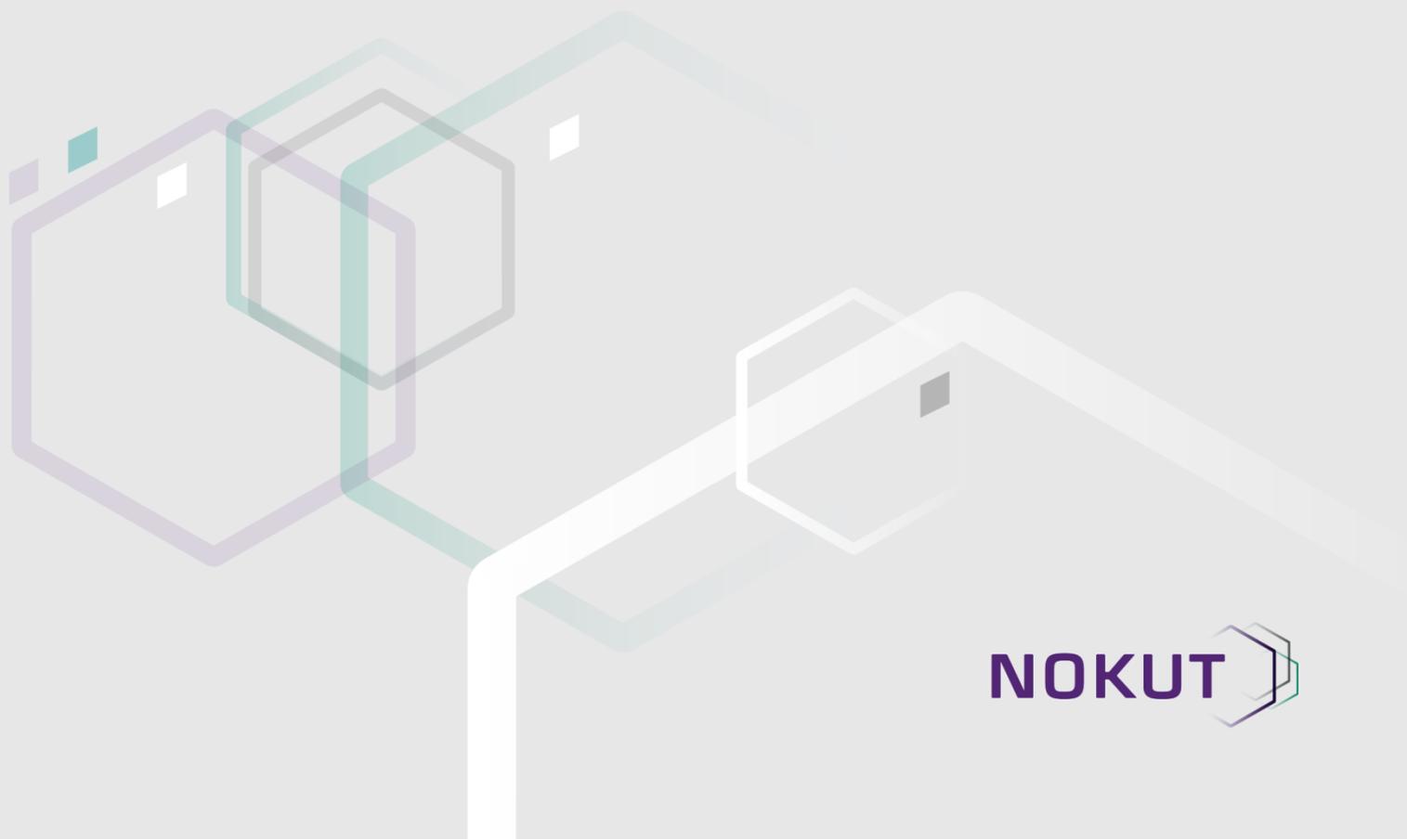


NOKUT's evaluations

# Educational quality in economics in Norway

Joint evaluations of research and education

2018



NOKUT 

NOKUT's work shall contribute to public confidence in the quality of both Norwegian higher and vocational education, as well as certified higher education from abroad. «NOKUT's evaluations» are expert assessments describing the state of affairs within academic disciplines and fields, as well as central common aspects of education relevant for different disciplines and fields.

We hope that the results will prove useful for higher education institutions in their programme-related quality assurance and development work.

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## Foreword

In September 2014, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research commissioned the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Research Council of Norway (RCN) to develop a model for joint evaluations of research and education in Norway. NOKUT and RCN took the opportunity of RCN's planned evaluation of Norwegian social science research to test the model. This resulted in three overlapping sets of evaluations of social sciences in Norway: a research evaluation, an education evaluation, and an evaluation of the interplay between research and education. Together, they form the *joint evaluation of research and education*. The first aim of the joint evaluation pilot project is to develop a model that will allow NOKUT and RCN to assess the quality of education and research and the link between them in the years to come. Since this model was tested in the social sciences, the second aim is to improve the knowledge of the current state of Norwegian social science research and education.

The education evaluation is a pilot project, and as such, one of its aims is to test out a new model for independently exploring and evaluating central aspects of educational quality in higher education. The evaluation also aims to improve the public's, the institutions', and the government's knowledge of the current state of social sciences education in Norway, and to give the institutions that took part individual feedback from experts in the field in order to enhance their educations further. More broadly, by attending to the current state of social sciences education, the issue of what helps and hinders it, and the question of how to improve it further, the evaluation aims to contribute to making educational quality a high priority in Norwegian higher education.

NOKUT developed a new evaluation model for the education evaluation in conjunction with the joint evaluation of research and education. A reference group of Norwegian academics supported this work. While the RCN's corresponding research evaluation targets six social science disciplines in Norway, the education evaluation covers three of these: political science, sociology, and economics. The decision to limit the education evaluation to these three disciplines was a pragmatic one: they are the largest social science disciplines in Norway, they are taught at different types of higher education institutions, and they are large international disciplines, making it possible to recruit international experts to the discipline panels.

Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Higher Education, Oslo, Norway provided scientific and project management support to the panels in education evaluations.

NOKUT would like to thank the participating programmes, experts and NIFU for their contributions to the project.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The mandate and aims of the education evaluation

This report describes the evaluation of educational quality in the discipline of economics in Norway. This is one of three *discipline evaluations*, along with sociology and political science, which make up *the education evaluation of social sciences*. In turn, the education evaluation is part of the larger pilot project *joint evaluations of research and education*. This section briefly describes the mandate and aims of each of these.

*The joint evaluation of research and education:* In September 2014, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research commissioned the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Research Council of Norway (RCN) to develop a model for joint evaluations of research and education in Norway. NOKUT and RCN took the opportunity of RCN's planned evaluation of Norwegian social science research to test the model. This resulted in three overlapping sets of evaluations of social sciences in Norway: a research evaluation, an education evaluation, and an evaluation of the interplay between research and education. Together, they form the *joint evaluation of research and education*. The first aim of the joint evaluation pilot project is to develop a model that will allow NOKUT and RCN to assess the quality of education and research and the link between them in the years to come. Since this model was tested in the social sciences, the second aim is to improve the knowledge of the current state of Norwegian social science research and education.

*The education evaluation of social sciences:* The education evaluation is a pilot project, and as such, one of its aims is to test a new model for independently exploring and evaluating central aspects of educational quality in higher education. The evaluation also aims at improving the public's, institutions', and the government's knowledge of the current state of social sciences education in Norway, and to give the institutions that took part, individual feedback from experts in the field in order to enhance their educations further. More broadly, by attending to the current state of social sciences education, the issue of what helps and hinders it, and the question of how to improve it further, the evaluation aims at contributing to making educational quality a high priority in Norwegian higher education.

This report describes the education evaluation of the discipline of economics.

## 1.2 Education evaluation model

The model for the education evaluation was developed by NOKUT, in conjunction with the joint evaluation of research and education. A reference group of Norwegian academics supported this work. While the RCN's corresponding research evaluation targets all social science disciplines in Norway, the education evaluation covers only political science, sociology, and economics. The decision to limit the education evaluation to these three disciplines was a pragmatic one: they are the largest social science disciplines in Norway, they are taught at different types of higher education institutions, and they are large international disciplines, making it possible to recruit international experts to the discipline panels.

All Norwegian higher education institutions offering study programmes in political science, sociology and economics were invited to participate in the education evaluation, and ten universities and university colleges chose to participate. In total, 59 study programmes were included, distributed across three levels: bachelor programmes (BA level), master programmes (MA level), and PhD programmes. Sociology was represented with 24 programmes, political science with 19, and economics with 16. In total, ten PhD programmes were submitted across the three panels. However, since very little specific data was available for the PhD level, the education evaluation focuses primarily on the BA and MA levels.

As participation was optional, not all existing study programmes chose to be included in the evaluation; this was especially the case for programmes with a multidisciplinary profile. While this limits the scope of the evaluation somewhat, the evaluation does cover the core educational offer within all three disciplines. At the same time, this implies that the overall assessments by the panels cover the programmes assessed, rather than a comprehensive view of the situation of educational provision in these three disciplines in Norway.

In line with NOKUT's commitment to peer review in external quality assurance, the education evaluation was assigned to a group of international experts forming three discipline panels. The international experts recruited to take part as panel members are active researchers, and have longstanding experience in educational leadership and teaching at university level.

### **1.2.1 Quality dimensions**

The education evaluation draws on NOKUT's policy document 'Quality areas for study programmes' (2016). The document outlines NOKUT's approach to the factors necessary to create high quality study programmes in higher education, centering on eight connected quality areas: knowledge base, initial competence, learning trajectory, learning outcomes, educational competence, learning environment, interaction with society and the workplace, and programme design and programme leadership. NOKUT's approach to quality in study programmes is process- rather than results-oriented, based on the idea that since the results of any learning process will usually depend heavily on each student's ability, motivation and effort, the final results of an educational process are not on their own evidence enough to determine an institution's educational quality. When evaluating educational quality, NOKUT emphasises the ways in which institutions create conditions for learning more strongly than the learning outcomes themselves. This education evaluation follows this ethos.

Drawing on this policy document and on discussions with the reference group, NOKUT landed on nine dimensions to use as indicators of educational quality for the evaluation:

- Initial competence
- Programme design
- Teaching and assessment methods
- Learning environment in study programmes
- Educational competence
- Achieved learning
- Internationalisation
- Relevance
- Educational leadership

Table 1 presents the different dimensions, and shows how the evaluation made use of them. Supplement 1 ('Survey form') shows the relationship between quality dimensions, the questions the evaluation aimed to answer, and the evidence used to answer each question.

Quality dimension	Definition
Initial competence	<p>The prior knowledge that the student brings to the start of the programme, as well as other qualities like motivation, experience and ability, are what we call the student's <b>initial competence</b>. Initial competence is not just a measure of the student's general level of competence when starting a higher education programme. It also has to do with how far this competence is appropriate to the programme in question, and with the student's motivation for choosing this education. A good study programme will make active efforts to recruit a diverse student body, composed of students with the right initial competence, who are highly motivated to undertake the programme.</p> <p>A successful study start also requires good admissions procedures and clear information before the study programme begins, and requires both a social and an academic welcome process. A good study start helps students develop motivation and good learning strategies.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on initial competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do students who start the programme have the initial competence that will enable them to complete it successfully?</li> <li>• To what extent do institutions and study programmes provide early programme activities to prepare new students for the demands of higher education?</li> </ul>
Programme design	<p>A good <b>programme design</b> unites many of the factors that contribute to good learning and to students' achieving learning outcomes. Designing a programme is a complex task that requires good educational management, as well as input from students, academic and administrative staff, support services, professional organisations, and the wider society. For a programme design to be successful, it needs a clear division of responsibility for everyone involved, and a sound basis in pedagogy and subject didactics.</p> <p>A well-designed study programme contains good and relevant learning outcome descriptions that are at the right level of the national qualifications framework, and that are adapted to the distinctive nature of the discipline. The learning outcome descriptions correspond to the teaching and assessment methods used. A well-designed study programme contributes to improve student learning, creates close links between research and teaching, and contributes to effective administration. Periodic assessment of study programmes means that the programmes, and other factors that play into students' learning trajectories, continually improve. Such assessments help to ensure that the programme and</p>

	<p>the students' learning correspond to the needs of both the student and society.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on programme design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well are the programmes designed?</li> <li>• Are courses well connected and do they create a coherent whole?</li> <li>• Do the different courses allow students to learn what is expected based on the described learning outcomes?</li> </ul>
Teaching and assessment methods	<p>The quality of teaching and assessment methods has great importance for the quality of students' learning. A good teacher is able to use student interaction to motivate and inspire students to learn. When students take part in shaping the teaching and learning methods used, they are likely to feel more in charge of their own learning trajectory.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on teaching and assessment methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there coherence between course content, teaching methods, and assessment methods?</li> <li>• Do programmes use varied and appropriate teaching and assessment methods?</li> </ul>
Learning environment in study programmes	<p>A <b>learning environment</b> is the sum of all factors that affect students' physical and mental well-being and their ability to learn. A learning environment is composed of physical, organisational and psychosocial factors. NOKUT uses the term 'learning environment' to describe how these factors affect not only student welfare, but also learning, student involvement, student democracy, and student ownership of learning. Physical surroundings affect learning. A good learning environment facilitates and provides training in forms of teaching and assessment beyond the traditional lecture/classroom model. Changing the physical environment and teaching methods can often make it easier to introduce aspects of research in learning. In this way, the physical premises can help transform the content of a program. Even early-stage learning can become more project- and collaboration-oriented, with a work flow more similar to what students will encounter in research projects as well as in their future work. A good learning environment involves practical application of teaching and assessment methods other than traditional lectures/classroom-based teaching, like flipped classrooms, problem-based learning, team teaching, courses in debate, drama or role-play, learning workshops, and learning by doing.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on learning environment in study programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are students satisfied with the social environment?</li> <li>• Are students satisfied with the academic environment?</li> <li>• Are students satisfied with the physical infrastructure?</li> <li>• To what extent are students engaged academically beyond the regular programme plan?</li> </ul>

