



Evaluation of Nordplus

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Evaluation of Nordplus

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Foreword Nordic Council of Ministers

In 2011, the Nordic Council of Ministers will decide on the next generation of Nordplus.

Nordplus is the largest ongoing programme run by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the most comprehensive example of Nordic/Baltic co-operation. It covers a wide range from kindergarten to university, adult education and language partnerships, and the programmes have grown in both breadth and depth since Nordplus was first launched more than two decades ago.

Today, Nordplus includes:

- Nordplus Junior (kindergarten, pre-school, primary- and lower-secondary school and upper-secondary school)
- Nordplus Higher Education (university and colleges)
- Nordplus Adult (adult education)
- Nordplus Horizontal (partnerships that transcend levels of education)
- Nordplus Nordic Language and Culture (language partnerships).

Since 2008, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have participated in the programme on an equal footing with the five Nordic countries Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland and the three autonomous territories the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland Isles.

The Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) was commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers to conduct an evaluation of the Nordplus programmes. The findings of the evaluation are that Nordplus is valuable *per se*, that it generates considerable added value and that it is important to continue and further develop the programmes. It is positive that so many people have contributed ideas and opinions about the way forward. The report also outlines three potential future scenarios for Nordplus, and proposes certain tangible changes to the programme.

The Council of Ministers would like to thank NIFU for the report, which constitutes a sound basis for future progress and for the decisions that need to be taken in 2011. The report will also make interesting and useful reading for all those who are interested in Nordplus and in Nordic/Baltic educational co-operation.



Gard Titlestad

Head of department

Nordic Council of Ministers

Preface

In 2009, the Nordic Council of Ministers issued a call for tenders for an evaluation of the Nordplus Framework Programme and Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture Programme. NIFU STEP (which changed its name to NIFU in December 2010) was commissioned and the evaluation was conducted by the researchers Jorunn Spord Borgen, Bjørn Stensaker and Vera Schwach. NIFU also consulted Kazimierz Musial of the University of Gdansk during the evaluation process, particularly in relation to the question of Baltic experiences of Nordplus.

NIFU would like to take this opportunity to thank the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat and its main co-ordinator and main administrators for excellent assistance and good communications throughout the project. We would also like to thank everybody involved in Nordplus who has made themselves available for interviews and contributed with their knowledge and experiences of the project. We hope that the report will prove useful in the future organisation of Nordplus.

Oslo, January 2011

Sveinung Skule
Director

Jannecke Wiers-Jenssen
Research manager

Summary

For more than two decades, Nordplus has been the main initiative in the field of Nordic co-operation on education. Since its inception in 1988 it has taken the form of a succession of fixed-term programmes. The current programme started in 2008 and will continue until the end of 2011. In 2009, the Nordic Council of Ministers decided to commission an evaluation of the Nordplus Framework Programme and Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture Programme (NLC). NIFU was commissioned to conduct the evaluation. This report comprises the written feedback from that evaluation.

The Framework Programme comprises four sub-programmes:

- Nordplus Junior
- Nordplus Horizontal
- Nordplus Higher Education
- Nordplus Adult

For the first time, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), have taken part in the new Nordplus programme launched in 2008. The decision was taken to continue NLC, but as a separate programme without Baltic participation.

The overall objectives for Nordplus are diverse, and include promoting Nordic languages and culture; mutual Nordic–Baltic language and cultural understanding; contributing to the development of quality and innovation in the educational systems; strengthening and developing Nordic educational co-operation; and contributing to the creation of a Nordic-Baltic educational area.

Based on this diversity, the remit of the evaluation remit was as follows:

- How have the programmes functioned during the programme period, including the programme structure and programme committees?
- What results have been achieved in relation to the overall objectives stipulated when the new programmes were introduced?
- To what extent have the Baltic countries been successfully integrated?
- How has the profiling, communication and follow-up of experiences and results from the programme been implemented?
- How has the administration of the programmes worked, including the online application and reporting system (ARS)?

Seen in a longer-term perspective, the political ambitions behind Nordplus have changed considerably. Any evaluation of the Framework Programme will not just be about the extent to which the objectives originally specified for the programme have been achieved, but also whether the Nordplus initia-

tive is forward-looking and sustainable in relation to the current political context – in particular the globalisation initiative launched by the Nordic prime ministers in 2007.

The evaluation has looked at the Nordplus programmes both individually and collectively, and the conclusions reached are summed up as follows:

Nordplus Horizontal

Horizontal is the youngest programme in the Nordplus family, and was originally founded to develop Nordplus activities beyond the focus on mobility that has traditionally characterised the programmes.

Although Horizontal has suffered from a number of teething problems related to uncertainty about its specific purpose, both users and those who run the programme feel that it is now working well. However, the extent to which the programme has established a clear profile is somewhat unclear, since the nature of its users has changed since the start-up phase. In general, Horizontal has benefited from relatively good resources, and there seems to be little need for greater investment. The main- and co-administrators also seem to work well together, and users feel that the programme is run in a positive manner, and with proper user support.

Nordplus Higher Education

Nordplus Higher Education is the biggest and best-established programme in the Nordplus family. The main impression is that, in general, the programme works well. It is run in an efficient manner, and the management and administration seem to be professional and easily accessible to the users. However, looking at the programme period as a whole, the administrative dissemination of results and the analyses of the programme are somewhat inadequate, although this has much to do with the introduction of ARS at the start of the period.

However, it is also possible to argue that, for some of the networks, Nordplus Higher Education has gradually become such an established form of co-operation that Nordplus grants are thought of more in terms of “operational funding” than incentives to generate added value. The fact that the number of applications and the amount applied for are as high as they are may indicate that many of the users apply on the basis of “old habits” and tradition. Many of the applications are also successful, and it is questionable whether quality is always the most important selection criterion when it comes to funding – particularly in relation to mobility activities. There would appear to be room for more innovative thinking about the nature of this programme in the years to come.

Nordplus Junior

Nordplus Junior seems to be a relevant and interesting programme for the target group, and the users are satisfied. However, opinions differ among stakeholders at the various levels within Nordplus Junior about how well the

programme is working at the moment and what challenges lie ahead. A relatively large number of users think that the programme is resource-intensive, particularly because of the self-financing requirement. However, this point of view seems, to a certain extent at least, to stem from a lack of understanding of the flexibility associated with these requirements.

The low level of activity among kindergartens in Nordplus Junior suggests that this part of the programme is of little relevance and should be dropped. Although Nordplus Junior is designed to support the development of quality and the renewal of primary and lower secondary during the current programme period (particularly in relation to development projects and theme networks), mobility remains the main area of activity. Based on the framework conditions in the sector, there seem to be clear signals about what is perceived to be academically relevant and possible in practice.

Nordplus Adult

Nordplus Adult is a composite programme with diverse characteristics. Education is the core concept, and the programme is designed to support and develop formal, non-formal and informal adult learning. Many types of stakeholders would be appropriate applicants for funding, but Nordplus Adult has attracted few informal-learning projects, and a large proportion of those who do receive funds are large, formal organisations and institutions. Even though the self-financing component is lower in Adult compared with the other programmes, this is nevertheless a critical point for some in the target group, while others have the resources to cover their share of the costs.

There seem to be different interpretations of the regulations for the programme, and some consider the requirements on applicants to Adult rather strict. There are also different views within the programme about whether it should continue to expand its breadth and diversity, or whether its range is already over-extended. The contradiction between spreading knowledge at institutional level and acquiring individual experiences should be discussed in more detail within the programme.

Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture (NLC)

The current language and culture programme makes tangible some of the key political ideas that underpin Nordic co-operation, much of the benefit of which may well be intangible in nature but is highly significant nevertheless. For work on the Nordic languages, the attention and financial support means a great deal. On the whole, the programme works very well, especially at an administrative level, and the resources seem to be used appropriately and efficiently. However, challenges do exist: some are organisational, while others are rooted in lack of knowledge or lack of clarity about the political situation.

In terms of content, the programme profile is somewhat indistinct. Very few attempts have been made to integrate language and culture. In practice, the cultural dimension has limited independent significance. The profile of

NLC would also be clearer if the mobility component was transferred to Nordplus Junior, which would bring all of the mobility initiatives for the same target group under a single programme umbrella. On the organisational side, the programme benefits from the fact that – in practice, and compared to the rest of the formal framework programme – it is a repository for knowledge of the various, relevant target groups as well as the venue for positive mutual exchanges of information, knowledge and experience.

Overall evaluation

Looking at the programmes as a whole, the general impression is that some work better than others when it comes to profiling, administration and operations. Some of the differences are undoubtedly due to reasons beyond the remit of the individual programmes. Firstly, there are major differences in the size of the programmes, which definitely makes a difference when it comes to processing applications and following-up. With regard to the number of applications, Higher Education and Junior are the biggest programmes, and both feel that coping with the procedures in an effective manner can be a challenge in terms of capacity.

Secondly, some programmes have built up a clearly defined academic profile over the years (NLC, Higher Education), while others are either newly established (Horizontal) or have undergone a shift in content (Junior) that has increased the complexity and altered what the programme is supposed to be about, which may also have given rise to a greater degree of uncertainty among potential users.

Thirdly, there are also differences related to the extent to which the various programmes face competition, either from other Nordic programmes or from elsewhere, e.g. the EU and its LLP programmes. For example, some users report that the Nordic Masters Programme is considered more attractive than applications to Nordplus Higher Education.

In terms of quantitative indicators, the key findings are that 2008–2010 saw a decline in the number of applications to many programmes in the Nordplus family (Adult, Higher Education, Junior and even the relatively new Horizontal). However, some of the decline may be due to administrative issues. The number of projects funded has, however, remained relatively stable over the period, with a slight overall increase if all the programmes are taken in to account. In other words, it has become somewhat easier to get Nordplus applications accepted. In terms of resources, there is a tendency for the available resources to be distributed evenly instead of them being concentrated on fewer projects.

As far as the financial benefits are concerned, the split between the Nordic countries seems to be relatively equal. There is a tendency for the Baltic countries to receive more back than they pay into the programme. However, there is also some variation between the programmes in relation to this trend. Mobility is still a highly important activity in the Framework Programme as a whole. In 2010, almost 6,000 people participated in activities

of this type under the auspices of Nordplus. In general, the share of mobility activities per country has been good. As far as the question of whether the programmes have included projects that reflected the priorities stipulated for the programme period (e.g. climate) is concerned, the effect seems to have been relatively modest – with the notable exception of Nordplus Junior.

As far as the resource frameworks for the various programmes and the number of applications compared to the number of approved projects are concerned, the picture is that Horizontal and Adult generally have higher rejection rates than Higher Education, NLC and Junior. Both main administrators report that lack of resources is not seen as a major problem in any of the programmes, so there does not appear to be a distinct correlation between resource frameworks and rejection percentages.

In relation to programme management, the administrators, committee members and users are generally positive about the current matrix organisation. Most agree that the management structure creates a high degree of participation, sense of belonging and closeness between the various people involved. The challenge seems to be that this high degree of involvement and participation has a price – namely, that the framework programmes have relatively little decision-making power and information transparency. The main co-ordinator has no formal management authority, which is one reason why it takes time to implement decisions. Responsibility for joint tasks – such as information, marketing and analyses – also seems to be diluted under this management structure. The programme committees, which are essentially the decision-making bodies, also seem to function differently, and the opportunities to manage programmes strategically are limited. In general, the main administrators lay down the guidelines for the decisions that are taken. Given the complex management structure, it is somewhat surprising to note that the actual administration of the Nordplus programmes is relatively smooth in terms of the actual application procedures and the daily running of the various programmes. This seems largely to be related to the administrators' aptitude for finding practical solutions and their extensive experience of Nordplus.

The general impression from interviews with users and administrators is that the integration of the Baltic countries has been a success. For users in the Baltic countries, Nordplus seems to provide multiple forms of added value. Firstly, it provides tangible support for collaborative activities, which was high on the Baltic wish list and reflects genuine interest in the Nordic Region and Nordic languages and culture. Secondly, participation in Nordplus marks a step towards even greater internationalisation – including outside the Nordic Region. Thirdly, the Baltic side seems to have become acquainted with a different type of collaboration, which is characterised by a greater degree of informal contact and an emphasis on problem-solving, and in which formalities, rules and routines are perhaps less dominant. The fact that the Baltic countries receive more from Nordplus than they pay into it also indicates that they ought to be satisfied with participation.

The profiling of the programmes and the dissemination of project results have long been a challenge for Nordplus. Prior to the launch of the Nordplus Framework Programme in 2008, considerable time and resources were devoted to marketing and information activities. Today, unfortunately, profiling and dissemination still seems to be an area in which there are no systematic or co-ordinated endeavours, and where the initiatives taken in 2008 have not been followed up.

Compared with similar activities at international level – in particular the EU mobility programmes (LLP) – Nordplus still seems to have a relatively favourable profile. Despite the fact that many think Nordplus has become more “bureaucratic” over time – not least due to the fact that rules and procedures have begun to be more stringently applied, and partly because quality requirements on projects have been tightened – most users still seem to agree that Nordplus has many advantages compared with the EU’s LLP programmes.

During the programme period, the functionality of the online application and analysis programme (ARS) has been severely limited. The idea behind an online programme portal that handles various functions, including applications, information and analysis, is sound – and both users and administrators are positive about it. In 2011, ARS is working satisfactorily when it comes to the application process and the administration of applications. Some users think that the system still suffers from a number of technical problems, but the majority do not find it particularly difficult to use. The main problem today is that the analysis and statistics section is not working well, and this leads to many disadvantages for the main administrators.

Three scenarios for the future

The evaluation strongly indicates that Nordplus is considered to be a well-established and respected form of co-operation in the Nordic sphere. Applicants, users, administrators, committee members and other stakeholders have all clearly indicated that Nordplus is a valuable activity. Its existence is justified by the added value it generates and the themes it addresses.

However, there is considerable disagreement about the direction in which Nordplus should develop in the years to come. The views presented cover a wide and diverse range. In order to encourage a more fundamental discussion about the shape of Nordplus in the years to come, three slightly different scenarios have been outlined, based on the following keywords: consolidation, concentration and co-ordination. What all three scenarios have in common is that they focus on improving the overall management of Nordplus, and that the profiling of the programmes and dissemination of project results ought to be improved.

The three scenarios are based on the political context surrounding Nordplus, and the political ambitions that characterise Nordic co-operation at the moment.

- The consolidation scenario is based on the idea that seeking a balance between old and new purposes for Nordplus is a constant, and therefore the main priorities should be to adjust the management of the Framework Programme, make minor adjustments to the divisions between the programmes, and improve the profiling and dissemination of results.
- The concentration scenario argues that the inherent tensions in Nordplus may, over time, have a devastating effect upon the focus and impact of the programmes, and that their growth and increased complexity must be dealt with by means of stronger management and prioritisation within the programmes. It is also important to evaluate the programme structure more critically in relation to target groups, instruments or combinations of the three.
- The co-ordination scenario might be said to reflect the increased attention paid to educational issues in the Nordic Region – not least through the Globalisation Initiative – and the need for greater professionalism when dealing with such issues. In this perspective, developments outside Nordplus are also considered, as they may illustrate the extent to which the current programme organisation is the most appropriate way to approach these issues.

1. Background and basis for the evaluation

Nordplus started life as Nordplus Higher Education in 1988, and celebrated its 20th anniversary as a mobility programme with the transition to the framework programme in 2008. This transition was important for several reasons. The establishment of a new framework programme marked the fact that Nordplus was more than just an academic meeting place and a mobility programme – it was a vehicle for realising the political aim of further developing the Nordic countries' education systems.

In 2009, the Nordic Council of Ministers decided to commission an evaluation of the Nordic Framework Programme and of the Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture Programme (NLC). This is the Nordic Council of Ministers' biggest education programme in the field of lifelong learning. The Framework Programme comprises four sub-programmes:

- Nordplus Junior
- Nordplus Horizontal
- Nordplus Higher Education
- Nordplus Adult.

The Framework Programme and NLC were launched in their current form in January 2008, and have adopted a programme period up to and including December 2011. Prior to 2008, Nordplus consisted of three sectoral programmes: Junior, Adult and Higher Education, as well as Nordplus Language and Nordplus Neighbour, in which the emphasis was on co-operation projects with Russia and the Baltic countries. Each of these programmes had its own rules, objectives and administrative routines. As of 2008, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) have participated on equal terms for the first time in the joint Nordplus Framework Programme (albeit without formal influence on the programme's overall management). The decision was taken to continue NLC, but as a separate programme without Baltic participation.

The overall objectives of Nordplus are to:

- promote Nordic language and culture and mutual Nordic–Baltic linguistic and cultural understanding
- contribute to the development of quality and innovation in the educational systems for lifelong learning in the participating countries

through co-operation in education and training, development projects, exchange programmes and networking

- support, build on, reap the benefits of and promote innovative products and processes in education through systematic exchange of experiences and good practices
- strengthen and develop Nordic co-operation on education and help create a Nordic–Baltic educational area.

1.1 Key perspectives and questions in the evaluation of Nordplus

The evaluation of the Nordplus programmes is designed to provide a basis for their potential continuation after 2011. By looking at the 2008–2011 programme period, the evaluation will identify future development opportunities for the programmes in terms of content and administration. It is particularly important to evaluate how the programmes have functioned in the period and what results have been achieved in relation to the general objectives introduced in 2008. The evaluation is designed to identify any need for changes in the activities.

More specifically, the evaluation provides answers to the following questions:

- How have the programmes functioned during the period, including their structure and the programme committees?
- What results have the new programmes achieved in relation to the overall objectives stipulated when they were introduced?
- To what extent has the integration of the Baltic countries been successful?
- How has the profiling, communication and follow-up of experiences and results from the programme been implemented?
- How has the administration of the programmes worked, including the online application and reporting system (ARS)?

Looking at these issues in the context of the overall objectives for Nordplus co-operation, it becomes clear that the Nordplus initiative needs to be evaluated on the basis of several partially overlapping perspectives.

The first perspective is linked more to the basic intentions behind the establishment of Nordplus, and the ambition to improve *linguistic and cultural understanding* in the Nordic Region. In this perspective, the results will not only be material, but will also be associated with knowledge, interest and motivation. Information dissemination, profiling and legitimisation are keywords in this work. This perspective has repeatedly been mentioned as a fundamental driving force behind Nordic co-operation, and it was again underlined in the Council of Ministers' proposal that formed the basis for

the Nordplus programmes 2008–2011. Among other things, the proposal states that Nordplus is an important tool with which to promote “development of the participating countries’ culture, language and value communities” (Nordic Council 2006: 1).

The second perspective is related to Nordplus as an *education and mobility programme*. The objectives of Nordplus are primarily related to mobility, exchange programmes and co-operation between stakeholders in the Nordic countries, as well as the most appropriate and effective use of the resources allocated for this purpose. If, for example, a contribution is made to strengthening and developing Nordic educational co-operation, then it has to be possible to identify the tangible results of this, i.e. in the form of stakeholders who actually participate in Nordplus. This consideration is also reflected in the political intentions behind the new Nordplus programme for the period 2008–2011. Among other things, the Council of Ministers’ proposal that formed the basis for the creation of the new programme states that an important and general objective of Nordplus is to “strengthen and develop Nordic educational co-operation and contribute to the creation of a Nordic–Baltic educational area” (Nordic Council 2006: 3). Mobility programmes might be said to constitute the tangible realisation of this within a geographically defined educational area – and Junior in particular might be said to play an important role as a type of catalyst, including for exchange programmes and future co-operation.

The third perspective could be said to build on the previous one, in that it is hoped that actual exchanges and increased mobility will lead to *creativity, innovation and the dissemination of good practice* in the Nordic Region and the Baltic states. This objective is based on several political initiatives in the Nordic Region over the last decade, including the 2005 discussion paper “The Nordic Region as a Global Winner” and the Council of Ministers’ strategy for the period 2005–2007, “The Nordic Region at the Forefront of the Development of Human Resources”. It is therefore important that the projects selected have the potential to contribute to such development – or alternatively, that they contribute to the creation of networks that can act as drivers in this process. In recent years, this latter perspective has become even more important in Nordic co-operation, not least as a result of the Globalisation Initiative that the prime ministers launched in 2007, which has later been followed up by annual globalisation summits and various initiatives and activities in a number of fields. Perhaps the most significant initiative in the educational area is the Nordic Masters Programmes, which were launched in 2007 as a direct result of the Globalisation Initiative. The number of Nordic universities and colleges that have applied to take part indicates that the initiative is a great success.

The political considerations that laid the foundation for the new programme in 2008 also seem, to a large extent, to assume that Nordplus should ensure both “continuity and renewal” (Nordic Council 2006: 1). In the new programme, the former seems to have been achieved by a continuation of

pre-existing sector programmes (Higher Education, Adult and Junior) and many of the activities related thereto, while the latter has been achieved through the establishment of a new inter-sectoral programme (Horizontal); through the inclusion of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia as new countries in the co-operation; and through several changes in the management, organisation and operation of the Framework Programme – not least, as a result of the admission of the Baltic states.

The inclusion of the Baltic countries presented particular challenges for Nordplus. With regard to the overall management, it was made clear that Nordplus would remain formally owned by the Nordic countries, but it would be “open to participation” from the Baltic states (Nordic Council 2006: 4). At the same time, the co-operation was also to be “equal”, which was emphasised by the establishment of programme committees with Baltic participation, and by the fact that the Baltic countries agreed to contribute to the funding of Nordplus according the same model for contributions (based on countries’ GDP and population) that applies to the Nordic countries – thereby increasing the overall Nordplus budget. However, in terms of organisation, national information offices were only established in the Baltic countries, and the existing countries attended to the main administration of the respective programmes.

Although the political basis for Nordplus still has great validity, the political context has changed over time, and brought with it new expectations and wishes for the future of the programme. These new expectations do not necessarily imply a break with the past, but it should be stressed that a partnership with so many built-in dimensions and objectives also has the potential to prove contradictory (see Figure 1).

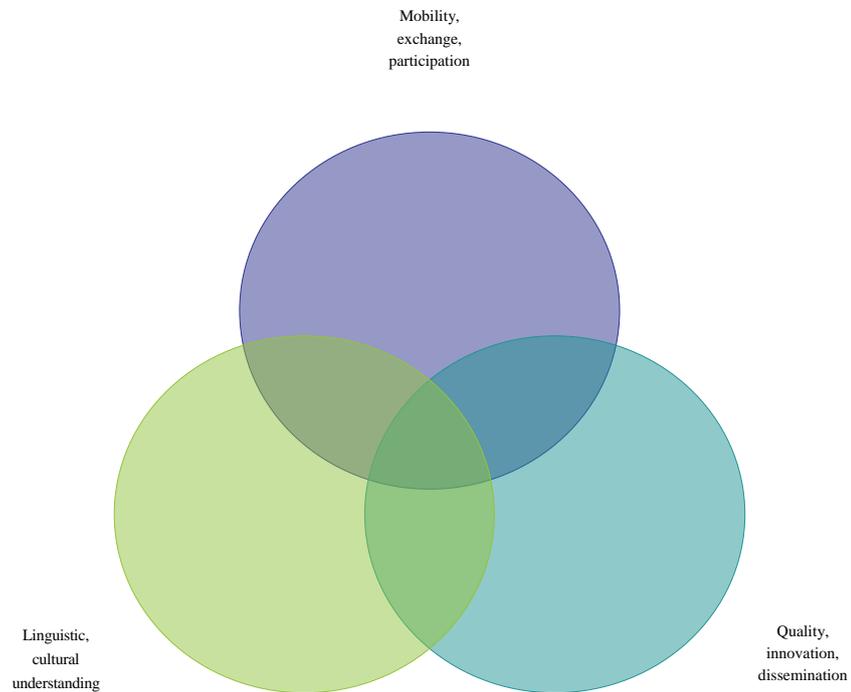


Figure 1: Objectives and potential areas of tension in Nordplus

In other words, Nordplus is no longer just about co-operation between educational institutions and exchanges of students and teachers. Rather, it has become a vehicle for achieving a number of policy goals that affect all parts of the education sector. Nordplus is further complicated by the fact that not only do the perspectives have to be balanced, but this equilibrium needs to be created by a complex form of organisation and operation in which different stakeholders have different roles but partially overlapping responsibilities.

The admission of the Baltic countries to Nordplus presented a challenge to both the limits and the purpose of Nordic education co-operation, not least in the light of the Globalisation Initiative.

This evaluation will return to some of these more general challenges in the concluding chapter. *1.1.1 Structure and operation of Nordplus 2008–2011*

The current organisation of Nordplus is different from previous forms of organisation, even though it is possible to see that it has adopted features of previous models (Vabø 2006). For many years, Nordplus was relatively centralised, but this was changed in 2004 when key features of the current system

were developed, and a more decentralised model established. The current organisation of Nordplus consists of a consortium with a main co-ordinator and five main administrators – one from each Nordic country (see Figure 2).

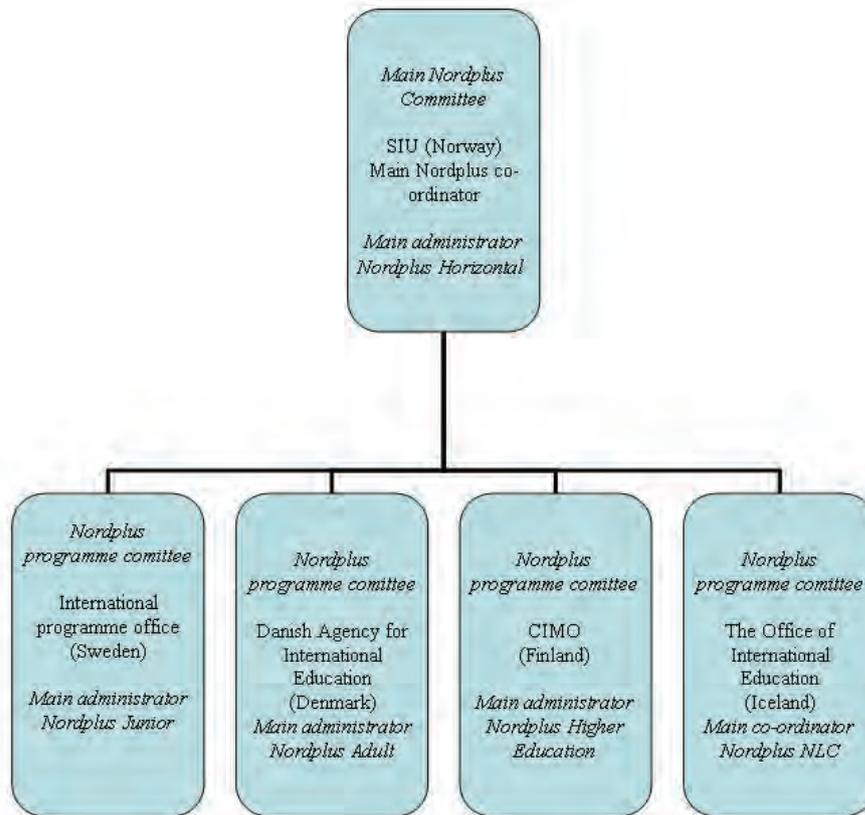


Figure 2: *Nordplus Organisation*

These main administrators are responsible for each sub-programme. In practice, NLC is integrated into the management and administration model. The role of main co-ordinator alternates between the five main administrators, and is at present held by SIU in Norway. In addition to having main responsibility for each programme, the five main administrators also have partial responsibility for the running of the other sub-programmes in their own countries.

