



Co-operation Programme for **Education, Research and Language** 2025–2030

The Nordics as a Stronger Region for
Education and Research



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Foreword



Lotta Edholm Swedish Minister for Schools, Johan Pehrson Minister for Education, and Karen Ellemann Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Co-operation within the Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) is based on the premise that co-operation in the areas of education, research and language is an important tool in allowing us to address national and international challenges. The ambition is that through Nordic co-operation, we can establish enhanced conditions for high-quality education and research.

The Nordic countries share fundamental common values, a strong democratic tradition and a common history; however, our countries are also sufficiently different that we are able to compare our experiences and learn from one another. It is precisely by standing together that we are able to develop and become stronger.

Education, research and language are essential to resolving society's challenges; however, these issues cannot be dealt with in isolation. It is also important for co-operation in this area to occur in co-ordination with Nordic collaboration in the areas of culture, integration and the labour market. This work seeks to address particularly complex societal challenges within which the Nordic Region as a whole can improve even further: Are we delivering the best possible education both for the individual and for society? Can we anticipate the best solutions and set clear priorities? Are we utilising the potential we have here in the Nordic Region?

The Co-operation Programme sets the direction for Nordic co-operation and reflects the priorities of the Nordic school, education and research ministers for co-operation in the period between now and 2030.

The co-operation programme is ambitious. It shows that Nordic co-operation has a relevant foundation and stands in a strong position. At the same time, it is also essential that we further bolster our co-operation. The goals that we have set therefore also reflect the responsibility that we have as ministers to set clear priorities and establish a clear agenda for yet even stronger collaboration. It is our ambition that the programme will play a role in strengthening Nordic co-operation at all levels.



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Introduction

In 2019, the Nordic prime ministers adopted a common vision for the Nordic Region to be the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The work undertaken by the Nordic Council of Ministers will therefore serve to realise this vision through initiatives within the three strategic priorities that have been established: A Green Nordic Region, A Competitive Nordic Region and a Socially Sustainable Nordic Region.

Nordic co-operation around education, research and language is crucial if we are to build a democratic and resilient society that is characterised by new knowledge, cohesion and mutual trust, and if the Nordic Region is to continue being one of the most integrated regions in the world. Climate and environmental changes, social inequality, and an ageing population are all challenges that are putting pressure on the welfare systems in all of the Nordic countries. At the same time, new and unknown national and international challenges and crises are also testing the Nordic welfare systems.

Through the education system, Nordic citizens are able to acquire knowledge about the requirements, values and rules of democracy, and this equips them to participate in democratic processes. The foundations for active participation are laid early – right from nursery school (preschool/early childhood education), children form part of an inclusive community in which they can express themselves, be heard and participate. Research and knowledge-building are important, both in relation to the results they produce and in demonstrating the value of critical reflection and conflicts of opinion.

Education, research and language are core areas for the Nordic Council of Ministers, and they play a crucial role in realising the ambitions of Vision 2030. They are also key in better equipping the Nordic Region and Nordic co-operation to face future crises. Co-operation in this area covers the entire spectrum of education, from nursery school to higher education and life-long learning, as well as research and language. Together, education, research and language can help support democracy in the Nordic Region by building trust, identity and community, and by boosting opportunities for reflection and the critical exchange of opinions.

The Co-operation Programme for the Nordic Council for Education and Research sets out the political priorities and objectives for the 2025–2030 period.

The objectives of the co-operation programme reflect the fact that the Nordic Region scores highly on several parameters, but there is a need to further enhance efforts. To attain a successful transition, we must aspire to ensure that education in the Nordic Region always remains high in quality, that everyone is able to attain good fundamental skills, and that all citizens will be encouraged in their schools to participate in democracy and to counteract anti-democratic phenomena such as exclusion and disinformation. It is important that the entire population in the Nordic

Region has opportunities to access education from an early age and right through all stages of life and education must move in step with the needs of working life. We must continue to have research that is of a high international quality and societal relevance, and a language policy that allows for identity and competitiveness.

The Nordic Council, civil society and other relevant stakeholders have been involved in the development of the co-operation programme. The Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research has received recommendations and input from national and Nordic stakeholders and organisations. This also includes recommendations from young people in the Nordic Region, in part via the Nordic Youth Month event of November 2023.

All Nordic co-operation must be viewed in the context of the Council's other governing documents, including its Vision 2030. Interdisciplinary perspectives such as sustainable development, equality and the rights of children and young people to be heard and included must all be considered in the implementation of all relevant initiatives. The disability perspective, inclusion and accessibility must also be incorporated into the work.