Educational competence	<p><b>Educational competence</b> means being able to adapt aspects of an academic field to create a course of study that has a relevant profile and is pitched at the right level. For educators, a good basic level of educational competence is a starting point for further development and qualification, and subject and programme leaders have a responsibility to ensure that this happens. Teachers also depend on their colleagues and academic community to discuss and help evaluate their teaching.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on educational competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are instructors encouraged to develop their own didactic/pedagogical competence?</li> <li>• How important is teaching ability relative to research in hiring decisions?</li> <li>• Is the institution working effectively to increase the status of teaching?</li> </ul>
Achieved learning	<p>Achieved learning is a difficult quality dimension to get to grips with, in particular because it cannot be reduced to grades alone. Not only do final grades never fully represent student learning, but grading can also vary from institution to institution (cf. the 2017 UHR report ‘Karakterbruk i UH-sektoren 2016’), and achieved grades can reveal as much about the student’s initial competence as about the quality of their education. With this in mind, the evaluation did not aim to supply full evidence of achieved learning, but focused only on two roughly indicative aspects: student satisfaction with their own learning, and the relationship between students’ self-reported workload and achieved grades. While neither of these aspects can give a full sense of what students have learned, they can give a general idea of where potential issues may lie.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on achieved learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are students satisfied with the outcomes of their learning processes?</li> <li>• Is there coherence or discrepancy between students’ workload and grades?</li> </ul>
Internationalisation	<p>In higher education, internationalisation is the integration of an international, intercultural and global dimension in the goals; organisation and actions of the higher education sector (cf. St.meld. 14 (2008–2009), ‘Internasjonalisering av utdanning’). For a given study programme this can involve a range of practices, including student and staff exchange programmes, courses conducted in languages other than Norwegian, the recruitment of international staff and students, and the use of international syllabus texts. Since different disciplines and study programmes will benefit from internationalisation in different ways and to different degrees, the evaluation question for this dimension is very open.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following question on internationalisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If relevant, does the use of internationalisation enhance each student’s education?</li> </ul>

Relevance	<p>Study programmes should be relevant in the sense of providing the competence society needs now and in the future, and in the sense of allowing students to gain knowledge and skills they will need in their future learning and working lives. Conversely, higher education institutions, academic staff and students can stimulate societal innovation by spreading knowledge of the most recent developments in relevant academic fields. Forums for interacting with the professional field can contribute to making study programmes more relevant and flexible. Where appropriate, these forums should have influence over both programme portfolios and the content of individual study programmes. Each academic community needs to consider how and how far such contact can help improve its study programmes. Collaboration with society and working life might involve, for instance, the use of teachers from outside the university, periods of practical training, specific course components addressing topics in the professional field, or MA and BA theses conducted in collaboration with the professional field.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following question on relevance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the study programme use means appropriate to the subject to help students develop skills that are relevant to their future lives, study, and employment?</li> </ul>
Educational leadership	<p>Facilitating others' learning is a demanding task that not only requires academic and didactic competence, but also depends on good educational leadership. Good educational leadership is here understood as being involved in the development of study programs, ensuring sufficient resources to all study programs, and monitoring the study programmes at the institution.</p> <p>The education evaluation asks the following questions on educational leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is academic management at different levels involved with the development of study programmes?</li> <li>• How does the academic leadership ensure that educational resources are available and that study programmes make good use of them?</li> </ul>

### **1.3 Data and assessments tools**

#### **1.3.1 Data**

The educational quality dimensions above guided NOKUT's selection of relevant data for the evaluation. Before the start of the evaluation process, NOKUT compiled the data and distributed them to the panels via an online portal. The panels based their evaluations on the following material:

## **Descriptive information about study programmes**

NOKUT provided a description of the participating study programmes, their structure, the formal requirements and entry score for admission, course outlines, and expected learning outcomes.

## **Institutional self-assessment**

The institutions' self-assessments provided important information for many of the qualitative indicators (cf. 1.2). The statements in the self-assessment reports were intended to reflect the education quality dimensions (see appendix 2, 'Institutional self-assessment form').

## **National student surveys**

Aggregated results from the 2014-2016 NOKUT student survey ('Studiebarometeret') were made available to the panels. NOKUT's annual survey provides information on how students perceive the quality of the study programme they attend. The data are divided in bachelor and master levels. The survey is distributed annually to second-year bachelor students, to second-year master students, and to fifth-year students in integrated master's degree programmes. The survey includes questions on various aspects of their study programmes. Students rate the quality of these aspects on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest level of satisfaction and 1 the lowest. In addition, students are asked to report the weekly hours they spend on learning activities organised by the institution, and on individual studies.<sup>1</sup>

## **National statistics on higher education**

The Database for Statistics on Higher Education, (Database for høgere utdanning, DBH), provided additional statistics to support the panels' assessments of educational quality. These statistics included intake requirements, numbers of applicants for the study programmes, and enrolment capacity. Numbers are from the 2015 enrolment call, or 2016 when available.<sup>2</sup>

## **Report from university pedagogy experts**

A group of international experts in higher education pedagogy was asked to use the same data and assessment tools as the panels themselves to evaluate the pedagogical quality of each discipline at individual institutions, and describe patterns of pedagogical quality in the discipline as a whole across the participating institutions. Their evaluations covered the four quality dimensions most closely related to pedagogy: programme design, teaching and assessment methods, educational competence, and research orientation in teaching methods and assessment. These reports formed an additional, pedagogy-specific perspective and source of information for the panels to draw on in their own assessments.

## **Additional data**

After the initial panel meetings, the panels were asked for feedback on the process so far, and given the opportunity to request additional data sources. In response, NOKUT provided additional analyses based on statistics from the national database (DBH, Database for statistikk om høyere utdanning), and a set

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.studiebarometeret.no/en>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/nokutportal>.

of follow-up questions were sent to the institutions. These follow-up questions differed between programmes, and were intended to clarify any unclear points in the original self-assessments.

It should be noted that some of the requests for additional data by the panel members were not possible to address, either because such data is not available, or not feasible for NOKUT to acquire within the evaluation period.

### **1.3.2 Assessment tools**

The experts were provided with a grading scale intending to ensure a similar starting point for evaluating each quality dimension and the overall quality of education within one discipline for each participating institution. However, the numeric grades are not reproduced in this report. Instead, the experts provide substantive reasoning in the form of a written statement for each quality dimension, for the overall quality of education for each institution, and for the quality of education in the discipline on a national level. The experts were also asked to provide recommendations for how to enhance the quality of education at an institutional and national level.

## **1.4 Review process**

### **1.4.1 Secretariat**

The Research Council in cooperation with NOKUT commissioned NIFU, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Higher Education, Oslo, Norway, to provide scientific and project management support to the panels in the research and education evaluations.

### **1.4.2 The panels' work process**

All panels started their work in May 2017. Each panel held three meetings with the panel participants, panel secretary and a representative from NOKUT. The panel in economics held two two-day meetings, in May and September 2017 and one one-day meeting in December of 2017. Between these three meetings, panel members worked individually and communicated primarily by email. The panel used email and a web portal set up by the Research Council of Norway to distribute data for the assessment, draft assessments, as well as other relevant information.

Before the panels first met in May 2017, NOKUT collected and prepared data packages for each of the institutions who chose to participate in the evaluation (including the self-assessments, information from national student survey and descriptive information on the study programmes, see point 1.3.1 for more information). Given that the panels requested additional data, NOKUT provided an additional statistical overview from the national database (DBH, Database for statistikk om høgere utdanning), qualitative information about the Norwegian higher education system, and a set of follow-up questions were sent to the institutions after summer (see point 1.3.1). The pedagogical report was supplemented to the assessment process in November 2017.

The economics panel distributed responsibility for writing the assessments of the institutions on each dimension between individual panel members. Each institution was comprehensively discussed during the meetings on multiple occasions, with collaborative examination of data sources, discussion of the assessment content and the specific statements in the report. During the last meeting, each of the quality dimensions were discussed across multiple institutions. The overall report was completed in February 2018.

## **1.5 Economics evaluation**

### **1.5.1 Members of the panel**

The economics panel consists of three members, led by Professor Henri L.F. de Groot.

*Panel chair Henri L.F. de Groot, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

De Groot is Professor in Regional Economic Dynamics at the Department of Spatial Economics (School of Business and Economics). He is programme director of a bachelor in economics and business economics. He is also crown-appointed member of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands. He was co-founder and former programme director of the MSc in Spatial, Transport and Environmental Economics and one of the founders of an interdisciplinary BSc Earth and Economics. He actively teaches courses in all years at the bachelor level, at the master level, and also at the PhD level at the Tinbergen Institute (the joint graduate school of the Vrije Universiteit, the University of Amsterdam, and the Erasmus University Rotterdam). He has also been active in various accreditations of educational programmes advising the NVAO (the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization). His current research deals with the empirics of regional economic growth, agglomeration and trade; energy and environmental economics; urban economics, technology adoption and meta-analysis.

*Panel member, Sascha O. Becker, University of Warwick, United Kingdom*

Becker is Deputy Head of the Department of Economics, a department with more than 50 faculty members and a broad range of teaching programmes at bachelor, master and PhD level. He was the founding director of Warwick's two-year MRes programme, introduced in 2012/13, which bundles the coursework for future PhD students in a dedicated 2-year research masters, separate from Warwick's one-year MSc program. He is research director of the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy (CAGE), sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). His main research interests are economic history, labour economics, education economics and public economics. He has taught at all levels: undergraduate, MSc and PhD, at universities in several European countries and at UC Los Angeles. He has won several teaching awards.

*Panel member, Mette Gørtz, University of Copenhagen, Denmark*

Gørtz is Associate Professor at the Department of Economics, a department with around 60 professors, associate and assistant professors and postdocs, and 40 PhD students. The department runs a large BSc and MSc programme with an annual intake of more than 300 students into each programme. Gørtz was the director of studies from 2013–2016. Gørtz is deputy head of the Centre for Health Economics and Policy (CHEP) at the University of Copenhagen. Her main research areas are health economics, labour economics, family economics, and applied microeconomics. She teaches in both the BSc and MSc programmes in economics and in the public health programme at the University of Copenhagen.

The panel's work was supported by panel secretary and research professor Vera Schwach (NIFU). From NOKUT, Marie Christine Boilard supported the panel's work.

## 1.5.2 Institutions and study programmes

In Norway, a bachelor's degree (180 ECTS) is a first-cycle academic degree awarded by a higher education institution upon completion of the programme. A master's degree is a second-cycle academic degree (120 ECTS). The master's degree requires previous study at the bachelor level, in social sciences usually completed as a separate bachelor's degree. In addition, the universities of Bergen, Oslo and NTNU offer a five-year integrated master's programme in economics (300 ECTS).<sup>3</sup>

In economics, 19 study programmes from five institutions participated in the evaluation.

Institutions	Study programmes
Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. BA Economics</li> <li>2. MA Economics</li> <li>3. PhD Economics and Business</li> </ol>
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. BA Economics</li> <li>5. MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)</li> <li>6. MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)</li> <li>7. PhD Economics</li> </ol>
University of Bergen (UiB)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. BA Economics</li> <li>9. BA Political Economy</li> <li>10. MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)</li> <li>11. MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)</li> <li>12. PhD Economics</li> </ol>
University of Oslo (UiO)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. BA Economics</li> <li>14. MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)</li> <li>15. MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)</li> <li>16. PhD Economics</li> </ol>
University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. BA Economics</li> <li>18. MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)</li> <li>19. PhD (Faculty) programme</li> </ol>

<sup>3</sup> Lovdata, Forskrift om krav til mastergrad, FOR-2005-12-01-1392, sist endret, ved forskrift 10.6. (2015; FOR-2015-06-10-620), [www.lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2005-12-01-1392](http://www.lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2005-12-01-1392); Lov om universiteter og høyskoler (universitets- og høyskoleloven), 1. April 2005, nr. 15, LOV-2005-04-01- 15, sist endret 16. Juni, 2017; LOV-2017-06-16-67.

## 2 Economics in Norway

The present economics programmes at the universities are the outcomes of three different lines of development: the first path being the development of a specialised study programme and a higher university degree in which teaching and research are strongly connected. The second line resulted from a process in which economics developed from teaching on a secondary level to a study on a tertiary level. In this setting, the linkage between teaching and research was weaker, but research evolved as economics became part of the university. A third factor shaping the present programmes in economics has been the development of programmes within a defined scientific field, like agriculture and the fisheries. Here economics was traditionally linked and subordinated to the central topics in the disciplines.

Economics as a teaching subject goes back to the establishment of the first university in Norway, the Royal Frederiks University in Christiania in 1811 (today's University of Oslo). During the nineteenth century, economics was represented at the Norwegian University as a defined field of knowledge, but was subordinated to the discipline and Faculty of Law, and no independent study in economics existed. The set-up of a two-year designed programme in economics at the Faculty of Law in 1905 was a milestone. From then onwards students could earn an academic degree in economics (candidatus oeconomicus (cand. oecon)).<sup>4</sup>

Starting in the 1930s, Norway experienced a cautious growth and diversification of economics, as specialised institutions for business and administration were established. In 1936, The Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) was inaugurated.<sup>5</sup> In 1943, the Institute for Business and Management (Bedriftsøkonomisk Institutt, BI) was established with the aim to fulfill a need for continued education. BI gradually developed to a comprehensive academic institution, and was renamed BI Norwegian Business School in 2011.<sup>6</sup> Even though the two above mentioned specialised universities did not participate in this evaluation of educational quality in economics, their existence is important to understand the overall profile of economics in Norway (see section 9 for some comments on this).

