

## Centres for Excellence in Education Call for proposals 2022

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills is pleased to issue this call for proposals for new Centres for Excellence in Education. The total funds made available in this call are NOK 140 million. Universities and university colleges are invited to apply for up to 8 million Norwegian kroner annually for five years for new centres. The funding and centre status are awarded for five years, with the possibility of continuation for another five years, subject to a mid-term evaluation.

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

---

### Who can apply?

Host institutions may be accredited universities, specialised universities or university colleges. Each host institution can submit a maximum of five applications. Institutions that submit more than one application should not rank their submissions.

The call is open to all fields of education.

### About the Centres for Excellence in Education scheme

The overall aim of the Norwegian Centres for Excellence (SFU) scheme is to develop excellent quality in higher education. Through the SFU scheme leading academic communities in Norway are awarded resources to further develop their teaching and education. The scheme is a long-term effort to stimulate the development of education and innovative approaches to learning in higher education at bachelor's and master's degree level.

The SFU scheme shall promote excellence in R&D-based<sup>1</sup> education. The SFU scheme is designed to further develop and reward the work that takes place in the interaction between students, academic staff, support services, working life, and the wider society. The scheme will strengthen evidence-based knowledge of educational quality within the academic community

---

<sup>1</sup> R&D-based here means "providing higher education based on the foremost within research, academic and artistic development work, and experience-based knowledge" (Universities and University Colleges Act, § 1-3).

and in higher education in general. The scheme also seeks to stimulate new forms of student involvement and partnership.

## Goals and expected results

The Centres for Excellence in Education scheme shall:

- stimulate universities and university colleges to establish and develop academic communities that offer excellent education,
- contribute to knowledge-based analysis and development of teaching and learning, that underpins quality enhancement and innovation capable of making significant impact,
- contribute to sector-wide development and dissemination of knowledge and excellent educational practices,
- stimulate stronger interaction between higher education and relevant working life and wider society.

Centres for Excellence in Education are leading academic communities in developing quality in higher education. The awarded centres must be in the forefront of national and international developments in education. Centres are expected to instigate change by disseminating knowledge and practices both within and outside their host institutions.

Academic communities that are awarded centre status must therefore:

- offer excellent R&D-based education,
- develop innovative ways of working with R&D-based education,
- encourage student engagement and ownership of learning,
- develop and disseminate knowledge and practices about the design of teaching and learning environments that are conducive to learning,
- relate to international developments in higher education and in the relevant field of education.

---

## What should the proposal contain?

The proposal must be structured in accordance with the two sections below and address the content under each subheading. Applicants should also consider the assessment criteria when writing the proposal.

### I. Documentation of quality in existing education

Quality in education is contextual and multifaceted. Important preconditions for innovative quality work include consideration of the global knowledge base, the learning environment, programme design, internationalisation, digitalisation, educational competence, student involvement and learning

outcomes, including relationships with the labour market and the wider society.

All quality aspects must be seen in developmental terms and as interrelated.

To document quality, the proposal should comment and reflect on the following aspects related to existing quality:

- Academic, educational, and managerial competences related to the activities of the proposed centre.
- Collaborations that support quality in education.
- Structures and practices that support excellent education and student engagement.
- Comprehensive approach to students' learning.
- Use of evidence-based knowledge and research in education practices.

## **II. An innovative and feasible centre plan, including a clear plan for dissemination of knowledge and practices**

The centre plan outlines the aims and vision of the centre, strategy and plans. The centre plan should include a description of how the centre is organised, both internally and in relation to the host institution. Access to resources, management structures, and relations to the research and educational activities associated with the centre should be described. It is important that the budget for the centre corresponds with the centre plan and reflects the centre's ambitions and activities.

