

UTFORSK

Call for applications 2021

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) is pleased to issue this call for applications for funding of joint projects between higher education institutions in Norway and Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States of America (USA). The projects may engage in bilateral or multilateral cooperation involving partners in one or more of the eligible countries.

***Update as of 2 March 2022:** In light of the present circumstances in Ukraine, please note that Russia is no longer an eligible country under this call. This means that applications involving Russian partners will be rejected.

The call is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

- The funds made available in this call are a minimum of NOK 100 million.
- This call for applications is open to project partnerships for four (4) years. Applicants may define the project period from 1 November 2022 to 31 December 2026.
- Each project may be awarded up to NOK 3 million.

Application deadline: 20 April 2022 at 12:00 CET/CEST

About UTFORSK

UTFORSK is a measure under the Panorama strategy (2021-2027), targeting cooperation on higher education and research with Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the USA.

The purpose of the strategy is increased quality and relevance in higher education, research, and innovation in Norway through internationalisation and cooperation with the business sector. The strategy forms part of the follow-up on the Long-term plan for research and higher education (2019-2028) and the White Paper *A world of opportunities — International student mobility in higher education* (Meld St.7 (2020-2021)). The latter is also

linked to the ambition that, over time, half of those graduating with a degree in higher education in Norway will have had a study or training period abroad, which was presented in the White Paper *Quality culture in higher education* (Meld St. 16 (2016- 2017)).

Education is a key factor in Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Quality education is a goal in itself, but education, research and innovation are also essential components for achieving the other SDGs, as expressed in SDG 17 – “Partnerships for the goals”. International cooperation is a prerequisite for achieving Agenda 2030. The SDGs demonstrate that the major economic, social, and environmental challenges facing the world today require international cooperation and global solutions. Knowledge collaboration in the form of broad international partnerships that include actors across disciplines and sectors is an important part of the solution. The countries included in this call are all significant stakeholders in achieving these goals.

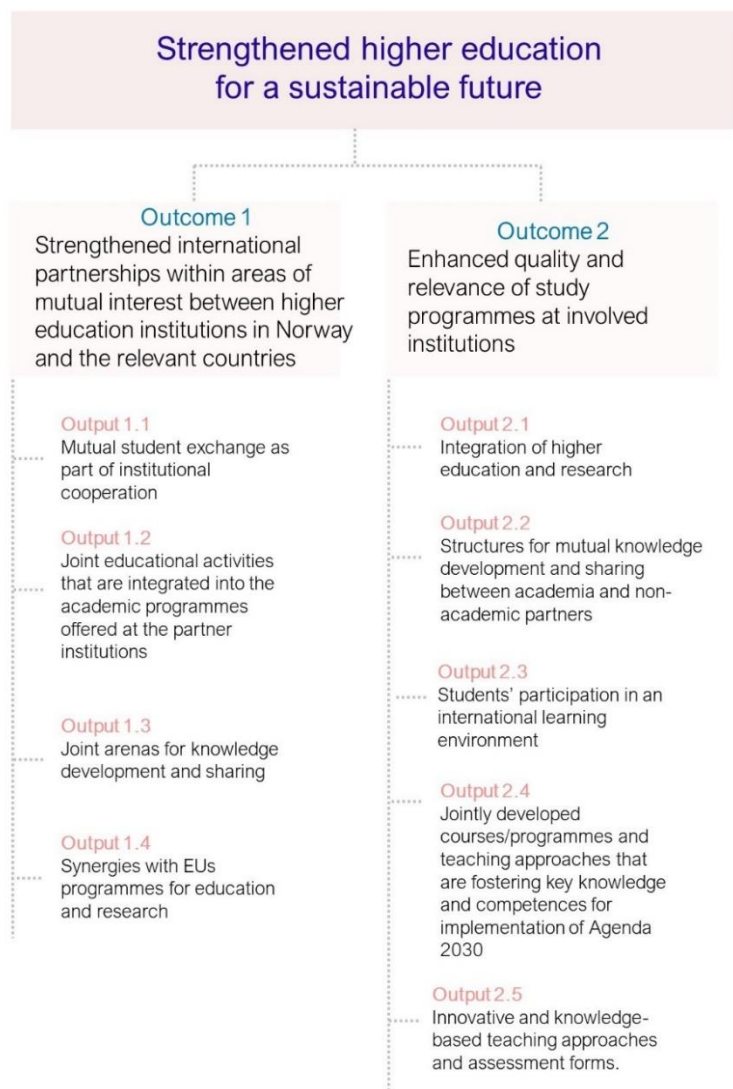
Goals and expected results

The overall goal of UTFORSK is to strengthen higher education for a sustainable future.

