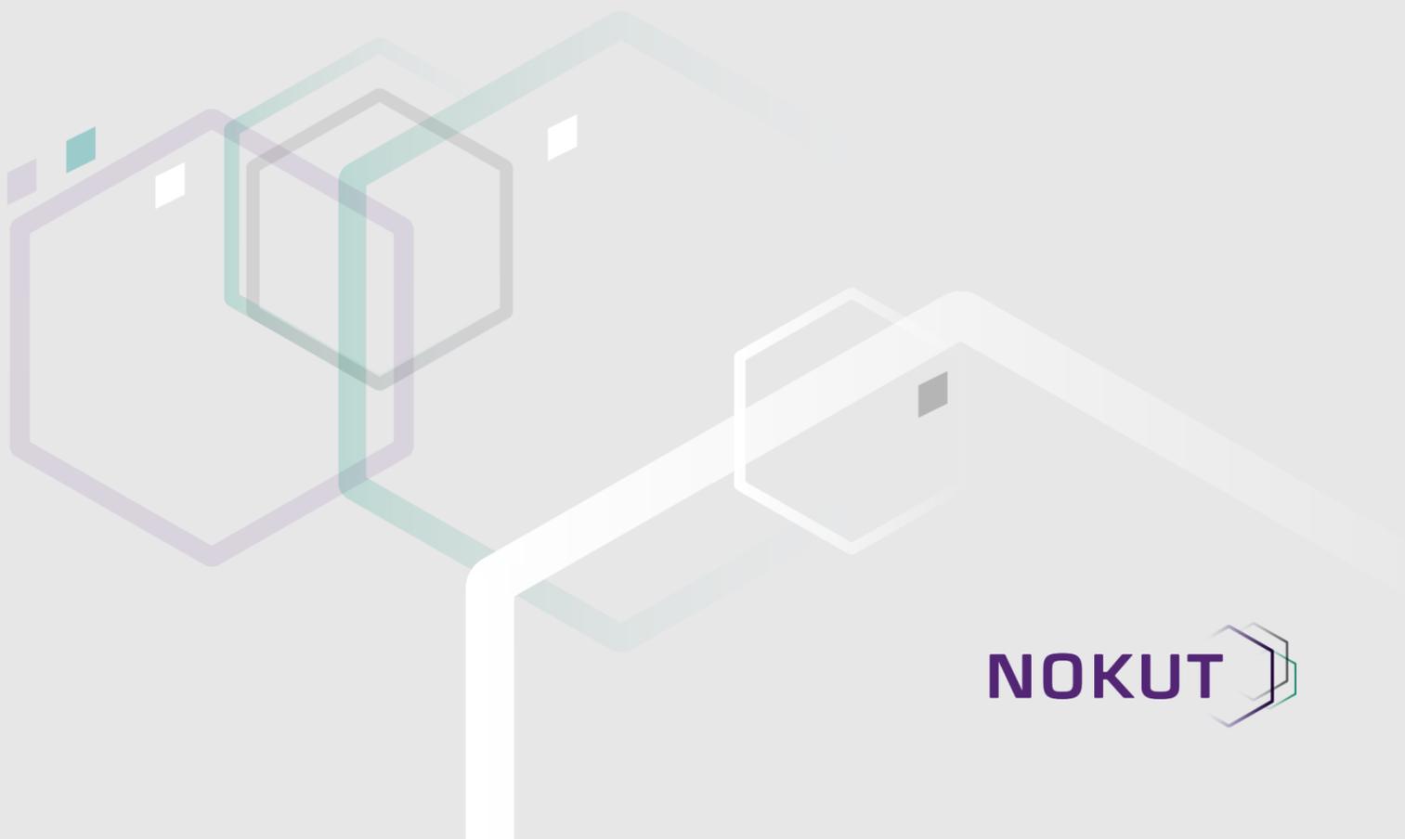


NOKUT's evaluations

# Educational quality in sociology 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 sociology in Norway. This is one of three *discipline evaluations*, along with political science and economics, 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 evaluations.

*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 Norwegian education and research and the link between them in the years to come. Since this model is 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 out a new model for independently exploring and evaluating central aspects of educational quality in higher education. The evaluation also aspires to improve 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, an important purpose of the evaluation is to make educational quality a high priority in Norwegian higher education.

This report describes the education evaluation of the discipline of sociology in Norway.

## 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 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 important international disciplines, which makes 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: BA programmes, MA programmes, and Ph.D. programmes. Sociology was represented with 24 programmes, political science with 19, and economics with 16. In total, ten Ph.D. programmes were submitted across the three panels. However, as very little specific data was available for the Ph.D. level, the education evaluation focuses primarily on the BA and MA level.

As participation was optional, a small number of relevant study programmes were not included in the evaluation. That was primarily the case for programmes with a multidisciplinary profile. This implies that the evaluation does not provide a complete view of the situation of educational provision in the three disciplines in Norway. Nevertheless, it does cover the disciplines' core educational offer.

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 they all 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 assure high quality study programmes in higher education, centering on nine 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 directed at process rather than results, 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. The present 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 demonstrates 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 admission procedures and clear information before the study programme begins, and demands 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 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 of 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 located at the right level of the national qualifications framework, and 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 the improvement of</p>

	<p>student learning, creates close links between research and teaching, and provides effective administration. Periodic assessment of study programmes means that the programmes, as well as other factors that play into students' learning trajectories, continually improve. Such assessments help to ensure that the programme and 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 of them, 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 programme. Even early-stage learning can become more project- and collaboration-oriented, with a workflow 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 or classroom-based teaching, like flipped classrooms, problem-based</p>

	<p>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 outside 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><b>Achieved learning</b> 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; 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, <b>internationalisation</b> is the integration of an international, intercultural and global dimension in the goals, organisation and actions of the higher education sector (cf. St.mld. 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 <b>relevant</b> 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 <b>educational leadership</b>. Good educational leadership is here understood as being involved in the development of study programmes, ensuring sufficient resources to all study programmes, 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>
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*Table 1: definition of quality dimensions*

### **1.3 Data and assessment tools**

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.

#### **1.3.1 Data**

The educational quality dimensions cited 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 links to the institutions' own webpages containing descriptions 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 supplement 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 between 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 statistikk om høgre 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 were 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, 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 høgre utdanning), and a set 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 could not be addressed, because such data is either not available, or not feasible for NOKUT to acquire within the evaluation time frame.

### 1.3.2 Assessment tools

The experts were provided with a grading scale intended to ensure a similar starting point for evaluation of each quality dimension and the overall quality of education within one discipline for each participating institution. The numeric grades are, however, not reproduced in this report. Instead, the experts provide substantial 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

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

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

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 panel's 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 sociology had three two-day meetings, in May, October and December of 2017. Between these three meetings, panel members worked individually and communicated primarily by email. The panel also employed a web portal for distribution of data for the assessment, draft assessments, and other relevant information.

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

The sociology 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 and discussion of the assessment content, as well as of the specific statements in the report. During the last meeting, each of the quality dimensions was discussed across multiple institutions. The overall report was completed in January 2018.

## **1.5 Sociology evaluation panel**

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

The sociology panel consists of three members, led by Professor Christofer Edling.

*Panel chair Christofer Edling, Lund University*

Christofer Edling is Dean of Social Sciences and Chaired Professor of Sociology at Lund University. Edling received his doctoral degree from Stockholm University in 1999, was a Pro Futura Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in Uppsala, and became a Docent in 2004. Before coming to Lund in 2012, he was Senior Lecturer and later Head of the Sociology Department at Stockholm University, and Full Professor at Jacobs University, a small liberal arts college in Bremen, Germany, where he was named teacher of the year in 2010. Edling has edited and authored sociology textbooks in Swedish and taught and developed courses in theory, methods, and methodology for first, second, and third cycles, targeted at both national sociology programmes and international liberal arts programmes.

*Panel member Gemma Edwards, University of Manchester*

Gemma Edwards is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Manchester, UK, where she has worked since 2007. She is Director of Teaching and Learning for Sociology, and prior to that she was Director of the Bachelors Sociology programme. In 2015 she received a University Teaching Excellence Award, and she is part of the Teaching Excellence Network. Edwards was Sociology's lead on the bid to become a Q-step centre<sup>3</sup>, as part of a step change in quantitative methods training in UK social science. She teaches courses on contemporary social theory and social movement studies, and has written the textbook *Social Movements and Protest* (Cambridge, 2014). Her research has revolved around participation in historical and contemporary social movements, German critical theory, and qualitative/mixed-method social network analysis.

*Panel member Frank van Tubergen, Utrecht University*

Frank van Tubergen is Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology, Utrecht University, Netherlands. In 2010, he was elected as a fellow of the Young Academy of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), and in 2011 as a member of the European Academy of Sociology. He was the Coordinator of the Bachelor and Master Programme in Sociology, Utrecht University; he teaches courses at BA, MA, and Ph.D. level, and he has given several workshops for Ph.D. students abroad. He has taught on many different topics, such as social networks, immigration, religion, social policy, and research methods. van Tubergen has written an introductory textbook on sociology, which is forthcoming with Routledge. He has also been nominated as best teacher of the Department in 2007 and 2013. His publications have appeared in various international journals, such as *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Demography*, and *European Sociological Review*.

The panel's work was supported by panel secretary senior researcher Silje Maria Tellmann (NIFU). From NOKUT, Erika Kvistad 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 the higher education institution upon completion of the programme. A master's degree is a second-cycle academic

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<sup>3</sup> Q-Step is a programme designed to promote a step-change in quantitative social science training in the UK. , currently funding 18 universities across Britain to establish Q-step centres and affiliates.

degree (120 ECTS). The degree requires previous study at bachelor level, in social sciences usually completed as separate bachelor's degree.<sup>4</sup>

In the sociology evaluation, 20 study programmes from eight institutions participated in the evaluation.

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Study programmes</b>
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)	1. BA Sociology 2. MA Sociology 3. PhD Sociology
University of Oslo (UiO)	4. BA Sociology 5. MA Sociology 6. PhD Social Sciences
University College of South-Eastern Norway (USN)	7. BA Sociology 8. MA Social Sciences
University of Stavanger (UiS)	9. BA Sociology
University of Bergen (UiB)	10. BA Sociology 11. MA Sociology
University of Agder (UiA)	12. BA Sociology 13. MA Sociology and Social Work 14. PhD Social Sciences
Nord University	15. BA Sociology 16. MA Social Sciences 17. PhD Sociology
University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT)	18. BA Sociology 19. MA Sociology 20. PhD Sociology

<sup>4</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 Sociology in Norway

While established as an independent discipline in Norway as late as in 1950, the roots of sociology in Norway can be traced all the way back to the pioneering empirical investigations of Eilert Sundt (1817–1875) in the middle of the 19th century. Eilert Sundt was a Lutheran priest who turned to science and systematic, empirical inquiries to uncover the living conditions, economic and cultural practices of people from different layers of society. Not only did Sundt do laborious statistical analysis of data sets on the living conditions of the Norwegian population – covering up to 180 000 persons, he also undertook extensive qualitative investigations of social practices of ordinary, often poor people in rural areas. In this way, Sundt contributed to the development of both quantitative and qualitative methods for the social sciences, and to the establishment of what became a long tradition of research into the social practices and living conditions of ordinary people.

As a social scientist, Eilert Sundt was not safeguarded by the institutional and economic stability that a tenure university position would have offered. He worked independently, but with a scholarship from the Norwegian government that was terminated in 1869, when the parliament stopped recognising the use of his investigations. From Sundt's death in 1875, it would take 75 years before sociology was established as a discipline of its own in Norway, when the Department of Sociology was founded in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Oslo in 1950. The first Chair in Sociology was established the previous year, and granted to Sverre Holm, who became the first permanent academic sociologist at the new department (Stalsberg, 2013).

Sociology had however been taught at the Faculty of Law at the University of Oslo since 1934 as part of their legal training, and from 1939, students could be awarded a magister degree in sociology at the Faculty of Law (Stalsberg, 2013). Sociology of Law continued to be a pillar in this department also after a separate Department of Sociology was established. In 1961, the sociologists of law separated from the criminologists at the Faculty of Law, and moved in with the Institute of Social Research (but still organised under the Faculty of Law). In 2000, sociology of law again merged with criminology, when the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law was established (Finstad, 2012). Departments of sociology are still found at both the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Oslo.

Simultaneously with the establishment of a sociology department at the University of Oslo, the Institute of Social Research (ISF) was founded in Oslo in 1950 as an independent research institute through a private donation. The social sciences were a fairly new field of research and education in Norway, but several Norwegian scholars had travelled abroad before and during the Second World War for studies and research stays. The initiative to establish a social science institute in Oslo came from a number of ambitious social scientists, among them Stein Rokkan and Vilhelm Aubert, who had visited research institutions in Europe and the USA. Sociology was, and still is, one of the core disciplines at the ISF, and the new social science faculties to emerge in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim often recruited scientific staff which had received research training and experience from the institute (Thue, 1997).

In 1963, the Faculty of Social Sciences was established at the University of Oslo, and the Department of Sociology became a unit at the new faculty, which awarded higher degrees in a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences (Nickelsen, 2013). In the subsequent years, sociology departments were also established at other universities in Norway. In 1966, a Department of Sociology

was founded at the University of Bergen, with Stein Rokkan as professor of sociology with a special duty to teach political sociology. Initially, the department was part of the Faculty of Humanities in Bergen, but moved to the Faculty of Social Sciences when founded in 1970. In Trondheim, teaching in sociology commenced in 1969, and in 1971 the Department of Sociology at the University of Trondheim was founded. In 1968, the University of Tromsø was founded, and the social sciences was one of three prioritised areas at the new university (Fulsås, 1993). Rather than organising the university in faculties with institutes, Tromsø decided to organise its activities in large institutes encompassing related disciplines, and this organisation is still visible at today's Department of Social Sciences, as it includes both Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology and Planning.

In parallel with the establishment of research and education in sociology at Norwegian universities, new social science research institutes with a thematic or regional profile were established. The institutes had different origins – some were privately owned, whereas most were under public ownership. They shared an orientation, however, towards conducting applied research, often on commission, or in collaboration with societal actors and governmental institutions (Gulbrandsen et al., 2012). Research on and for the expanding welfare state were at the core of activities of several institutes founded in these decades. These research institutes offered an important arena for sociological research in Norway, and the interplay between the institutes and the universities was strong.

From 1969 and onwards, regional district colleges in Norway were established with the purpose of providing short, vocational educations. They also started to provide traditional university subjects at basic and intermediate level, and gradually sociology gained foothold at the regional colleges. In Bodø, sociology has been a key discipline since the University College was established in Bodø in 1971 (now part of Nord University). In other colleges, sociology was introduced as educational programmes later, including in Vestfold (now part of University of South-Eastern Norway) in the 1990s, and in Stavanger (now University of Stavanger) and in Kristiansand (now part of University of Agder) where sociologists also have contributed to educational programmes in social work.

Over the past 25 years, higher education in Norway has gone through several reforms, which have changed the institutional landscape of higher education and research institutions, as well as the organisation of higher education programmes. In 1994, a major reform was carried out when about one hundred colleges were merged into 26 university colleges. Ten years later, the so-called Quality Reform announced further reorganisation. Foremost, the reform introduced new study programme structure, led to changes in the law regarding autonomy of institutions and their funding structure, and had important consequences for how educational provision in Norwegian universities and university colleges is organised. In addition to this, the reform was also the basis for establishing NOKUT. Moreover, the reform introduced the option for changing institutional categories, which led to the establishment of the above-mentioned Universities in Agder and in Stavanger, and later Nord University. The Norwegian landscape of higher education is still changing, especially after the so-called Structural reform that was launched in 2015. This reform set in motion a range of merger processes - between universities and university colleges, between colleges, and between university colleges and research institutes. In a short period, the number of higher education institutions as well as research institutes has reduced considerably.<sup>5</sup> This has also changed the landscape of sociological

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<sup>5</sup> Several of the mergers were implemented after the evaluation of sociology were set in motion, and accordingly some evaluated entities do no longer exist as single institutions, but form part of larger entities.

research and education in Norway, and the largest number of sociologists under one roof is now found at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (now Oslo Metropolitan University).