In relation to the Baltic countries, the national information offices in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are responsible for information about Nordplus. In the autonomous territories, the main co-ordinators are Denmark (for Greenland and the Faroe Islands) and Finland (for Åland).

The decision-making structure in Nordplus is rooted in various committees. The main programme committee has overall responsibility for the Nordplus Framework Programme and Nordplus Horizontal. There are also separate programme committees for Junior, Adult and Higher Education. In addition, the individual sub-programmes also have advisory committees (Advisory Group for Nordic Co-operation on Higher Education (HØGUT),

Advisory Group for Nordic Co-operation on Adult Education (SVL), the Nordic Language Council (NSR) and Advisory Group for the Nordic School Co-operation (NSS)).

The Nordic Language Council fulfils the decision-making function in relation to Nordplus Language and Culture. The committees have responsibility for the development of both overall priorities and the individual programmes. The main administrators provide a secretariat function for the various programme committees. The main co-ordinator for Nordplus has responsibility for maintaining contact and communication with the Nordic Council of Ministers (the formal employer). It should be emphasised that NLC is not a formal part of Nordplus, even though it is included in the programme under the current organisational structure. The Baltic countries are not included in this work because of the programme's profile.

1.1.2 Operational problems reported 2008–2009

As part of the new organisational and management structure, a new joint ICT-based application and reporting system (ARS) came online in 2008, with the aim of exploiting economies of scale in the processing and evaluation of applications. This system has generated a certain amount of frustration and extra work for those involved (SIU 2009). Many of the problems now seem to have been resolved, but the main co-ordinator thinks that the system is still not satisfactory. It is suggested that problems with ARS may have had negative consequences for the reputation of Nordplus in general.

1.2 Data, methodology and basis for evaluation

The remit for the evaluation implies the use of both formative and summative methods of evaluation. Formative, since the evaluation is designed to contribute to learning and recommendations for future development; summative, as it also has to include analysis of the results achieved.

The programme activities for international co-operation and exchange programmes in an educational context are often evaluated in relation to a number of basic indicators, e.g. the number of applicants, how many applications were successful, how many participated and the extent of the spread in relation to different variables. This report tries to put this information into a system, both in the individual chapters dealing with the various programmes and in Chapter 8, where the programmes are compared. In this context, an important consideration is the programme's development over time, i.e. whether Nordplus is on the right path in relation to the objectives stipulated.

However, some results do not lend themselves to easy, unambiguous interpretation, including the extent to which Nordplus promotes Nordic language and cultural understanding, or contributes to processes and innovation

that develop the education sector. We have sought to validate data and evaluations in different ways. One important methodological tool is based on triangulation, in which information, data and points of view are collated from different sources and viewpoints in order to sketch a more general picture. Effective triangulation of data requires the evaluation to be based on desk research, quantitative data and analyses, self-reporting and visits, and interviews with various stakeholders and participants. Nordplus has expanded both geographically and thematically, which means that it has been necessary to prioritise elements of the data collection. In order to take development into account, it was considered desirable to prioritise increasing knowledge of good practice and experiences within the individual programmes, as illustrated by a special, strategically chosen case study. This case was selected in consultation with the main administrator of the programme, and involved direct contact between NIFU and the users.

Another way to improve the basis for the evaluation was to ask informants to compare Nordplus activities with similar programmes – primarily the EU's LLP programmes. LLP consists of four sub-programmes (Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus and Grundtvig) with profiles that are often equivalent to the Nordplus programmes. This enables a useful comparison to be made between the content and administration.

The evaluation also looked more closely at resource-related data at country-, programme- and project level. However, the data basis was insufficient at programme and project level. There were, therefore, limited opportunities to conduct systematic analyses at this level. An evaluation of the payment and distribution of funds at country level is presented in Chapter 8.

The data collation attempted also to involve the relevant principals, target groups and partners in the evaluation process – either in person, by e-mail or by telephone. This applies not only to representatives of the programme committees, the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat and the programme managers in the respective participating countries, but also to representatives of universities, colleges, primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, and other stakeholders who have an interest in Nordplus, e.g. the Nordic Association. Information has also been obtained from adult education organisations and other users of Nordplus Adult.

Given that the Baltic countries are still in an implementation phase, we also chose to conduct a relatively large number of interviews in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. A total of almost 80 people were interviewed as part of the evaluation, about half of whom were user representatives from the eight participating countries and autonomous territories (Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands). Qualitative interviews were thought to be preferable to a larger quantitative survey, as the wide range of issues covered by the evaluation would have required a very extensive and sophisticated questionnaire. The disadvantage of this approach is that we have less knowledge about the general validity of users' opinions. Nevertheless, triangulation

between different types of informants within the same programme provides an overview of more general trends.

NIFU has also tried to draw attention to this data through extensive use of quotations in the text. However, the quotes have been kept anonymous, partly to encourage greater openness during the interviews.

Table 1.1: Overview of data sources, analyses and their relation to the remit for the evaluation

Sources	How these sources respond to key themes of the Nordplus evaluation
Self-evaluation	Relationship between objectives, organisation, administration and results
Document analysis	General information about programme activities, analysis of results, analysis of information strategy. Profiling and communications.
Interviews	Evaluation of integration in the Baltic countries, administration of the programme
Comparative analyses	Results, relevance and impact of profiling and communications

The evaluation was also asked to think about the future of Nordplus, in relation to which NIFU has actively sought the views of active partners and participants in the programme. Our contribution has been to try to build upon these thoughts in the form of various scenarios for the Nordplus of the future (see Chapter 9).

1.3 Report structure

The report consists of nine chapters. The various programmes in the Nordplus family are described and evaluated in chapters 2–6. A separate chapter attempts to summarise the views of the Baltic countries (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 summarises and compares the programmes. Chapter 9 outlines potential future scenarios for Nordplus.

2. Nordplus Horizontal

2.1 Introduction

Nordplus Horizontal is the newest programme in the Nordplus family, and is still relatively small in terms of both the number of applications and the resources at its disposal. As the name suggests, the programme aims to be an inter-sectoral initiative in which education level or type of activity does not restrict participation.

According to the project description for Nordplus Horizontal, the programme supports innovative projects that transcend traditional categories and sectors – in particular, projects that are capable of addressing new, wider and more complex problems and challenges. The programme is aimed at institutions and organisations that work mainly in the field of education and lifelong learning. Funding applications for projects and networks must involve at least two sectors. They can involve co-operation between two education sectors (e.g. higher education and the primary-and-lower-secondary sector), or between organisations, institutions and businesses across the public, private and/or voluntary sectors. Applications must be for some form of educational co-operation. The activities in question must also involve at least three partners from three different participating countries. In addition, the application may also include participants from non-Nordic and non-Baltic countries. These must be regarded as relevant by the network or project partners.

The programme therefore supports a variety of initiatives:

- Seminars and workshops
- Seminars at which information and experiences are shared
- Conferences
- Analyses and studies
- Calculating and analysing statistics
- Research based on utilising existing data
- Development of innovative (language)training-, learning- and translation material
- Development of new courses and teaching modules based on new technology
- Communications and exchange of experiences related to education and learning.

2.2 Management structure and resources

The general impression is that the current organisational model, in which the tasks of the main administrator and co-administrators are divided between the various Nordic countries, works well for the Horizontal programme. In general, the organisational model seems to reflect established cultural traditions for co-operation in the Nordic Region, which are firmly rooted in values such as consensus, dialogue and reciprocity. Specific advantages mentioned as a result of this organisational form include good quality assurance of project applications and better targeting of information and profiling work at national level.

The challenge seems to be that a process-oriented perspective of this kind will often be at odds with a strong emphasis on action and results. The current matrix organisation will generally have greater co-ordination and management costs than organisational models with shorter and simpler lines of responsibility and authority. This seems particularly pronounced in relation to the allocation of responsibility and authority between the main administrator, the programme committee for Horizontal (which is identical to the main Nordplus committee), the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat and the Committee of Senior Officials. There seems to be a certain degree of uncertainty associated with the decision-making capabilities of each body. However, this does not signify a lack of co-operation. On the contrary, co-operation is described as positive and constructive.

The current organisational model is therefore relatively time- and resource-intensive, and it is the main administrator's view that the available administrative resources do not correspond with the requirements placed on information, quality assurance and reporting back. On the other hand, the organisation of Nordplus Horizontal cannot be viewed in isolation from the other Nordplus programmes. Given the complexity of co-ordinating the current Nordplus programmes, the main stakeholders seem satisfied with the existing model.

Looking more closely at programme funding and the number of applications to Horizontal, the main administrator is reasonably happy with the resource situation. However, this evaluation appears to be conditional on the quality of approved projects remaining high. Viewed over time, the success rate for applications still varies somewhat – from 46% in 2008 to 63% in 2010.

Many users have pointed out that the 50% self-financing requirement represents a challenge – especially for schools, which report that they have very limited funds available for this type of project and have only to a limited extent been able to come up with creative alternatives to cover their share of the costs.

Informants regard the new and relatively limited nature of the programme (compared to the others) as one of the special challenges facing Nordplus Horizontal. Lack of clarity about target groups, sectors and themes

means that Horizontal is more difficult to market, and that the applications are more difficult to compare. The main administrator finds that a lot of hard work has been put into defining what the programme is about, what kind of profile it is supposed to have, how to develop a common understanding of what can be defined as “inter-sectoral”, etc. The administrator believes that this work has now been put in, and that Horizontal is now better known and has a clearer profile as an independent programme within Nordplus. This point of view seems to be shared by the users and the co-administrators in other countries. A typical statement from a user illustrates this:

Nordplus Horizontal is, in many ways, the programme that was missing from the Nordplus family. We were, of course, previously in Nordplus Higher Education, but once we became aware of the degree of freedom in Horizontal, we decided to “move over” and we have no regrets. Horizontal has been a breath of fresh air, not only for Nordplus but also for our own thinking.

The inclusion of the Baltic countries is perceived as unproblematic in Nordplus Horizontal. The biggest change is probably linguistic in nature, as all communication has to be in English. A number of teething problems were encountered during the implementation phase (regarding guidance, information, the application process, etc.), but the Baltic countries now seem to be well integrated into Horizontal and are considered valuable additions to the co-operation. Compared with other programmes, Baltic participation in Horizontal is relatively high. Representatives of users in the Baltic states and views from the Nordic countries indicate that the Baltic states’ admission to the programme has been met with great enthusiasm. One explanation for this seems to be that the process of integration is easier because Horizontal is a new programme. The networks created are new and not as well established as in some of the other programmes, and therefore the threshold for participation and commitment is lower.

2.3 Administration and running of the programme

As far as the administration and operation of the programme is concerned, Horizontal does not seem to have any particular problems. As suggested, the evaluation of applications seems to have been a challenge at the start of the programme due to its multi-sectoral nature, which made comparison and prioritisation difficult. Initially, people seem to have focused heavily on the formal criteria for participation, while in later rounds they were more concerned with making substantive evaluations related to the project’s ambitions and to the types of organisation chosen to achieve these ambitions in practice.

The programme committee for Horizontal is the same as the main Nordplus committee, which means that the committee’s involvement in Horizontal has been limited. In reality, this means that the main administrator has had

great influence in relation to the interpretation and implementation of the programme. At the same time, there has also been considerable informal contact between the main administrator and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat in Copenhagen regarding how a number of practical challenges ought to be addressed. The main administrator (who is also the main Nordplus coordinator) has exerted the greatest influence over the programme. This does not, however, mean that the co-administrators did not participate in the operation and quality-assurance phase, which seems to have been unproblematic. In many ways, it is exactly in this type of process that the main and co-administrators have great experience and professional expertise, and Horizontal has not given rise to any special challenges in this respect. This form of organisation, in which different stakeholders share responsibility, increases their opportunities to learn from each other's experiences.

From a user standpoint, Horizontal is seen as relatively unproblematic. Some users complain that the handbook is too standardised and contains insufficient in-depth information, but they also think that it answers many of the standard questions about funding and budgeting, reporting and selection criteria. Applicants are generally also satisfied with processing times and accessibility in relation to responses from the main and co-administrators. As one Horizontal user put it:

We are, after all, participants in both the EU's LLP programmes and in Horizontal. If you compare the two programmes, Horizontal is far more flexible – we are able, to a greater degree, to “negotiate” with SIU, even though there are, of course, strict formal deadlines.

Another user seems to share this view, and asserts that:

The whole of Nordplus has, of course, become more formalised over the years. This is partly a consequence of the fact that the Framework Programme has grown in both breadth and depth. Horizontal, and the flexibility built into this programme, is, I think, reminiscent of the “old” Nordplus, when pragmatism and flexibility were key characteristics.

In relation to the electronic application and reporting system (ARS), Nordplus Horizontal has suffered from major teething problems from both an administrative and a user perspective. Nordplus staff report that the system is difficult to use, particularly when it comes to extracting the information (statistics, etc.) they need. The difficulties are partly due to the way in which ARS is structured, but are also a result of the fact that, on a purely technical level, the system has not worked properly. The main administrator still does not think that ARS work properly when it comes to analysis and reporting. As far as the submission of applications is concerned, all of the problems seem to have been solved.

The users agree with this to a great extent and functionality no longer seems to be an issue. Users think that the fact that the same portal is used for all programmes is highly appropriate, and also makes contact with other

programmes easier. Some users of Horizontal have expressed a wish that ARS contain a more extensive database of potential partners, as well as a project database. The fact that all programmes use ARS has its advantages, from both an administrative and a user standpoint, and in that way one of the key objectives of the system is in on the way to being met.

2.4 Profiling, communications and information

Since Horizontal is basically an “open” programme, information and profiling work has been a challenge. The strategy chosen by the main administrator has been to merge information about Horizontal with information about the other Nordplus programmes. The intention was to show that applications that do not always fit in one of the other programmes might be reworked as a Horizontal project. In addition to the information that has been conveyed via other programme initiatives, approx. 3,000 leaflets about Nordplus Horizontal have been distributed directly to relevant organisations and stakeholders in different countries. This information strategy is understandable, but Horizontal does not always seem to have been perceived as a new programme by the users:

It seems as if Horizontal is both a “catch-all programme” for everything that falls outside of the other Nordplus programmes, as well as an important innovation within Nordplus – clearly, this is a difficult balancing act.

It seems that many users of Horizontal were previously involved in other programmes. Several users report that this influenced their thinking during the project-development phase, and that the projects were therefore not as tailored to Horizontal as they might have been. However, many of these same users also point out that, over time, they can see the new opportunities that Horizontal offers, as well as the limitations that characterised their original projects. These statements hint that Horizontal still has innovation potential that has not yet been fully exploited.

2.5 Attainment of objectives and results

In 2008, Nordplus Horizontal received 46 funding applications, of which 21 were successful. In 2009, the figures were 35 applications, 18 successful. In 2010, it was 32 applications, 20 successful. In general, the success rate in Horizontal is lower than for the other programmes (except Adult). This seems to be related to the fact that applications to Horizontal are relatively comprehensive and on a larger scale than those submitted to other Nordplus programmes. This also means that the approved applications make relatively large inroads into Horizontal’s resources. On average, approx. half of the applications to Horizontal are for projects that last for more than a year, and

the average amount applied for is €43,400. The average grant awarded is €55,000. Similarly, approved projects involve more partners (6.6) than the average (4.6).

In general, successful projects are bigger than the average and involve more partners. However, this is partly seen as a consequence of Horizontal's objectives – which, of course, include building bridges between different levels and stakeholders. It is therefore not unnatural for networks to become larger and more complex. Generally, higher education institutions act as project managers/co-ordinators in the early stages of Horizontal, although the school level is well represented among the partners. Other stakeholders play a more prominent role at a later stage – particularly local authorities, county councils, private companies, non-profit organisations, etc. An example of the distribution of projects by type of institution is given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Types of institutions involved in the Nordplus Horizontal in 2009 (applications).

Institution	Co-ordinator	Partner	Total no. of institutions
Higher education	18	65	83
Adult learning	3	16	19
Schools	1	35	36
Public and private sector	13	44	57
	35	160	195

Source: SIU (2010a).

The spread in Table 2.1 seems to indicate that Nordplus Horizontal is best known in higher education and by other stakeholders in the public and private sectors, and that lifelong learning and the school sector have not been involved to the same extent. In particular, the large number of higher education institutions with responsibility for co-ordination suggests that it is from this area that the initiative for the projects often stems. However, the reason that the school sector seems particularly underrepresented may also be due to the resource situation and the 50% self-financing requirement. As a representative of one of co-administrators for Horizontal put it:

Many schools do not have room in their budget to participate in this type of activity when the self-financing requirement is 50%. On the other hand, it means that once you are in, you are very much committed. The ownership of and commitment to the project seems greater.

However, some users and other administrators point out that self-financing does not necessarily always mean that you have to pour cash into the project. Working time or other types of contribution also count, but schools do not always have the administrative expertise required to exploit this flexibility in the programme. It is, of course, also legitimate to ask whether schools have been adequately informed about these opportunities.

Considering that Nordplus Horizontal was a new programme, the geographical spread in terms of project applications seems to be relatively good. The fact that SIU is the main administrator for the programme may explain why Norway seems to have the most applicants in a project co-ordinator role. Table 2.2 provides an example of the geographical distribution of projects in 2009.

Table 2.2. Nordplus Horizontal: Number of projects by institutions and countries in 2009. Applicants.

Country	No. of institutions co-ordinating projects	No. of institutions as partners in projects	Total no. of institutions
Norway	9	24	33
Sweden	6	28	34
Denmark	6	33	36
Estonia	3	17	20
Lithuania	3	13	16
Latvia	3	8	11
Iceland	3	8	11
Greenland	2	2	4
Finland	0	26	26
The Faroe Islands	0	1	1
Åland	0	0	0
TOTAL	35	160	195

Source: SiU (2010a).

As shown in the table, Denmark, Sweden and Norway are the most active countries in Horizontal, closely followed by Finland. Of the Baltic countries, Estonia is the most active, but both Latvia and Lithuania are well represented.

In general, users consider Nordplus Horizontal to be a very attractive programme, well suited to generating new forms of collaboration and innovation within education and learning.

Horizontal seems largely to have met its objectives. The projects that receive support are to a large extent multi-sectoral, and have helped to highlight innovation and new thinking in education and learning. Compared with the other programmes, which carry some historical baggage, Horizontal captures the attention of stakeholders who want to adopt an innovative approach to education and learning. Several stakeholders point out that Horizontal seems to break down the boundaries between research, education and innovation, and that the programme therefore presents an opportunity to make tangible some of the more abstract political ideas about closer integration between these areas.

Best practice : Polar Research in the Classroom

Among the activities Nordplus has funded is the project “Polar Research in the Classroom” (www.sarepta.org). Co-ordinated by the Norwegian Centre for Space-related Education (NAROM), the project introduces teachers and student teachers to the relevance of space-related research to teaching in schools. Partners include higher-education institutions and institutions on lower levels in Denmark, Iceland and Norway. The main activity consists of running courses that provide qualifications (10 ECTS credits) in subjects such as “Climate research in the polar landscape”, “Under the polar skies” (a study of the Northern lights) and “Environmental changes in sub-polar areas” by means of a mixture of internet-teaching and physical gatherings in Svalbard and Iceland, etc. The project has its own blog, on which results are disseminated and discussed.

We think this programme sets an example of best practice for three reasons:

The programme content

- The project has a clear pedagogic idea of how research and researchers can be utilised not only for more general communications but also for teaching purposes. In this way, the project adds content to concepts like “research-based teaching”, including in schools for younger children.
- The project culminates in a take-home exam that, in terms of content, results in a pedagogic presentation of how knowledge acquired through the project can be applied in teaching.
- The project has a deliberate relationship to the uses of new technology (GPS, data logs) in teaching, and as such it helps to link technology and pedagogy.

Extra effects for Nordplus

- The courses have so far only been in Norwegian, but from 2011 they will also be held in English, partly in order to accommodate Baltic participants.

2.6 Overall evaluation

Horizontal is the youngest programme in the Nordplus family, and has its origins in a desire to develop Nordplus activities beyond the focus on mobility that has traditionally characterised the programmes. Even though it has suffered from a number of teething problems in relation to uncertainty about its nature and purpose, both users and those who run the programme feel that it has built up a clearer profile over time. As far as Baltic participation is concerned, Horizontal is one of the most successful Nordplus programmes. It can be said to have fulfilled one of the key objectives of the programme, in that the activities and projects currently underway bear witness to a strong orientation towards quality and innovation.

In many ways, Horizontal represents new thinking within Nordplus cooperation, in that the projects are somewhat bigger and the number of participants somewhat higher than in the other programmes. However, there is some uncertainty about the extent to which the programme has really estab-

lished a clear profile, since the nature of its users has changed somewhat since the start-up. In addition, the fact that Horizontal was at first marketed alongside the other programmes may also have contributed to some users considering it a “fall-back” rather than a separate programme with a more innovative profile.

In general, the main administrator thinks that the resource frameworks for Horizontal have been relatively good, and there seems to be little need to invest greater resources. Co-operation between the main- and co-administrators also seems to have been working well, and its users feel that the programme is run in a positive manner with proper user support.

3. Nordplus Higher Education

3.1 Introduction

Measured in the number of applications and amount of funds allocated, Higher Education has, over time, been the largest programme in the Nordplus family. The programme is specifically targeted at universities and colleges, and at students and lecturers at these institutions, but in practice applications are submitted by the organisations and not the individuals.

Initially, the programme was purely concerned with mobility, but its area of activity expanded considerably during the last programme period. According to the handbook for the Nordplus programmes, the key objectives for this programme include helping to establish links between higher education institutions through exchange programmes for staff, practices and results, and improving contact between Higher Education and other stakeholders with an interest in or relevance to the sector (Nordplus Handbook 2010: 24).

Following the inclusion of the Baltic states, the programme has recently prioritised expanding existing networks and projects to include these countries. Other key priorities have been to encourage joint study programmes and quality-assurance projects.

The description of Nordplus Higher Education states that, during the current project period, the programme is designed to contribute to:

- mobility scholarships for students and teachers, including “express mobility” lasting less than a month
- networking and partnerships
- project development, including joint study programmes or new curricula.

The profile of Nordplus Higher education has not changed substantially from the previous programme period, and initiatives launched during the current programme period, e.g. joint study programmes, do not therefore necessarily constitute innovations. In general, project applications to Higher Education must involve at least three institutions in three different countries.

3.2 Management structure and resources

Nordplus Higher Education is an extremely well established programme in the Nordplus family, and derives benefit from that fact, particularly in terms of profiling and public awareness of the programme. The main administrator reports that the budget has been reduced in the current programme period compared with the previous period, from approx. €4.1 million in 2004–2006 to approx. €3.9 million after 2008. Meanwhile, interest in Nordplus Higher Education is very high, and over time the total amount applied for has been relatively stable (around €10 million p.a.), while the actual budget is only approx. €4 million p.a. (CIMO 2010: 1). In recent years, the budget has been equivalent to just 20% of the total amount applied for, which is lower than in the previous programming period (Vabø 2006: 26). Traditionally, however, Nordplus Higher Education has solved this problem by reducing the scope of mobility applications but retaining a high number of participants. On the other hand, the number of approved applications is more selective.

Figures show that on average approx. 25% of the amount applied for during the programme period has been approved (CIMO Applications and proposal for distribution of funds 2010: 1). However, there are differences of opinion regarding this issue. On the one hand, it is argued that competition for funding contributes to the high quality of the programme (the projects). On the other hand, it is argued that the current allocation pattern – especially in relation to mobility – does not in fact indicate any form of prioritisation, as the majority of applications are rejected.

The fact that many receive funding, but less than they applied for, gives rise to two kinds of reaction among users. Firstly, some users traditionally seem to apply for far more than they actually need on the assumption that the amount will be reduced anyway. Secondly, users indicate that they gradually develop a relationship of trust with the main administrator, which helps them to be perceived as serious and responsible, and therefore increases the likelihood that their applications will be approved. In recent years, there has been a trend towards applications for more realistic amounts, which indicates that this same relationship of trust may also reduce applicants' tendency towards more "strategic" behaviour. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many applications are from repeat applicants, and a potential problem in Nordplus Higher education is therefore how to achieve renewal when the applicants themselves emphasise continuity and the long-term perspective. As one user put it:

We have been part of Nordplus for a long time, and I suppose we also feel that Nordplus is a part of us – so we don't really see any great need for change. We think we have a good project that we run well – so why change it?

Given that the funds awarded are not always used, the utilisation of resources in Nordplus Higher Education seems to have been somewhat variable. In 2009, for example, €200,000 was returned unused (CIMO 2010: 1).

Over time, however, the amount undisposed of at year-end has fallen. In 2010, the situation is that it is stipulated that the budgeted amount must be used up. The main reason for funds remaining unused is that various mobility projects do not come to fruition as planned. This indicates that following up on whether project funds are used during the implementation phase is an important contribution to healthy financial management of the sub-programme.

From a management perspective, Nordplus Higher Education works well. Both sides report that the ongoing co-operation between the main administrator and the programme committee is constructive and characterised by positive dialogue. CIMO also has long experience of Nordplus Higher Education, and the other administrators recognise its expertise in the field.

At the same time, there is a certain amount of uncertainty as to who in the current structure actually has the authority to make decisions. The management of the programme rotates and it has been difficult to obtain in-depth analyses of the projects, which means that the programme committee regularly has to merely note information, and act, effectively, as more of an “approving” body than a “strategic” one that, via dialogue with the main administrator, is also capable of playing a greater role in planning and evaluations related to future activities.

Concerning the relationship between the main administrator and the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Secretariat, there appear to have been some problems during the start-up phase of the new programme period, again related to the decision-making powers of the various stakeholders. While the Secretariat is responsible for implementing political decisions, the main administrator and main co-ordinator are responsible for day-to-day practicalities. The various stakeholders have often had somewhat differing views of whether a given issue should be defined as political or administrative, but this divergence seems to have evened out over time. Typically, clarification regarding these issues seems to have been sought directly from the Secretariat in Copenhagen, rather than via the main co-ordinator or main administrator. Again, this creates confusion about the management structure, and different stakeholders having different information does not make for an optimal decision-making process. Paradoxically, this type of situation seems to arise because Nordplus operates with low thresholds for enquiries and responses to them, and also because many of the stakeholders know each other well. In other words, a system that in principle works reasonably well on the informal level makes for ambiguities in the formal management structure.

With regard to whether the inclusion of the Baltic countries has caused problems in Nordplus Higher Education, it is agreed that the three new countries have added new dimensions without posing any particular challenges. Of the 254 applications in 2009, institutions in Baltic countries co-ordinated 11 networks but participated as partners in 80 (approx. 30%) (CIMO, 2009: 2). In 2010, the number of co-ordinators from the Baltic coun-

tries rose to 20. However, Baltic integration in Higher Education seems to be somewhat less successful than in the other programmes in the Nordplus family.

Of the problematic issues mentioned, the resource situation is perhaps the most precarious. The admission of three new countries has further contributed to a situation in which resources that were already under pressure are becoming inadequate. Although the overall framework for Nordplus was expanded as a result of Baltic participation, the budget framework for Higher Education seems to have been reduced compared with the previous programme period. As a representative of one of co-administrators in the programme pointed out:

There is a resource problem in “Higher Education” [...] Its attractiveness is dependent on resources.

