

NOVA UNIVERSITY NETWORK

STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

2014–2017

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1. Background

The NOVA University Network (NOVA UN) was established in 1995. It is a platform for cooperation on teaching and research between Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural universities. The nine members of NOVA UN are the **University of Copenhagen: Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences** (KU-HEALTH) and **Faculty of Science** (KU-SCIENCE); **Aarhus University: Science and Technology** (AU-ST); the **University of Helsinki: Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry** (HU-AF) and **Faculty of Veterinary Medicine** (HU-V), the **University of Eastern Finland: School of Forest Sciences** (UEF-F); the **Agricultural University of Iceland** (LBHI), the **Norwegian University of Life Sciences** (NMBU), and the **Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences** (SLU).

The NOVA UN member institutions contribute to developments in the sustainable use of natural resources, food production, health and welfare protection of human beings and animals, and to enhancing the capacity for the use of land, water, plants and animals in accordance with sustainable principles. The main task of NOVA UN is to initiate, administer and promote cooperation between the member institutes on postgraduate education.

2. Values

Science and research-based education contributes to supporting the sustainable use of natural resources and food production, and to adapting to changes caused by global warming. It is also a way of promoting the health and welfare of human beings and animals. The Nordic countries are similar in many ways in terms of conditions for land use and ideas about how to build capacity to meet future challenges facing the world. As a platform for cooperation between Nordic forestry, veterinary and agricultural higher education institutions, NOVA UN operates on the basis of the core value of nurturing and strengthening the Nordic dimension.

3. Mission

The mission of NOVA UN is to engage in Nordic cooperation in higher education in order to advance our understanding of sustainable use and management of natural resources in a Nordic and global context. NOVA UN promotes the sharing and implementation of good practices in the Nordic countries. NOVA UN provides a platform for networking between Nordic postgraduate students, as well as senior researchers. NOVA UN facilitates high-quality education for postgraduate students, in fields where the critical mass in one country alone would be too small to offer courses, or in fields with a specific Nordic dimension, defined by, for example, geographical, climatic or cultural commonalities.

4. Vision

The vision of NOVA UN is to maintain and utilise the already extensive and well-functioning Nordic cooperation in order to become more competitive in the international arena in the areas addressed by NOVA UN.

5. Main aim

NOVA UN will mainly concentrate on PhD education by facilitating specialised PhD courses of a high international standard. In addition, we will support internationalisation and student mobility at all levels. By planning and providing education, senior researchers will network and get to know each other. This creates possibilities for developing common research projects.

5.1 PhD courses

NOVA UN spends approximately 70% of its total activity budget¹ on funding PhD courses. The goal is to offer 25 to 30 PhD courses a year. Veterinary students enrolled in residency programmes in the international and national specialisation programmes are treated on a par with veterinary PhD students, and specialisation courses are treated on a par with PhD courses.

5.2 MSc courses and other activities

NOVA UN supports master's level courses in specific areas where Nordic cooperation can add particular value, as well as other projects such as the planning of courses. Approximately 15% of NOVA's overall activity budget is spent on this.

5.3 Mobility among undergraduate students and members of staff

Individual mobility periods for undergraduate students and members staff between the NOVA UN institutions are mainly organised through the Nordplus and Erasmus programmes. The NOVA-BOVA Nordplus Network applies annually for funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers for mobility periods for individual students and teaching staff. Through a NOVA-BOVA mobility period, students are integrated into the Nordic-Baltic research community early in their careers. NOVA UN supports mobility among students and teaching staff when Nordplus or Erasmus funding is not sufficient.

5.4 Networking

NOVA facilitates subject-based networking by awarding planning grants for the creation of courses. Bringing together students, teachers and scientists in NOVA courses will help to strengthen the education offered. Networks can also be used as platforms for research collaboration.

6. Actions

NOVA UN will work actively to sustain and increase the quality of the courses offered via NOVA UN. High quality will be achieved by bringing together area-specific experts who collaborate on developing courses. A quality assurance process must be guaranteed by the member institution organising the course. Feedback from the course participants will be collected by NOVA UN.

In 2017, NOVA UN will be a lean and flexible organisation that offers joint research education courses in close Nordic cooperation, but which also involves international groups from both within and outside Europe. NOVA UN works in close cooperation with the BOVA University Network. By promoting and financially supporting collaboration between Nordic researchers, NOVA UN creates a platform for strong groups of teachers and researchers in other kinds of scientific cooperation as well, thus ensuring Nordic competitiveness, for example in relation to EU grant schemes.

