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Platform on Structure and Governance of Academia

*Revised at NSO's
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Introduction

The landscape of higher education consists of both large and small institutions, many of which are spread over wide geographical distances. This creates both opportunities and challenges in connection to quality assurance at institutions. Institutions must make sure that there is a fair distribution of tasks, both internally between campuses and externally with other institutions. Academic environments must be strong enough to carry out research and education at a high level. Norwegian higher education institutions must be able to compete with the best international institutions, both in terms of research and education.

The autonomy of the institution is of vital importance, to ensure independence in research and good quality education. This depends upon a system that provides a high basic funding allocation, ensuring that institutions can work under predictable conditions. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research can control operations by offering incentives in the performance-based funding allocation, entering development agreements with individual institutions and implementing other measures. To support vulnerable academic disciplines, the Ministry must delegate national responsibility. This may be bestowed on individual institutions, to safeguard the further development of research and to improve recruitment to the academic discipline in question.

Higher education and its relationship to the rest of the educational system

In the Norwegian educational system, higher education functions as a research and development-based option available after secondary school, in which people are educated at a higher level and for a longer duration for specific professions, academic disciplines and/or multiple disciplines. Both bachelor's and master's degrees at universities and university colleges should prepare and develop the abilities needed to carry out further research training and research careers, in addition to prepare students for employment in general. To ensure that new bachelor's degree students do not meet an unfamiliar study situation with regard to methods and planning at the commencement of studies, secondary schools must prepare their pupils for studies at a higher level. Therefore, it is important that the leaders of secondary schools, universities and university colleges co-operate together to develop a mutual understanding of what the daily life of students at higher education institutions entails.

Higher education is not, and should not be, the only alternative for further studies after secondary school. It is important that the higher education sector and the vocational education sector have well-functioning co-operative schemes, to ensure that the studies

they offer complement each other, functioning well together where they have close connections or overlap. We need good transitional arrangements, founded on solid

academic principles, for the step from vocational education to higher education institutions. It may be appropriate to establish a co-operative network in which the academic and professional communities at vocational institutions and higher education institutions all participate to discuss how to create the best transitional arrangements. NSO believes that it is important for vocational education to award vocational credits. This should contribute to preserving the distinctive character of vocational education, while preventing giving misleading or unclear information to applicants.

It should be possible for vocational institutions to apply for membership in a student welfare organisation, if the students and the institution want this. Vocational education students must have the same rights to study grants and loans from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund as students attending higher education institutions. They must also have the same rights to organise student democracies and opportunities for student participation as their fellow students in higher education.

NSO encourages vocational education institutions and higher education institutions to enter into agreements for approval of relevant courses. However, it must remain the right of each individual institution to evaluate applicants who have a vocational background.

The various aspects of the Norwegian education system must be developed and monitored, to ensure that they comply with the National Qualifications Framework (NKR) learning outcome requirements for education at different levels. If the education system is to function as a satisfactory whole, it is essential that its constituent parts are in accordance with the levels of the NKR in which they are placed, to prevent parts of the education system from competing with each other or appearing unclear as to the type of educations offered, how the qualifications can be used, and what further educational options they lead to.

Academic profile and the autonomy of the institution

Academic environments and structure

Institutions must have an academic structure which stimulates and makes possible the satisfactory integration of research activities and courses. Consequently, NSO believes that institutions need to find out how best to coordinate their academic environments to make this possible. NSO believes that the unification of academic environments should be based on evaluations of academic quality and long-term needs. Evaluations should be carried out to decide the best size and composition of academic environments. The institutions themselves should be able to downsize or close down environments when this is beneficial.

In the light of the great changes in the institutional landscape, it is the task of the institutions to supply relevant education which produce highly-qualified graduates. The selection of study programmes available should be dynamic, providing relevant, high quality courses to accommodate the needs of society, the business sector and industry, at both regional and national level. To achieve this, NSO believes it is necessary for institutions to revise their

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programme portfolio regularly, making sure that they continue to develop in terms of quality. This applies to newly-established programmes, improvements to existing ones and the phasing out of others, particularly when programmes and academic environments are considered to fall outside of their academic profile. There must be a collaboration between institutions in the division of academic orientation and profiles between them.

'National responsibility' refers to a special, politically-governed area of responsibility which can be allocated to an individual institution, with the intention of protecting and maintaining small-scale and vulnerable academic disciplines. NSO believes that there must be a solid academic basis for the allocation of national responsibility to an institution. There must also be funding schemes in place to ensure the high quality, continued strong academic environment and recruitment of students to study programmes in these disciplines.