Other matters raised by informants that relate to Baltic participation include cultural differences as well as different administrative traditions regarding the interpretation of rules and the procedures for doing so. Here too, good and pragmatic solutions seem to have emerged over time.

There are mixed opinions among both administrators and users about whether it is an advantage or a disadvantage that Nordplus Higher Education has close similarities with EU mobility programmes. Those who think Nordplus is losing out in competition with the EU’s mobility programmes argue that it has less resources, which has a negative impact on competitiveness because many Nordic universities and colleges also apply for EU funding for exchange programmes within the Nordic Region. Several users also claim that Nordplus Higher Education is now more bureaucratic than it used to be, but admit it is not as formalistic as the EU programmes.

Those who say that Nordplus Higher Education and the EU programmes reinforce each other argue that it is easier to market and promote the programmes together, that the programmes target slightly different segments and niches, and that it can be easier to launch and run a project/mobility programme within the Nordic Region than within the EU – all of which means that Nordplus serves as a simpler “entry point” to internationalisation than the EU programmes. “Express mobility” is also stressed as a strong competitive advantage in Nordplus, as this is not an option in the LLP programmes. Individual users also pointed out that, in many ways, Nordplus Higher Education represents an “old form” of internationalisation, in the sense that the academic personnel are closely linked to the projects/mobility. Many users think that the integration of the academic staff is not always as strong in the EU mobility programmes.

The main administrator suggests that possible measures could include making it easier to apply to Nordplus Higher Education, as simplified application procedures would provide a greater competitive edge. At the same time, the applicants themselves point out that Nordplus Higher Education’s

greatest competitive advantage lies in its flexibility, which stems from (historical) knowledge of different stakeholders in Nordplus, various networks, and low thresholds for making contact and identifying solutions.

3.3 Administration and running of the programme

In general, the model comprising a main administrator and co-administrators is well received, and this form of organisation is considered highly appropriate. Various informants confirm that the co-administrator role is important because it provides a point of contact in each country, which means that potential applicants are always close to somebody who is able to answer questions about the programmes in the Nordplus family. The fact that the co-administrators participate in the processing of applications also means that knowledge of the programmes is good. The main administrator also stresses that the current model also has low thresholds because language barriers are minimised by the fact that applicants always have access to an office that speaks their own language, in their own country.

Tangible areas suggested for improvement include greater clarity in the rules, so that unnecessary contact with the main administrator can be minimised. It is also argued that the decision-making processes sometimes take too long due to the requirement for participation and shared responsibility.

A particular problem for Nordplus Higher Education is that the high number of applications means that there are always pressures regarding processing time. This programme (along with Junior) has the highest number of applicants (around 250 p.a.), but operates with the same processing deadlines as the other programmes, which generally have a significantly smaller number of applications.

As far as the spread of resources between different activities is concerned, mobility remains the biggest activity in terms of funds allocated. About 70% of resources are earmarked for mobility, while the remainder is used for other projects. In addition, most mobility projects also have other activities associated with them.

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, ARS has posed a challenge for all of the sub-programmes in Nordplus – including Higher Education. As one user so strongly put it:

When ARS was launched, the system crashed completely and it was only because we had good and well-established contacts and networks within the Nordplus system that everything worked out. With hindsight, there is no doubt that the system has damaged the reputation of Nordplus. Fortunately, it has improved since then.

However, ARS has not yet been given a completely clean bill of health. There seem to have been three main problems within this sub-programme: Firstly, ARS does not seem to be particularly well suited to the Higher Education programme. Dealing with mobility, networks, etc. is difficult in ARS,

since the software is mainly designed for single projects. Secondly, the reporting and statistics tools in ARS are not particularly appropriate – the data that it is possible to extract seems to have little relevance to Nordplus, and ARS is difficult to use. Mentioned in particular were illogical setups, the lack of user manuals, etc. Thirdly, ARS is not seen as a useful tool for the further development of Higher Education. One argument in this context is that statistics and historical data are difficult to extract from the system, which means that little is known about developments over time. At the same time, there have been positive developments in recent years. ARS now works, at least technically, for users and for the main- and the co-administrators when it comes to applications, administration of applications and generating simpler standard reports.

3.4 Profiling, communications and information

As Nordplus Higher Education is an established programme with a high profile by Nordic standards, the programme enjoys a high level of recognition in educational institutions. The main administrator claims that nearly all universities and colleges in the Region take part in the programme. When asked about the programme's profile, one user stressed that many people probably based their opinion on the history of Nordplus as a pure mobility programme, which no longer accurately reflects Higher Education. The person concerned points out that:

Profiling is difficult because Higher Education in many ways is so fragmented, which makes it difficult to see it in a holistic perspective. The website works very well and is attractive, but the updates could be much better. Not a lot happens there.

The last point is also emphasised by the main administrator and the main coordinator, who argue that, due to time constraints related to administration and operations, only very limited time is left for communication and the dissemination of results.

It seems that when the consortium is required to prioritise tasks, it is easiest to give lower priority to activities related to profiling, dissemination and information. At the same time, it is agreed in principle that Nordplus Higher Education will only improve if successful projects are publicised. Users and administrators both agree that at present the website provides information and is not interactive.

3.5 Attainment of objectives and results

In recent years, the number of applicants to Nordplus Higher education has dropped from about 300 to 250 – however, this is not considered to be particularly problematic because the resources available are far less than the

amount applied for. As far as the inclusion of the Baltic countries is concerned, the strategy has been to get Baltic institutions to join existing and established networks. However, the indications so far are that the integration has not been good enough. On the other hand, the main administrator points out that the Baltic universities and colleges are included in more than half of all applications to the programme, and that grants to networks that involve Baltic educational institutions have also increased in recent years. Projects that involve the Baltic stakeholders consider their participation to be very positive

In the case of joint study programmes, approx. 40 applications have been received p.a., of which around 10 have been successful – in other words, the eye of the needle seems to be relatively narrow compared with other activities in the programme. As far as quality-assurance projects are concerned, the majority of these have been associated with joint study programmes, and therefore their success rate reflects that of the joint programmes.

In 2010, 40 projects were rejected during the application process. Most did not comply with requirements for clear objectives and the achievement of them, and some were rejected because of poor results in previous projects (CIMO Applications and proposal for distribution of funds 2010: 5). However, users whose applications were rejected think that clearer feedback about the specific reasons for the rejection would be desirable. Some users argue that the requirement for transparency in administrative procedures should be mutually applicable – i.e. that demands for openness and transparency should apply not only to users, but also to those who run the programme.

As per the guidelines for the programme, the number of development and academic projects in Higher Education has increased over time. Different stakeholders seem to have different opinions of what actually constitutes the achievement of objectives in Nordplus Higher Education. While it is easy to find those who will argue strongly that Higher Education should continue to be a mobility programme, it is not hard to find others who believe that mobility has given way to internationalisation, and that it is necessary to develop academic co-operation and joint projects in which mobility is only part of the total activity.

In academic terms, there is a good spread of disciplines among projects covered by Nordplus Higher Education. The most active areas are medicine, teacher training, social sciences and humanities, in that order (CIMO Applications and proposal for distribution of funds 2010: 3). Mathematics, computer science, languages, agriculture, architecture and law are among the least visible disciplines in this sub-programme.

As far as the annual programme priorities are concerned, a relatively large number of stakeholders – both users and administrators – stress that the themes of the environment and the climate have generated important and successful initiatives. Other users acknowledge that they mainly address the annual priorities on a “symbolic level” – i.e. they are inserted into existing

applications without actually enacting the major changes proposed in the projects. As one user put it:

The annual priorities mean that our applications to the programme become more creative. In relation to the emphasis on climate, a lot of things can fall under this label – if the priorities are so general, it is not difficult to adapt.

More generally, however, the consensus seems to be that Higher Education is a success, given that the programme has been running for many years but the level of interest remains high. The vast majority of the projects have proceeded in accordance with the submitted plans, and only three appear not to have been completed. Several people identified continuity and the fact that interest in the programme remains high as important indicators of its success. On the other hand, they also think that the programme seems to be changing. There has been a reduction in ordinary student-mobility activities in recent years, whereas “express mobility” (stays of less than one month) has increased significantly (CIMO, 2009: 6).

The formalisation of the Nordplus programmes has also improved follow-up of users, not least in terms of reporting. The process has obviously been tightened up in this respect, which seems to be one of the reasons why several users report that Nordplus is more “bureaucratic” than before. Several users also seem to have encountered difficulties, in terms of content, in reporting back about what their projects have managed to achieve. In general, most users seem to refer to their websites as communication channels, and the projects also seem to result in products such as web-based courses and course materials, as well as books and articles (CIMO 2009: 9). However, many users see the dissemination of results as a challenge. As one user stresses:

The problem is that we cannot document the achievement of the objectives – the social and cultural aspects – in a quantitative manner.

Many users emphasise that Higher Education’s results are informal, long-term and very difficult to quantify. Often, users fall back on the number of reports, conferences, development processes, translations, etc., but acknowledge that such products are unlikely to provide an accurate picture of the results achieved in knowledge development and dissemination. Rather, such indicators reveal only that the conditions for achieving the project’s objectives are in place.

Best practice: An Art University Without Walls

KUNI is one of the many projects funded by Nordplus (www.kuno.no). KUNO is a network of 16 Nordic and Baltic art schools, the aim of which is to develop an “art university without walls”. The project includes a variety of activities, from traditional and express mobility programmes for students and teachers to establishing a joint Master’s programme (Nordic Sound Art) with ten students. The project also has its own blog, and regularly runs symposia for teachers and students, the results of which are communicated and discussed regularly via the blog.

We think this programme sets an example of best practice for three reasons:

The programme content

- The project is highly aware of how different types of activities can be incorporated into a larger overall project. The project design helps to create flexibility while preserving its overall nature.
- The project demonstrates how small subject areas can develop activities that institutions would not have been able to manage single-handedly (e.g. own Masters’ programmes).
- The project demonstrates, in an excellent manner, how new technology can be developed and used as a working tool and also to disseminate information about and profile the project.

Use of funds from the Nordplus scheme

- In addition to the funds received from Nordplus for operations, the project has set up its own secretariat, funded by membership fees from the participating institutions. This ensures a greater degree of professionalism and co-ordination of the project.

Extra effects for Nordplus

- The project was originally intended as a pure mobility and exchange project, but over time new co-operative activities have been established that have shifted the project’s content in the direction of the priorities that Nordplus has defined for the current programme period.
- The organisation of the project, and the use of technology to disseminate information and results should serve as a source of inspiration for other projects in the Nordplus family.

3.6 Overall evaluation

Nordplus Higher Education is the largest and most well established programme in the Nordplus family. It has been running for a long time in the Nordic countries, and the overall impression is that it works well. The main administrator seems to run the programme in an effective manner, and the management and administration of the programme also seem to be profes-

sional and easily accessible to the users. However, looking at the programme period as a whole, the administrative dissemination of results and analyses is somewhat lacking, although this has much to do with the introduction of ARS. Positive progress has also been made in recent years – not least, users report that ARS now has a user interface that works.

However, it is also possible to argue that Nordplus Higher Education has gradually become such an established form of co-operation for some of the networks that the funds it provides are thought of more as “operational” money, rather than as an incentive to create value – especially in relation to mobility. A large number of users also report that many of the activities in the sub-programme would still take place without financial support from the programme (CIMO 2009: 11). The fact that the number of applications and the amount applied for are as high as they are may indicate that many of the users apply on the basis of “old habits” and tradition – again, this is closely linked to mobility. Mobility is undoubtedly still a key form of internationalisation and knowledge exchange in the Nordic Region, but the question now is whether this should always be the main method used by Nordplus Higher Education, or whether it is a responsibility that could be left to others.

It is therefore possible to argue that the time may be ripe for more innovative thinking about the form that Nordplus Higher Education should take in the years to come. Several users and administrators see both advantages and disadvantages of interaction with the EU’s LLP programmes, and this quote from a user may serve to illustrate their feelings on the matter:

Nordplus Higher Education could do with some new thinking. Mobility represents very traditional thinking – we need new ideas!

Many users and informants would prefer Nordplus to preserve traditional mobility activities and, to a greater extent than at present, initiate innovative projects in Higher Education based on a broader set of instruments than just mobility. However, the limits on current resources seem to serve as an obstacle to ambitions like these, which suggests that Nordplus Higher Education needs a clearer profile. This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 9.

4. Nordplus Junior

4.1 Introduction

Nordplus Junior's predecessor, Nordplus Mini, was run by the Nordic Association. Its main activity was mobility, in the form of exchange visits for school classes. This activity was incorporated into the Nordplus Framework Programme during the previous programme period as part of Nordplus Junior, with the objective of strengthening the Nordic dimension through co-operation between Nordic schools. The idea was to increase knowledge and understanding of the other Nordic cultures, languages and living conditions, and also to help promote Nordic affinity in terms of shared values and views of humanity and democracy (Vabø 2006: 31). The first years after Nordplus Junior was established in 2004 were, according to Vabø (2006), characterised by a certain amount of testing of the programme's potential. During the programme period evaluated here (2008–2011), Nordplus Junior's aims were more sector-oriented: "[...] to strengthen and develop co-operation and create networks of pre-schools, primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools (university-preparatory and vocational) among the participating countries, in order to support the development of quality and innovation" (Nordplus 2008–2011, Handbook 2010: 17). Organisations or institutions that work with or have strong interests in primary and lower secondary education may also apply.

The instruments in Junior (mobility, development projects and networking) were the same during both programme periods.

- Mobility co-operation requires min. two partners in two countries, and includes pupils in primary and lower secondary schools and upper secondary schools, as well as teachers and other educational staff in pre-schools, and primary-and-lower-secondary as well as upper-secondary education and training. Pupil mobility may be relevant to classes in primary and lower secondary schools and in secondary schools, as well as for individual upper-secondary pupils. The content of the mobility component must be thematic, and last from one to three weeks over the course of a year. In relation to individual mobility, upper-secondary pupils have the option of a stay of up to one year. Mobility for teachers and other pedagogic personnel includes job switching between schools in different countries. A contribution is made to funding preparatory visits.

- Development projects must focus on improving pedagogic methods, and must be related to pedagogic development work covered by the annual Nordplus priorities. Development projects within the framework of vocational training must be designed to enhance the quality of the training. Applications must involve min. three partner schools from min. three countries. Project activities can stretch to max. three years and projects must be integrated into the schools' activities.
- Network funding is allocated to long-term co-operation between min. three partner schools from min. three countries, and can also last up to three years. It is recommended that co-operation should include different levels of education.

Mobility funding is based on fixed rates for travel and accommodation. The rates vary according to the countries involved (Nordplus 2008–2011, Handbook 2010: 20). Pupils are only entitled to support for travelling expenses, and they are expected to stay in the homes of their exchange partners. New to this programme period is that teachers and other pedagogic staff receive funding for their stay abroad. Although it is said that applicants do not need to pay for their mobility activities, it is possible that the fixed rates will not cover all costs, and that a certain amount of self-financing will be necessary. Also new to this programme period is that, no matter which form of funding is received, one school must act as co-ordinator on behalf of all of those involved, and must be responsible both for the application and for the allocation of funds throughout the contract period. This reform was designed to make the process easier by linking the applications, which were previously individual, and thereby making the administration easier. For development projects and networks, the self-financing component is 50% of the total budget, including planning meetings and preparatory visits. Participants have the option of contributing in the form of working hours or some other form of non-financial contribution. For development projects, up to 5% of the total applied for may take the form of administration costs. Funds may also be provided for contact seminars.

The annual deadline for Junior activities is 1 March, while the deadline for applications for funding of preparatory visits is 15 October. New applicants are given priority over those who have previously received grants from the programme. Since 2004, the main administration for Nordplus Junior has been located at the International Programme Office in Sweden.

4.2 Management structure and resources

The current organisational model, with a main administrator and co-administrator for Nordplus Junior, seems to have several advantages. One particular advantage is that the main areas of responsibility are clearly des-

ignated. Co-operation between the countries on the evaluation of applications is also stressed as an important advantage of the current organisation. In addition, ownership of the Nordplus programmes is strengthened by the fact that the main and co-administrators are also involved in the administration of other Nordplus programmes.

Disadvantages of the current organisation include lengthy decision-making processes and the fact that changes take time to implement. In addition, the distribution of responsibilities and tasks between the main administrator, the programme committee and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat seems to be unclear. This may help to explain why there are such widely different opinions about the programme among those involved on the various levels. The new aspect of the Framework Programme for 2008–2011 is the need to focus on results and be more project-oriented than was the case during the previous programme period. Nordplus Junior is now specifically adapted to reflect this, whereas the main activity was previously mobility. In the current application period, the Nordic Council of Ministers has high hopes that the activities will generate results for schools, education systems and policies, which is reflected in the fact that initiatives for children and young people are generally given high political priority.

The committee members are of the opinion that the Junior programme works well, and that mobility remains a key instrument.

The challenges for Nordplus Junior seem to be associated with the programme's complexity. The organisational and structural conditions that apply to primary education vary between the Nordic and Baltic countries. The programme also covers multiple and very different levels of education, as kindergartens and schools are the target group, and the programme's users include children, young people and adults. Other central challenges are related to administrative and financial regulations and the self-financing requirement.

Junior is now the second largest Nordplus programme as far as the number of applications is concerned, and informants also pointed out that the applicants are perhaps the least "professional". It is often individual teachers who submit the application, even if it is the schools that are the formal partners. The participating schools are often institutions with limited resources and little free time. It is therefore a challenge for mobility programmes to find board and lodging for pupils, as it is not always realistic to accommodate them privately. For teachers and other pedagogic staff, there are challenges associated with the fact that the rates set for travel support are sometimes perceived as too low in relation to actual expenditure; and for the schools, that they require resources for supply teachers. The opportunities for development projects and networks are rarely taken up, and several sources point out that this may be due to the 50% self-financing requirement and because the available administrative resources are perceived as being scant compared to the scope of the tasks involved.

The timeframes for using the allocated resources are relatively tight. Several sources point out that the late application deadline (March 1) and late

allocations (in May/June) can make it difficult for schools to plan. This may be one reason why some of the funds are not being spent. The previous evaluation noted that it was a problem for the schools that they apply in one school year for projects in the next year (Vabø 2006). This still appears to be a problem. In this context, it should therefore be considered whether it is appropriate for Nordplus Junior to have an application deadline of 1 March each year and to announce grant awards in May. One solution suggested is that funds be spread over two school years, as in the Comenius programme, and that round sums be paid out to each school rather than differentiated amounts, as per current practice.

The differences in the ownership structure of schools between the Nordic and Baltic countries can also serve as a barrier, in particular when it comes to reporting and accounting. Calls have, therefore, been made for co-ordinators of Nordplus Junior international work at school-owner level.

4.3 Administration and running of the programme

The administration and running of Nordplus Junior seems to be challenging. The programme is generally complex and bureaucratic and practical obstacles have been encountered. ARS is a contributing factor. The requirement that a school acts as co-ordinator was introduced during the previous programme period to standardise and adapt to match the other Nordplus programmes – partly because of ARS. It was also meant to facilitate procedures for the administrators. From a user perspective, this has resulted in a more bureaucratic model. Out of consideration for the user group, it has been necessary to maintain a low user threshold and close follow up, and this seems (still) to generate a great deal of work for the main and co-administrators. As far as the electronic application and reporting system (ARS) is concerned, it is reported that the system seemed to work better in 2010 than in the two previous years, but that it is generally perceived as an obstacle to be overcome by schools in the application process. A particular problem in this context is that it is easy to input errors into ARS, especially in the budget section. It appears that there might be lessons to learn from the way in which applications are completed in Comenius.

The co-operation between the main administrator and co-administrator in Nordplus Junior consists of two meetings a year, both convened by the main administrator. An information meeting is held before the application deadline of 1 March, at which the assessment process, points allocation, criteria and priorities are discussed and determined. A subsequent meeting is held to co-ordinate the assessment of the applications. The results are then co-ordinated by the main administrator and presented to the programme committee (Annual Report 2009). The programme's application procedures and operations are still characterised by a degree of uncertainty, which can be attributed to ambiguities in the interpretation of the handbook and regula-

tions. A revision of the regulations would help to optimise the utilisation of resources by the programme. It would also help to reduce the number of users who ask questions, big and small, about Nordplus Junior.

The users report that the programme works well, and say that they receive good support and help from the co-administrator and main administrator. They state that ARS has become more user-friendly, even though they find it confusing that they are not guided towards the parts relevant to Junior. Informants point out that the Nordplus programmes have different objectives and practices, and that the shared ARS template is unfortunate and not well suited to the target group for Nordplus Junior. The users have found that it is an advantage to have submitted applications several times, as they then know how to avoid “dead ends” in the ARS system. A typical statement is:

The first year, I spent a lot of time searching, but it works better now that I know how to use it.

On the other hand, users think there are a large number of ambiguities in relation to the allocation criteria and the interpretation of the Handbook. For example, it is not widely known that new applicants are prioritised when funds are allocated.

The main administrator and co-administrators point out that ambiguities concerning the allocations of money among partners involved in co-operation between schools is another obstacle in the programme, in particular the schools’ ability to cope with the dual roles of partner and co-ordinator. Informants also report that it can be demanding for small schools – in both the Nordic Region and the Baltic states – to act as co-ordinators, and express concerns about the handling of money, e.g. currency transactions.

The main administrator notes that significant resources are expended just on reviewing applications to find out exactly what it is that the applicants plan to do – purely substantively – that corresponds to the regulations for the programme. This is partially related to the fact that the applicants do not receive an error message in ARS if they make a mistake while completing their application. Similarly, substantial resources are expended on tightening up budgets in the applications. This is partly related to the ambiguities in the rules, and partly due to the fact that the applicants do not receive error messages when they make mistakes in ARS. In addition, the size of individual grants has been reduced in order to provide grants to a larger number of applicants. Proposed solutions from the main administrator and co-administrators are that Nordplus Junior be simplified, and that clearer regulations be drawn up. In addition to clear rules, a ceiling is suggested for individual awards so that applicants are familiar with the financial framework when submitting applications.

4.4 Profiling, communications and information

The joint Nordplus web portal and visual identity were designed to be a strength and to contribute to the profiling and dissemination of information about the programme. According to the Nordic Council of Ministers, the funds available for this work are not used every year. The main administrator and co-administrators state that most of their time is taken up by tasks associated with user contact and the processing of applications submitted via ARS. Users report that being a repeat user is a major advantage when it comes to understanding what Junior is all about.

The resources for the profiling and strengthening of Nordplus Junior seem, therefore, to be more suited to this particular group of users.. For example they have called for contact meetings and applicant seminars, which could introduce an element of prioritisation into future work on dissemination and information.

Administrators and users both point out that there is a need to make Nordplus more attractive to the target group, compared with, for example, the EU's Comenius programme. Suggestions include emphasising and clarifying the Nordic dimension of Nordplus Junior in its Handbook, regulations and priorities, as well as simplifying the programme itself. Informants note that Comenius offers easier access to information, has simpler application and reporting systems and greater programme funding, and that its awards are for two years instead of one. SIU has invested a great deal of energy into simplifying and de-bureaucratising Comenius, and it would therefore serve a resource for similar work in Junior.

4.5 Attainment of objectives and results

The total amount applied for in 2009 was €3,850,084 and grants amounted to €2,084,527.

The total number of applications received by the deadline in 2009 was 195, in 2008 it was 340. In 2010, the number of applicants was 200 – which represents a stabilisation in relation to 2009. Applications to Nordplus Junior increased between 2007 and 2008, but have declined ever since – this is the case even taking into account that the changes in the number of applications reflect the fact that one co-ordinator now applies on behalf of all parties involved, rather than, as before, all parties applying separately. The decline has not resulted in a decrease in the number of participants in the projects – on the contrary, there has been an increase, as the single co-ordinator now typically applies on behalf of a larger number of participants. The priority areas and themes for Nordplus Junior in the period 2008–2011 are:

- quality in education
- vocational training
- health
- preventing drop-out
- entrepreneurship
- the multicultural classroom
- climate.

In the first two years, most applications selected “quality in education” as their theme. “Climate” was also frequently selected, while “preventing drop-out” was the least frequent. Mobility (in the form of class exchanges) is the most popular activity, and most of the mobility applications are from secondary level. There are very few applications from kindergartens. Of the 40 applications for preparatory visits submitted before the 15 October deadline, 33 received grants (Annual Report 2009). Within the mobility part of the programme, the main activity is exchange visits by school classes, while a total of 43 teachers/other pedagogic staff and pupils have been on individual exchanges in 2009. As shown in Table 4.1 below, there are very few networks and development projects in Nordplus Junior. Several of our informants pointed out that this could be related to the 50% self-financing requirement for this type of funding.

Table 4.1. Nordplus Junior: Types of activities applied for and funded 2009.

Type of activity	Number of activities applied for	Number of activities funded
Mobility	Preparatory visit	24
	Class exchanges	57
	Individual exchanges	113
Theme networks	9	6
Development projects	6	4
Total	209	139*

* The total number of grants was 135, but the total number of activities was 139. This was because some projects received funding for two different activities.

Source: *The International Programme Office, Sweden, Annual Report, 2009.*

Table 4.2 below shows that the primary-and-lower-secondary sector is the most active in Nordplus Junior. Upper-secondary education receives the highest number of grants, while upper-secondary schools receive more grants than vocational programmes. Vocational education therefore seems to have made inroads within Nordplus compared with the previous programme period (Vabø 2006: 45). By contrast, the number of applications is small, and few of the grants go to kindergartens.

Table 4.2. Types of institutions involved in Nordplus Junior 2009 (number of grants awarded).

Institution	Co-ordinator	Partner*
Kindergarten	2	
Primary and lower secondary school	55	
Upper secondary school	39	
Vocational training	34	
Others (foundations and, e.g. the Nordic Association)	5	
TOTAL	135	

* It is not possible to extract this data from ARS.

Source: The International Office, Sweden.

Table 4.3 below shows that Sweden and Finland were the most active in terms of applications to Nordplus Junior in 2009, closely followed by Denmark and Norway.

Table 4.3. Nordplus Junior: The number of mobility activities by institutions and countries in 2009.

Country	No. of institutions co-ordinating mobility	No. of institutions as partners	Total no. of institutions
Norway	17	23	40
Sweden	27	40	67
Denmark	26	29	55
Estonia	7	16	23
Lithuania	9	14	23
Latvia	6	13	19
Iceland	3	21	24
Greenland	2	3	5
Finland	35	29	64
The Faroe Islands	2	3	5
Åland	1	0	1
TOTAL	135	191	326

Source: The International Office, Sweden, Annual Report, 2009.

One problem that prevents schools from applying for mobility funding is the absence of 100% funding. Nordplus Junior pays for travel for pupils, but not room and board, as the assumption is that they will be able to stay with exchange families. Previously, many schools resolved this through payments by parents. However, in the Nordic countries, free schooling is a principle enshrined in law, and therefore parent charges are unlawful. The schools cannot collect money from parents and the parents are not allowed to pay. Several informants identify this as a problem for many schools.

Best practice: Co-operation on biology between two upper-secondary schools in Denmark and Iceland.

This example of best practice illustrates how the requirement for content achieved in mobility activities under Nordplus Junior, and it might be argued that this example actually serves as a bilateral development project. “Co-operation on biology between two upper-secondary schools in Denmark and Iceland” is an example of the kind of project to receive mobility funding from Junior (2008–2009). The Danish school acted as the co-ordinator, and the teachers had expertise in biology and Danish. The two classes worked individually on the theme of pollution and global warming and conducted laboratory experiments. The intention was to study elements of the ecosystem, including producers (plants), consumers (animals) and decomposers (for example, micro-organisms), in order to explain how they are interconnected and how pollution and global warming affect both nature and people.

