



Nordic Council
of Ministers

NORDIC CO-OPERATION PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH 2019–2023



**NORDIC CO-OPERATION PROGRAMME
FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
2019–2023**

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Nordic co-operation

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

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

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

Nordic Council of Ministers

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FOREWORD

The co-operation programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) sets the direction for co-operation at ministerial level on education, research and languages from November 2019 until November 2023.

The purpose is to enhance co-operation based on the political agendas of the Nordic countries, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland, and to describe the themes to which the ministers wish to devote particular attention. It is not, therefore, an exhaustive list of MR-U's priorities.

MR-U ran a comprehensive programme of strategic development work in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, it presented a research policy report to the Session of the Nordic Council and set up a high-level group that submitted recommendations on education to the sector of the Nordic Council of Ministers covered by MR-U. The sector also discussed the future of co-operation on language. In the light of this work, MR-U drew up this revised programme for co-operation. The process involved positive dialogue with the Nordic Council and relevant sectors within the Nordic Council of Ministers. Responsibility for IT has been transferred to the ad hoc Nordic Council of Ministers for Digitalisation 2017–2022. After the meeting of Prime Ministers on 20 August 2019, the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted a new vision for Nordic co-operation.

It is the hope of the Nordic Council of Ministers that the programme will be a benchmark for future co-operation on education and research that will benefit all stakeholders.

Lilja Dögg Alfreðsdóttir

Minister of Education and Culture, Iceland

INTRODUCTION

The Nordic Council of Ministers has a long tradition of consensus-based co-operation. The Nordic countries, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland, are democratic societies with many shared values, including trust, openness and gender equality.

In the Nordic region, there is a strong focus on sustainable development in all areas of society, and on facilitating mobility wherever relevant and possible. Over the years, formal intergovernmental co-operation in the Nordic Council of Ministers has been a platform for generating synergies and sharing knowledge and experiences of a wide range of issues, in ways that benefit the citizens of the region.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' vision for 2030 is that the Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. The strategic priorities for co-operation are based on the vision of a green, competitive and socially sustainable region. This work is being done at a time when the Nordic welfare states are also facing challenges related to globalisation, economic conditions, demographic change, the climate and energy.

With regard to education and research, the vision is of a region that continues to be a world leader in knowledge and welfare.

Turning the vision into reality will require wide-ranging commitment, including at global level. The co-operation



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Photo: NordForsk/Terje Heiestad

programme has multifaceted links and potential in relation to the UN Agenda 2030 and relevant objectives for sustainable development, including in the areas of education and research.

The goals are to provide all children and young people, girls and boys, with learning environments that support their mental and physical health, to reduce the importance of social background, and to give everybody opportunities to learn and develop throughout their lives.

Nordic co-operation emphasises equality and diversity perspectives (gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) and incorporates a disabilities perspective whenever relevant.

The co-operation must also strengthen research and research policy in the Nordic countries, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

The co-operation is based on the desire to create a well-run Nordic education and research community. The Nordic countries have much in common in terms of geography, history and culture. The education systems also have many similarities and face many of the same challenges. The Nordic countries can achieve better results by working together and exchanging knowledge and experiences for the benefit of the region's institutions and citizens.

The target audience for the programme is MR-U, as well as all of the stakeholders under it that work to realise the goals for Nordic co-operation on education and research.





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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research focuses on three strategic areas – education, research and language – and on further developing existing initiatives and forms of co-operation, as well as identifying new ones.

EDUCATION

Education is a prerequisite for a competitive and socially sustainable Nordic region based on knowledge, innovation and mobility, as well as for the promotion of inclusive value communities and welfare. Nordic co-operation on education covers 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. The co-operation is based on the principle of lifelong learning, and contributes to a Nordic agenda for future competencies that will enhance children's, young people's and adults' opportunities to learn throughout their lives.

Nordic co-operation on education and adult learning focuses on enhancing quality in all areas of education, including early childhood education and care/pre-school.