The first two decades after 1945 saw a slow growth in the number of students, study programmes and institutions, followed by an expansion from the 1970s onwards. The change of the education in economics at the University of Oslo in 1951 represented a landmark for the discipline as a whole. Hereafter, the study of economics was organised as a six-year integrated programme, in order to obtain the degree as cand. oecon. (social økonomisk embetseksamen av høyere grad). Oslo came to be a model regarding the intellectual content in programmes in (social) economics, and in part for a system with integrated programmes in economics. For the modernisation of the country's economy and the expansion of the welfare state, the government and the economists employed in public administration came to have a key role.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1980s, the field of economics expanded, in terms of both volume and diffusion of subfields. Already in 1970, the University of Bergen established a study programme with an emphasis on economics, as business had its foothold at the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) in the same city.

<sup>4</sup> Anon., «Økonomi ved UiO siden 1811, undated, 5 pages, [www.uio.no](http://www.uio.no), read October 12, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Bjørsvik, Elisabeth and Yngve Nilsen; *Norges handelshøyskole i 75 år. «En lærestalt av høyeste rang»*, Bergen, (Fagbokforlaget), 2011.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.bi.edu/about-bi/history/?\\_ga=2.47520033.783778553.1507121504-1063914018.1507121504](https://www.bi.edu/about-bi/history/?_ga=2.47520033.783778553.1507121504-1063914018.1507121504), (anonymous author), read 4 October 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Einar Lie, *Institusjon, profesjon og politikk. Finansdepartementet 1945–1965*, thesis, dr. art, University of Oslo, 1995; Einar Lie and Christian Venneslan, *Over evne. Finansdepartementet, 1965–1992*, Oslo, (Pax forlag A/S), 2010; Olav Bjerkholt, «Sosialøkonomisk oppmarsj og nasjonalbudsjettet», *Samfunnsøkonomen*, nr. 5, 2008: 1–13..

Unlike Oslo, Bergen chose a non-integrated programme design. The study was built up as a four-year study to receive a lower degree, a candidate magistratus degree (cand. mag.), and then another two years to complete a major (hovedfag) in economics to meet the upscaled requirement for the academic title cand. oecon. In doing this, Bergen followed the regular national system for university programmes in the disciplines of social sciences, humanities and a wide range of natural sciences.

Economics at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)<sup>8</sup> evolved, just like BI, gradually from part time classes for continued education and evening schools to a formal institution on a tertiary level. NTNU advanced from classes for part time education run by the Norwegian Business School (NHH) in the early 1960s to full time programmes in 1966. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the number of programmes at the undergraduate level expanded. In 1997, NTNU introduced its first master programme, and the school got its first accreditation for a PhD programme in 2012. Then in 2016, the Business School (Handelshøyskolen i Trondheim) was reorganised as a faculty of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).<sup>9</sup> The same year NTNU merged with three regional university colleges, and as part of this merging process a new Faculty for Economics and Management was established.

Unlike economics at NTNU, the programmes at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, the School of Economics and Business, (NMBU–HH) and the University of Tromsø, Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics, (UiT–BFE) both grew from defined subfields in general programmes in economics.

Economics at NMBU has its roots in agricultural economics, a field that, due to national political and industrial needs, expanded especially after 1945. Partially due to a decreasing number of farms and restructuring in the agricultural area, the study programmes were transformed from the 1970s and 1980s and came to include more general applied economics, business administration, studies in entrepreneurship and innovation. Fast-forwarding to 2012, the current School of Economics and Business (Handelshøyskolen, HH) was established, which is now one of the seven faculties of NMBU.

The crucial importance of the sea and its resources makes the Norwegian economy somewhat atypical. It partly explains the historical fact that UiT–BFE has its roots in the economics of fisheries. In 1972, a specialised university institute for fish and the fishing industry was founded and linked to the new University of Tromsø. In 1988, the school was fully incorporated in the UiT and has since then been through a range of reorganisations. Currently it is part of the Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics, one of eight faculties at UiT. BFE comprises three departments, whereof two are subject to this evaluation: The Norwegian College of Fishery and the School of Business and Economics.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ntnu.no/hhs/skolens-historie>, (anonymous author), read 4 October 2017.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ntnu.no/hhs/skolens-historie>, (anonymous author), read 4 October 2017.

### 3 Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)

In 2014, the Norwegian School of Veterinary Science (NVH) and the University of Life Sciences (UMB) were merged to form the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. The university is situated in Ås, about 30 kilometres south of Oslo. The School of Economics and Business has its roots in agricultural economics, but today offers a broad teaching and research portfolio.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA Economics
- MA Economics
- PhD Economics and Business

Norwegian University of Life Sciences, School of Economics and Business, (NMBU–HH)			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA Economics	MA Economics
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>10</sup>	29	14
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>11</sup> .	42,5	47,7
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>12</sup> .	25	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>13</sup> .	28	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>14</sup>	43,2	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>15</sup> Per study programme:	35,1	
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>16</sup>	41,8	51,7

<sup>10</sup> Students who actually started their studies in 2017 after being offered a study place. Data from Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH): <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>11</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>12</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>13</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>14</sup> Grade points for the primary certificate quota (Norwegian: ORDF). Grade points are the average of all number grades multiplied by 10. Bonus points may be added, e.g. for science and foreign languages. See full explanation here (Norwegian only):

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/opptak/poengberegning/index.html>. Data from NUCAS:

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>15</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>16</sup> All A and B grades as a percentage of all grades given at the study programme. Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

### **3.1.1 Study programmes, organisation and resources**

NMBU offers study programmes on all three levels. There is one programme in each of the three levels. With a total of 680 registered students, the school is small, and so are the programmes at all levels. Also, the size of the faculty is small with 28 staff members. They cover the fields of economics, entrepreneurship and innovation. The panel wonders whether sufficient resources are available to cover all fields of economics in sufficient depth. The panel recognizes an attempt to merge economics and business, but in the material provided to the panel little evidence of true exploitation of synergies in the programmes is offered (apart from increasing class sizes). The university acknowledges that the number of students is on the low side and that it had to reduce the number of elective courses in response to the low student numbers. Still, the university considers resources to be sufficient to offer well-rounded programmes covering micro, macro, econometrics and some specialisations. It furthermore indicates that there are plans to develop new courses that are of interest to students in both business and economics, especially in skills.

### **3.1.2 Initial competence**

The grade point limit is relatively low for the BA. The panel wonders why there is no requirement for specialisation in mathematics in high school. Given the importance of mathematics in the discipline, clearly flagging its importance is deemed relevant by the panel, especially in order to minimize the chance of early dropouts. Despite the small scale, there is larger demand than supply of positions, so selection is possible (although the admission criteria are relatively soft at both the bachelor as well as the master level).

### **3.1.3 Programme design**

Both the bachelor and the master programmes are rather standard with relatively few options for specialisation. As compared to international standards, the panel has the impression that students get relatively many credits for a limited amount of material which they are required to study. In other words: more can be demanded from the students.

Although business is mentioned, the panel only sees clear evidence of some accounting in the programme. The importance of finance in the study programmes was not clear from the self-evaluation. In response to additional questions, the university clarified that finance is compulsory both in economics as well as in business. The same unclarity holds for marketing, which appears to be an elective option according to NMBU's response to supplementary questions. Regarding the design of the programme, the self-evaluation mainly focuses on the process and hardly on the content. Having said that, and given the size of the programme, the panel appreciates the attempts that are made to reflect on the curricula and trying to exploit potential synergies between economics and business. At the same time, the panel also has the impression that these discussions are still in a rather early phase. The panel finds it surprising that there is little evidence of cooperation with the nearby University of Oslo.

### **3.1.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

The teaching and assessment methods look standard and traditional. The panel has the impression that they are largely supply driven. There is no written evidence on how the faculty tries to develop the curriculum with appropriate methods for ensuring student participation. Final assessments are still largely based on written exams. Learning outcomes are defined. Yet, the panel thinks that a systematic revision of intended learning outcomes, which also focuses on the coherence between the learning outcomes of different courses, is a desirable next step.

The faculty is attempting to get an AACSB accreditation.<sup>17</sup> In consideration of the present situation, this appears overly ambitious. It is the panel's impression that the road towards an AACSB accreditation is viewed as a process that will force the school to make a step towards more formalized testing, developing assessment plans, etc. There does not seem to be an overarching assessment plan yet. Still, the university indicated that accreditation is important for several reasons, signalling high quality, structuring continuous improvement, learning from partner universities in the AACSB network, guaranteeing autonomy within the university, and strengthening the community.

### **3.1.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The learning environment appears standard and traditional. However, we would like to add that the information in the self-assessment report is very limited in this regard.

### **3.1.6 Educational competence**

The claim in the self-assessment report that there is rarely the case that they must trade-off research competence against educational competence is not fully convincing to the panel. Although we recognize the claim that good researchers are oftentimes also good lecturers, hiring the real top researchers is most likely rather challenging. The self-assessment report states that most of the staff puts great effort into teaching and enjoy teaching. The panel suggests that the department could build on this enthusiasm in teaching also by further developing teaching methods that favour a more varied approach. In response to additional questions on part of the panel, NMBU indicated that a learning centre was established which offers courses in teaching methods. The panel applauds NMBU for this initiative. Additionally, a system for quality control is in place and NMBU organises discussions about teaching methods.

Based on NMBU's responses to questions about career paths and the evaluation of teaching skills, the panel has the impression that the university's evaluation system is not particularly rigorous, even though teaching portfolios are a criterion in the recruitment process. Response rates for student evaluations are reportedly low. NMBU explicitly states that teaching skills do not constitute an important qualification when evaluating an applicant for a promotion to a (full) professorship.

### **3.1.7 Achieved learning**

The available information about achieved learning was limited, also when the institution's answers to supplementary questions are considered. According to the available data, the share of grades A and B is amongst the highest of the programs participating in the evaluation. The panel had difficulties to

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<sup>17</sup> Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

properly interpret this number, because exams and theses were not available. It can both indicate that students are relatively strong and/or that the educational process is highly effective which leads to achieving good results. Yet, the panel is reluctant to draw this conclusion, due to the lack of the material upon which the grades are awarded. The good results may also be explained by relatively generous grading. This underlines one of the panel's main recommendations for future evaluations, which is that being granted insight in the results by having access to exams and theses is an important prerequisite for an evaluation of this kind. Furthermore, the panel holds that the share of students completing the programme within the set time is low. This is a universal problem for all economics programmes in Norway (and elsewhere), which can in part be alleviated by more rigorous admission process (see also our remarks on initial competence).

The panel has the impression that students mainly develop research skills by writing their theses. However, evidence in this regard was limited in the self-assessment report.

### **3.1.8 Internationalisation**

The available data on internationalisation is fairly limited and appears standard appears average (use of international textbooks, offering MSc programmes in English, etc.). The panel appreciates the attempts to obtain AACSB accreditation. About half of the MSc students have an international background, which is promising. However, the panel could not obtain a good understanding of student quality of the international student population. NMBU has an opportunity to truly exploit the potential offered by an international student population, also due to the topics of courses such as climate change, poverty, and resource economics. Yet, the panel is of the opinion that a dedicated effort in educational innovation is needed in order to actually be able to exploit this potential.

### **3.1.9 Relevance**

The information provided to assess this quality dimension was very limited. Answers in the Studiebarometeret to the question «provides good career opportunities» are below average (2.9 compared to an average of 3.8 among Norwegian economics departments). This result is confusing when considered along with the rather high share of grades A and B. Additional information in this regard would have been essential for the panel in order to understand the gap, which apparently exists between good grades and students' claim that their career opportunities are worse than those of students at other Norwegian departments.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.1.10 Educational leadership**

The self-assessment report does not provide clear information about the organisation of NMBU's educational leadership. The panel wonders why there seems to be no director of studies. The structure in place seems to be very informal and apparently lacks a distinct and independent leadership with clearly assigned responsibilities. The response to additional questions clarify that everyone reports to the Dean directly. There is an education committee, which is chaired by a head of education. Each programme has a programme leader and a programme committee who are jointly responsible for

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<sup>18</sup> Additional information that was provided in the final stage of writing this report strengthens this feeling of surprise since the evidence is at odds with information regarding actual success in securing jobs derived on the basis of own surveys of past candidates and a NIFU report (<https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/2480986>).

developing the study programs. Based on the panel members' own experiences, the panel feels that this organisation of the educational leadership may create problems regarding the AACSB accreditation. Therefore, the panel strongly recommends the university to further develop and formalise its management structure and to assign clear responsibilities for the quality of education to individuals.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.1.11 Overall assessment of NMBU**

The panel would like to start its overall assessment with the observation that the provided information was limited in terms of quantity as well as quality. This made our task difficult, and the panel's conclusions are not as firm as they otherwise could have been.

Having said that, the panel concludes that the programmes are small, rather traditional, and solid. The specialisations offered are limited, which is inevitable given the somewhat narrow scale of the programmes. The panel therefore appreciates and supports the attempts to consider the potential of somewhat broader programmes linking economics and business more strongly. At the same time the panel concludes that the development of plans is still in a very early phase.

The panel acknowledges the university's strong position with regard to its PhD education, which partly stems from the history of the institute and the clear identity with a focus on agriculture. Further, the panel recommends reflecting on the possibilities to increase the degree of specialisation at bachelor and master level in line with the clear identity of the university. This would provide the opportunity to attract a more specialised and homogeneous group of students which could be offered unique and high-quality programme despite, or perhaps exactly because of, the small size of the institution. Realizing this objective requires strategic decision-making and a clear vision, which would need to be developed at any rate if the university intends to obtaining an international accreditation.

The panel's conclusion regarding the pedagogical quality is that much depends on the quality of individual lecturers. NMBU (apparently) lacks a strong educational leadership with a clearly developed vision for education. Another important (and next) step is further developing formal structures, which complement the strong existing social capital. A reasonable first step is to improve the descriptions of the programmes and their coherence by means of clearly defined learning outcomes, which so far seem to be defined at a very basic level.

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<sup>19</sup> We learned that as of January 2018, the dean no longer doubles as head of education and that a separate head of education has been appointed. Needless to say that this is a development that the panel applauds.