### 3 Sociology at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

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 programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Sociology
- PhD programme in Sociology

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Sociology
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>6</sup>	78	3 <sup>7</sup>
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>8</sup> .	64,0	69,7
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>9</sup> .	70	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>10</sup> .	101	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>11</sup>	41,4	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>12</sup> Per study programme: Average: 39,2	38,0	43,1

<sup>6</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>7</sup> This is the number that has been reported to DBH. NOKUT acknowledges that this number is most likely wrong.

<sup>8</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>9</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>10</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>11</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>12</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>13</sup>	32,5	72,2
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### **3.1 Organisation and resources**

Sociology is offered at the Department of Sociology and Political Science, and has been taught at the institution since 1969. Today, NTNU hosts both a bachelor's programme (including a one-year unit), a master's programme and a PhD programme in sociology.

Because of scarce resources and understaffed programmes, several courses are offered in large classes, and both temporary staff from other institutions and PhDs and post docs take part in teaching.

### **3.2 Initial competence**

The BA programme has 1.5 applicants per position, and the grade point requirement of incoming students is the second highest of the sociology programmes that are participating in the evaluation. The MA requires a BA in social science (with a strong preference for a sociology major) with grade C. The department specifically lists six BA sociology programmes in Norway that meet these requirements. The PhD requirement is an MA in a relevant area with at least grade B, and is subject to additional tests. The department supports students in presenting the sociology programme and university life to their old high schools, and the department offers presentations and guided campus tours for high school classes. Incoming BA students participate in academic introductory courses in academic writing and other core skills. The department is introducing new initiatives to build a stronger sense of community for new students, which involve students and Faculty. First year classes are also used to foster small group work and social interaction. Programmes at all levels emphasise academic and methods skills through entry requirements and course offerings.

The departmental emphasis on thorough application processes, and the clear communication of expectations, is very good. The panel finds room for improvement both with respect to promoting sociology to potential students, and in organising introductory activities for sociology students.

### **3.3 Programme design**

Students find the BA programme to be challenging, but highlight some issues regarding their motivation for study, and the integration of the programme. The first year builds cumulative depth in sociology, and includes qualitative and quantitative research methods training (15 ECTS). The second year consists of electives. The third year is also predominantly based around electives on general topics (in all 22.5 ECTS), and has mandatory ex phil. + sociological models + thesis. This structure is satisfactory, although the large component of electives may be creating challenges for a cumulative and integrated programme structure. More mandatory courses are recommended by the panel in order to enhance the coherence of the BA programme. Students find the MA programme to be the same as national average when it comes to core quality dimensions. The MA programme is strong on methods

<sup>13</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/>.

and theorising. However, in terms of content, the research methods training courses seem to offer little room for methods specialisation.

### **3.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

In line with the national picture, the Studiebarometeret results suggest that teaching methods are predominantly lecture and seminar based, with a greater than average use of written assignments (4.4. cf. 3.7 average). Within the BA and MA programmes, teaching and learning activities therefore appear to be rather traditional with a relatively low level of independent group work, project work or blended learning. The department might consider developing the teaching and learning activities in these fields to create more variation, and to encourage student engagement and motivation.

In practice, the panel sees more variety in assessment methods, with some signs of innovation. As an alternative to traditional term papers, courses experiment with blogs, presentations, and small research projects. Students are undertaking a range of activities therefore as part of a course, but this is not necessarily reflected in the formal assessment. The panel praises the strong emphasis placed upon students collecting, analysing, and discussing their own data at BA and MA level through a supervised dissertation/thesis. At both BA and MA level the thesis component includes an oral examination. Overall, the content, teaching, learning activities, and exams seem to be properly aligned so that students are allowed to learn what is described in the intended learning outcomes.

There is some experimentation with digital work methods, but this remains an area for expansion. Digital exams are used for some courses, and Blackboard is the course e-learning platform. The panel suggests that an e-learning strategy using Blackboard could be developed further, for example using quizzes for feedback, discussion boards, and peer-to-peer feedback. It is noted, however, that there are some promising innovations using digital methods, which have the potential to enhance the student experience in the longer term. These include the use of an interactive lecture room called “sandkassa” (the sandbox), compulsory assessments involving film-making, blogs and podcasts, an online only course involving digital exercises, and plans to implement flipped classrooms. These are examples of innovative practice around digital methods, which will be of interest to other programmes in Norway.

Innovations in teaching methods and assessment are clearly encouraged by institutional incentives. Sociology staff have benefitted from a teaching innovations fund, and an initiative to increase digital competence in teaching, learning and assessment (NTNU DRIVE). The department seems to have a strong focus therefore on developing teaching and learning activities and assessment. Overall, the panel got a clear picture of teaching being supported, rewarded, and recognised and this has been to the benefit of the programme.

### **3.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The academic environment appears lively, with quizzes, debates, mini conferences, and opportunities for MA students to present their work. There is often a social side to these activities, which is valuable for the sense of community. Although many of these activities are not organised by the department, it offers active and financial support. Even though events are open and students are encouraged to attend, it is not clear to what extent students participate in lectures, festivals, and other events. There are however active student organisations at all levels.

According to the survey responses of Studiebarometeret, the sociology students at NTNU are moderately satisfied with the learning environment, largely in line with the national average. Both BA and MA students are satisfied with the social environment. Student-staff relationships however score significantly below the national average. Students are also not satisfied with rooms for teaching and study, and this issue is acknowledged by the department.

Overall, NTNU offers a very good learning environment at all levels. The department might consider if some of these initiatives could be aligned/embedded with the learning programme in a meaningful way. The department also needs to consider seriously the causes and implications of student dissatisfaction with the student-staff environment.

### **3.6 Educational competence**

Teaching is given a high priority, from recruitment through to the provision of institutional incentives for existing staff to develop and innovate in pedagogical approaches (e.g. funds for developing new teaching methods). 95% of teaching is done by staff with a PhD or equivalent. All teaching staff are also engaged in research. Trial lectures are used in interviews, and new lecturers take a course in teaching (Pedup). There is also a system for recognising and rewarding good teaching at Faculty level. There are some examples of how these systems have positively influenced teaching and learning within sociology programmes.

### **3.7 Achieved learning**

The fraction of A and B grades for sociology students at the BA programme is 32.5, which is the second highest of the participating BA programmes (2017). For the MA students the number is 72.2, which is much higher than all of the other participating MA programmes. According to Studiebarometeret, students receive almost 10 hours per week in organised teaching, and at 22.7 hours per week in self-study, students put in more time than at most other universities and more than four weekly hours above the national average. The failure rate is approximately the same as the national average. NTNU awards more than average credits per student, the national high for full time sociology studies.

BA student scores in Studiebarometeret show several areas where NTNU score below the national average on achieved learning items. These include experience with research and development work, discipline or professional specific skills, cooperative skills, and oral communication skills. These scores perhaps reflect the assessment and teaching methods employed, e.g. the large emphasis upon written assignments and lectures. At the MA level, the Studiebarometeret scores are also below the national average on many items, including core skills such as theoretical knowledge, scientific work methods, experience with research work, and discipline specific skills.

There is a strong coherence between student workload in terms of study hours per week and the above average fraction of students that receive high grades in sociology programmes at NTNU. Just like sociology programmes at UiO, NTNU gets better than average students in, and gets better than average grades out of them. It is somewhat surprising that scores in Studiebarometeret indicate that student satisfaction with achieved learning is below the national average, and the panel suggests that the department look into this.

### **3.8 Internationalisation**

There are opportunities for students to study abroad and the department has several student exchange agreements (e.g. with Berkeley). However, the numbers of students going are in decline due to costs. The panel suggests developing agreements with other universities. To promote incoming students, there is one course in English (MA). The panel recommends developing more courses in English, and making sure that Norwegian students also participate in these classes in order to foster an international classroom. The research environment at NTNU is international, but currently there could be more spill-over into teaching. In terms of the curriculum, the topics and literature are heavily focused upon Norway and would benefit from further internationalisation. A research-oriented MA in English is highly recommended by the panel.

### **3.9 Relevance**

Students are satisfied with the general competence provided by the programme, for example skills in critical and independent thinking. The emphasis on critical thinking within the programme, particularly in the way in which theory is presented as a tool for analysis rather than a history of ideas, holds much potential for improving the relevance of the programme to students' lives. Students are less satisfied with the relevance of the programme for future employment, however, suggesting that this is an important area for development. The Studiebarometeret results indicate that BA students see the programme as providing competences helpful for occupational life (4.0), but are less confident about career opportunities (3.0). MA students are below average on development of occupational competence.

Within the programme, relevance is reduced largely to generic skills. Skills of analysis and presentation skills are however generic to graduates. While there is good emphasis upon the skills that students are getting, more can be done to connect sociological skills to future employment and to consider how they are best talked about to employers. The course SOS2016 (the sociological experience, 7,5 credits) is a very good initiative to meet this need, aiming to enable students to develop their creative use of sociology in society, and thus experience the relevance of their education. Further initiatives around careers that help sociology students to think specifically about the value that they can add in the labour market might be considered. UiO sociology careers website provides examples of a number of schemes that might provide valuable models. The alumni connections could be valuable to future initiatives. In terms of occupational and professional skills, the programme would also benefit from more consistent, cumulative training in research methods. These are skills highly valued in the labour market, both in more research-oriented occupations and for social policy jobs.

### **3.10 Educational leadership**

Study programmes are run in a satisfactory manner and developed by the Head of Department, Head of Teaching, and a staff management team. Resources can be difficult to secure since they are divided between the different subjects and programmes taught. This explains some of the issues around teaching rooms. Despite these resource restrictions, there appear to be management mechanisms in place for developing and evolving the programmes, and these are collaborative in nature and responsive to student feedback. The extent of student involvement and contribution in educational leadership committees is less clear. Integrating students further within the institution's management

mechanisms would be one way of improving staff-student relationships. Furthermore, maximising the role of strategic leadership from sociology is particularly important in the context of multi-disciplinary departments where sociology is not the sole focus.

### ***3.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education***

Overall, the strengths of the sociology programmes at NTNU are in the initial competence of the students, the learning environment that is fostered, and the innovations that are going on around teaching and assessment methods in order to introduce more variety. While digital methods remain an area for development, we see some promising initiatives at NTNU, such as the use of the interactive lecture room (sandbox). Teaching is clearly both valued and supported when it comes to encouraging innovation. While the design of the BA programme is satisfactory and reflects standard structures found elsewhere, it might benefit from increasing the number of compulsory/core courses for sociology students in order to improve the overall coherence of the programme. While there is evidence of a lively and active learning environment, it is important to investigate the issues raised by students around staff-student interactions. While achieved learning is very good, students appear less satisfied with some aspects of their achieved learning, particularly when it comes to research and development skills and discipline and profession specific skills. This links to an area that should be made a priority for improvements, which is making the study of sociology more relevant to students' future lives, and in particular, their future career opportunities. Finally, internationalisation should be a focus, and the panel recommends that consideration be given to the provision of a research-orientated MA in English.

## 4 Sociology at 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 university library. The Faculty of Social Sciences was established as a faculty in 1963, but several of the social science disciplines were previously taught at other faculties. Sociology was established as an independent discipline in 1950, and had its own department until the Department of Sociology and Human Geography was founded in 1996.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Sociology
- PhD programme in Social Sciences. Programme option: Sociology

University of Oslo (UiO)			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Sociology
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>14</sup>	107	41
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>15</sup> .	72,3	67,9
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>16</sup> .	101	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>17</sup> .	193	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>18</sup>	44,8	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>19</sup> Per study programme: Average: 34,4	36,6	30,1
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>20</sup>	41,8	46,4

<sup>14</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>15</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>16</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>17</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>18</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>19</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>20</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/>.

## **4.1 Organisation and resources**

The Department of Sociology and Human Geography at UiO offers a bachelor's programme (including a one-year unit) and a master's programme in sociology, and a PhD in social science (under the Faculty), with a programme option in sociology. Located together with Human Geography, the sociology programmes have some collaboration on thematic courses with the programmes in Human Geography. Students may also choose from a wide range of other subjects offered at the faculty, and the courses in sociology host many students enrolled in other study programmes at the faculty.

Student numbers are high, and the economy of the department is considered strong. Both PhD students and post docs contribute to teaching activities, and scientific staff are offered pedagogical training from the Faculty of Educational Sciences.

## **4.2 Initial competence**

UiO has about twice as many applicants for the BA programme as they have positions. Consequently, the grade points of incoming students are significantly higher than the national average for sociology, and students presumably come well equipped to the programme. The department provides a range of activities to promote the interest of potential students and to introduce incoming students. Promotion is done via social media, school visits, and open days. A successful one-year sociology programme is also on offer as an inroad to the sociology major and to counter declining demand for sociology as a priority subject. Early programme activities for new BA students include a 'welcome week', a 'buddy' system (of existing students), mini lectures, and social events. MA admission requires a C grade average and a sociology specialisation at the BA-level. Such a substantial and strict sociology entry requirement might risk excluding potentially strong students from other relevant backgrounds. In terms of introduction, MA students have a welcome day with senior students and, since 2016, they are assigned a personal tutor from among the academic staff. MA students are also offered a mentoring programme with sociology alumni working outside of the university. The PhD programme is in high demand with many more applicants than positions. Selection is based on an evaluation of research proposals, grades and previous academic work. Half of the approximately 50 PhD students are employed at, and pursue their research in, external research institutes.

With the highest grade points of incoming BA students in the country, there is no doubt that the geographical location of UiO provides a national competitive advantage that is hard for other universities to match. Still the institution does not rest on its laurels. Promotion of sociology studies and the introduction for incoming BA and MA students are strong points. The use of 'buddies', tutors, and mentors is an excellent way of introducing students to the programme, to sociology, and to the application of sociological skills. The panel suggests that the sociology entry requirement for the MA programme should be reconsidered as it risks excluding strong students from neighbouring disciplines. An explicit methods requirement for the MA could be introduced and it would make sense to raise the grade requirement from C to B.

## **4.3 Programme design**

The BA programme consists of a mixture of introductory subjects, classical and modern social theory, qualitative and quantitative methods, various thematically orientated courses, electives, and an individual thesis. The MA programme is a continuation of this setup. The programme works well in

teaching students to think critically and independently. Students can specialise in areas of their own interest, such as inequality or migration. The programme structure could be more cumulative, however. The research methods courses also come too late in the programme, especially the course on quantitative research methods (4th semester). The panel thinks that students would benefit from research methods training earlier in the 1st or 2nd semester, and that methods and techniques are best integrated into the substantive courses.

The introduction to sociology course is very comprehensive, i.e. 20 credits, and strongly topic-oriented. Its focus is less upon thinking like a sociologist, and more of an introduction to different sociological topics (organisations, health, family, etc.). It might benefit from paying more attention to the tools that are essential for sociology students, such as the art of asking good sociological questions, how to formulate sociological theories and hypotheses, and how to relate hypotheses to observations. Not unlike other programmes in Norway, the BA programme would benefit from more research methods training. It is currently thin on quantitative methods and statistics, for example (SOS1120, 10 credits). In addition, there appears to be a heavy emphasis on classics and history in the BA programme at the expense of more contemporary sociological work. The Modern Social Theory course for example requires updating to reflect contemporary social thought. This should be reflected upon to ensure there is not a mismatch between the knowledge presented to students and the current state of knowledge in the field. The panel therefore recommends updating the BA programme with more current research and approaches.

