

# The Research Council of Norway

## Report of the Executive Board for 2013

*The main functions of the Research Council are to provide strategic policy input, administer research funding and serve as a meeting place for the development of research policy and dissemination of knowledge. The year 2013 solidifies a trend that has been underway for a long time. Strategic planning has become an increasingly important part of the Research Council's activities, also within areas where these activities have traditionally played a less prominent role. This has manifested itself in a set of supplementary strategies and policies in new areas, in the development of comprehensive strategic knowledge bases for the planning and implementation of the financial instruments, and in the expansion of dialogue arenas with a stronger strategic focus.*

### **Supplementary strategies that clarify the Council's ambitions**

The Research Council's strategic advisory capacity has come to play an increasingly important part of its activities. These activities are targeted towards the ministries, trade and industry, and the research community at large. The Council provides regular input on how to target research initiatives, the further development of funding instruments, views on cooperation and distribution of tasks within the research system, further development of international cooperation and utilisation of research results. This is conveyed via specific strategies, work programmes, comments to documents circulated for review, and participation in various forums.

#### ***Four new supplementary strategies and policies***

In 2013 the Research Council drew up a new strategy for the research institute sector and a new regional policy, updated the policy for university colleges and revised the policy for gender balance and gender perspectives in research. These efforts have resulted in a set of supplementary strategies to the main strategy, which give clearer substance to and set out in greater detail the Research Council's strategic advisory tasks in key areas of activity.

The Research Council has a special strategic responsibility for the research institute sector. The *Strategy for the Independent Institute Sector* codifies for the first time how the Research Council will exercise its responsibility for this sector and where these activities will be targeted. The strategy addresses challenges related to the public basic funding system, the dialogue with and governance of the institute sector, the participation of the institutes in research programmes and initiatives, the need for cooperation and task-sharing, the role of the market for commissioned research, and the further expansion of international cooperation. This strategy represents an important component of the Research Council's ongoing research institute policy activities.

The *Regional Policy* is a pioneering document in that it presents for the first time a consolidated framework for the Research Council's regional involvement and role, and how this will be further developed in the future. The Regional Policy makes it clear that achieving a more research-oriented private sector and an innovative public sector is dependent on a research, education and innovation system with close geographic proximity, local involvement and regional cooperation. The policy emphasises the need to intensify efforts to

promote mobilisation and mobility and to strengthen cooperation between research and educational institutions, and the private and public sectors. Additionally, the policy underscores the need to help regional actors qualify for funding and increase their expertise through strategies and initiatives based on the specific advantages and development potential of the individual regions. This policy, together with the *Policy for R&D at University Colleges*, set out a clear, strategic framework for the Research Council that emphasises the important role of cooperation between the regional, national and international levels in the development of the knowledge society.

A new dimension has been added to the ambitions of the *Policy on Gender Balance and Gender Perspectives in Research and Innovation* with the Research Council's objectives to assume a broader national responsibility in all segments of the research sector, to work more systematically via its own instruments, and to increase knowledge and expertise related to gender balance and gender perspectives in research.

### ***Strategic policy input in key areas of society***

Much of the Research Council's strategic policy input is related to the further development of initiatives and priority areas, especially in connection with the conclusion and continuation of research programmes and other initiatives. Extensive strategic efforts have been carried out in four areas in particular:

- The ICT field, in which plans are in place for a new initiative beginning in 2015 after the conclusion of the Programme on Core Competence and Value Creation in ICT (VERDIKT). The strategy document *Veien videre for IKT-satsing* ("The Road Ahead for Investment in ICT") calls for significantly larger investment, after the evaluation of the Research Council stated that ICT is an extremely under-funded area.
- A new, integrated plan for transport research, in which the objective is to establish a new, large-scale national research programme when the Programme on Intelligent Freight Transport (SMARTRANS) concludes in 2014. The strategy document *Ingen vei utenom* ("No Road Around It") emphasises the link between the Research Council's research and the national transport plan, and the need for more research within the transport agencies and a stakeholder-based strategic planning process in the area.
- Development of the R&D strategy document *Miljø21 – Miljø i alt* ("Environment21 – Environment in Everything"), which in cooperation between research, government administration and trade and industry presents the long-term perspectives in Norwegian environmental research while identifying specific scientific challenges and knowledge needs.
- The new *Policy for Norwegian Polar Research 2014–2023* sets out the objectives and direction for the Research Council's activities within polar research for the upcoming 10-year period.

