

Feedback to finalist

Name of Centre	PREPARED - Center of Excellence in Crisis Management Education
Name of Institution(s)	Nord University (host), The Arctic University of Norway (UiT), University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), and the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (INN) as consortium partners
Aim and vision	<p>PREPARED's vision is to <i>"be an innovator in crisis management education based on advanced simulation tools and educational platforms integrating scholars, lecturers, researchers, and practitioners in education at all bachelor and master levels."</i> The mission is stated as providing <i>"superior crisis management education on a joint pedagogical platform emphasizing collaborative education and practice-oriented simulation tools, based on the theoretical frameworks of experiential, problem-oriented, and student-centered learning, tailor-made to professional needs."</i></p> <p>In its vision, the centre's vision recognises the inter-disciplinary nature of crisis management and seeks to bring together four academic institutions willing to explore opportunities and synergies that might arise from developing a unified centre of excellence within Norway, whilst also helping to address Norway's somewhat fragmented educational architecture.</p>
Centre Plan and Organisation	<p>PREPARED's centre plan envisions work packages (focus areas) along four major objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create a wide-ranging crisis management education curriculum that can be incorporated into higher education and transferred to both national and international learning contexts • To provide competence, capacity, and facilities to conduct innovative, flexible and tailor-made exercises based on computer-aided training technology • To build a collaborative system that empowers students to become resources and active participants in educational programs • To develop a feedback system and evaluation framework for life-long crisis management competence development and strengthen the education-work connectivity <p>These objectives are operationalised in the way of sub-goals (called activities) with a strong developmental orientation, but not yet fully developed targets, milestones or measures of success.</p> <p>In terms of organising the centre, the four focus areas, each a lead and coordinator of its own, are supervised by an Executive Board, including the centre leader (Prof. Borch), the centre coordinator, and the leaders and coordinators of the four focus areas, as well as a Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from the leadership at Nord, USN, INN, UiT, and student representatives. Student involvement in the centre's governance is further ensured by student representatives working closely together with the focus area leads as well as being a part of the Innovation Forum, which also involves employees involved in the centre, representatives from the preparedness and response community, as well as international experts and other SFUs representatives.</p>

PREPARED particularly emphasises its various international partners and networks, such as the Center for Advanced Disaster Emergency and Rapid Response Simulation at York University in Canada, the Risk and Crisis Center at Mid Sweden University, the University of Arctic, the Cooperation Network for Risk, Safety & Security Studies (CONRIS), and the Global Alliance of Disaster Research Institutes (GADRI),

Strengths and weaknesses

During the assessment of the application and in the course of the site visit, the panel was impressed by a considerable number of strengths and assets, most notably:

- The consortium boasts a strong base of existing education, training, and research activity in crisis management, including an emerging portfolio of VR/AR simulation exercises and opportunities for private sector collaboration, public sector participation and academic sector research and education benefits.
- The consortium is also characterised by shared understanding among all key actors and stakeholders that collaborating across the four HEIs on enhancing societal preparedness for disasters would on the one hand benefit all institutions, but also the field as such. Each university has their own specialisations/strengths related to the overall topic. The application's strength clearly emanates from the impressive individual strengths of the consortium partners, including the associated partners and their willingness to learn from each other.
- Efforts are driven by a convincing needs and gap analysis, emphasising how the crisis and disaster management in Norway as a whole would be in need of more coordinated efforts between different institutions, including the government, the key military, key civil institutions dealing with crises and disasters, and last but not least, higher education.
- The centre plan is characterised by clear aims to link four universities with vocational and professional practice colleges for mutual benefit ('better together'), to bring 'traditional' students together with experienced crisis management practitioners seeking to return to academia (lifelong learning within Norway), and to innovate pedagogic strategies and skills in the dissemination of crisis management learning and research
- Last but not least, the panel noted during the visit that a considerable number of smaller initiatives and steps have already been taken (e.g. work on a new standard textbook for the field, collaboration on the level of individual courses). The panel could already see how some seeds from the past were already coming to fruition and how the partners have come to realise and appreciate what others bring to the table and how this opens up new possibilities.

On the other hand, the panel also identified some key elements still lacking as well as some room for further improvement, most notably:

- The panel missed a clearer sense of purpose beyond improved collaborations on crisis and disaster management. In other words: a sense of what the centre could be, also in relation to other international institutions, against which PREPARED wants to benchmark itself. The need for a lead role helping to coordinate crisis and disaster management and find a unified approach was strongly voiced by all actors, especially the associate partners and stakeholders; but it did not become clear how and why this needs to be tackled via a SFU. In this regard, the panel also missed a focus on the more strategic dimension of crisis and disaster management, including aligning the centre itself with national strategies and agencies/authorities in order to

support the desired positioning to become the “go to place for the government” when it comes to crises and disasters.

- The panel also saw the need for a more united approach from senior institutional managers and key actors representing each of the four academic institutions. Whilst supporting the concept of ‘stronger together’, leaders appear to currently oppose any attempt to share academic UG/PG or PhD accreditation for specific offerings. In contrast, the teachers, students, and professional practice stakeholder sessions indicated that this would be their preferred goal.
- In line with this, PREPARED is yet in need of a clear plan what the centre will/can safely achieve in 2, 3 5 or even ten years and what would be needed to get there beyond money and mutual inspiration. Focus area 1 (curriculum development) is a good example here, as the site visit showed that the actual outcome (number of shared courses, PREPARED modules to be incorporated into the various institutions’ programmes) is not yet defined but will depend on what the consortium learns during the project.
- During the site visit, the panel found that a systematic mapping and assessment of what each PREPARED partner will bring that is unique and ground-breaking to the project is yet to be undertaken. Such a step was identified as an early ‘to do’ in the event of funding, as opposed to a compelling assessment of what a ‘better together’ strategy might look like.
- Last but not least, the panel did not hear any explicit proposal of how the centre would help to facilitate second order learning and out of the box thinking among students, which was a clearly stated ambition in the application and the interviews. The consortium partners certainly do not lack pedagogical drive, but questions on how to translate this into practice remained largely unanswered. It might be helpful to explore some yet untried paths in the way knowledge is created and imparted, in order to bring the idea of a pedagogy of the unforeseeable to full fruition.

In summary, the visit confirmed several key strengths of the application and the panel found a consortium eager to tackle the various gaps and needs they had identified when preparing for the application. There are considerable strengths and assets to build upon, and some first successes from an increased collaboration can already be identified. On the other hand, the panel also found considerable gaps and questions not yet tackled, as well as a need to further clarify and specify the centre’s rationale, trajectory and specific outcomes, not least in light of the area emphasised in the SFU call. In other words: the consortium and centre plan will well benefit from some additional time and from taking the current collaborative efforts even further. Applied scenario thinking could probably help all actors involved to get a better understanding of the low hanging fruit as well as the more visionary goals and what steps need to be taken to harvest/achieve them. The panel would also recommend developing a more systematic and sustainable approach to connecting research, education and practice/the professional field, and to invest in leadership mechanisms that will assist the consortium in overcoming silo thinking and fragmentation and achieve convergence beyond individual academics’ interests and concerns.

In conclusion, the panel recommends not to fund PREPARED as an SFU.