



Awarding Status as Centre for Excellence in Education (SFU)

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About the Centres for Excellence in Education Initiative

The Ministry of Education and Research established 'Centres for Excellence in Education (SFU)' in 2010 to stimulate teaching excellence and educational activities in higher education. The SFU initiative is managed by NOKUT, and is a parallel to Centres of Excellence in Research and other top centre initiatives in the area of research.

The SFU initiative represents a focused and long-term effort in order to stimulate the development of education and innovative approaches in higher education at the bachelor and master levels.

The ambition of the initiative is to contribute to the development of excellent quality in higher education and to highlight the fact that teaching and research are equally important activities for universities, specialised universities and university colleges.

A significant element of the initiative is to promote excellence in R&D-based education¹. The SFU initiative is designed to further and reward the work that takes place in the interaction between students, academic staff, support services, the labour market, professional bodies and the wider society, as well as the knowledge base of educational activities. The initiative seeks to contribute to developing new forms of student involvement and partnership. For professionally oriented programmes, both the R&D-base and the relationship with the field of practice should underpin submissions.

In principle, calls for bids for SFU status are open to all educational areas, but the Ministry of Education and Research may attach specific requirements to an individual round. It is the intention to put out a call for new centres every three years.

The SFU initiative shall

- stimulate universities and university colleges to establish and develop academic communities that offer excellent education
- contribute to knowledge-based analysis and development of teaching and learning and that this underpins quality enhancement and innovation
- contribute to stronger interaction between higher education and the relevant societal and professional fields
- contribute to the sector-wide development and dissemination of knowledge and practices

An SFU must therefore

- offer excellent R&D-based education
- develop innovative ways of working with R&D-based education
- encourage student engagement and ownership of learning
- contribute to the development and dissemination of knowledge and practices about the design of teaching and learning environments that are conducive to learning

¹ 'R&D-based' here means 'based on the forefront of knowledge gained from research, academic and artistic development work and work experience (Universities and University Colleges Act, § 1-3).'



Organisation and Duration of an SFU

The Host Institution

An SFU is integrated into an educational institution, hereafter referred to as the 'host institution', that is responsible for its activity. Host institutions may be universities, specialised universities or university colleges.

The host institution is the applicant for the appropriation of funds and the award of SFU status. In the contractual arrangements, the host institution carries the project responsibilities. This entails the practical, academic and financial responsibility for the establishing, effective running, monitoring and embedding of the Centre.

Consortiums

A host institution may collaborate with other educational institutions or other types of organisations, for instance pedagogical development centres or units, enterprises or organisations with responsibility for practice training.

An SFU consortium consists of a host institution and one or more collaborating partners. The host institution must ensure that a consortium agreement is signed. The agreement shall regulate the organising and the running of the consortium, including the respective rights and obligations of the partners. The consortium partners must make financial and other contributions in accordance with the consortium agreement for the Centre, as described in the application.

Duration and Funding

SFU status is awarded for five years, with the possibility of prolongation for another five years, subject to an interim evaluation after three to four years. Funding for the SFU initiative is decided in the State Budget. Resources are allocated annually to the Centres subject to the previous year's Centre report and accounts.

The SFU initiative is a top funding agreement. The expectation is that the host institution and the consortium partners, if applicable, specify substantial co-funding, for instance in terms of co-opted staff, Ph.D. students, infrastructure, resources for travel etc.

Management and Organisation

The Centre must have clearly defined academic leadership and be organised in such a way that the progress can be monitored and evaluated effectively.

The Centre must be an integral part of the host institution and, if relevant, its partners. Key members of the Centre staff must be employed by the host institution or its partners.

Student participation at all levels is essential.



Assessment Criteria for Applications

An educational community that is awarded status as an SFU must stand out in terms of:

- a. *documented educational quality* in existing provision, and
- b. an innovative and feasible *centre plan*.

Documented Educational Quality in Existing Provision

Quality in education is contextual and multifaceted. Important preconditions for innovative quality work include consideration of the knowledge base, the learning environment, programme design, internationalisation, educational competence, student involvement and learning outcomes hereunder relationships with the labour market and the wider society². All quality aspects must be seen in developmental terms and as interrelated.