#### **4.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

The content, teaching and learning activities, and exams, appear to be properly aligned so that students are able to learn what is described in the intended learning outcomes. Many courses have mandatory assignments throughout the semester that must be completed before the students can sit the exams, thereby encouraging active engagement throughout the academic term. Some of these assignments are graded and count with a certain percentage of the final grade for the course. Also, courses – and in particular the seminars – are designed so that students learn to plan, compile data and write the relevant genres of academic writing as an integrated part of the courses.

While teachers have the freedom to use the teaching methods they wish, the programme is predominantly delivered through lectures and seminars, and written assignments and exams. This traditional mix is not discordant with the national picture. Nevertheless, the department might consider developing the teaching and learning activities to create more variation and to encourage student engagement and motivation.

The panel did see positive signs that teaching methods are under development. Some classes utilise class buzzers and digital methods in order to introduce variety. Digital exams are used (Inspira), and some podcasts made available. In 2018, UiO will participate in the pilot of Canvas, a digital platform which offers the potential for more interactivity. Recently, the BA research methods courses have been redesigned and show much greater variety and innovation in their practical, hands on, mini-project based approaches. The panel considers the redesigned methods courses to be examples of best practice in their variety and use of digital methods. Methods courses use video clips for example to help guide students with statistical procedures, make use of e-learning platforms within classroom methods teaching (e.g. datacamp.com), and are developing data collection apps.

The continued development of teaching approaches, particularly with respect to project work and digital methods, will be important since other kinds of teaching methods scored lower than average on Studiebarometeret, such as group work without teacher, project work and digital work methods at MA or BA level. The need to diversify teaching and assessment methods is highlighted as a current priority by UiO, who plan to work first on the MA level by developing more formative assessments and varied methods of assessment, which can then be filtered down to the BA. The panel suggests that when developing new assessment, it should be considered that while students evaluate assessments fairly positively, the scores are a little lower for reflection and critical thinking so students might gain by assessment redesigns that focus on those specific skills. Wider institutional incentives for staff to develop their approaches are also important, and are not as extensive at UiO as elsewhere. To be effective, incentives require university funding and support. Changing the way teaching is perceived in its value and emphasis within the institution will be important to the success of this endeavour.

#### **4.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

There are several departmental initiatives to create an active and engaging learning environment that reaches beyond the regular programmes. Many of these initiatives take the form of funding and support for student initiatives and include lunch seminars, a yearly sociological week, a student newsletter, and travel support to the national association meetings. It is difficult to assess if these initiatives reach all students. PhD students are advised to join a monthly faculty-lead seminar with paper presentations and discussions that provide a forum and meeting place for PhD students within and outside of the university. The department organises a yearly flagship lecture (the Aubert lecture) that certainly adds to the academic credibility of sociology, and should be valuable for PhD students. However, it is less clear to what extent this lecture is an integrated aspect of the learning environment for BA and MA students.

According to Studiebarometeret, the students are moderately happy with the social and learning environment, which is very much in line with the national average. Students are happy with the library service, which is also the case across universities; however, they score below the national average on the ICT environment.

The support for student led initiatives is very good. However, there is a risk that the department hands over responsibility for the learning environment outside of programmes to students alone. One small suggestion would be to embed the Aubert lecture into the programme (seminar, paper assignments, Q&A, masterclass, etc.) to really make it a concern for the junior sociology community at UiO.

#### **4.6 Educational competence**

There is room for improvement in terms of providing incentives (at all levels of the university) for staff to develop their teaching and pedagogical competence. The self-assessment report is honest about the barriers to this development, despite staff often being willing to engage with discussions and reforms around their own teaching. These barriers include time restrictions, especially in balancing the needs of research with the demands of teaching. A second barrier comes from a persisting perception that research is the main emphasis of the university, e.g. in hiring and in promotion. Further ways to emphasise the importance of teaching, encouraging teaching innovation, and rewarding good teaching should be introduced. Currently, training of 100 hours is required for new staff, to be completed within

the first 2 years. PhDs are also provided with teaching opportunities and training. However, the panel recommends that more opportunities for continual professional development be introduced for existing staff, and alongside the regular teaching seminars for staff, some kind of annual teaching away day, for example, where training and development needs can be identified and met. This would also be a regular opportunity to share best practice, which would be helpful here since there are pockets of innovation that could be shared with existing staff who have little time. A more extensive system of peer review of teaching could also have the function of sharing best practice and identifying common training needs.

#### **4.7 *Achieved learning***

At 41.8%, the fraction of A+B grades for BA students at UiO is significantly above the average of the participating BA programmes (30 percent). For the MA students at UiO the fraction of A+B grades is 46.4 which is the third highest of the participating MA programmes. Studiebarometeret indicates that BA students put in 23.7 hours per week in self-study, which is more than at most other universities. The failure rate significantly lower than the national average. MA students only put in 18.3 hours, and receive approximately the same amount of teacher-led teaching as the BA students (8.8 vs 7.9 hours per week).

Students' satisfaction with achieved learning is largely in line with the national average. Students are less satisfied with the 'discipline and professional skills', and their experience with 'research and development work'. Possibly, these results reflect the need to pay more attention to research methods training throughout the programme (and not only in stand-alone methods courses). MA students report lower than average satisfaction with cooperative skills.

There is a strong coherence between student workload in terms of study hours per week and the large fraction of students that receive high grades at UiO. The department not only put their students to work, but also have students achieve strong results, which is very good. The department should look to improve opportunities for research and development work. Since the programmes at BA and MA offer lots of scope for achieving professional/discipline specific skills, the department should review the ways in which these are communicated to students.

#### **4.8 *Internationalisation***

Internationalisation is well established. Students (BA, MA, PhD) have the opportunity to expand their horizon and follow courses elsewhere. 14 BA students went on exchange in 2016. The panel questions why no MA students went on exchange. PhDs are also encouraged to go abroad as part of their studies, although evidence is lacking on how many do so. In addition, the programmes at UiO offer a good place to study for foreign students. There are four English language courses in the BA programme, and four in the MA programme, bringing an international dimension to some of the courses students study at BA and MA level. It is unclear, however, if the programmes attract sufficient foreign student numbers. The PhD is an internationally advertised programme. The panel thinks there is some room for improvement in terms of updating the course materials and topics, which tend to focus on Norway, and Norwegian authors. The panel recommends a more international outlook in teaching materials and topics.

## **4.9 Relevance**

There are many positive initiatives and examples of best practice around making the study of sociology relevant to students' future employment and career prospects. The sociology careers website carries an impressive array of material, for example, case study interviews with alumni talking about their jobs and how sociology is valuable to what they do. There is a novel scheme called 'shadow a sociologist at work', and a mentoring scheme run by alumni for MA students. What is particularly valuable about these initiatives is the way in which they emphasise how the knowledge and skills acquired from the study of sociology are useful in the labour market. Too often, the emphasis within social science degrees is placed purely upon transferable skills, neglecting the skills gained from the sociology-specific content of the degree. UiO offers excellent examples to students of how sociology will benefit them in future employment. The intended learning outcomes of the BA and MA also provide students with a helpful language for talking about the knowledge, skills and competence they have gained from their studies, and unlike many other programmes, show how they may be relevant for areas outside academia. It should be noted that for PhDs the learning outcomes are, by contrast, academia-specific, while only half of PhDs go on to an academic career.

Nevertheless, the panel stresses that student awareness of the relevance of the programme needs to be improved. Studiebarometeret scores for 'provides good career opportunities' were 3.0 for the BA programme (out of 5), and 'is relevant to natural occupations' was 3.6 for the BA, and 3.6 for the MA respectively. Possible strategies for addressing this might include further embedding the employment initiatives into the programme in face-to-face activities. A careers panel event could be run with alumni who have contributed online profiles within something like the introduction to sociology course. Opportunities can be created for discussing careers in mentoring situations with staff (such as personal tutoring programmes). Further collaboration with the labour market can also help ensure that the faculty assessment of what is relevant is based upon actual exchange and interaction with the labour market.

There are also critical questions about how the programme design and content (which heavily emphasises classical theory and philosophy and less so research methods training) prepares students for future life and employment. In terms of occupational and professional skills, consistent, cumulative training in research methods would focus on producing researchers with relevant skills for the labour market, both in more research-oriented occupations, but also for social policy jobs.

## **4.10 Educational leadership**

Educational leadership appears very good. Heads of Research are responsible for PhDs, while the Head of Studies is responsible for the taught BA and MA programmes. Each has a programme council. Different levels of academic management are taking part in the development of the teaching programme (including the director, staff, and students). One of the strengths is the active engagement in development of the programmes shown by leadership and the programme councils. The programme councils are explicit about their use of quality assurance and monitoring procedures. These include student feedback on programmes, which is regularly generated and reflected upon. The ways in which the programme is continually monitored are made explicit on the website and in relation to individual courses as well as the programmes as whole. There is a high level of critical reflexivity shown about the programme, its resources, and where changes are required.

#### **4.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education**

A major strength of the BA sociology at UiO is the strong initial competence of students entering the programme. UiO attracts amongst the strongest students in Norway and provides a very good range of induction and students support activities. The panel suggests that UiO consider revising the entrance requirements for the MA programme to encourage strong students from related disciplines. It is clear that the students completing sociology programmes have above average levels of achieved learning, and are satisfied with their learning. Students' learning also takes place in an active and lively learning environment, which is international in nature. Despite the lack of some institutional focus on the value of teaching relative to research agendas, teaching and assessment methods are an area of strength because initiatives already exist to improve variety and to encourage innovation. There are promising uses of digital methods, and the assessments used in methods training have moved towards hands-on project based assignments where this is a valuable emphasis upon students collecting and working with their own data. These initiatives around teaching and assessment can be further expanded across the programme, and would benefit from the provision of institutional incentives. The panel also suggests that the design of the BA sociology programme would benefit from revisions to increase the amount of research methods training and to bring it into the programme at an earlier stage. The content of teaching could also be more contemporary in orientation. One significant issue is that the programme design did not appear to reflect the research of the department, and the panel suggests that a strategy around research-led teaching could improve the distinctive features of studying sociology at UiO. Concentrating more upon research methods training would also help to make the study of sociology more relevant to student's future lives, study and careers. The panel commends the excellent careers section of the sociology website and innovative schemes like shadow a sociologist at work, but suggests that student perceptions of relevance still indicate that this is an area to improve.

## 5 Sociology at University College of South-Eastern Norway (USN)<sup>21</sup>

The University College of South-Eastern Norway was founded in 2016 after a merger between the University Colleges of Telemark and the University College of Buskerud and Vestfold. USN has been through several reorganisations, and the sociology programme is now organised under the Business School at USN. The university college has a portfolio with mainly vocational courses, but the campus in Vestfold has hosted a programme in sociology since the early 1990s.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Social Sciences

University College of South-Eastern Norway (USN)			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Social Sciences
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>22</sup>	77	8
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>23</sup> .	66,9	54,1
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>24</sup> .	50	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>25</sup> .	60	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>26</sup>	28,3	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>27</sup> Per study programme: Average: 36,8	39,7	28,0
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>28</sup>	27,1	37,0

<sup>21</sup> In May 2018 the institution obtained university status and is now called University of South-Eastern Norway. This assessment refers to University College of South-Eastern Norway (HSN), given that this was the institutional context in which the assessment was conducted.

<sup>22</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>23</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>24</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>25</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>26</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>27</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>28</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/>.

## **5.1 Organisation and resources**

Sociology was first offered as a one-year Minor and later as a Major, before the bachelor programme was established in the early millennium. In 2009, an interdisciplinary master's programme in social science was established, offering students in sociology an opportunity for further studies at the campus in Vestfold. In the first decade of the bachelor's programme, only 3–4 sociologists worked full time with the programme. They devoted most of their time to teaching and assessment activities, and research was done on an individual basis. Nevertheless, they have reorganised the course content, reading lists and curricula several times. With the latest reorganisations, the resource situation of the programmes is again constrained, but they also see new opportunities in the location at the Business School, with possible professional cooperation with economics and history.

## **5.2 Initial competence**

The grade points of incoming students is the lowest of the programmes participating in the evaluation. Student recruitment has been satisfactory to good, but there are potential problems in the future over securing higher quality students from the region. There are however many activities organised to promote the interest of potential students for the BA programme, via social media, school visits, and more, and an initiative that offers sociology taster courses to pupils at a local high school. There is a good introductory programme for incoming BA students, including a social programme fostering a good level of student integration and community that appears to be present throughout the programme. The MA programme is in social science and requires an average grade C and documented knowledge of quantitative methods.

The promotion of sociology studies and the introduction for incoming BA students is well developed. The use of excursions, a film club, and close collaboration with high schools is noteworthy. The MA entry requirement for methods training is an important signal of the skill requirements for a working sociologist.

## **5.3 Programme design**

The programme structure is fairly standard, with methods, and classical and contemporary theory at the core. This is complimented by a number of thematic courses (media, welfare, marginalisation, economic sociology). The introductory course focuses on classics in sociology (Mead, Goffman, Parsons, Simmel, Bourdieu), and thus has little coverage of the state-of-the-art research, theories and methods. The follow-up course on 'Four sociological traditions' likewise focuses on the history of ideas in sociology; with anything published after 1930 regarded as 'modern sociological theory'. The panel recommends extending the coverage of contemporary sociological theories and findings. The panel would also have liked to see more evidence of progression in sociology courses. We recommend developing a more cumulative programme, in which (contemporary) theory and research methods are more strongly integrated, and in which the proximity to economics and business that USN offers is fully exploited in the thematic content.

## **5.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

The main teaching methods are lectures and seminars. The main assessment methods are written work, oral presentations (individual and in groups), and PC-based exercises. Written exams are, however, the most frequent assessment tool, and Studiebarometeret suggests that written assignments are used more than the national average. The programme is also more structured than other programmes in Norway. Students have more organised work compared to the national average (11.2 hours a week compared to 8.8 hours on average). Altogether, teaching and assessment seem to be rather traditional and could be further developed. While it was noted that staff have autonomy in deciding upon the teaching and assessment methods for their course, the panel considered that the programme would benefit from the further development of teaching at a strategic group level. This could produce a programme level sense of the teaching and assessment methods used at the different levels of the programme, and would help to implement a strategy for expanding variety and innovation.

Digital work methods are used slightly more than average, although exploiting the opportunities for independent work on an electronic learning management platform or similar seems to be limited. Digital examinations are implemented as standard. Canvas is used for assessment submission and feedback, and to host teaching materials. Few courses in the programme currently use methods like knowledge clips, online peer-to-peer feedback, flipped classrooms, or podcasts. There are particular opportunities available for developing e-learning considering the geographical circumstances of the institution and the challenges this generates. The panel suggest that distance-learning opportunities be investigated, and that this could have major beneficial effects for engaging with students from outside the region.

## **5.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The department offers a series of extracurricular activities for students, including public lectures, student camps, social events, sociological film screenings with discussions, and field trips. Representatives from organisations and firms are invited to inform about careers and to increase engagement with the labour market. These initiatives are either organised from above or emerge from student participation in programme board meetings. The goal is that at least two activities be offered to students every year.

According to Studiebarometeret, BA sociology students at USN are reasonably satisfied with the learning environment, reporting scores are at or slightly above the national average, a case in point being the relationship between students and the relationship between students and staff.

It is good that a range of activities are organised, that they are (partly) based on student input, and that a reasonable frequency of such activities is guaranteed. It is very good that such activities include active engagement with the surrounding society.

## **5.6 Educational competence**

Educational competence is high on the agenda. Trial lectures are used in hiring decisions. Formal qualifications and teaching experience are desirable. Seven out of eight sociology staff have PhDs and all teaching on the BA and MA is done by academic staff. The university provides a Postgraduate Certificate in Education that enables staff to complete basic training, and new staff have to complete it

within 2 years. A teaching and learning centre at the university also supports educational competence. Sociology courses are evaluated midway and at the end of each semester. The department intends to introduce a teaching merit system and more peer reviews of programmes.