The Research Council does more than just develop strategies; it also participates in and serves as the secretariat for ongoing national strategy processes. In 2013 extensive effort was dedicated to the National Research and Innovation Strategy for Health and Care for the 21st Century in Norway (the Health&Care21 strategy). The Research Council provided the secretariat and took part in the strategic work at several levels. The report *Forslag til mer koordinert FoU-innsats rettet mot marin, maritim og offshore-næringen* ("Proposal for more coordinated R&D activities targeting the marine, maritime and offshore industries") by the

Research Council and Innovation Norway represents another type of input in which the Council's expertise is actively used by the ministries for policy development.

## **Long-term plan for research and higher education –input to establish predictability in research funding**

In the white paper on research *Long-term perspectives – knowledge provides opportunity* (Meld. St. 18 (2012–2013)), the Ministry of Education and Research launched the idea of a long-term plan for research and higher education, to which the Government gave its support. A long-term plan for research and higher education can evolve into a new and powerful research policy instrument. The Research Council's input to the Government's long-term plan for research and education has therefore been an important area of activity for the Council in 2013.

In its input the Council identified nine priority areas within particularly important areas of Norwegian research. Specific escalation plans were drawn up for a four-year and a ten-year period for each priority area together with budgetary targets for the various phases. The nine areas were:

- Education and recruitment
- Long-term, basic research
- Research infrastructure
- Open arenas for trade and industry
- Demographics, health, welfare and work
- Enabling technologies
- Resource-based industries
- Climate and environment-friendly energy
- The SkatteFUNN R&D tax incentive scheme

In its proposal the Research Council has emphasised that a long-term plan must realise the guidelines set out in the white paper on research in concrete terms, and must provide a new steering mechanism in Norwegian research policy. The plan must lead to predictability and create expectations in research policy which inherently give rise to optimism, growth potential and a long-term belief in research and higher education as an area of investment for the future.

The long-term plan must identify certain areas of priority that can serve as clearly defined research policy focus areas. It must provide an overall framework of priorities in which some will receive the greatest attention in the beginning of the period while others will be given priority later on. Assigning a target figure for budget increases in each area will highlight the investments that will be needed and lend further credence to these as specified, tangible research policy focus areas.

## **Budget proposal 2015 – input to achieve integration and diversity**

The budget proposal specifies and quantifies the Research Council's various strategic objectives within a larger, balanced whole. The document for priority initiatives for 2015 provides input to the individual ministries and in addition identifies eight focus areas that all of the ministries are asked to help to realise. The budget proposal for 2015 contained a recommended increase of NOK 1 billion and specified four thematic and four structural main priorities for 2015. These were:

### *Thematic priorities*

- Active and healthy for many years
- Two-degree target
- Resource-based industries
- ICT – Enabling technologies

### *Structural priorities*

- Innovative research environments
- Research-based, innovative trade and industry
- Internationalisation – Horizon 2020
- Use and benefit of research

The proposed thematic priorities provide a framework for strengthening efforts to address the grand societal and industrial challenges on which research can have an impact. One of these is the climate challenge and the objective of avoiding a rise in global temperature of more than two degrees. The other is the challenge related to preparing for a society with a substantially larger proportion of elderly among the population. Two areas of trade and industry are prioritised. One is targeted towards resource-based industries, especially areas that draw on the oceans as a resource. The other focuses on ICT, where there is a need to strengthen long-term research.

If research is to help solve these challenges, the appropriate input factors must be in place. The first strategic priority is related to the need to develop innovative research environments through investment in research infrastructure, primarily oriented towards joint European research infrastructure. The second is targeted at the need to encourage trade and industry to invest in research as a tool for innovation. The Research Council also proposed giving priority to stimulation measures to take full advantage of the potential of European cooperation, especially under Horizon 2020. The final strategic priority focuses on the need to use research dissemination and new commercialisation instruments from the best innovation projects to ensure that research results and innovation are put to good use.

## **Budget 2013 – still no real growth**

Public investments in research rose by NOK 1.4 billion in 2012. The Research Council's revenues for R&D purposes increased by almost NOK 300 million from 2012 to 2013. The overall R&D budget in 2013 was almost NOK 7.6 billion, of which NOK 7.4 billion came from the ministries. The weak growth in 2013 followed the similarly weak growth in 2012, resulting in an overall decline in allocations to the Research Council for the third consecutive year. However, the national budget for 2014 presented at the end of the year doubled the growth compared to 2013.