## 4 Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) was founded as a university in 1996 after a merger between six research and higher education institutions in the Trondheim area. In 2016, they merged with the university colleges in Gjøvik, Ålesund and Sør-Trøndelag, and became the largest university in Norway. NTNU is a comprehensive research university, with research and training in nearly all disciplines and professions.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA Economics
- MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)
- MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)
- PhD Economics

Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Economics and Management				
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA Economics	MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)	MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>20</sup>	90	23	22
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>21</sup> .	47,1	44,6	36,4
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>22</sup> .	85		20
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>23</sup> .	149		34
	Grade points (2017) <sup>24</sup>	45		49,8
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>25</sup> Per study programme:	19,5	46,2	22,7

<sup>20</sup> Students who actually started their studies in 2017 after being offered a study place. Data from Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH): <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>21</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>22</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>23</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>24</sup> Grade points for the primary certificate quota (Norwegian: ORDF). Grade points are the average of all number grades multiplied by 10. Bonus points may be added, e.g. for science and foreign languages. See full explanation here (Norwegian only):

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/opptak/poengberegning/index.html>. Data from NUCAS:

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>25</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

	Average: 25,3			
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>26</sup>	43,1	47,1	47,0

### 4.1.1 Study programmes, organisation and resources

The NTNU Department of Economics offers programmes on all three levels: a two-year master programme (120 ECTS) and a five-year integrated master programme in economics (300 ECTS). Both programmes are mainly taught in Norwegian (with the exception of master courses in which non-Norwegian students participate).<sup>27</sup>

According to the self-assessment, the department is small, currently consisting of 14 tenured faculty members. The department believes that its small size is an advantage because the development of study programmes is considered a collective responsibility. Lecturers think that they have good knowledge of the content of most courses offered by the department.

In terms of resources, the department states that it is generally satisfied with the infrastructure provided by the university. One exception relates to resources related to the provision of digital exams, where the department mentions a lack of resources to allow faster implementation adoption.

#### Bachelor programmes

The department is involved in several bachelor programmes. There is a traditional economics bachelor, and also a bachelor in political economy in cooperation with the Department of Sociology and Political Science. The joint bachelor is/was one reason for a rich offering in public economics electives. However, due to low completion rates, this joint bachelor programme will be terminated. Some public economics electives will be replaced by electives in behavioural economics in the traditional economics bachelor.

#### Master programmes

Students in the two-year programme and in the five-year programme take the same courses. However, the students in the integrated five-year programme take the courses during the first three years of the programme. Thereby, they have the chance to take elective courses during the last two years.

The stated purpose of the the five-year master is providing a programme with a stronger focus on economics and additional specialisation in economics. Moreover, there is one more mandatory course in econometrics in the five-year master programme, which has a stronger focus on methodology.

<sup>26</sup> All A and B grades as a percentage of all grades given at the study programme. Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ntnu.no/studier/msok5/oppbygning>.

Students need to fulfil rather strict requirements regarding prerequisites in mathematics in order to be admitted to the programme.

The programme has a strong emphasis on applied econometrics and application of software for quantitative analysis. Moreover, a great variety of electives related to public economics is part of the programmes, as already mentioned.

The programme provides a list of options for thesis projects in order to help the students develop project proposals which can be realized within the set time.

#### **4.1.2 Initial competence**

Requirements for admission to programmes in economics at NTNU roughly correspond to those at other economics departments in Norway. First semester students commence their studies with an elective two-week intensive preparatory course in mathematics, which ensures that students have the same basic knowledge in mathematics.

The panel noted that the gender ratio is somewhat more biased towards men when compared with UiO and UiB.

#### **4.1.3 Programme design**

The offered programmes are rather standard with regard to several aspects. However, the programmes provide some specific features which the panel would like to highlight.

So far, the department has offered a considerable amount of courses in public economics, which was explained by two reasons. First, the considerable research activity of faculty members in this subject area provides particularly solid resources in public economics. Second, the mentioned bachelor's degree in political economy required a number of electives in this area.

The majority of the electives in the bachelor programme appear rather standard.

The panel wonders whether the department has considered adopting the ideas of the CORE curriculum, which was developed to revamp undergraduates teaching. More generally and based on the provided material, the panel has the impression that there is relatively little reflection about the incorporation of new ideas on the teaching of economics in the programmes.

A peculiarity of the Norwegian system seems to be the five-year master programme that runs parallel to the three-year bachelor, which is followed by a two-year master. While all Norwegian departments seem to be enthusiastic about this offer, the panel is not convinced that the department's resources are used in the best possible way regarding the five-year master in order to allow for this rather unconventional model which deviates from the Bologna system.

The panel's concerns may become more intelligible through the assessment of the PhD programme. Apparently, NTNU (and other Norwegian economics departments) offer a three-year PhD programme. The panel was wondering whether the three-year programme is internationally competitive, considering that the median time to completion of a PhD in economics in US programmes is 5.5 years. Instead of running a parallel structure of two different (non-research) masters, the panel is of the opinion that

resources would be better deployed by offering a two-year MPhil/MRes for the strongest bachelor students. These programmes would prepare them for a PhD of three years, which would exclusively focus on writing the dissertation.

The current two-year MSc could remain “as is” or could be geared further towards labour market relevant skills. Another consideration worth making, which would require a change of national legislation, is one-year MSc programmes, which is common in the UK and the Netherlands.<sup>28</sup> In both these countries, two-year programmes in economics are offered by graduate schools as MPhil programmes, which prepare for a position as a PhD student.

#### **4.1.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

The department clearly values teaching. This is evident in two features showing how the department awards incentives to staff who invest in teaching. First, the teaching load is reduced for staff who propose to develop new courses. Second, lecturers can generally stay on the same module for several years, allowing lecturers to reap the returns on investment. Furthermore, the department grants a teaching award worth NOK 15.000 which is earmarked for research travel funds. The panel commends the various incentives and awards related to teaching.

Most of the teaching methods listed in the programme and course description appear rather traditional. This is also confirmed by the Studiebarometeret. There is some evidence of innovations such as the use of flipped classroom teaching in the context of the bachelor’s thesis, which deviates from the otherwise more traditional approaches.

Similarly, the methods of assessments appear traditional, with a strong emphasis on work related to the thesis. This particularly regards the development of a research orientation. The panel appreciates the fact that all teaching is carried out by research-active lecturers. Nevertheless, it sees clear potential for reconsidering both the teaching and assessment methods in order to continue strengthening the development of research skills throughout the curriculum.

The department is self-critical in terms of providing feedback (to students) and using digital exams. The main reason for the delayed implementation of digital exams is said to be lack of resources.

#### **4.1.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The panel notes that students seem to be happy overall. However, according to Studiebarometeret, NTNU students report a lower than average usage of seminar-based education. Either NTNU uses a different terminology or fewer seminars are offered compared to other Norwegian economics departments. Such seminars are considered useful by the panel to strengthen the link between research and education.

#### **4.1.6 Educational competence**

NTNU established a programme called “Top Teaching” which aims at making teaching internationally competitive. In 2016, the Department of Economics received funding for one project connected to the

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<sup>28</sup> In the current system of Norwegian higher education, one year MSc programmes are not feasible, but worth considering given international developments.

“Top Teaching” initiative. The project related to web-based technology, which facilitates improved teacher-student interaction and steady follow-up of the students. This is achieved by splitting the curriculum into modules and providing students and teachers with an overview of the students’ progress throughout the modules.

Together with UiT, the Arctic University of Norway, NTNU is also involved in a joint initiative for developing a system for recognition of pedagogical competence. According to the panel’s correspondence with the department, none of the staff members at the Department of Economics has applied so far. However, one of the department’s professors is member of the expert committee, which evaluates applicants. The panel had liked to hear more about the system for recognition of pedagogical competence, but was pleased to learn of various efforts aiming at comprehensively review the teaching activities at the department.

While the panel intuitively agrees with the department’s statement that good researchers make good teachers, the panel is not sure to what extent a correlation between good research and teaching is verified empirically.

All new lecturers are required to enrol in a two-year long course in educational development, which seems to be standard in many countries.

An apparently uncommon feature in other departments, or not explicitly mentioned by them, are trial lectures in the hiring process, which are (amongst others) attended by student representatives. The panel considers trial lectures a good means to (i) review the teaching quality of candidates who apply for the position of lecturer, and (ii) to signalize the department’s valuation of good teaching skills.

Teaching competence is regularly assessed in three ways. Firstly, all students provide feedback by filling in a questionnaire. Furthermore, a selected group of students evaluates the course, which includes (assessing) the lecturer’s teaching skills. The head of the study programmes receives a written report for every course. Finally, the study programme council, which consists of student representatives, the study programme leaders and the head of office (administrative staff), is a forum for discussion of all teaching-related matters.

Pedagogical teaching qualifications must be documented and is a requirement for a promotion to professorship.

#### **4.1.7 Achieved learning**

The grade point entry requirements for the five-year program is the highest of all of the participating programs, while the grade point requirement is the second highest of the participating BA programs. A slightly lower fraction of NTNU MA students receive A+B grades than the the average for all participating MA programs, while higher fraction of the BA students at NTNU receive A+B grades than the average for the participating BA programs.

The panel was struck by completion rates within set time being particularly low for the five-year MSc programme and the bachelor programme, and higher for the regular master programmes. This may suggest an unbalance between the regular MSc programme and the five-year programme, especially because the five-year programme is said to focus on the better and more motivated students. The panel recommends reconsidering the five-year programme. It advocates the introduction of a standard three-

year bachelor programme and offering two different types of master programmes, e.g., a one-year regular (MSc) and a two-year research-oriented (MPhil or MRes) master.<sup>29</sup>

### **4.1.8 Internationalisation**

A large number of students in the five-year integrated master in economics study abroad for one or two semesters, which is commendable. At the same time, there is a large number of visiting students, benefiting from a range of English language lectures. The panel liked the fact that students can opt to write term papers and exams in English.

The Department of Economics at NTNU states that it is preparing the application for international accreditation together with the Faculty of Economics and Management. This will most likely be an application within the EFMD framework, either programme-accreditation or a full EQUIS accreditation.

The panel had liked to learn more about to what degree the departments' graduates are competitive in the international context, regarding the non-academic labour market, and also at the master level in terms of admission to international PhD programmes.

### **4.1.9 Relevance**

According to interviews with employers, which were conducted by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC), NTNU students are at the same level as students from UiO (part of this pilot) and NHH (not part of this pilot). Similarly, ECONnect surveys in 2013/14 and 2016/17 suggested that NTNU students were attractive for the labour market. The department considers its master's teaching in applied econometrics a key asset which increases NTNU students' relevant competence and knowledge in the labour market.

A large fraction of the students spends one or two semesters abroad (cf. institutional self-assessment). This provides them with cultural, social, and personal experiences, which can be useful in their future lives.

The panel notes two differences between NTNU and other departments of economics that it found noteworthy and commendable: first, 'experts in teamwork' (7.5 ECTS) is a mandatory course for all master students at NTNU. Second, the master thesis is combined with an oral exam graded A-F (not pass/fail) intending to stimulate students to work hard. This form of assessment strikes the panel as useful.

Training in strong applied econometrics, together with a focus on interdisciplinary teamwork where students learn teamwork skills (as described in the institutional self-assessment), seems to provide relevant experience highly valued in the labour market.

### **4.1.10 Educational leadership**

The leadership of the department consists of the head of the department, a deputy head of studies, and a head of office (administrative staff). The head of department, the deputy, and one professor serve as study programme leaders. Together with student representatives, the study programme leaders and the

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<sup>29</sup> We realize that the introduction of one-year master programmes requires a change in the national system of higher education.

head of office form the study programme council. The council meets regularly to share information, and to discuss content of the programmes and the social and physical learning environment.

This seems to be a clear structure. A sufficient amount of resources is devoted to educational leadership.

At the same time, the department, which is (rather) small, regards the development of study programmes a collective responsibility. The presented material suggests a good mix of clearly defined roles, alongside informal interaction along with a strong focus on processes.

Students seem to be involved to a sufficient degree.

#### **4.1.11 Overall assessment of NTNU**

Overall, the strengths of the economics programmes at NTNU are manifold. It is a well-established international department with a comprehensive offer of economics training. The department's affiliation to a technical university means that it can provide a particularly solid educational offer in technical subjects, such as econometrics. Researchers are involved in policy advice and media outreach. This, together with a range of invited guest speakers, suggests that students are provided with an environment which offers several links to the «real world». Among the departments which are included in this evaluation, the department at NTNU seems to have the largest share of internationally mobile students, in terms of (both) incoming and outgoing students, who spend one or two semesters abroad.

The teamwork in developing the curriculum is a direct consequence of the comparatively small size of the faculty. This seems to facilitate innovation in teaching (e.g., flipped classroom teaching). Incentives for teaching are well thought-through.

A weakness is the male bias, which may partially be explained by the male-dominated engineering environment at NTNU. The gender imbalance nevertheless appears puzzling to the panel.

Regarding assessment, the material suggests quite traditional and exam-based methods. The panel suggests that, as in other Norwegian departments, the department should discuss the viability of the five-year MSc programme, as opposed to a Bologna-style three + one model, with a three + two for students who consider continuing on the PhD level.

While the small size of the faculty at the Department of Economics is an advantage in terms of agility, it also constitutes a potential threat to the teaching at NTNU-ØK. Minor changes to the size of the faculty at a small department pose a larger risk to the stable and predictable provision of teaching. In addition, a small faculty can only offer a rather limited amount of electives. It is unfortunate that the BSc in political economy had to be terminated, because the cooperation with political science seemed to be a way to secure a broader variety of electives.

Furthermore, due to the international standing of the Department of Economics at NTNU as a research-active department. Regarding opportunities, the international standing of Trondheim as a research-active department can be leveraged also in the future. An aspect worth considering is taking greater advantage of the international network and visiting academics who could further enrich the educational offer.