The project also had a cultural element. Classes visited each other for a week, which included a day of normal school (biology teaching) in both countries, as well as field studies and visits to universities. In Iceland, the visit also included trips to nature reserves, a boat trip to the Vestmanna Islands (including bird-watching and a hike to the volcano), visits to key sites in Icelandic history, a visit to the Department of Biology at the University of Iceland, etc. The visit to Copenhagen concentrated on history, especially Iceland’s historical links to Denmark, and academic exchanges between the two classes.

The programme content

- The theme was academically relevant and rooted in the curriculum for upper secondary schools.
- In addition to biology, the project had a cultural focus, with an emphasis on the role of humans and the use of nature in the two countries, and the similarities and differences between them in understanding pollution, etc. In this way, culture, nature and the differences between the two countries were turned into a theme.
- The pupils visited biology researchers at universities.
- Emphasis was also placed on pupils learning about similarities and differences in working methods and framework conditions within the same school subject and in the same subjects in two countries.
- The pupils kept in touch with each other via Facebook throughout the school year.

Use of funds from Nordplus Junior

- Nordplus mobility grants and private funds were both used.

Extra effects for Nordplus

- The teachers wanted to experience other teaching methods, and report back that they found new ideas for their own teaching.
- The Danish school class participated in the “Young Scientists” competition and won an award for their contributions to the project.
- The co-ordinator was the first teacher at the school in question to apply for Nordplus funding, and has inspired other colleagues to follow suit.
- The local newspaper carried several articles about the project

Another problem identified was that there is also a mobility component in the primary-and-lower-secondary school sector in Nordplus NLC and the requirements for mobility activities differ between the two programmes. This is a typical statement from the administrators:

The structure – with four Nordplus programmes within the Framework Programme and a fifth outside – is inappropriate and difficult to explain to users. Primary and lower secondary schools can apply for mobility grants for the same type of activity/form of co-operation from two different programmes. It would be better if users only had to relate to one programme, and if all of the options for the sector were gathered in one place.

The mobility part of Junior includes a requirement to account for the activities and to link them to the programme's priority themes. The users agree with the requirement for academic content. A typical statement among users is that:

The mobility part of Junior needs to include academic content.

The evaluation of the previous programme period addressed the fact that the bulk of the activity in the Nordplus Junior seemed to consist of mobility projects, and it was suggested that greater emphasis be placed on thematic development projects and pedagogic collaboration in order to develop and/or swap teaching materials (Vabø 2006: 33). During the current programme period, these opportunities for thematic development and networking have not been particularly popular. Among respondents to this evaluation, opinions differ about the reasons for this, and also to what extent it is actually a problem.

On the one hand, it is argued that there needs to be quality in the co-operation and that this is more effectively guaranteed by development projects and networking than by mobility projects. On the other hand, both administrators and users assert that relatively strict requirements are placed on plans and content in the mobility component of Junior compared with the requirements for mobility in some of the other programmes. However, the most important difference between these forms of activity in Nordplus Junior is the role of the pupils. Pupils are the focus in mobility – they get involved in academic activities and have direct experience of meeting their peers in other countries and working with them. In a development project, the main participants will be the adults, i.e. the teachers and schools, not only in terms of labour and resources (cf. the 50% self-financing requirement), but in the sense that, according to the criteria for awarding funds, the project must result in improved pedagogic methods. In development projects, therefore, pupils are not active participants to the same extent, but objects of study during the co-operation and experimentation led by the teachers.

Committee members, administrators and users point out that physical meetings between children and young people are highly valuable for the target group, and therefore are a key instrument in Nordic co-operation aimed at increasing linguistic and cultural affinity in the longer term. The following statement is typical of many of those involved in Junior:

For me, mobility is the most important element – giving youngsters the opportunity to travel and meet others as a group in other countries is of great value per se. It is a practical way of learning neighbouring languages, and gives young people a personal and lasting experience.

The evidence seems to suggest, therefore, that mobility activities should continue to occupy a central position in the Nordplus Framework Programme for the target group “children and young people”. As far as the low level of support for development projects and theme networks is concerned, self-financing is identified as a problem – not only because school budgets are tight, but also due to the fact that the schools’ time is tied up with teaching, which leaves little room for extra working hours and offsetting them against the self-financing requirement. A further obstacle is the requirement that development projects involve three schools from three countries – as mentioned previously, the degree of co-ordination involved is considered somewhat demanding for the schools concerned. Reducing this requirement would therefore help increase the level of take up in this part of the programme. A few approved applications in 2009 combined several forms of activity. If the requirements for development projects and theme networks were reduced to only two countries, more combinations would be possible.

The low number of kindergartens involved in Nordplus Junior may be due to the fact that development projects and staff mobility are the current priorities. Many of the same barriers that apply to primary and lower secondary schools also apply to kindergartens, and may explain the low level of interest. The evidence suggests that this part of the programme has little relevance and should be dropped.

4.6 Overall evaluation

Nordplus Junior appears to be a relevant and interesting programme for the target group, and its users are satisfied. The target groups are a complex and mixed bunch, and the applicants have little experience of complex application systems and regulations. However, opinions differ among stakeholders at various levels within Nordplus Junior as to how well the programme is working at the moment and what challenges lie ahead.

Primary and lower secondary schools have statutory duties and little flexibility in terms of time and resources. This places special demands on the way in which Nordplus Junior is organised compared to the other programmes. As far as the mobility component is concerned, the lack of funding for pupils’

room and board has increasingly become a problem. The same applies to funds for travel and accommodation for teachers and other pedagogic staff. The 50% self-funding requirement for development projects and theme networks also seems to serve as an obstacle for many potential participants, but also acts as a “quality assurance” tool that can be used to gauge the level of interest in the project from the users’ side. More contact and application seminars have been called for to improve the recruitment and training of new applicants. Nordplus Junior seems to have special needs in relation to the new application and reporting procedures introduced in 2008. Unlike the other programmes, Junior requires a special platform that simplifies the application procedures and reflects the programme regulations.

The low level of involvement by kindergartens suggests that this part of the programme is of little relevance and should be dropped.

During this programme period, the objective of Nordplus Junior has been to enhance quality and promote renewal in primary-and-lower-secondary education, and it has been geared towards development projects and theme networks. Notwithstanding this, mobility projects remain the main activity, and it seems that this is where the interest in and motivation for participation is greatest. Based on the framework conditions in the sector, there seem to be clear signals about what is perceived as academically relevant and possible in practice. In relation to the overall objectives of Nordic synergy and mutual understanding, the mobility of children, young people and adults in primary and lower secondary schools is an important instrument, and represents an alternative to, e.g. Internet-based communication, which has become more common in recent years. Contrary to what was envisaged just a few years ago, personal encounters have become more important as instruments to achieve the objectives of the programme.

Simplification of the requirements in relation to development projects and theme networks (from three countries to two) may enable these forms of activity to be more easily combined with mobility activities than is possible under the current regulations. Another feasible simplification would be to make mobility funding more flexible, so that surplus funds can be used for other activities. The co-ordination role could also be simplified by individual schools assuming a greater share of the responsibility for their own mobility costs.

5. Nordplus Adult

5.1 Introduction

Many of the people and types of activities targeted by Nordplus Adult received annual operational budgets from the Nordic Council of Ministers prior to 2004. When Nordplus Adult was established as a new programme in 2004, the objective was to combine adult education and general education. The idea was that the programme would bring together small and large stakeholders, professionals as well as newcomers, in the field of adult learning. At the same time, a number of permanent funding mechanisms for Nordic organisations in the same subject area were closed down, and support for adult learning, via the creation of Nordplus Adult, was characterised as “a change from aid to a programme” (Vabø 2006: 29). The programme’s range is therefore diverse and complex.

The objective of Nordplus Adult during this programme period (2008–2011) is to improve co-operation between the people involved in adult learning in the Nordic and Baltic countries, and to contribute to development and renewal. The programme is designed to encourage and develop closer co-operation, create networks and partnerships between the participating countries’ funding bodies and promote quality enhancement and innovation in adult learning in the participating countries. It is also designed to stimulate and develop learning in all parts of adult education – formal, non-formal and informal.

Nordplus Adult is relevant to many types of applicants: Educational institutions, organisations, associations, companies, NGOs, libraries, museums and other informal learning arenas, research-based institutions with competence and experience in adult learning, and institutions that train adult-education teachers and advisers. The programme supports mobility activities, projects and networks.

- **Mobility**

The mobility component provides grants for preparatory visits in advance of the other forms of activity and support, as well as continuing- and further education visits for teachers and educational managers – the latter for min. one week, with max. two participants per organisation or institution. Exchange visits are not a requirement in this part of the mobility component. Any visit covered by a mobility agreement must take place within one year.

Applications can also be lodged for exchange visits for adult learners and teachers/trainers in public and adult education, as well as for

theme networks, development projects and mapping exercises. The purpose of the exchange component is to give participants new professional competences and insight into other cultures. Exchanges must last min. five days in the same location.

- Project activities

Development projects must involve the development of new courses/modules, methods, etc. aimed at enhancing adult learning, raising quality or meeting new learning needs. It is a requirement that the projects are based on available knowledge, are product-oriented, and are accessible and useful to others outside the project. A detailed timetable for the planned activity must be produced. Research-based institutions with experience and expertise in adult learning may be included to improve the results the project aims to achieve.

Mapping exercises are expected to generate new knowledge about adult learning by collating, identifying and analysing the current status of knowledge and experience. These exercises are allowed to take up to three years. The results must be published.

- Theme networks

Theme networks must consist of a relatively broad group of organisations (usually more than five). The minimum level of participation consists of three organisations from three countries and applications can cover a period of up to three years.

Although in theory the applicant does not need to provide self-financing for mobility activities, it is possible that the fixed rates for travel and lodgings will not cover everything and a certain amount of self-financing will be necessary. As far as project and network activities are concerned, a lower co-financing rate of 25% applies (as opposed to 50% on the other programmes). Funding for project and network activities may also be used for travel, accommodation and other expenses. As well as financial contributions, the self-financing element may take the form of working hours directly related to the Nordplus project.

Nordplus Adult has many priorities. In 2010, the priorities are basic skills (i.e. reading, writing, numeracy and ICT), language skills among immigrants and minority groups in the Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as second-language teaching. Another priority area is the recognition and validation of non-formal skills, challenges in modern society (with a particular focus on climate and the environment), easier access to knowledge and education for all, and the interaction between companies and institutions when it comes to continuing and further education for adults. New applicants and partnerships, new topics or problems, or new methods and model solutions, as well as applications in which the collaboration transcends organisations and sectors, will be prioritised in the allocation of funds. In addition, the programme has a strong focus on disadvantaged groups. Since 2004, the main administration has been located in Denmark.

5.2 Management structure and resources

The model of a main administrator and co-administrator is deemed to be appropriate for Nordplus Adult. The advantages of this model are that it provides the programmes with greater visibility in the individual countries, and ensures that applicants receive information and advice in their own language. The types of stakeholders, factors and framework conditions are vary greatly from country to country. Knowledge of the special characteristics of the individual countries' education systems therefore plays an important role in the application process and in drawing up recommendations. The communication between the main and co-administrators appears to be good, and is organised both online and via six-monthly meetings.

The co-operation and division of labour between areas seems to work well at the tangible, day-to-day level. As in the other programmes, many of the stakeholders in Nordplus Adult report a degree of general uncertainty about the role played by the programme administration in relation to the joint consortium on the one hand and the programme committee and main committee on the other. However, this does not seem to have had any significant impact on the running of the programme.

Nordplus Adult covers a sector that is not only diverse and complex, but one that administrators and committee members also describe as populated by many relatively small organisations and stakeholders lacking in resources. The work is characterised by a generally low level of professionalisation, so there is a significant degree of dependence on individuals. This creates a certain vulnerability that, amongst other things, seems to have contributed to fluctuations in the number of applicants from year to year.

In terms of resources, relatively large amounts are needed to reach the target groups and assist them, e.g. in submitting good applications and using ARS in the application process.

The Baltic countries seem to be well integrated in Nordplus Adult, in terms of both administration and project participation. The Baltic participants rely on grants being paid on time. Recession has not led to a noticeable reduction in the number of applications from these countries.

One problem is that, due to the termination of projects, not all funds are used in the budget year. These funds are transferred to the budget for the following year, and this would appear to be a recurring issue. One proposed solution is for the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat to establish a guarantee fund so that the available allocation can be slightly exceeded in any given year, thus dealing with the problem of unused funds during a programme period, which would mean that the funding does, ultimately, benefit the sector.

5.3 Administration and running of the programme

On the whole, Nordplus Adult seems to be run well and the application procedures seem to work fine. The two annual application deadlines (March 1 for all parts of the programme; 15 October for preparatory visits) are perceived to be well timed, support the objectives of the programme and provide balance in relation to the administrative needs of the people involved. However, there have been calls for an earlier application deadline in the spring, e.g. 1 February. Grants are not allocated until May, which some people think does not leave sufficient time to prepare for activities at the start of autumn semester in the same year. It is also pointed out that the self-financing requirement may exclude certain participants from the programme, and also that project resources are limited in comparison with the corresponding EU programme.

Although co-operation between the main and co-administrators is described as good, there seem to be different interpretations of the programme regulations. It is pointed out that more stringent requirements are placed on applicants in Adult than in other programmes (except Junior, where the situation appears to be the same). One point in need of clarification is whether an educational component is required in development projects. Another area of ambiguity concerns exactly what constitutes a mobility activity. A third point in need of clarification concerns networking, which is said to be different in Adult than in the other programmes, and serves as preparation for the project proper. In addition, a clearer description of the rules is required in the Handbook so that unsuccessful applicants are still registered in ARS as applicants.

It emerged from interviews with users of Nordplus Adult that two of the stakeholders had completely different perceptions about what is required for participation in the programme. This may indicate that there are different interpretations among users and those who provide advice about the application process. There appears to be a need to revise the Handbook and conduct a review of how relevant the programme is perceived to be in each country (cf. views about whether the programme is too wide-ranging), the results of which will be drawn upon when developing future programme initiatives.

Users point out that the practice of across-the-board cuts to budgets of up to 25–30% should be replaced by clearer guidelines about the ceiling for funding applications. Writing an application involves a great deal of work, so it is important to know exactly what funding is available. It is also perceived as a problem for project quality that across-the-board cuts are imposed without dialogue with the applicants. A typical statement in this regard is that:

It is important that they have confidence in us, and the budgets must be evaluated on the basis of whether they are realistic or not. Either you give money or reject the application, not just impose the same cuts everywhere.

As far as ARS is concerned, similar views emerged from Nordplus Adult as from the other programmes. For administrative purposes, shadow statistics have to be calculated outside of ARS, because it does not distinguish sufficiently clearly between the amount applied for, amounts allocated and the stakeholders involved. In 2009 and 2010, ARS functioned without any major problems, but administrators claim, based on their experience, that in future they will have to provide fairly comprehensive assistance to applicants to enable them to understand and use the system. Most participants in adult and public education have little experience of databases and online systems, and so need help with applications and reports.

It is pointed out that ARS has brought about changes in the programme's content, and that standardisation has led to uniformity between the programmes. This is considered unfortunate, as it does not reflect the political priorities and framework conditions in the sectors targeted by the programme.

5.4 Profiling, communications and information

Nordplus Adult has a diverse target group, which is reflected in the diversity of outreach activities directed at potential applicants. An information meeting and a writing seminar have been arranged in Denmark. The writing seminar was arranged for applicants from all of the Nordic/Baltic countries. The idea was to provide applicants with advice on how to plan their projects and write the best possible applications. Both users and co-administrators found this helpful.

Information has also been disseminated to potential user groups in Denmark via e-newsletters and targeted information campaigns. There are reports of synergy in relation to international networks, and that information is provided about the Nordplus programmes in parallel with EU programmes.

In order to stimulate interest in Nordic/Baltic co-operation and encourage more applications to Nordplus Adult, a wish has been expressed for contact seminars to be held on a more systematic manner than at present. Experiences from the EU programmes are presented as an example of how this can be achieved in a Nordplus context. It is also pointed out that this would necessitate a bigger administration budget for Nordplus Adult.

Users point out that the results of the development projects are not very visible to the outside world. They would like to see dissemination activities given higher priority in Nordplus Adult via, for example, more conferences or contact seminars at which results and experiences are disseminated to potential stakeholders who have not been involved in the projects. Some users mention that the Network for Adult Learning (NVL) may be important in relation to the dissemination of results and knowledge, and that Adult is well placed to develop an even closer partnership with NVL on this issue.

5.5 Attainment of objectives and results

The total amount applied for during the period has varied somewhat – from about €3.6 million in 2008 to approx. €2.6 million in 2009. In 2010, the amount was approx. €3.2 million. The number of applications has also varied – 90 in 2008, 60 in 2009 and 69 in 2010.

The problems associated with ARS in 2008 were cited as one explanation for the decline in the number of applicants from 2008 to 2009. Another explanation was that, since 2004, the number of applicants has varied somewhat from year to year. A third factor mentioned in the annual report is the potential participants' lack of capacity to apply every year. This appears to explain the relatively large variation in the number of applications and the amount applied for from one year to the next.

Table 5.1. Approved applications and grants per country (i.e. country of co-ordinator).

	2009 applica- tion round 1	Grants (€)	2009 application round 2	Grants (€)	Total number	Total grants (€)	Proportion (%)
Denmark	8	292,443	3	6,800	11	299,243	21%/25%
Finland	10	219,099	2	3,520	12	222,619	23%/18%
Iceland	4	138,764	0	0	4	138,764	8%/11%
Norway	2	54,161	1	4,880	3	59,041	6%/5%
Sweden	8	228,795	3	9,860	11	238,655	21%/20%
Estonia	3	71,460	1	1,360	4	72,820	8%/6%
Latvia	3	75,780	2	5,170	5	80,950	9%/7%
Lithuania	2	94,535	1	1,080	3	95,615	6%/8%
The Faroe Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%/0%
Greenland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%/0%
Åland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%/0%
Total	40	1,175,037	13	32,670	53	908,464	

Source: Source: Annual Report 2009 to the Nordic Council of Ministers from the Danish Agency for International Education, Denmark.

Table 5.1 shows that there is a good spread between the countries. Finland, Denmark and Sweden have the highest number of applicants, and are most successful in terms of grants allocated. *Per capita*, Sweden has lower participation than Finland and Denmark. Norway is low both in the percentage of applications and in *per capita* comparisons. Iceland is among the more successful countries, with a high level of participation *per capita*.

The Baltic states fared relatively well, with a level of participation in line with population. For the autonomous areas, participation is greater than the population size would suggest. However, these countries rarely assume the role of co-ordinator and the number of participating organisations is low.

According to the 2009 annual report, applications are evaluated on the basis of the year's priorities, the project's purpose and content, organisation and plans for implementation, and plans for dissemination of results. Applications are also required to be clear and concise, the partnerships must be relevant to the project, and there has to be an innovative element. In addition, in 2009 grants were allocated in such a way that priority was given to new applicants, as well as to applications for projects that transcend formal,

informal and non-formal adult education. Against this background, Nordplus Adult seems to be ambitious in relation to the target group. On the one hand, many of the stakeholders in the target group are described as small and lacking in resources, but on the other hand it is emphasised that they must still be subject to certain requirements.

At the same time, across-the-board cuts are applied to applications that receive grants. This is justified by the fact that more applications are approved and that a low success rate may discourage some applicants from applying again in the future. The principle of applying cuts across the board is under discussion in the programme committee. There seems to be a certain tension within Adult between broad public education and more specialised knowledge development. It is also pointed out that a more general problem for Nordplus Adult is the lack of political interest in and prioritisation of the field. The following is a typical statement in this context:

Public education used to have greater influence. Basically, there is not much focus on adult learning these days. All of the focus is on children and young people. But if youngsters fail to complete their education, where do they turn later on if adult learning is downgraded?

It is also pointed out that it is these organisations that are responsible for, e.g. formal and informal learning among immigrants, and that their work is especially important for women's participation in society outside of the home.

There appear to be different views among people participating in the programme about whether to further develop and adapt it to better meet the diverse needs of its composite target group, or whether to lower the level of ambition and focus the way it is organised.

Table 5.2 below shows the types of institutions/organisations that received funding in 2010. It shows that people involved in non-formal learning, etc. are poorly represented, while organisations and institutions engaged in formal learning, higher education and research are relatively well represented.

Table 5.2. Types of institutions involved in Nordplus Adult 2010 (awarded grants).

Type of institution/organisation	Co-ordinator	Partner	Total no. of institutions
Stakeholders involved in informal learning	0	1	1
Adult education associations	8	30	38
Centres for adult learning	11	25	36
Centres for special-needs education	1	6	7
Employers' organisations	0	2	2
Evening schools	0	1	1
Folk high schools	4	15	19
Language schools	1	2	3
Open University	0	3	3
Others	5	19	24
Private companies	4	9	13
Public-sector companies	3	12	15
Research centres	1	19	20
Social and health schools	0	2	2
Trade unions	1	3	4
Training opportunities schemes	0	1	1
Unions	3	14	17
Vocational schools	2	0	2
TOTAL	44	174	218

Source: Danish Agency for International Education.

According to the self-evaluations, there are different views within the programme administration about whether it should in future focus on working to improve breadth and diversity, or whether the range is already too wide. Users agree that there is a need for a tighter and clearer focus, and indicate that the programme is now far removed from general public education and the focus on exchanges of experience with which Nordplus Adult used to be associated. Typical user statements illustrate this:

The profile is good enough, but the inter-sectoral requirement is superfluous.

The scientific aspect is a problem, as it accounts for much of the budget and it costs to have them [researchers] involved and doing real work. For us, exchanging experiences would have been important.

It is an obstacle that there is a strong focus on project output. Money could be saved if more time was spent exchanging experiences.

Among the proposed solutions are a clearer focus on some priorities, and theme networks and development projects designed to meet the needs of the target group. According to several of those involved, the most important aspect of Nordplus Adult is the institutional co-operation, which is thought to ensure greater durability. The same people see mobility as principally beneficial to individuals, and therefore it is more difficult to turn it into a longer-term activity. Users seem to see a contradiction between spreading knowledge at institutional level and garnering individual experiences. This contradiction should be discussed in greater detail in the programme.

Best practice: Culture as a Form of Treatment

The project “Culture as a Form of Treatment: A development project in Nordic care of the elderly”, under Nordplus Adult, explores how cultural activities can stimulate and help elderly people in their everyday life. The project involves 11 organisations from Sweden, Norway and Finland. These comprise higher education institutions, colleges, local authorities and care institutions. The project is co-ordinated by the YA Österbotten unit in Gamla Vasa, Finland. It began as a one-year network project in 2006, and was later extended to a two-year development project. The aims were to create training modules about cultural activities in elderly care, and to establish long-term co-operation between the project partners. We think this programme sets an example of best practice for three reasons:

The programme content

- The project makes use of cultural activities such as music, handicrafts and literature to stimulate memory among the elderly.
- Participation in the project gives the partners the chance to experience different cultures and work together to develop teaching modules.
- The co-operation in three countries helps to develop a broad understanding of culture’s potential for the elderly.

Use of funds from the Nordplus scheme

- The 25% self-financing requirement is met in the form of labour invested in the project.

Extra effects for Nordplus

- The project demonstrates that a network can be used to introduce cultural activities as a form of treatment in elderly care.
- A 40-hour course for continuing and further education in health sciences on various levels has been developed.
- The results are publicised via reports, radio interviews, articles and conferences.

5.6 Overall evaluation

Nordplus Adult supports mobility, projects and network activities, and has a broad and diverse range. Its core concept is education, and its activities are designed to stimulate and develop adult learning – formal, non-formal and informal. Nordplus Adult is relevant to many types of applicants.

The great breadth of the Nordplus Adult programme may seem to be a challenge. There are few applicants from the informal learning area, and many of those who receive funding are larger formal organisations and institutions. Even though the self-funding component is lower in Adult compared with the other programmes, this is nevertheless a critical point for sections of the target group, while others have the resources to cover it.

As all of Adult's activity is related to education in some way or other, early autumn is a natural starting point for its activities. An earlier spring deadline has been called for, e.g. 1 February, in order to more effectively prepare for implementation in autumn. At present, grants are allocated in May, which can leave insufficient time for preparation.

There seem to be different interpretations of the programme regulations, and requirements on applicants are perceived as being strict. For these reasons, it would appear appropriate to review the programme and clarify the room for interpretation in the Handbook.

There are different views within the programme about the extent to which it should extend its breadth and diversity, or whether the range is already too wide. Adult now has a profile that can be said to meet its programme objectives, which, to a large extent, reflect the Nordic tradition of diversity within adult education. At the same time, many users indicate that the programme needs a clearer focus, and suggest that it has deviated considerably from its original foundation in general education. Some of the people involved consider institutional co-operation to be a more lasting guarantor of quality, while mobility is considered as something beneficial to the individual and more difficult to turn in to anything long-term. The perceived contradiction between spreading knowledge at institutional level and garnering individual experiences ought to be discussed in more detail within the programme.

6. Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture

6.1 Introduction

Language and culture are both specific Nordplus themes and recurring and fundamental components of Nordic co-operation. The general intentions behind the Nordic Languages and Culture Programme are linked to the motives for the establishment of binding, state-level Nordic co-operation after World War II – namely, a common understanding of geographical, historical and linguistic affinity in the Region. The purpose was – and remains – to build on this sense of community and strengthen cohesion in the Nordic Region through both material and instrumental means, but also through more intangible measures, such as the exchange of knowledge, the mutual understanding of each other's languages, and a broad commitment to Nordic cultural idioms and ways of life. The value of common language and culture has been central to the awareness of the need to preserve and strengthen the Region's economic, social and cultural cohesion. Strengthening the sense of community, understanding each other's mother tongue (especially the Scandinavian languages), and communicating with each other in Scandinavian have been priorities of the Nordic Council since it was founded in 1952. As such, the work of Nordic Languages and Culture (NLC) is firmly rooted in the Region's long-standing tradition of co-operation. The current programme is also a continuation of earlier ones with similar objectives, most recently Nordplus Language.

In organisational terms Languages and Culture differs from the other Nordplus programmes. Formally, it is an entirely separate programme. It covers the languages in the Nordic Region – the three Scandinavian languages, as well as the Finnish and the Saami language area – but not the Baltic languages. Since 2008, the Baltic countries have been incorporated into all of the other Nordplus programmes except this one.

The general objectives of NLC 2008–2011 are:

- to improve language comprehension, especially of neighbouring languages (Danish, Swedish and Norwegian)
- to stimulate interest in and knowledge and understanding of the Nordic Region's cultures, languages and living conditions (www.nordplusonline.org).