The increase in the national budget for 2013 was targeted in particular towards climate research, global health, follow-up of the new technology strategies for biotechnology and nanotechnology, a new programme on societal security and funding for the Kavli Institute for Systems Neuroscience. The Programme on Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management (BALANSE) received a modest increase, and the budgets of several other programmes received minor adjustments as well. The Programme on User-driven Research-based Innovation (BIA), the FRIPRO funding scheme for independent projects, the National Financing Initiative for Research Infrastructure (INFRASTRUKTUR), and the Programme on Practice-based R&D for the Health and Welfare Services (PRAKSISVEL) were among those that received a slight increase. The budget entails that only the main priority area of *Climate*

*change and sectoral challenges* from the Research Council's budget proposal for 2013 is followed up in the national budget.

The Research Council receives annual allocations over the national budget. Some of this funding is not used in the actual year of allocation, and must be transferred to subsequent years. Transfers from 2013 totalled NOK 2.75 billion, representing an increase of NOK 374 million. The causes of the financial transfers are well-known, and have their origins in ministerial allocation and steering methods, the work procedures of the research programmes, the inherent ramifications of a competition-based distribution system, and the framework conditions and implementation capacity of the research groups and institutions. The Research Council has acknowledged that certain fundamental, structural steps must be taken to reverse the trend of increasing transfers. Consequently, in 2013 an internal project was initiated to investigate, among other things, the kinds of underlying structural changes needed to ensure more consistent use of the allocations.

## **A clearer strategic basis for international cooperation**

Increasingly, research problems are being solved not by individual countries on their own, but as part of a cooperative effort with research groups outside of Norway. The emergence of a common international research area? that also entails competition for talent, research infrastructure and cooperating partners poses a rising challenge.

### ***Mobilising for Horizon 2020***

The Horizon 2020 Framework Programme is being launched in 2014. A large-scale information campaign has been implemented throughout the country in order to prepare and encourage Norwegian research groups to participate. The Project Establishment Support scheme is used actively. Roughly 1 300 individual Norwegian actors have taken part in grant applications submitted to the EU Seventh Framework Programme. The Research Council's efforts to mobilise participation have been reinforced by the incorporation of international perspectives into all relevant programmes and activities.

Most of Norway's international cooperation takes place via participation in European research cooperation under the EU Framework Programme for Research and the European Research Area (ERA). Participation in the Framework Programme, partnership programmes and other ERA activities is constantly evolving. Norway has participated in 1 464 projects under the EU Seventh Framework Programme. Norwegian participants have gained access to knowledge and research results deriving from a total of roughly NOK 74 billion in project costs for an investment of NOK 10 billion.

The Research Council takes part in 29 of the 30 active ERA-NETs, all of the Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI), and many of the partnership activities. Norway has a special responsibility for the JPI Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans, which was launched by Norway in cooperation with Belgium and Spain. Norway also assumed the chairmanship of EUREKA, the European network for innovation, in 2013. Norway participates actively in the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) and in Science Europe, an association of European research councils.

### ***Bilateral cooperation will be specified in country policies***

In 2013 importance has been attached to strengthening bilateral cooperation outside of Europe. The Research Council launched a project to draw up country policy documents for

the eight highest priority partner countries for bilateral cooperation: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa and the US.

The purpose of the policy documents is to identify the priorities of the individual countries, their strongest research areas, potential areas for cooperation, and the best ways to further develop cooperation. The most comprehensive bibliometric study of Norway's international cooperation was conducted in connection with these efforts. The study shows that Norwegian researchers are publishing more results and being cited more often, and above the international average in most subject areas.

Another tool for promoting ongoing bilateral cooperation is the annual Transatlantic Science Week, which in 2013 was held in Washington, D.C. and focused on the themes of international security and emergency preparedness. There was also significant activity in programmes targeted towards specific partner countries, such as the Programme on Research Cooperation with India (INDNOR), the Programme on Research Cooperation with China (CHINOR), the Latin America Programme (LATINAMERIKA) and the Programme on Russia and the High North/Arctic (NORRUSS). The Programme on South Africa-Norway Research Cooperation (SANCOOP) comprises an important component of the bilateral cooperation as well. In addition, the Japan-Norway Science Week was held in Tokyo to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the signing of the bilateral agreement with Japan.