Activities include the following topical themes:

1. Improving the basic skills and knowledge of girls and boys, women and men, by:
 - a. promoting co-operation on knowledge and analysis concerning the key challenges in education and adult education
 - b. contributing to the development of Nordic education through closer focus on management leadership and the implementation of reforms



- c. promoting the development and use of new teaching and learning methods, for example through closer focus on creativity, innovation and digitalisation.
- 2. Promoting early, cross-sectoral work in early childhood education and care/pre-school and primary and lower secondary schools, including on language, integration, inclusion and democratic citizenship.
- 3. Contributing to smooth transitions between phases of education, and between education and working life.
- 4. Improving young people's and adults' opportunities to complete their education and training.
- 5. Raising the status of vocational education and training programmes, and contributing to an improved framework for workplace learning for young people and adults, including encouraging more young people to complete vocational education and training.
- 6. Profiling higher education by promoting co-operation on quality, including by sharing national experiences of developing methods for quality assurance.
- 7. Working more closely together on ongoing teacher training throughout the entire spectrum of the profession, from preschool and school to continuing and further education.
- 8. Developing the Nordplus and Nordic Master programmes in relation to the EU programmes for education and research in such a way that they support Nordic mobility for both students and educational institutions as well as possible, and also support networking, development projects and structural co-operation at institutional level.
- 9. Working more closely together on recognition, including of higher education qualifications.
- 10. Working together on the digitalisation of education, e.g. through exchanges of good practice in new pedagogy and information about educational opportunities, in order to promote a more open and flexible approach to learning in the Nordic region.

RESEARCH

Science-based knowledge is fundamental to sustainable development in all areas of society, and contributes to the green transition, competitiveness, growth and socially sustainable societies. Advanced Nordic research co-operation improves the quality and impact of research. It also generates added value for research stakeholders and the countries through cost savings and increased opportunities to attract research funding from EU programmes and initiatives.



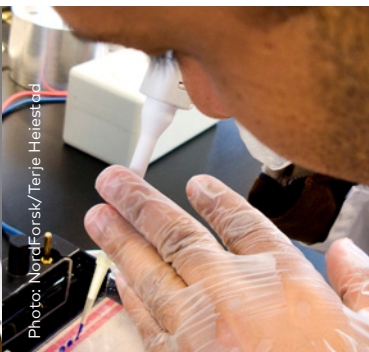
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The Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation in this area not only covers research and research funding, but also research policy. The main form of co-operation on research policy consists of exchanges of experience under the auspices of MR-U and EK-U.

MR-U wants the Nordic region to be a leading global knowledge region, and as such focuses on the following topical themes:

1. Supporting multidisciplinary and intersectoral research co-operation between national and Nordic research funding bodies
2. Promoting research co-operation in potential fields of excellence, including strategically important areas in which a joint Nordic approach is necessary to build research and educational competencies of international quality and strength
3. Promoting co-operation on and joint use of research infrastructure in the Nordic region
4. Contributing to greater mobility, researcher training and networks, including for young researchers
5. Contributing to stronger research policy in the Nordic countries through exchanges of knowledge and experience on research policy.

Well-developed Nordic research co-operation can also generate knowledge in the areas prioritised by MR-U.



LANGUAGE

While all languages are considered equal in the Nordic region, they do not all play the same role. Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish are official national languages. Along with Faroese, Greenlandic and the Sámi languages, they are the languages that are essential to society. The closely related and mutually comprehensible neighbouring languages of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish constitute a Nordic language community. Various national minority languages and sign languages in the Nordic region have been granted special status. The non-Nordic languages that have been introduced into the region in recent years further add to this linguistic diversity.

The main responsibility for language co-operation lies with MR-U, while MR-K has sectoral responsibility. The aim of language co-operation is to contribute to themes that are high on the Nordic countries' language policy agenda.

Follow-up work on the *Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy* (2006) is done at national level, but Nordic co-operation also contributes support to relevant national initiatives. In 2019, MR-U will start the process of deciding whether to revise the language declaration, with the aim of identifying shared Nordic interests in the language area.



Nordic language co-operation will focus on further developing the common values inherent in Nordic linguistic and cultural identity, and contributing to the focus on language via the following topical themes:

1. Improving awareness and knowledge of the languages in the Nordic region (official languages, sign languages and national minority languages), as well as the links between language and culture, identity and social cohesion
2. Focusing on the language-policy challenges created by changes in communication and language use, particularly among children and young people
3. Improving children's and young people's mutual understanding of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, including by promoting understanding of spoken Danish, Norwegian and Swedish
4. Improving knowledge and exchanging experiences related to current linguistic themes and questions
5. Contributing to national follow-up work on the Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy.





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APPENDIX

The operationalisation of the co-operation programme

MR-U has a long tradition of intensive and constructive work on challenges and initiatives of common interest within the education and research area. In the years ahead, MR-U will work on:

Nordic education and network programmes

- Nordplus
- Nordic Master Programme (NMP)
- The Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL)
- The Language Courses Programme (PSK)

Nordic institutions

- NordForsk

Nordic co-operation bodies:

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

Nordic agreements – conventions, treaties and declarations

- 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 the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning 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 (the Upper Secondary Agreement)

MR-U will also work on politically embedded areas and themes that the sector wants to develop, through:

- ad hoc working groups and projects
- meeting places for exchanging experiences, knowledge sharing, learning and mutual inspiration
- studies, analyses, reports and evaluations, etc., e.g. on the basis of data and statistics
- co-operation and dialogue with Nordic associations and civil society organisations on subjects covered by MR-U.