The co-operation programme takes its starting point from the mission of the Nordic Council of Ministers to contribute towards realising the vision of a Nordic Region which is the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030. The entire Nordic Council of Ministers works to achieve this vision by way of the three strategic priorities.

The co-operation programme establishes the framework for all activity undertaken by the Council of Ministers for Education and Research. The co-operation programme was approved by the Council of Ministers for Education and Research on 19 August 2024 and applies until 31 December 2030.

Our Vision 2030



A **competitive** Nordic Region

Together, we will promote green growth in the Nordic Region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility, and digital integration.



A **green** Nordic Region

Together, we will promote a green transition of our societies and work towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable, circular, and bio-based economy.

The Nordic Region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world



A **socially sustainable** Nordic Region

Together, we will promote an inclusive, equal, and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchanges and welfare.

All activities in the Nordic Council of Ministers will contribute to fulfilling our vision that the Nordic Region will be the world's most sustainable and integrated region in 2030.

The co-operation programme describes how the sector will work with the three strategic priority areas.

Political Priorities

The political priorities in the co-operation programme reflect challenges that are common to the entire Nordic Region, and for which the Nordic countries can jointly work to offer solutions and Nordic added value.

The Nordic Region is well positioned to meet the societal challenges it faces. The Nordic countries all have good nurseries, schools and education programmes, and a highly educated population. The countries invest a large share of their GDPs in education and research, and the higher-education institutions in the Nordic Region are competitive within international rankings. Moreover, the level of trust placed in research and knowledge development within the Nordic Region is generally high. All of the Nordic countries participate actively in European research collaborations; they all have internationally strong academic environments, and they all score high when it comes to innovation. The Nordic Region is home to a rich linguistic diversity, and the mutual intelligibility of the Scandinavian languages gives the Nordic Region a competitive edge compared to other similar regions.

However, it is also true that education and research in the region have many considerations to accommodate. On the one hand, education and research have a mandate to promote the value of knowledge, the formation of the individual, opinion-forming and socialisation. At the same time, they are also increasingly expected to meet the needs of society for an adaptable labour force, to be socially relevant and to function as a tool that can help find answers to current and future problems.

This leaves us, then, with an overall picture that underscores the need for education and knowledge, and which requires us to think in new ways. Educational programmes in the Nordic countries are generally high in quality, and they score above the EU average in international surveys of fundamental skills. However, both statistics and international surveys also show that the level of fundamental skills in the Nordic Region is in decline, and that the education sector is increasingly being influenced by other factors such as social, linguistic and cultural background, in addition to social media. Differences between girls and boys can have an impact on school performance, sense of belonging at school and what students choose to study, and there exists a trend towards greater social inequality, discontent and concerning levels of absenteeism and drop-out rates among children and teenagers. The number of vulnerable children and young people with complex problems is on the rise in the Nordic countries.

The onset of new technologies and digitalisation is also affecting the education and research sector to an ever greater extent – this is a development which results both in uncertain consequences as well as potential opportunities. Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, can affect central actors and processes of democracy, but they can also lead to innovation. In the future, there will be a considerable need to establish the necessary frameworks and to find the right level in terms of how such technologies should be used within education and research systems.

The future of work will bear the mark of the green and digital transition, and will involve both new professions and new ways of working. Studying will therefore remain important, both in order to upgrade existing competencies within the population and also in terms of getting more people into employment. The education system and labour market in the Nordic Region are still altogether too divided on the grounds of gender, and challenges are posed both by the growing number of people who are neither in work nor education, and by completion and drop-out rates, especially within vocational subjects. Even if the share of young people who are not in education or in training is below the average for OECD countries, it is nonetheless the case that too many people are excluded or not managing to realise their potential. Projections also show that the Nordic Region will face particular challenges in recruiting the occupational groups that it will need in the future, such as teachers, educators, nurses and other healthcare roles, as well as individuals with IT skills and engineers. For the Nordic Region, this means that there will not be enough people in central occupations to maintain the current level of the welfare system and ensure the transition that we need.