## **The knowledge base documents the impact of research and innovation**

Sound, up-to-date knowledge about and analysis of the functioning of the research and innovation system is essential to the Research Council's activities. It contributes to the design of more effective, better targeted funding instruments, sheds light on emerging needs and lays the foundation for advisory functions. Activities related to enhancing the knowledge base include research, reports, evaluation activities and the further development of indicators and numerical data.

### ***Eleven evaluations completed in 2013***

A systematic approach to evaluations as a basis for learning is a key element of the effort to maintain a reliable knowledge base. Independent evaluations of subject areas, institutions and funding instruments generate knowledge about the Norwegian research and innovation system which the Council uses in its role as a provider of input on strategic research and innovation issues as well as in the further development of its own funding instruments.

Thirteen new evaluations were completed in 2013. Evaluations were conducted of two of the large-scale programmes, the Programme on Aquaculture – An Industry in Growth (HAVBRUK) and the Programme on Core Competence and Value Creation in ICT (VERDIKT). These concluded that the programmes have made a significant contribution to the research environments, recruitment and innovation results, but that there is a need for a more long-term perspective, a broader scope and greater openness in the thematic orientation. The final evaluation of the Programme on Practice-based Research and Development in Pre-school through Secondary Schools and Teacher Education (PRAKSISFOU) and the mid-term evaluation of the Programme on Norwegian Educational Research towards 2020 (UTDANNING2020) were also positive, and formed the basis for the consolidated Programme on Research and Innovation in the Educational Sector (FINNUT).

### ***Mid-term evaluations foster effective management of initiatives***

Mid-term evaluations and process evaluations of various schemes are a critical step in adjusting the course of these during their period of activity. In 2013, mid-term evaluations were conducted of the Centres for Environment-friendly Energy Research (FME), the national researcher training schools, and the Centre for Molecular Medicine Norway, among others. The mid-term evaluation of the FME centres shows that they are well on their way to achieving their objectives, and as a result all of the centres received funding for their final three years of operation. The evaluation of the Industrial Ph.D. scheme concluded that the scheme is beneficial and should be made permanent. Process evaluations of the two main regional initiatives were conducted in 2013. The process evaluations of both the Research Initiative for Northern Norway (NORDSATSING) and the regional research funds concluded that these schemes have provided regional actors with a much broader contact network on research issues than has been the case under national programmes.

The Research Council also evaluated one of its application types in 2013, which was the first time this kind of evaluation has been conducted. The evaluation of the Knowledge-building Project with User Involvement application type shows that the projects have a high level of additionality and that the impact on industry is greatest when the research concept is closely aligned with the business strategy. The evaluation also concluded that the application type is especially crucial for doctoral research projects of relevance for companies.

## **An active designer of funding instruments**

The Research Council seeks to develop research programmes and funding instruments that meet the needs of researchers, research institutions and research policy. This entails designing completely new funding instruments as well as adapting the functionality of already established programmes and initiatives.

### ***Four new types of support***

Four new types of support or instruments have been developed in 2013.

First, *Young Researcher Talents* is a new application type targeted specifically towards researchers who are at an early stage in their research careers, who have completed a post-doctorate or a period in a researcher position, and who have especially high potential of achieving success as independent researchers. There were 64 grants with start-up in 2014 issued under this scheme.

Under the new *Public Sector Ph.D. scheme*, public sector institutions may apply for funding for an employee to pursue a doctoral degree of relevance to the institution's area of responsibility and long-term needs for expertise. Funding for 25 grants under this scheme was set aside for 2014. Some 200 public institutions have expressed an interest in this scheme.

A recommendation has been drawn up for a new initiative to enable the Research Council to promote *better use of promising research results* through funding for proof-of-concept, pilot and demonstration activities in particularly promising innovation projects in industry. In the international sphere, a new instrument has been developed for *institutional cooperation* between institutions in Norway and abroad who wish to enter into long-term scientific collaboration.

### ***Generating pioneering research ideas***

New steps have been taken to create a more flexible framework for breakthrough research. The Research Council has introduced the Idélab initiative, a sandpit or “idea laboratory” initiative, which is specially designed to support precisely this kind of research. The Idélab method gathers together researchers in cross-disciplinary groups for a five-day workshop. During this period they will develop ideas into concrete project proposals with advice from highly qualified external mentors. The event enables researchers with different backgrounds to try out their ideas with each other and together develop new, ground-breaking projects. The Research Council’s first Idélab workshop resulted in four radical, cross-disciplinary projects and a researcher network.

