



## **Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway Report from the Principal Evaluation Committee**

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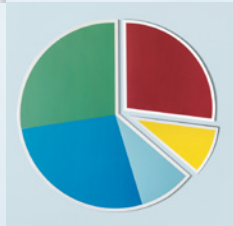
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# Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway

Report from the Principal Evaluation Committee

Evaluation  
Division for Science and the Research System





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# Foreword

In 2017, the Research Council of Norway (RCN) appointed six panels to undertake a wide-ranging field evaluation of the Social Sciences research in Norway. The panels consisted of independent social scientists from a range of Nordic and European countries. The task was carried out from spring 2017 until the early months of 2018. Each panel covered a research area within the social sciences. Their evaluations have been published in six separate research area reports.

The panels' reviews have been synthesised by a principal committee into an overall evaluation of the social sciences. The principal committee comprised the panel chairs of the six research area panels under the leadership of Professor Katarina Eckerberg.

The Research Council of Norway and the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Higher Education (NIFU), Oslo, Norway provided project management support to the committee. Research Professor Vera Schwach of NIFU acted as scientific secretary to the committee.

The committee would like to express its gratitude to all the research institutions and their research groups that provided extensive reports and publications, and for making time for the follow-up interviews for SAMEVAL. We are also very grateful for the professional assistance provided by a long list of RCN employees, headed by Heidi Dybesland of the Division of Science and the Research System.

Oslo, June 2018

Professor Katarina Eckerberg, Chair of principal committee and chair of Panel 3, Political Science

Professor Ole Mertz, chair of Panel 1, Geography

Professor Eva Liljebloom, chair of Panel 2, Economics

Professor Karin Helmersson Bergmark, chair of Panel 4, Sociology

Professor Jon Mitchell, chair of Panel 5, Social Anthropology

Professor Niels Vestergaard, chair of Panel 6, Economic-Administrative Research Area

# Executive summary

The aim of the evaluation of Social Science research in Norway (SAMEVAL) was to review the present state of social science research in Norway as a basis for recommendations on the future development of research. The evaluation covered six research areas: geography, economics, political science, sociology, social anthropology and the economic-administrative research area. It included 3,005 social scientists in total and 42 institutions – 26 faculties/departments at universities and university colleges, and 16 publicly financed social science research institutes. The evaluation further comprised 136 research groups within those institutions.

Based on the six disciplinary evaluation reports, the principal committee finds that a large number of institutions and research groups are performing well across the social sciences and above the Nordic and OECD averages in terms of the bibliometric analysis (Damvad, 2017). A high proportion of the evaluated research groups are performing very well. The distribution of scientific grades is relatively even among the six evaluated disciplines, centred around the two grades 'good' and 'very good', but with Social Anthropology and Economics performing particularly well compared to international standards. Still, it is possible to get much more out of the social science research, to make further international impact, advance theoretical debate and develop critical thinking. The principal committee therefore calls for a better balance to be struck between basic and applied research. For institutions with high levels of core funding, this might involve directly allocating core funding to basic research. Elsewhere, more funding might be allocated to 'free research' in pursuit of more theoretically driven research, as formulated by the researchers themselves rather than steered by programmatic topics.

All of the panels were struck by the large number of institutions pursuing social science research, widely spread over the country, with many separate research units even within a particular region. Creating critical mass for disciplinary research in rather small research groups and/or multidisciplinary environments is therefore a considerable challenge. Various forms of national as well as international networking and collaboration within the disciplines are therefore imperative. The situation also calls for more strategic thinking, both by the Government and by the respective institutions, about who should do what, and how this can be sufficiently funded. In addition, the principal committee suggests that PhD education could be strengthened by national coordination, given the small numbers of disciplinary PhD students in almost all environments except the Oslo region.

Interdisciplinary research is a strong feature of the Norwegian research landscape compared with many other countries. In part, this could be a reaction to the stronger emphasis on strategic and/or thematic research, but it is probably also an attempt to resolve the problem of having many small social science environments. While the strong interdisciplinary research is a considerable asset, there are also associated risks as regards how to ensure sufficient disciplinary depth and methodological innovation in such research.

