Quality and Relevance in Education and Research

Co-operation Programme of Nordic Council of Ministers for
Education and Research (MR-U) effective from 2015

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Nordic co-operation

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

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

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

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Introduction

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of co-operation based on trust, and the countries share several common values such as democracy, human rights and sustainability. Over the years, formal Nordic government co-operation in the Nordic Council of Ministers has provided a platform for creating synergies and exchanging experiences of solutions in a wide range of areas to the benefit of citizens in the Nordic region. The Nordic Council of Ministers is currently going through a major modernisation process in order to revitalise the co-operation and contribute to a Nordic region characterised by freedom of movement, innovation, visibility and international engagement. This is taking place at a time when the Nordic welfare societies are being challenged simultaneously by globalisation, economic crisis, demographic changes and climate and energy questions.

The vision of Nordic co-operation in education and research is that the Nordic region will continue to be a leading region in knowledge and welfare in the future. This co-operation is based on the desire to create an efficient education and research community in the Nordic region. The Nordic countries are close to each other – geographically,

historically and culturally. The education systems have many similarities and common challenges. The countries can achieve better results if they co-operate – to the benefit of institutions and citizens.

The co-operation programme of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) points the way for the ministers' co-operation on education and research, languages and IT from 2015. The programme is designed to focus and target the work, which stems from the political agendas in the countries and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands. The programme describes the themes to which the ministers wish to devote particular attention and thus it does not contain an exhaustive overview of all the priorities of MR-U. The co-operation programme will be continually discussed and adapted in the Council of Ministers in relation to new political priorities. In that way it will support continued development of MR-U's co-operation and the way co-operation is conducted within the education and research field. The programme is supplemented with an overview of activities with specific projects and initiatives for internal use.

Topical Themes in Education

Nordic education co-operation encompasses the whole spectrum from early childhood education and care/pre-school to primary and lower secondary education, youth education programmes, adult education, non-formal education and higher education.

Nordic co-operation in the education field for 0-18 year-olds and adult learning focuses on strengthening quality in early childhood education and care/pre-school, teaching and education. The objective is to create education courses that allow all children and young people, girls and boys, to become as competent as they can in a good mental and physical learning environment, so as to lessen the significance of social background, and so everybody has an opportunity for life-long learning and development. Activities include the following topical themes:

1. Strengthening the basic skill set and knowledge of children, young people and adults, boys and girls/women and men, by

- Enhancing co-operation in knowledge and analysis around the central challenges in the education area for ages 0-18 and within adult education.
- Contributing to the development of Nordic education through greater focus on management, leadership and implementation of reforms.
- Promoting the development and use of new teaching and learning methods, for example through greater focus on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and digitisation.

2. Contributing to smooth transitions between phases of education and between education and working life.

3. Strengthening possibilities for young people and adults to complete their education or training, including by encouraging more young people to complete a vocational educational and training programme.

4. Raising the status of vocational education and training programmes and contributing to an improved framework for workplace training for young people and adults.

Within higher education the co-operation is rooted in the increased international competition, which makes it essential to highlight strengths and to contribute to increased mobility within the knowledge sector. Activities include the following topical themes:

5. Stimulating increased structural co-operation between Nordic higher education institutions, for example within small academic areas and further development of the Nordic Master Programme.

6. Profiling higher education by promoting quality co-operation, for example by exchanging national experiences of developing methods for evaluating quality within the area.

Two themes are common to the entire education system and comprise:

7. Strengthening co-operation regarding teacher training, the practice of the teaching profession and in-service training and further education, so as to cover the entire spectrum of the teaching profession.

8. Strengthening the competitiveness of Nordic educational institutions in the international market, for example by examining what it would take to raise the profile of and demand for Nordic education internationally.

Topical Themes within Research

Scientific-based knowledge is important for creating growth and dealing with various social challenges. Advanced Nordic research co-operation increases the quality and impact of the research. Moreover, this co-operation gives the research stakeholders and countries added value through cost savings and greater ability to attract research funding within EU programmes and initiatives.

MR-U wants to contribute to the Nordic region becoming a leading knowledge region globally by means of the following topical themes:

1. Supporting multidisciplinary and cross-sectorial research co-operation between national and Nordic research financing bodies.

2. Promoting research co-operation within possible top-level research areas, including strategically significant areas where a common Nordic approach is necessary to build research and education competence of international quality and strength.

3. Promoting co-operation in and joint usage of research infrastructure in the Nordic region.

Moreover, advanced Nordic research co-operation can yield new knowledge within areas prioritised by MR-U, for example education and training, Nordic languages and linguistic communication.

Topical Themes in Language Co-operation

Nordic language co-operation aims to focus on further developing the common set of values inherent in Nordic linguistic and cultural identity and contribute to a focus on parallel linguistic equality by means of the following topical themes:

1. Strengthening children's and young people's mutual understanding of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, inter alia by promoting understanding of spoken Danish, Norwegian and Swedish.
2. Strengthening national follow-up of the Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy.

Topical Themes in IT Co-operation

Nordic IT co-operation aims to make it easier for citizens and businesses in the Nordic region to move across borders and increase the quality of digital public administration in the region.

Forms of Co-operation

MR-U has a long tradition of intensive and constructive co-operation on challenges and initiatives of common interest within the education and research area. In the years ahead MR-U will carry out long-term co-operation through:

The education and network programmes

- Nordplus
- Nordic Master Programme (NMP)
- Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL)
- Nordic Language Coordination (NOSK)

The institution NordForsk

The five co-operative bodies

- The Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics (NORDITA)
- The Nordic Institute of Maritime Law (NIFS)
- The Nordic Institute for Asian Studies (NIAS)
- The Nordic Volcanological Center (NORDVULK)
- The Nordic Sami Institute (NSI)

Ad hoc working groups and projects

Meeting places for exchanging experiences, knowledge sharing, learning and mutual inspiration

The Nordic agreements

- The Convention between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden on the right of Nordic nationals to use their mother tongue in other Nordic countries (The Nordic Language Convention)
- The Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy (the Language Declaration)
- The Agreement concluded by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden on Admission to Higher Education
- The Nordic Declaration on Recognition of Diplomas, Degrees and Other Qualifications in Higher Education – the “Reykjavik Declaration”
- The Agreement Concluded by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden on a Nordic Education Community at the Upper Secondary and Vocational level

Studies, analyses, reports and evaluations etc.

Co-operation and dialogue with Nordic associations and organisations within MR-U's portfolio

Many tasks are best solved across various policy areas and MR-U collaborates with other specific councils of ministers on the detailed implementation of transverse measures, programmes and strategies. This collaboration takes place inter alia through:

- The Sustainable Nordic Welfare Programme
- The Education, Training and Research for Green Growth Programme
- The Nordic Co-operation Programme on Gender Equality 2015–2018
- The Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability 2015-2017
- The Strategy for Children and Young People in the Nordic Region
- The Nordic Sustainable Development Strategy
- The Strategy and Action Plan for Nordic Mobility (Co-operation on obstacles to freedom of movement).

MR-U also works with various regional and international organisations on tasks and opportunities of common interest.

Conclusion

The target group for the programme is MR-U and all stakeholders under MR-U working to achieve the objectives of Nordic co-operation in the education and research area.

It is the ambition of the Nordic Council of Ministers that all parties concerned will benefit from the programme as a benchmark for future co-operation.

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