### **5.7 Achieved learning**

According to Studiebarometeret, sociology students at USN receive more organised teaching time than average, but they spend significantly less time on their own self-study. In fact, the panel considers it notable that, according to Studiebarometeret, sociology students at USN put in 10 hours less per week than a sociology student at UiO. The panel has no information on grades or failure rates for USN.

Student scores on Studiebarometeret reflect national averages almost exactly. However, for 'innovative thinking' USN sociology students score significantly above the national average (4.2/3.6).

The department should reflect and act upon the fact that sociology students at USN manage to pass through the programme on a time-investment that is only half of what is expected for full time study. The panel is concerned that this is a quality issue and that the student workload has to be increased. The high student satisfaction with the training in innovative thinking is very positive. The panel wonders if this is related to the fact that sociology is situated in the business school. The department should try and exploit and develop this intersection further, and it could serve as food for thought for other sociology programmes in the country.

### **5.8 Internationalisation**

There is an established study abroad scheme for BA and MA students, with an impressive list of partnerships globally. There are some issues, however, with take up of these schemes. Students tend to be drawn from the region and study close to home due to various commitments, so study abroad numbers are low. Currently, there are no courses in English, but the programme is trying to introduce some so that international students can study at USN. The panel encourages this, and recommends a more international outlook in the teaching materials as well.

### **5.9 Relevance**

The programme helps students to develop skills relevant to their future lives, study and employment but this is an area of relative weakness compared to other programmes. While general competences are well met, the programme can better emphasise the relevance of the BA for future career and labour market opportunities. Currently, the BA is discussed in very general terms and possibly as a preparation for MA studies. It would be beneficial to stress the sociological/analytical skills and transferable skills of the programme. Similar improvements can be made in the description of relevance on the MA programme, which is currently underselling the transferable skills acquired. The initiatives around careers should focus more upon articulating how sociological knowledge and skills (specifically) benefit certain occupations. There are particular opportunities that could be exploited here through the proximity of sociology to business and economics within the institution. There is space to expand upon this in the section on the website for BA and MA careers. UiO's sociology website provides an example of best practice in this respect. The website should also stress that BA students will be qualified for undertaking any MA in sociology, not just the USN programme.

The limited labour market opportunities in the region for social science students suggest the importance of an explicit employability agenda for the programme. This would benefit from extending research methods training within the programme, since these skills are attractive to a range of research-orientated and more social/public policy jobs. There are, however, some useful initiatives underway. These include linking employers into dissertation research projects at BA and MA level, which holds much potential for enhancing relevance. Speakers from workplaces are also invited to student career events. It is clear that these kinds of initiatives have a positive effect upon students' perceptions of the relevance of the programme. Compared to the national average, USN students find the relevance of the programme to be higher in terms of good career opportunities (3.3 out of 5), competence to be useful to occupational life (4.1 out of 5), and relevance to natural occupational fields (3.9 out of 5).

### **5.10 Educational leadership**

The educational leadership of the programme appears satisfactory. A positive feature is the collegiate leadership model that is in place at programme level. Different levels are taking part in the development of the teaching programme (i.e. director, staff, students). The programme is managed by the programme coordinator and programme council, including student representatives. Mechanisms are in place for the monitoring and development of programmes, although the extent of external review is less clear. Attention is given to the mechanisms for the effective distribution and use of resources, and a system called Work Plan is employed to ensure this. The importance of acting upon student feedback is usefully emphasised. All courses are evaluated through mid-term student evaluations and their results discussed with class representatives and action plans agreed upon. Student survey results are also systematically reflected upon.

Sociology is taught as a branch of the School of Business, and the Head of Department is responsible for several academic fields, which may dilute the strategic leadership presence of sociology specifically. The panel recognises that there are structural factors here shaping educational leadership and that the securing of resources for sociology presents significant challenges for the programme.

### **5.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education**

While there are some problems with recruitment to the BA sociology from within the region, USN provides incoming students with an impressive array of social and academic support activities and this results in a strong sense of student community. The active and lively learning environment is a major strength, and this is reflected in high student satisfaction scores. The sociology programmes are well run with a high value placed upon educational competence. Teaching and assessment methods are appropriate, although diversifying methods and innovation in teaching is an area for development, especially when it comes to digital methods and possible distance learning opportunities. The panel recommends some revisions to the BA programme design in order to make the programme more coherent and cumulative, and to increase the amount of research methods training offered. Theory teaching can also be updated to reflect a more contemporary orientation. In considering programme revisions, the panel also recommends that USN investigate the disparity in self-reported study hours for the BA programme compared to other BA programmes nationally. The amount of reported self-study hours is half of what we have found in some other institutions, and this is a matter for urgent reflection when it comes to issues of programme quality. Another area where improvements can be

targeted regards making the study of sociology more relevant for students' future lives, studies and careers. There are some initiatives around careers that can be expanded, and the focus should be upon articulating the skills that sociology students gain from their study for future labour market opportunities. The panel considers that there is very good potential at USN to show the relevance of study because of the proximity to business and economics programmes. The location within the Business school could be exploited in order to develop a distinctive profile for the sociology programmes, which would be attractive to both students and potential employers alike.

## 6 Sociology at University of Stavanger (UiS)

The University of Stavanger was founded in 2005, when Stavanger University College of Applied Sciences was granted status as a university. The university is currently organised in six faculties, and sociology is taught at the Department of Media and Social Sciences under the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology

University of Stavanger (UiS)		
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>29</sup>	113
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>30</sup> .	71,6
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>31</sup> .	80
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>32</sup> .	99
	Grade points (2017) <sup>33</sup>	35,4
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>34</sup> Per study programme:	43,4
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>35</sup>	29

<sup>29</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>30</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>31</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>32</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>33</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>34</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>35</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/>.

## **6.1 Organisation and resources**

The department offers a one-year course and a bachelor's programme in sociology. Several courses are also open to students enrolled in other programmes, and the first year of the programme therefore has the most students. Some courses, such as methodology, are offered jointly with other programmes in the department, mainly political science. The budgetary situation of the department is described as relatively good, due to the large classes in sociology and in political science.

Staffing is multidisciplinary, and the programme offers specialisations with a more vocational orientation within leadership, organisational and workplace topics, and in societal safety. It also draws on the proximity to IRIS (International Research Institute of Stavanger) in recruitment and in collaborations on teaching and assessment.

## **6.2 Initial competence**

The grade points are among the lower of the participating programmes, and there are 1.3 applicants per position in the BA programme. Beyond the joint university open day and information packages (that include sociology), there appears to be little active promotion or recruitment activities for sociology specifically. Incoming students get an introductory week that has both academic and social content. Senior students introduce new students to university life through lectures and a mentoring system. A shared university 'study lab' provides academic support.

Even though the university is actively promoting its programmes, the panel recommends that specific initiatives should be introduced to highlight sociology specifically.

## **6.3 Programme design**

The BA programme consists of various topic-oriented courses, theory courses, and methods courses. The BA thesis (20 credits) runs over two semesters. It is interdisciplinary, but with enough sociological content. The programme has a good level of coherence in its design, and some state-of-the-art sociological research is incorporated into the BA programme. The quantitative component of the research methods training comes a bit late in the BA programme (semester 3). The panel suggests that it would be better to have this course earlier, so that the more substantive (topic-oriented) courses can integrate these methods skills. At the moment, these topic-oriented courses seem to focus upon theoretical argumentation rather than methods of inquiry and empirical evidence.

## **6.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

Like elsewhere in Norway, lectures are the dominant mode of delivery. There is notably less reported use of seminar teaching in Studiebarometeret compared to the national average (1.7 cf. 3.4 out of 5.0), although more use of group work without teacher (3.4 cf. 2.2 out of 5.0). Some issues regarding the physical infrastructure restrict the availability of rooms appropriate for group work. The main assessment methods include home examinations, school examinations, and oral presentations. There is less self-study in the programme compared to elsewhere in Norway (13 hours a week cf. 18 on average). The content, teaching and learning activities, and exams, seem to be properly aligned so that students are able to learn what is described in the intended learning outcomes.

Diversifying teaching and learning methods is clearly an area for development. There are some infrastructural resources available for teaching development, although whether these have been utilised by sociology staff to aid the programme is not clear. Some good examples of teaching and assessment innovation have not been sustained due to resource restrictions (e.g. the use of portfolio assessments). The consequence of larger lecture based methods is less individual and small group interaction, less frequent assignments and feedback, and fewer oral presentations. These challenges – while well acknowledged – might be more imaginatively met. Consideration could be given to activating students for the purposes of peer review (see the Peer-Wise software programme). This would enhance opportunities for feedback. The combination of large class sizes and scarce resources also suggests that developing strategies around digital methods and e-learning will be particularly valuable for the programme. Currently, the programme uses digital examinations (Inspira) and Canvas as a learning platform. There could be more use of quizzes (currently used in class, but could also include online quizzes completed outside of the class, as these are another resource-effective way to generate forms of feedback in large groups), use of podcasting and knowledge clips to diversify modes of delivery, and flipped classrooms, which may open up the possibility of using workshop models.

Altogether, teaching and assessment seems to be rather traditional. Large student cohorts are seen to prohibit extensive feedback and more time-consuming teaching and learning activities. However, this seems to be all the more reason to develop teaching and assessment, where needed, with the support of the pedagogical learning centre and the department responsible for developing digital learning tools.

## **6.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

There are several academically relevant activities in and outside of the university on offer for students. These include seminars and lectures, debates, and cultural events. However, the department appears mostly to encourage student participation in activities, rather than developing and launching such activities with their own students in mind. There is a student sociological association, but it is not clear to what extent their activities are supported by the department.

According to Studiebarometeret, the sociology BA students at UiS almost exactly reflect the national averages on learning environment items.

It is very good that there is such a wide range of activities available for sociology students in Stavanger, and that student participation in these activities is encouraged. The department should explicitly support and (as far as possible) fund student initiatives, and the department should consider taking a more active role in these initiatives and strive to align them with the educational programme.

## **6.6 Educational competence**

Teaching experience and skills must be evidenced in recruitment processes, or new staff must acquire them within two years of the post. Trial lectures are used in hiring decisions. Teaching competence is also part of academic promotion processes. 85% of teaching is done by staff with a PhD. There is some valuable institutional support offered for developing educational competence. For example, funds can be applied for to develop teaching and a Learning Environment Committee gives yearly awards for good teaching environments. Teaching is also talked about as having a high status, with equal time divided between research and teaching.

## **6.7 Achieved learning**

At 29%, the fraction A+B grades for sociology students at UiS is slightly lower than the national average. The average fail rate at 5.18 percent is slightly lower than the national average. There is a discrepancy between these results and the fact that, according to Studiebarometeret, sociology students at UiS put in about 5.5 hours less self-study per week than the national average, thus receiving approximately the same result for considerably less effort.

The responses from BA students in Studiebarometeret reflect the national averages for achieved learning. Given the vocational specialisations offered, one would have expected the scores for experience with research and development work to be higher. Nevertheless, student satisfaction with discipline or professional specific skills are above the national average.

The department should reflect and act upon the fact that sociology students at UiS seem to pass through the programme on a time-investment that is significantly less than that assumed for full time study, and considerably less than the national average for sociology programmes. The panel is concerned that this is a quality issue and that the student workload has to be increased.

## **6.8 Internationalisation**

The programme has exchange agreements with other universities, although few students seem to make use of them. High priority is given to the international agenda with the establishment of an International Forum across programmes, something the panel encourages expanding, particularly given the international orientation of Stavanger. It is recommended to create an international classroom at the BA and MA level, and to offer (at least some) BA and MA courses in English. The panel would also recommend that the department create a general environment that comes across as welcoming to exchange students (e.g., websites and course descriptions in English).

## **6.9 Relevance**

The programme does a satisfactory job of helping students develop skills that are relevant to their future lives, studies and employment, although this job is weak in some areas. Some of these weaknesses are already identified and are leading to positive developments in relation to future employment to help students find places within the labour market. For example, placement and work experience opportunities are being brought into the programme, and a practice based 20 credit course is being introduced for 2018. It is also recognised that students are slightly more positive than average about the relevance of the programme, particularly when it comes to providing good career opportunities (3.5 cf. 3.1 out of 5). This is an area in which the programme is particularly well placed to excel, given that the content of the programme provides skills useful for careers in human relations and social security. Other highlighted areas, like risk management, HRM, and leadership, prepare students well for labour market opportunities. It is therefore important to maximise the potential that the programme has when it comes to relevance, and this dimension could be developed as area of particular strength for UiS sociology.

In order to do this, the programme would benefit from developing occupational and professional skills through consistent, cumulative training in research methods. These are skills highly valued in the labour market, both in more research-oriented occupations, and for social/ public policy jobs. The

emphasis on skills (beyond those regarding writing) can be incorporated into the intended learning outcomes. Sections of the website relating to future careers can also be developed further (e.g. the 'what can you be?' section of the website), including statements of the transferable skills that students obtain from the programme. It is good practice to ask former students what they have gone on to do after graduation, and opportunities for current students to interact with alumni could be offered, for example through careers panels. The UiO sociology website offers a helpful example of best practice with respect to the way it discusses careers.

### **6.10 Educational leadership**

The educational leadership of the programme appears satisfactory overall. The programme is overseen by the sociology programme coordinator, who is also responsible for programme development. A regular Strategy Committee coordinates across programmes, and includes the programme coordinators and the Head of Department. It raises issues for discussion at faculty meetings. There is yearly monitoring and revision of programmes, and an external review every three years. It is positive that different levels are taking part in the development of the teaching programme (i.e., director, staff, students), and it is clear that very good practices are in place for developing study programmes in a coherent and managed manner. The processes of dialogue between the Strategy Committee and faculty meetings ensures the flow of information and involvement of leadership at all levels, and allows the Faculty to participate in strategically important decisions.

There are many very good features, therefore, to the educational leadership structures and mechanisms in place. Nevertheless, the issue of securing appropriate resources for the programme remains. This is a management issue, and the challenges discussed around teaching and assessment methods demonstrate that there is some way to go in terms of educational leadership securing that the required resources are in place for sociology. It is recognised that there are institutional barriers in terms of the availability of resources, but this makes the effectiveness of sociology leadership within the Strategy Committee even more important.

### **6.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education**

Overall, the programmes at UiS are well run and place a welcome emphasis upon the value of teaching. There is a good range of induction activities for students, but the panel suggests the introduction of more sociology-specific promotion and recruitment activities. The programme adopts a largely standard structure, and is strong on a sense of identity and distinctive profile within the highlighted areas of human relations and social security. However, the panel does recommend some revisions to the programme design. Research methods training should come earlier in the programme and might be more embedded into the theoretical/topical courses. There are also less reported self-study hours a week compared to the national average, raising important quality issues for reflection. It is clear that, while teaching and assessment methods are appropriate, they would benefit from more variety and innovation. Practical constraints around large group teaching and assessment are acknowledged, but must be more imaginatively met. Digital methods and e-learning should be developed in this context, and can be helpful for providing feedback to large groups (e.g., via quizzes and peer-to-peer feedback). There are some very good schemes, such as teaching development funds and teaching awards, which place significant emphasis upon the value of teaching, and with which sociology can further engage. Students are slightly more positive than average about the sociology

programme preparing them for future labour market opportunities. The panel believes that this reflects the potential that the emphasis upon human relations, HRM, social security and risk management has for making study relevant to students' future careers. It will be important to maximise the relevance of the programme, and the panel considers this to be a potential area of strength for UiS that is currently under-exploited.