The Research Council implemented a number of measures in 2013 to enhance its ability to promote pioneering research. Under the FRIPRO scheme for independent projects, several new changes have been introduced: a criterion has been added for assessing boldness in scientific thinking, the new application type for Young Researcher Talents has been added, and a new procedure for dealing with interdisciplinary grant applications has been implemented.

Under the Large-scale Programme for Energy Research (ENERGIX), a new priority area “New concepts in the energy sphere” has been established with the explicit objective of encouraging new high risk/high gain ideas. The Large-scale Climate Programme (KLIMAFORSK) also focused on promoting breakthrough activities, and the first call for proposals under this programme was for “Creative, bold pre-projects on societal transformation in light of climate change”.

### ***Successful instruments are being enhanced***

A new generation of large-scale programmes has issued calls for proposals in 2013 with excellent response from applicants. In total, 630 grant applications were received by the Large-scale Programmes for Nanotechnology and Advanced Materials (NANO2021), Biotechnology for Innovation (BIOTEK2021), Energy Research (ENERGIX) and Petroleum Research (PETROMAKS 2).

A total of 103 new proposals were submitted in response to the call for mandatory outlines as the basis for the third round of applications for status as a Centre for Research-based Innovation (SFI).

NOK 500 million was announced under the National Financing Initiative for Research Infrastructure (INFRASTRUKTUR), and was awarded to 16 new, modern and greatly needed research infrastructures in the form of laboratories, databases and advanced scientific equipment. Norway is currently taking part in the preparation of six international research infrastructures on the ESFRI roadmap.

The SkatteFUNN R&D Tax Incentive Scheme has conducted a major mobilisation effort and achieved an increase of 30 per cent in the number of applications received.

The FRIPRO scheme for independent projects introduced the new application type for Young Researcher Talents and achieved an increase of 20 per cent in the number of applications. Together, these measures point to a research system with high ambitions and considerable potential to enhance quality and increase research capacity in Norway.



## **A meeting place for the development of research policy and dissemination of knowledge**

The Research Council's role as a meeting place entails, on the one hand, efforts to provide strategic research policy advice in an open and inclusive dialogue with the research community and society at large, and, on the other, activities to convey research-based knowledge to users and the general public in order to promote the incorporation of research results into society and business life.

### ***Dialogue and collaboration on research policy***

Meetings have been held with relevant research groups, institutions and other stakeholders in connection with the formulation of all the new supplementary strategies. This has ensured that important viewpoints are brought to the table, discussed and assessed, which is itself a valuable component of the individual strategy processes. In addition, strategy conferences on key thematic and industrial areas have been held in which industry, users and researchers can participate in targeting and streamlining future activities. In 2013, the most important strategy conferences were *Mat fra havet* (Food from the Sea), the launch of the *Hav21 marine R&D strategy process*, the *2013 Energy Research Conference*, *Forskernes arbeids- og karrierevilkår i instituttsektoren* (Working conditions and career paths for researchers in the institute sector), and the conference on the *Industrial Ph.D. scheme*.

Regular meeting places for establishing and discussing the research policy agenda are needed to promote participation in the research policy debate. The Research Council has developed a set of recurrent annual meeting places: the *Evening of Excellence*, the *Focus on Business Seminar*, the *Arctic and Northern Areas Conference*, and the *Knowledge Base Conference*. The latter has its origins the Research Council's wide-ranging efforts relating to the knowledge base for research and innovation policy and has now become an annual event. In 2013 the theme for the conference was "Knowledge for Cooperation and Change".

New in 2013 is the Research Council's effort to expand the involvement in research policy of society at large. "People's Climate Research" is a Research Council initiative in which researchers are to address research questions that have been defined by the public. To find out what kinds of questions that people would like climate researchers to answer, the Research Council conducted a survey in cooperation with the Norwegian company Ipsos MMI. Researchers who sought project funding had to specify how they would answer research questions that have been defined and prioritised through public engagement. The KLIMAFORSK programme set aside NOK 10 million for these activities.