The SAMEVAL evaluation was tasked with assessing the societal relevance and impact of social science research. However, a majority of institutions largely reported their dissemination activities, rather than the relevance and impact in relation to different societal actors, suggesting that the methods and application of such assessments need to be further discussed and developed. Overall, however, there is no doubt that Norwegian social science has considerable relevance for a large range of public and private societal actors and activities, and that a large number of 'good practice' research impact cases were submitted by the social science institutions.



# Sammendrag

Målet med evalueringen av samfunnsvitenskapelig forskning i Norge (SAMEVAL) var å vurdere status og komme med anbefalinger om hvordan forskningen kan utvikles videre. Evalueringen har omfattet seks fagdisipliner: geografi, samfunnsøkonomi, statsvitenskap, sosiologi, sosialantropologi og økonomisk-administrativ forskning. Til sammen har 3 005 samfunnsvitere og 42 institusjonene deltatt, herunder 26 fakulteter/institutter ved universiteter og høyskoler og 16 offentlig finansierte samfunnsvitenskapelige forskningsinstitutter. Evalueringen omfattet videre 136 forskningsgrupper ved disse institusjonene.

På grunnlag av de seks evalueringsrapportene konkluderer hovedkomiteen med at mange av de samfunnsvitenskapelige institusjonene og forskningsgruppene gjør det godt, og med basis i publiseringsanalysen over gjennomsnittet i Norden og OECD (Damvad 2017). En stor andel av forskningsgruppene som ble evaluert, gjorde det meget godt. De seks disiplinene rangeres vitenskapelig sett ganske jevnt og faller for det meste i kategoriene godt og meget godt, men sosialantropologi og samfunnsøkonomi gjør det spesielt godt etter internasjonal standard. Det er imidlertid fortsatt rom for å få mye mer ut av den samfunnsvitenskapelige forskningen og for å øke den internasjonale gjennomslagskraften, fremme teoretisk debatt og utvikle kritisk tenkning. Hovedkomiteen mener derfor det bør arbeides for å utvikle en bedre balanse mellom grunnforskning og anvendt forskning. For institusjoner med en høy andel basisfinansiering kan dette bety at de bør prioritere midlene til grunnforskning. Andre steder kan en større andel av midlene settes av til "fri forskning" for å produsere mer teoretisk orientert forskning som ikke er styrt av programtemaer, men er formulert av forskerne selv.

Alle panelene trakk frem det store antallet institusjoner over hele landet som driver samfunnsvitenskapelig forskning, over, med mange separate forskningsenheter innenfor en og samme region. Å oppnå en kritisk masse innen forskningen i et fag med små forskningsgrupper og/eller tverrfaglige miljøer er derfor en betydelig utfordring. Det vil være avgjørende å etablere ulike former for nettverk og samarbeid nasjonalt og internasjonalt i disse fagene. Situasjonen krever også mer strategisk planlegging både fra regjeringens side og institusjonene selv med hensyn til hvem som bør gjøre hva, og hvordan dette kan finansieres med tilstrekkelige midler. I tillegg mener hovedkomiteen at det lave antallet disiplinorienterte ph.d.-studenter i nesten alle miljøer bortsett fra i Oslo-regionen tilsier at ph.d.-utdanningen bør styrkes gjennom nasjonal koordinering.

Noe som preger det norske forskningslandskapet sammenlignet med mange andre land, er tverrfaglig forskning. Denne utviklingen kan delvis skyldes den sterke vektleggingen av strategisk og/eller tematisk forskning, men det har sannsynligvis også vært en måte å knytte de mange små samfunnsvitenskapelige miljøene sammen på. Selv om solid tverrfaglig forskning er av stor verdi, vil en slik modell kunne være problematisk når det gjelder å sikre tilstrekkelig faglig dybde og metodeutvikling i forskningen.

SAMEVAL-evalueringen skulle vurdere samfunnsvitenskapelig forsknings relevans for og påvirkningskraft i samfunnet. Imidlertid rapporterte et flertall av institusjonene omfattende om sin formidlingsvirksomhet snarere enn om forskningens relevans og påvirkningskraft i forhold til ulike samfunnsmessige aktører, noe som kan tyde på et behov for ytterligere drøfting og utvikling av metoder og anvendelse av slike vurderinger. Samlet sett er det imidlertid ikke tvil om at norsk samfunnsvitenskap har betydelig relevans for et bredt spekter av offentlige og private samfunnsaktører og -aktiviteter, og at de samfunnsvitenskapelige institusjonene kan vise til god forskningsrelevans og et stort antall "impact cases" å lære av.