All higher education institutions should have a clear and specific profile, which forms the basis of communication between them and the Ministry of Education and Research. ~~The academic profile should be confined to certain areas which are decided politically by the Storting (Norwegian Parliament) after considering the sector as a whole. However, the institutions may give their own recommendations to the Ministry, based on academic strengths and areas of investment [see note]*.~~ The programmes on offer at institutions should be linked to the research that they carry out. This means that institutions must have an academic structure which stimulates and makes possible the satisfactory integration of research and education activities.

Co-operation, distribution of tasks and concentration of academic environments

NSO believes that a greater division of tasks within the higher education sector is desirable, and that this will have a positive effect on strengthening and uniting academic environments to a greater degree. If Norwegian higher education institutions are to assert themselves internationally, we are dependent upon strong and stable academic environments.

Together with other ministries, the Ministry of Education and Research must carry out evaluations of the needs of different academic environments at a national level, and examine how the dimensioning of the educational sector can be improved. The Ministry must be clear in its expectations towards the institutions, so that they can specialise their academic activities in accordance with political intentions and their own academic priorities. To create authentic co-operation, division of tasks and concentration of academic environments, NSO believes it is necessary to develop stronger political incentives, based on a unified national strategy and a system of funding that supports quality in research, teaching and dissemination.

The current funding system, based on funding per unit, does not reward national co-operation and national mobility. NSO believes that this obstructs the division of tasks within the sector, especially in the case of elective subjects in study programs. An increased investment in national mobility will reduce the need for institutions to offer so many small topics and subjects, and rather enhance the quality of the subjects they do offer.

Adjustments to the selection of courses

Where there is a well-documented need, funding should be provided to help carry out the division of tasks and the concentration of academic environments, with the aim of strengthening academic activities. This type of funding should not be given simply to make administration and management more effective. NSO is of the opinion that too many institutions today offer courses within the same academic discipline.

~~The national authorities must set clear terms to the number of tuitions on offer, so that institutions are unable to set up new programmes which are outside the scope of their profile and social responsibility [see note]*. Furthermore, the authorities must be able to place demands for activity on individual programmes which are especially important for securing competence within certain academic disciplines.~~

~~If institutions are not willing to tailor their selection of programmes in accordance with the strategy laid out by the Storting, as well as the national and international need for graduates, the concentration of academic environments can be created through political resolution. This can be implemented by phasing out study places gradually, to avoid affecting the institution, academic staff and enrolled students adversely. The Ministry must examine plans to phase out study places. As an ultimate consequence, it may place sanctions on institutions which refuse to participate in collaboration, the distribution of tasks and concentration of academic environments according to political intentions [see note]*.~~

In the opinion of NSO, the quality of education can be defined by the degree to which higher education institutions organise and realise the aim of making all aspects of a programme contribute to the learning outcomes and goals set out for it. Distinct institutional profiles contribute towards a high level of quality in education, and new programmes should be seen in connection with the sector as a whole. NSO believes that the increase in programmes on offer can be limited, by making it obligatory for institutions to apply to the Ministry of Education and Research for permission to start up programmes which are outside of their academic profile.

Autonomy

With regard to academic autonomy, NSO believes that higher education institutions should be allowed to determine admission requirements for the programmes they offer. Nevertheless, efforts should be made to ensure that institutions which offer the same programmes have approximately the same admission requirements. The authorities must be able to set a limit on the number of students an institution can admit to a particular academic discipline, in addition to those who are covered by full funding. However, institutions should be able to decide how many students they admit within this limit.

Organisational autonomy

Universities and university colleges must have collegial management at all levels. The institutions themselves must be allowed to decide how management is selected or

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appointed. External chairpersons of the board and external board members should be appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, on the basis of proposals from the institution. The board must have a trilateral division of power; the students, the staff and external representatives. NSO believes that no single group should be able to have a majority on its own. All groups should have at least 20% representation.

The institutions must have the financial autonomy to allow them to decide over sources of revenue other than government funding. The institutions must be allowed to take out loans. They must have the administrative autonomy to allow them to decide who they employ.

Other bodies and administration

NSO believes that the departmental control of state-owned institutions should be carried out directly, between the Ministry of Education and Research and the individual institution. Furthermore, we believe that administrating bodies commissioned by the Ministry should have specialised areas of responsibility, with a narrow scope. This will avoid giving individual government bodies too broad a range of influence, and being able to create a benchmark for the entire sector. In the opinion of NSO, there should not be a Directorate for Higher Education.