The Research Council's governing bodies constitute the core group of representatives of the research sector, society at large, and trade and industry in the discussions about research and research policy in Norway. The 640 representatives who constitute the combined membership of the Executive Board, the four division research boards and the 74 programme boards and committees make it possible to draw on viewpoints from all the key players in the research sector. Key research-policy issues are also discussed in regular dialogue meetings with central organisations in the research system.

### ***Communication about the results of research***

The Research Council's primary tasks include taking national responsibility for dissemination of research, and working to ensure the utilisation of research results. This is followed up in a number of different ways, for instance by promoting the communication of and access to

research results, by organising dedicated events focused on the application and impact of good research, and by maintaining the various meeting places. The active use of social media has become an important component of these efforts.

The organisation of the annual National Science Week is perhaps the Research Council's most widely known initiative, but a number of other conferences are organised by the various programmes and activities as well. In particular, resources are invested in conferences when programmes come to a close. Four such conferences were held in 2013 in connection with the conclusion of the Research Programme on Assigning Cultural Values (KULVER), the Programme for Gender Research (KJONNSFORSKNING), the Research Programme on Core Competence and Value Creation in ICT (VERDIKT), and the Large-scale Programme on Climate Change and its Impacts in Norway (NORKLIMA).

The largest of these was the Climate Conference. Over two days, 300 participants learned about the latest developments in climate research across a wide range of different areas, including Norway's role in the larger picture, the evaluation of Norwegian climate research, the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, climate scenarios anno 2049, and samples of research results from projects carried out under the NORKLIMA programme.

In 2013 the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for Education was launched as a central disseminator of knowledge-based practice in the educational sector.

## **Administrative resources for greater efficiency and competence**

The international evaluation of the Research Council from 2012 confirmed that the organisation is effective, with a high degree of expertise. The ever-growing importance of research for society, the weight given in the white paper on research to the need for a strong research council that can cope with key challenges in the R&D system, and the importance attached by the authorities to efforts to simplify and rationalise the use of public resources, have all encouraged the Research Council to continue to give priority to administrative development in 2013 as well.

### ***Efficient, transparent distribution of research funding***

In 2013 the Research Council allocated NOK 6.5 billion, of which NOK 1 982 million went to the university and university college sector, NOK 2 825 million to the research institute sector (including basic funding), NOK 1 120 million to trade and industry, and NOK 163 million to the regional health authorities and hospital trusts. A total of 5 104 projects were underway, and funding was granted for 1 293 person-years in doctoral fellowships and 720 person-years in post-doctoral fellowships. In the context of Research Council projects, there have been several thousand scientific articles published overall in peer-reviewed scientific journals, reports, presentations and books. New companies have been established, new patents conferred, and new methods and models produced. The Council has reviewed 5 474 grant applications and awarded funding to 985 new projects.

The Research Council is continuously seeking to improve its administrative methods and user orientation. New steps have been taken in the effort to restructure grant application processing through the ongoing refinement of the electronic submission and assessment systems (an integrated solution for applicants, individuals submitting reports, referees, project partners, etc.) to promote more efficient, constructive and uniform work processes in the management of research programmes and other instruments. Technical barriers relating to permitted project

periods and funding amounts sought have been introduced, making it impossible to submit grant applications that do not fulfil the requirements stipulated in the call for proposals on these points.

In 2013 the foundation was laid for the introduction of the electronic contract system from 2014. Efforts are underway to update the website to make it easier to access the information needed to apply to the Research Council for funding.

There has been a drop in both the number of grant applications denied funding and in the number of complaints relating to rejection of grant proposals, which has decreased by roughly half, from 46 to 22 complaints lodged. This corresponds to a very small proportion (.007 percent) of the number of applications submitted.

The objective to ensure transparency and openness in the processing and review of grant applications has been further bolstered by the efforts to establish the new Project Databank, to be launched in the first half of 2014. The new databank will make it possible to customise statistics and will provide information about project results as well.

### ***Competent administration***

The Research Council is a public administrative body granted special powers of authority. Its main offices are located in Oslo, with a separate office in Brussels and regional employees with offices located in counties outside Oslo. The Research Council manages property assets as part of its portfolio. These activities are organised as a separate profit centre.

The administrative accounts show that NOK 565 million was used in 2013 to perform the Council's three main tasks: allocation of funding, provision of advisory services and meeting place activities for parties in the research sector. As of 31 December 2013, the Research Council's staff consisted of 448 person-years (460 individuals). Senior-level managers comprised 39 individuals, advisers 351 individuals and executive officers 70 individuals.

