



Nordic Research Board (NRB) - an organisation for Nordic research co-operation

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1. The Need for a Research and Innovation Area in the Nordic Region

Advanced, high-quality research is a decisive prerequisite for the development capacity of modern society and for international competitiveness. Research and the climate for innovation together constitute prerequisites for wealth. Research at the highest international level requires top quality environments. However, the cost of high quality research tends to get increasingly higher.

During the past four years, the European Union has been developing the concept of a European Research Area (ERA), to strengthen collaboration, ensure better use of resources and expand activities. Regional research collaboration will become increasingly important in an enlarged Europe and regional co-operation patterns will most likely develop.

The Nordic countries are prominent in many areas in an international context and this should be better exploited to create synergies and a stronger profile. However, despite a considerable proportion of research results, measured as share of the economy, the Nordic countries are all small in absolute numbers on the global arena. Furthermore, there are no guarantees of continued success when scientific competition becomes fiercer.

For this reason, it is necessary to establish a Nordic Research and Innovation Area with the purpose of strengthening the Nordic countries as a region in Europe and in other parts of the world.

2. Some Examples of Successful Nordic Collaboration

One example of successful Nordic collaboration is the Nordic Centres of Excellence (NCoE) to promote research of the highest scientific excellence. The purpose of establishing the centres was to create added value and improve the quality of Nordic research. The NCoEs are virtual units, four of which were established in 2002 for global change and two in 2004 for molecular medicine.

The Max Lab at Lund University, shared by all the Nordic countries, is another example of successful Nordic infrastructural collaboration. Co-operation that has a catalysing effect on research results has been established through the Nordic research institutions. The specific purpose of the five-year Nordic research programmes is to improve Nordic competence and gather small research units together. The Nordic Optic Telescope (NOT) collaboration, located in the Canary Islands, is another successful example of co-operation between the Nordic countries.

During the next few years, many researchers who are active today will retire, making it necessary to recruit many more young research-workers to universities, research environments, industry and society in general. Several Research Schools have been established in recent years, to attract and keep prominent researchers and research students in the Nordic coun-

tries. The Nordic Academy for Advanced Study (NorFA) has granted funds to Nordic Research Schools linked to the NcoEs for global change and molecular medicine. NorFA has also granted funds to a Nordic Research School within the humanities and the social sciences.

3. Synergies between research and innovation

The Strategy of the Nordic Ministers for Education and Research

In 2002, the Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) commissioned Professor Gustav Björkstrand at Åbo Akademi University to examine the conditions for closer research collaboration in the Nordic countries.

He presented his proposal in a White Paper entitled “NORIA – Nordic Research and Innovation – Co-operation for a World-Leading Position” in the autumn of 2003. The Nordic Ministers for education and research supported the proposal to establish a research and innovation system based on two pillars, one for research and one for innovation with strong links between the two. The MR-U has named the research pillar within NORIA The Nordic Research Board (NRB). NordForsk in Scandinavian.

The Strategy of the Ministers for Trade and Industry

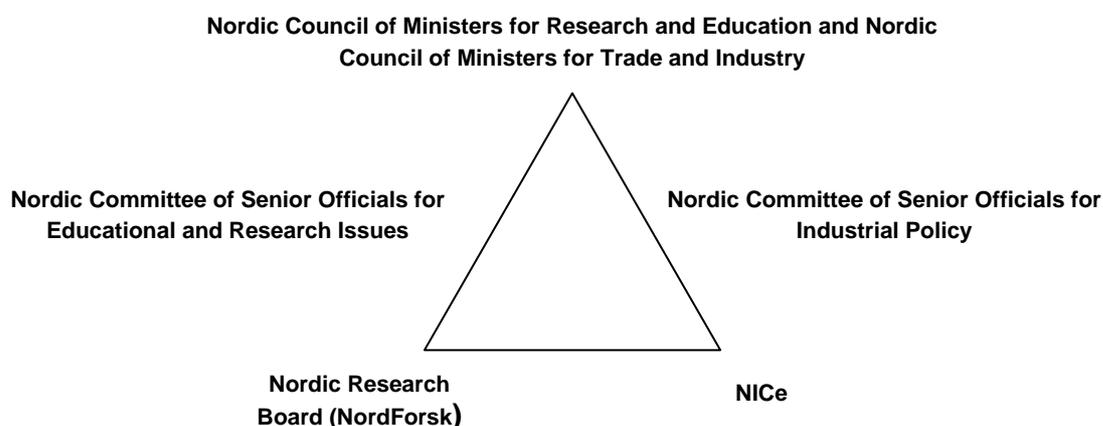
In parallel with these measures, the Council of Ministers for Trade and Industry (MR-N) has initiated work to develop a specific innovation strategy for trade and industry. A report entitled “Nordic Strength, National Benefit and Global Excellence: A Proposal for a Nordic Innovation Policy Collaboration programme” was presented in May 2004. The strategy outlined in the report will also impact on research in important ways. There is already an institution under the auspices of the Council of Ministers for Trade and Industry, The Nordic Innovation Center (NICe), which may constitute the second pillar; that is, serve as a complement to and co-operation partner with a new structure for Nordic research collaboration.