## 7 Sociology at University of Bergen (UiB)

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

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Sociology

<b>University of Bergen (UiB)</b>			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Sociology
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>36</sup>	141	9 <sup>37</sup>
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>38</sup> .	72,6	59,4
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>39</sup> .	88	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>40</sup> .	94	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>41</sup>	36,3	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>42</sup> Per study programme: Average: 34,7	34,5	36,0
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>43</sup>	28,7	44,9

<sup>36</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>37</sup> This is the number reported to DBH. NOKUT acknowledges that this number might be wrong.

<sup>38</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>39</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>40</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>41</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>42</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>43</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 Organisation and resources**

The Department of Sociology offers a bachelor's programme and a master's programme in sociology, and they offer several courses at PhD level, which are integrated in the PhD in social sciences offered by the Faculty of Social Science. Both permanent and temporarily employed staff take part in teaching activities, and MA students contribute as teaching assistants at the BA level. Staff are also employed temporarily to contribute to teaching, and the department draws on the proximity with UNI Rokkan (research institute).

The administration of the programmes is mainly handled at the Faculty level, and only one administrative member of staff works close to full time with the programmes in sociology. Hence, academic staff also engage in administrative tasks related to education.

## **7.2 Initial competence**

The grade points are slightly above the average for the participating programmes, and the programme has about one applicant per position. The department is explicit in its ambition to maximise the grade points of incoming BA students, but it is not clear if this also extends to actively declining admissions at the cost of having fewer students in the programme. Beyond information on the webpage, there is some active promotion of sociology through interaction with local high schools. The MA requires a BA with grade C and major in sociology. Such a substantial and strict sociology entry requirement might risk excluding potentially strong students with other relevant backgrounds. There is a faculty wide introductory week for incoming BA students that includes the use of senior students as mentors, and that has some specific introductions for sociology students. During the first semester, all students do a 20 credit ExFac course specifically tailored to sociology. There is a thesis development seminar in place, but otherwise incoming MA students currently receive little support in terms of introduction. A mentoring system for incoming MA students is under consideration.

It is very good that the department aims at improving the grade point entry level and that they offer a sociology specific ExFac during the first semester. The panel appreciates that the student committee is an active partner in promotion and introduction activities, but this partnership should be further developed. The sociology entry requirement for the MA programme should be reviewed as it risk excluding strong students from neighbouring disciplines. Although most sociology BA programmes include some methods training, an explicit methods requirement for the MA should be introduced and the grade requirement raised from C to B.<sup>44</sup>

## **7.3 Programme design**

The BA programme structure is fairly standard, but specific attention is paid to the coherence between courses so that the programme avoids being fragmented through a collection of stand-alone courses. The elective courses offer many different topics. A point of concern, however, is that there are relatively few mandatory sociology courses (excluding the BA thesis, a total of 60 credits), which makes it more difficult to offer a cumulative program. In terms of programme content, UiB intend to reduce the focus on history/theory, and pay more attention to sociological analysis and contemporary

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<sup>44</sup> The department claims that MET102 or equivalent is a necessary entry requirement, but his information cannot be found at the course's web page: <https://www.uib.no/studieprogram/MASV-SOS#uib-tabs-korleis-soke>

problems. The panel is highly positive about this development. The programme could also look to introduce more research methods training and to embed methodology within substantive courses. The elective (topic-oriented) courses focus on theory, and pay less attention to methodological research skills and empirical inquiry. The panel recommends that more combined theory-empirics courses be developed.

#### **7.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

Teaching and assessment seem to be rather traditional in the combination of lectures, seminars and written exams, but with clear attention to integrating the BA students into the discipline and offering feedback on their work. The MA is more research intensive and relies more on independent work, also in the form of written exams. Results from Studiebarometeret regarding the BA indicate a much higher frequency of seminars compared to the national average, coupled with significantly less group work without teacher, although there is little reported use of project work. The Masters programme shows more variety in teaching and assessment methods compared to the BA. It has better than average use of project work (2.8 out of 5.0), and more use of digital methods (3.1 out of 5.0). The content, teaching and learning activities, and exams, seem to be properly aligned so that students are able to learn what is described in the intended learning outcomes.

While lectures remain the central method of teaching, the panel sees a welcome emphasis upon encouraging innovation and variety. Variety comes in the form of seminar discussions, oral presentations, home exams, written exams and oral exams. Variety is also introduced through the use of digital methods, although this is an area that can be developed. Currently, all written exams are digital, and assignments are submitted and marked digitally in Canvas. There are some very good uses of digital tools to enhance large-group lecture teaching and student interaction, such as Kahoot and Socrative. E-learning could be usefully developed further to increase variety, for example by the use of knowledge clips, online peer-to-peer feedback, podcasting, and flipped classrooms.

There are institutional incentives available to innovate in teaching and assessment methods, including quality enhancement awards. The sociology programme has benefitted from engagement with these schemes, for example in the innovations seen in the BA-level course MET102 Methods in the Social Sciences, which won the faculty's Teaching Quality Prize for 2016, and through individual lecturers. Awards and nominations have been secured by sociology in both the Teaching Quality Prize and the University's Learning Environment Prize. This is a good foundation on which to build further cases of successful teaching innovation, and to provide a network of award winners in sociology that could support and encourage further applications. These awards, along with grants available for developing teaching and assessment methods, make UiB a good example to others of how institutional support can generate diversity and innovation in teaching and assessment.

It is interesting that despite this focus at UiB on enhancing teaching quality, a tension is still visible between the agendas of teaching and research, which means that staff finds it more difficult to prioritise teaching innovation and invest in the teaching side of their job. Research-led teaching innovations might form a valuable focus in casting these agendas in more complimentary ways.

## **7.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The department offers various activities for BA students, including guest lectures, excursions and film screenings. Specific support is offered for MA student initiatives, including study-trips and workshops. The student organisations in the Faculty of Social Sciences also offer academically relevant activities, developed in collaboration with faculty and department leadership. In general, UiB has a strong student democracy that guarantees the student voice is heard in programme and extra-curricular development at all levels.

According to Studiebarometeret, the sociology BA students at UiB score slightly below the national average on satisfaction with the learning environment, whereas the MA students score above the national average. MA students are particularly satisfied with student–staff relations, scoring 4.1 on this item compared to the national 3.5 (at a 60% response rate).

UiB takes advantage of a strong student democracy, which is excellent. The department obviously supports a stimulating learning environment for graduate students, which is very good. The department is encouraged to consider what types of activities and departmental support could be introduced to raise the BA environment to the same level as the MA environment.

## **7.6 Educational competence**

Proven educational competence is part of new staff selections. Trial lectures are also used in hiring decisions. A programme for university pedagogy is mandatory for new staff. There is also a quality in education awards programme for the sharing of best practices in the faculty of social sciences. An Excellent Teaching Practitioner programme may be rolled out to the faculty in the future (it is being trialled elsewhere). Grants are also available for developing teaching and assessment methods and for developing good teaching. It appears difficult for staff to invest in developing educational competence, however, due to the pressures of research, and finding ways to improve research and teaching simultaneously is encountered as difficult.

## **7.7 Achieved learning**

The fraction of A and B grades for sociology students at UiB is slightly below the average of the other participating programmes. The failure rate is also slightly below the national average. At only 7 hours per week according to Studiebarometeret, students receive less organised teaching than average. At the national level, UiB provides fewer organised teaching hours per week to its sociology students than any other university (the only serious contender being UiO). Students put in 18.2 hours per week in self-study, which is almost exactly the national average.

For sociology BA students at UiB, the satisfaction scores for achieved learning in Studiebarometeret tend to be slightly below the national average. The lower scores from BA students on experience with research and development work, and discipline and profession specific skills, are particularly noteworthy. For sociology MA students at UiB on the other hand, scores in Studiebarometeret are above the national average with only one exception (‘oral communication skills’).

There is coherence between student workload in terms of study hours per week and the fraction of students that receive high grades at UiB. The department appears to do a very good job with the MA

programme. However, the BA programme is less successful in achieved learning. Particularly for the BA programme, the department should improve opportunities for research and development work. Since sociology programmes offer lots of scope for achieving professional/discipline specific skills, the department should review the ways in which these are communicated to students.

## **7.8 Internationalisation**

Studying abroad is encouraged for BA students. There are five highlighted partner universities, located in the UK, the Netherlands, Australia, and the US. There are agreements with a large list of universities globally (42 in total). Exchange is not encouraged for MA students, however. PhDs are expected to spend some time abroad, but it is not clear if PhDs are recruited internationally. There is one BA course in English to encourage interaction with international students. The panel recommends expanding the number of English courses at the BA level in order to foster an international classroom. The teaching materials also tend to focus heavily on Norway (in terms of topics, authors), and a more international perspective is recommended.

## **7.9 Relevance**

The revisions to the content of the BA programme are positive for enhancing the relevance of the programme for students' future careers, lives and studies, especially the efforts to develop theory teaching away from a history of ideas and towards sociological analysis. This increases the relevance of what is taught and is a useful example to other institutions of good practice when it comes to making theory teaching more relevant to students.

The Studiebarometeret results show, however, that improvements are required in linking the BA programme to students' perceptions of good career opportunities (2.8 out of 5) and cooperation with workplaces (2.3 out of 5). The results are better, but still slightly lower than national average, for MA students. More can be done to enhance student awareness of labour market opportunities. The section of the website called 'what can I be?' could be further developed with this in mind. It is very helpful to provide students with a language for articulating what skills the study of sociology specifically provides them for future employment. The UiO website provides a good example with respect to how sociology career opportunities can be presented and discussed.

## **7.10 Educational leadership**

Educational leadership of the programme appears very good. There are structures and mechanisms in place for managing the programme and they appear to work effectively. Deputy chairs are programme coordinators and seem to be valued. The University board approves new programmes after design at department level, which explicitly discusses programme structures and the links between teaching and assessment methods and learning outcomes. More regular quality development happens in staff meetings and the department council. Mechanisms for the annual review of programmes, and external review, are in place. Different levels are also taking part in the development of the teaching programme (i.e., director, staff, students). The emphasis upon student representation within evaluation and monitoring processes is particularly strong, with the student committee involved in decision-making. There are some issues, however, around securing resources for the sociology programme, particularly with regards to administrative support for the department.

### ***7.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education***

Overall, incoming students at UiB get a very good introduction to university life and to the sociology programme, both through a mentoring system and the sociology tailored first semester ExFac. It is very good that UiB aims at increasing the grade point level of incoming students. However, the panel suggests that the sociology and grade requirement for the MA programme be reviewed. MA students are particularly happy with the learning environment, and overall the learning environment appears to benefit from a strong student democracy. The panel finds that there is room for improving the learning environment and achieved learning in the BA programme, and it is concerned that compared to the national average, BA students receive fewer hours of teacher-led training. There is a very welcome ambition to update and modernise the BA curriculum, which signals that sociology education at UiB is on the right track. The panel would encourage the institution to also use this revision of the BA programme to develop the cumulative structure and strengthen the methods and research components, and to consider how relevance is taken into account and communicated to students. Sociology at UiB appears to encourage and stimulate teaching innovation, including the use of digital methods, and offers a varied teaching and learning experience. However, the panel believes that there is room to improve the connection between teaching and research, and suggests that in the future special attention be paid to also stimulate researcher-led teaching innovations.

## 8 Sociology at University of Agder (UiA)

The University of Agder was founded in 2007, when Agder University College of Applied Sciences gained university status. The university has seven faculties, of which the Faculty of Social Sciences is one. Sociology is organised together with social work at the Department of Sociology and Social Work, located in Kristiansand.

Since Studiebarometeret has a very low response rate at UiA (20%, n=10), the panel will not consider survey results for UiA. The department should strive to raise the response rate in Studiebarometeret.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Sociology and Social Work
- PhD programme in Social Sciences

<b>University of Agder (UiA)</b>			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Sociology and Social Work
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>45</sup>	53	18
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>46</sup> .	68,1	77,4
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>47</sup> .	30	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>48</sup> .	45	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>49</sup>	37,0	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>50</sup> Per study programme:	n.a.	20,0

<sup>45</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>46</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>47</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>48</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>49</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>50</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>51</sup>	29,8	48,8
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### **8.1 Organisation and resources**

The department offers a bachelor's programme in sociology, and a master's programme in sociology and social work, where sociology and social work are offered as different specialisations. The department also offers courses on PhD level. The co-location with social work has resulted in several courses with an interdisciplinary profile, and the department describes this as a combination which has attracted many students.

The department is fairly small, which is presented as an advantage in terms of its flexibility and capability to adapt. Nevertheless, this makes the department vulnerable to staff changes.

### **8.2 Initial competence**

This is a fairly small BA programme, with 30 places per year. The grade point of incoming BA students is slightly higher than the average of the participating programmes. The university is approving of students combining work and full-time study (perhaps to a greater degree than the panel would have expected). There is one particular effort to promote sociology (and social science) in the form of a yearly research competition and award for social science projects in regional high schools, the Eilert Sundt award. Assuming that high schools consider this competition in their social science curricula, this is an excellent initiative. Entry requirement for the MA in Sociology and Social Work is a BA with grade C and a major in a relevant discipline, and at least 10 credits methodology training. The PhD in Social Science requires a MA degree in social science with an average grade B. For incoming BA students, there is a welcome week and a buddy system in place. An active student association also organises both social and academic events. For MA students, there is a start-up seminar, which includes senior students sharing experiences.

The Eilert Sundt award is an excellent way to promote social science and sociology. The MA entry requirement for methods training is an important signal of the skill requirements for a working sociologist. The panel suggests raising the grade requirement for the MA from C to B.

### **8.3 Programme design**

The BA programme is structured through introductory courses, classical and contemporary theory, research methods, optional course choices, and a thesis. There is a diverse range of subjects offered (education, class, culture, health, religion, welfare, multi-cultural society). The close ties between the study of sociology and the study of social work appear however to hamper the coherence of the BA sociology programme, and its cumulative structure. Many of the elective courses, for example, are unrelated to sociology. There are also very few research methods courses, and they come too late in the programme. The panel found the emphasis upon classical sociological theories throughout the programme striking. As a consequence, students are not properly equipped with analytical and methodological skills that prepare them well for the labour market. The panel recommends increasing

<sup>51</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/>.

the amount of research methods training in the BA programme, and putting more emphasis upon contemporary social theories and approaches. In terms of the MA programme, concerns are raised about the amount of sociology contained within the current structure, and the panel thus has concerns about the quality of the programme.

#### **8.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

Teaching methods are largely traditional and predominately lecture-based. There is some good use of digital work methods, such as quizzes, knowledge clips to supplement topics and stimulate discussion, and digital scientific posters as part of first year course assignments. Assessment methods are predominantly written exams, however. The BA and MA theses have supervision and an oral seminar presentation, but no oral defence of the final written product. The panel suggests creating more opportunities for oral assessment. It also suggests increasing diversity in assessment methods more generally. E-learning can usefully be expanded in this respect, for example the use of peer-to-peer feedback.

Developing this diversity in teaching and assessment should be more explicitly reflected upon in the institution's narrative around teaching. This is especially the case since opportunities are clearly available for the discussion of teaching methods and pedagogical approaches through staff seminars, and there is a focus on collaborative discussion of pedagogical issues. There are also institutional incentives in place for developing and innovating teaching, for example, certain costs are reimbursed to encourage collaborations. The launch of a strategy for 2020 around teaching shows that it is a valued part of the institution and accorded high status. The panel found that this strong knowledge and support base did not translate into strong statements around teaching strategy. UiA state that the university/department strategy stresses varied teaching and assessment methods, and that this is discussed among academic staff. However, such variety is not reflected in the current course descriptions. Taken as a whole, the teaching and assessment methods would benefit from more variation.

#### **8.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

A range of activities is on offer to students, many of which are organised by the local sociological association, including lectures, debates, and film screenings. The Faculty of Social Science and the department regularly organise lectures and conferences. Students receive invitations to all such events and students diffuse such invitations among themselves. It is not clear to what extent invitations to the rich supply of activities also result in student participation.