ABOUT THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS' CO-OPERATION PROGRAMMES

The co-operation programme governs the work of MR-U, but it must also be seen in the context of the other documents that inform the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, including the vision for intergovernmental co-operation, strategic priorities, intersectoral strategies, programmes for co-operation in other sectors, and the programmes for the annual Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

DEALING WITH INTERSECTORAL STRATEGIES AND OTHER STRATEGIC PLATFORMS

Many tasks are best solved by co-operation between policy areas. MR-U collaborates with other councils of ministers to determine precisely how intersectoral initiatives, programmes and strategies are implemented in practice. The sector focuses on activities that promote mobility and seeks to remove obstacles to cross-border mobility where relevant and possible.

This work is done through the following:

- [Strategy for Children and Young People](#)
- [Nordic co-operation programme on gender equality](#)
- [Strategy for Sustainable Development](#)

- [Strategy for Nordic Cultural Co-operation](#)
- [Arctic Co-operation Programme](#)
- [Nordic Programme for Agenda 2030](#)
- [Nordic-Baltic Ministerial Declaration on Digitalisation](#)
- [Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability](#)
- [Strategy and Action Plan for Nordic Mobility](#)
- [Nordic Co-operation on Integration](#)
- [Nordic Co-operation Programme on Labour](#)

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

MR-U has entered into separate but identical agreements with each of the Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – regarding their participation in the educational programme Nordplus. The work on Nordplus complies with the guidelines for Nordic-Baltic co-operation.

ORGANISATION IN THE SECTOR

MR-U has a simple organisational structure. It meets twice a year to discuss political matters. Cases of an administrative nature are, as far as possible, considered in written procedure or 'silence procedure'. Budget authority is delegated to EK-U. EK-U holds quarterly meetings. There are no permanent committees or advisory groups. Rather, the sector uses ad hoc working groups when necessary. The sector has one institution: NordForsk.

STRATEGIC MANDATE FOR NORDFORSK

Set up by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2005, NordForsk is a Nordic institution for research co-operation.

The strategic mandate outlines the objectives that lay down the direction and ambition for NordForsk's activities. The objectives are based on MR-U's co-operation programme, and set the frameworks for NordForsk's role in implementing the programme.

NordForsk's role

NordForsk shall facilitate effective and trustful research co-operation in the Nordic Region, and ensure that NordForsk-funded research has the highest international quality and contributes to Nordic added value. NordForsk shall function as a co-operation body between national research funding bodies. NordForsk shall first and foremost draw up initiatives on the basis of the national research funding bodies' priorities. NordForsk's role is to facilitate, i.e. identify and respond to strategic priorities for co-operation, and in this way generate Nordic added value.

NordForsk's board is responsible for its activities and development. To be able to realise the full potential of the co-operation, NordForsk shall engage in close dialogue with the Nordic Council of Ministers, especially MR-U.

NordForsk's goals

NordForsk's goals are listed below. They are based on NordForsk's statutes, the co-operation programme and the Nordic Council of Ministers' intersectoral strategies.

The main goal for its activities is, through Nordic co-operation, to improve the quality of research and its significance for society, while ensuring that the total costs for the Nordic countries remain unchanged or fall. The research shall be of the highest scientific quality and contribute to Nordic added value. The ambition is to contribute to making the Nordic region a global leader in research and innovation. The specific goals and sub-goals are listed below.

1. Research funding (cross-border research co-operation) and Nordic research infrastructure co-operation

Goal: Through Nordic research co-operation, to conduct research activities that produce new knowledge that will help ensure positive and sustainable development in the Nordic region in relation to topical challenges faced.

Goal: Through Nordic research co-operation, to create critical mass in areas where the national arena is too small and there is potential for Nordic added value.

Goal: Through Nordic co-operation, to improve access to and the use of existing research infrastructure, and to stimulate co-operation on new infrastructure in the Nordic region, in Europe and at global level.

Goal: NordForsk shall identify and implement research initiatives that have clearly identifiable Nordic added value. NordForsk shall facilitate Nordic research co-operation that attracts financial contributions from national agencies. NordForsk shall, in close dialogue with national stakeholders, work to increase the volume of national research contributions co-ordinated by NordForsk. One indicator for this is that NordForsk ensures that the national actors together contribute a sum that is at least twice the amount allocated under NordForsk's budget (1/3 NordForsk and 2/3 after national funding).