The programme has the following main objectives:

- strengthened international partnerships within areas of mutual and strategic interest between higher education institutions in Norway and the relevant countries
- enhanced quality and relevance of study programmes at the institutions involved

Project results that contribute to achieve the goals of the programme are outlined below.



Please see [the UTFORSK programme document](#) for more information about the programme's theory of change.

Applicants should design their projects in the way they consider to be best suited to achieving the goals of the programme and based on a needs assessment at the partner institutions and among relevant stakeholders. Applicants are asked to describe the expected results and effects of the project as specifically as possible. Project activities should be proposed by partners based on jointly identified challenges and opportunities. Activities may include all levels (Bachelor, Master and PhD) and all academic fields. Cooperation across disciplines and sectors is encouraged.

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills will monitor project results and the degree to which project activities contribute to achieving the objectives of the programme.

Who can apply

Applicant institution

The applicant must be an accredited Norwegian higher education institution or an institution with accredited higher education programmes.

Partners

The main partner must be an accredited higher education institution from Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, or the USA. The main partner institution must provide accredited education programmes that are relevant to the proposal and at a level equivalent to that offered at the Norwegian applicant institution.

The application may include higher education institutions, public or private enterprises, research institutes, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or other organisations in Norway, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the USA as partners.

What can you apply for

Funding framework and project period

Each project may apply for up to NOK 3 million.

The projects can have a duration of up to four years. Projects must have planned start-up no later than 1 March 2023 and be completed by 31 December 2026.

Own contribution

Applicant institutions and/or project partners must make available resources equivalent to a minimum of 20 per cent of the amount applied for. These contributions may be in cash or in kind.

Any contributions from the applicant and other project partners must be specified in the application form.

Earmarked funds

Of the total available funds for this call, NOK 9 000 000 are separately earmarked for projects with main partners in one of the following countries: South Korea, Canada, Japan (NOK 27 000 000 in total).

What can the funds be used for?

Please see *Budget guidelines* (Appendix 1) for specifications of what costs may be covered through project funding and how to budget and calculate budget items. Information about the rates applicable to student and staff mobility is also included in the budget guidelines.

The project may include funds for salaries and indirect expenses (including administration and overhead). The funds may be shared between the applicant and the project partners.

Information about the different budget items and the guidelines on calculations are also available in the application form.

Please note that investment in scientific equipment and infrastructure is not an eligible cost and may not be included in the application. The same applies to costs related to research activities not clearly linked to educational activities.

Eligibility and selection criteria

Eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible, applications must meet the following requirements:

- The **applicant** must be an accredited Norwegian higher education institution or an institution with accredited higher education programmes.
- The application must include a **main partner** that is an accredited higher education institution in Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, or the USA providing accredited education programmes that are relevant to the proposal and at a level equivalent to that offered at the Norwegian applicant institution.
- The institutions must contribute with own funding (in cash or in kind) amounting to a minimum of 20 per cent of the funds applied for.
- All project activities described in the application must be completed within the project period.
- The following attachments must be included:
 - **Letters of commitment** from all project partners, including the applicant institution, documenting their interest in and commitment to the project by the leadership at the relevant level.
 - A **curriculum vitae** (CV) for the project coordinators in Norway and the partner country.
- The application must be written in English.

- The application must be submitted through the application platform [Espresso](#) fully completed, including attachments.
- The application must be submitted within the call's final deadline.

Please note that failure to meet the above requirements will lead to the application being rejected.

Selection criteria

Applications that meet the above requirements will be assessed on the degree to which they are deemed able to meet the following selection criteria:

The project's relevance to the goals of the programme (30 per cent), including:

- To what extent the need for the project and the significance for the target group(s) are demonstrated in a clear way.
- The extent to which the project's planned results are concrete and suitable for achieving the call's objectives.
- The level of ambition of the results.
- The extent to which the project is innovative and/or complementary to other measures/activities already initiated at the participating institutions/stakeholders.
- The extent to which the project plans for long-term student mobility (minimum 3 months duration) within and beyond the project period.

The quality of the project design and implementation (30 per cent), including:

- The application's overall clarity, coherence, and quality.
- The extent to which the project has a concrete, comprehensive and realistic plan for implementation.
- The quality of the needs assessments.
- The quality of the risk assessment.
- The project's feasibility.
- Cost-effectiveness and reasonable resource allocation in the project.

The quality of the partnership and structures for collaboration (20 per cent), including:

- The complementarity of the participating institutions' and organisations' profiles.
- The composition of the project team and their expertise and experience in producing the expected results.
- The distribution of tasks and responsibilities and active contribution from all participating institutions/stakeholders.
- The level of formalised commitment from the participating institutions and organisations, and the potential for long-term collaboration between the partners.