# 1 On the evaluation of the Social Sciences

## 1.1 Introduction

Part of the mandate for, and a central duty of, the Research Council of Norway (RCN) is to conduct field evaluations of Norwegian research. These are reviews of how entire research fields, disciplines/research areas, and academic institutions are performing in the national and international context. In general, the evaluations initiated by the Research Council have two main purposes: firstly, to provide an outsider's view and feedback on performance in order to encourage further development of scientific quality; and, secondly, to provide the Research Council with input on the development of national research policy and more specific funding schemes.

The evaluation of Social Science research in Norway (SAMEVAL) covered six research areas: geography, economics, political science, sociology, social anthropology and the economic-administrative research area. It included 3,005 social scientists in total. It involved 42 institutions, 26 of which were faculties /departments at universities and university colleges, and 16 were publicly financed social science research institutes. Within those institutions, the evaluation further comprised 136 research groups (see also Appendix A).<sup>1</sup>

The general tasks of the SAMEVAL evaluation were to:

- review the scientific quality of Norwegian research in the social sciences in an international context;
- provide a critical review of the strengths and weaknesses of the fields of research nationally, at the institutional level and for a number of designated research groups;
- identify the research groups that have achieved a high international level in their research;
- assess the role of organisational strategies and leadership in promoting the quality of research, education and knowledge exchange;
- assess the extent to which previous evaluations have been used by the institutions in their strategic planning;
- investigate the extent of interdisciplinary research at the institutions and in the research groups;
- investigate the relevance and social impact of Norwegian social sciences research and its potential to address targeted societal challenges as defined in the Norwegian Government's Long-Term plan for research and higher education;<sup>2</sup>
- review the role of the Research Council of Norway in funding research activities in the social sciences.

See also Appendix B Terms of reference.

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<sup>1</sup> To identify, select and classify the relevant research areas of social sciences and the researchers involved in each of the areas, the Research Council categorised the areas of social sciences in accordance with the definitions used in the Norwegian Centre for Research Data's (NSD's) register for scientific publication channels. All institutions with social science research as part of their activities were invited to take part. The Research Council sent each institution an overview of the researchers' publication data (2013–2016) from CRISTin (Current Research Information System In Norway). The institutions made the final decision on whether to include researchers in the evaluation, and to which research area panel. The researchers had to be employed by the institution as of 1 October 2016, and they could not be listed if they were included in other ongoing evaluations. The Research Council decided that research groups in all research areas had to consist of at least five members.

<sup>2</sup> Kunnskapsdepartementet (2014).

## **The overall evaluation of the Social Sciences**

The whole evaluation of the social sciences consisted of four elements; 1) three education panels, 2) six research panels, 3) an interplay panel for the combined evaluation of research and education, and 4) a principal evaluation committee for the evaluation of the six research areas taken together. The six research panels wrote separate area assessment reports. The chairs of the six research panels formed a principal evaluation panel with the task of viewing the six research areas as a whole. The present overall report on Social Science in Norway thus builds on the six research area panels, while synthesising across disciplines.

The aim of the evaluation was to review the present state of social science research in Norway as a basis for recommendations on the future development of research within the various areas of social science. The principal evaluation should offer insight into the scientific quality, strengths and weaknesses of social science research, and provide advice and feedback to the evaluated institutions that can be used to enhance their research. Furthermore, it should expand the knowledge base used to develop the funding instruments of the Research Council and provide input on research policy to the Norwegian Government. The more precise tasks are listed below.

## **1.2 Tasks of the principal evaluation**

The terms of reference for the principal committee were as follows:

- Summarise the overall scientific quality and relevance of the research in the social sciences in Norway. To identify which research areas have a particularly strong scientific and societal impact in a national and international context, and which are particularly weak;
- Summarise general assessments related to structural issues such as institutional and national strategies, the institutional landscape, research infrastructure, recruitment and mobility;
- Summarise how the research institutions and the Research Council have followed up on previous evaluations;
- Provide assessments and recommendations at the institutional level, taking into account the different roles and purposes of the universities, university colleges and research institutes;
- Provide assessments and recommendations at the national level, including the role of the Research Council in funding research activities in the social sciences (see Appendix B).

