

Research Council of Norway – Annual Report for 2002

Report of the Executive Board

2002 will go down in history as a year when the principle of quality was put into practice in new ways in Norway's national research system. The Executive Board devoted considerable attention to the establishment of the Centres of Excellence (CoE). The international evaluation of the Research Council was another focal point for the Executive Board.

The international evaluation of the Research Council and the Research Council reform were submitted to the Minister of Education and Research in December 2001, and then discussed at all Executive Board meetings in 2002. The follow-up efforts paid special attention to internationalisation, quality-promoting measures and focused initiatives.

The evaluation report was discussed in close dialogue with the political authorities. In June, the Norwegian government decided to retain the system of having a single research council. It also decided that the Research Council should be reorganised to better deal with basic and innovation-oriented research. In addition, more efforts were to be made to facilitate collaboration across subjects and sectors.

The evaluation has been followed up by a number of in-house improvement measures in the Research Council. Reorganisation and improvement efforts have been conducted with a large degree of openness and dialogue that has included the employees and their organisations.

The administration and the outgoing Executive Board have both attached importance to furnishing the best possible basis for the decisions to be taken by the new Executive Board in 2003.

The new Research Council

On 20 December 2002, the Research Council adopted new articles of association and a new Executive Board was appointed. The articles of association state that the six divisions will be replaced by three new units: Discipline Development, Innovation and User-initiated Research and Strategic Priorities. (These are temporary terms per June 2003)

With just seven members, the Research Council's new Executive Board will be smaller than before, but more active and strategy-oriented. Meanwhile, a new administrative structure was introduced. The heads of the three new technical units will have seats on the Executive Board .

Quality in Norwegian research

The Centres of Excellence scheme (CoE) is the most comprehensive quality measure ever implemented in Norwegian research. Thirteen CoE institutions were selected in June 2002 and formally established in late 2002/early 2003.

The CoE scheme is funded by the Research and Innovation Fund. The Executive Board adopted a statement of intent to evaluate expanding the scheme in 2006; the evaluation of the CoEs in 2005 will furnish an important platform for any decision with a view to expansion.

The CoE process and the application work *per se* had favourable side effect – even on those not selected. New co-operation constellations and new quality-promoting measures evolved as a direct consequence of the process. A separate website has been established for the CoEs, and the Research Council published a special magazine on the 13 centres.

The major research initiative Functional Genomic Research (FUGE) is also purely a quality measure, initiated in 2002 through an earmarked allocation from the Research Fund.

The SkatteFUNN Scheme

There was a considerable cutback in the funding for user-driven research from 2001 to 2002, meaning that many programmes were unable to initiate new projects. On the other hand, SkatteFUNN was initiated in October as a measure aimed at small businesses. The Research Council strongly advocated that the scheme be broadened to embrace more enterprises. In connection with the government budget for 2003, the scheme was extended to apply to all enterprises. SkatteFUNN allows enterprises to take tax deductions for R&D expenses. The scheme is designed as a joint project between the Research Council and Norwegian Regional and Industrial Development Fund (SND).

Towards year end, a total of 1500 applications were received in just 14 days. Although it certainly put the administration to the test, the situation was handled with great enthusiasm and energy. The scheme has stimulated new R&D projects in business and industry, rendering visible current projects not previously evident from the statistics. These factors enhanced registered industrial research efforts.

Strategic efforts

A draft of a new paramount strategy was discussed by the governing bodies in 2002, and a number of external groups contributed input. Interesting strategic processes were also addressed in dialogue with the Research Council's associates. The draft strategy was not adopted by the outgoing Executive Board.

The draft strategy will be a working document used by the administration as a normative strategy pending the initiation of a new strategic process by the new Executive Board.

The new draft strategy is a collective product of the efforts of all the Research Council's divisions. The divisions also launched their own strategic processes and worked in parallel to develop divisional strategies to supplement the paramount strategy.

Evaluations

Evaluation of disciplines and research institutions is a crucial research policy tool, furnishing an important platform for decisions about the allocation of responsibilities and resources.

The Executive Board is of the opinion that the various evaluations ought to be followed up more specifically and rendered visible to a greater extent than previously.