Conclusion

Close collaboration between research and innovation is important. For this reason, it is imperative to foster close contacts between research institutions and research-based activities in trade and industry and between a new Nordic research structure and NICe. The role of research collaboration should be considered to be an important element in the innovation process in trade and industry and for society’s capacity for renewal. More ambitious efforts to turn scientific and technological progress into new enterprises and more jobs are an important part of the justification for enhanced Nordic collaboration.

A Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA) should be created for all the reasons listed above. The crucial players in this new structure should be **a Nordic Research Board (NRB)** and the **Nordic Innovation Center (NICe)**.

Fig: Illustration of a Nordic Triple Helix within NORIA



4. The Tasks of the Nordic Research Board

The Nordic Research Board (NRB) will provide the organisational framework for promoting collaboration between the central research-funding bodies in the Nordic countries. The aim should be to define collaboration on the basis of **national priorities** and identified common interests. The basis for all granting of funds should be excellent scientific quality.

The available Nordic funds transferred to the NRB are expected to amount to just over MDKK 76 in 2005 and to rise to MDKK 100 in 2007. If other Council of Ministers research activities can also be attracted to the NRB, the disposable funds may rise to approx. MDKK 200.

The Nordic funds should be used as seed or marginal funds. The whole funding package will be organised as a co-financing scheme, involving both national and Nordic funds. The NRB will play a strategic role and primarily perform three functions: Co-ordination, funding and policy-making. The NRB will be ensured considerable freedom in terms of its activities and the organisation of its work and will enjoy complete autonomy in the allocation of funds. The NRB's decisions on appropriations will be based on evaluations of scientific quality.

The NRB will expand and further develop research collaboration, not only between the Nordic countries, but also with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and, at a later stage, possibly also with North-western Russia. The collaboration should be based on specific action plans. The Nordic Council of Ministers already supports a researcher exchange scheme between the Baltic countries and North-western Russia through the Nordplus Nabo and NorFA Nabo (Nordic Academy for Advanced Studies) programmes.

5. The NRB Board

The Nordic Research Board (NRB) will have a board with nine members and seven observers, all appointed by the MR-U. The MR-U will also lay down the statutes of the organisation. The board will consist of five representatives of the national research councils, three representatives of universities in the Nordic countries and one representative of enterprises carrying out research. The observers will consist of one representative of each of the autonomous areas, one joint representative of the national research-funding bodies in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, one representative of the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers, one representative for the staff of the NRB Secretariat and the Director of the Nordic Innovation Centre.

The board members should be leading representatives of their respective organisations. It is important to ensure that the board members together represent broad knowledge of research and research policy. The board will play a key role in making the planned collaboration successful.

The NRB will have a secretariat with the necessary competence to take initiatives in different areas. The NRB will replace and take over the tasks of the Nordic Research Policy Council (FPR) and the Nordic Academy for Advanced Studies (NorFA).

6. Collaboration between MR-U och MR-N

Close co-operation between research and innovation is imperative. This applies nationally, but also at Nordic level. At national level, several countries have developed constructive relationships between the two "pillars" of research and innovation policy. Correspondingly, it is important to establish close contacts between the NRB and NICE.

7. Timetable

The intention is to establish the Research and Innovation Area during 2005. More information is available on the Nordic Council of Ministers website, www.norden.org. Click on "Co-operation" and then "Research."