- The impact and dissemination of project results (20 per cent), including:
 - Expected impact for the participants, participating institutions, and other target groups.
 - The quality of planned measures to ensure that project results may be sustained beyond the project period.
 - The quality of the plan for dissemination of project results.
 - The quality of planned measures to evaluate and document the project's effects.

The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills presumes that all projects adhere to a high ethical standard in research and higher education. HK-dir emphasises the importance of gender equality, inclusive practices, and anti-corruption measures in all project activities.

Please note that these criteria correspond to various compulsory fields in the online Espresso application form and that the application's ability to meet these relative criteria will be assessed based on the description provided. To ensure coherence and a logical order in the description of your project, please read the relevant help texts in the online application form carefully. Remaining questions may be directed to the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills.

How are applications evaluated?

Applications that meet the minimum requirements for the call will be assessed by two evaluators with the relevant competencies. The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills appoints evaluators facilitating peer-review of the applications.

Applications will receive a grade on a scale from 1 (poor) to 7 (outstanding) for each of the four assessment criteria mentioned above, weighted according to the percentage specified for each criterion.

The applications will be ranked based on the weighted average of the sub-grades.

If two or more applications have been given the same overall grade, the applications will be ranked based on the highest partial grade on the criteria in the order in which they are specified above. If two or more applications are still equally ranked the decision will be made by lottery.

HK-dir makes the final funding decision based on the ranked applications.

To qualify for a grant, the application must achieve a minimum average grade of 4.

Applications that receive an average grade of less than 4, or less than 4 for one or more criteria, will be rejected.

Feedback to applicants

All applicants will be informed of the outcome of the evaluation process, tentatively by 1 November 2022.

The final decision will be communicated in a decision letter to each applicant, including information about the reasoning behind the final, consolidated grade and information on the right of access to the case documents and the right to appeal.

Applications that receive an average grade and sub-grades that exceed the minimum grant thresholds but for which there are not sufficient funds to offer a grant will be placed on a waiting list prioritised in accordance with the grading. Any approvals of applications on the waiting list will be announced once any complaints have been considered for conversion.

[Information about how appeals against rejection decisions are processed can be found here.](#)

Contracting and reporting

The applicant will be required to enter into a contract with the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The contract will be subject to HK-dir standard terms and conditions and must be signed by a representative holding the requisite authority to legally bind the applicant. The obligations on part of the applicant include a duty to submit progress reports, project accounts, and a final report upon completion of the project.

Until a binding contract has been entered into, HK-dir reserves the right to at any time revisit any evaluation and decision on the basis of newly discovered facts which may adversely affect the planned implementation of a project.

How to apply?

Applications must be written in English and be submitted through the application portal [Espresso](#). The application must include:

1. Completed application form in Espresso, including budget.
2. Attachments, uploaded as PDF files:
 - a. CVs for project coordinators.
 - b. Letters of commitment from all project partners, including the applicant institution.

Guidance

In the application form you will find help texts that provide detailed guidance on what kind of information you need to provide in the various fields.

Contact information

Questions regarding the UTFORSK Call for applications can be directed to:

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Appendix 1

Budget guidelines

Project budgets will be assessed on the basis of their cost-effectiveness and reasonableness. The official Norwegian travel regulations (*Statens reiseregulativ*) will be used as a starting point in the assessment of the reasonableness of budgeted travel and accommodation costs. Where available, moderately priced alternatives for travel and accommodation should be chosen.

The calculation of the budget amounts must be clearly explained in the *Specification of budget items* field in the application. Please note that the budget for all types of expenses may be subject to revision if the project is granted funding.

Student mobility

The tables below describe eligible costs that may be included in project applications regarding incoming/outgoing student mobility.

Please ensure that the project budget distinguishes between mobility up to 4 weeks and mobility exceeding 4 weeks.

Mobility up to 4 weeks	Eligible costs
To/from Norway	<p>Bachelor/master/PhD students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project applications may include accommodation and living costs for students related to the planned project activities (e.g., work placements/teaching practice, fieldwork, intensive courses, workshops, supervision, research activities, etc.). • Costs related to participation in conferences not clearly linked to the planned project activities may not be included.

Mobility over 4 weeks	Eligible costs
<p>To Norway</p>	<p>Bachelor/master students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project applications may include scholarships for students to cover accommodation and living costs in Norway. The scholarships may not exceed the applicable rate set by the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (<i>Lånekassen</i>). In 2021/22 the monthly rate is NOK 11,487. <p>PhD students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project applications may include accommodation and living costs associated with the PhD students' stay in Norway up to the applicable monthly rate set by the Norwegian Research Council ("Overseas Research Grants") for individuals. In 2022 the rate is NOK 21,000. Additional grants for dependents are not given.
<p>From Norway</p>	<p>Bachelor/master students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project applications may include scholarships for students from Norway to cover costs which are not covered by student funding available from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (<i>Lånekassen</i>). The scholarships may not exceed NOK 7,000 per student per month. These rates also apply to international mobility for work placements. <p>PhD students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project applications may include specified cost items which are not covered by other external funding up to the applicable monthly rate set by the Norwegian Research Council ("Overseas Research Grants") for individuals.