Examples of evaluations in 2002:

- The evaluation of Norwegian researcher training indicated that Norway has fewer doctoral students than the other Nordic countries in most fields of research. In addition, candidates take longer to complete their degrees.
- The evaluation of basic research in information and communications technology (ICT) ascertained that Norway invests too little in relation to its potential and compared with other countries. Despite that, Norway has strong ICT groups.
- The evaluation of mathematics subjects showed that Norway has several groups at the forefront of international research, but that recruitment is alarmingly weak.
- The evaluation of the bio-sciences showed that they fall short of international standards, with a few notable exceptions. It is recommended that Norway increase allocations, especially to basic researcher-initiated research. The bio-science evaluation will be followed up by four divisions based on a bio-science plan.
- The evaluation of the Research Council's initiatives on computational science over the past four years indicated a growing need for more resources on the part of a growing number of research groups. Accordingly, the Research Council will endeavour to promote a stronger, more comprehensive focus on computational science.
- The evaluation of political science research pointed out that professional standards are good and that Norway has some outstanding research groups. Meanwhile, the report identified a number of challenges.
- The evaluation of the field of linguistics indicated that many groups maintain a high level, but pointed out the need for more integration and collaboration to better exploit available resources. The evaluation has already been followed up through reorganisation.

- The evaluation of the programme Information Technology for the Disabled (IT-Funk) indicated that the initiative has largely been effective and successful. In particular, IT-Funk helped build a number of new bridges between research, industry, users and user organisations as well as to public sector activities.

Advisory services, dialogue and interaction

The Research Council exerts a special influence on research policy through its dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Research (UFD) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (NHD), although interaction with other ministries and bodies is also vital. The Research Council's administration and individual divisions work continuously to forge stronger bonds to the authorities and research communities.

The Research Council encourages more R&D initiatives on the part of business and industry. Such projects will contribute to future value added and competitiveness. A set of instruments has been developed to enhance innovation capacity.

Examples of advisory services, dialogue and interaction in 2002:

- *Technologies to enable economic development* are a policy instrument intended to contribute to long-term industrial researcher training and human resources development in research communities, in fields of research with a major impact for economic development in Norway. In 2002, the scheme helped business and industry fund roughly 250 doctoral candidates.
- Food safety research is part of several Research Council programmes. Nearly 50 per cent of the initiatives under the programme 'Food' under the auspices of the Bioproduction and Processing Division (BF) are linked to the needs of the authorities and the food industry for knowledge in this field.
- The Research Council has emphasised the importance of marine research through the media and other channels. New statistics indicate there was a 25 per cent increase in public and private expenditure on marine R&D from 1999 to 2001. The largest increase was in the college and university sector, with nearly 35 per cent, while the Research Council's grants for marine research increased by 44 per cent during the period.

International activities

The Research Council actively endeavours to promote collaboration and exchanges between Norwegian and foreign research groups. In 2002, the Executive Board attached particular importance to contributing to Norway's bid for success in the EU's 6th framework programme for research and technological progress (6RP). Active use of pre-project funding has helped facilitate this. The new framework programme will employ several complex new instruments to promote more collaboration between many players, so it was decided to escalate the Research Council's advisory services in this field. EU ForskningsInfo's newsletter "Interaction" is one of several expressions of this. A total of 1500 individuals participated in the Research Council's information meetings on 6RP in 2002.

Trends in the WTO system involving increasing globalisation of trade and ever stronger regional trading constellations, present a range of challenges for Norway's agriculture, fishery and aquaculture industries. The Bioproduction and Processing Division (BF) has concentrated on producing knowledge about the political, administrative and financial processes that help shape trade policy. Special emphasis was attached to issues associated with market access, an important prerequisite for further developing Norway's marine potential.

Examples of international activities in 2002:

- In 2002, the Research Council, represented by BF, assumed the role of leader and took secretariat responsibility for the Nordic Contact Organ for Agricultural Research (NKJ) and the Nordic Forest Research Co-operation Committee (SNS).
- In 2002, Norwegian enterprises and institutes took part in 10 new EUREKA projects, five of which were led by Norwegian enterprises. Only three of the projects received R&D support from the Research Council, reflecting the Council's modest budgets for user-driven R&D in 2002.
- The French-Norwegian Steering Group under the Aurora programme granted funding to 16 projects for the initiation of research collaboration between Norway and France in 2003. The support is intended to cover Norwegian participants' visits to France.
- There is also a mobility programme between Norway and Germany: The DAAD programme. Ten applications were granted funding for 2003.