6.1.1 Defining languages in the Nordic Region – the Nordic and Scandinavian languages

To discuss the issue of NLC's profile and objectives, it is essential to establish definitions that clarify the language situation in the Region and also form the basis for discussing future initiatives in the area of language and culture. The concept of "Nordic" languages may be synonymous with the term "North Germanic" languages (Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic and Faroese), or it can mean the languages spoken within a geographical area (the Nordic Region). In the latter case, as well as the three Scandinavian languages (Danish, Swedish and Norwegian) and the North Germanic languages (Icelandic and Faroese), other language families are also included. In other Nordplus contexts, the Baltic states are included in the geographical designation "the Nordic Region", so it is possible to envisage adding their national languages and other languages in the Baltic countries to the list above. In this evaluation of NLC, *Nordic languages* are defined as languages spoken in the Nordic Region, excluding the Baltic states, while *Scandinavian languages* are defined as the national languages of Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

6.2 Management structure and resources

6.2.1 NLC and the Nordic Council of Ministers

Even though NLC is an independent programme, it is associated with Nordplus in organisational terms, and is an integral part of the Nordic Council of Ministers' management and administration of Nordplus.

The Handbook puts Nordic Languages and Culture on an equal footing with the other programmes. It has the same application deadline, and since summer 2010 it has been included on the Nordplus website.

Initially, NLC's outsider status meant that it was governed by two different documents. It was unclear whether the "Common Programme Document" (CPD), which was the basis for the framework programmes within Nordplus, also applied to NLC. Specifically, there were questions about whether the requirement for self-financing would also apply to Nordic Languages and Culture (as the requirement was not mentioned in one of the basic documents). The programme committee wanted a lower percentage than 50% (Self Evaluation, 2010: 2). The self-financing requirement, which the programme committee considers to be high – and possibly a major obstacle for some applicants – has been discussed within NLC. It can also be seen as an expression of a general lack of clarity about the framework conditions for a programme associated with Nordplus. For example, how much freedom did the programme committee have to define the conditions for organisation and operations? The Nordic Council of Ministers decided that the same organisational framework, including self-financing, that applied to

other programmes would also apply to Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture.

6.2.2 Language: an inter-sectoral commitment and programme

Language is a disparate programme in Nordplus. The Region's shared languages, culture and living conditions form a pervasive and fundamental basis for Nordic co-operation. The expertise in the area has been used to develop a programme with three dimensions: i) linguistic insight enhances knowledge and understanding of Nordic culture and of the Region's diversity and ways of life; ii) the programme facilitates and enhances communication, especially in the Scandinavian languages, and prioritises the learning of Scandinavian languages; and iii) the programme supports academic development through research and development in the Nordic languages. It is important to continue to prioritise this field of knowledge. One co-administrator for the programme compared the Nordic method of organising language programmes with similar activities in the European Union, and expressed the benefit of Nordplus as follows:

LLP (Lifelong Learning) finds it more difficult to maintain the language component within a more integrated form.

The Nordplus organisation, with a main administrator and co-administrators for each of the framework programmes, can be a strength for an inter-sectoral programme such as Nordic Languages and Culture, not least because, with regard to questions of language and culture, national administrators often have greater insight into national characteristics.

6.2.3 Objectives

In 2010, the programme objectives were specified as follows:

- Activities that enhance children's and young people's understanding of languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish), cf. the language campaign
- Activities that show how best to teach Danish, Norwegian and Swedish in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland, and in the Saami areas
- Activities that carry on the work with the "language pilots" in connection with the education of young people (aged 14–19)
- Activities that boost language comprehension in teacher-training courses and improve co-operation on language strategy in Nordic teacher training
- Activities that reflect on the universities' choice of teaching language, language technology co-operation and development co-operation (Nordplus 2008–2011, Handbook 2010: 52).

Three distinct themes are prioritised: i) children's, young people's and teachers' understanding of Scandinavian languages; ii) the development and use of new technology that aids understanding of the Scandinavian languages; and iii) choice of language in higher education.

The deadline for the second round of applications in 2010 is mid-October. Again, the priority will be children and young people's understanding of language, with an emphasis on the Scandinavian languages. NLC's focus on children and young people is consistent with the general political signals from Nordic politicians. It follows up on and makes tangible the Helsinki Treaty (1962), the Declaration on Nordic Language Policy (2006) and the work of the Expert Group (www.norden.org, approved guidelines for the Expert Group Nordic Language Council (ENS)). The general intentions behind Nordplus of greater mobility in the Region also play a role.

The number of priority objectives has been relatively high during the current programme period. The question is whether this represents an initial phase in which the programme is working to establish its profile, or indicates a desire to meet the many and varied expectations and wishes placed upon the programme. Another issue is whether the priorities are in line with the applications received and those that receive funding. It might appear as if, during the first phase, with a new structure, new types of activity and partially different groups of applicants, the programme has been trying to find its way.

6.2.4 A language programme, not a cultural programme?

The cultural part of Nordic Languages and Culture mainly stems from the fact that its mobility projects were transferred from the Junior programme, the remit of which was not limited to language-oriented activities. The expansion of the programme has therefore contributed to a more diffuse identity – especially among potential users.

The Handbook tries to strengthen this profile by emphasising the general importance of language as a bearer and communicator of culture (Nordplus 2008–2011, Handbook 2010: 53). However, the priorities make clear that NLC is largely a language programme. One co-administrator tried, for example, to encourage artists in his country to apply to NLC but met with little success. Outside of this programme, there are also several other established culture initiatives under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

6.2.5 The programme's two parts: mobility and language

In order to promote the theme objectives, NLC supports a variety of different activities and measures aimed at different and sometimes specific target groups. One type of initiative is known as *the mobility component*, and the other, *the language component*. Activities in the mobility component target exchanges of knowledge and of students and teaching staff between the

Nordic countries at primary-and-lower-secondary- and at upper-secondary school level. The language component provides support for networks and projects.

The mobility component:

- Exchanges of knowledge, class exchanges and exchanges of teachers and other pedagogic staff.

The language component:

- Information work
- Conferences
- Courses
- Publications
- Research projects
- Language-technology projects
- Dictionary and terminology work
- Devising and publishing teaching materials.

The Nordic Languages and Culture Programme is divided into two parts. This division is underlined by a rule that 30% of the funds (DKK 2 million) are earmarked for mobility and 70% for language. While the language component is a continuation of the former Nordplus Language, the mobility activities are new (introduced in 2008). They introduce student and teacher exchanges at primary and lower secondary school level, as part of the overarching goal of increasing understanding of neighbouring languages among children and young people, as well as enhancing teaching about social conditions in other Nordic countries. The mobility component overlaps partly with Nordplus Junior, and was part of Junior prior to the reorganisation.

Language activities are dominated by established categories and collaboration with professional stakeholders in the field, many of whom are researchers and research groups in language disciplines such as terminology and dictionary work (Nordplus 2008–2011, Handbook 2010: 53). Many of the applicants to this programme are academics studying Nordic languages, and the list of initiatives includes many activities that can be linked to academic projects, networks and other R&D work.

6.2.6 *The programme committee (ENS) and the Nordic Language Council*

In 2009, the current ENS replaced the previous steering committee for the programme, the Nordic Language Council, which was then disbanded. The Nordic Language Council was established by the Council of Ministers in 2004, and included representatives from all of the Nordic countries, most of whom were language professionals. An evaluation of the previous programme stated that it was characterised by close interaction between the programme committee and the Nordic languages research community. Ho-

wever, because applicants to the programme were often members of the former Nordic Language Council, it was pointed out there were possible conflicts of interest and, therefore, a need for rules on impartiality (Vabø 2006: 36–37).

The overall language work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, including NLC, was restructured following the reorganisation of the language area. The current programme committee (ENS) consists of ten members: one expert each from Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, two from Finland, and one from each of the autonomous areas (the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland), as well as an expert from the Saami Parliament. The members are appointed by the Nordic Council of Ministers on the recommendation of the respective states' ministries. The majority have research expertise in Nordic languages or linguistics at first/top-post level. As well as being the programme committee for NLC, ENS acts in an advisory capacity to the Council of Ministers in other language work. ENS co-operates with Nordic Languages Co-ordination, which is physically housed in the Danish Language Council and receives operational funding from the Council of Ministers. Since 2009, Nordic Languages Co-ordination has been responsible for supporting the permanent bodies *Nordkurs* (Nordic Courses) and *Nordspråk* (Nordic Language), as well as the co-operation board for the Nordic language councils.¹ Nordic Languages Co-ordination also plays a role in identifying and disseminating the lessons learned from NLC.

Nordic Languages Co-ordination is also responsible for the Council of Ministers' commitment to the Nordic Languages Campaign, which promotes mutual language understanding among children and young people in the Nordic Region. The conflict of interest problem within the language area seems to have been taken seriously, and the new system has severed some of the close ties between the former Nordic Language Council and the Nordplus programme. However, during the current programme period, members of ENS have also been co-applicants on projects, so impartiality is still a real issue. Nevertheless, the establishment of ENS means that programme work in NLC is more reflective and more firmly rooted in language policy.

6.3 Administration and running of the programme

The main administration for Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture is based in the University of Iceland "International Office for Education". The work is regulated nationally by a contract with the Icelandic Ministry of Education. It probably does the programme no harm to be based in Iceland, where language policy is a particularly important national concern, and where there is a long-standing tradition of contact with Nordic culture and the Scandinavian languages. The fallout from the recent financial crisis in Iceland may have contributed to an enhanced awareness of the funding oppor-

¹ www.dsn.dk.

tunities that the programme offers Icelandic academics, schools and other groups, but it may also mean that Icelandic stakeholders currently play a relatively dominant role in the programme.

As far as the management and running of the programme is concerned, Nordic Languages and Culture seems to work well. The co-operation between the programme committee and the administration also seems to work well (Self Evaluation, 2010: 3, interviews with administrators), as does the evaluation of applications to the programme. Many of the applicants to the language part have established norms and traditions for academic work and operate within a knowledge and organisational structure that is readily compatible with Nordplus activities and where there are clearly established reporting requirements. The mobility component provides greater challenges for schools, which often have weaker administrative structures and are less accustomed to dealing with the demands of application writing and reporting. However, visits to upper secondary schools where classes and their teachers had been on exchanges to another Nordic countries showed that resources revealed been earmarked for co-ordination and administration. Here too, the work was accompanied by a commitment to Scandinavian languages and Nordic cultural affinity that exceeded the teachers' professional obligations. In relation to the mobility component, the applicant is not required to make a contribution, but the fixed rates may not cover everything. There may often be a need for self-financing, as well as academic and practical planning. This self-financing may take the form of working hours, or even co-funding from the school and/or private sources.

From a user standpoint, the administration of the programme, as far as the evaluators can tell, seems to be unproblematic. Users praised the main administration for its accessibility and clear information, and the positive, ongoing support they had received for class visits to other Nordic countries. Users of the language component praised the administration's accessibility, efficiency and flexibility in relation to applications and approved projects.

6.3.1 Application and reporting system (ARS)

The introduction of the new application and reporting system (ARS) in 2008 created major difficulties for management and for applicants. The difficulties stem from both the way in which ARS is structured and the fact that, on a purely technical level, the system did not work. During the first year, a great deal of time and effort was expended, including on additional local solutions, to enter applications into the system and to try to resolve technical difficulties processing them. As far as submitting applications is concerned, the most serious difficulties seem to have been overcome. But the system still does not function as intended when it comes to the main administrator's analysis and reporting requirements. The feedback is that it is still difficult to extract relevant statistical data and other information needed to process applications. Nordic Languages and Culture's programme committee ex-

pressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the system was only available in English (which is mainly due to technical reasons). This is said to convey the wrong impression to users and applicants for a programme whose purpose is to enhance knowledge and understanding of languages in the Nordic Region. There is now an option to choose a Scandinavian (Norwegian) version, but only after launching the programme in English. The default language is still English, with a Scandinavian language coming in second – a somewhat unnatural state of affairs for a Nordic language programme.

6.4 Profiling, communications and information

The most important joint tool shared by the Nordplus programmes is www.nordplusonline.org, which provides an overview of the whole framework programme. Each sub-programme has its own section on the site. Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture, which is formally separate from the framework programme, was incorporated into the joint website in summer 2010.

Nordic Languages and Culture benefits from the various Nordplus offices' experiences and channels of communication. The structure of Nordplus, comprising a main administrator and co-administrators, has clear advantages when it comes to reaching the target groups for language activities. The fact that each country has its own administrator therefore establishes a low threshold for contact. However, the language field is also able to draw on other networks and resources in Nordic co-operation, and some users have expressed a desire for greater collaboration between NLC and, e.g. Nordic Languages Co-ordination on the dissemination and exchange of knowledge.

One of NLC's priorities is to raise awareness of the programme. The administration has conducted an annual mapping exercise among its co-administrators about how they disseminate information about Languages and Culture. The policy of the main administrator seems to be to stimulate open and regular communication about the work of the programme administration (Self-Evaluation, 2010:4).

Nordplus Language and Culture targets two very different groups: people in research and higher education; and children, young people, school classes and teachers. There are several difficulties involved in profiling a programme that has to reach such different target groups.

6.4.1 *The EU and Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture*

The mobility component is subject to competition from EU programmes, while the content of the language component means that it is uniquely Nordic and without competition from the EU. It is therefore important for the Nordic Council of Ministers to focus on this area of knowledge.

6.5 Attainment of objectives and results

Table 6.1 NLC, number of applications and of grants

Year	2008	2009	2010
No. of applications	48	43	82 (spring 46, autumn 36)
Total amount applied for	1,841,176	1,381,854	921,376 (spring only)
Approved applications	37	36	56 (spring 35 and autumn 21)
Total amount awarded (€)	1,083,360	965,950	593,303 (spring only)

Source: SIU, 2010.

Overall, the success rate was high (70–80%) during the period 2008–2010. Experiences from the application rounds in 2008 and 2009 and the first round in 2010 suggest a certain abundance of resources – a fact that facilitated a second round of applications in autumn 2010.

This situation may be due to several different factors, not least the restructuring of the criteria for applications with some types of grants transferred directly from the Nordic Council of Ministers. Other factors included a new deadline for applications, a new application system (ARS) that did not work particularly well in 2008, and the financial crisis in Europe and Iceland, which generated widespread uncertainty. As far as the awards in 2010 were concerned, the situation was such that a certain amount of money was still available even after good-quality projects worthy of support had been selected. As a result, a new call for tenders was issued, this time with a deadline of mid-October, as a result of which 21 new projects were awarded grants. This may indicate that multiple deadlines also stimulate an increase in the total number of applications.

6.5.1 NLC – mobility and language

As previously mentioned, 30% of the funding went to the mobility component and 70% to the language component. The success rate is generally high, and about the same for both components.

According to the self-evaluation, for the time being the current budget is sufficient to support a reasonable number of qualitative projects. The number of applications fell from 67 in 2006 (under the former programme, Nordplus Language) to 48 in 2008, when the current programme began (Self-evaluation, Nordplus Languages and Culture Programme, 2009: 1). Prior to the reorganisation in 2008, Nordplus Language funds were often allocated to a number of “regular applicants”. This meant that there was a lack of funding for other projects, and many applicants had to be rejected. However, the close association with academia and language research in the Nordic Region reinforces the weight and continuity of the applications. The programme is now in a better position to support innovative projects in a field where the applicants, schemes and networks are well established.

6.5.2 *Co-ordinators and partners in NLC*

When we look closely at the number of projects by country – including in relation to countries that act as co-ordinators – Iceland emerges as the most active country in NLC, closely followed by Norway. The other countries assume the role of co-ordinator less often, but are partners more frequently, especially Denmark.

It is unclear why Iceland and Norway are the most active countries in NLC. Considering that Iceland's population is less than 10% of Norway's, the level of Icelandic participation is extremely noticeable. Iceland and Norway also both have a high and approximately equal number of co-ordinators and partners. One possible explanation may be that these countries have a great interest in language issues, and that this is an important motivating factor in them taking charge of projects. Another possible explanation may lie in the fact that the threshold for getting in touch with the Icelandic main administrator is lower for Icelanders than for applicants in other countries.

Compared with other Nordplus programmes, the total number of NLC projects is relatively low, especially in terms of the number of partners. Many of the co-ordinators are primary and lower secondary schools, often for mobility activities. R&D institutions account for many of the other co-ordinators. There seems to be a tendency for R&D institutions to be involved in the language component, as the activities performed by the other types of institutions do not seem to require formal competence in language disciplines (cf. the list of awards granted 2009).

Best practice: Learn Icelandic on the Internet

One of the many activities funded by Nordplus is “Icelandic Online” (www.icelandic.hi.is), a free language course for those who want or need to learn Icelandic. The programme is open to all, but was designed with two target groups in mind: those who want to learn Icelandic (primarily) for practical, everyday purposes, and those who are learning for study purposes and need to take a language-proficiency examination. The programme is based on innovative language technology. “Icelandic Online” helps to stimulate interest in and knowledge of Nordic cultures. It improves comprehension of a language in the Nordic Region and contributes to research and didactics in language studies.

We think this programme sets an example of best practice in Nordplus for three reasons:

The programme’s content and form

- It helps to spread knowledge of and raise interest in a Nordic language
- It strengthens a language with a relatively small number of native speakers
- The programme is, at the same time:
 - a language-training course for newcomers who need to master day-to-day life in Iceland
 - a language-training course for those who need to pass a language examination in Icelandic
 - a training course for those with general interest in language.
- Research related to the programme is based in linguistics, and didactically and academically quality-assured
- An attempt is made (mostly at the more advanced levels of language instruction) to link language with culture, religion, daily life and history
- The programme shows, in an excellent manner, how information technology and graphic design can be developed and used for digital-learning resources.

Use of funds from the Nordplus scheme

- The 50% self-financing requirement was met by working hours put in by employees at the University of Iceland
- The results of the project are available to the public.

Extra effects for Nordplus

- The project offers simple, relevant language training for students on exchange visits under Nordplus auspices and on other scholarship programmes
- The idea could be taken up, developed and linked to other programmes under the Nordplus umbrella, e.g. Higher Education and Horizontal.

6.6 Summary

The general objective of Nordplus is – through programmes such as Nordplus Nordic Languages and Culture – to enhance knowledge and mutual understanding of the different living conditions, ways of thinking and cultural idioms in the Region that are of fundamental importance to the Nordic sense of affinity. The current programme is a manifestation of political ideas, with benefits that are often intangible, but no less significant for that reason.

The work on Nordic languages requires attention and financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers. On the whole, the programme works very well. However, there are challenges, some of which are organisational in nature, while others are knowledge-related and/or based on ambiguous policy goals.

In terms of content, the programme's profile is currently somewhat indistinct in four ways. It covers a wide range of prioritised objectives. Little attempt has been made to integrate the language and culture components. In practice, the cultural dimension has limited independent significance, which means that the Languages and Culture programme for 2008–2011 is largely a language programme with a certain emphasis on language as a bearer and communicator of culture. The distinctions between the Nordic and Scandinavian languages are also somewhat unclear but in practice the *de facto* emphasis is on the latter.

The programme includes a mobility component with a distinct target group, and a language component with a number of different target groups. The profile of NLC would be clearer if the mobility component was transferred to Nordplus Junior. This would bring all of the mobility initiatives directed at the same target group under the same programme. It would also improve Nordplus Junior as a programme, and applicants would find it easier to relate to one programme rather than two. In order to boost language learning and reinforcement, it could be made a requirement that all class- and teacher-exchange programmes in Scandinavian countries be conducted in a Scandinavian language. Funds could also be earmarked for this purpose.

On the organisational side, NLC benefits from the fact that, in practice, it is part of Nordplus, which has good overall knowledge of the various relevant target groups for the programme, and which facilitates mutual exchanges of knowledge. The main administration in Iceland works well, the programme is effectively managed, and the administrator's commitment to running, profiling and realising the objectives of the programme runs very deep. The resource frameworks are reasonable in relation to both the number of applications and the number of approved projects. According to NIFU's evaluation, the resources are used appropriately and effectively. The profiling of the programme is commensurate with the available funding.

7. Baltic perspectives

7.1 Introduction

In the wake of EU enlargement in 2004, the Nordic Ministers for Co-operation (MR-SAM) identified the restructuring of co-operation with the Baltic states as an important strategic objective. Since then, co-operation with the Baltic countries has increasingly evolved into regular collaboration on an equal footing between official bodies as joint funding of projects. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania's participation in the Nordplus programmes emerged from this restructuring in the education and research area. Since 2008, the Baltic countries have had the opportunity to participate on an equal footing with the Nordic countries in the Nordplus programmes, except Nordic Languages and Culture.

This chapter presents and considers the views of the Baltic stakeholders. In connection with Baltic participation, certain reservations were expressed about possible administrative issues related to language problems, Baltic co-funding, and the consequences for the management model. In addition, the admission of the Baltic countries has undoubtedly led to increased attention being paid to cross-cultural contexts and to multilingualism as a possible framework condition for all partners involved in Nordplus. The Baltic and Nordic countries have now collated their experiences of Baltic participation. During the evaluation, we have, therefore, considered it appropriate to encourage the new Baltic partners to shed light on the co-operation with a view to evaluating and improving the whole Nordplus programme. Qualitative improvement, with the active participation of the Baltic partners, may well entail an institutional restructuring of some parts of Nordplus, which will be discussed in greater depth in the recommendations at the end of this chapter.

7.2 Management structure and resources

During the initial years of Baltic participation in Nordplus, representatives of the Baltic programme offices did not act as the main party responsible for a Nordplus sub-programme, nor did they have joint responsibility for any of the other programmes. The advantage of this decision was that it gave Baltic partners and administrators time to learn about the programmes' organisation and administration. However, it also meant that it was not possible to implement joint decision-making on a scale commensurate with Baltic ambitions. Instead, the Baltic information offices have tended to adopt a waiting brief *vis-à-vis* the administration of Nordplus, dealing with the Nordplus programmes in much the same way as a number of EU programmes. More

and more of the administrative staff in the Baltic information offices are now well acquainted with how the Nordplus programme is run. In both Latvia and Estonia, and to a lesser degree in Lithuania, a desire for more direct involvement in the administration of Nordplus has been expressed. There seems to be a demand for the Baltic states to be assigned an area of work in which they feel strong and where there is a long-standing tradition of collaboration. Several informants note that a Nordplus Culture Programme, with the Baltic countries (either alternately or jointly) as head administrators, would further the aim of closer Nordic–Baltic co-operation.

7.2.1 Culture as a Baltic strength

From the Baltic perspective, the time is now ripe to stop being a recipient in European or Baltic–Nordic co-operation and to make a greater contribution to the fields in which the Baltic countries have particular strengths. Without exception, the Baltic informants identified culture as a sector in which Baltic art, culture, experiences and competence in communication are relevant and at a very high level compared with the Nordic countries. With this in mind, the informants think it would be appropriate to distinguish to a greater extent between language and culture in the Nordplus Framework Programme, i.e. to create a new Nordplus Language Programme and a new Nordplus Culture Programme, which would better meet the need for linguistic and cultural co-operation between the Baltic states and the Nordic Region. However, several of the informants in the Baltic countries have also directly expressed the wish to be responsible for the administration of Nordplus Culture as a new programme. They think that this would enable the Baltic countries to make their mark in Nordic–Baltic co-operation, particularly in the cultural field, and also enable them to raise the profile of Baltic culture in the Nordic countries. For a more detailed discussion of these views in relation to the Nordplus programmes in general, see Chapter 9.

7.2.2 Funding

As far as funding is concerned, the Baltic side has expressed grave concern in relation to Nordplus Junior. The Baltic informants assert that the 50% self-financing requirement is often beyond the means of Baltic partners. This should be seen in comparison with other schemes, e.g. the LLP programme Comenius, in which up to 100% of various activities can be externally funded. A 75% stake from Nordplus with 25% self-financing would certainly encourage applications from more good projects, and it would help to offset the large material differences between the Nordic and Baltic institutions.

In the case of Nordplus Junior, structural problems in the Baltic countries are often also cited as the reason why the programme's funding is perceived as problematic or inadequate. For example, Latvian schools often do not have control of their own budget, and are run by the local authority. Co-

ordination between schools and local authorities is often problematic – in one case, a co-ordinating school ran into problems regarding the distribution of funds because there is no legal basis for such activity. One solution may be to transfer money to the schools’ so-called “donation accounts”, over which they have greater control.

These comments and suggestions undoubtedly reflect the problems that have characterised the economic situation in the Baltic countries in recent years. The word “crisis” is often used as to explain why it can be painful and difficult for the Baltic states to provide annual contributions to the Nordplus budget. Despite this, the current funding model, in terms of programme fees, seems able to accommodate the Baltic countries’ interests in the longer term.

Some of the Baltic informants have also expressed a wish to prioritise particular subjects or areas of work in the funding application process, i.e. applications in these fields would be considered particularly desirable for a given period. Climate change was mentioned as one suitable subject. This would also increase awareness of Nordplus as representative of the Nordic Region, where the question of climate change has become a something of a brand in recent years.

As far as funding is concerned, the global economic crisis seems to have greatly influenced the opinions of the Baltic informants. For example, many of the institutions and individuals express very great interest in Nordplus Higher Education, but the paucity of funding for students’ board and lodgings means that Baltic partners do not use the programme very much. There is a sense in which the current funding scheme primarily meets the needs of large and established Nordplus networks that only involve the Nordic countries. One solution might be to bring funding for board and lodgings up to the level provided by the Erasmus programme.

7.3 Programme administration

Participation by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania introduces greater linguistic diversity into the programme activities. As a result, English has been the working language of the day-to-day running of the programmes, including in interaction between the Baltic states. The well-developed and well-equipped national offices have been used to administer and run the Nordplus programmes because they have many years’ experience with information, guidance and processing work for similar programmes run by the EU. The offices are funded by the Archimedes Foundation in Estonia, the Education Exchanges Support Foundation in Lithuania, and the State Education Development Agency in Latvia. This has secured national support for the Nordplus programme and generated administrative synergies.

The national offices’ years of experience with information, guidance and processing work in similar programmes has been a great advantage when it comes to using the joint Application and Reporting System (ARS) for all

parts of Nordplus. The most recent changes to the system have also been positively received. At the same time, some of the Estonian informants have expressed a preference for striking a balance between the relatively straightforward application system and the reporting system, which seems more difficult and causes greater problems for users.

From the Baltic perspective, there is still a need for training in Nordplus administration. In this context, the emphasis could be on facilitating meetings and exchanges of experience between programme managers from Nordic and Baltic countries. The Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat should therefore evaluate several forms of training (e.g. seminars, conferences, and guest residences) that would promote the mobility of Nordic administrators to the Baltic countries and vice versa. Seminars for people responsible for Nordplus at the ministerial level are also an option. Representatives of the Baltic education and research ministries, which take the actual decisions on funding, need to be better informed about relations between the countries so that they are better equipped to tackle any future problems.

7.3.1 Language as key to Nordic–Baltic co-operation

According to the Council of Ministers' language policy, all Nordic co-operation must be conducted in one of the Nordic languages (primarily Scandinavian). In the political and administrative spheres achieving this is largely unproblematic – but within Nordic co-operation in general, the ideal of a common language of communication is far from a reality. This situation and the problems associated with it become even more apparent when Baltic representatives are also involved in Nordplus work.

Despite pragmatic concessions in day-to-day work, the Nordic languages are the most important foundation for co-operation, as stipulated in several of the Nordic Language Council's recommendations. According to the Language Council documents and publications for wider dissemination should be in at least one Nordic language. The language skills displayed in Nordic co-operation facilitate the discussion of complicated issues of joint interest. In this respect, co-operation with the Baltic countries, which is in English, is no different from other types of regional co-operation with other countries around the Baltic Sea, e.g. Poland or Russia. According to the Language Council, this puts into perspective Nordic co-operation, which is based on common linguistic, cultural, historical and political characteristics.