Research is becoming an increasingly more important part of society's development and is key both to succeeding within innovation and to the green and digital transition. The Nordic countries are home to strong academic environments which are already collaborating around key topics such as the green transition, the oceans, welfare and health, and the Arctic region, to name some examples. At the same time, there are many research bodies within the Nordic Region and a great deal of competition for research funds. Geopolitical tensions are generating a greater need for knowledge and for awareness around responsible international knowledge collaboration. Statistics also show other challenges such as uncertainty in the opportunities for career progression and gender divisions in academia.

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Nordic co-operation around education, research and language is crucial if we are to build a democratic and resilient society that is characterised by new knowledge, cohesion and mutual trust, and if the Nordic Region is to continue being one of the most integrated regions in the world.

One of the special features inherent to Nordic co-operation is the mutual intelligibility of the Scandinavian languages. These languages have strong links to culture and traditions and they are important markers of identity. However, research and surveys also show that Scandinavian language comprehension is varying or in decline, and that the Nordic languages are facing challenges in the form of greater internationalisation

and migration, as well as trends within digitalisation such as the rise of artificial intelligence. This is a challenge, but it also represents an opportunity to bolster common interests and knowledge around Nordic language policy ahead of 2030. Linguistic diversity in the Nordic Region is also further bolstered by the region's indigenous languages and other languages with a unique history and status. Altogether, languages are crucial both in terms of promoting identity and mobility, but also as one of the most important facilitators of integration in the Nordic countries.

The challenges discussed here are not exclusive to the Nordic Region. However, the Nordic countries share a number of common features, and they have a very strong tradition of collaboration. This makes co-operation via the Nordic Council of Ministers particularly well suited for sharing experiences and finding common solutions to complex problems in a more effective manner than what might be possible in other international arenas. It also presents the Nordic Region with an opportunity to be a political and academic front-runner.

Goals and sub-goals

The Council of Ministers for Education and Research has adopted goals and sub-goals for the work to be undertaken in the 2025–2030 period. The political priorities establish the framework for activities in the policy area of Nordic co-operation. This means that the goals form the basis for the initiatives to be implemented by the sector.

Goal 1: Everyone in the Nordic Region must have access to high-quality education from an early age and through all stages of life, regardless of their background



The Nordic Region must continue to be a globally strong region for education in 2030 where there are good opportunities to study and where the entire population possesses fundamental skills and digital competencies. Education must offer a safe framework from early years right through to adulthood. Research shows that investing in the quality of education and early interventions, through good support services where there is a need, has human and socio-economic value, and reduces the need for larger-scale and more expensive interventions later in life. Education also needs to provide the competencies and motivation to participate in democracy and society, to teach the population critical-thinking skills and how to identify and counteract disinformation, and to participate in open debate and the fact-based exchange of opinion. The Nordic Region must work in an even more effective and unified way to

promote inclusion within education and work, in part by ensuring well-being and health for all, regardless of level of education and linguistic or cultural background, and by putting preventative and pedagogical initiatives in place from an early age.

Sub-goal 1.1: More people must have good fundamental skills

Sub-goal 1.2: Education must help to strengthen the population's democratic skills, as well as its critical thinking, digital formation and ability to navigate a new media and information reality

Sub-goal 1.3: Fewer people should fall outside of work and education, in part as a result of early, preventative initiatives

Sub-goal 1.4: The Nordic Region must work to create meaningful communities, to boost well-being and to ensure the good health of children, pupils and students at all levels of the education system

Goal 2: Future educational programmes in the Nordic Region must reflect the competency needs of society and the labour market



By 2030, the ability of individuals to develop their own skills all through their lives must continue to form the foundation for life-long learning in the Nordic Region regardless of needs and ability/disability. At the same time, the Nordic Region also needs to develop flexible and adaptable education programmes and forms of learning that both leverage existing skills within the population base while also meeting the needs of the labour market and wider society. This includes skills development at the workplace, where there is a need for the continuous up-skilling of educators in order to support new methods and practice-based learning. In order to promote our transition into sustainability and to maintain the welfare system, it is necessary to get as many people as possible acquire an education so that they can enter the labour market with the specialised skills and competencies that are needed within the professions that

society requires. In parallel with this, the Nordic Region must also make joint efforts to counteract exclusion and marginalisation so as to ensure a transition that is inclusive and effective for all.