## 5 University of Bergen (UiB)

The University of Bergen (UiB) was formally established in 1948, but the origin of the university can be traced back to 1825 when the Museum of Bergen was founded. UiB is a comprehensive university, organised in seven faculties. Economics has its own department, which was established in 1977.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA Economics
- BA Political Economy
- MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)
- MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)
- PhD Economics

University of Bergen, Faculty of Social Science, Department of Economics (UiB)					
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA Political Economy	BA Economics	MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)	MA Economics (300, ECTS, 5 years)
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>30</sup>	32	141	16	28
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>31</sup> .	34,0	38,2	49,0	47,0
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>32</sup> .	20	99		22
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>33</sup> .	36	216		26
	Grade points (2017) <sup>34</sup>	42,2	43,2		45,4
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>35</sup> Per study programme: Average: 37,3		41,4	42,0	13,2

<sup>30</sup> Students who actually started their studies in 2017 after being offered a study place. Data from Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH): <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>31</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>32</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>33</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>34</sup> Grade points for the primary certificate quota (Norwegian: ORDF). Grade points are the average of all number grades multiplied by 10. Bonus points may be added, e.g. for science and foreign languages. See full explanation here (Norwegian only):

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/opptak/poengberegning/index.html>. Data from NUCAS:

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>35</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>36</sup>	27,6	36,5	59,5	46,9
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### 5.1.1 Study programmes, organisation and resources

Currently the University of Bergen offers four programmes in economics. Bergen has two bachelor programmes in economics, a BSc in economics and a BSc in political economy. At the master level, Bergen offers a two-year master programme (120 ECTS) and a five-year integrated master's degree in economics (300 ECTS).

According to the department's self-assessment report, the department consists of 18 tenured professors and associate professors. Additionally, a number of assistant professors and postdocs are employed at the department. As stated on the department's website, the programme builds on the department's core areas of research competence in game theory, incentive theory and microeconometrics.

The panel notes that it may be potentially challenging to offer four programmes with the current size of the staff. Courses in the BSc and MSc programmes are joint with courses in the integrated programme, which allows for economies of scale. Furthermore, the panel thinks that there may be opportunities for cooperation with NHH, e.g. by offering joint courses or by the two institutions cooperating in offering a particular specialisation.

### 5.1.2 Initial competence

The panel is not familiar with the grading system in Norway, which makes the evaluation of the entry requirements difficult. Inferred from the provided information, grade point entry scores at the UiB bachelor program is a bit lower than the entry scores at the NTNU and UiO BA programs. The grade point entry score for the integrated master programme is a bit higher than for the BA program, but here too the entry score is lower than the entry score at the NTNU MA program. The department uses different minimum scores for entry and has higher math requirements for the integrated master than for the bachelor. This might reflect an ambition to try attracting more qualified students to the integrated master program.

According to the self-assessment report, the department finds that many of its bachelor students lack a sufficient background in mathematics. Due to an identified need for a greater focus on basic math skills as a prerequisite for studying economics, the department has enhanced its teaching in mathematics in the first semester of the BA programme. Moreover, the department is considering stricter formal requirements in math.

The panel suggests that it may be worthwhile having specific entry requirements regarding the mathematics level from high school (videregående skole), which are required from new students and which are applied in other economics programmes. Furthermore, placing math in the first semester

<sup>36</sup> All A and B grades as a percentage of all grades given at the study programme. Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

seems like a good idea in order to improve the math level of students admitted to the programme and for emphasising that math is important from the very beginning of the study.

### **5.1.3 Programme design**

All four programmes consist of a mix of mandatory and elective courses. Most courses are worth 10 ECTS, implying that students take three courses per semester.

#### **The bachelor programme**

The BSc programme in economics is a three-year programme. The structure of the BSc programme favours a less technical course mix than the bachelor part of the five-year programme. Apparently, a BSc student can structure his/her studies in order to obtain the same degree as students enrolled in the integrated programme. However, a student cannot move from the BSc to the integrated programme, if he or she desired to do so.

The core elements of the bachelor programme consist of a basic introduction to economic principles, a 10 ECTS math course, and a statistics/econometrics course of 10 ECTS (statistics and mainly some OLS). Students take microeconomics courses of 2 x 10 ECTS by a basic microeconomics course and ECON210, which is a course on public finance and behavior. Students obtain a macroeconomic qualification by attending 2 x 10 ECTS courses, including basic macroeconomics and ECON 230, which is a course on macroeconomics and international economics. Furthermore, students choose between seven elective courses in economics (of which they typically need three or four to complete their BSc), and the fifth and sixth semester allows for total freedom regarding the choice of courses, which implies that 60 ECTS can be in non-economics courses. The bachelor study concludes with a project amounting to 10 ECTS credits.

The statistics/econometrics course is the only mandatory econometrics course of the bachelor programme. The panel considers the mandatory coursework in statistics and econometrics less demanding than what is common in other comparable economics bachelor programmes in Europe.

#### **The master programme**

The first semester of the MSc programme consists of three compulsory courses each (each 10 ECTS): microeconomic analysis, macroeconomic analysis, and econometrics. There are five elective courses in economics (each 10 ECTS) in the second and third semester. The department offers a variety of courses in economics, which the students can choose from. In the third semester, the programme offers a mandatory preparatory course for the master's thesis (10 ECTS). In their fourth semester, students write their master's thesis (30 ECTS).

The panel considers the preparatory course for the thesis a good means for preparing students for writing a thesis and it may also be valuable experience for a later research career.

## The integrated master programme

According to information from the department, the main motivation for the five-year integrated master was to create an “elite” programme for better-qualified and motivated students.

The structure and expected learning outcomes of the last two years of the five-year integrated master programme is similar to the two-year programme.

The main difference between the three + two programme and the integrated programme is that the integrated programme includes two level 300 courses in the fifth semester. Thus, the students (enrolled in the integrated programme) attain a higher academic level sooner than in the three + two programme. Yet, the three + two students also have the possibility to choose elective courses on a technically high level in their fifth semester, which are in accordance with the course content of the integrated programme.

The panel questions UiB’s choice of offering both the integrated programme and the three + two programme as parallel programmes. The five-year programme is slightly more ambitious in its course content and is regarded more prestigious. Also, students who start in the regular bachelor programme, but decide to choose courses consistent with the integrated programme, can do so, but without the additional benefit of getting a 5 year integrated degree. This appears to have a signaling effect, marking a distance from the more prestigious integrated programme. The panel suggests that UiB aligns its programmes with the Bologna agreements, thus having separate bachelor and master studies, but with an option of following bachelor and master course sequences with a more ambitious content.

Moreover, the panel recommends that UiB offers specialisations within the master programme, which could help students to develop a profile, e.g. in macroeconomic policy, finance, or applied microeconom(etr)ics, consistent with the research strengths of the department.

### 5.1.4 Teaching and assessment methods

The self-assessment report states that the department emphasises the importance of applying different kinds of teaching methods.

According to the pedagogical quality report that was prepared for this evaluation, the UiB programme favours courses taught in the form of lectures or seminars. Furthermore, written exams are the common form of assessment of learning, while writing assignments, which facilitates academic feedback, is used to a certain extent. Students seem to demand more of this type of learning according to Studiebarometeret.

Furthermore, the pedagogical quality report discusses the department’s interpretation of “research based teaching”, which seems to favour the (widespread) idea that this is teaching that is updated on the research frontier. However, alternative interpretations include the idea of developing teaching activities that teach students to think like a researcher. This idea is e.g. supported by a number of articles in a recent special issue of *The Journal of Economic Education* and in *American Economic Review*, which evaluate the experiences in the top 30 liberal arts colleges and top 30 national universities in the US.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See several articles in special issue in *The Journal of Economic Education*, 2017, 48(4); and Hoyt, G.M., & K.M. McGoldrick (2017): Promoting Undergraduate Research in Economics. *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*, 107(5):655-659.

Teaching that teaches students to think in a researcher-like manner is not central in UiB's economics programmes, which may also explain the students' assessment of teaching quality in Studiebarometeret.

Overall, the pedagogical report emphasises that the pedagogical quality of the economics programmes at UiB is very good.

### **5.1.5 Educational competence**

The department reports that UiB offers courses and workshops on teaching methods. Information on these courses is provided to faculty members. Although the courses reportedly are well attended, even by senior faculty members, there are no mandatory activities for experienced teachers. However, there is a programme for university pedagogy, which employees have to complete within two years after hire.

Moreover, the department reports that it has developed new teaching formats in order to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning in recent years. Hence, the staff has adopted new teaching methods and more student active learning forms in several courses. These new methods are directed towards activities that require the students to be more active in class and where video material is applied in teaching.

The department's self-assessment report states that teaching is an important part of the job interview conducted by the head of department and faculty members. The department recognizes that teaching qualifications have relative little impact on career paths, except perhaps when moving from one institution to another. In terms of evaluations for promotions, the department states that some value is attached to teaching qualifications. However, greater value is ascribed to research and research quality.

High quality in teaching is honoured by an annual prize for teaching excellence. The UiB is in the process of developing a programme for excellent teaching, which allows for a significant pay rise for selected staff members. However, the recent focus on teaching does not seem to have any impact on the promotion from assistant professor to associate professor or from associate professor to full professor.

### **5.1.6 Achieved learning**

All courses are subject to student evaluations by the students, which are usually carried out at mid-term and by the end of each course. The head of department receives the evaluation results each semester and the results are public. The response rate is 40-50 percent, which is reasonable by comparison with programmes internationally. The students generally show great satisfaction with the academic level and employment opportunities after graduation (grades 3.5-4.0 on a scale from 1 to 5 in Studiebarometeret), but are less impressed by their achieved skills and competencies in terms of research and project work, oral communication skills and innovative thinking (grades below 3.0).

### **5.1.7 Internationalisation**

At UiB, most courses are taught in Norwegian. This allows for relatively few possibilities to accommodate international students in the programme. The department reports that all programmes emphasise benefits of studying abroad, and the department has 29 Erasmus-agreements. UiB also receives many students from abroad through Erasmus. It is not clear from the information we received which courses these students attend. However, according to UiB's webpage, that five ECON-courses are apparently taught in English and thus available for exchange students.

In terms of internationalisation, the department benefits from its strong network of international postdoctoral researchers who contribute to teaching.

The fact that most courses in the integrated master program are in Norwegian seems to be at odds with the idea of the integrated master programme being the “elite” programme. The panel wonders if the five-year integrated programme may obstruct achieving stronger internationalisation. That may be another cost of the integrated system.

The panel had liked more information on the number of outgoing and incoming students, in order to provide a more qualified assessment of internationalisation at UiB.

### **5.1.8 Relevance**

The economics programme at UiB is a classical high-quality economics programme that trains students in core competencies in economics. UiB reports that while employment numbers show that around 50 percent of the BSc candidates have a relevant job two years after graduation, 83 percent of the MSc candidates have a relevant job two years after graduation. Thus, there seems to be a limited job market for bachelor candidates, whereas employment options are considerably better for MSc candidates. Even so, an employment rate of 83 percent two years after graduation does not strike the panel as particularly impressive, given the low unemployment rates in Norway.<sup>38</sup>

The panel wonders whether candidates who continue in a PhD programme are considered as being employed or as students, and whether PhD studies can explain the fairly low employment rate. Another potential explanation may be that employment through the international labour market is not registered in the data.

Internships seem to be part of the integrated programme, but not the two-year MSc programme. One solution to increase internships is to grant ECTS for them. The panel wonders why internships are valued differently in the MSc and the integrated master programme.

Furthermore, the panel had liked to learn in which sectors candidates get their (first) job, to what extent the international labour market is accessible for graduates, and whether international students stay in Norway to work after having completed their studies.

A means of ensuring that courses taught remain relevant for the labour market is having regular dialogue with employers. If this kind of dialogue does not already exist, the panel suggests that UiB establishes a panel or advisory board of employers or former students (alumni network) that can advise on appropriateness and relevance of programme.

### **5.1.9 Educational leadership**

The educational leadership of the economics programmes at UiB is organised in a way that resembles many other economics departments. The head of department, who is elected for a four-year period, runs the department’s daily business together with a deputy chair and an administrative employee. An extended leader group also includes a staff member responsible for teaching.

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<sup>38</sup> It is to be noted that the question asks about *relevant* jobs, so the low score may be consistent with a substantial part of students finding good jobs outside their discipline of study.

The panel finds it a bit peculiar that the staff member responsible for teaching is apparently not directly involved in the department's daily business as a director of studies.

The department also has an elected council. The department organises its discussions on teaching quality through the department board and an education panel. In addition, a panel of elected students, the *Fagutvalget*, is responsible for all student matters at the department.

### **5.1.10 Overall assessment of UiB**

The University of Bergen has a number of very attractive features. Its location turns it into a well accessible university in one of the economically vibrant places in Scandinavia. The size of the programmes is highly viable. Its proximity to NHH is attractive and adds to the vibrant academic atmosphere in the city and the university. Also, the links to research institutes seem to be well developed. The department is strong with internationally recognized scholars, a good reputation and a vibrant research environment. The international mobility of students is relatively high.

Given these positive assets, we are surprised that most courses are still offered in Norwegian (with an option perhaps of changing to English if international students attend the class). This constrains internationalisation amidst otherwise favourable conditions for further improvements. In addition, the seemingly limited focus on (applied) econometrics came as a surprise, not least because of the research reputation of the university. We also find it surprising the department offers an integrated five-year programme (as in other Norwegian economics departments) which is a peculiar legacy from the past in our view (see also Chapters 8 and 9).

Based on the provided material, we detected limited evidence of innovation in education. We would expect a top Norwegian economics department to also lead in teaching innovation and to continuously reflect on ways to improve and adjust the programmes for new generations of students and with regard to changing societal demands. Moreover, we have the impression that the size of tenured staff is small relative to the size of the programmes, and we imagine that the university may face some problems regarding offering its staff competitive salaries.