There is no simple way to resolve the language issue in Nordic–Baltic co-operation. Abolishing the principle of using the Nordic languages and allowing all communication to be in English would encourage greater participation – but it would mean that the special nature of Nordic co-operation would have to be redefined. However, it is worth considering adopting a principle that the political and administrative communication must be in English, which would put the Nordic and Baltic partners on an equal footing. Projects would be multilingual, depending on the nature of the individ-

ual project, and multilingual segments would also be promoted in programme activities.

This argument meets no resistance from the Baltic side. On the contrary, the opportunity to learn the Scandinavian languages has contributed to the spread of the programme in the Baltic countries. The Scandinavian languages are associated with Scandinavian/Nordic society and Scandinavian/Nordic lifestyles, which have long enjoyed great respect in the Baltic countries. The desire to practice the Scandinavian languages in Lithuania and Latvia, and Finnish in Estonia, is an important motivating factor in project participation, and is considered an important aspect of the learning process. This is particularly the case in environments in which Scandinavian languages are already taught. Traditionally, learning a Scandinavian language was associated with accessing the “Western European” culture and lifestyles that lay just beyond the Baltic countries’ borders, and which many wished to emulate post-1991.

7.4 Profiling, communications and information

The fact potential Baltic applicants have relatively limited experience of Nordplus, has made it a particular challenge for the national contact centres responsible for applications, publicity and information work to profile Nordplus in relation to EU programmes. The primary source for information about Nordplus and its activities are websites such as:

- Lithuania
<http://www.smpf.lt/index.php?id=1593>
-
- Estonia
<http://www.archimedes.ee/hkk/>

The Baltic countries (especially Estonia) have made online communication and Internet access for all flagship issues. Despite the economic crisis, this has already been partially achieved and/or is progressing rapidly. Especially in small villages, where in recent years local libraries have been turned into information centres for all sorts of administrative tasks and cultural enterprises, a comprehensive online information service is a great advantage. As a result of the major efforts in this area and the widespread use of the Internet in the Baltic countries, investment in e-services as the main information source would appear to be an appropriate solution.

Given the overwhelmingly positive experiences and active use of online communications and the Internet, several informants stressed the need to make better use of the Nordplus website, e.g. by showcasing best-practice projects and providing statistics about current programmes and ones about to come to an end. In addition, a wish has also been expressed for better infor-

mation about events related to Nordplus, including political discussion about the shape of the programme. Administrators have also suggested making more effective use of the site for interactive dialogue with applicants about the programme and its projects.

In addition to well-thought-out and -developed websites, the Baltic countries have used more traditional information channels, in the form of brochures, pamphlets and meetings. One example of a successful and well-thought-out strategy has been to include Nordplus projects with Baltic coordinators in the annual project exhibition Baltic EXPRO+. This event was staged for the first time in 2005 in Tallinn, and was seen as an opportunity to present LLP projects in the Baltic countries. Nordplus has been included since 2009. At the 2009 EXPRO in Šiauliai, Lithuania, a total of 52 projects were presented and discussed, seven of which fell within the Nordplus frameworks. Combining and comparing Nordplus projects with other creative and innovative European projects has made it possible to get the Nordplus message over and to highlight the user-friendly Nordplus application procedure as one of its advantages.

7.5 Attainment of objectives and results

Representatives of education authorities and institutions in the Baltic countries interviewed for the purpose of this evaluation all expressed an increased and sustained desire to participate in the Nordplus programme. From their perspective, participation is topical because there is considerable (and increasing) interest in this type of activity among children, young people, teachers and researchers. In general, the Nordic Region is seen as a feasible destination for school classes of all levels. This interest is promoted and strengthened, among other things, by the positive experiences of Baltic teachers during exchange programmes with Nordic colleagues.

For most informants and Nordplus administrators in the Baltic countries, an effective strategy has been to base new Nordplus projects on existing networks and traditions of co-operation. On the other hand, it has been relatively difficult to find brand-new partners, and interest in new projects has varied greatly from country to country. For example, several Lithuanian informants complained that only the Danes show any interest in co-operation, while the other potential Nordic partners do not display any willingness to engage in joint projects. A similar situation is found in Estonia, where it is mostly colleagues and institutions in Finland that respond quickly and positively, and prove most willing to enter into co-operation with new partners.

Patterns of co-operation in Nordplus Higher Education show that participants build upon positive experiences and connections established during the Nordplus Neighbour programme. However, in relation to better utilisation of human capital in higher education, disappointment was expressed

that the Baltic countries cannot participate in applications for the Nordic Masters Programme. Allowing Baltic research- and higher-education institutions to join the programme would certainly help create greater cohesion between the Baltic and Nordic universities, and it would also have an impact on the ongoing structural changes in higher education in the Baltic countries.

Experiences of adult education in the Baltic countries are mixed. It is only now getting underway in some places, but elsewhere, especially in the big cities, there is already a range of institutions, both public and private. For them, Nordplus Adult is an ideal funding scheme, as it provides an opportunity to spread the Nordic adult-education tradition to the Baltic states. Overall, the Baltic countries have insufficient access to opportunities of this kind, and Nordplus funding sets trends in this sector. The information offices (especially Latvia) have requested a more precise definition of adult education. A simpler application process would almost certainly generate more Baltic applications.

The Nordplus programmes are also relevant for the Baltic states because there is considerable (and increasing) interest in learning Scandinavian languages. Several schools in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania teach in Scandinavian languages. Cultural similarities are also highlighted in this context. However, without full Baltic participation in Nordplus Languages and Culture, opportunities to apply for funding for such activities have been limited. Several informants stated that it would be desirable if language acquisition was made a natural part of all projects, and if language courses could be held during the preparatory phase. This would enhance the partners' communication skills at the start and would mean that English would not occupy such a dominant position.

Inclusion of the Baltic countries in the Nordplus programme has helped generate the critical mass needed to run projects that have a certain degree of significance. It has also increased the opportunities to share work and improve quality in Nordic education, although Nordic–Baltic co-operation on joint study programmes still leaves much to be desired. This could also create a better foundation for attracting students to development projects in the Nordic/Baltic region and from other countries/regions. It would at any rate be an improvement on the current situation, as it is still difficult to attract enough pupils, teachers, researchers and students from the Nordic Region to the Baltic states. In the higher education sector, one solution could also be to direct greater efforts towards the further development of political-science themes (e.g. Baltic Study Programmes or Baltic Sea Region Studies) that seek to redefine the ontological understanding of a joint Nordic–Baltic region and community of interests. If the Baltic countries were allowed to apply, then study programmes of this kind would be well suited to the Nordic Masters Programme.

Similarly, there has been a widespread perception that not enough has been done to support work on issues that are common to Baltic/Nordic schools, e.g. the quality of teacher training, high drop-out rates in further

and higher education, the classroom situation (particularly in relation to problems with pupils aged 13–16), the effect of demographic changes (e.g. the declining birth rate putting rural schools under pressure), the integration of pupils with special needs (due to mental and/or physical impairment), and curriculum development. Prioritisation of funding for these areas/subjects could involve teachers and pupils from multiple countries.

7.6 Overall evaluation

The trend towards internationalisation in the Baltic countries can be identified both at institutional and individual level. The Nordplus programme is clearly perceived as a means of promoting internationalisation. It is not difficult to find good partners. Some of the informants used their experience from Nordplus applications to apply for funding for major EU projects. Estonian informants involved in a Nordplus Adult project reported that their success in Nordplus gave them the confidence to work on major European projects and submit applications to the EU.

All of the Nordic countries are highly respected and well known as good, reliable neighbours. Only rarely do informants criticise the funding opportunities that Nordplus offers and the conditions that have to be met in order to receive project funding.

The Baltic countries have encountered no major difficulties with the administrative procedures involved in the application process. However, there has been criticism of the self-financing principle or co-financing of projects. In several cases, the considerable differences in the material situation and levels of prosperity between the Nordic and Baltic countries were identified as factors that may exclude disadvantaged Baltic schools from co-operation (e.g. student mobility proved difficult, as it was impossible, for social reasons, to find host families for Norwegian pupils on an exchange visit to Latvia).

8. Summary of overall evaluation and main conclusions

While the previous chapters mainly focused on the individual programmes, this chapter provides a summary and evaluation that transcends the programmes and their common features, and also addresses the more general challenges they face. The five sub-headings in the presentation correspond to the five questions that the evaluation was specifically asked to address (see Chapter 1). ARS is also discussed as a separate item.

8.1 The functionality, structure and management of the programmes

Looking at the programmes as a whole, the general impression is that some work better than others when it comes to their profile, administration and operation. Some of the differences are undoubtedly due to reasons beyond the individual programmes' remit. Firstly, there are major differences in the size of the programmes, which undoubtedly poses a challenge when it comes to procedures and follow-up. In relation to the number of applications Higher Education and Junior – are the biggest programmes, and both experience challenges related to issues of capacity as far as the adequate processing of applications is concerned.

Secondly, some programmes have established a clear and defined academic profile over the years (NLC, Higher Education), while others are either newly established (Horizontal) or have had a shift in content (Junior) that has increased the complexity and altered the nature of the programme. To some extent, this has also given rise to a greater degree of uncertainty among potential users. As far as, e.g. Junior is concerned, schools do not always have sufficient resources and capacity to participate in the programme as per the stated requirements.

Thirdly, there are also differences related to whether programmes have “competitors”, either other Nordic programmes or programmes run by other bodies, including the EU and its LLP programmes. Some users mention, for example, that Nordic Masters Programmes are rated by certain others as more attractive than Nordplus Higher Education, and as such may be a viable alternative for them in the future. Similarly, some users seem to be more attracted to the opportunities to expand their network's geographical activities via the EU's LLP programmes. For these users, it is internationalisation *per se* that is important, not just the Nordic aspect. In particular, it

should also be mentioned that the financial conditions for student mobility are somewhat better in LLP.

Quantified in terms of total programme applications 2008–2010, there has been a decline in the number of applications to Nordplus Adult, Higher Education, Junior and even the relatively new Horizontal (see Table 8.1). The biggest decrease was between 2008 and 2009, and the number of applications seems to have stabilised in 2010 (an important reason for the number of applications rising slightly in 2010 is that NLC had two rounds of applications). The biggest fall was in Junior, from 340 to around 200 between 2008 and 2010, but the falls have also been considerable in the other programmes. However, an important factor for Junior is that three-year applications were allowed for the first time in 2008, which may have reduced the number of potential applicants in subsequent years. Junior's slightly modified profile compared to NLC might be another explanation. In addition, new application routines were introduced in which a co-ordinator applied on behalf of multiple parties. Other explanations for the decline include the very high level of information and marketing activity in advance of the launch in 2008, while later marketing efforts were not as intensive. Technical issues related to the budgeting model in ARS and the subsequent difficulties experienced by users may also be relevant.

Table 8.1. Number of Nordplus applicants 2008–2010.

	2008	2009	2010
Nordplus Adult	90	60	69
Nordplus Higher Education	301	254	255
Nordplus Horizontal	46	35	32
Nordplus Junior	340	195	200
NLC	48	43	82
TOTAL	825	587	638

The general decline was particularly large during 2008–2009, and to some extent this can be attributed to the introduction of ARS. However, no subsequent increase has been noted following improvements in its functionality, which suggests that the introduction of ARS does not fully explain this development. In the European context, we also see general indications that traditional mobility programmes are no longer as attractive as they were, and that internationalisation appears to be assuming different forms (Janson et al 2009). The financial crisis may also have played a role in the fall in applications, but our data is limited in that context.

An internal analysis conducted by the main co-ordinator also seems to indicate that the amount applied for has also been greatly reduced in recent years, which may reflect increasing pragmatism among applicants (SLU 2010C). This trend is most obvious in Higher Education and Horizontal. The cause of this is unclear, but may include better dialogue between applicants and administrators in advance of the application process, as well as greater

expertise accumulated by the users over time. However, the latter may indicate that many applicants are repeat users of the programmes.

Although the reduction in the number of applications can be seen as an indication that the attractiveness of the Nordplus programmes has been somewhat reduced, the reduction does not seem to have had much impact on the number of projects that have received funds from the various programmes in the Nordplus family. In 2008, 443 projects were awarded grants, but in 2010 that figure was 480, which actually represents a slight increase in the number of approved projects (see Table 8.2 – again, it should be noted that NLC had two application rounds in 2010, which led to 21 new projects receiving awards in the autumn of 2010). The greatest variations within that outline were that slightly fewer applications to Junior resulted in grants being awarded, while the opposite was true of Higher Education. The fact that the number of projects worthy of funding has been maintained while the number of applications has been reduced is a strong indication that there has been a lack of applications from suitable projects. However, the various main administrators strongly indicate that the quality of the applications has not only been maintained, but has even slightly improved since stricter requirements were placed on the content of applications, on specifying objectives and on the ability to implement the projects. On the one hand, this greater formalisation has helped make applicants and networks think innovatively and adopt a critical attitude towards their own projects. This seems appropriate given that many applicants also received funding from Nordplus during previous programme periods, when custom and practice may have been too dominant in the design and organisation of the projects. In this context, it might be argued that self-financing – which is cited as a problem for some users several times of the report – may have made a positive contribution to the quality of the projects. The argument is that self-financing can be seen as an expression of a strong motivation to implement the project, and that this is an important indicator of a good project.

On the other hand, a balance needs to be struck in relation to the requirements set. Over time, Nordplus has gained a reputation for programmes characterised by “low thresholds”, flexibility and simple lines of communication. These are valuable attributes and important instruments that distinguish Nordplus from competing activities both within and outside the Nordic Region.

Table 8.2. Number of approved projects 2008–2010.

	2008	2009	2010
Nordplus Adult	43	40	43
Nordplus Higher Education	191	210	217
Nordplus Horizontal	21	18	20
Nordplus Junior	151	135	143
NLC	37	36	56
TOTAL	443	439	480

The current programme structure and the boundaries between the different programmes seem to present challenges. As mentioned above, the different sizes of the programmes are a challenge for the main administrators, as quality assurance and monitoring follow-up has to reflect the variation. For example, the success rate varies greatly between programmes – from 85% of applications in Higher Education to 63% in Horizontal. In this context, the programmes' activity profile appears to be an important explanatory factor. In Higher Education, for example, the bulk of the resources go to mobility activities – and these may be limited in scale.

However, the demarcation lines between the content of the programmes do not seem to be particularly well thought out either. For example, Junior and NLC have partly overlapping activities (related to mobility). Another example is that Adult and Horizontal sometimes have the same type of projects (especially in development projects and theme networks). A third example is that Higher Education and Horizontal can cover relatively identical development projects (e.g. developing new study programmes). That said, neither users nor administrators see the current demarcations between programmes as insurmountable problems. The creation of Horizontal as a programme capable of contributing to innovation, cross-border mobility and flexibility has been very positively received, and many users consider the programme to have had a very positive impact. The fact that Horizontal seems to have been established specifically to cope with projects that were worthy of support (and which were often innovative) but which did not fit into the existing structure can, however, also be taken as a sign that the current split between programmes is not optimal.

In relation to the management of the programmes, administrators, committee members and users are generally positive about the current matrix organisation, consisting of main administrators, co-administrators, programme committees, the main Nordplus committee and other governing bodies. Most agree that this structure creates a high degree of participation and a sense of belonging and closeness between the parties involved.

The programme committees are formally responsible for the activity in each programme. The primary role of the main committee is to monitor the various sub-programmes and set annual priorities for the framework programmes. However, the evaluation has revealed that each programme committee functions very differently, and that the degree of involvement and interest in the programme area seems to vary between the members. An important task for the committees in the current structure is to establish solid academic support and a context for the different programmes (see Vabø 2006). At the same time, with the exception of the NLC programme committee, academic questions make up a relatively small part of the agenda in most committee meetings – most meetings focus on administrative procedures and formal decisions. This may partly be due to the fact that the current committees comprise civil servants and experts, but also because the programme committees meet relatively infrequently (usually just once a

year). With such infrequent meetings, it is perhaps not particularly surprising that the committees' level of commitment and involvement vary greatly, and that the programme committees change relatively few of the main administrators' recommendations. In addition, there does not seem to be a high degree of co-ordination and contact between the committees either. During the current programme period, only one joint meeting of all the committees has been held. The administrators function as the secretariat for the various committees, but the secretariat in Copenhagen is also responsible for contact with the main co-ordinators and main administrators (the Consortium) (see Nordplus Common Programme Document 2008–2011). In reality, this means that the committee structure is almost decoupled from its "owners" in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat. The people who sit on the various Nordplus committees (except NLC) often represent national bodies, so might be said to alternate between a "managing" and "controlling" role. Many also sit on several committees at the same time, and therefore it is no wonder that many stakeholders are also somewhat confused as to who actually decides what in this structure. A typical example of the somewhat ambiguous governance structure is that the lines of communication in Nordplus often follow their own logic, which requires the Secretariat in Copenhagen to be called in as a "referee" on political and administrative issues. The role of the main co-ordinator also seems somewhat problematic, given that SIU does not have formal decision-making authority. The result is a great deal of "co-ordination" without perhaps reaching decisions that point the way forward. A typical example of this is that the main administrators' annual reports are sent directly to the secretariat in Copenhagen without being automatically submitted to the main co-ordinator. During the programme period, only one seminar has been held on the governance structure, and even though it has led to greater reflection on roles, responsibilities and authority, some of the problems still seem to be unresolved. The governance structure should be simplified in order to clarify responsibilities, authority and lines of communication.

Results and attainment of objectives The Nordplus programmes have a large number of stated objectives, the most important being strengthening Nordic languages and culture, innovation, quality and co-operation. These objectives are achieved by means of the activities funded by the programmes: mobility, networking and projects. In addition, Nordplus is a Nordic initiative, so equal participation and benefits are key to its long-term legitimacy. From a financial perspective, the countries' payments to and economic "dividends" from Nordplus seem to be fairly evenly distributed, albeit with some national variations. The payments to Nordplus, as mentioned earlier, are linked to national GDP and population. Table 8.3 shows a list of awards and payments to the Nordplus Framework Programme at institution level (based on a calculation by SIU (SIU 2010c)). As the table shows, differences in GDP and population give rise to considerable variation in how much each country pays into Nordplus. It shows, first and foremost,

that Norway and Sweden are the countries that contribute the most to the Framework Programme in relation to how much they get back. In general, Iceland and Finland receive more in funding than they contribute. However, the variation between the countries does not seem to be particularly great. Per capita, the table shows that Sweden, Lithuania and Latvia receive less than their populations would seem to justify. Since the redistributive effects of Nordplus vary somewhat in relation to which criteria are used, it might be argued that the current formula (which combines various criteria) is an appropriate way to balance the different characteristics of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Table 8.3 Overview of awards, payments and populations for 2009 and 2010 for the Nordplus Framework Programme.

	No. of participating institutions in 2009	Per-cent	No. of participating institutions in 2010	Percent	Paid into Nordplus	Per-cent	Population	Percent
Denmark	501	19	489	19.4	13,381,184	20.4	5,532,579	17.3
Finland	575	21.8	505	20.1	10,780,134	16.4	5,282,346	16.5
Sweden	605	23	538	21.4	19,660,705	30	9,047,752	28.3
Iceland	176	6.7	178	7.1	762,228	1.2	299,891	0.9
Norway	463	17.6	430	17.1	17,440,739	26.6	4,640,219	14.5
TOTAL The Nordic Region	2,320	88.1	2,140	85	62,025,000	94.5	24,802,787	77.5
Estonia	121	4.6	144	5.7	927,174	1.4	1,332,893	4.2
Lithuania	104	4	121	4.8	1,579,283	2.4	3,596,617	11.2
Latvia	87	3.3	113	4.5	1,103,464	1.7	2,291,000	7.2
TOTAL The Baltic states	312	11.9	378	15	3,609,921	5.5	7,220,510	22.5
TOTAL	2,632	100	2,518	100	65,634,921	100	32,023,297	100

Source: SIU 2010c.

In relation to evaluations of economic dividends from Nordplus, it is also important to emphasise that the countries should not be the main indicator of the proliferation, participation and support, it should be the number of participating institutions. Table 8.4 shows that the spread is largely equal in relation to approved projects 2009–2010, and that in general there are a very large number of institutions involved.

Table 8.4. Number of participating institutions in approved projects, by country.

	2009	2010
Sweden	605	538
Finland	562	493
Norway	463	430
Denmark	429	392
Iceland	176	178
Estonia	121	144
Lithuania	104	121
Latvia	87	113
The Faroe Islands	49	56
Greenland	23	41
Åland	13	12

If a mobility perspective is adopted in relation to Nordplus, the main finding is that there is the same wide spread. In addition, the number of mobility activities suggests that even if objectives such as innovation and quality have become increasingly important in Nordplus, traditional mobility activities are still central (see Table 8.5).

Table 8.5. Mobility in 2010.

From country	To country											Total
	AX	DK	EE	FI	FO	GL	IS	LT	LV	NO	SE	
AX		6	5	12			3	4	5	14	17	66
DK	7	17	40	179	30	38	123	47	44	235	185	945
EE	4	47	2	120	1	5	25	28	31	46	84	393
FI	10	189	83	36	13	12	82	66	54	231	297	1,073
FO		29	1	14	2	6	10	3	5	20	10	100
GL		33	2	4	8	2	10	2	3	14	14	92
IS	6	109	21	65	13	10	8	23	29	97	73	454
LT	3	64	31	79		4	33	5	32	49	69	369
LV	4	43	37	69	1	4	31	29	4	53	78	353
NO	8	226	51	206	22	15	87	47	40	40	225	967
SE	15	213	62	275	11	18	97	45	56	237	34	1,063
Total	57	976	335	1,059	101	114	509	299	303	1,036	1,086	5,875

Source: SIU.

In particular, the table shows that Nordplus makes a major contribution to cultural exchange, since the people involved in mobility activities travel to and from the entire Nordic–Baltic area. All of the countries and areas have, therefore, a relatively good balance between outgoing and incoming mobility projects. Within this general picture it is, as expected, the four biggest countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway) that have the most outgoing and incoming mobility. The Baltic countries also seem to be well integrated into Nordplus. Iceland has a somewhat unique profile in relation to the four other Nordic countries, as it is highly active in some programmes, less visible in others. The numbers from the autonomous territories may be small but the spread seems to be reasonably good.

Quality and innovation are more difficult to quantify. However, assuming that one of the conditions for innovation is that it involves co-operation between different types of stakeholders, then there are several indications

that Nordplus successfully manages to create an arena that values inter-sectoral and cross-border diversity and partnership.

In 2010, Nordplus Adult and Horizontal had the greatest organisational diversity in terms of project co-ordinators. On average, each had more than a dozen different types of organisations acting as co-ordinators. In relation to programme size, Higher Education seems to have the lowest level of organisational diversity among the co-ordinators. It might, therefore, be argued that the establishment of Nordplus Horizontal has been important in the promotion of new thinking about the design of projects funded by Nordplus.

In the current period programme, some stakeholders have also expressed a wish for content guidelines for the projects in the form of annual priorities. Climate change has been the overriding priority during the current period. A closer evaluation of the impact of prioritisation on the various programmes suggests that the response has only been clear and pronounced in Junior – in Adult, Higher Education and Horizontal it seems to be markedly less pronounced. Looking at all of programmes as a whole, prioritising the climate does not seem to have generated a great deal of interest. Interviews with various users indicate that many of them have a highly pragmatic attitude towards the annual prioritisation, and that there is some confusion about the status of the priorities in relation to the programmes' other objectives. It is also suggested that some users simply do not wish to develop or run projects that are subject to priorities of this kind. The fact that the climate priority has been repeated over several years also seems to create an impression that some sort of attempt has been made to establish a new “virtual programme” that transcends the current programme structure. At present, prioritisation seems to be a tool to bolster the political relevance of Nordplus. However, it is still open to question whether the annual priorities actually constitute appropriate tools for this purpose, and whether they should be continued in their present form.

8.3 Integration of the Baltic States

The general impression from interviews with users and administrators is that the integration of the Baltic countries has been a great success. For users in the Baltic countries, Nordplus seems to provide multiple forms of added value. Firstly, Nordplus provides tangible support for collaborative activities, which seems to be strongly desired from the Baltic side, and is linked to genuine interest in the Nordic Region and Nordic languages and culture. Secondly, participation in Nordplus represents a step towards even clearer internationalisation, including beyond the Nordic Region. Thirdly, the Baltic side seems to have developed a new form of collaboration, which is characterised by a greater degree of informal contact and an emphasis on problem-solving, in which formalities, rules and procedures are not quite so dominant.

As shown in Table 8.5, the Baltic countries are well integrated in terms of mobility activities (both incoming and outgoing). However, when we look at the overall participation per country in the period 2008–2010, a subtler picture emerges in relation to Baltic integration in the design and organisation of the projects (see table 8.7 in the appendices). Table 8.7 shows, for example, that Lithuania is heavily involved in the co-ordination of Adult. Latvia and Estonia play a more significant role in the co-ordination of Horizontal. Taken as a whole, the figures for the programme period show an increase in the number of partners from the Baltic countries, while for Estonia and Latvia the number of projects in which they fulfil the co-ordinator function has also increased. Table 8.6 also shows that the same trend is evident in relation to Baltic participation in the different framework programmes, which show an increase from 2009 to 2010.

Table 8.6: Nordic and Baltic institutions' participation in the Framework Programme in 2009 and 2010 (percentages).

	Higher Education		Adult		Horizontal		Junior	
	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
The Nordic Region	91.2	89.5	76.9	70.7	74.3	72.6	80.1	76.1
The Baltic States	8.8	10.5	23.1	29.3	25.7	27.4	19.9	23.9

From a financial perspective, the Baltic countries should be satisfied with the benefits derived from Nordplus. A calculation by the main co-ordinator based on available data shows that the Baltic countries generally pay less than they receive in funding through the Framework Programme (SIU 2010c). Even though the calculation is somewhat uncertain due to inadequate data, the situation in 2009/2010 seems to have been that the Nordic countries contribute approx. 95% of the funds to Nordplus, and receive on average around 86.5% of the funds granted. The Baltic countries pay around 5% of the contributions and receive approximately 14.5% in return (SIU 2010c). The main co-ordinator's analysis also reveals that the Baltic states receive less *per capita* than the distribution model would justify. The fact that the Baltic countries receive back more than they pay in can be interpreted from different perspectives. On the one hand, it is argued that co-operation should imply that all parties benefit to roughly the same extent, and therefore Nordplus should strive to achieve a relatively equal distribution of resources. On the other hand, it may be that the Baltic applicants come up with good projects and submit good applications, and that this quality is rewarded. However, the data upon which this analysis is based only covers two years, so further developments should be awaited before conclusions are reached.