It is very good that there is a range of activities available, both through the faculty, the department, and the sociological association. The department should evaluate to what extent these activities actually contribute to the learning environment experienced by sociology students.

#### **8.6 Educational competence**

Teaching qualifications are considered in recruitment decisions. 100% of teaching is done by staff with a PhD at MA level, and 90% at BA level. There is a foundation course for University lecturers that takes 2 years to complete and is mandatory for new staff. There are frequent opportunities for

discussion of teaching methods and approaches through staff seminars and a focus on collaborative discussion of pedagogical issues. A priority area for the 2020 strategy is 'Learning and teaching for the future'. This will establish a learning centre, a system for rewarding teaching (merit system), and educational management structures.

### **8.7 *Achieved learning***

The fraction of A and B grades for sociology students at UiA is about the same as the average for participating programmes. The failure rate is a bit lower than the national average.

### **8.8 *Internationalisation***

Students (BA) are offered an exchange abroad for one year, or one semester. This is well advertised to students on the website. MA students are also offered studies abroad, but many do not take it up because of personal commitments. Some aspects of the MA are taught in English to foster international student participation. Overall, teaching materials focus heavily on Norway (topics, authors), and the panel recommends a more international perspective in the curriculum.

### **8.9 *Relevance***

There is some discussion of the way in which sociology programmes prepare students for the labour market, and future job opportunities are part of welcome events. The website helpfully discusses job opportunities for sociology graduates of the BA and MA programmes, but can be developed further, for example by including graduate career profiles. The UiO sociology careers website is a helpful example of how to effectively discuss and present future career opportunities for sociologists. The way in which the programme at UiA uses appropriate means for sociology students to develop labour market skills beyond the website requires more articulation. One way to do this is by revising the intended learning outcomes to include explicit reference to transferable skills.

There should be good potential for improving relevance, especially with the welfare component to the Masters programme, which has clear occupational relevance. Other ways to improve student perceptions of the programme's relevance relate to the points made about internationalisation. Developing international comparative perspectives within the programme will be useful for students' future lives and studies both in Norway and beyond. Practical courses can also fit particularly well within the programme. Considering the profile of the programme and its vocational links, it should be well placed to show students the relevance of studying sociology. In terms of occupational and professional skills, the programme would benefit from more consistent, cumulative training in research methods. These are skills highly valued in the labour market, both in more research-oriented occupations, and for social policy jobs. Overall, the initiatives that are in place around relevance, especially for future employment, have the potential to be integrated into a wider strategy, which would benefit from stronger articulation and prioritisation.

### **8.10 Educational leadership**

The educational leadership of the programme appears satisfactory, and there are some very good management systems in place. It is clear that different levels are taking part in the development of the teaching programme (i.e., director, staff, students). Students can provide feedback on study programmes through a student advisory board and student reps forum. There is an annual evaluation of the programme in the study council, which includes student representatives. Regular meetings are held between the head of department and programme coordinators with teachers and students to assess the quality and development of the programme. In addition to internal monitoring systems, an external review of programmes takes place every five years. Effective mechanisms are in place therefore for the management of the programme. The role played by educational leadership in the effective allocation of resources for the programme is less clear.

### **8.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education**

Overall, incoming sociology students at UiA are properly introduced to university life, not least through an active student association that also contributes to a lively learning environment. The research competition for high school students, the Eilert Sundt Award, is a very good way of promoting social science and sociology studies to the next cohort of potential students, and the panel believes that this idea is something that other institutions should adopt. However, the panel also has some concerns. The panel is concerned about the encouraging attitude towards combining work with full-time study. The programme structure in the sociology BA also appears to be weak and to suffer from the close link to social work, at the risk of producing students with insufficient training in sociological theory and research methodology. This is reflected in the way that the relevance of the programme is articulated in the self-assessment. The panel further believes that teaching innovation and strategy is not well reflected upon in the institutional self-assessment, despite the supportive and encouraging infrastructure available at UiA.

## 9 Sociology at Nord University

The current Nord University was founded in 2016, after a merger between University of Nordland, Nord-Trøndelag University College and Nesna University College. University of Nordland was established only four years prior, after a merger of four university colleges in the region. The rectorate of the university is located in Bodø, but the university has in all nine different study locations across the northern part of the country. Sociology has been a key discipline in Bodø since the 1970s.

Since Studiebarometeret has very few respondents at Nord (27%, n=3), the panel will not consider survey results for this university. The department should strive to raise the response rate in Studiebarometeret.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Social Sciences, major in Sociology
- PhD programme in Sociology

Nord University <sup>52</sup>			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Social Sciences (Sociology)
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>53</sup>	1	63
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>54</sup> .	67,7	65,3
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>55</sup> .	20	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>56</sup> .	4	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>57</sup>	n.a.	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>58</sup>	27,4	

<sup>52</sup> Because of mergers in the years 2015 – 2017, the data reported to DBH is somewhat uncertain.

<sup>53</sup> Students who actually started their studies in 2017 after being offered a study place. NUCAS reports that the programme did not accept students in 2017. Data from Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH): <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>54</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>55</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>56</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>57</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>58</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

	Per study programme:		
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>59</sup>	27,4	40,5

### 9.1 Organisation and resources

Nord University host both a bachelor's programme in sociology, a master's programme in social sciences, and a PhD programme in sociology. Due to the mergers, sociology is taught at two campuses, some 600 km away from each other (Bodø and Steinkjær), and staff are also located at a third campus. This involves several challenges, including travel expenses and distant leadership, as well as a united professional environment. On the other hand, the department describes this as an opportunity to modernise and digitalise teaching.

### 9.2 Initial competence

The BA programme is extremely small with very few applicants and incoming students. Based on data from the 2015/2016 intake, the grade points requirement is below the national average. This raises a serious question about the resilience of the whole programme. The MA requires a BA degree with grade C and the PhD requires an MA degree with grade B. There is little evidence of promotion or recruitment activities for potential sociology students at all levels. Incoming BA students participate in a faculty wide introductory semester that provides the necessary academic foundations for a university degree programme. There are no support activities targeted specifically at sociology students at any level.

Several other universities struggle with geographical and demographic challenges, but they appear to be particularly demanding at Nord. It is the panel's perception that with so few and weak students the BA-programme is not sustainable. If the programme is to survive, Nord should consider radical measures: turning the downside into an opportunity by moving to distance learning and by taking a leading role in developing an academically solid programme primarily based on interaction in virtual classrooms; develop and implement recruitment and promotion activities to target potential sociology students that involve regional high schools; develop and implement support for sustaining a sense of sociological community for incoming students.

### 9.3 Programme design

The BA programme is similar to the national standard in terms of structure. It has a separate course on classical sociological theory, another on contemporary sociological theories, various topic-oriented elective courses, two methods courses and a BA thesis. It is good that the first methods course is in the first study year. However, it is unclear whether the methods skills are integrated in the follow-up, topic-oriented, courses. The wide variety of electives offers students the opportunity to design their own study path, but it also hampers the cumulative nature of the program. Moreover, some of the elective courses are unrelated to sociology. The MA programme consists of only 20 credits compulsory courses, namely social science analysis and a methods course. The panel suggests that the research methods training component of the MA is increased.

<sup>59</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/>.

## **9.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

There is no clear incentive to ensure varied teaching and assessment methods, even though there seems to be an increased awareness of applying appropriate methods. Prezi is mentioned as an example of technological solutions. However, this is just one of several slideware products that might be used and cannot be considered educational IT as such. Video-recorded or streamed lectures are mentioned as one technical solution to the logistical challenges that Nord University faces. Nevertheless, there is no further mentioning of how this – or a learning management system – has been put in place, and this seems crucial with such a geographically spread institution. The panel sees clear opportunities for developing innovative, digitally based teaching and assessment methods. The benefits of investment in this area could be substantial. Distance learning courses provide a model for ways of learning that would benefit staff and students. Nord University should consider the use of virtual classrooms and ICT combined with physical meetings for the BA programme.

The programmes would also benefit from more emphasis upon pedagogical innovation and on the value of teaching more broadly. Nord University considers that, for certain structural reasons, ‘research comes first’. The way teaching is articulated in its status, however, is an important part of a culture of valuing teaching. There are perhaps ways to bring the agendas of teaching and research together in the institution’s narrative. Research-led teaching innovations, alongside distance learning, might usefully become the focus in this context.

## **9.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

Several activities are on offer, including seminars, but most are organised outside the department. A seminar series (Lytring) at Bodø library is co-organised with the university and caters to both students, staff and the public. The department integrates MA students into research groups and involve them in seminars, trips and meetings. PhD students are expected to actively develop and contribute to the academic environment.

The department provides a very good learning environment for MA and PhD students, with strong support and explicit expectations of participation. With such a small programme, the department has limited resources to develop its own activities for BA sociology students. The department should make instrumental use of the activities on offer so that they align with the BA study programme in a meaningful way.

## **9.6 Educational competence**

Proven teaching competence and trial lectures are part of hiring decisions. All new lecturing staff are required to complete a Uniped course. Currently, there are internal evaluations of the teaching competence levels of staff. Self-assessment does suggest that staff without PhDs and research time do most of the teaching related tasks (and academic staff with PhDs teach 55% of their time). This increases the division between research and teaching and the issue of their relative status. There is an explicit sense that teaching is not the priority of the institution and research is the focus. Although teaching is recognised as a core activity, there clearly is not an institutional focus on it as an area of priority or reward. There are ways to embed research in teaching to raise its profile and reward among

staff. The panel believes, however, that there is a need for an institution-level response to the role of teaching and the status of teachers.

### **9.7 *Achieved learning***

The fraction of A and B grades at Nord University is below the national average. The failure rate is also somewhat high and above the national average. There is no further reliable information about achieved learning at Nord University.

### **9.8 *Internationalisation***

Internationalisation is high on the agenda. Students have the opportunity to expand their horizon and follow courses elsewhere. A one-year study abroad is offered to students, with established partner institutions in Europe and North America. Exchanges are formalised through the Erasmus programmes. To increase the number of incoming students, the programmes are currently being translated into English. The panel recommends updating the literature for the non-English courses, and creating a more international perspective in the teaching materials (i.e., English textbooks, non-Norwegian topics, authors). However, the panel questions whether it pays off to invest in internationalisation at the BA level, given the low intake.

### **9.9 *Relevance***

This is an area that would benefit from considerable development. The programme relates most clearly to the development of academic sociologists, emphasising progression towards PhD and academic careers. A broader conceptualisation of relevance can be adopted, however. It would be useful for example to elaborate upon careers for sociology students outside of the academy, especially with the focus on welfare and environment in the programme, which should offer good potential for relevant occupational skills. The programme can be more explicit about the kinds of transferable skills and competences that students are acquiring for future employment, providing students and employers with a language for articulating the value of studying sociology. The section on job opportunities on the website could be expanded with this in mind. The UiO sociology careers website offers a useful example in this respect. Research methods training should also be expanded within the programme, with an emphasis upon the relevant skills it provides for a number of occupations. Increasing the international nature of the programmes can also help improve the relevance of study for students' future lives.

There are some positive initiatives that are in place and could usefully contribute to a broader strategy around the relevance of study. Career days are organised, for example, and the "Lytring" programme adds value. Considering the focus in programmes and specialisations in the MA, relevance is an area that is ripe for development.

### **9.10 *Educational leadership***

It is positive that different levels are taking part in the development of the teaching programme (i.e., director, staff, students). Study programme leaders develop academic programmes together with

subject leaders. The Dean approves programmes and is responsible for quality. There is also an important role given to student evaluation. There is a division between teaching and research, however, as research staff rarely teach. This may influence the effectiveness of academic leadership at a strategic level in the future, particularly when it comes to securing resources for the programme. Work plans are used to allocate resources, but they are currently prioritising research.

Educational leadership also faces some significant practical obstacles. Study programme leaders oversee the programme at campuses that are very distant from where the leaders are based. E-learning tools, like virtual classrooms, might therefore be of benefit not just for teachers, but for educational leaders as well.

### ***9.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education***

Overall, there is an explicit focus on research at this institution that unfortunately reflects badly on its sociology education. The BA programme is extraordinarily small and receives very few applicants, incoming students receive very little support, the programme design is non-cumulative and is lacking in focus and relevance. The MA programme has very few mandatory courses, but appears to be able to take better advantage of the research focus at Nord. The ‘research comes first’ attitude is also evident in the division between teaching and research staff and in a lack of ambition when it comes to teaching and assessment methods. Nord claims that its particular geographical challenges render it suitable for applying innovative digital teaching methods, but there is little evidence that this is happening as far as sociology is concerned. The panel does not believe that the current sociology BA programme at Nord is sustainable. If the institution insists on training sociologists at the BA level, the only perceivable option given the circumstances is to offer it as a digital distance learning programme. However, the panel believes that an even better idea would be to focus on an international research MA programme, which would sit more comfortably in Nord’s research oriented environment and could evolve in parallel to the PhD programme.

## 10 Sociology at University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT)

The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT) 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 Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education was founded in 2009 after a reorganisation of the university and the departments. Sociology is offered at the Department of Social Sciences, together with political science, social anthropology and community planning.

Study programmes included in the evaluation:

- BA programme in Sociology
- MA programme in Sociology

UiT the Arctic University of Norway			
Study programmes included in the evaluation:		BA in Sociology	MA in Sociology
Student population	Number of enrolled students, first year (2017) <sup>60</sup>	75	6
	Share of female students, total (2017) <sup>61</sup> .	67,6	70,6
Admission data	Number of study places per year (2017) <sup>62</sup> .	70	
	Number of qualified first choice applicants (2017) <sup>63</sup> .	31	
	Grade points (2017) <sup>64</sup>	All	
Output	Completion rates at standard time (% , 2014-2016) <sup>65</sup> Per study programme: Average: 29,8	27,5	40,0
	A+B grade percentage (2017) <sup>66</sup>	23,5	40,0

<sup>60</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>61</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>62</sup> Norwegian: Planlagte studieplasser. Data from The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS): <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>63</sup> Data from NUCAS: <http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2017/>.

<sup>64</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>65</sup> Data from DBH: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/>.

<sup>66</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/>.

## **10.1 Organisation and resources**

The department offers a bachelor's programme and a master's programme in sociology. The programme offers courses that are open to students enrolled in other programmes, and the department values an interdisciplinary orientation. The faculty also offers a PhD programme in humanities and social sciences, with a study track in sociology. Its location in the Subarctic offers the programme possible advantages and specialisations that the department mentions as assets to the programmes.

## **10.2 Initial competence**

The BA-level enrolment is significantly below average and all qualified applicants to the programme are admitted. Recruitment is difficult and the student group has an academically heterogeneous background and motivation. Many students enrol not out of an interest in the subject field, but rather to get credits in preparation for other study programmes. Considering this challenge, there is surprisingly little on offer in terms of promotion and introduction of new students. MA admittance requires a BA in sociology with an average grade C, and admittance to the PhD in Humanities and Social Sciences requires an MA and average grade B.

The department needs to raise the interest and quality of incoming students. There should be more activities to reach out to potential students. There should be sociology specific academic and social events added to the university induction programme. There is a plan to put on an introductory course in the first semester that would include study skills and welcome activities, and this would be a significant improvement.