We see a clear potential to further strengthen the links between the university and the industries in the region. In addition, an enhancement of the cooperation with NHH appears possible and mutually beneficial. (In the panel's view, it was unfortunate not to include NHH in this evaluation was unfortunate). Finally, the department should carefully think about strengthening the academic leadership in the programmes and shifting it from a focus on process to a stronger focus on content. Programme directors with a clear mandate to improve the quality and content of educational programmes are important and necessary drivers of change and can add to further strengthening the quality of the programmes that are offered.

## 6 University of Oslo (UiO)

The University of Oslo is the oldest university in Norway, founded in 1811. The university is a comprehensive research university, with eight faculties, in addition to museums and collections, and a university library. The Faculty of Social Sciences was established in 1963, but several of the social science disciplines were previously located (and taught) at other faculties. Today's Department of Economics was originally a research institute for economics (Sosialøkonomisk institutt) and the study programme was placed at the Faculty of Law.

Study programmes included in this evaluation:

- BA Economics
- MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)
- MA Economics (300 ECTS, 5 years)
- PhD Economics

University of Oslo, Faculty of Social Science, Department of Economics (UiO–SV)				
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA Economics	MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)	MA Economics (300, ECTS. 5 years)
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>39</sup>	97	60	51
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>40</sup>	43,1	45,6	38,4
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>41</sup>	95		50
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>42</sup>	207		78
	Grade points (2017) <sup>43</sup>	46,8		43,6

<sup>39</sup> Students who actually started their studies in 2017 after being offered a study place. Data from Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH): <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>40</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>41</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>42</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>43</sup> Grade points for the primary certificate quota (Norwegian: ORDF). Grade points are the average of all number grades multiplied by 10. Bonus points may be added, e.g. for science and foreign languages. See full explanation here (Norwegian only):

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/opptak/poengberegning/index.html>. Data from NUCAS:

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>. <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>44</sup> Per study programme: Average: 29,2	26,0	37,4	23,6
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>45</sup>	44,8	39,8	40,4

### 6.1.1 Study programmes, organisation and resources

The university offers a two-year master programme in economics (120 ECTS) and a five-year integrated master programme in economic theory and econometrics (300 ECTS). The five-year programme is a combined bachelor and master programme. The learning outcomes and structure of the last two years of the five-year programme are quite similar to the two-year program.<sup>46</sup>

### 6.1.2 Initial competence

It is evident from the provided material that Oslo is able to attract and select very good students. The BA programme at UiO has the second highest grade point entry requirement of all programmes that were part of this pilot, while the grade point requirement for the integrated MA program is a bit lower and lower than grade point requirement for both NTNU and UiB's integrated MA programme. The panel is particularly interested in knowing whether the university manages to contribute to the further development of these relatively high-potential students in an optimal way.

### 6.1.3 Programme design

The panel is of the opinion that the programmes are of good quality, but at the same time also traditional. A programme committee is well positioned to maintain the programme and incorporate new trends although the panel would have liked to see evidence that is more concrete in this regard.

The two-year master programme is an international programme taught in English. The department emphasises that they provide a solid grounding in mathematics and statistics, and a relatively theoretical orientation. The programme includes a research specialisation, which prepares students for a PhD trajectory.

The panel is astonished about the existence of the five-year master programme, which seems to be a legacy from the past and is uncommon from an international perspective. The value added by the five-year programme is not made convincingly clear to the panel, apart from the fact that it possibly contributes to selecting better and more motivated students. The panel is of the opinion that there are other, more effective ways, of achieving this goal, which provide more flexibility to the students. At the

<sup>44</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>45</sup> All A and B grades as a percentage of all grades given at the study programme. Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>46</sup> We only describe the two-year programme in detail here. Students in the five-year programme take the same courses, though they take some of them in the third year of the program. For a detailed view of the structure of the five-year programme see: <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/samfunnsokonomi-5aar/oppbygging/>.

same time, the panel also acknowledges the importance of having devices for selecting the promising students. Moreover, the panel understands that the five-year master programme does not add financial costs, because the courses constituting the program are also integrated in regular bachelor and master programmes.

The panel is also puzzled by the existence of a one-year in-between program, even though it acknowledges the potential difficulties in transition between secondary and tertiary education. However, such issues should ideally be addressed within the respective programme and not by developing an add-on to the main, internationally comparable, programme. Instead, the panel suggests to further develop and strengthen activities by offering summer schools, digital materials and lectures at secondary schools in order to improve information provided to students about what studying economics actually entails.

The panel is aware of the strong research reputation of the department, but finds relatively limited concrete evidence of cross-fertilization in the curricula in the available material. Apparently, the focus on the thesis work is relatively strong. It is undoubtedly possible to strengthen this link, especially in a solid research environment as is present in Oslo.

Based on the accessible material, the panel has the impression that the university could take a strong lead in Norway if it took greater advantage of its excellent student intake, top research faculty and of the apparently good availability of resources. However, the impression is difficult to substantiate. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that the panel did not have the chance to talk to the management, lecturers and students of the university.

#### **6.1.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

The teaching and assessment methods are rather traditional. Despite incentives that are available for innovation, the panel saw little evidence of actual progress in further developing the teaching and assessment methods and trying to improve student activities during the semester. The panel sees a clear potential for further developments in this direction that can improve the quality of education and the attractiveness of the programmes substantially, by means of relatively small investments. These conclusions are supported by results from Studiebarometeret.

#### **6.1.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The learning environment is in a good condition, although given the vibrant environment offered by the university, the panel is somewhat surprised by the rather average satisfaction of students. The average satisfaction may, of course, partly be caused by very high expectations of students. However, based on the accessible material and in line with earlier comments, we also have the impression that accessible potential is not fully exploited. Relatively much effort is devoted to PhD training (as also evidenced from the self-assessment report), while teaching especially at the bachelor level seems to be rather extensive. The panel feels that a better balance is desirable. The self-assessment report describes several good initiatives. Nonetheless, the panel cannot identify a strong student targeted culture in which students are fully integrated in the academic, mainly research oriented, community. In the opinion of the panel, a more pronounced integration of students from the first year onwards, may help strengthening the link between research and education.

### **6.1.6 Educational competence**

The quality of the staff is striking. There is a dedicated effort to train staff members pedagogically. This training is also a requirement for promotion from associate to full professor. In addition, the panel highly appreciates that PhD students have the chance to progress as lecturers, which is facilitated by the university renewing their contract for one more year/ financing a fourth year. Good master students are selected to teach at the bachelor level. This is a promising way of integrating the good students into academia and providing them with valuable experience.

Furthermore, funding for innovation and a prize for excellent teaching are available. It is not clear how these affect the quality of education. It had been interesting to learn of some best practices as an example.

Despite the high quality of the staff, the panel is left with the impression that the emphasis is still very much on research. The panel is aware that this is also the case internationally and that incentives are biased towards research for many reasons, which cannot entirely be controlled by the university. It is not clear to the panel if the department considers excellence in teaching to be equally important as excellence in research. The self-assessment does not convey a clear ambition for excellence in teaching.

### **6.1.7 Achieved learning**

Based on the available information, the quality of the students who complete the programmes is good. The panel had liked to substantiate its conclusions based on an evaluation of the quality of theses and exams. This was not possible within the scope of this pilot evaluation (see section 10 for recommendations). The two MA programmes have the lowest the fraction of A+B scores among all the participating MA programmes. This is somewhat surprising given the quality of students the University of Oslo recruits. Completion rates within standard time are low across the board. Although this may partly reflect the fact that programmes are very demanding, we see a strong potential for further activating students which can contribute to improved outcomes in terms of length of study and quality.

### **6.1.8 Internationalisation**

The two-year master programme and the PhD programme are offered in English. The panel considers the number of international students fairly small in light of the small and open economy in Norway and because Norway's population is known for its excellent mastering of English. Also, the number of exchange agreements is rather small. This may partly result from a fairly restrictive approach focusing on quality, but it also seems to reflect a fairly modest ambition with regards to internationalisation. Moreover, the number of outgoing exchange students is limited, especially at the bachelor level. The self-assessment report is honest and realistic by emphasizing the challenges that are associated with an internationalisation strategy. The panel is of the opinion that the university has a clear potential to play a more important role internationally, and by doing so can enhance the diversity of the university and provide its students with a unique and highly valuable experience. Admittedly, a dedicated effort is required to be successful in achieving such an ambition, but it is worth considering in defining the next level of ambitions.

### **6.1.9 Relevance**

Based on the provided information, we have the impression that students end up in good positions. However and as emphasised in the self-assessment report, there is clear scope for improving the students' skills, especially in terms of writing and presenting. It is evident that some measures are introduced. The panel recommends taking on a more proactive role in terms of continuously improving programmes, adjusting to the changing needs of the labour market and the changing capabilities of the new students. Furthermore, the department would benefit from a more ambitious and independent educational leadership.

The panel appreciates the intern programme, which is one of the mandatory courses, and supports the pilot that is described in the self-assessment report.

In order to enhance the relevance of the master students' qualifications, the panel thinks it is worth considering to distinguish and further strengthen the specialisations which has a stronger research orientation and more applied specialisations. A separate two-year MPhil or MRes programme is a natural way to implement this, which also is very much in line with international developments.

### **6.1.10 Educational leadership**

The responsibility for running and developing the programme rests with a programme committee. Its members are appointed by the head of department. The committee consists of seven members, including two student members. In addition, course group leaders are appointed for the larger topics in economics. This kind of system can work well. However, the provided information does not clarify to what extent the committee is truly independent, considering that the head of department is also the leader of the programme committee. Thus, the head of department can make decisions in the interest of the quality of education, which undoubtedly involves trade-offs with emphasis given to research.

Based on our remarks on internationalisation, the panel is of the opinion that assigning responsibility for an internationalisation strategy is recommendable, if the university is determined to strengthen its international profile.

### **6.1.11 Overall assessment of the UiO, Economics**

The panel has the impression that the University of Oslo has a solid set of bachelor and master programmes that are offered in a high-quality research environment. The programmes seem to offer a good entry ticket to international programmes. The quality of the staff and the available resources are considerable. At the same time, the panel thinks there is an unexploited potential to deliver truly excellent programmes. The existing programmes are rather traditional as are the teaching and assessment methods. The panel would like to encourage the management to develop a strong vision on education excellence, for example by applying for international accreditations and further strengthening the educational leadership. These can act as a driving force, stimulating change. Additionally, educational quality benefits from competition and given the high-quality resources, the university can gain from organising the competition and strive for being the top university in economics in Europe. In order to achieve this, it would be important to strengthen internationalisation.

The panel has several suggestions which facilitate further developments:

- Further promoting international exchange by carefully aligning own programmes with those of partner universities;
- Eliminating the five-year programme which seems to be a legacy from the past;
- Take a leading role in innovation by improving the quality of education in Norway, also by strengthening strategic cooperation between universities in Norway, especially at the PhD level;
- Further developing relations to professional organisations in order to offer more students the option of an internship.

## 7 University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT)

UiT The Arctic University of Norway (University of Tromsø) was founded in 1968 as a comprehensive university for the northern region of Norway. Over the past 12 years, the university has been through several mergers with university colleges in the region, and it is now the third largest university in Norway. The current Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics comprises three departments, two of which are part of this evaluation: the Norwegian College of Fishery Science and the School of Business and Economics.

The study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA in Economics
- MA in Economics.

University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway, Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA Economics	MA Economics (120 ECTS, 2 years)
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>47</sup>	38	11
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>48</sup>	17,2	36,8
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>49</sup>	30	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>50</sup>	30	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>51</sup>	All	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>52</sup> Per study programme: Average: 28,7	21,2	48,6
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>53</sup>	29,6	50

<sup>47</sup> Students who actually started their studies in 2017 after being offered a study place. Data from Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH): <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>48</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>49</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>50</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>51</sup> Grade points for the primary certificate quota (Norwegian: ORDF). Grade points are the average of all number grades multiplied by 10. Bonus points may be added, e.g. for science and foreign languages. See full explanation here (Norwegian only):

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/opptak/poengberegning/index.html>. Data from NUCAS:

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>52</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>53</sup> All A and B grades as a percentage of all grades given at the study programme. Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

### **7.1.1 Study programmes, organisation and resources**

UiT has a bachelor and a master programme in economics, both of which are relatively small. The panel wonders to what extent programmes of this size can offer the degree of specialisation and in-depth knowledge, which is/will be expected from academics. Similarly, the panel wonders whether sufficient resources are available to cover all the fields included in the program appropriately.

In this regard, the panel appreciates and supports the attempt to combine economics and business, but again has doubts about the feasibility. It is not clear to the panel whether a separate programme in business administration exists, which could provide the necessary critical mass.

The panel appreciates the additional value of the university by fostering regional development, especially in the fishing industry. Nevertheless, the panel is of the opinion that the university is somewhat ambiguous about the balance between excellence in research and excellence in education. The panel recommends developing a clear vision regarding this balance, and to align recruitment policies according to the clear vision of the university and its role in the (local) society.

### **7.1.2 Initial competence**

Although the information was limited, the panel got the impression that most of the students are local. The selection process is not characterized by competition, most likely due to the small scale. The consequence of this seems to be low grades and exceptionally high dropout rates for the BA programme. Although the panel understands the complicated trade-off, it considers high dropout rates to be very undesirable. The panel suggests the university to be stricter in the admissions in order to enhance the quality of the students and the programmes, and thereby become more attractive for students from other regions and countries.

### **7.1.3 Programme design**

Although there are processes in place for the design of the programmes (managed by a board of studies), the size of the faculty is such that in the final programme design is unavoidably supply driven to a substantial extent. The self-assessment is vague regarding the process of updating the curricula. The panel noted the remark that the staff provides a comprehensive competence and can teach a widespread variety of courses. Yet and as previously mentioned, we have some concerns about the available resources. In the opinion of the panel, the self-assessment report lacks a clear vision on how to deal with the limitations and the consequences for a smart design of the programmes, including strategic cooperation, strong specialisation, etc.