6.1 Administration

NOVA UN has only one main governing body, the Board (see the Appendix). The Board is appointed for a term of three years. The chair and the deputy chair of the Board will be from the member institution chosen to attend to the rotating secretariat function for each three-year period. The Board can appoint task forces or special groups to manage different projects.

¹ Activity budget= PhD courses, master's courses, other projects and the planning of courses, NOVA guarantee, NOVA Student Board, strategy seminar.

NOVA UN's statutes will be updated during this strategy period (2014–2017). The statutes are from 1995 and need thorough revision. The new statutes will be approved by each NOVA UN member institution in accordance with their own rules of procedure.

One call for applications will be held every year.

6.2 Motivation of teachers and incentives

To create incentives for teachers to hold courses, NOVA UN will adopt a simplified application procedure, where the home institution plays a greater role in quality assurance. A flexible course budget frame will be applied, which will also make it easier to organise NOVA courses.

The course organiser can invite international experts to teach courses. In connection with courses, it will be possible to organise researcher meetings, workshops or seminars, thus enhancing the utilisation of NOVA UN as a vehicle for increasing research activity and cooperation, at both the Nordic and the global level. Teachers gather experience of best practices from partner universities and implement them in their own institutions. Feedback from the course teachers will be collected by NOVA UN and used to develop NOVA.

6.3 Motivating students

Measures aimed at motivating students to participate in NOVA courses include: 1) offering interesting and relevant high-quality courses, 2) spreading information about NOVA courses among students and their supervisors.

6.4 Financing the activities

NOVA UN's activities are funded by fees collected from member institutions and by financial support from cooperating Nordic organisations. Any current and potential future surplus in NOVA UN's budget will be used, on the basis of careful planning, to part-finance the activities during this strategy period (2014–2017).

6.4.1 Funding principles

The budget for courses is flexible. It is possible to give funding for invited non-NOVA speakers (remuneration, accommodation and travel expenses), non-NOVA teachers and researchers in the field in question (travel expenses and accommodation), and expenses relating to course content (laboratories, field excursions etc.). Some compensation can also be paid to the NOVA member institute organising the course, in addition to administrative costs of 10% of the total costs of a course. For NOVA PhD courses, independent of the 10% in administration fees budgeted in the grant, the NOVA Board will provide an additional grant in the amount of EUR 2500 to cover administration, regardless of actual costs. This applies for courses applied for after 1 January 2015.¹

6.4.2 Charting new external funding possibilities

NOVA UN's activities should be increased by external funding. Intra-Nordic financing bodies, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers, could play a larger role in NOVA funding. This and other external funding possibilities will be investigated by the Board.

6.5 Annual reporting

An annual report will be prepared every year. It describes the core functions of NOVA UN during the year in question. The report includes the year-end accounts as well as a balance sheet. The annual report will be prepared by the central coordinator in cooperation with NOVA's chair. The NOVA Board approves the report.

6.6 Annual strategy seminar

A strategy seminar will be held once a year, which will be attended by the board members, local coordinators, the Nordplus coordinator and the NOVA Student Board. The purpose of the seminar will be to examine how well the

¹ Cf. NOVA Board resolution § 69.3.2

goals have been attained and, if relevant, to prepare an activity plan for two years at a time, and to ensure that all the NOVA functions are focused on achieving the mission, vision and the goals defined in the strategy.

6.7 NOVA-BOVA cooperation

NOVA UN and the BOVA university network have been cooperating closely for more than 15 years to develop research education around the Baltic Sea. In future, NOVA UN will continue to give priority to collaboration with the BOVA university network. Making financial savings by organising courses in the Baltic countries will be encouraged in future, as well.

Appendix

Criteria for the evaluation of course applications, how to apply the Nordic dimension

Definitions used in this paragraph:

Head applicant (=course leader)

- Responsible for the application.
- Must be a member of the academic staff at one of the NOVA member institutions.
- Person in charge of the course.
- Must have a doctoral degree if applying for PhD courses.

Main teacher

- Teacher giving a substantial amount of lectures or tutoring on the course, can be from either a NOVA or a non-NOVA institution and must hold a doctoral degree.