## **10.3 Programme design**

The BA programme is (next to Ex. Phil. and Ex. Fac.) a mixture of topic-oriented courses (e.g., 'Culture, leisure and volunteering'), theory courses (sociological analysis), introduction to sociology, a qualitative-quantitative method course, and a course on classics in sociology. Students have many opportunities to specialise. According to the self-assessment report, the programme is cumulative, but the panel does not see evidence for this. The programme appears instead to offer stand-alone courses at the expense of a more coherent, in-depth and cumulative programme. Furthermore, the panel observes that there is only one methods course, which is insufficient. The panel recommends developing at least one other methods course and integrating research methods skills into the substantive courses. There also appears to be an unbalanced emphasis upon classics and history in the programme at the expense of modern sociological work. Specifically, the BA programme offers a course on 'Classics of sociology' and the course on 'Sociological analysis' (SOS-2001) presents more recent classics ranging from Parsons to Luhmann. Although some introduction to the history of the discipline is required, state-of-the-art theories, methods and findings in sociology should be included. This avoids a mismatch between the knowledge presented to students and the current knowledge in sociological research. The panel highly recommends updating the BA programme with current research and approaches.

The MA programme consists of a theory course (20 credits), which focuses on fundamentals (what is society) and usefulness of theoretical concepts. The methods courses (10+10 credits) appear to be cumulative with respect to BA. The MA-thesis seminar includes a research design seminar. Overall, thesis writing appears to be well integrated.

## **10.4 Teaching and assessment methods**

Teaching is a combination of lectures, seminars, group work, and supervision. The teaching and learning activities on individual courses seem closely aligned with the assessment forms chosen. The department explicitly wants to ensure that they have different assessment forms across the curriculum in order to allow students to demonstrate different presentation and argumentation strengths.

The teaching and assessment methods therefore show some variety, with some initiatives around online classes, which are particularly appropriate to the institutional context of UiT. There is also more of an emphasis on oral examinations compared to other programmes in Norway. The MA results from Studiebarometeret suggest more use of project work compared to other programmes in Norway (2.8 cf. 1.8 out of 5), although the use of project work overall remains low.

The main assessment methods include homework assignments, written examinations and oral examinations. These are appropriate assessment methods with respect to the majority of the intended learning outcomes of the BA programme. One noticeable gap in the assessment methods, however, is the option of a research-based dissertation for students on the BA programme. The programme deviates in this respect from other sociology BA programmes in Norway. The panel considers a research-based dissertation crucial to enabling students to achieve learning outcomes by having the opportunity to apply and demonstrate the research and analytical skills they have acquired through the programme. It is unclear otherwise how certain aspects of the BA learning outcomes are to be met through the current assessment methods.

The reported use of digital work methods at BA level is slightly higher than the national average (2.2 cf. 1.7 out of 5.0), but not for the MA programme (1.3 cf. 2.0 out of 5.0). This perhaps reflects the way in which digital examinations are used on all BA courses. There are some signs of the development of e-learning more generally, including the provision of online classes. A selection of courses are fully digitalised (in Fronter), and include discussion forums, and online assessment submission and feedback. There are some attempts to innovate using flipped classrooms by making short, recorded lectures available for students in the LMS platform. Considering some of the geographical and structural constraints faced by the institution, the development of an e-learning strategy and online classes is seen by the panel as a priority area that is worthy of investment.

Overall, there is some variation in teaching and assessment methods evident in individual courses. Incentives for extending this variation and supporting innovation are provided by the institution to some extent, including availability of funds and a UiT merit system for teachers. Institutional funding has been secured in the past to develop online sociology courses. The programme should ensure that mechanisms are in place so that these schemes can filter down to sociology staff and be utilised for the benefit of further innovation, particularly the extension of e-learning.

## **10.5 Learning environment in study programmes**

The department organises a yearly student conference that focuses on student life and careers where alumni present their experiences to current students. The department also collaborates with the local sociological association on various arrangements on and off campus. As far as funding permits, guest lecturers are invited around specific events. It is not clear to what extent there is encouragement and support for student-led initiatives with regards to the learning environment.

According to Studiebarometeret, sociology students at UiT are moderately satisfied with the learning environment, scoring slightly below the national average on several items. With a score of 2.8 compared to the national average of 3.6, MA student dissatisfaction with the academic learning environment is a sign of worry.

The frequent extracurricular lectures and conferences are a good addition to the learning environment. As a complement, the department should consider supporting student-led initiatives. The department should investigate why MA students report such low satisfaction with the academic learning environment.

## **10.6 Educational competence**

Educational competence is an area currently undergoing improvement at UiT. There is a joint project with NTNU to enhance teaching. A joint report was submitted in 2016 on Commitment to Quality in Teaching, with suggestions on how to improve teaching quality and acknowledge teaching qualifications. Teaching is more central in hiring decisions, with pedagogic portfolios required in applications, and trial lectures in interviews. The university is piloting a system of merit to acknowledge good teaching. Staff are encouraged to attend teaching and learning conferences in Norway and abroad. More focus is needed on how these conferences are filtering down to the sociology department and staff. It is not clear to what extent staff engage with teaching, share best practice and approach educational innovations.

## **10.7 Achieved learning**

23.5% of the sociology bachelor students at UiT receive an A or B grade. This is below the average of the participating BA programmes of 31.5. For the MA programme the situation is similar. Here 40% of the student receive an A or B grade, while the average of the participating MA programmes is 47.1. The failure rate for the bachelor students is above the national average. According to Studiebarometeret, students receive around 10 hours a week in student led teaching, and invest 18.7 hours per week on self-study. Both these figures are in line with the national average.

The students are satisfied with their ability to think critically and independently, although these results are no different from the average findings for sociology in Norway. However, students report lower satisfaction with the 'discipline- and professional skills', and with their experience with 'research and development work' (2.8 BA). Possibly, these results reflect the omission to pay more attention to research methods throughout the programme.

Incoming students have a lower than average level of achievement, but also come in with a lower GPA. Since the amount of self-study hours is still less than at some other universities, the department should introduce more tasks to increase the student workload. The department should consider introducing a research-based BA thesis to improve student learning of scientific work methods and research and development work.

## **10.8 Internationalisation**

Internationalisation is not seen as an important area for the study programmes, as reflected in the self-report. There are established student exchanges of good quality, but few students take it up. No subjects in the BA or MA are taught in English. The panel recommends broadening the concept of internationalisation beyond the idea of student exchanges. More can be done to highlight the ways in which the curriculum speaks to internationalisation. Specifically, it is recommended to offer BA and MA courses in English to create an international classroom, which can greatly enhance the learning experience of students. In addition, the panel advises the department to include more international literature, topics and authors in the curriculum, which is currently too narrowly focused on Norwegian society.

## **10.9 Relevance**

Significant improvements can be made in order to help students develop and articulate skills relevant for future employment. In terms of occupational and professional skills, more of a focus on consistent, cumulative training in research methods should be considered. These are skills highly valued in the labour market, both in more research-oriented occupations, and for social policy jobs. Overall, the programme undersells professional (sociological) skills and stresses instead the development of responsible citizens (which should be the meta-goal for all higher education). This is reflected in the way in which research skills in the BA and MA programmes are not adequately articulated. The MA is said not to be about producing researchers, and BA students do not have opportunities to collect their own data (for example in a dissertation project). The MA programme develops independent and critical researchers, but with somewhat weak methods skills.

It is positive that the programme runs an annual careers panel for sociology students, and students do perceive a link between their studies and workplace and labour market cooperation. Even though a variety of career prospects are highlighted, more help can be given to students and employers in articulating the value of sociology (specifically) for working life. The emphasis should be upon the skills that sociology students develop that are useful for working life. The intended learning outcomes at both programme and course level weakly articulate transferable skills and areas of general competence that would relate to the workplace, so these would be usefully revised. Web materials relating to career prospects for sociology students can also be developed to concentrate upon sociology-specific skills. The UiO sociology website provides an example of best practice in this respect. The relevance of the programme for student's future lives, studies and employment would also benefit from increased internationalisation. Expanding international comparative perspectives within the programme, diversifying literature beyond the Norwegian context, and developing a more international campus would improve relevance to future lives by expanding perspectives and outlooks.

The panel saw a particular opportunity for UiT to develop the relevance of the programme through the regional interest in climate change. The programme should be well positioned to develop sociological skills and knowledge around climate change in ways that are highly relevant to future employment and lives. Initiatives might usefully find ways to develop and highlight this important dimension of the programme to students and employers.

### **10.10 Educational leadership**

There is evidence of strong involvement of academic leaders at BA level in programme and course design. Single courses are looked at and audited in terms of their place within the broader programme. At MA level, course convenors have more control over content. Monitoring procedures are in place through annual reviews of the programme. Different levels are taking part in the development of the teaching programme (i.e., director, staff, students), although it is less clear how student feedback is used and acted upon within programme monitoring processes. While the day-to-day governance of the programme is very good, educational leadership could usefully expand its strategic function. Considering some of the institutional and structural challenges faced by the institution and the issues raised in the report relating to areas like programme design, relevance, and internationalisation, there is certainly a role for educational leadership to intervene and shape these issues by developing a greater strategic presence.

### **10.11 Overall assessment of the quality of the education**

Overall, given the challenge to fill the BA sociology programme at UiT with motivated students, there is surprisingly little on offer to promote sociology, and to introduce and support incoming students. The panel recommends implementing more strategic interaction with high schools, and to provide a thorough introduction to new students. The planned introductory course looks to be a step in the right direction. MA student dissatisfaction with the learning environment is cause for concern. The panel believes that the BA programme design would gain from a clearer cumulative structure, a strengthening of the methods components, both in terms of more methods credits and in terms of the integration of methods into substantive courses, and an overall update informed by current sociological research. There are positive signs of developing e-learning at UiT, and given specific constraints at the institution, the panel recommends further investment into e-learning and online classes. The panel also recommends that UiT introduce a research-based BA thesis, a recommendation that is supported by results from Studiebarometeret. Overall, the panel is critical of the tendency at UiT to underplay research skills in both the BA and MA programme, which, according to the panel, undermines the relevance of the programmes. In contrast to the self-image, the panel sees a real opportunity and potential for UiT to develop an international, research-based sociology programme around climate and the arctic.

## 11 Conclusion

### 11.1 Overall assessment of the disciplinary area

#### 11.1.1 General remarks, initial competence

All BA-level sociology programmes across the country require the Higher Education Entrance Qualification. For the MA programmes, there is some slight variation in the requirements, with some departments demanding a BA degree with grade B and some specifying a methods requirement. In general, students who choose sociology programmes have moderate grade point requirements, and some programmes have few applicants. It can be assumed that the initial competence of BA students in some programmes is satisfactory, whereas some programmes really struggle. Almost all programmes offer a range of activities both for promoting the programme and for supporting incoming students, and several programmes collaborate with student organisations. Most of these activities target BA students. Some MA programmes offer various support also for MA students, but in general, the self-assessments lead the panel to believe that the frequency and intensity of student support decline as students progress from one level to another. Presumably, though, PhD students in Norway will be able to take advantage of the same structures as faculty members.

#### 11.1.2 General remarks, programme design

The programme design appears highly similar across institutions. The mainstream BA programme starts with an Introduction to Sociology course (20 credits) together with Ex. Phil. and Ex. Fac., followed by topic-oriented courses (e.g., family, migration), one or two research-methods courses, a substantial number of specialisation/elective courses and a BA thesis at the end. In the MA, this logic is usually extended. The ability to think critically and independently is high on the desired learning outcome, and almost all programmes succeed in realising this goal – students unanimously indicate this as a strong point of their education.

The impression of the panel is that, in general, students in Norway become very familiar with a variety of sociological topics, qualitative and quantitative methods, and sociological classics, and have ample room to design their own study programme – even up to following subjects outside sociology. According to the panel, however, this mainstream programme structure also has several serious omissions. First, BA and MA programmes are not very cumulative. Programmes very often consist of stand-alone courses, in which students can participate without prior knowledge – this happens even in third year BA courses. It therefore seems that the aim to provide a very diverse range of methods and topics comes at the expense of providing a more coherent, in-depth, advanced and cumulative programme. Second, and related to the first point, the panel believes that programmes pay insufficient attention to research methods. Most programmes are thin on research methods courses, in particular quantitative methods and statistical techniques. The panel holds the opinion that methods skills need to be more integrated into the substantive courses rather than something to be learned in the stand-alone methods courses. Students would benefit from methods and statistics courses earlier on, preferably in the first semester, as this creates opportunities to integrate and apply these methods in the follow-up (more substantive, topic-related) courses (e.g., inequality, migration, etc.). In order to acquire the methodological and statistical tools to do sociological research, students need not only learn about

these methods and techniques in a stand-alone methods course, but also to apply these in the substantive courses (which now typically focus on theory and argumentation). Third, it also strikes the panel that most programmes disproportionately pay attention to classical sociology at the expense of modern sociology. Classic work takes a central place in many courses throughout the programme (e.g. ‘introduction to sociology’, ‘sociological classics’, and the many topic-oriented courses). Even courses on ‘modern sociology’ or ‘contemporary social theory’ typically cover sociological research from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Foucault, Bourdieu) and omit recent sociology. The panel identifies ‘two sociologies’: on the one hand, the theories, methods and findings addressed in contemporary international sociological research, and on the other hand, the sociological studies discussed in education. The panel believes that in Norwegian sociology programmes, the state-of-the art of sociological theories, methods and findings need a much more prominent place.

### **11.1.3 General remarks, teaching and assessments methods**

Most of the teaching and learning activities and assessment methods seem to be rather traditional, but with some notable exceptions. There is a clear national picture in which lectures, seminars and written assignments predominate. This picture can often hide some of the variety and innovation that the panel found happening within individual courses and programmes. Nevertheless, increasing the variety of teaching and assessment methods, and encouraging innovation should be a national priority for sociology programmes. In this respect, institutional incentives and resources are key. The panel found a strong connection between variety and innovation and the provision of institutional incentives (funds, award scheme, merit systems). Teaching status and recognition is also important for teaching innovation, and this needs to be fostered in the culture of the institution. The panel found that research and teaching are still often pitted against each other. Developing a focus upon the value of research-led teaching would be useful.

What stands out nationally when it comes to teaching and assessment methods in sociology, is the relative absence of e-learning or blended learning initiatives. It could be either that this is an area with plenty of room for improvement and expansion, or that it is so ingrained in what the universities do, that it is not even considered worth mentioning. The panel assumes, however, that considering low student awareness of the use of digital work methods, the former is more likely. An increased focus on the didactic gains in using educational technology could be a general focus for future development initiatives. Since this is a pilot project, future assessment exercises may also choose to ask more specifically about the use of educational technology. The use of e-learning technology would be particularly appropriate for the institutions facing geographical and structural challenges.

### **11.1.4 General remarks, learning environment**

Studiebarometeret provides some insight into the way that students perceive their education. However, the panel is well aware of the low response rate, the lack of a variance measure, and the lack of a non-response analysis. Consequently, we suggest that these numbers be interpreted with great caution. In addition, the panel is under the belief that a student satisfaction survey is a sub-optimal indicator of the quality of the learning environment.

Even though students are generally content with library services and ICT, it should be noted that the Studiebarometeret results indicate that in other respects the learning environment is an area for

improvement nationally. Beyond the appropriate study facilities and ICT support, a good learning environment should provide both social and academic support. This requires encouragement of student activities that promote student community support and engagement in activities that promote interactions between staff and students. It also requires integration of research and teaching, where state-of-the-art research is integrated in education and an environment where students participate in various academic meetings, conferences, seminars, etc.

### **11.1.5 General remarks, educational competence**

Educational competence of staff is generally a well-conceived aspect of the quality of the sociology programmes in Norway. Most institutions incorporate teaching credentials as an important criterion for hiring and promoting staff. Proven teaching competence and trial lectures are often part of the selection procedure, although teaching abilities are sometimes seen as less important than research output. Additionally, most institutions organise activities to further increase teaching competence. The panel recommends that staff make more use of such teaching facilities, as this is not common practice in all institutions. Funds need to be available to develop teaching competence. As good practices to further develop teaching competence the panel noted peer-to-peer feedback (staff evaluating each other), evaluations of courses, regular teaching seminars, and rewarding good teaching.