### **1.2.1 The principal committee**

The six members were:

Committee chair: Professor Katarina Eckerberg, Umeå University, Sweden,  
Chair of Panel 3, Political Science

Professor Ole Mertz, University of Copenhagen,  
Chair of Panel 1, Geography

Professor Eva Liljeblom, Hanken School of Economics, Finland  
Chair of Panel 2, Economics

Professor Karin Helmersson Bergmark, Stockholm University, Sweden  
Chair of Panel 4, Sociology

Professor Jon Mitchell, University of Sussex, United Kingdom  
Chair of Panel 5, Social Anthropology

Professor Niels Vestergaard, University of Southern Denmark,  
Chair of Panel 6, Economic-Administrative Research Area

### **The panel's work**

The principal committee met five times in total, first to coordinate the work of the six research area panels with one-day panel chair meetings in April 2017 and September 2017. In addition, the panel chairs met during a week of interviews in October 2017. The principal committee also came together to draft the synthesis report at two one-day meetings in February and April 2018. In between these meetings, the panels have exchanged information and views, mainly by email.

The principal committee is collectively responsible for the overall assessment of social science research based on the six disciplinary panels' respective reports, and for writing up of the evaluative chapters in this synthesis report, and the overall feedback.

### **The principal committee's report**

The evaluation report synthesises the respective evaluations of the six research areas listed above, making observations across the six research areas and making a set of overall recommendations about the future development of research in the social sciences.

The report describes the committee's tasks (Chapter 1), the social sciences and the structure of the national research system (Chapter 2), and assesses the institutional organisation, infrastructure and strategies (Chapter 3). This is followed up by a review of the profile, strengths and weaknesses of the research and its scientific quality and societal relevance (Chapter 4). The overall assessment and the principal committee's advice to the institutions, the Research Council and the Ministry of Education and Research conclude the evaluation report (Chapters 4 and 5).

## **1.3 Approaches, data, methods and assessment tools**

The SAMEVAL evaluation is more than a mere update of previous reviews in the field of social sciences, having spearheaded a new practice in research field evaluation. Using the recent evaluation of the Humanities (2016–2017) as a model,<sup>3</sup> SAMEVAL has taken on new and innovative features.

### **Research groups**

First, in addition to assessing research areas at the national and institutional level, the evaluation includes reviews of research groups. Research groups were assessed in the evaluations of the six research areas and integrated as part of the evaluation of the institutions' research profiles, scientific quality, societal impact and accompanying infrastructure and research personnel.

### **Interplay between research and education**

A second innovate feature entails evaluating the interplay between research, teaching and education. The issue of the interplay between research and education is dealt with both in the evaluation reports from the six research areas (see Table 1, below) and in the interplay reports.<sup>4</sup>

### **Societal impact**

Thirdly, a novel assessment practice in SAMEVAL is the requirement to assess the societal relevance and impact of the research. This calls for explorative searches for the different forms and channels through which knowledge from social science research can affect activities in various spheres and areas of society. It is a response to concern about the need to enhance the societal impact of research. The definition of, and model for, societal impact in the Research Council's evaluations is derived from the

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<sup>3</sup> RCN (2017a).

<sup>4</sup> NOKUT, Interplay reports in Economics, Political science and Sociology.

2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the United Kingdom. In the REF, societal impact is defined as ‘any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’.<sup>5</sup>

Societal relevance and impact have become increasingly emphasised in justification of research, both internationally and in Norway. The potential for societal impact has become a mandatory part of research applications, and it is assessed in the evaluation and selection process for funding strategic research programmes.

To be able to evaluate the societal impact of Norwegian social sciences, the Research Council invited all institutions and research groups to submit examples of ‘impact cases’. The submission of impact cases was not mandatory. In total, 234 unique impact cases were sent to the evaluation.<sup>6</sup> The instructions from the Research Council to the institutions were to describe societal impact as follows: Impact as an effect on, change or benefit to: the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals in any geographic location, whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

In addition, The Research Council had the following requirements for reporting impact:

- The research underpinning the impact cases should be anchored within the institution/research group.
- Both the research and the impact should have been produced within the last 10–15 years. Priority should be given to more recent examples.

