



## Summary - The centres of excellence in teaching

### *1 Background*

In a letter from the Ministry of Education and Research dated 26 September 2008, the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) was asked to prepare a report on the proposal to establish a scheme for centres of excellence in teaching. The proposal is based on and derived from Official Norwegian Report 2008: 3, *Sett under ett. Ny struktur i høyere utdanning* (“Viewed as a whole: A new structure for higher education”) written by the government-appointed Commission for Higher Education (also known as the Stjernø Commission).

The scheme is designed to “encourage and reward high quality in teaching, provide the basis for the further development of outstanding learning environments, and facilitate the proliferation of good practice” (translated from the Norwegian on page 152).

### *2 Mandate*

The objective of the scheme is to “...promote development and innovation in learning methods and pedagogical adaptations, raise the level of educational quality, and give a clear signal that teaching and research are tasks of equal importance for universities and university colleges”.

The report is to take its point of departure in this objective, the Stjernø Commission’s proposal and other countries’ experiences with similar schemes. On this basis, the ministry requests a detailed description of how a scheme for centres of excellence in teaching and learning could be designed.

### *3 Members of the working group*

UHR appointed the following members to the working group:

- Kirsten Hofgaard Lycke, professor, Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo (chair)
- Harald Eriksen, head of department, Department of Clinical Dentistry, University of Tromsø
- Ingrid Maria Hanken, vice-rector, Norwegian Academy of Music
- Raket Christina Granaas, dean, Faculty of Humanities and Education, Volda University College
- Rein Aasland, professor, Department of Molecular Biology, and vice-dean, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Bergen

- Trond Løfgren, student body president, Vestfold University College, and national committee representative, Norwegian Association of Students

Senior Adviser Øyvind Nystøl and Assistant Director Guri Bakken, both of UHR, have served as secretaries for the working group.

Senior Adviser Lena Engfeldt has been the working group's contact at the Ministry of Education and Research.

#### ***4 Recommendations of the working group***

On 15 June 2009, the working group submitted its report which contained the following recommendations:

4.1 The scheme for centres of excellence in teaching should:

- Encourage the establishment and development of academic environments that facilitate students' learning through cutting-edge means;
- Promote knowledge-based analysis and development of teaching and learning that provide a basis for enhanced quality and renewal;
- Strengthen the status of teaching at each institution and within the sector as a whole;
- Assume particular responsibility for the dissemination of documented knowledge and experience with principles and design of teaching practices that promote students' learning within the centre's area of expertise.

4.2 The centres of excellence in teaching should distinguish themselves with regard to:

- Quality of teaching;
- Efforts to develop and promote innovation in teaching and education;
- Dissemination of research- and experience-based knowledge about stimulating excellence in teaching and education.

The centres may prioritise and implement these three areas in different ways. They should however, document that the teaching they offer maintains a high standard and is based on knowledge about student learning and teaching methods. The centres must be dynamic, innovative, and demonstrate a strong commitment to teaching among the academic staff and students alike.

The centres may profile high quality in one or more areas deemed to be of interest for academic and pedagogical reasons. It is up to the centres to analyse which educational challenges they will use as the basis for their choice of profile.

4.3 The centres should be organised in a manner that is appropriate for their aims. The centres should be large enough to ensure the availability of sufficient resources, thus achieving the desired versatility and maintaining the quality of the activities over time. They should not be so large, however, that they come to dominate the academic environments with which the centres are affiliated.

4.4 The academic and pedagogical quality of the study programmes and teaching practices is the main criterion for selection of the centres. In addition, the centres must demonstrate that their strategies call for the use of innovative practices in the study programmes as well as the

sharing of knowledge and experience and that the centres are able and willing to carry this out.

A centre of excellence in teaching should take a long-term perspective, and inspire and encourage other academic environments to improve through the development and dissemination of information, models, ideas and materials as well as through consultation.

Those applying for status as a centre of excellence in teaching must be able to document that the centre:

- Offers an outstanding study programme using state-of-the-art teaching practices;
- Encourages higher quality, renewal and knowledge-based development efforts;
- Disseminates knowledge and experience about learning and teaching;
- Plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of higher education.

4.5 On the basis of an application, the centres will be allocated substantial funding to further develop their educational activities (in the broadest sense) and to disseminate knowledge and share experiences through research and other activities.

Status as a centre of excellence in teaching will usually be granted for a five-year period, but this may be extended for three years for exceptional academic environments.

4.6 The scheme should be permanent, and consist of 15 to 18 centres when fully operational.

The initial evaluation of the scheme should be conducted when the first centres have been in operation for about 2-1/2 years. General evaluations should then be conducted every five years.

Funding should also be set aside for research projects that shed light on the scheme, the centres' activities and students' learning under various conditions.

4.7 The working group has not found sufficient reason to establish different centre schemes or formulate separate criteria for shorter professional studies; the general scheme should be able to encompass all study programmes through, among other things, the academic environments' own choice of and justification for their profile/area of specialisation.

The working group notes that measures may be needed in addition to the centre scheme to promote the development of all types of study programmes.

## **5 Contents of the report**

The report begins with introductory chapters on Background (Chapter 1) and Mandate (Chapter 2). These are followed by:

**Chapter 3** sheds light on the assumptions underlying the working group's discussions and recommendations. These are taken from the Stjernø Commission's report and the corresponding input following its circulation, as well as from the general focus on quality in higher education, the relevant national schemes established, experiences from other countries, and not least, the working group's mandate from the Ministry of Education and Research and the objectives established by the ministry for the scheme.

**Chapter 4** describes the objectives of the scheme and the centres' tasks and profile, form of organisation, size and criteria. It also discusses the designation for the centres. The chapter also presents the working group's recommendations for other measures that can work together with the centres with a view to enhancing the quality of studies in higher education.

**Chapter 5** describes the working group's recommendations for the more practical aspects of implementing and following up a Norwegian scheme for centres of excellence in teaching. The discussion is organised according to the areas stated in the ministry's mandate: establishment, procedures, number of centres, award period, economic framework and financing, evaluation and administration of the scheme. The working group also comments on research conducted at the centres.

**Chapter 6** looks more closely at the status of the short professional study programmes and discusses the potential need for separate centres for professional studies.