### **7.1.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

The self-assessment reveals a clear ambition to be at the forefront of teaching practice. The panel appreciates that there seems to be an environment for experimenting with teaching methods and a learning environment. The emphasis on digital learning environments may be a means to cope with limited resources. The panel had liked to see some concrete examples. Students also indicate being

satisfied. However, the panel struggles to detect proper incentives and feasibility of realizing the objectives.

Concrete information on the variety of teaching methods is scarce. Assessment still seems to be traditional and focuses on written exams. The panel recommends that the learning outcomes are specified to a greater extent and to link them to the tests.

The basic elements for a good learning environment are provided by having established good contacts with the local industry. The small scale seems to guarantee close interaction between students and staff. Otherwise, the information in the self-assessment report is limited. The panel has certain concerns about the quality and diversity of the learning environment, which are essential for a stimulating and effective high-quality learning environment, in the panel's opinion. Furthermore, the panel is surprised that the response rate on the evaluations is quite low despite the claim that students are engaged.

### **7.1.5 Educational competence**

The self-assessment reveals a clear awareness of the importance of educational competence. The panel is convinced that considerable efforts are invested in recruiting well-qualified candidates. However, the panel is aware of the limitations resulting from the presence of a limited critical mass and the peripheral location of the university. From the provided information, bachelor students seem to be very satisfied. Yet, master students are less satisfied which casts doubt about to what degree lecturers fulfil their task of aligning with recent developments in the field. The panel appreciates, the university's considerable commitment to create an environment where excellence in teaching is awarded.

### **7.1.6 Achieved learning**

The fraction of the grades A and B scores is very low for the BA programme. It is not clear to the panel to what extent this is caused by high dropout rates and a lack of entry requirements, results from below-average quality of inflow, or a lack of quality of teaching. The results are disappointing, because of the great efforts invested in education and the small scale of the programmes. Otherwise, the panel has difficulties to draw conclusions, partly because the panel did not have a chance to assess the quality of exams and theses.

### **7.1.7 Internationalisation**

The programmes offer the option of going abroad for a year, which students seem to take advantage of to a very limited extent. The university has several agreements with foreign universities, but the selection seems to be rather coincidental. Otherwise, the internationalisation strategy does not appear to be particularly clear. The panel is of the opinion that the small size of the programmes requires a clear vision on internationalisation in order to increase the size as well as the quality of the programmes. However, the panel acknowledges that this is not an easy task. A certain scope of action may be provided by developing a unique specialisation that further exploits the geographical positioning of the UiT.

### **7.1.8 Relevance**

The panel agrees to the importance of links to the industry, but wonders whether these relations are sufficiently exploited. Important indicators for success of the programmes are those students who are employed in the local industry after having obtained their bachelor or master's degree. The same applies for students who enrol in a master programme elsewhere and later return to the region after having completed their studies, and the fraction of master students who continue with the PhD level. However, the task to evaluate this criterion was difficult, because information about the labour market was not available for this evaluation.

Regarding the research orientation, the self-assessment states that all teaching is research based, but the panel had no means to confirm this. The fact that a research-active person is teaching classes does not automatically ensure a strong research orientation.

### **7.1.9 Educational leadership**

The educational leadership is not particularly clear, which probably results from the small size and the informal relationships. Especially the bachelor programmes seem to be understaffed. The self-assessment report mentions that the head of department oftentimes has to ask the faculty board for more permanent resources. This situation reflects that the department has a relatively weak position in the university, which provides a limited scope for effective leadership in the first place. At the same time, the self-assessment reveals a strong awareness of the importance of innovation and educational leadership, which leaves the impression of a discrepancy between ambition and reality.

### **7.1.10 Overall assessment of UiT**

The panel is of the opinion that the University of Tromsø has a unique and interesting position in the Norwegian system of higher education. It is strongly connected to the local economy and has ambitions to meet local demands. The name of the university is well chosen and provides a clear message about the unique features of the university. There is an awareness of the need to increase the extent of specialisations due to the relatively small size which again appears inevitable because of the geographical location of the university. UiT has developed a recognized center of expertise on polar research by (means of) specialising.

Nevertheless, the programmes are very small, and despite the attempt to specialise, the panel wonders how viable the programmes are. It seems particularly important to the panel to focus more strongly on the international context, which provides an abundance of specialised programmes, especially at the master and possibly at the PhD level. Strategic cooperation with other universities and local industries are probably required to maintain the unique regional position.

## 8 Conclusion: overall assessment

Our overall assessment of economics in Norway is positive. The programmes are of good quality, but still somewhat traditional and inward looking. In this concluding chapter, we aim at formulating a series of rather generally applicable conclusions (we refer to the previous chapters for the individual institutes and programmes). This of course implies that some of these conclusions hold more strongly for some than for other programmes. The conclusions form the basis for the recommendations the panel provides in chapter 9.

A first general conclusion is that most of the programmes, especially at the master level, are relatively small. This holds especially for the universities in the more peripheral regions of Norway. The degree of specialisation is rather limited, although the smaller universities typically seem to specialise more and have stronger connections to the local community. Some of the programmes are so small that the panel wonders whether the programmes can offer the quality and diversity that students desire and need for developing academically.

A second observation is that the self-assessments did not reveal much about strategic plans. Clear visions of how the schools want to develop and why are missing. Similarly, clear visions of new developments in the field how to integrate new developments in the educational programmes are limited. The limited strategic thinking occurs in a period of comprehensive discussions about the quality of education in economics in view of the Great Recession. Furthermore, the current setting is influenced by the perceived need to pay more attention to behavioural economics in our programmes, for example the CORE project; (see, e.g., *The Economist*, September 23, 2017). This corresponds with the earlier observation of traditional programmes offered in Norway.

A third conclusion is that Norway apparently has not (yet) fully adopted the principles that were agreed upon in Bologna. The panel considers the five-year programmes as peculiar leftovers from the former system and has the impression that differences in terms of quality between the 5 and 2+3 year programmes are rather subtle. Content-wise, most programmes have an almost exclusive focus on economics. Based on the useful insights to be gained by students from business economics and business administration, this is a limitation. Moreover, this is not in line with the Bologna principles, which state that bachelor programmes should be relatively broad in nature.

A fourth conclusion is that Norway seems to lag behind regarding its internationalisation ambitions when compared to many other countries in Europe, which surprises the panel given the small and open Norwegian economy. The limited focus on internationalization is evident in the mainly Norwegian language courses at the universities, and in the limited focus on international accreditations, which foreign students often consider to be an important indicator of high quality.

A fifth observation is that we have seen limited evidence of distinct educational leadership. The panel has not identified organisational structures where programme directors with a strong academic reputation, and the ambition and task to continuously develop and improve his/her programmes. The panel has the impression that this may well be one of the important reasons for the traditional orientation of the programmes. In the panel's opinion, there is limited evidence of coherent programme structures, which unfortunately leads many programmes to resemble a collection of high quality courses rather than integrated programmes tuned towards a higher level of achievement. We emphasise that this impression is based on the material we received, and it is one of the conclusions that we had liked to substantiate based on discussions with representatives from the schools. However, this was not possible in the

context of this pilot. We also saw limited evidence of explicit recognition of the most innovative and best lecturers. The panel detected little evidence of career paths for top lecturers, even though educational quality is a criterion in the evaluation of scholars. There seems to be a bias towards recruiting strong researchers who then are automatically expected to be excellent and active in teaching.

A final observation is that the integration of research and education is mainly established in the theses projects at the end of the programmes. The panel is of the opinion that a further and earlier integration of research experiences in the programmes is desirable.

## 9 Recommendations

We would like to make a series of recommendations, based on our observations and internal discussions. We want to point out that the recommendations are based on the sometimes limited material which we had access to, and the lack of opportunities to verify our conclusions by means of interviews. In the panel's view, these recommendations are best understood as a starting point for a discussion on further improving the quality of education in economics in Norway and for adjusting the programmes in order to serve the needs for future generations. We would much appreciate to be part of such discussions and hope that our recommendations may at least serve as a useful starting point for the involved institutions.

### 9.1 *The institutions*

A first general recommendation to the institutions is to organise internal discussions about the future of their programmes and to what extent they are addressing ideas about what future-proof and internationally competitive programmes should look like. This recommendation is based on the panel's observation that most of the programmes are traditional and lack dynamics, driven by scholars who have the ambition and are motivated to develop excellent programmes.

A second recommendation to the institutions and the Ministry is to reconsider the main objective of the programmes. It is challenging to balance between offering top internationally competitive programmes and more regionally oriented programmes, which to a large extent serve regional developmental needs in terms of possibly both research and education. We are aware that universities can be important boosters for regional economic development. Yet, the limited size of some of the programmes unavoidably confines the diversity and quality, which is offered in these programmes. We miss a clear vision on the desired role of universities.

A third recommendation is to reconsider the exclusive focus on economics from the first year onwards, without substantial focus on for business economics/business administration and other social sciences, history and psychology. According to the objectives and principles agreed upon in Bologna, the bachelor should ideally offer students a broad introduction into the discipline. Increasingly, the discipline is recognized as being broader than economics and interesting research results are obtained at the interfaces of disciplines. In case of a strong preference to maintain the fairly exclusive focus on economics, the panel recommends reconsidering the current structure of programmes, and to opt for a three-year bachelor programme and a one year (possibly specialised) master programme. Students interested in pursuing a PhD could be offered a two-year MRes/MPhil programme (followed by a three-year PhD training which results in a PhD thesis). A clearer distinction between regular masters and research masters would result in a greater degree of specialisation and would facilitate and improve the students' preparation for their respective (and greatly differing) future positions in the labour market.

A fourth recommendation is intensifying the internationalisation efforts, which entails many aspects. A first aspect is a clear vision regarding internationalisation. Ideas to consider are the development of small but excellent programmes that are open to international students, offering more courses or entire programmes in English. Another idea is further stimulating international exchange, which would also benefit from stronger standardisation of programmes according to international practices. Moreover, universities could consider acquiring international accreditations, with the aim to enhance visibility and reputation among foreign students, and also because of the quality assurance that is associated with international accreditations.

A final recommendation is to further integrate research and education from the first year onwards and to carefully redesign the curriculum in order to allow students to gradually develop their skills as researchers, which they can apply and demonstrate in the thesis project.

## **9.2 *The Ministry of Education and Research***

Based on the relatively small size of several of the schools, we feel that the Ministry could consider developing incentives to enhance cooperation between the institutes and allow for stronger specialisation among them. There are interesting examples in, for example, Scotland where lectures at MSc level are taught in Edinburgh and broadcasted to other universities. In addition, the Netherlands have some interesting examples of cooperation at the PhD level in the Network of General and Quantitative Economics (NAKE). Stronger links between the bigger, more centrally located universities and the smaller, more remote ones, could strike a balance between local development and top education.

A second recommendation is to consider exploiting the potential to use education in Norway as a tool to provide development aid. This recommendation is based on the role that Norway plays in this respect, and the opportunity to increase these efforts in the field of education. Some interesting examples in this regard are already in place (e.g. at the NMBU). In the panel's view, approaches of this kind have a great potential and constitute an appealing means for providing effective development aid that is beneficial for all parties involved.

## **9.3 *The students***

Our recommendations to students are limited by the fact that we did not have the chance to talk to them. Thus we did get an impression about student life in Norway, apart from the information provided in the surveys. Still, we want to make a couple of suggestions.

First, we are somewhat concerned about the high dropout rates. It is difficult coming up with solid conclusions, based on the available information. However, we do have some experiences from our home countries that are likely to be equally relevant for Norwegian students. A typical problem in programmes in economics is that a relatively large share of students does not choose studying economics based on a strong intrinsic motivation but based on aspirations for good and well-paid jobs in the future. We strongly recommend all (future) students to invest in a broad orientation about programmes that are offered and to at least partly base their choice on passion for the discipline of choice. This requires that institutions provide clear, transparent and honest information that helps students make their decisions.

Second, the panel recommends students currently enrolled in economics programmes to actively participate in the development of the programmes. Contributing to the development of programmes is an awarding experience. It provides students with important skills for their future careers, and contributes to forming a strong community of students and academics. We raise this point in part because of the low response rates to the evaluations and in part because we have seen rather limited evidence of active student participation in the development of programmes. Oftentimes, an active student body is appreciated by faculty and is an important driving force of change in curricula and as such a driving force of improvement of educational quality.

## 9.4 NOKUT

Our recommendations to NOKUT are not very far reaching because we mainly experienced the role of NOKUT in the system of Norwegian higher education as our host and the organiser of this evaluation. Thus, our main recommendations to NOKUT are related to our observations regarding the evaluation in which we have participated and are discussed in Chapter 10 of this report.

## 10 The panel's reflections on the evaluation

This section contains our reflection on the evaluation process and provides suggestions for future undertakings like these.

A first and very important remark is that the panel very much appreciates the attempt to combine the evaluations of research and education. This is quite different from British, Dutch and Danish approaches, the systems we are most familiar with of two completely disconnected exercises evaluating research excellence (the REF) and teaching excellence (the TEF) that set what seems like conflicting incentives. Thus and as far as we can see, the Norwegian KOMBEVAL seems to be a rather unique pilot project experiment and relevant because of the often weak links between research and teaching, especially at universities. For the purpose of university education, reflecting about this relationship and acknowledging associated opportunities and challenges, is relevant and worth pursuing further.