The proposal should address the following five areas:

- The centre's aims and vision for excellence in education. Outline needs that the centre shall address given current international developments of knowledge and practices.
  - The centre's rationale and relevance. Outline how the centre will contribute to the SFU scheme and take the role of a leading academic community.
  - The centre's contribution to innovation in education. Outline the proposed centre's strategies and plans to achieve its aims and vision.
  - Evaluation and impact framework. Outline how the centre will systematically assess its own work for development of education over time and how it impacts different target groups.
  - Dissemination of knowledge and practices. Outline a clear strategy for dissemination, linked to the changes in knowledge and practices that the centre aims to generate, including impact at local, national and international level.
-

## What will be emphasised in the assessment process?

Centres that are awarded status as a Centre for Excellence in Education must be able to document existing quality in education and present an innovative and feasible centre plan. The centre plan should respond to a need for development, situating the project in a larger context. Eligible applications will be assessed based on the following criteria:

### Project relevance

In this criterion, the proposal will be assessed in relation to the goals for the SFU scheme. The proposal will also be assessed based on the identified needs and current developments in higher education. Points that will be particularly emphasised are:

- Coherence between project plan and aims of the SFU scheme.
- Quality of existing educational practices and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
- Level of innovation in the centre's plans for R&D-based education, including approaches to teaching and learning.
- Ability to encourage student engagement and ownership of learning.
- Ability to situate and reflect on proposed practices and innovations in a national and international context.

### Project design and implementation

In this criterion, the clarity, coherence and the quality of the project design and plans for implementation will be assessed. Points that will be particularly emphasised are:

- Coherence between the centre's aims and visions and the centre's planned activities.
- Level of ambition, innovation and feasibility of the proposed centre plan.
- Potential for added value and synergies attributable to the proposed centre.
- Quality of strategy for evaluating success and implementing necessary change.
- Level of cost- effectiveness and reasonable resource allocation.

### Impact and dissemination

In this criterion, the proposal will be assessed based on the centre's plan to implement change and disseminate knowledge and practices among participating groups, relevant stakeholders and target groups. Points that will be particularly emphasised are:

- Quality of plan to develop and disseminate excellence in higher education at a national level, both within and across academic disciplines.

- Level of dissemination and impact beyond the local and national context.
- Potential for impact on students learning, and dissemination to other academic communities.
- Potential for societal impact.
- Quality of plan for implementing innovative educational practices and sustainability of innovations after the funding period.

### **Quality of the centre leadership and structures for collaboration**

In this criterion, the proposal will be assessed on the competence of participants and the capacity of the centre to achieve its aims. The centre must be an integrated part of the host institution, and, if relevant, its consortium partners. Points that will be particularly emphasised are:

- Level of academic, educational and managerial competencies of the centre leadership.
- Quality of the organisational and administrative structure of the centre to promote excellence in educational development.
- Extent of ownership and engagement by institutional management, the academic community and students, in support of centre's aims and vision.
- Level of integration between centre activities and the host institution/consortium's wider effort to develop educational quality.
- Quality of structures for collaboration with partner institutions, and internal and external stakeholders.

### **How to organise the centre?**

The organisation of a Centre for Excellence in Education is crucial for its success and should support the centre's aims and vision. The following outlines the organisation of the centre.

#### **Host institutions**

An SFU is integrated into an institution (the 'host institution') that is responsible for the centre activities. The host institution is the applicant of funds and SFU status. The host institution carries the responsibilities in the contract with the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. This includes the practical, academic and financial responsibility for establishing, running, monitoring and integrating the centre into the institution.

#### **Consortia**

A host institution may collaborate with other institutions or other types of organisations, for instance academic support units, research institutes, or enterprises/other organisations for practise training. International collaboration partners may be included in the Centre.

An SFU consortium consists of a host institution and one or more collaboration partners that organise and run the centre in partnership. Consortium partners are formally committed partners, that are essential to the results of the Centre.

Associated partners that contribute to the implementation of specific tasks or activities may also be included. Associated partners are not considered part of the consortium.

### **Management and organisation**

The centre must have clearly defined academic leadership with relevant competence and experience, and an organisational structure with clearly articulated management responsibilities. The centre must be organised in such a way that the progress and impact can be monitored and evaluated effectively.

The centre must be an integral part of the host institution and, if relevant, its consortium partners. This should also be reflected in the participation of institutional leadership in a steering committee. Key members of the centre staff must be employed by the host institution or its consortium partners.

Student participation and co-creation with students at all levels is essential.

---

## **How much funding can you apply for?**

### **Funding and duration**

You may apply for up to NOK 40 million to establish a new Centre for Excellence in Education. The total amount must be dispersed over the five-year centre period.

SFU status is awarded for five years, with the possibility of continuation for another five years, subject to a mid-term evaluation after three to four years. Resources are allocated annually to the centre after approval of an annual report and accounts. Expected start date for centres after award decision is January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023

### **Requirement of own contribution**

The host institution and consortium partners, if applicable, are expected to contribute to the co-funding of the centre with a minimum of 50% own contribution of the total centre budget. If you are rewarded with funding, you are free to decide which of the costs in the centre budget that will be covered by own funding and granted funds.