Other teacher

- Teacher contributing a small amount of lectures or tutoring.

General instructions for PhD course applications

Call for applications

There is one yearly call. Series of courses are evaluated only once, but funding decisions are made for each course (see below for more details).

Budgetary considerations

Based on budgetary decisions, the Board will define a maximum amount that any single course can be granted. The general framework is based on the NOVA strategy (see 5.1). There should be minimum 10 registered and qualified NOVA students on a NOVA course for the course to be held¹. If a course attracts fewer students than that, the course should be cancelled. The course organiser is responsible for applying a cancellation policy of its choice that aims to reduce the risk of financial loss. The maximum length of a course should be five working days (plus a distance learning part, if appropriate).

The budget for courses is flexible (see 6.4.1). Students' accommodation costs will not be included in budgeted costs, but student and teachers' meals on course days can be included in the course budget (see 6.2). To enable continuous evaluation of NOVA functions, it is important to follow up how money is actually spent on courses. A detailed reporting system should therefore be continued.

Non-NOVA students

Students and others not registered at a NOVA member institution are welcome to take a course if a place is available. Admission is handled by the course leader. Non-NOVA (and non-BOVA) students should pay a course fee of minimum EUR 200 (course fees are regarded as income and must be reported and deducted from the final disbursement²). It is important that students are registered in the correct category in the course database as non-NOVA or NOVA students.

¹ NOVA Board resolution 75.7.1, 25 Nov. 2016.

² For courses applied for after 1 January 2015, 50% of the fees will be deducted from the final disbursement, cf. NOVA Board resolution 69.3.3.

The NOVA members at the University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Science, the University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, and Aarhus University, Science and Technology, are responsible for actively informing their students about their status as regards NOVA. All the students at these faculties / institutes, who do not fall into the NOVA student category will be charged a course fee of minimum EUR 200 and identified in the database as 'other Nordic non-NOVA students'.

Course series

NOVA accepts applications for series of yearly courses (maximum four courses in a series will be funded per application). Only one application is submitted for the series and the courses in the series should be offered by different member institutions each year. The courses can either be a series of courses within a related area or courses that form a thematic whole. In such cases, the funding granted covers the whole course series, and annual reapplication is not necessary. However, the NOVA funding for each separate course will be dependent on student evaluations of previous courses in the series, as well as on NOVA's course budget.

Priorities

Every year, NOVA's Board can define thematic priorities that will be announced in connection with the call for applications. In addition, NOVA will always also aim to fund high-quality courses in all fields of its activities every year.

Course evaluation criteria

Evaluations take place in three steps:

1. **Official approval by the home institution.** Institutions should be given clear information about what their role is in relation to approving applications for submission. An official signatory at the home institution should sign a document confirming that the home institution has carefully examined and approved the following aspects of the course:
 - a. Course content and level are confirmed as suitable for PhD students (or MSc students, in the case of MSc courses)
 - b. The course leader is competent to organise a course and is guaranteed the necessary administrative support by the home institution
 - c. Teachers have good academic and teaching competence to teach at the course level in question
 - d. The course programme is well-planned, and different educational methods and elements are balanced and in line with the learning objectives of the course
 - e. The topic is relevant for the home institution and NOVA students
 - f. The number of ECTS credited is in line with the planned workload
 - g. The budget is in line with the course content
2. **Technical approval by the NOVA central coordinator.** The central coordinator will ensure that the practical eligibility criteria are met: that the budget and course plan is in accordance with the guidelines, that all the necessary documents are submitted and that the course application has been officially approved by the home institution before submission. If the application has deficiencies, the central coordinator will usually not ask the applicant to complete or improve the application. Such applications will be rejected. The central coordinator will check for course evaluations from previous courses organised by the applicant / course group and forward them to the Board for consideration during the evaluation process.
3. **Final evaluation and approval by the NOVA Board.** Final evaluation and approval are based on the set priorities, including an evaluation of the Nordic dimension of the application. The Board does not discuss the details of applications.