In spite of the comprehensive material provided to us, a second remark is that it was difficult preparing a good assessment of the quality of education. This was partly due to the heterogeneous and oftentimes somewhat passive self-evaluations that we received. Information on the PhD programmes was particularly limited and difficult to compare. The panel felt that the material provided was not particularly informative regarding achieved learning, at least in a rigorous sense. The crux is that one would like to understand the value-added a university gives its students, considering quality of student intake. Instead, the data of all departments seem to indicate that departments with better-than-average student intake, get better than average grades out of them. It is difficult working with the data about the different grades, because we lack information about grading standards. The panel was very interested in seeing a sample of bachelor theses and master (MSc) theses as a benchmark of achieved learning across the different departments, but was told that this was not possible within the framework of this pilot. However, the panel is of the opinion that the theses and other 'hard indicators of achieved' learning are more valuable than grade distributions and students' replies to questions in the Studiebarometeret. Among the indicators that would contribute to assess achieved learning are data on employment including how these distribute across sectors, transition rates from bachelor to MSc programmes (local and abroad), length of time from graduation to first job, placement domestically and internationally. Moreover, the panel wonders whether a panel of employers or former students may advise on the appropriateness and relevance of the programmes from the perspective of the labour market. Some of these indicators relate to relevance of the material learned which is discussed further below, but the two seem to be closely linked. A consequence of the previously mentioned lack of information is that the evaluation is strongly process-focused, rather than result-focused. The greatest emphasis is on the review of the educational quality as part of the learning programme, more than educational quality reviewed by the final outcome of the programmes and education. We are convinced that in the end the *outcome* of the educational process is most important in assessing quality of education.

Thirdly, and based on the international context in which programmes in economics are offered and on the highly international labour market, more emphasis on international benchmarking would be warranted. The panel members have useful experiences from their home countries (and experiences from other countries) that were not exploited entirely because of relatively limited information set on how the different programmes position themselves internationally. A related point to consider for future evaluations is how to define the field of economics. For the time being, business economics and business administration are (almost) entirely left out. In several countries, there are developments to further integrate these fields and to equip students with a broad education in economics and business economics, whereupon they specialise. In addition, research is increasingly at the interface of disciplines. Including business economics and business administration in the evaluation is therefore worth considering. Accordingly, we consider not including NHH and BI in this pilot as a missed opportunity. Several leading Norwegian scholars in economics are affiliated with NHH. Therefore, the panel is of the opinion that it could not properly and fairly evaluate the overall quality of education in economics in Norway.

A fourth general remark is that it has proven to be relatively difficult to generate comparative quantitative information across the institutions. Information seems to be scattered. For projects of this kind, it is advisable to invest more in collecting and storing information centrally and to have all information readily available. In addition, information on previous evaluations and concerns raised in earlier years had been useful in order to guarantee continuity of evaluations.

A fifth remark is that we decided to structure our discussions using a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) in a very early stage. This has proven very helpful for us and we are convinced that a SWOT analysis and a clear vision statement would have been a useful and very informative contribution to the self-evaluation of the institutions. A SWOT should address the following elements: (i) assessing the quality, (ii) the way forward, and (iii) tackling barriers that the programmes foresee. It could greatly help in setting up a process of continuous improvement in which the SWOT analyses can be a very helpful input, which panel members can reflect on. Needless to say is that a SWOT analysis runs the risk of appearing overly defensive if accreditations are at stake. It requires trust and constructive settings to make optimal use of the potential that we see.

We lacked information about the leading scholars in research and education in the programmes. This had provided a valuable dimension. In addition, information on the balance between research and education among the scholars of the institute had been most welcome since it informs about the organisation of the institutes and incentives, and the institutions' considerations about the optimal balance between research and education.

Regarding relevance, we were interested in more information on the alumni of the programmes. How do they perform on the labour market? Did they find (good) jobs quickly? Which alumni are the schools (most) proud of?

A final remark is that we very much appreciate the support that we received. The meetings were well organised and the flexibility that was offered was very much appreciated. Due to the fact that site visits or talks with representatives from the schools could not be conducted, three meetings with the team were sufficient for the task that we faced. As a panel, we had appreciated additional possibilities to align with the educational panels of the other disciplines and with the research panel on economics. Yet, we are aware of the virtually impossible task of getting all people together on one and the same day. The information received by the pedagogical team arrived when we formulated our first conclusions. In

hindsight, this timing added great value. Many (if not most) of their conclusions confirm ours, which reinforces our conclusions because of the independent way in which they were generated. Being part of this pilot has been an interesting experience, which we learned a lot from regarding the Norwegian system of higher education but also the value added by integrated evaluations. Yet, we must add that the time burden was greater than expected.

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## Table list

Table 1 Definition of quality dimensions .....	<b>Feil! Bokmerke er ikke definert.</b>
Table 2 Institutions and study programmes in Economics.....	<b>Feil! Bokmerke er ikke definert.</b>
Table 3 Factsheet, Norwegian University of Life Science, School of Economics and Business (NMBU–HH) .....	<b>Feil! Bokmerke er ikke definert.</b>
Table 4, Factsheet, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Economics and Management, (NTNU–ØK).....	<b>Feil! Bokmerke er ikke definert.</b>
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## Appendices

### ***Appendix 1: Assignment description for expert panels in education***

#### **Objectives**

The task of the expert panels is to evaluate the quality of education in three disciplines within social science in Norway: sociology, political science, and economics. Panel chairs will also contribute to an evaluation of the interplay between research and education in these disciplines.

The panels are part of a pilot of joint academic evaluations in research and education, run by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Research Council of Norway (RCN). Panel members will contribute to greater knowledge about the current state of social sciences education in Norway, as well as to the development of a new method for joint education and research evaluation.

#### **Context**

The Ministry of Education and Research has given NOKUT and the Research Council of Norway the task of creating a model for jointly evaluating research and education in Norwegian higher education. The model will evaluate the institutions' societal mission as a whole, including the previously underexplored aspect of education and the ways in which research and education interact. This pilot project, which forms part of RCN's broader evaluation of social science research, is NOKUT's and RCN's response to this task.

#### **Evaluation**

Each education panel will be responsible for evaluating educational quality in their subject area, evaluating each higher education institution individually. For each institution, NOKUT will provide the panel with a set of questions covering a range of topics relevant to educational quality, and an information pack providing the relevant data for each question.

Each panel will have a panel secretary provided by NOKUT and RCN, who will help coordinate the work of the panel and, in collaboration with the panel leader, contribute to producing the panel's sub-reports. Each panel's work will result in a written sub-report on educational quality in the discipline.

Panel chairs for each education panels will also participate in evaluating the interplay between research and education in the various institutions and disciplines. They will work with members from RCN's corresponding research panels. This evaluation will work in a similar way to the education evaluation, with NOKUT and RCN providing questions and evidence and a panel secretary supporting the panel's work. The interplay evaluation will result in a written interplay report.

The evaluation covers the following topics:

#### *Education*

- Organisation and resources
- Students' initial competence
- Programme design
- Teaching and assessment methods
- Learning environment in study programmes
- Educational competence

- Achieved learning
- Internationalisation
- Relevance
- Educational leadership

#### *Interplay between education and research*

- Organisational conditions
- Academic staff research and development orientation in relation to education
- Research orientation in teaching methods and assessment
- Student training in research methodology
- Student involvement in staff research

#### **Data**

NOKUT is currently in the data collection process, and expects the information necessary for the evaluation to be ready by April 2017. The panels will base their evaluation on the following data sources:

- Institutional self-assessment forms
- NOKUT's student survey
- Institution study programmes and selected course plans
- RCN's institutional self-assessment forms
- Database for Statistics on Higher Education

#### **Panel composition**

Each panel will include experts from the relevant discipline (three in the cases of sociology and economics, and five in the case of political science), each with a strong track record of educational activities and/or educational leadership, one of whom will act as panel chair. Experts in higher education pedagogy will also contribute to the evaluation. For the interplay evaluation, panel chairs come together with members from the RCN's corresponding research evaluation.

#### **Schedule**

Panel chairs will start their work in May 2017, and will finish the task of drafting sub-reports for each discipline in December 2017. Panel chairs will finish the main interplay report in collaboration with panel members from the RCN's research evaluation between January and March 2018. The evaluation work for panel members will start in May 2017 and finish by the end of the year. In-person meetings will take place in the Oslo area. All members will arrive the evening before the first meeting day.

The schedule below gives an overview of the timings of the panel meetings.

Date	Description	Days members	Days chairs (interplay)
2017 May	1st meeting for panels and panel chairs	2	2

2017 September/ October	2nd meeting for panels and panel chairs	2	2
2017 December	3rd meeting for panels and panel chairs, drafting of panel sub- reports	2	3
2018 January-March	Panel chair meeting for interplay report	0	2
Total		6	9

### **Workload and remuneration for panel members**

All panel chairs and panel members should reserve time to read the data provided for each panel before the first meeting in May 2017. This preparation is estimated to require about one week's work.

Each member's contribution to the report is expected to amount to about one week's work. Panel chairs will have more meeting days and work for a longer period of time due to the interplay evaluation. In addition to the scheduled meetings, the panel chairs will be paid for one extra week dedicated to extra preparations and written contributions to the interplay report.

Including meetings, the total workload is expected to be approximately 15 days for members and 28 days for panel chairs.

NOKUT will appoint a panel secretary to assist in drafting the panel sub-reports and the interplay report, as well as in preparations for meetings and interviews. NOKUT will arrange travel and accommodation for panel chairs and members, and will cover these expenses.

## ***Appendix 2: Institutional self-assessment form Guidelines***

As part of the SAMEVAL evaluation, NOKUT and the Research Council of Norway are conducting a pilot of combined evaluations of research and education, covering sociology, political science and economics. As well as research, this pilot evaluation will cover education, and will address the interplay between education and research in these subjects. This education self-assessment only applies to degree study programmes (BA, MA or PhD) that fall under the economics, political science and sociology panels (panels 2, 3 and 4) in the Excel file.

The purpose of this self-assessment is to help an expert panel evaluate the quality of the education in the institution's relevant study programmes. The expert panel will also make use of information from other sources in their evaluation, including the documents listed in the Attachments section at the end of this form.

### **Responding to the self-assessment**

- You should produce one self-assessment for each of the subject panels in which your institution is participating.
- Where one numbered point contains several questions, you may either answer the questions separately or write a single response that covers several or all questions.
- When responding to the questions, we encourage you to give specific examples where possible. You may choose to integrate examples into the text of the response, or to give a more general response followed by listing specific examples.
- Please write in English, and avoid using abbreviations or acronyms whose meaning may not be obvious outside a Norwegian context.
- The form refers to 'you' on several occasions. Because of the nature of the questions, this 'you' will apply to different people at different points in the form: some questions can best be answered by a dean or department head, while others can best be answered by study programme leaders, who will also need to consult and include the responses of the academic staff who teach in this programme. It is up to the institution to decide who has the necessary knowledge to answer each question.
- For questions about study programmes, there is no need to give separate answers for each programme. If there are significant differences between programmes, indicate this briefly in your response. Note that, where relevant, you should address any PhD-level programmes as well as BA and MA-level study programmes. Where relevant, you should distinguish between BA, MA, and PhD level in your responses.

### **Format of the response**

Depending on the number of study programmes covered in each self-assessment you write, the response should cover approximately 5 to a maximum of 10 pages. Below, we give a suggested number of pages per question, but this should be taken only as indicative. Please

use 12-point Times New Roman font, and submit the document as an editable PDF document. Documents should be structured as follows:

1. Front page with the name of the institution
2. List of contents (use the numbers and titles of each of the questions as headings, and list attachments by name of study programme)
3. Responses to questions
4. Attachments

### **Submitting the self-assessment**

The self-assessment, including all attachments, should be submitted as an editable PDF document by email to [kombeval@nokut.no](mailto:kombeval@nokut.no) no later than **10. March 2017**.

If you have questions about the self-assessment, please contact us at [kombeval@nokut.no](mailto:kombeval@nokut.no)

Project leader Marte Sinderud can also be contacted at [marte.sinderud@nokut.no](mailto:marte.sinderud@nokut.no) / (+47) 21 02 18 98, or in her place Andreas Snildal at [andreas.snildal@nokut.no](mailto:andreas.snildal@nokut.no) / (+47) 21 02 18 20.

## Questions (indicative number of pages)

### 1. Organisation and resources (1 page)

- Describe the opportunities and challenges deriving from organisational, economic, geographic, and other conditions that may affect study programme quality.

### 2. Initial competence (1 page)

- What type of introductory activities and events do you organise for new students in order to prepare them for the demands of higher education and/or postgraduate education?
- How does your recruitment process ensure that you attract students who can successfully complete the programme?

### 3. Programme design (0,5 pages)

- How do you ensure that courses are well connected and form a coherent study programme?

### 4. Teaching and assessment methods (0,5 page)

- What incentives are used to ensure varied and appropriate teaching and assessment methods?

### 5. Learning environment in study programmes (0,5 pages)

- What do you do to ensure that academically relevant activities exist in addition to the regular programme plan, such as debates, public lectures, student conferences, etc.?

### 6. Educational competence (1,5 pages)

- What are you doing to increase the importance of educational competence in hiring decisions?
- What kind of incentive programmes for teaching and the further development of didactic and pedagogical competence exist?
- What other methods does the institution use to increase the status of teaching?

### 7. Internationalisation (0,5 pages)

- Is internationalisation an important dimension of the study programmes? If yes, explain what role it plays; if no, explain why.
- How does this conception of internationalisation express itself in practice?

### 8. Relevance (1 page)

- Explain the role that relevance plays in the study programmes. By 'relevance', we mean the capacity to help students develop skills that are relevant to their future lives, study, and employment.
- How does this conception of relevance express itself in practice?

9. Educational leadership (0,5 pages)

- In what ways is the academic leadership at different levels involved in the development of study programs?
- How does the academic leadership ensure that educational resources are available and that study programs are able to make use of them?

10. Academic staff research and development orientation in relation to education (0,25 pages)

- Estimate the share of teaching that, in 2016, was given by academic staff with PhDs or equivalent research qualifications.
- Estimate the share of teaching that, in 2016, was given by academic staff whose positions do not include mandatory research time.

11. Research orientation in teaching methods and assessment (1 page)

- Describe how study programmes use teaching and assessment methods to develop students' research abilities.

**Attachments to the self evaluation**

Please provide the following for each of the study programmes covered. The attachments should be provided in English where available.

1. Study programme plan, including programme learning outcome descriptions and a description of the programme structure indicating mandatory and optional courses.
2. Course descriptions for all mandatory research methodology courses in the study programme.
3. One course description for another course of your choice above introductory level.