Baltic participation in Nordplus has also resulted in more challenges and unresolved questions. By way of conclusion, three factors are worth mentioning. Firstly, participation in Nordplus has enabled the Baltic countries to join established network activities, which – according to users in the Nordic

countries – has contributed to greater reflection and innovation in relatively well-established activities. However, participants on the Baltic side have often expressed a wish to more clearly mark out their contributions to the content and development of Nordplus, as this highlights what they bring to the table and reflects their desire to move away from a somewhat one-sided role as a “recipient”. Secondly, the current economic situation seems to have contributed to a perception that the self-financing requirement – especially in Junior – is difficult to accommodate. Questions of economics and self-financing have been central to the integration of the Baltic countries in Nordplus from the very beginning, and still seem to be a difficult topic. However, it seems that some users are relatively uninformed about the opportunities that exist for meeting the self-financing requirement through putting in working hours, etc. The users themselves point out that in many schools there is no spare time available for this purpose, which is why they choose mobility projects instead of projects under this programme. It is also relevant in this context that a number of the administrative tasks looked after by the information offices in the Baltic countries represent a challenge due to the resources available. Even though various training initiatives have been implemented, as well as meetings between the main administrator and the Baltic information offices, there still seems to be uncertainty about which tasks the information offices are required to perform. Thirdly, questions related to language seem to be a recurring challenge for Baltic–Nordic cooperation. This is partly due to the need for resources for translation and communication in general, but also because the language issue is important in relation to NLC. The Baltic countries are not currently part of NLC, which seems to give rise to two distinct reactions from the Baltic side. Some users clearly state that their interest in Nordic languages is sufficiently great that they would like to take part in this programme under the existing terms. Other users see the language problem as subsidiary – they think that English should be used as the primary language, and that NLC should be expanded to include Baltic culture. The latter point of view indicates that the Baltic side questions (or is not as aware of) some of the fundamental goals of the Nordplus programmes.

8.4 Profiling and communications

Over time, the profiling of Nordplus programmes and the dissemination of project results have been a challenge for Nordplus. During previous programme periods, this was also considered something that should be improved because it would enhance the impact of Nordplus (Vabø 2006).

Prior to the launch of the Nordplus Framework Programme in 2008, considerable resources and time were devoted to marketing and information activities. For example, “roadshows” were staged in all of the countries, and more than 30 information meetings were held. A dedicated website and co-

ordinated advertising and marketing activities were launched. The stakeholders and several users pointed out that the bar was set high in relation to profiling the new programme. A graphic identity was designed for the new framework programme, which has helped to create added value in terms of ease of recognition and impact on users.

In subsequent years, annual information strategies have been drawn up, but on the whole this work seems to have been relatively fragmented. In 2010, there seems, unfortunately, to be no systematic or co-ordinated input into profiling and dissemination work, and the initiatives taken in 2008 have not been rigorously followed up. This does not mean that there were no activities aimed at strengthening the profile and disseminating information in the current programme period. Typical activities included conferences and seminars (organised under the auspices of the various main administrators), the distribution of brochures to various potential user groups, and the promotion and updating of the Nordplus websites.

Users generally think that the Nordplus websites are neat, clear and appealing, but that they are more useful for gathering information than for dialogue and exchanges of experience. Even though most of the programmes contain links and information about best-practice projects, outsiders find little information about the profile of other ongoing projects, about the various activities institutions are taking part in or about the results of those activities. The pages are updated relatively infrequently, and this means that many users do not make return visits because they “know that nothing new will be going on”.

The main co-ordinator has overall responsibility for the websites, but states that, due to capacity problems, the services have not been developed as well as originally intended. This is partly due to the functionality of ARS (see below), as the system has not been able to generate information and analyses that could have been valuable to both current users and external stakeholders. Another important factor is that ARS has also caused a great deal of extra work, which has diverted resources from other tasks. Having said that, the current situation is not solely due to ARS. In particular, it seems to be difficult to obtain up-to-date information about ongoing projects at present. It is undoubtedly appropriate that the websites are perceived as relevant to users, but the web portal currently emphasises this too heavily, at the expense of those who are either just curious about Nordplus or who want to learn about the ongoing projects.

Some users have developed their own project websites, but even so, it is sometimes difficult to track down many of the projects that have received Nordplus funding in the current period. Links to these kinds of project pages do not always appear on the current programme pages, making it difficult to find tangible examples of how projects work in real life.

The sites of the various main administrators and information offices differ greatly in terms of how they are linked to the Nordplus programmes. Each site has a different layout, with the links in different places. Seen from

outside, this lack of a cohesive, co-ordinated system gives a somewhat chaotic impression, which falls short of the standard expected of a programme as large and wide-ranging as Nordplus. However, compared with LLP, Nordplus still seems to have a relatively favourable profile. Despite the fact that many users think that Nordplus has become more “bureaucratic” over time – not least due to the fact that rules and procedures have started to be more stringently applied – most people nevertheless still seem to agree that Nordplus has many advantages compared with the EU’s LLP programmes. A typical example of this might be the new rules for the late submission of applications to the Nordplus system, which still allow for a fairly large element of discretion. Several aspects were mentioned as contributing to this degree of flexibility. Firstly, the low thresholds for contact, including the minimising of language barriers by solving problems at national level. Secondly, the established networks are based on mutual trust and have often been built up over many years. Thirdly, there are fewer rules and simpler reporting requirements in Nordplus. At the same time, the EU programmes seem, in some cases, to provide better financial support than Nordplus offers, and LLP has the advantage of offering opportunities to participate in larger networks that are even more international.

In general, the main administrators do not see competition from LLP as a problem – rather, it is argued that the LLP and Nordplus are often marketed together, and that both types of programme benefit from this. The implication is that the market is big enough for both LLP and Nordplus. Having said that, the fact that ‘express mobility’ is on the increase in Nordplus may be linked to the fact that LLP programmes do not offer it, which is one way in which Nordplus distinguishes itself from the EU programmes.

8.5 Administration of the programmes

As noted above, the management structure in the Nordplus is relatively complicated. It is therefore somewhat surprising that the actual administration of the Nordplus programmes works relatively well in terms of the application procedures, the daily running of the various programmes, and the administrators’ ability to solve practical problems.

This is attributed to several factors. Firstly, the main administrators have good competences and experience with Nordplus (even if it is the programme committees that have the formal decision-making authority), including the evaluation of programme applications. Secondly, the current Nordplus structure is fairly identical to the EU’s LLP programmes, and this organisational similarity allows both users and administrators to feel that they are familiar with the logic of Nordplus, even if there are also some differences between the Nordplus and EU LLP programmes in terms of funding criteria and rules. Thirdly, a culture for co-operation seems to have been established, which means that problems within the formal management

structure are resolved informally. Fourthly, several positive initiatives taken at the start of the new programme have contributed to greater professionalisation in the administrative processes. The “Nordplus Common Programme Document” (a guide for applicants, an updated version of which is available online) sets out a number of standards and procedures for processing that both administrators and (to some extent) users find valuable.

Regarding the resource frameworks for the various programmes (see Table 8.8 in the appendices) and the number of applications in relation to approved projects, the general picture for the programme period is that Horizontal and Adult have higher rejection rates than Higher Education, NLC and Junior. In relation to the reports from both main administrators, lack of resources is not seen as a major problem in all of the programmes (cf. Horizontal, Junior and NLC), so there does not appear to be a marked correlation between resource frameworks and rejection percentages.

However, other challenges are faced on the administrative side. The fact that the Nordplus programmes differ in size means that there is considerable variation in the scope of the main administrator’s procedures. The correlation between the resources allocated to the main administrators and their workload does not appear to be optimal. This seems to be a particular challenge for Higher Education. Some administrative resources seem to be allocated on the basis of tradition and history, but as the programmes are changing, it might be worth revisiting the question of new principles for resource allocation. This also applies to the resources allocated to the main coordinator. At present, these do not seem to be sufficient for the profiling, marketing and analysis of Nordplus. The feedback is that the resources are mainly earmarked for operations.

These issues seem largely to be related to the current management structure in Nordplus. As such, a redesign of the future management structure would have major implications for the programmes’ administration and operation. However, several options exist, and we will return to them in the final chapter.

8.6 ARS

Most of the main administrators are of the view that the current resources for administration are too limited. This seems to be closely related to the lack of functionality in ARS. The idea behind an online portal capable of coping with multiple functions, including applications, information and analysis, is a good one, and both users and administrators are positive about the actual concept.

The design of ARS comprises various modules for application, administration and statistics/analysis. It had major operational problems in all modules during the programme period – especially in the start-up phase, when the whole system more or less collapsed, which required the launch of

a separate re-development and re-testing project. In retrospect, when the system was launched in 2008 it was not sufficiently well specified or designed, nor was it functional on technical level or quality-assured from a user perspective. This seems to have been a particular problem for Junior, where applicants have not always had the competence and experience needed to work with online application portals, and the ease of use has also been relatively low (e.g. it is easy to enter information into the wrong fields in the application form).

In 2010, however, ARS is working satisfactorily with regard to the application process and the administration of applications. Even though some users think that the system still suffers from a number of technical problems, the majority do not find it particularly difficult to use. The main problem at present is that the analysis and statistics part does not work well. A number of standard reports have now been defined in the system, but the problem seems to stem from the original specification being incomplete and not particularly relevant to the analyses needed for Nordplus purposes. One example of the cumbersome work processes involved is that applications from ARS have to be converted to Excel files in order to carry out relatively simple analyses and systematisation. This means that some of the basic data is entered in such a way that it cannot be linked up and related to other data. Historical data also seems difficult to extract (e.g. relating to the antecedents of various projects and networks), and it is difficult to implement changes to the system. The decentralised administration of Nordplus helps to create further problems, as the ICT competences of the main administrators are highly variable, which necessitates technical support via phone or e-mail. This makes it difficult for the main administrators always to complete the number of applications to the requisite high standard within the given timeframe.

It should be noted that the system supplier underwent major personnel changes during the programme period, and there are strong indications that Nordplus has not received the degree of follow-up normally expected from a supplier. In addition, the main co-ordinator does not seem to have had good ICT skills – and this, combined with limited capacity for follow-up work on ARS, means that the improvements have taken a very long time.

A further complicating factor is that the Secretariat in Copenhagen has had the formal responsibility for ARS during the programme period. Although the Secretariat has actively sought to co-ordinate the development work on ARS, this solution has not been ideal in terms of developing a greater degree of user orientation and appropriateness. The central problems are that the Secretariat has had little practical user experience with the system, and that the main administrators do not have ownership of the system because the formal responsibility for development lies in Copenhagen. The lack of management capacity and user competence (interpretation of rules, etc.) helps to explain why ARS is still somewhat dysfunctional for analysis purposes. A further indication of this is that 2010 was the first time that the main administrators processed applications in ARS.

In principle, there are two options with ARS: get rid of it and start again, or develop it. How practical the choices really are is another question. One challenge is that so much time and resources were spent on ARS in 2010 that the “losses” associated with starting anew would be disproportionately large. However, if ARS is retained, it will mean that in future not all types of programme changes will be possible in practice, so ARS will effectively determine the guidelines for Nordplus, rather than *vice versa*. However, there are also major risks involved in scrapping ARS and starting afresh. All system development of this type involves relatively high costs, and it is difficult to know whether any new system – relatively speaking – would be an improvement. For the users, who have become accustomed to ARS in recent years, a new system would also mean a new learning curve. Although ARS has several weaknesses in the current version, there is much to suggest that continued development of the system – at least over a 3–5 year period – would be the preferable option.

NIFU is aware that development work on ARS has been ongoing, and attempts have been made to try to find positive solutions to the challenges posed by the system. The question is whether the current governance structure will guarantee continued focus on this work if measures are not taken regarding the formal responsibility for the further development of the system. There is reason to believe that improved management of development work, allied with good insight into the functionality of ARS, would create opportunities to improve its analysis and performance-indicator functions.

9. The future of Nordplus – a discussion

The evaluation of Nordplus has provided strong indications that it is considered a well-established and respected form of co-operation. Applicants, users, administrators, committee members and various other stakeholders have all clearly indicated that Nordplus is valuable. It generates added value and its existence is justified by the themes it addresses.

However, there is disagreement about the future direction Nordplus should take. The views presented range far and wide, and the proposals are, to some extent, diverse. Based on the interviews conducted, the results of the evaluation and the way in which the Nordplus programmes have evolved since 2008, NIFU would like to contribute to a more fundamental discussion about the design of Nordplus by outlining three slightly different ways forward for the programme, based on the following keywords: consolidation, concentration and co-ordination. The three scenarios are based on the tensions built into Nordplus, as outlined in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1), and are about how best to manage these tensions. As suggested, the consolidation scenario is based on the idea that seeking a balance between old and new purposes for Nordplus is a constant, and that the most important tasks are to adapt the management of the Framework Programme and to make minor adjustments in the splits between the programmes. However, the concentration scenario argues that, over time, the built-in tensions in Nordplus may destroy the focus and impact of the programmes. It also argues that the programmes' growth and increased complexity need to be addressed by greater prioritisation, and also by more critical evaluation of the programme structure in relation to target groups, instruments or combinations of the two. The co-ordination scenario might be said to be the answer to the increased attention paid to educational issues in the Nordic Region, as well as the need for greater professionalism in dealing with these issues. Also considered are developments outside Nordplus that may be relevant to whether the current programme organisation is the most appropriate way to deal with issues like these.

As well as identifying the arguments in favour of the different scenarios, we also suggest some of the changes (in the form of recommendations) that we think they would entail. The biggest group of recommendations is, of course, related to the consolidation scenario, which would involve the fewest changes in relation to the way the programme is organised at the moment. They are also more general than the recommendations made for the other two scenarios.

9.1 Consolidation

The evaluation shows that Nordplus is a reasonably well-functioning programme. Its attractiveness may be somewhat diminished, but the programme is still considered to be an important instrument for the promotion of Nordic languages, culture, and co-operation in relation to education and associated communications work. It might therefore be argued that Nordplus needs, first and foremost, to consolidate the current programme structure and organisation, in order to resolve the problems identified and streamline the programmes that already exist.

Another argument for consolidation is that Nordplus has been through a series of changes during the current programme period (including the introduction of ARS, the establishment of Horizontal, the inclusion of the Baltic countries and the restructuring of language work in the Council of Ministers), and therefore changing the programmes would merely generate new problems rather than solve existing ones.

The time aspect is also important in a consolidation perspective. It might be argued that the current programme period is too short in relation to achieving the ambitious goals set, and that a longer programme period might establish a more long-term perspective and a better planning horizon for both users and administrators. One possibility would be to extend the current programme period, e.g. to five years.

It might also be argued that the current organisation of Nordplus, i.e. the model with main- and co-administrators, is in itself an example of Nordic co-operation, and that this decentralised model lowers the threshold for contact both within and between the countries involved. The fact that the number of projects funded by Nordplus is high (and growing) can also be taken as a sign that the programme in its present form largely corresponds to the diverse needs of a large number of its users.

The evaluation has shown that, even within the current programme structure and organisation, there is a need for certain adjustments and improvements. Even though a certain overlap between the programmes may be beneficial – it contributes to diversity within certain types of activities and target groups – too great a degree of overlap is unfortunate because it makes it more difficult to compare and evaluate related applications in context, and fragmentation rather than co-ordination end up characterising the activities both within and between the programmes. Clarification is needed in relation to Adult and Horizontal, Higher Education and Horizontal and Junior and NLC. Another important concern in this regard is clarification of Horizontal's purpose – should it have an independent profile, or should it be a kind of “umbrella programme” for applications that do not fit into the more established programmes? Given the diversity and opportunities that already exist within the current programme structure, it might be argued that Horizontal should do more to strengthen its separate profile – perhaps it should even

specify to a greater degree the type of projects it welcomes, and how to organise them.

The latter would entail a clearer management structure in Nordplus Horizontal – something that applies to all of the other programmes in the Nordplus family as well. The evaluation shows that most people find the management structure in Nordplus to be unclear and cumbersome, yet endowed with great legitimacy. The main administrators have a clear task in the current structure and their function can be retained. However, there seems to be uncertainty concerning the roles and responsibilities of the programme committees and the main co-ordinators. Evaluation of these two stakeholders in relation to what appear to be the key challenges faced by Nordplus suggests that perhaps the most important changes would be a clearer management structure and more concentrated activity related to profiling, marketing and analysis.

In practice, this could mean simplifying the current programme structure by replacing the current five committees with a single joint committee for all of the programmes, members of which would have particular responsibility for the various sub-programmes in the Nordplus family. It might also be worth considering the possibility of professionalising the management of this committee by installing a “working programme manager”, who not only manages the programme committee but also has overall responsibility for the operation of all Nordplus programmes. The committee members should also possess great expertise and in-depth insight into the various dimensions of Nordplus co-operation, so that the programmes and their profiles are viewed in that context. To ensure professional input into the evaluation of applications, the main administrator would increasingly draw on a variety of different resources and experts. It is also necessary to make sure that there is no overlap between the roles and responsibilities of EK-U and the main Nordplus Committee.

In relation to the job of the main co-ordinator, responsibility for contact with the Council of Ministers’ Secretariat ought to be taken over by the “working programme manager”, who would be better placed to liaise with the main co-ordinator on – and improve – analyses, profiling, reporting and communications. As far as ARS is concerned, responsibility for the development and usage of the programme ought to lie with the main co-ordinator, but with a working programme manager formally in charge. A management and organisational model like this would establish a clearer division of responsibilities and roles between the Secretariat in Copenhagen, the current main committee and the current main co-ordinator.

Based on the consolidation approach, as well as signals from many administrators, users and representatives from the Baltic countries, it might also be appropriate to bring NLC into the structure of the framework programme. This would involve opening up NLC to the Baltic countries, but the objective of the programme would remain unchanged. The Nordic languages would still be prioritised in the co-operation, but Baltic users with an

interest in Nordic languages could be coupled to ongoing projects in the Nordic Region.

An important concern from a consolidation perspective is the need to weed out in the multiple hierarchies of objectives, performance ambitions, annual priorities and guidelines that currently characterise the Nordplus programmes. Although they are meant to serve as management tools, there are now so many of them that it is reasonable to query whether they in fact provide the desired direction and profile.

Finally, systematic and continuous efforts are needed to boost promotion, information and marketing activities. Most of these endeavours should be associated with activating the current web portal, and to improving the opportunities for interactivity, learning and publicising results. A separate “web editor” post should be established, and resources devoted to the operation and development of the portal.

In summary, the main recommendations in relation to the consolidation perspective could be described as follows:

- Keep the current programme structure but try to eliminate overlaps by redistributing specific activities between the programmes
- Extend the current programme period, e.g. to five years
- Retain the organisation with main- and co-administrators, but simplify the programme structure by having just one joint programme committee, the individual members of which have particular responsibility for the various sub-programmes. The new main committee appoints a “working programme manager” with overall responsibility for the ongoing development and running of the programme. The “working programme manager” will have overall responsibility for Nordplus in relation to the Secretariat in Copenhagen, and will be able to use the main co-ordinator as an instrument to improve the analysis, promotion and development of Nordplus
- Transfer responsibility for ARS from the Secretariat in Copenhagen to the main Nordplus co-ordinator
- Incorporate NLC into the Framework Programme, but with unchanged objectives and focus, thus enabling the Baltic countries to take part
- Focus on the web portal in order to turn it into a more dynamic and interactive profiling tool. A separate web editor position should also be considered.
- Establish a guarantee fund so that the available allocation can be slightly exceeded in any given year, thus dealing with the problem of unused funds during a programme period.

The following more detailed recommendations should also be considered:

Horizontal:

- Horizontal should be marketed more strongly as an independent programme, not as a Nordplus “catch all”
- Clarify how the current overlap between Adult and Higher Education should be dealt with
- Given the size of the programme, the main administrator should strengthen contacts between the various projects in order to make the programme more visible externally
- The programme committee should increase its involvement in Horizontal, and make a more active contribution to the design of the programme

Higher Education:

- The resource framework for Higher Education seems somewhat limited given the interest in the programme. Alternatively, the main administrator should be more selective in approving projects
- The main administrator should analyse in greater detail the historical guidelines related to the projects, and critically evaluate the degree of new thinking and innovation in the project portfolio – this could be very important in streamlining administrative procedures during the annual calls for applications
- The results from the projects should be publicised more, and the information should be readily available to external users
- The programme should enhance its profile as “complementary” in relation to the EU’s LLP programmes, and ought to promote its unique characteristics more forcefully

Junior:

- Reduce the requirement for co-operation in development projects and theme networks to two countries (from three at present), as this would seem more feasible and may allow for more combinations of activities (such as mobility and development projects)
- Set a ceiling for individual awards instead of across-the-board cuts, so that applicants are aware of the financial framework when they apply
- Earlier application deadline/awards in the spring, to prepare for activities during the following school year
- Provide grants for board and lodging to pupils in the mobility component, as it is not realistic to insist they stay with families
- Allocate funds over two school years to ensure that they are used (as in the Comenius programme), and pay them as a lump sum to each school, rather than, as now, differentiated amounts
- The Nordplus Framework Programme should initiate discussion about the need for co-ordinators for international work at school-owner level
- Arrange contact and application seminars to contribute to the recruitment and training of new applicants

Adult:

- Clarify and simplify the rules
- Clarify the differences between the types of activity
- Earlier application deadline/awards in the spring, to prepare for activities during the following school year
- Set a maximum amount payable for the different types of activity so that applicants are aware of the financial framework when they apply
- Take into account the fact that the Baltic participants in Nordplus Adult rely on the grants being paid on time
- Continue (expand) contact and writing seminars to help recruit and train new applicants
- Make improving the visibility of adult education a main task – emphasise the fact that today’s youth are tomorrow’s adults and will need educational opportunities

NLC:

- Clarify the annual priority objectives for the programme
- Discuss the weighting between strategies for Nordic languages, and for the Scandinavian languages, in NLC’s strategies and action plans.
- Clarify the meaning of the term “culture” and its implications for the further development of Nordic Languages and Culture
- NLC to receive applications from the Baltic countries on topics relating to teaching and practice of Nordic languages, and research and development work in the Nordic/Baltic languages, e.g. translations and dictionary work
- Move the deadline for applications to NLC from March 1 to February 1 to make it easier for applicants in the mobility section (schools) to plan activities in the next school year

9.2 Concentration

The evaluation has also revealed that the Nordplus programmes are undergoing a process of change, and it might be argued that this reflects that fact that the users’ needs are changing. The history of the Nordplus programmes is, in many ways, a story of growth and expansion – in terms of both the whole programme portfolio (an increase in the total number of programmes), and within individual programmes (an increase in the type of projects and activities within the programmes). From this perspective, the establishment of Horizontal can be seen as an attempt to create a new level of co-ordination for something that has grown too large and fragmented.

Another argument for a greater degree of concentration is that the spreading of resources over a large number of projects reduces the amount of follow up done on each project and makes it more difficult to see the overall results of the programmes. The current economic situation in the Nordic

countries also means that Nordplus is unlikely to benefit from any a significant increase in resources in the next few years, and the expansion it has previously enjoyed will lead to greater prioritisation and concentration of existing resources.

A degree of concentration would also potentially help make Nordplus easier to market and profile, and make the added value it generates for the Nordic Region more visible.

Much in the same way as the time aspect is a factor in favour of consolidation, a longer-term perspective would also be beneficial in relation to a greater degree of concentration. A longer programme period would, for example, allow for clearer prioritisation of certain objectives.

Today, Nordplus comprises several different programmes and activities within these programmes, including traditional mobility activities, development projects within and transcending sectors, joint study programmes, etc. A significant feature, which to some extent is also reflected in the current programme, is the desire to turn the activity away from mobility and towards development and joint projects that perhaps incorporate a mobility perspective. In relation to developments in Higher Education – the largest programme – the data shows that traditional mobility activities related to student exchange programmes are in decline, while ‘express mobility’ is becoming more commonplace. This may be due to more generous funding by competing programmes, or because traditional mobility activities are not considered as attractive as they used to be. Not least, it is possible to identify a stronger orientation towards results, with several users indicating that students now seek tangible outcomes from the activities in which they are involved, and that exchange programmes without strong content and tangible results no longer seem as attractive.

A scenario characterised by a greater degree of concentration could be organised in a number of different ways. There would also be a need for a clearer management structure, in which context many of the recommendations from the consolidation scenario should be considered. However, the main point is that the programme structure and priorities should be re-evaluated. In this context, alternates would include the programmes developing a closer focus on individual activities, or the current programme structure changing. The solution chosen will depend in part on what can be easily implemented – e.g. without the need to dramatically remodel ARS – and what priorities are deemed desirable. As in the previous scenario, it seems to make sense that responsibility for ARS is assumed by the stakeholder who has day-to-day responsibility for co-ordination.

In relation to the latter, a starting point could be a discussion about whether the current resource frameworks for the individual programmes match the political objectives for Nordplus. The programmes’ different sizes and levels of activity are partly due to traditional user demand, and partly due to the fact that some of them have grown more naturally than others. Perhaps the time is ripe to highlight more general Nordic political priorities,

and to assess the feasibility of reallocation between programmes and of stronger commitment to and profiling of individual activities within them.

One aspect of this debate is whether Nordplus will continue to be relatively similar to the EU's LLP programmes, or whether it should be more clearly stressed that Nordplus is a Nordic programme with a distinct Nordic profile. If the latter is deemed to be more desirable, then there ought to be a greater focus on areas in which changes can be made. One such possibility might be the strong interest in express mobility and exchange programmes lasting less than a month.

Another possibility would be to examine the opportunities for strengthening programmes such as Horizontal by looking at them in relation to, e.g. Adult, and parts of the portfolio in Higher Education, thereby creating a new heavyweight programme that transcends sectors and breaks down barriers between them. A third possibility – as requested by some users, including in the Baltic states – would be to establish a cultural programme that is separate from the current NLC. However, it should be noted in this context that there is already a cultural programme outside Nordplus. The fact that Nordic co-operation operates with two different cultural programmes seems highly inappropriate, and militates against such a solution.

It is also possible that, instead of annual priorities on different themes, Nordplus could devise its own programme for such activities, in which the opportunities for networking and interaction between different projects would probably be greater than if the priorities were spread over various programmes. In many ways, NLC already fulfils this purpose, so similar initiatives might be envisaged in areas such as “school development”, “climate”, “technology and entrepreneurship”, etc. In these types of initiatives, the themes could be reasonably well defined in advance, but the projects would need to be more open in their design, including in relation to which organisations, education levels and sectors would be eligible to participate.

In summary, the main recommendations in relation to the concentration perspective could be described as follows:

- The current programmes ought to develop a much clearer, one-dimensional profile – for example, through a stronger thematic orientation, or by focusing on a particular activity
- Consideration should also be given to reducing the number of programmes, e.g. through mergers
- Extend the current application period, e.g. to five years
- Retain the organisation with main- and co-administrators, but simplify the programme structure by having just one joint programme committee, with individual members having particular responsibility for the various sub-programmes
- The new main committee appoints a “working programme manager” with overall responsibility for the ongoing development and running of the programme

- The “working programme manager” will have overall responsibility for Nordplus in relation to the Secretariat in Copenhagen, and will be able to use the main co-ordinator as an instrument to improve the analysis, promotion and development of Nordplus
- Switch responsibility for the operation of ARS to the main co-ordinator
- Focus on the web portal to turn it into a more dynamic and interactive tool for profiling Nordplus. A separate “web editor” position should also be considered
- Establish a guarantee fund so that the available allocation can be slightly exceeded in any given year, thus dealing with the problem of unused funds during a programme period
- Include NLC within the Framework Programme, but transfer the culture component to Junior

The following more detailed recommendations should also be considered:

Horizontal:

- Merge Horizontal with Adult, with a heavyweight profile linked to lifelong learning and skills enhancement that transcends sectors and organisational boundaries
- Attempts should be made to increase the resource framework for the programme and to profile the programme as distinctive in relation to Higher Education

Higher Education:

- Reduce the scope of activities within the programme. The programme should focus in particular on “express mobility” as a priority
- Review the allocation of resources within the programme, emphasise quality to an even greater extent, and develop bigger and more heavyweight networks in order to improve visibility and external impact

Junior:

- Concentrate on mobility activities that revolve around the pupils, so they are involved in academic activity and enjoy direct experience of meeting and working with their peers in other countries
- Move purely development-oriented projects (in which adults, i.e. teachers, schools, school owners, etc., are the people involved, and in which the criteria for the allocation of funds are tangible results in the form of improved pedagogic methods, etc.) to Horizontal
- Redefine the theme network so that it is relevant to activities related to mobility

Adult:

- Redefine the programme and focus on the individuals and the parts that improve the field in general as well as the weaker
- Retain and enhance mobility with theme content (cf. Junior)
- Move the current development projects to Horizontal

NLC:

- Move NLC's sub-programme for mobility initiatives to Nordplus Junior. Earmark a certain amount of mobility resources for linguistic activities – in this context, it is a requirement that the common language should be one of the Scandinavian languages

9.3 Co-ordination

However, it is not just the Nordplus programmes that are changing – many of the other Nordic initiatives outside the domain of Nordplus indicate that the time is perhaps ripe to look at the various Nordic measures and initiatives in relation to each other. The examples of partly overlapping activities are many and varied, and include, e.g. the establishment of the Nordic Masters Programmes, cultural initiatives (including mobility and exchange programmes), and various initiatives in research and development, including the establishment of and activities under the auspices of NordForsk.