The Council has a stated objective to seek gender balance at all levels of the organisation. Gender balance is satisfactory at the management level, with women comprising 54 per cent of the senior-level positions. Women comprise the majority of other executive officer and adviser positions. The percentage of men is declining and is quite low at the lowest executive officer level. The Research Council's employment procedures stipulate that it is mandatory to call in qualified applicants of non-Norwegian origin for interviews.

The Research Council maintains an ongoing focus on issues relating to the working environment, and carries out preventative Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) measures, including regular assessment of the physical and psychosocial working environment, internal staff surveys conducted every other year, follow-up of employees on sick leave and cooperation with the occupational health services. The total sickness absence remained low (3.3 per cent), but showed a slight increase from 2012. The Research Council works actively with safety and emergency preparedness. The Research Council incorporates environmental management procedures as an integral part of the internal management system, and implements measures relating to energy, waste, procurement and travel.

An efficient, competent administration is characterised by its ability to respond quickly to tasks and enquiries. The Executive Board has noted that the Research Council's internal administrative budget will from now on be allocated in the Government's budget proposal,

and that any growth beyond the general price increase will require separate discussions. It is critical that adequate attention is paid to administrative costs and that these are appropriately aligned with the tasks to be performed. The Executive Board is concerned with ensuring that a constructive dialogue is established in connection with the allocation of the budget, to enable the Research Council to continue to play an active role for all the ministries, for the research community and within international cooperative activities in the future as well.

## **A strong change agent – the overall assessment of the Executive Board**

The new white paper on research, *Long-term perspectives – knowledge provides opportunity*, presented in the winter of 2013, follows up the evaluation of the Research Council by among other things asking the Research Council to enhance its role as a change agent within the Norwegian research establishment. For the Research Council, this entails strengthening its role as a strategic adviser, becoming a more active designer of funding instruments, giving greater emphasis to efficient and legitimised working methods, increasing transparency and inclusiveness in its activities and by assuming greater social responsibility in all its endeavours. Wide-ranging efforts have been implemented in all of these areas.

A new level of activity has been achieved in the Research Council's strategic research planning efforts. Four new supplementary strategies to the main strategy have been drawn up, the knowledge base for new initiatives has been expanded, the input on the long-term plan for research and higher education has given substance and method to a new research-policy instrument, the completion of eleven evaluations has provided more knowledge for use in research policy-making, the international efforts have become more clearly rooted in strategic analyses and statistics-generating activities have become more comprehensive. A greater proportion of the Research Council's administrative resources has been devoted to these tasks.

Efforts to develop new and enhance existing funding instruments have incorporated innovative measures to promote more breakthrough research. The new application type for Young Research Talents; the Public Sector Ph.D. scheme; the long-term, international, institutional cooperation grants; and a novel scheme for commercialisation of promising innovation projects all open up a new range of opportunities for research groups. A new generation of large-scale programmes has been launched; 16 modern research infrastructures in the form of laboratories, databases and advanced scientific equipment have been established within the research community; and new rounds of competition for SFF and SFI centre status have cemented the scheme as part of the quality profile of the institutions involved. Together, these efforts have led to greater capacity, better quality and a clearer structure within the Norwegian research system.

A common understanding of opportunities and challenges in research and research policy is essential if we are to promote legitimised, inclusive, democratic development of the inherent potential of research. A comprehensive system of boards and committees contributes to this. In 2013 an effort was made to involve the public at large more closely in research policy via a "People's Research Programme" related to climate research and at the same time a wide array of strategy conferences, dialogue meetings and concluding conferences with users have been held.

Norwegian research is faced with challenges stemming from five factors:

1. The research environments need to give greater priority to promoting high quality in research.
2. Norway needs to ensure the development of top-notch research and educational institutions.
3. The private and public sectors need to carry out more research to safeguard competitiveness and value creation in the years to come.
4. More dedicated research is needed to deal successfully with the grand challenges facing society.
5. There is a great need to strengthen international research cooperation.

Together, these add up to a need to increase capacity, improve quality and enhance the relevance of Norwegian research, and the State must be willing to play a key role in making this happen. In support of this, the Research Council's input to the Government's long-term plan for research and higher education recommends that public investment should comprise 1.2 per cent of GDP, and proposes that the share of total public funding channelled via the Research Council should be increased to one-third.