The rates for student accommodation and living costs are based on rates and net amounts paid to bachelor and master students by the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (*Lånekassen*) and to Ph.D. students by the Norwegian Research Council.

The rates cover the individual student's costs. Additional funding for dependents/family members may not be included in the budget. Please note that scholarships for Ph.D. students may be subject to taxation. As the relevant rates are adjusted annually according to the retail price index, the rates may be adjusted accordingly for the coming years.

Travel, visa, and insurance costs incurred in connection with student mobility may be supported if not covered by funding attainable from the State Education Loan Fund or other external funding sources. These costs may be covered in addition to the rates for accommodation and living costs (please see specification of rates in tables above). Please check the conditions for compulsory or voluntary membership of the National Insurance Scheme (*Folketrygden*) for mobility to and from Norway.

Visa costs for students doing internships abroad may be costlier than for students going on a regular student exchange. Costs related to this may be covered by the project. Students participating in internships may also get insurance for occupational injury covered by the project if the company or organisation is not covering this locally.

Costs related to mobility between partner institutions outside Norway may also be covered, albeit to a limited extent and only to facilitate participation in joint educational activities. Students' expenses related to studies or research at the home institution or in the country where the home institution is located (e.g., fieldwork expenses, laboratory fees) may only be included in the application if these expenses are incurred in connection with joint project activities that include students from more than one country involved in the project.

Cost related to mobility between partner institutions outside Norway should only cover expenses related to travel and accommodation and must be covered under budget item 2. Travel and accommodation.

Travel costs for staff

Projects may include travel costs and expenses for academic and administrative staff related to the project activities. Please note the general guidelines set out above regarding reasonableness and cost levels.

Costs related to participation in conferences not clearly linked to the planned project activities may not be included.

Please note that travel costs for staff (and students) to/from countries that are not part of the project may as a general rule not be included (for instance participation in conferences/seminars in non-partner countries).

Direct and indirect costs

Direct and indirect costs are defined as costs related to actual work hours and other costs that are necessary for the execution of the project:

Direct costs are salary costs for project staff working directly on the project where resources have been set aside specifically for the implementation of the project. This includes projects managers, project participants, as well as administrative staff who are directly supporting the project activities. All costs related to salary needs to be reflected in the institutions own accounting system. The funds may be shared between the applicant and the partner institutions, based on agreements between the institutions. Please specify how these costs have been calculated and how many months of work will be carried out by whom.

Indirect project costs encompass use of general resources within the institution that the project benefits from. Indirect project costs include the project's share of the office space rental cost, IT/telephone, and other administrative services at the institution where project activities are carried out.

Procurement of Services and Equipment

It is possible to include relevant costs for consultants, experts or different types of services offered outside the partner institutions (e.g., experts in digital pedagogy, workplace mentors or teaching facilitators).

Costs for purchasing equipment necessary for the project should be justified and explained in the application and should be fully depreciated by the end of the project period. Investments covered in equipment that will not be fully depreciated by the end of the project period or services that surpass the end date of the project, may not be covered.

Please note that investments in infrastructure such as physical structures/components and scientific equipment may not be included in the budget. The same applies to costs related to research activities not clearly linked to educational activities at master and Ph.D. level.

Other operating costs

This budget line includes all costs that are necessary for the execution of the project that are not included under the other cost categories and may include reasonable costs for:

- Dissemination activities
- Costs related to scientific publications relevant to the project.
- Costs related to digitisation of educational activities, such as licenses/fees for learning platforms etc.
- Activities to make data and other information from the project accessible.

- Other materials and expenses that are not covered under other cost categories, such as lab fees and consumables related to students' research.

Own contribution

Applicant institutions and/or project partners must make available resources equivalent to a minimum of 20 per cent of the amount applied for.

These contributions may be in cash or in kind.

Any contributions from the applicant and other project partners must be specified in the application form.

Transfer of funds to partner(s)

The applicant institution may transfer funds to other partner institutions. All transfers of project funds to partner institutions must be made by bank transfers and the applicant must ensure that recipients of such transfers undertake the necessary steps to provide sufficient documentation to comply with its accounting and reporting obligations. The applicant bears the costs of transfer costs charged by its bank.