetings will be arranged in such a way as to promote informal discussion and relevant sharing of experience between ministers on

current issues, one suggestion being to hold parts of meetings within a smaller group or on an 'inner circle' basis. Themes for discussion at meetings should offer added value at a national level and help to meet the challenges the Nordic countries and autonomous territories face in education. Sweden will also take note of the High Level Group's call for greater scope at ministerial meetings to discuss strategic, long-term and visionary co-operation.



CALENDAR

MEETING/CONFERENCE/SEMINAR	DATE	VENUE
EK-U 01/18 (Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials for Education and Research)	20 February	Copenhagen, DK
Consultation hearing on the High Level Group's report on future Nordic co-operation in education	15 March (date to be confirmed)	Stockholm, SE
MR-U 01/18 (Meeting of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research)	25 April	Stockholm, SE
Seminar on implementing curricula in early childhood education	23–24 May	Stockholm, SE
EK-U 02/18	12–13 June	Lund, SE
Conference on quality in higher education	13 June (date to be confirmed)	Stockholm, SE
Meeting of Directors General	30–31 August	Lidingö, SE
EK-U 03/18	20 September	Stockholm, SE
Conference on open science	October/November	
Conference as part of the DIS project Education for Democracy in Troubled Times	29–30 November	Örebro, SE

MEETING/CONFERENCE/SEMINAR**DATE****VENUE**

Nordic expert seminar presenting the results of Nordic research based on data from the PIAAC database

November/December

Stockholm, SE

EK-U 04/18

5 December

Copenhagen, DK

(To be confirmed:)

Dissemination conference on the social inclusion of young people

November/December

(To be confirmed:)

Conference on Arctic research

Date not set

Hanasaari/Hanaholmen, FI





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