Alongside a general search for demonstrated societal impact of scientific activity, the evaluation of social sciences was viewed in the context of the five thematic priority areas and one scientific ambition set out in the Norwegian Government’s Long-term plan for research and higher education (LTP) from 2014.

The six priorities are:

- seas and oceans;
- climate, environment and clean energy;
- public sector renewal, better and more effective welfare, health and care services;
- enabling technologies;
- innovative and adaptable industry;
- world-leading academic groups.<sup>7</sup>

The impact cases were analysed and characterised by the RCN according to these six priorities. This exercise exposed some thematic overlap between the five priority areas of the LTP and the seven societal challenges of H2020. The analysis showed that about one-third of impact cases were related to the LTP priorities, with the two categories ‘Public sector renewal, welfare and health services’ and ‘Climate, environment and clean energy’ being the most prevalent, followed by ‘Innovative and adaptable industry’ and ‘Seas and oceans’. Perhaps surprisingly, however, almost half of the impact cases were seen to be linked to the H2020 challenges, with ‘Europe in a changing world’ and ‘Secure

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<sup>5</sup> Research Excellence Framework (REF), United Kingdom, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> The total number of submitted impact cases was 305. However, since some of these cases were submitted by both the institution and a research group, by the institution to several panels, or even by different institutions, only 234 of the submitted impact cases are unique.

<sup>7</sup> Kunnskapsdepartementet (2014).

societies' accounting for more than half of the matches. Hence, the submitted impact cases appear to target the H2020 challenges to a greater extent than the LTP priorities, even though the latter are formulated in the national context and subject to considerable thematic research funding. Still, the interpretation of these results remains somewhat unclear, and it is difficult to draw conclusions on societal relevance based on such an exercise.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.3.1 Background material

#### Six research area evaluations

The principal evaluation mainly draws on the assessments provided in the evaluation reports from the six research areas (see Table 1). The Research Council has previously initiated subject evaluations of nearly all the research areas involved in the current evaluation of Social Sciences, with one exception: the economic-administrative research area. This body of knowledge has been singled out as a separate subject for evaluation for the first time.

**Table 1: Research area evaluations in Social Sciences, 2017–2018**

<i>Title of evaluation report</i>	<i>Number of institutions evaluated by each panel</i>	<i>Number of researchers evaluated</i>	<i>Numbers of research groups</i>
<i>Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 1 – Geography, The Research Council of Norway, 2018.</i>	12	192	9
<i>Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 2 – Economics, The Research Council of Norway, 2018.</i>	18	502	23
<i>Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 3 – Political Science, The Research Council of Norway, 2018.</i>	22	534	31
<i>Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 4 – Sociology, The Research Council of Norway, 2018.</i>	24	611	32
<i>Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 5 – Social Anthropology, The Research Council of Norway, 2018.</i>	10	171	11
<i>Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 6 – Economic Administrative Research Area, The Research Council of Norway, 2018.</i>	20	995	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>3005</b>	<b>136</b>

In addition, this report considers previous evaluations of the Social Sciences instigated by the Research Council from 2000 to 2016.

<sup>8</sup> RCN (2017d).

**Table 2: Evaluations of Social Sciences, 2002–2017.**

<b><i>Title of evaluation report</i></b>	<b><i>Number of institutions participating</i></b>	<b><i>Number of researchers involved</i></b>
<i>Statsvitenskapelig forskning i Norge. Status og utfordringer, [Research in Political science in Norway. Status and Challenges], The Research Council of Norway, 2002.</i>	19	164
<i>Economic research in Norway – An evaluation. The Research Council of Norway, 2007.</i>	20	345
<i>Sociological research in Norway. An evaluation. The Research Council of Norway, 2010.</i>	13	177
<i>Social and cultural anthropological research in Norway – An evaluation. The Research Council of Norway, 2010</i>	9	88
<i>Geography research in Norway. An evaluation. The Research Council of Norway, 2011</i>	7	57