For courses that reach the NOVA Board through the application process described above, the most important evaluation criterion is how well the course promotes the Nordic dimension as defined in the NOVA strategy. This should be shown qualitatively, not quantitatively. Criteria that will be taken into account therefore include the items listed below, and applicants need to make sure that they address all of them clearly:

1. Does the topic fit with **NOVA's strategy** and is it in accordance with the **priorities**, if any, set by the Board for the current call?
2. Does the course provide postgraduate students with high-quality education in fields where the **critical mass in one country alone would be too small**, or fields with a **specific Nordic dimension**, defined by, e.g., geographical, climatic or cultural commonalities?
3. What is the **added value** of the course? Does it, for example, promote the exchange of best practices in teaching and discipline know-how between teachers? Does it facilitate other forms of cooperation between teachers and students, for example on research?

When evaluating applications, each board member will read all the applications and make brief comments on the criteria mentioned above. In order to make grading comparable between evaluators, applications should be categorised according to their quality based on the above criteria, and not given subjective scores.

Calculation of membership fees

For the strategy period 2014–2017, the percentage membership fees are based on both the average percentage of degrees awarded (95% emphasis on PhD degrees and 5% on master's degrees) and the average percentage of PhD students in NOVA PhD courses in recent years. Both these indicators will weigh 50% in the total percentage membership fee.

For the years 2014 and 2015, the percentage membership fee will be calculated using the following data: the average number of degrees awarded in the period 2007–2012 and the average percentage of PhD students in NOVA PhD courses during the period 2008–2012.¹ For the percentage membership fees in 2016 and 2017, the statistics for both these items will be updated and the percentage member fee adjusted accordingly.

Administrative structure

NOVA UN has a rotating secretariat, which passes from one member institution to another every third year. The board member from the institution hosting the secretariat becomes the NOVA chair for the three-year period. Decisions about the hosting institution are made by the Board.

A. The NOVA Board

NOVA UN is managed by its Board, on which each member institution has one representative. The number of votes² per board member is as follows: SLU three, NMBU two, other members one each. The NOVA Student Board appoints two student representatives to the Board. Each of the two student representatives has a vote on the Board.³ Each member must have a designated deputy. It is the responsibility of all board members to ensure that all the disciplines (agriculture, forestry, veterinary science) are adequately represented.

The chair, as well as the deputy chair, of the Board comes from the NOVA UN member institute that is currently responsible for the NOVA secretariat (see above). The voting details will be defined in the revised statutes. The NOVA secretariat is responsible for the secretarial functions of the Board. The roles and responsibilities of the NOVA Board:

- Define the mission of NOVA UN
- Set out the vision, objectives and the strategy for NOVA UN
- Provide sound finances for the organisation
- Review and evaluate the organisation and performance of NOVA UN
- Manage external cooperation, such as NOVA-BOVA cooperation

¹ See the minutes of the NOVA Board meeting, 15 Oct. 2013, §66.9

² Decided at the Board meeting on 24 May 2013, §65.10

³ Cf. resolution 69.4.1 of the NOVA Board meeting, 26 Nov. 2014

- Decide the course funding strategy
- Decide the funding of proposed PhD and MSc courses under the annual call for applications
- Decide the funding of other projects throughout the year, when the proposed funding is more than EUR 5,000
- Adopt two-year activity plans
- Approve annual reports and annual accounts submitted by the central coordinator and the chair
- All the board members are responsible for ensuring that NOVA UN has a firm policy foundation in the home universities, and that NOVA UN remains an accepted, well-known and recognised partner for the relevant member institutes

B. The NOVA Executive Committee

The NOVA Executive committee (EC) consists of the NOVA chair, the deputy chair, a student representative and with the central coordinator as secretary.

Responsibilities and tasks of the EC:

- The EC has chief responsibility for preparing items for consideration by the NOVA Board
- Deciding the funding of courses, planning activities and other grants up to EUR 5,000
- Making necessary decisions relating to the day-to-day running of NOVA that are not fundamental enough to need Board consideration

C. NOVA central coordinator

The NOVA secretariat consists of one secretary (central coordinator), who is responsible for the secretarial functions of the Board and the EC, and the day-to-day administration of NOVA. In consultation with the chair, the central coordinator is also responsible for preparing items to be considered by the NOVA Board and the EC.

D. Local coordinators

Each NOVA UN member institution has a local NOVA coordinator, whose task is to promote NOVA UN at the home institution and to contribute to the two-year NOVA UN activity plans. The local coordinators provide necessary support in connection with the preparation of NOVA meetings that are hosted by their respective institutions.

E. NOVA Student Board

The NOVA Student Board works to further the goals of NOVA UN and contributes actively to the NOVA Board by bringing students' perspective to the table.