One argument for closer co-ordination of the various instruments is the general political intention of more closely integrating research, education and innovation, including the aim of developing strong “knowledge triangles” in which old demarcation lines and understandings of policy are broken down, and where the emphasis is on development, innovation and entrepreneurship in practice.

If the Nordic Region is also to be characterised by innovative thinking, experimentation, new initiatives and new forms of organisation, then it is only natural to question the existence of Nordplus as an independent programme, or how long it will last.

One example of an initiative that falls outside of Nordplus but that could be connected more closely to it is the Nordic Masters Programme. Quantified on the basis of the level of interest in it, this programme has been a great success. The establishment of joint educational programmes also facilitates more binding co-operation than ordinary mobility activities, the development of individual courses, conferences, etc. However, it is also possible to apply to Nordplus Higher Education for funding for the development of joint Master's programmes, so it is legitimate to ask whether the time is ripe to look at the relationship between the various Nordic Council of Ministers' initiatives. If the Globalisation Initiative is to have the intended effect, it is especially important to ensure that the measures to be imple-

mented are not only *ad hoc* initiatives, but that an organisational framework is set up to ensure continuity and long-term strategy.

However, if stronger commitment to PhD programmes is also considered desirable, then such efforts ought to be co-ordinated with the activities already taking place under NordForsk auspices. This would mean a somewhat longer-term scenario, which would also divert focus from education to research-related activities.

If the aim is to maintain the focus on education, then another way forward might be to transform the Nordplus Framework Programmes into a separate and distinct organisational priority, so that the various research initiatives are looked after and co-ordinated by NordForsk. In this context, the establishment of a separate organisational unit would in itself act as an important co-ordination mechanism. Organising activities as a programme has its drawbacks – not least in relation to strategy development, follow-up, profiling and implementation. The question, therefore, is whether introducing into the programme a more professionalised management role (as suggested in sections 9.1 and 9.2) would be sufficient to make the desired changes happen.

If Nordplus is transformed from a “programme” to an “organisation”, it would (in principle) be possible to simplify the management of initiatives such as Master’s programmes, centres of excellence in schools and education, various networking initiatives, development projects, and overviews of the status of knowledge. There are already several networks in the Nordic Region that could be involved in this work (e.g. NVL).

However, such a transformation implies a willingness to see the various Nordic Council of Ministers’ activities brought more closely together and would necessitate new resource frameworks.

In summary, the main recommendations in relation to the concentration perspective could be described as follows:

- End the current programme structure, with Nordplus as a “programme” replaced by a more permanent organisational unit, with a special focus on education, under the Nordic Council of Ministers
- Nordic Masters Programmes should be continued and evaluated as a new and separate initiative and organisational unit
- It might also be worth evaluating whether Centres of Excellence can be established within the context of schools, education, and lifelong learning
- The new organisational unit ought also to be far more proactive when it comes to implementing policy, e.g. developing knowledge overviews, mapping out initiatives and analysing best practice in relation to schools and education in the Nordic countries

9.4 Postscript

The three scenarios outlined above are, of course, not the only possible development paths for the Nordplus. It is also feasible that elements of the different scenarios could co-exist – one example might be integration of the Nordic Masters Programmes. It should, in particular, be noted that the three scenarios can be seen as stages in the long-term development of Nordplus co-operation.

As described here, the scenarios are conceived more as outlines than solid proposals, and there are certainly other good suggestions and ideas that are not mentioned above but which might be important if or when decisions have to be made. The point of the scenarios is to challenge the ‘natural’ development and conventional thinking that has characterised Nordplus in the last decade, and to stimulate debate and critical reflection on what has in many ways been a great success for Nordic co-operation. The fundamental question is whether to change a formula that has proved sustainable over a long period of time, or if it is precisely the changing and developing of the formula that creates long-term sustainability.

10. Sammendrag

Nordplus har i over 20 år vært det sentrale samarbeidstiltaket innen utdanningsfeltet i Norden, og har helt siden etableringen i 1988 vært organisert i ulike programmer med en tidsbestemt varighet. Nåværende programperiode startet i 2008 og varer til og med 2011. Nordisk ministerråds sekretariat besluttet i 2009 å igangsette en evaluering av Nordisk Rammeprogram og Nordplus Nordiske Språk- og Kulturprogram (NSK). Etter en utlysning ble oppdraget gitt til NIFU. Denne rapporten er den skriftlige rapporteringen fra denne evalueringen.

Nordisk Rammeprogram omfatter fire delprogram

- Nordplus Junior
- Nordplus Horisontal
- Nordplus Høyere utdanning
- Nordplus Voksen.

I det nye Nordplusprogrammet som ble iverksatt fra 2008 deltok for også første gang de baltiske landene, Estland, Latvia og Litauen i det felles Nordplus Rammeprogram. NSK ble besluttet videreført, men som et eget program uten baltisk deltakelse.

De overordnede målsettingene for Nordplus er mangfoldige og inkluderer det å fremme nordisk språk og kultur og gjensidig nordisk-baltisk språklig og kulturell forståelse, bidra til utviklingen av kvalitet og innovasjon i utdanningssystemene, og styrke og utvikle det nordiske utdanningssamarbeidet og bidra til å skape et nordisk-baltisk utdanningsområde.

Evalueringen hadde på denne bakgrunn følgende mandat:

- Hvordan har programmene fungert i programperioden, herunder blant annet programstrukturen og programkomiteene?
- Hvilke resultater er oppnådd sett i forhold til de overordnede målsettingene med innføring av de nye programmene?
- Hvordan har integreringen av de baltiske landene lyktes?
- Hvordan er profilering, spredning og oppfølging av erfaringer og resultater fra programmene gjennomført?
- Hvordan har administrasjonen av programmene fungert, herunder blant annet det elektroniske søknads- og rapporteringssystemet (ARS)?

Sett i et lengre tidsperspektiv har de politiske ambisjonene med Nordplus endret seg relativt mye, og i dag vil en evaluering av Nordplus ikke bare handle om hvorvidt de målsettinger som i sin tid ble spesifisert for pro-

grammet er oppnådd, men også om Nordplus er et tiltak som er fremtidsrettet og bærekraftig i forhold til dagens politiske kontekst – ikke minst det globaliseringsinitiativ som de nordiske statsministre tok initiativ til i 2007.

Evalueringen har vurdert Nordplus programmene både individuelt og samlet, og de sentrale konklusjonene kan oppsummeres som følger:

Nordplus Horisontal

Nordplus Horisontal er det yngste programmet i Nordplus familien, og har sin opprinnelse i et ønske om å videreutvikle aktivitetene i Nordplus utover det fokus på mobilitet som tradisjonelt har kjennetegnet programmene. Selv om Horisontal har hatt en del innkjøringsproblemer knyttet til «hva programmet skal være» – opplever både brukere og de som administrerer programmet at programmet i dag er fungerer godt. Horisontal kan sies å ha oppfylt en av de sentrale målsettingene i og med at aktivitetene og prosjektene som er igangsatt er kjennetegnet av en høy grad av nytenkning.

Horisontal representerer på mange måter en nytenkning innen Nordplus-samarbeidet, der prosjektene er noe større og deltakerne flere enn i andre programmer. Hvorvidt programmet faktisk har fått en tydelig profil synes likevel å være noe uavklart siden typer brukere har skiftet noe siden oppstarten. Generelt synes ressursrammene for Horisontal å være relativt gode, og det synes i liten grad å være behov for å styrke ressursene. Samarbeidet mellom hoved- og medadministratorene synes også å være velfungerende, og brukerne opplever at programmet driftes på en god måte med god brukerstøtte.

Nordplus Høyere utdanning

Nordplus Høyere utdanning er det største og mest etablerte programmet i Nordplusfamilien. Hovedinntrykket er at programmet i store trekk er velfungerende. Programmet driftes effektivt, og styringen og administrasjonen av programmet synes å skje profesjonelt og med lave terskler overfor brukerne. Programperioden sett under ett er imidlertid den administrative resultatformidling og analysene av programmet noe mangelfulle, men dette har stor sammenheng med innføringen av ARS i starten av programperioden.

Samtidig er det også mulig å argumentere for at Nordplus Høyere utdanning etter hvert har blitt et så etablert form for samarbeid for en del av nettverkene at støtten fra Nordplus mer tenkes på som «drift» enn som insentiver for å skape merverdi. At antall søknader og at søknadsbeløpet er så høyt som det er, kan tyde på at mange av brukerne søker av «gammel vane» og ut fra tradisjon. Mange av søkerne får også innvilget sin støtte, og det kan stilles spørsmål ved om kvalitet alltid er det viktigste utvelgelseskriteriet når det gjelder søknadsstøtte – spesielt i forhold til mobilitet. Det synes å være rom for mer nytenkning omkring hva dette programmet skal være i årene som kommer.

Nordplus Junior

Nordplus Junior synes å være et relevant og interessant program for målgruppen, og brukerne er godt fornøyd. Samtidig er det ulike oppfatninger blant aktørene på de ulike nivåene innenfor Nordplus Junior om hvordan programmet fungerer i dag, og hva som er utfordringer framover. Relativt mange brukere gir uttrykk for at programmet er ressurskrevende, spesielt i forhold til egenandelkravene knyttet til deltakelse. Samtidig synes slike synspunkter til en viss grad å ha sitt opphav i en mangelfull forståelse av hvilken fleksibilitet som er knyttet til disse kravene.

Den lave aktiviteten blant barnehager i Nordplus Junior taler for at denne delen av programmet har liten relevans og bør tas ut. Selv om Nordplus Junior i inneværende programperiode har hatt som formål å støtte utviklingen av kvalitet og fornyelse av grunnopplæringen, spesielt i forhold til utviklingsprosjekt og tematiske nettverk, er hovedaktiviteten likevel mobilitet. Ut fra rammevilkårene i sektoren synes dette å være tydelige signaler om hva som oppfattes som faglig relevant og praktisk mulig.

Nordplus Voksen

Nordplus Voksen er et sammensatt program med et mangfoldig preg. Ut-danning er nøkkelbegrep, og programmet skal stimulere og utvikle voksnes læring, både formell, ikke-formell og uformell læring. Mange typer aktører er aktuelle søkere for å delta i Nordplus Voksen, samtidig har programmet få søkere innenfor uformell læring, og en stor del av aktørene som får midler er større formelle organisasjoner og institusjoner. Selv om egenandelskravet er redusert i Voksen sammenlignet med i de øvrige programmene, er dette likevel et kritisk punkt for deler av målgruppen, mens andre har ressurser til å dekke egenandelen.

Det synes å være ulike tolkninger av regelverket for programmet, og det hevdes å være strenge krav til søkerne innenfor Voksen. Det er ulike synspunkter i programmet på hvorvidt man i programmet fremover skal arbeide for å styrke bredden og mangfoldet, eller at spennvidden i Nordplus Voksen er blitt for stor. Motsetningen mellom å spre kunnskap på institusjonelt nivå, og å gjøre individuelle erfaringer bør diskuteres nærmere i programmet.

Nordplus Språk og Kultur (NSK)

Nåværende språk- og kulturprogram er en konkretisering av sentrale politiske ideer om nordisk samarbeid; der mye av nytten kan sies å være av immateriell karakter, men ikke mindre vesentlig av den grunn. For arbeidet med de nordiske språkene betyr oppmerksomheten og den finansielle støtten fra programmet mye. I det store og hele fungerer programmet meget bra, ikke minst administrativt. Ressursene synes brukt hensiktsmessig og effektivt. Det har imidlertid noen utfordringer: Noen av dem er av organisatorisk art, mens andre bunner i kunnskapsmessig og/eller politisk uavklarte forhold.

Innholdsmessig er programmets profil i dag noe utydelig. En eventuell ide om en integrasjon mellom språk og kultur er knapt forsøkt gjennomført. Kulturdimensjonen har i praksis begrenset selvstendig betydning. Profilen til NSK ville også bli tydeligere om mobilitetsdelen ble flyttet til Nordplus Junior. På den måten ville alle mobilitets tiltak rettet mot samme type målgruppe bli samlet i et og samme program. På den organisatoriske siden nyter programmet godt av at det - i praksis - nærmest er den del av det formelle rammeprogrammet som har god samlet kunnskap om de ulike, relevante målgrupper for programmet, og der det foregår gjensidig utveksling av denne kunnskapen.

Samlet vurdering

Ser man på programmene sett under ett er det generelle inntrykket at noen programmer fungerer bedre enn andre når det gjelder profil, administrasjon og drift. En del av forskjellene skyldes utvilsomt forhold som ligger utenfor ansvarsområdet til det enkelte program: For det første er det store forskjeller i størrelsen på programmene – noe som utvilsomt kan være en utfordring når det gjelder saksbehandling og oppfølging. Nordplus Høyere utdanning og Nordplus Junior er – målt i antall søknader – de største programmene, og begge opplever at det kan være en kapasitetsmessig utfordring å håndtere saksbehandlingen på en god måte.

For det andre har noen programmer gjennom mange år hatt en tydelig og avgrenset faglig profil (NSK, Høyere utdanning), mens andre programmer enten er nylig etablert (Horisontal) eller hvor det har vært en innholdsmessig dreining (Junior) som har bidratt til økt kompleksitet og en justering av hva programmet skal være, noe som til en viss grad også kan ha bidratt til større grad av usikkerhet hos potensielle brukere.

For det tredje er det også forskjeller knyttet til hvorvidt de ulike programmer har «konkurrenter» enten i det nordiske samarbeidet eller fra andre aktører herunder EU og deres LLP programmer. Noen brukere nevner eksempelvis at satsingen på «Nordiske Masterprogrammer» er noe man vet andre har vurdert som mer attraktivt enn mer ordinære søknader via Nordplus Høyere Utdanning.

Målt i forhold til ulike kvantitative indikatorer er sentrale funn at det fra 2008 – 2010 har vært en nedgang i antall søknader til mange programmer i Nordplusfamilien (Nordplus Voksen, Høyere utdanning, Junior og til og med det relativt nystartede Horisontal). Deler av denne nedgangen har imidlertid administrative forklaringer. Sett i forhold til bevilgede prosjekter har antallet prosjekter som er støttet imidlertid vært relativt stabilt i programperioden med en liten økning alle programmene sett under ett. Det er med andre ord blitt noe lettere å få innvilget søknader i Nordplus, og sett i et ressursmessig perspektiv er det en tendens til at ressursene som er tilgjengelige fordeles jevnt utover i stedet for konsentreres om færre prosjekter.

Når det gjelder landenes økonomiske «utbytte» av Nordplus synes fordelingen mellom de nordiske land å være relativt lik. I forhold til de baltiske land er det en tendens til at disse landene mottar mer støtte i form av programmidler enn hva de betaler inn til programmet. Det er dog noe variasjon mellom programmene i forhold til denne fordelingstendensen. Mobilitet er fremdeles en svært viktig aktivitet rammeprogrammet sett under ett. I 2010 var det nesten 6000 personer som deltok på en slik aktivitet i regi av Nordplus. Generelt er spredningen på mobiliteten god mellom landene. Når det gjelder hvorvidt programmene har hatt prosjekter som har respondert på de innholdsmessige prioriteringer som har vært lagt i programperioden (klima), synes effekten å være relativt beskjeden – med et markant unntak for Nordplus Junior.

Ser man på ressursrammene for de ulike programmer, og antall søknader sett i forhold til de innvilgende prosjekter, er bildet at man i Horisontal og Voksen generelt i programperioden har en høyere avslagsprosent enn for Høyere utdanning, NSK og Junior. Sett i forhold til hva både hovedadministratorene selv rapporterer, oppleves ressursknapphet ikke som et stort problem i alle programmer, og slik sett synes det ikke å være en markert sammenheng mellom ressursrammer og avslagsprosent.

I forhold til styringen av programmene er administratorer, komitémedlemmene og brukere generelt positive til dagens matriseorganisering. De fleste er enige i at denne styringsstrukturen skaper høy grad av medvirkning, tilhørighet og nærhet mellom aktørene. Utfordringen synes å være at høy grad av medvirkning og deltakelse har en pris i forhold til at rammeprogrammene har en relativt dårlig beslutningskraft og informasjonsgjennom-siktighet. Det forhold at hovedkoordinator ikke har noen formell styringsmyndighet bidrar til at iverksettelse av beslutninger tar tid. Ansvar for felles oppgaver som informasjon, markedsføring og analyser synes også å forvitte i denne styringsstrukturen. Programkomiteene, som i utgangspunktet er de besluttende organ, synes i tillegg å fungere ulikt, og mulighetene for å drive strategisk styring av programmene synes begrenset. Generelt legger hovedadministratorene mange av føringene for de beslutninger som tas. På bakgrunn av denne kompliserte styringsstrukturen er det således noe overraskende å konstatere at selve administrasjonen av Nordplusprogrammene foregår forholdsvis problemfritt når det gjelder selve søknadsbehandlingen og den daglige driftingen av de ulike programmer. Dette synes i stor grad å henge sammen med administratorenes evne til praktisk problemløsning, og deres brede erfaring med Nordplus.

Et generelt inntrykk fra intervjuene med brukere og administratorer er at integreringen av de baltiske land har vært vellykket. For brukere i de baltiske land synes Nordplus å gi flere typer merverdi. For det første gir Nordplus konkret støtte til samarbeidsaktiviteter som synes sterkt ønsket fra baltisk side – knyttet til en genuin interesse for Norden, og til nordisk språk og kultur. For det andre har deltakelsen i Nordplus vært et skritt på veien mot en mer tydelig internasjonalisering – også utenfor det nordiske rom. For det

trede synes man på baltisk side også å ha blitt kjent med en annen måte å samarbeide på, kjennetegnet av en større grad av uformell kontakt og vekt på problemløsning, og der formaliteter, regler og rutiner kanskje ikke er så dominerende. At man fra de baltiske land også mottar mer enn de betaler inn til Nordplus, er også en indikasjon på at man fra baltisk side burde si seg fornøyd med deltakelsen.

Profilering av Nordplusprogrammene og spredning av resultatene fra prosjektene har over tid vært en utfordring i Nordplus. I forkant av lanseringen av Nordplus rammeprogram i 2008 ble det derfor satset mye ressurser og tid på markedsføring og informasjonsarbeid. I idag synes dessverre profilering og spredning dessverre fremdeles å være et område hvor det ikke foregår en systematisk eller koordinert innsats, og hvor de initiativer som ble tatt i 2008 ikke har blitt fulgt opp.

Sammenlignet med tilsvarende aktivitet internasjonalt – ikke minst EUs mobilitetsprogrammer (LLP), synes Nordplus fremdeles å ha en relativt gunstig profil. Selv om mange brukere oppfatter at Nordplus er blitt mer «byråkratisk» over tid - ikke minst ved at man har begynt å praktisere regler og rutiner strengere, samt delvis som en følge av at kvalitetskravene til prosjektene er blitt skjerpet inn - synes de fleste brukere likevel å være enige i at Nordplus har mange fordeler sammenlignet med EUs LLP programmer.

I programperioden har funksjonaliteten til det elektroniske søknads- og analyseprogrammet ARS vært svært begrenset. Tanken bak å ha en elektronisk programportal som kan håndtere ulike funksjoner herunder både søknader, informasjon, og analyse, er god og noe både brukere og administratorer er positive til. I 2011 fungerer imidlertid ARS tilfredsstillende når det gjelder søknadsprosessen, og administrasjonen av søknadene, og selv om en del brukere mener at systemet fremdeles lider under en del tekniske feil, opplever majoriteten at systemet ikke er spesielt vanskelig å bruke. Hovedproblemet i dag er først og fremst at analyse og statistikkdelen ikke fungerer godt, og at dette medfører en rekke ulemper for hovedadministratorene.

Tre scenarier for fremtiden

Evalueringen av Nordplus har gitt sterke indikasjoner på at Nordplus er å regne som en vel fundert og respektert form for samarbeid i det nordiske rom. Både søkere, brukere, administratorer, komitemedlemmer og ulike interessenter har gitt klart uttrykk for at Nordplus er en aktivitet som er verdifull. Den gir merverdi og har en eksistensberettigelse gjennom de temaer som adresseres.

Når det er sagt er det imidlertid mer uenighet om i hvilken retning Nordplus bør utvikle seg i årene som kommer. Synspunktene som er fremmet spenner her vidt og forslagene er til dels mangfoldige. For å stimulere til en mer prinsipiell diskusjon omkring utformingen av Nordplus i årene som kommer er tre noe forskjellige scenarier skissert basert på stikkordene; Konsolidering, Konsentrasjon og Koordinering. Felles for de tre scenariene er at

de vektlegger en styrking av den overordnede styringen av Nordplus, og at profilering av programmene og resultatformidling av prosjektene bør forbedres i årene som kommer.

De tre scenarier tar utgangspunkt i den politiske konteksten rundt Nordplus, og de politiske ambisjoner som preger det nordiske samarbeidet i dag.

- Konsolideringsscenariet er basert på at søkingen etter en balanse mellom gamle og nye formål med Nordplus er noe man må kontinuerlig leve med, der det viktigste er å justere styringen av rammeprogrammet, samt gjøre mindre justeringer i programinndeling, og styrke profileringen og resultatformidlingen.
- Konsentrasjonsscenariet argumenterer imidlertid mer for at innebygde spenninger i Nordplus over tid kan være ødeleggende for fokus og gjennomslag for programmene, og at veksten og den økte kompleksiteten i programmene må håndteres gjennom en sterkere styring og prioritering i programmene og der en også vurderer programstrukturen mer kritisk, enten i forhold til målgrupper, virkemidler eller i kombinasjoner av dette.
- Koordineringsscenariet kan på sin side sies å være svaret på den økte oppmerksomhet utdannings spørsmål etter hvert har fått i Norden – ikke minst gjennom det såkalte globaliseringsinitiativet - og behovet for økt profesjonalitet rundt håndteringen av slike spørsmål. I dette perspektivet ser man dermed på utviklingstrekk også utenfor Nordplus, men som kan ha betydning for hvorvidt dagens programorganisering er den mest hensiktsmessige måten å håndtere disse på.

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11.1 Appendices

Table 8.7 Participation per country in approved applications

Participation per country for approved applications	Nordplus Adult				Nordplus Horizontal				Nordplus Higher Education				Nordplus Junior				Total Nordplus framework programme							
	2008		2009		2010		2008		2009		2010		2008		2009		2010		2008		2009		2010	
	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount awarded (€)	No. of applications	Amount awarded (€)	No. of applications	Amount awarded (€)	No. of applications	Amount awarded (€)	No. of applications	Amount awarded (€)	No. of applications	Amount awarded (€)
Danmark	9	8	8	3	4	2	35	32	42	17	26	20	64	70	72									
Denmark	-	18	30	-	23	15	-	289	247	-	29	28	-	359	320									
Estland	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	6	5	7	7	11	14	18									
Estonia	-	9	25	-	14	11	-	68	67	-	16	23	-	107	126									
Finland	8	10	5	3	0	3	61	66	67	46	35	42	118	111	117									
	-	12	29	-	22	21	-	388	294	-	29	32	-	451	376									
Færøylene	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	4	1	3	6									
Faroe Islands	-	4	2	-	1	2	-	38	36	-	3	10	-	46	50									
Grønland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	2	4									
	-	2	2	-	1	0	-	15	28	-	3	7	-	21	37									
Island	4	4	5	1	1	1	8	8	9	17	3	8	30	16	23									
Iceland	-	8	11	-	6	3	-	125	119	-	21	22	-	160	155									
Latvia	1	3	2	3	2	3	4	6	5	7	6	9	15	17	19									
	-	9	14	-	5	10	-	43	47	-	13	23	-	70	94									
Litauen	6	2	7	3	2	1	3	4	3	12	9	10	24	17	21									
Lithuania	-	8	10	-	10	13	-	55	60	-	14	17	-	87	100									
Norge	2	2	5	4	5	4	38	35	40	20	17	12	64	59	61									
Norway	-	16	19	-	16	21	-	349	297	-	23	32	-	404	369									
Sverige	10	8	9	2	2	3	39	54	43	26	27	26	77	91	81									
Sweden	-	19	21	-	20	29	-	435	372	-	40	35	-	514	457									
Åland	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	1	2	3	2									
	-	2	1	-	0	1	-	8	7	-	0	1	-	10	10									
Coordinated projects per programme and total	43	40	44	21	18	20	191	210	217	151	135	143	406	403	424									
Participation in projects per programme and total	-	107	164	-	118	126	-	1 813	1 574	-	191	230	-	2 229	2 094									
Total number of participants	43	147	208	21	136	146	191	2 023	1 791	151	326	373	406	2 632	2 518									

Table 8.8 Nordplus 2008–2010: Number of applicants and amounts applied for

	2008		2009		2010		2008		2009		2010		2008		2009		2010	
	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	No. of applications	Amount applied for (€)	Projects awarded	Amount awarded (€)										
Adult	90	3,545,986	60	2,594,942	69	3,195,389	43	1,175,047	40	1,175,047	44	962,876	40	1,175,047	44	962,876	40	1,175,047
Horizontal	46	3,774,422	35	1,518,811	32	1,316,459	21	699,100	18	699,100	20	890,854	18	699,100	20	890,854	18	699,100
Higher education	301	25,975,107	254	15,497,796	255	12,288,693	191	4,069,700	210	4,069,700	217	3,894,200	210	4,069,700	217	3,894,200	210	4,069,700
Junior	340	6,429,799	195	3,850,084	200	4,325,812	151	2,084,660	135	2,084,660	143	2,203,963	135	2,084,660	143	2,203,963	135	2,084,660
Total Nordplus Framework Programme	777	39,725,314	544	23,461,633	556	21,126,353	406	8,028,374	403	8,028,374	424	7,951,893	403	8,028,374	424	7,951,893	403	8,028,374
Language and Culture	48	1,841,176	43	1,381,854	46	923,913	37	956,850	36	956,850	35	1,083,360	36	956,850	35	1,083,360	36	956,850
Total Nordplus	825	41,566,490	587	24,843,487	602	22,050,266	443	8,967,873	439	8,967,873	459	9,035,253	439	8,967,873	459	9,035,253	439	8,967,873