In Norway, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), is an academic, independent, governmental quality-assurance body for higher education, which operates in accordance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. NOKUT's task is to control the quality of education in Norway's higher education institutions, within a framework prescribed by laws and regulations. The role of NOKUT is to monitor the systematic quality assurance work done at institution level, as well as contributing competence and recommendations for the work of quality improvement at institutions.

Bodies which perform tasks related to administration and technical support services should be integrated as much as possible.

The role of the Research Council of Norway (NFR) is to evaluate academic levels in the country's institutions, allocate funds for research through application processes, and to contribute support to improve Norwegian research work.

NOKUT and NFR should collaborate closely in evaluating academic environments and support schemes to help institutions improve efforts to see education and research in relation to each other.

Accreditation and the autonomy of institutions

It is necessary to have accreditation within Norwegian higher education, to ensure that institutions attend to matters of institutional authority, give attention to planned learning outcomes and organise operations to promote good quality in research, teaching and dissemination. Accreditation is an official acknowledgement and declaration of confidence in an organisation's competency and ability to perform given tasks in accordance with given

requirements. The aim of accreditation is to safeguard and promote quality in education, in regard to quality and relevance of students' learning outcomes.

Accreditation of institutions and their authority

NSO believes that the institutional accreditation which accompanies the categorisation of institutions is unsuitable, as this arrangement does not promote quality or focus on learning outcomes to a satisfactory degree.

It is the opinion of NSO that academic authority should be given on the basis of the quality of a specific academic environment. Accreditation authority for the establishment of new degrees should be granted on the basis of the number of accredited degrees the academic environment already has. If the institution wants to establish a degree outside of an existing academic environment with the right to self-accreditation, the institution must apply to the Ministry of Education and Research. Applications should be considered on the basis of an expert evaluation carried out by NOKUT. The Ministry should also evaluate applications in relation to the concentration of academic environments, division of tasks, and societal responsibilities in a national context, assessing the effect of establishing the new study program or academic environment. This should counteract an increase in study programs, leading to sector with more specialised institutions, in accordance with NSO's ambitions for a more concentrated and task-division oriented sector which promotes quality.

Categories of institution

Mergers in the sector have led to a change in dimensioning within higher education institutions. Today there are fewer but larger higher education institutions, with broader academic profiles. NSO supports this development, as long as the societal responsibility of the institution is addressed, and the emphasis on quality in education and research is maintained.

NSO believes that the institution's academic profile should be reflected in its name, and that the traditional division between universities and university colleges is on the verge of disappearing. A greater number of doctoral candidates are graduating from university colleges and research production is increasing in both quality and amount. NSO believes that the title of the institution should be partly based on the institution's role and academic profile. Institutions should have subject-specific names, like the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). 'Professional University' should be used as an alternative title for institutions which offer professional courses as a main area of responsibility and feature of their academic profile. Regardless of their Norwegian title, all higher education institutions should be allowed to call themselves universities in international frames of reference.

National responsibility

National responsibility for specific academic disciplines can be allocated to institutions by the Ministry of Education and Research, to further bolster academic environments which are already well-developed, or to protect academic environments and courses which are

vulnerable but essential to the development of a knowledge-based society. In such cases, allocation of national responsibility should be a long-term strategy, building competence within vulnerable academic disciplines, which in turn can help to build up academic environments beyond the host institution. Earmarked funds should be allocated together with national responsibility, to make it possible for the institution to maintain the specified academic environment. NSO believes that national responsibility should be a formal title, to ensure the specialisation of education, research and dissemination within individual academic disciplines.

Dimensioning of higher education institutions

The number of small and vulnerable academic environments poses a threat to good quality education for many students in higher education in Norway today. NSO believes that the practicality of having the same courses on offer at many institutions must be continually evaluated at a national level. There is a desire to unify fragile academic environments and competence, so that both students and staff are part of larger academic groups. NSO would like to point out that the scope of higher education in Norway should be based on an evaluation of the sector in its entirety, not merely on concrete projections of the future need for competence within education.

Funding

Universities and university colleges should be primarily funded by the state. The board of each institution is responsible for managing funds in a manner that stimulates the generation of high quality in all sections, balancing the total resources available – both economic and administrative, and within research, education and dissemination. NSO believes that the reporting requirement of institutions needs to be revised. Private accredited higher education institutions should be allocated a more equitable rate of funding, to minimise the economic burden on each individual student.