- The Research Council and the Maritime Port Authority of Singapore drafted a new cooperation agreement which was signed in March 2003. The agreement is of considerable interest for Norway, as one of the world's largest maritime nations, and Singapore, as the world's second largest port.
- The Research Council and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology are involved in an international collaboration scheme aimed at improving general logistics expertise in Norway. The scheme entails that Norwegian students can take part of their logistics training at the National University of Singapore and the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.
- The Environment and Development Division (MU) is actively involved in collaboration with the South African Research Council, financed by national programme funding from NORAD. The programme includes Norwegian and South African researchers on an equal footing and concentrates on specific themes such as the environment, energy, HIV/AIDS, democracy and social development.
- During the year, the Halden Project was prolonged to 2006, based on the Research Council's evaluation of the research and a political assessment of environmental policy considerations.
- Under the Culture and Society Division (KS), Nordic collaboration was reformed and close co-operation developed between the Nordic and British research councils with a view to co-ordinated offensives in respect of EU research. KS has also been active in several European networks to enhance research co-operation.
- The Medicine and Health Division (MH) organised a number of information meetings and seminars on the opportunities to apply for funding from the EU's 6th framework programme, National Institutes of Health (NIH) and International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC/WHO). Outstanding Norwegian research groups were presented at a promotion seminar for researchers and innovation groups in the USA. Immense efforts have also been invested in Norway's participation in the EU's new initiative, Europe and Developing Countries Clinical Trial Platform (EDCTP) for research on poverty-related diseases (HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis).
- MH has also endeavoured to set up Nordic strategic collaboration on larger-scale initiatives in molecular medicine and participates in several European research collaboration networks.

Information, the media and public relations

The Research Council attaches a great deal of importance to comprehensive communications activities through its own publications, ongoing media contact and Internet-based information. Communications and publicity efforts are included in the Research Council's ongoing activities and in major national initiatives.

In 2002, the Executive Board supported national initiatives aimed at providing public information about research activities, not least by increasing the budget for 2003.

In 2002, the Research Council's website *forskning.no* had about 300 000 visits per month. The website has been further developed so that its main emphasis is now on research policy and administrative news.

The change in the Research Council's website is a consequence of the establishment of the website *forskning.no*, which was officially launched by Research Minister Kristin Clemet on 10 April 2002. The objective of *forskning.no* is to be the best Internet-based gateway for information about Norwegian and international research. The website is owned by 'The association for the operation of *forskning.no*'. All Norwegian universities and several university colleges and research institutes are now members and co-owners, in partnership with the Research Council. At the end of 2002, *forskning.no* received some 30 000 unique hits per month. A growing number of publications and reports cite *forskning.no* as their source.

The annual 'Research Week' is the most noteworthy national research publicity measure. In 2002, 165 organisers organised 900 events. That is a new record.

'Curious George' is a well-established programme for pupils and teachers in primary school. In 2002, the annual 'Curious George' competition involved almost 3000 children who turned in about 200 projects. As a link in developing a national network and regional activities, in 2002, for the first time, regional finals were organised in the competition in co-operation with the science centres in Bergen and Trondheim.

The Research Council's administration contributes actively by providing feature articles and speaking about key research policy issues in the media. In 2002, the Research Council registered about 300 media mentions per month; fewer in July and more in September, when 'Research Week' doubled media attention on research.

Shortly before year end, the magazine *Nature* published a special supplement, *Scandinavian Networks*, presenting Norwegian and Nordic research. The Research Council contributed to the Norwegian presentation, which focused on CoEs, recruitment and internationalisation. *Nature* also presented Norwegian biotechnology research in two major articles in 2002.

The magazine *Forskning (Research)* published a special edition in 2002, presenting all the CoEs. A reader survey in 2002 showed that *Forskning* achieves good results in the target group for the Research Council's work.

The Research Council's thus far third popular science vision of the future, entitled: "The State of the Nation's Environment 2030 – A Vision of the Future", was presented in 2002 by the Environment and Development Division. The vision received considerable media attention.