Sub-goal 2.1: There must be a good level of concordance between the education systems and skills supply in order to realise the green transition and to retain a good welfare society

Sub-goal 2.2: More people shall improve their position on the labour market via further and continued education and greater use of validation

Sub-goal 2.3: More people with foreign backgrounds shall participate on the labour market via targeted language and up-skilling initiatives

Sub-goal 2.4: More people shall complete an education and receive a good start to an inclusive and equal working life

Goal 3: Nordic research must be of a high international quality and capable of ensuring good knowledge preparedness and new knowledge within strategically important areas for the Nordic Region



The Nordic Region must be regarded as a solid region for knowledge, where Nordic research is integral to finding concrete solutions to considerable challenges in society, working across disciplines and areas of collaboration. Research must generate Nordic added value on the basis of common values and principles, and it must ensure that the Nordic Region has the necessary research preparedness for the future. The Nordic Region must be an attractive research region with good framework conditions for practising research, regardless of gender, age or disability. Among other things, this includes good gender balance within academia and career opportunities for young researchers.

Sub-goal 3.1: The Nordic countries must promote excellence and Nordic added value via research collaboration and research dissemination that support the development of the Nordic societies

Sub-goal 3.2: Nordic research collaboration must promote multi-disciplinary and cross-sector co-operation between national and trans-Nordic research funders

Sub-goal 3.3: Nordic co-operation on research infrastructure must be promoted

Sub-goal 3.4: The Nordic Region must be an attractive research region with good framework conditions for practising research, regardless of gender, age or disability

Sub-goal 3.5: The Nordic Region must conduct its research on the basis of the principles of academic freedom, research integrity, responsible research conduct, open science and research security

Goal 4: As a Nordic community, we must preserve and develop our languages and language communities



Language is our most important piece of shared societal infrastructure; it plays a role in creating both community and trust, and in strengthening democracy and participation. There is a large degree of linguistic diversity in the Nordic Region, and so it is therefore important that we retain and develop all of our languages and language communities, including our indigenous languages and the national minority languages. The Nordic language community is unique and plays a role in creating and maintaining a shared Nordic identity, and in promoting the Nordic Region as the world's most sustainable and integrated region. Interest in the use of the Scandinavian languages among children and young people must be bolstered, as they are the ones who shall carry on Nordic co-operation into the future. Children, young people and adults with foreign cultural and linguistic backgrounds must be given the opportunity to learn the primary language of society in the Nordic country in which they live. If we are to

succeed in bolstering the Nordic languages ahead of 2030, our ambitions in this area will require long-term collaboration, and our languages will need good framework conditions and political focus. In particular, we need to follow up on the Declaration on Nordic Language Policy and undertake targeted work in the area of digital tools and artificial intelligence, among other things.

Sub-goal 4.1: There must be a strong degree of knowledge and understanding of the Nordic languages and, in particular, a high degree of understanding of the Scandinavian languages

Sub-goal 4.2: Interest in the Nordic languages and in Nordic co-operation among children must be furthered

Sub-goal 4.3: The Nordic countries must ensure that the primary languages of the Nordic societies, as well as the region's minority and sign languages, continue to develop and remain alive in a time characterised by digitalisation

Goal 5: The Nordic Region must be developed as an integrated region for education and research



The Nordic Region aspires to be the world's most integrated region by 2030. It must be easy and attractive for Nordic citizens to live, study and work in another Nordic country. Nordic qualifications already receive a high degree of mutual recognition, and tens of thousands of pupils, students and teachers participate in exchange activities each year, helping to build an integrated Nordic Region. However, if the Nordic Region is to be attractive and relevant in the future, then this is something that must also be preserved and bolstered. Nordic co-operation must be promoted as a natural arena for the further development of national policies, the furthering of common Nordic solutions and the bolstering of the Nordic Region as a player and a unified voice within the arenas of European and international collaboration.

Sub-goal 5.1: Experiences must be shared and trans-Nordic problems must be viewed in the context of European and international policy development in order to bolster the Nordic Region as a strategically important part of the world

Sub-goal 5.2: It must be easy and attractive for Nordic citizens to study, conduct research and work in another Nordic country

Sub-goal 5.3: There must be a high degree of exchange and mobility in the Nordic Region, and between the Nordic and Baltic countries within the field of education and research

Evaluating the Co-operation Programme

The co-operation programme applies for the 2025–2030 period, which in turn is divided into two, three-year work plans for 2025–2027 and 2028–2030, respectively.

An evaluation will be performed in the middle of the period. The Council of Ministers can then use this evaluation as a basis for adapting the co-operation programmes and to determine how the work plan for the last period should be formulated.

Continuous evaluations will also be performed at the discretion of the Secretary General and the Council of Ministers.

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