Goal: NordForsk shall adjust funding models and instruments in order to address the countries' needs. The institution shall consider using different funding models (e.g. virtual common pot) and financial instruments (e.g. networks, research schools and mobility-promoting measures).

2. Impact of Nordic research and research infrastructure co-operation

Goal: Contribute to continuous improvements to the Nordic welfare states and to an internationally competitive business community in the Nordic region by conveying new evidence-based/informed knowledge (to relevant stakeholders) that emerges from Nordic co-operation on research and research infrastructure, in accordance with the goals stated above.

3. Preparatory activities

Goal: NordForsk shall further develop long-term processes for future Nordic initiatives and processes for national support and funding. Inclusive and transparent dialogue shall be conducted with the national research funding organ (including the NOS joint committees) on future Nordic initiatives.

Goal: NordForsk, Nordic Innovation and Nordic Energy Research shall co-operate more closely.

Goal: Work for the Nordic Council of Ministers shall be on time and of high quality.

4. Administration and operations

Goal: NordForsk shall work to improve the efficiency of administration and operations so that a greater proportion of the Nordic budget can be spent on Nordic co-operation on research and research infrastructure.

Goal: NordForsk shall seek to ensure that it has the appropriate personnel and competencies.

Goal: NordForsk, Nordic Innovation and Nordic Energy Research shall work more closely together on administration.

Dealing with EU-related and international questions and themes

EU-related and international issues and themes are central to MR-U and are included in the sector's work at both strategic and programme/project level. Viewing Nordic activities in relation to relevant EU activities contributes to Nordic synergy. In addition to using Nordic networks for informal dialogue on topical issues in the European Union, NordForsk shall work with the following:

1. Complementary tools and funding opportunities that strengthen co-operation between the Nordic Ministers of Education and the mobility programmes Nordic Master and Nordplus, in relation to the EU's framework programmes for education and research.
2. Nordic co-operation on quality in higher education, cf. the EU modernisation agenda for higher education (which is part of Education & Training 2020) and the Bologna Process (the European area for higher education, which includes 48 countries).
3. The Reykjavik Declaration and the work with recognition of qualifications, cf. the Lisbon Convention (adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in 1997) and the EU Recognition Directive (adopted in 2005). The purpose of the Convention is to facilitate mutual recognition of entrance exams, study periods and exam certificates in higher education. The Directive makes it easier for EU citizens to work in a regulated profession in another member state after qualifying in their home country.

4. A Nordic agenda for the competencies of the future, which is linked to the EU initiatives 'New Skills for Europe' and 'Upskilling Pathways – New opportunities for adults'.
5. Nordic digitalisation work in the education area, in conjunction with the EU Digital Education Action Plan.
6. Nordic research co-operation is related to, but also differs from European research co-operation, including the EU's framework programme for research, Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe, and the European research co-operation (ERA).
7. Nordic co-operation on research infrastructures and open processes in research (Open Science/Open Access), including co-operation on EU processes and the countries' implementation of GDPR.
8. Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL)'s co-operation with the national EU agenda coordinators on the EU's Lifelong Learning agenda and the development of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). NVL is also part of EPALE, which is the online platform for adult education in the EU.
9. Nordic co-operation on education and teaching democracy under the Nordic Ministers for Co-operation's Programme for Democracy, Inclusion and Safety (DIS), which takes as its starting point the learning resources developed by the Council of Europe and the EU.

Evaluating the co-operation programme

The Nordic Council of Ministers will regularly discuss and adjust the co-operation programme in the light of new political priorities. This will support the ongoing development of MR-U's work and the way in which it works with others in the field of education and research. The programme is supplemented by a list of activities, concrete projects and initiatives, for internal use in the sector. The sector will also contribute to relevant follow-up work on the implementation of the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision.

Halfway through the programme period, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research will submit an interim report to the Nordic Council on the follow-up on the programme.





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NORDIC CO-OPERATION PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH 2019–2023

The vision for Nordic co-operation on education and research is of a region that continues to be a world leader in knowledge and welfare. The co-operation is based on the desire to create a well-run Nordic education and research community.

The co-operation programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) sets the direction for co-operation at ministerial level on education, research and languages from November 2019 until November 2023. The purpose is to enhance co-operation based on the political agendas of the Nordic countries, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research focuses on three strategic areas – education, research and language – and on further developing existing initiatives and forms of co-operation, as well as identifying new ones.