Agnar Sandmo, professor of socio-economics at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen, was awarded the 2002 Möbius, the Research Council's Prize for Outstanding Research. The Prize for Outstanding Research Communications went to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, professor of social anthropology at the University of Oslo.

Prospects for the future

The Research Council will continue to strive to ensure that overall Norwegian research efforts reach the OECD average at the very least. An all-out effort is still required if Norway is to assert itself in the vanguard of international research and participate in the new knowledge economy.

Major Research Initiatives 2004 is the Research Council's proposed escalation plan for research, and represents a first step in addressing the proposed budget for 2004 currently being compiled by the ministries. It is proposed the Research Council be allocated MNOK 800 above and beyond the yield on the Research Fund. Moreover, it is proposed that MNOK 50 be invested in intensifying Norwegian participation in the EU's 6th framework programme (6RP), bringing the total invested in 6RP to MNOK 100.

The Research Council strongly recommends that industrial research be reinforced as a supplement to the tax deduction scheme (SkatteFUNN). More emphasis on basic research will help build future expertise, and the thematic research initiatives in the White Paper on Research (marine research, medicine and health, information and communications technology (ICT) and research in the interface between environment and energy) are essential to boost added value and keep enterprises in Norway.

The Research Council also gives priority to biotechnology, materials research and petroleum research in the expansion proposal for 2004. As part of the expansion proposal, and in furtherance of the thematic research initiatives, it is proposed that five new *Major Research Programmes* be established.

The establishment of *Major Research Programmes* is also a follow up of the evaluation of the Research Council, which recommended larger-scale initiatives with a duration of 5 to 10 years. The programmes are to cover basic, applied and industrial research. They are to promote interdisciplinary research, entailing more collaboration across units in the Research Council.

Internet-based research administration

The efforts to introduce Internet-based research administration (the IFA project) made major advances in 2002. The IFA project is aimed at simplifying and improving the efficiency of the Research Council's work processes, with emphasis on users experiencing more predictability, openness, efficiency, security and quality in research administration. One of the goals is that all applications are to be received and processed electronically by the end of 2004.

In 2003, the Research Council's website *forskningsradet.no* will be upgraded and given a new structure, design and publication solution, and be equipped for the receipt of electronic applications. Subsequent to that, the IFA project will gradually integrate functions such as applications processing, peer reviews, financial affairs functions, statistical analyses, etc.

Since its establishment in 1993, the Research Council's activities have been based on a system of more than 1000 elected officers who have invest tremendous efforts by serving on research boards, programme committees and other bodies. The Executive Board would like to thank all elected officers and employees for their dedicated efforts and the huge volume of important work they have performed during a year characterised by a large number of demanding tasks.

Oslo, 31 December 2002

5 March 2003

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The Research Council's administration

The Research Council is headquartered in Oslo. The Research Council's activities do not pollute the environment. As of 31 December 2002, the administration accounted for 298.1 man-years of labour, performed by 308 individuals. In addition, individuals accounting for 30 man-years of labour were employed on a temporary basis. The advisory group is the largest with a total of 135 man-years of labour, up from 112.7 man-years at year-end 2001. The administrative officer group comprised 70.8 man-years of labour, the same level as in 2001. The specialised case officer group (advisers, special advisers, heads of section without supervisory responsibility) experienced an increase of 42 man-years of labour from 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2002. The administrative case officer group (consultants, technical positions) experienced a decline of a total of 22 man-years during the same period.

Results of the year's activities

The Research Council's revenues aggregated MNOK 3 839 in 2002. Of that amount, grants from the ministries totalled MNOK 3 699. Operating expenses, including both administrative and R&D expenditure, added up to MNOK 3 609. Items carried forward to 2003 added up to MNOK 803, a substantial increase compared with MNOK 582 in 2001.

The Research Council's result for the year was MNOK 235.

The working environment

Personnel statistics indicate that total absence due to illness was 3.8 per cent in 2002, which is low and indicative of a slight decline from 2001. Notwithstanding, it has been noted that some absences may be related to overwork, and the Research Council is working actively to counteract this. No cases of on-the-job accidents were reported in 2002. As of 1 January 2003, the Research Council implemented its agreement to promote *Inclusive Working Life*. It is hoped the agreement will contribute to maintaining a low level of absence due to illness and allow better follow up of employees on sick leave.

Colophon information:

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