Public core funding

Block grants consists of two parts - a basic allocation and a performance-based allocation. The basic allocation should create predictable and stable conditions for both the institution's financial position and long-term quality-improvement measures. In the opinion of NSO, the basic allocation should constitute 70 - 80 % of the total block grants. Changes in the level of basic funding to institutions from one year to the next should never be less than the increase in the consumer price index.

Performance-based funding

This part of the block grants should give institutions increased latitude beyond the minimum level of activity. The educational incentives should reward completed degrees, production of course credits (ECTS) and student exchange. The remainder of the performance-based allocation should reward external financing and scholarly publication.

Grants from EU research programmes and the European Research Council (ERC) should activate performance-based funding. NSO believes that publication in open channels

should be rewarded through an independent publication level for Open Access Publication. All of the foundations for performance indicators in research must contain a peer review.

Funding categories for study programmes

There should be different expense categories (for funding of study programmes by discipline) which take into account the variation in costs between different courses. Funding categories should reflect the necessary expenses within an academic discipline, covering teaching, supervision and mentoring. The funding should only be used within the category to which it belongs.

Infrastructure and buildings

Self-managing institutions are responsible for maintaining and updating existing buildings, property and infrastructure. Institutions which are not self-managed should be ensured a non-bureaucratic and effective system for investments, maintenance, adaptations, and operation of buildings, through *Statsbygg*¹. Institutions which neglect or do not show sufficient care for their buildings may lose the right to self-govern, with the consequence that responsibility is transferred to the Directorate.

Statsbygg should help to maintain good framework conditions for study and work environments, giving institutions a large degree of autonomy in adaptations and changes to buildings. The Ministry of Education and Research has a responsibility for ensuring that higher education institutions have good, predictable framework conditions for investments and maintenance through long-term planning.

NSO believes that institutions should have a digital infrastructure which maintains good conditions for the use of digital equipment.

Competence for institutional development and management

If Norwegian higher education is to maintain a high level and compete internationally in the fields of research and education, NSO believes it is especially important to look closer at how competency is developed at institutions. In this instance, on the competence of the staff; how the management operates and develops on a daily basis, to create a good foundation for staff and academic environments to reach their goals.

NSO feels that management at lower departmental level are not given sufficient attention at Norwegian universities and university colleges. NSO believes that personnel management at department level is extremely important in order to give each staff member the necessary

conditions to develop their personal competence. There should be activities in the institutions and its departments which promotes and creates collaboration between staff members. Therefore, it is necessary for institutions to invest in competence enhancement for managers at these levels. It is especially essential that good leadership helps to develop academic environments – where the academic teaching staff work together in teams. This is of key importance, creating cohesive course progressions and collaboratively developing good teaching methods and relevant courses.

Staff positions

NSO believes that the separation of the career path for academic positions leads to a prioritisation of research in the more common career path of assistant professor/professor. NSO believes it is problematical that not all academic positions contain both teaching and research work. Research and education are both tasks of universities and university colleges, which should be regarded equal. Consequently, staff must prioritise both aspects. NSO perceives that there is a cultural challenge in the higher education sector, in which teaching and course-related work is not awarded the same status and prestige as research. Therefore, NSO believes that the system with two different career paths must be discontinued, in favour of only one career path, in which all academic positions are both teaching and research positions.

If education is to be invested in equally as much as research, this will require making the same demands on the development of teaching skills as on research skills, when employing or promoting staff.

*Note to the Platform on Structure and Governance of Academia

Note adopted by the Central Board, 9 December 2017.

According to § 3.1.2 of the current statutes, the Main Platform takes precedence over NSO's other policy platforms. The Central Board interprets the following policies in the Platform on Structure and Governance of Academia as being in conflict with the Main Platform for 2016-2019, and should therefore be disregarded as long as the current Main Platform is valid:

The academic profile should be confined to certain areas which are decided politically by the Storting (Norwegian Parliament) after considering the sector as a whole. However, the institutions may give their own recommendations to the Ministry, based on academic strengths and areas of investment.

The national authorities must set clear terms to the number of tuitions on offer, so that institutions are unable to set up new programmes which are outside the scope of their profile and social responsibility.

If institutions are not willing to tailor their selection of programmes in accordance with the strategy laid out by the Storting, as well as the national and international need for graduates, the concentration of academic environments can be created through political resolution. This can be implemented by phasing out study places gradually, to avoid affecting the institution, academic staff and enrolled students adversely. The Ministry must examine plans to phase out study places. As an ultimate consequence, it may place sanctions on institutions which refuse to participate in collaboration, the distribution of tasks and concentration of academic environments according to political intentions.