### **Other recent relevant evaluations**

Besides evaluating the Social Sciences, the present review process should be viewed in a broader methodological context. Since 2010, the Research Council has launched evaluations that cover larger research fields. An earlier example of what can be seen as a new tendency was the comprehensive evaluation of the scientific fields of biology, medicine and healthcare in 2011.<sup>9</sup> This was followed up by a broad review of the fundamental engineering sciences.<sup>10</sup> A few years later, independent social science research institutes were evaluated. Some of the same institutes are included in the present overall evaluation of the Social Sciences.<sup>11</sup> Then the evaluation of the Humanities introduced the concept of research groups.<sup>12</sup> This concept was taken further and formalised when the Research Council required the institutions to register their research groups in CRISTin (Current Research Information System In Norway). Societal Impact was new to the evaluation of the Humanities and it was retained in this SAMEVAL evaluation.

### **Documents on the follow-up of previous evaluations**

The evaluation discusses how the previous evaluations have been used by the Research Council and institutions in plans and strategies. The background material to this assessment consisted of previous evaluations, including plans for follow-up drafted by the national disciplinary boards (Nasjonale fagrådsutvalg), or by a special committee set up by the Research Council for that purpose. The previous evaluations referred to are listed in Table 2 above.

### **1.3.2 Assessments tools**

To ensure that all dimensions were covered, and to make the evaluation exercise uniform across the six different research areas, the panels used identical assessment tools. The grading scale used for the

<sup>9</sup> RCN (2011).

<sup>10</sup> RCN (2015).

<sup>11</sup> RCN (2017b).

<sup>12</sup> RCN (2017a).

SAMEVAL assessment for research production and scientific quality referred to the institution or research group (here called unit), and included criteria relating to quality, productivity and international networking. The scale and its criteria are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Scientific quality, numerical scale**

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>5 Excellent</b>	Original research at the international forefront. The unit has a very high productivity. The unit [the institution /research group] undertakes excellent, original research, and publishes it in outstanding international channels for scientific and scholarly publications. Its researchers present ongoing research regularly at recognised, international scientific conferences.
<b>4 Very good</b>	Research with a high degree of originality, and a scientific profile with a high degree of publications in high quality channels for scientific and scholarly publications. The unit has a high productivity. The researchers participate habitually at international scientific conferences. The research is decisively very relevant to the knowledge production in the field internationally.
<b>3 Good</b>	Research of a good international standard. The unit has an acceptable productivity and contributes to the development within its field. The researchers participate at scientific conferences.
<b>2 Fair</b>	Research of an acceptable, but moderate standard. The productivity at the unit is modest, and with few original contributions to the field internationally.
<b>1 Weak</b>	Research of insufficient quality and with a meagre scientific publication profile. The productivity is low.

### **Assessment of societal impact**

In practice, the six panels used the following criteria for assessing the *reach and significance* of the impact cases:

- (1) Detailed documentation of research (results/processes) that are suggested to have impact;
- (2) Proof of evidence of the impact of this research (product/process) on the activity, attitude, awareness, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals;
- (3) Importance and significance of the documented change (high/low);
- (4) Reach of the documented change (global/national/regional or local).



## **1.4 The principle committee's observations on the evaluation of social sciences**

The process has been a comprehensive endeavour, and a precondition for its accomplishment has been the orderly organisation provided by the RCN and the immense work done by the participating institutions in providing the self-assessments and other underlying data. The panels were presented with a large and complex body of written data from different sources to illuminate the research area at different levels of each institution. The material has been read and discussed thoroughly by the panels, yet some limitations of the exercise have been noted during the process.

Firstly, the available quantitative data and bibliometric analysis were quite difficult to incorporate into the evaluation. Data on funding streams were reported differently by different institutions, and bibliographic data were not as reliable as might be hoped. For some institutions, there were discrepancies between the number of researchers submitted for evaluation and the number evaluated in the bibliometric analysis. The absence of comparable citation data made it hard to calibrate the grading of the institutions and research groups. Except for the economics panel, which, by tradition, relies a great deal on bibliometric measuring of research quality, the other five panels therefore agreed to use the bibliometric data with some caution, using qualitative assessment of the self-assessments and published submissions as the primary information. In some cases, however, the bibliometric data were found to be reliable and they were used more actively in the evaluation. Bibliographic data for the institute level on publication in Level 1 and 2 outlets, comparative levels of scientific impact with the OECD/the Nordic countries/Norway, and the number of publications per researcher, were used to confirm judgements made in the qualitative review.

