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## Nordic Centre of Excellence – Upgraded Concept

### I. Aims of Nordic Centres of Excellence

Nordic Centres of Excellence are established to strengthen cooperation between outstanding researchers, research groups and research institutions within areas of priority for the Nordic countries. Nordic Centres of Excellence add value to research conducted in the Nordic countries and increase the impact of Nordic research in Europe and worldwide.

### II. Main features of a Nordic Centre of Excellence

A Nordic Centre of Excellence is an *outstanding, creative and efficient multi-site or single-site environment* with a joint research agenda, joint management, coordinated researcher training, common communication activities, and collaboration on research infrastructure.

Nordic Centres of Excellence are to comprise Nordic researchers at the forefront of their fields, and may include participants from non-Nordic research environments who are needed to fulfil the goals of the centre.

Nordic Centres of Excellence facilitate more efficient use of resources by bringing together people, funding and infrastructure in collaborative entities, thereby enhancing the coordination of research efforts. They promote international researcher mobility, true interdisciplinary research, and the joint use and establishment of research infrastructure. The centres incorporate a targeted international strategy and provide joint access to the best research environments in the Nordic region, thus increasing the region's attractiveness and strengthening Nordic ties to and impact on relevant European research initiatives. Through coordination of researcher education, the centres build competence, establish long-term networks and expand the career opportunities of younger researchers.

The Nordic Centres of Excellence promote both the development and use of research-based knowledge. The joint communication and dissemination activities and coordinated data management conducted at the centres increase the likelihood that the research results will be used both in the scientific communities and by society as a whole. Collaboration with public service providers and industry is encouraged within the framework of a Nordic Centre of Excellence.

Status as a Nordic Centre of Excellence and the appurtenant funding are granted for a five-year period. Funding is granted for Nordic research cooperation as specified in the proposal. The amount of funding allocated by NordForsk will depend on the centre's thematic area, size and budgeted activities; however, in order for a Nordic Centre of Excellence to function properly, the funding amount should normally not be less than NOK 20 million. NordForsk may award additional grants in connection with needs arising from new ideas and partnerships during the funding period. All in all, the five-year funding period should be used to create conditions conducive to continued cooperation beyond the funding period.

### **III. What to include in a proposal for a Nordic Centre of Excellence**

A proposal for a Nordic Centre of Excellence must describe how the planned centre will fulfil the objectives of a Nordic Centre of Excellence.

A Nordic Centre of Excellence must have joint strategies for research, management, international cooperation, communication and dissemination, coordinated researcher training, infrastructure cooperation and data management.

Special importance will be attached to researcher mobility as a means of achieving the objectives of the Nordic Centre of Excellence. Participants are therefore expected to engage in cross-border mobility within and outside the Nordic region, and plans for this must be described in the proposal.

The proposal must include a budget specifying the total anticipated expenses for the Nordic Centre of Excellence and a specification of the funding requested from NordForsk. In addition, information should be provided about any grants for research activity and research infrastructure that the proposed centre receives from national funding agencies and international sources, as well as the expenses to be covered by the host institution. National funding and in-kind contributions are essential in order to demonstrate national commitment and ensure that activities have support within the countries and are aligned with national priorities.

### **IV. Criteria for selecting Nordic Centres of Excellence**

All proposals must be **relevant to the call**, must be of **excellent scientific quality**<sup>1</sup>, and must describe **how added value will be created** through the cooperation.

**The quality of the proposed Nordic Centre of Excellence will be assessed in relation to the following three components:**

- ***Excellence of Research Plan*** (scientific quality; originality and novelty of research; relevance; feasibility and expected results; appropriateness of budget; potential for

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<sup>1</sup> The term "scientific" is used to refer to all fields of research, including the humanities.

knowledge transfer and use of knowledge; potential for long-term cooperation beyond the funding period)

- **Excellence of People** (scientific merits; leadership; experience and skills related to management and operation)
- **Excellence of Environment** (inclusion of relevant environments; cohesion; potential for specialisation; economy of scale; access to relevant infrastructure; international strategy and profile; demonstrated skills and plans for researcher training; organisation of the NCoE)

The research plan will in the final phase also be assessed in relation to the feasibility of the proposed budget for the Nordic Centre of Excellence, including the specification of the funding requested from NordForsk.

**To be eligible to submit a proposal under this call, applicants must fulfil the following criteria:**

- The Leader of the Nordic Centre of Excellence must be an established senior researcher based at a research institution in a Nordic co-funding country. NordForsk will enter into a contract with this institution, which is responsible for the administration of the Nordic Centre of Excellence. The grant will be disbursed to this institution.
- A Nordic Centre of Excellence must have institutional commitment from at least three Nordic countries.
- Partners from countries that do not participate in the common-pot funding of the respective programme must document their own contribution (cash and in-kind) to the Nordic Centre of Excellence.
- Proposals must include a statement on research ethics.
- Proposals must include a description of gender aspects of the research and organisation of the NCoE.

## **V. Monitoring of Nordic Centres of Excellence**

Nordic Centres of Excellence are funded under thematic programmes, prioritized by the Nordic countries. Funding decisions are based on calls with an open competition and in-depth peer review performed by external and international experts. NordForsk's Rules for Impartiality are applied to avoid conflicts of interest in the selection and monitoring of Nordic Centres of Excellence. Funding decisions are taken by the NordForsk Board or by the Steering Committee of the respective programme, when authorised by the Board.

NordForsk signs a contract with each Nordic Centre of Excellence, specifying the exact funding amounts and other details. NordForsk administers the funding and plays an active role as the secretariat (programme coordination). The Steering Committee monitors and further develops the research programme, including the Nordic Centres of Excellence, in cooperation with NordForsk.

Performance of the Nordic Centres of Excellence is monitored through annual progress reports comprising a scientific progress report and a financial report. After three years of operation, a more comprehensive interim progress report is prepared, before the centres are granted the final

two years of funding. A final evaluation of the results and impact of the Nordic Centres of Excellence is conducted at the end of the funding period.

To facilitate the best scientific progress, Nordic Centres of Excellence should receive regular, structured input from internationally renowned, non-Nordic scientists in their respective research fields. To this end, a Scientific Advisory Board or Reference Group will be appointed either by the Steering Committee of the programme or by the Nordic Centre of Excellence itself. Each programme decides how this group is to be organised.

To support cross-border mobility, new positions within the Nordic Centre of Excellence should be announced internationally in an open competition.

It is recommended that NordForsk keeps open the possibility of awarding additional funding for new activities that emerge during the funding period (as a result of creating ties to other activities/programmes, establishing new collaborations, developing joint tools etc.).