### **Eligible costs**

Eligible costs for funding can include:

- Direct and indirect costs
- Procurement of services
- Procurement of equipment
- Other operating expenses

More comprehensive information about how to set up the centre budget, what the different budget categories can include and not, and the requirements set towards the justification of the budgeted costs can be found in the [budget guidelines](#).

---

### How to apply?

- The application must be submitted within the deadline
- The application must be submitted through an online application platform (Espresso)
- The application must be written in English
- The application must be submitted by the host institution on behalf of the proposed centre
- The application must meet requirements with regards to duration and own contribution
- The proposal must be written as outlined in the section What should the proposal contain.
- The proposal shall not exceed 12 pages (appendices not included)
- Appendices include:
  - A list of references
  - Budget for the centre for the five-year period 2023-2027, including explanations of costs, according to budget guidelines
  - Brief statements from the institutional leadership of the host institution and any consortium partners. The statement(s) should express the institutions' investment in the centre as well as confirm the institutions' committed co-funding if the centre is awarded SFU status.
  - CVs of the proposed centre leader and two to five key members of the centre. Each CV must not exceed one page. The centre proposal and appendices must be uploaded as a single PDF file.

Applications that do not meet these requirements may be rejected or considered insufficient. For applications with missing information, HK-dir will give a short additional deadline to correct the application.

---

## Application process

Applications will be assessed by an international expert panel appointed by HK-dir, with expertise relevant to the call. The English version of the call is therefore authoritative in the assessment of proposals. The assessment process has two stages:

### Stage I: Assessment of the proposal and attachments

An expert panel will assess all the submitted applications and select the best candidates for progression to the second stage. Assessment is given on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). Applications that receive the grade 5 or higher will proceed to the second stage. All applicants will receive a written feedback after the first stage.

### Stage II: Site visit

The site visits will be carried out by the expert panel at the selected institutions who make it past the first stage. Site visits are undertaken to provide further insight through interviews with the members of the proposed centre and key stakeholders such as students, staff, senior management and other partners. Additional information might be requested by the expert panel prior to the site visit.

Based on the written application and the supplementary information gathered through the site visit, the expert panel will make a ranked recommendation of which applications are eligible for status as a Centre for Excellence in Education. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills will make the final decision. All finalists will receive a written feedback.

The SFU status is awarded based on quality. If there are multiple applications of equally high quality, the academic range of the SFU portfolio may be given priority.

### Indicative timeline for the selection process

All applicants will be informed about the selection results. We expect that the results of the first stage of the process will be made by the end of June 2022. The site visits will be carried out tentatively in September 2022. The final selection results and award will tentatively be announced by the end of 2022.

### Contracting and reporting

If awarded SFU status, the host institution will be required to enter into a contract with the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The contract outlines standard terms and conditions and the respective rights and obligations of the contracting parties. The contract must be signed by a representative holding the requisite authority to legally bind the host institution.

If the SFU is a consortium, the host institution must ensure that a consortium agreement is signed and in place prior to signing the SFU agreement with the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The agreement shall regulate the organising and the running of the consortium, including the respective rights and obligations of the partners.

Until a binding contract is signed the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills reserves the right to revisit the decision regarding allocation of funds.

---

### Contact information

Questions regarding the call for proposals for Centres for Excellence in Education can be directed to:

Anja Olsen Moberg, *Senior Adviser*  
[anja.moberg@hkdir.no](mailto:anja.moberg@hkdir.no)  
959 09 044

Torstein Nielsen Hole, *Senior Adviser*  
[torstein.hole@hkdir.no](mailto:torstein.hole@hkdir.no)  
980 71 617

Ida Iselin Eriksson, *Adviser*  
[ida.eriksson@hkdir.no](mailto:ida.eriksson@hkdir.no)  
412 30 276

---

### About the Norwegian Centres for Excellence in Education

The Norwegian Centres for Excellence in Education (SFU) is a national initiative to recognise and stimulate excellence in Norwegian higher education. The initiative was established in 2010 and is funded by the Ministry of Education and Research.

There are currently twelve centres. More information can be found at <http://Diku.no/sfu>