### **11.1.6 General remarks, achieved learning**

The assessment of achieved learning is based primarily on the student survey, Studiebarometeret. Since this survey has low to moderate response rate, and an unknown item-specific response rate, the information is questionable – even more so for small programmes where the number of respondents make the results statistically meaningless. In all cases where the number of respondents to the survey is below 10, we have refrained from using the information. The weak reliability of Studiebarometeret is unfortunate since such surveys are instrumental for benchmarking and quality assurance of higher education, being useful both for programme development purposes and for student influence.

For sociology MA students in Norway, the scores in Studiebarometeret are largely satisfactory, while there is room for improvement for BA students. Sociology students in Norway are reasonably content with the skills they receive in theoretical knowledge, methods, critical thinking, communication and independence. However, a general issue of concern according to the panel is that sociology students in Norway feel that their education does not provide discipline specific skills. This is highly unfortunate. The panel is of the strong belief that sociologists in general should receive training in methods, analysis, and critical thinking that is in high demand. It is an important task for Norwegian sociology to reframe the self-image of sociology as pre-occupied with academic discourse into the image of a discipline that has the means to address and understand challenges in contemporary society across many dimensions. In Studiebarometeret, students also express concern about their experience with ‘research and development work’. Possibly, this reflects the need to pay more attention to research methods and analysis throughout the programme (and not only in a stand-alone method course).

Studiebarometeret suggests substantial national variation in the teacher led learning, ranging roughly from 7 to 11 hours per week, as well as in the number of hours that a Norwegian sociology student invest in self-study, ranging roughly from 11 to 23 hours per week. It is not reasonable that students within essentially the same disciplinary programme receive over 50% more organised teaching in one

university than in another. It is also not reasonable that the student workload can vary more than 100% between universities for what is basically supposed to be the same education. If anything, one would expect that the highly selected and academically strong students at UiO and NTNU would have to invest less time into their sociology studies than less selected and weaker students at some local universities. Nevertheless, the situation is the reverse. This discrepancy is a strong indication that the learning requirements put on students depend not so much upon which programme they choose, but far too much upon which university they attend. The panel considers this to be a serious quality issue for the system as a whole.

### **11.1.7 General remarks, internationalisation**

Internationalisation is a broad concept that encompasses various dimensions and learning experiences. Most programmes (BA, MA, PhD) offer their students opportunities to study abroad. The degree to which programmes facilitate such foreign exchanges differs, however, and it is important to overcome barriers wherever possible (e.g., financial costs, poor institutional support) that prevent students from actually going abroad. There are some exemplary programmes that have extensive agreements with multiple universities abroad, and that actively support their students to make use of these possibilities. Internationalisation is more than ‘sending students abroad’, however, and also includes having an international outlook within the courses of the programme. At a minimum, according to the panel, this implies that teaching materials adopt an international perspective. Currently, however, there appears to be a tendency in most sociology programmes to focus on Norway, i.e., most (text)books and articles are in Norwegian, many are originally written by Norwegian authors, and the course topics are often strongly focusing on Norway. The panel invites these programmes to adopt a more global perspective in the teaching materials, to include more of the international (English) state-of-the-art literature, and to teach students the merits of cross-national, comparative research (e.g., in terms of social policy and best societal practices). Another aspect of internationalisation is having an international classroom, which can be a great learning experience for (foreign and Norwegian) students. Some programmes succeed in creating such an international environment, by offering courses in English and having a website and course descriptions in English, but many more do not. Offering courses in English should, needless to say, not be a goal in itself, and hence the panel is sceptical about the value of English courses which are not attended by Norwegian students. The panel is also sympathetic to some programmes that invest less heavily in international student exchange, when the staff of the programme is small, and/or when the aim of the programme is to attract students only locally and make them ready for jobs in the local labour market.

### **11.1.8 General remarks, relevance**

Sociology programmes in Norway aim to teach students to think critically and independently, and this is what programmes accomplish very well. This is general competence, and students tend to be very satisfied with this. There is a need in most institutions, however, to develop the relevance of the programme for future employment. There is also a need for learning outcomes to more consistently provide a language for students and employers to articulate the skills that sociology programmes provide and that are valuable for the labour market. Put simply: if we can’t say it, students can’t say it. UiO’s careers website provides an example of best practice in the way in which it discusses and presents sociology careers, and the schemes it employs, e.g., ‘shadow a sociologist’ and ‘work placements’.

The majority of programmes would also benefit from developing occupational and professional skills through consistent, cumulative research methods training. The research skills of sociology students are highly valued in the labour market, both in more research-oriented occupations, and for social policy jobs.

Relevance can also be improved through revisions to programme content. UiB provides an example of best practice in showing how revisions to the content and approach of sociology programmes are positive for enhancing the relevance of study. This includes efforts to develop theory teaching away from a history of ideas and towards sociological analysis. Other ways to enhance relevance through content is by increasing international and comparative perspectives.

### **11.1.9 General remarks, educational leadership**

Most programmes have appropriate management structures and mechanisms for programme monitoring in place, including internal and external evaluations of programmes. Student democracy through involvement in educational leadership committees is generally very good. Across the majority of institutions, the panel found that different levels are taking part in the development of the teaching programmes (i.e., director, staff, students). There was less evidence, however, of strategic leadership over programmes and the effectiveness of leadership in securing appropriate resources for programmes. Many programmes encountered problems over resource allocation (short on staff, appropriate teaching rooms, finances and so on) and it is here that effective sociology-specific leadership strategies would be most valuable.

## 12 Recommendations

### 12.1 The institutions

Concerning programme structure and relevance, the panel makes the following recommendations to the institutions:

*Design cumulative programmes.* Most programmes provide stand-alone courses. The panel recommends a cumulative programme structure instead, in which theory and methods are more integrated. Methods courses should be at the beginning of the programme, ideally in the first semester, which allows follow-up (theory, topic) courses to integrate the acquired methodological skills. This also helps students to appreciate these tools, as they realise what they are used for.

*Integrate state-of-the-art sociological research in teaching.* It appears that many programmes focus on classical sociology, on theories and perspectives from the past at the expense of state-of-the-art sociology. The students are therefore exposed to ‘old sociology’, which hampers their knowledge of current sociology, and thereby undermines the relevance of their education for the labour market. The panel therefore recommends integrating much more state-of-the-art theories and research in teaching.

*Increase quantitative methods skills.* The panel is of the opinion that sociology programmes in Norway equip their students with insufficient quantitative skills. Such skills are not only at the heart of sociology as a discipline, but also provide students with tools that are highly valued in the labour market, and hence increase the relevance of their sociology education – which is clearly of concern at the moment. It is therefore highly recommended to develop more quantitative methods courses and to integrate more methods training in general courses.

*Improve labour-market orientation.* The panel is under the impression that most programmes are not updated to improve the transition of students into the labour market. The panel suggests monitoring the labour market entry of alumni (via survey or register data), to examine where former students find their employment. It also recommends inviting alumni to give presentations about their current work, and to improve more generally the connection between the sociology programme and the labour market.

*Diversify content.* Programmes in Norway follow a fairly standard set-up, with similar topics offered at the different programmes. The panel recommends diversifying the content of the programmes and encourages programmes to develop distinctive profiles.

Concerning teaching, the panel has the following recommendations to the institutions:

*Bring research and teaching together.* Many institutions mention that research and teaching are pitted against each other. This increases the risk that teaching is not grounded in state-of-the-art research, that staff members either research or teach, and that teachers and teaching are undervalued. The panel recommends creating a culture that values not only research but also teaching, to integrate research activities and teaching more strongly, and to strive for a well-defined balance between teaching and research activities for all staff members.

*Create and use teaching facilities and incentives.* The panel observes that at some universities, teaching facilities (e.g. teaching learning centre, e-learning, etc.) are available but not fully used by

departments and teachers. At the same time, it also appears that some departments offer more facilities and incentives to teachers than elsewhere. The panel recommends making more use of current teaching facilities at the university level (particularly with respect to e-learning), and to further increase teaching incentives (funds, award system for teaching).

Concerning internationalisation, the panel has the following recommendations to the institutions:

*Create an international classroom.* It appears that many programmes facilitate a stay abroad for their students, but much less is done to welcome foreign (English-speaking) students, and hence to create an international classroom. The panel thinks this is not something to be desired for all institutions, but for some sociology programmes in Norway, creating an international classroom would be an asset and a great learning experience for the students.

*International curriculum.* Many programmes have a strong Norwegian-bias in teaching materials, i.e., most (text)books and articles are in Norwegian, many are originally written by Norwegian authors, and the course topics are often strongly focusing on Norway. The panel believes that a more international outlook would strongly benefit the learning experience for students: the academic language is English (hence all state-of-the-art, too) and the comparative perspective is highly valuable. It is therefore recommended to update the curriculum and increase the use international (English) books and articles.

## **12.2 The students**

The panel has the following recommendations to the sociology students:

*Play an active role.* The panel notes that the workload and study hours differ dramatically across programmes. It also observes that in some institutions, students are highly active and in others, they are less involved. The panel realises that some of these differences are due to institutional differences, but also that students are part of what is happening. The panel encourages students to play an active role in their programme: to take the initiative to set up a peer-to-peer buddy-system, for example, but also to study more and thereby change the standards among peers. It is also important to engage in student representative committees, to help teachers to improve their education, to raise your voice, to fill in course evaluation surveys, and, more generally, to become involved in the teaching and academic community. Not all of that is given and fixed: you, as a student, also create the learning environment.

*Go abroad.* It is the belief of the panel that sociology programmes are strongly nationally oriented. The panel thinks this is a weakness, and for you it is therefore all the more important to broaden your views. Go abroad. Many programmes help you with this; there are many exchange programmes. Spend a few months at another university, outside Norway.

*Consider the methods training.* Following lectures and discussing sociological studies can be a great experience. However, within only a few years you are expected to prepare yourself for the future. You also need to acquire skills relevant in the labour market. Hence, the panel thinks that it is legitimate for you to ask: Why should I learn this? What is this course good for? Will future employers value what I learn, here, today? According to the panel, there is a nationwide deficiency in all sociology programmes in the methodological skills students acquire, particularly in quantitative methods. Since

such quantitative skills make sociology students highly attractive in the labour market, the panel advises you to follow such methods courses, possibly at other programmes.

### **12.3 The Ministry of Education and Research and NOKUT**

The panel has the following recommendations to the Ministry and NOKUT:

*Invest in quantitative skills.* The panel is of the opinion that sociology programmes in Norway follow a standard design that equip their students with insufficient quantitative skills. Such skills are not only at the heart of sociology as a discipline, but also provide students with tools that are highly valued in the labour market, and hence increase the relevance of their sociology education. The panel therefore highly recommends institutions to develop more quantitative methods courses. However, the panel also realises that this requires major investment for all institutions. New methods courses need to be developed; the content of these courses needs to be integrated in follow-up theory and topics courses; the courses need to be integrated in an overarching, cumulative programme. In addition, many institutions most likely need to hire new staff, which are sufficiently trained in quantitative methods to teach such courses at the BA, MA and PhD level. In short, this is a major change that needs to be coordinated and requires resources. The panel believes, therefore, that this nationwide investment in sociology curricula needs support from the Ministry to become effective. The panel recommends considering a Norwegian “Q-step”, as recently seen in the UK (<http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/about-q-step>). The Q-Step programme supports social science departments and programmes throughout the UK to develop more quantitative courses. This successful programme could also be implemented in Norway.

*Reconsider the ecology of programmes.* The panel observes that there are many sociology programmes in Norway, that there are no stringent entry requirements and that the workload of students appears to be very low for some programmes. According to the panel, the quality is at threat in programmes that have very low student entry numbers (and consequently few staff), and in programmes in which students appear to invest little time. Without taking a strong opinion on this, the panel suggests the following:

*Collaborate.* At present, sociology programmes in Norway are taught in isolation from each other. Given low intake numbers at some programmes (and small staff), it may be important to promote cooperation between institutions and stimulate joint programmes. One option that would facilitate such a development is distance learning.

*Select.* Currently, entry requirements are the same across institutions. The panel thinks that to secure the quality of some programmes, it would be wise to let programmes have stricter entry requirements (e.g., require mathematics or English skills). It thus recommends that universities have the autonomy to set entry criteria.

*Monitor labour market position of alumni.* To make sure that students acquire labour-market relevant tools and skills during their education, it is important to monitor the labour market position of alumni. It also seems important to be fair and transparent to upcoming students about their prospects in the labour market. At the moment, such occupational data are not available. The panel therefore suggests that instruments be developed to monitor the labour market entry of alumni (via survey or register data), to examine where former students find their employment. Such student monitoring should be a

nationwide initiative, for only then can sociology programmes compare how their students fare in the labour market, and compare their alumni to that of other programmes. Thus, the panel recommends the Ministry to set up a nationwide monitoring of alumni.

## 13 Reflections on the evaluation

The panel would like to submit the following reflections on the pilot evaluation exercise:

The panel has been small (three persons), international (Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom), and with relatively young members. Over eight months we have met three times for two-day meetings in Oslo. We are happy and pleasantly surprised by the panel composition; coming from different teaching traditions and systems, it has been highly rewarding to assess Norwegian sociology. The panel meetings have been collaborative and the division of labour has been kept to a minimum as to produce a genuinely joint conclusion. With this panel, it would have been quite possible to replace one of the physical meetings with a teleconference, but in general, the panel finds that three meetings are adequate. The panel has received highly efficient and constructive support from NOKUT and NIFU staff throughout the process, which have greatly simplified the task. Still, panel members have to acknowledge that the workload has been a bit heavier than expected.

The panel believes that for the level targeted in this assessment, i.e., sociology education in Norway, the exercise adds value. At this observational level, it goes without saying that the finer details of individual programmes and institutions are lost. Still, the panel believes that the evaluation has brought to the fore some of the characteristics of Norwegian sociology that are shared across institutions, and some issues that are of common concern for Norwegian sociology.

The quality of an assessment such as this one is a direct function of the quality of the received information. The panel would like to raise a few issues. First, the panel appreciates that the assessment has put a small burden on the participating institutions. Even so, some dedication is necessary also on behalf of the institutions under evaluation. It is essential that the self-evaluation is compiled by someone who has a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching environment. In this regard, the quality of the self-assessments has been uneven and the panel has often been under the impression that more is going on than is visible in the self-assessments. For the future, the panel would recommend that NOKUT further reviews its guidelines for the self-assessment, including detailed questions and examples, and that some institutions show stronger commitment.

Second, a significant share of the background information was compiled from the institutions' webpages. For some institutions, it has been difficult to find detailed information at the course-level. While 2/3 of the panel members are not confident in reading Norwegian, it has been an occasional challenge that some of this information has not been available in English.

Third, it has also been difficult to separate and evaluate the three different levels (BA, MA, PhD). There is one notable exception, but basically there was very little information on the PhD-level and the panel regrets that it has been unable to say anything meaningful about Norwegian PhD programmes in sociology. More information has been available for the BA and MA levels, but even so, for some institutions it has been difficult to make a stringent assessment of the MA level. The lack of information is evident both in the self-evaluations and on webpages.

Fourth, Studiebarometeret (SB) is a potentially interesting and important source of information. However, with its current response rates and without some sort of commentary or triangulation from the institution, the panel has been a bit hesitant to use it as a stand-alone source, especially beyond the BA level. The panel was concerned that some items had to be assessed almost exclusively based on SB responses. In particular, the panel feels that student satisfaction is not a good indicator of achieved

learning. In addition, the SB data package should include, at least, information on item response and some measure of dispersion.

The panel would have liked to have information on former students. Some sort of destination survey of register-based follow-up would add an important dimension to a system-level evaluation such as the current one. However, the panel is not of the view that additional and more detailed institutional information *per se* will improve the assessment, without also producing another type of evaluation targeted at the institutional or programme level. In general, the panel holds the view that the evaluation adds value already in its current design.

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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.