This implies that applications for status as an SFU must comment and critically reflect on:

Input factors

- What is the academic, educational and managerial competence of the institution/consortium and how is this related to the proposed area of activity of the Centre?
- How are the management and the academic community actively engaged in and supportive of the educational mission of the Centre?
- How does the management ensure that resources are provided, adequately deployed and monitored?

Process factors

- How does R&D permeate the development of teaching and students' learning?
- How are teaching and learning methods employed in order to promote students' learning?
- How is the students' learning assessed and monitored?
- How is student engagement and ownership of learning promoted? What are the methods for student feedback and the follow through for student learning?

Outcome factors

- How is student achievement related to learning aims and intended learning outcomes?
- How is the educational provision (content and design) relevant for continued education and/or research training, the labour market and the expectations of the wider society?

A central aspect is the documented strength of the current educational provision, as compared to other provision within the same subject/discipline area, both nationally and internationally.

Feedback from important stakeholders (students, alumni, labour market representatives, professional bodies etc.) validating the quality of education should be included in the application.

² [Kvalitetsområder for studieprogram](#) (In Norwegian. English version coming soon)



Plans for the Activities of the Centre – ‘The Centre Plan’

The Centre Plan outlines the vision of the Centre, its strategy and plans. It also outlines plans for the dissemination of knowledge and practices inside its own institution(s) and to other educational communities.

Applications for SFU status must comment and critically reflect on the following three areas:

Innovation

- Outline the proposed Centre’s strategies and plans for educational development and innovation.
 - Why is this Centre important to higher education (taking into account the knowledge base, labour market, societal needs etc.)?
 - What are the intended novelties and transformations of current practices?
 - How are students active in the development and innovation processes?
 - How does the Centre plan fit in with international developments in higher education?
 - What are the key steps to be taken for the ambitions to be realised? Important milestones should be specified.
 - What outcome and impact will the SFU Centre Award deliver that would not be achieved without support (additionality)?

Evaluation and impact framework

- Outline an evaluation and impact framework for the work of the Centre from a student, staff, institutional and wider stakeholder perspective.
 - How will the Centre work to contribute to and stimulate institutional development over time?
 - How will value for money be gauged?
 - How will the Centre be sustainable post funding (exit strategies)?

Dissemination

- Outline a clear plan for dissemination³.
 - What plans do the Centre have for sharing knowledge and practices developed by the Centre?
 - How will other educational communities and stakeholders be involved?
 - What dissemination approaches will be used with different target groups?
 - How is the academic leadership engaged in disseminating the generated knowledge and experiences?

³ See for instance [‘Creating an Effective Dissemination Strategy: An Expanded Interactive Workbook for Educational Development Projects’ \(Harmsworth and Turpin 2000, pdf\)](#).



The Application Process

Potential Applicants

Universities, specialised universities and university colleges may apply for one or more SFUs. Each host institution can submit a maximum of five applications. Institutions submitting more than one application should *not* rank their submissions.

The 2016 call is open to all educational areas.

The Application

The application must be written in English and follow the requirements set in the [NOKUT template for applications](#) (doc)

An application for SFU status (as indicated in the NOKUT template) must consist of:

1. An abstract (no more than 150 words)
2. Documentation of educational quality in existing provision and a Centre plan (together a maximum of 10 pages)
3. A budget for the Centre for the first five-year period, including motivation for costs ([see guidelines](#))
4. An action plan for the Centre, including milestones (no more than three pages)
5. CVs of the proposed Centre Leader and two to five key members of the Centre team (each CV must not exceed two pages)

The rector of the host institution must sign the application.

The deadline for submitting applications is set in the announcement of the call.

Assessment of the Applications

Assessment of the applications will be based on the criteria above.

Assessment is given on a scale from 1 (weak) to 6 (excellent), and written feedback will be provided.

The assessment process has two stages:

1. Assessment of all submitted applications and selection of the best candidates for progression to the second round.
2. Site visits at the institutions selected. The visits will provide further insights through interviews with members of the proposed Centre teams and key stakeholders such as students, staff, senior management and other partners. Additional information might be requested prior to the site visit.

An international expert panel with student representation will conduct the assessment. NOKUT appoints the members of the expert panel.

The recommendations of the expert panel will be presented to the board of NOKUT, which makes the final decision.