Secondly, several of the evaluated institutions had undergone organisational and structural changes during the period evaluated, and many smaller institutions had merged due to government decisions. These organisational changes made the evaluation more challenging, since it was difficult to ascribe the present state/performance of the institution to the bibliometric data and submitted material. In addition, since only a small fraction of the research at the institutions was evaluated, it was not always easy to disentangle the position of this disciplinary research field from the overall organisational context.

Thirdly, it was not always clear how research groups were identified and what their actual 'social life' was like. In general, it was not clear why specific researchers were included while others were not. Rather, the interviews suggested that, while some research groups were well established, others had only been created for the purpose of the SAMEVAL evaluation. In the latter situation, assessing their leadership, research strategy and methods for increasing scientific quality (as part of the evaluation criteria) was not particularly relevant.

Fourthly, the material to be evaluated was selective. A limited range of published material was presented (the '10 best' per unit), and a limited number of research groups, and a limited number of researcher CVs. This meant that the panel could only view the scientific output of a distinct slice of the total social science community in Norway. The SAMEVAL interviews revealed that the different units had chosen their '10 best' publications according to quite varying criteria; for example, some focused on the highest scientific impact journals, while others wanted to show publications from almost all members of the institution or research groups. Similarly, the panels had problems identifying and assessing the role of some of the affiliated professor IIs in terms of their actual contribution to the institution and/or research group, other than merely strengthening its list of publications. Taken

together, these limitations mean that comparisons across disciplines, institutes and groups are not straightforward.

Fifthly, several of the panels were presented with a relatively high percentage of interdisciplinary research to evaluate. Some of this was derived from disciplinary researchers working in interdisciplinary environments, which posed few problems since the disciplinary contribution could still be assessed. However, some research groups and institutions stressed in their self-assessments that their research was of a truly interdisciplinary nature, raising certain questions about what disciplinary contribution was being evaluated and against what criteria. Still, this was not seen as a major issue by the panels.

While the SAMEVAL panels appreciate that high-level publications should be targeted, and supportive structures put in place to promote such efforts, we also note that the current system for measuring research production and scientific quality should be regularly evaluated and updated to ensure that it conforms with the international publication strategies of social science research. While peer-reviewed publications will most likely remain the core of scientific publication, other forms of rapidly evolving communication venues (such as film and social media) need to be recognised, especially if such communication is also subject to some form of peer review.

Finally, the evaluation of the societal relevance and impact of the research caused much discussion in the panels, a topic that we develop further in section 4.6.

In light of the above issues, the principal evaluation committee wishes to emphasise that the scientific scores should be used with care. The grading scale used for the SAMEVAL assessment for scientific quality and production referred to the institution or research group, and included criteria related to quality, productivity and international networking. This made the scale rather difficult to use consistently. It is suggested that the RCN should consider using a grading scale in future based more on quality expressed as the originality, rigour and significance of the research, and that the grading criteria be revised to reflect these attributes.

## 2 Social Sciences: profile and context

### 2.1 The institutions

The social sciences have a distinct place in Norwegian research policy and funding, and the social sciences are fairly large, given Norway's size. Social sciences research is pursued at a variety of institutions in the higher education sector and the 'institute sector' (see below). The total expenditure on the social sciences amounted to approx. NOK 6.4 billion in 2015, or 21 per cent of the total public research and development (R&D) expenditure.<sup>13</sup> In 2015, the sum of NOK 6.4 billion broke down as NOK 4.3 billion, or 67 per cent, to the higher education sector and NOK 2.1 billion, or 33 per cent, to the institute sector.

#### The higher education sector

The higher education sector comprises universities, specialised universities and university colleges, as well as a number of other institutions, both governmental and private, with different accreditation status. Since the turn of the millennium, several structural changes have taken place in the higher education sector. The number of institutions with university status increased from four to eight, and in the space of relatively few years, several mergers of state university colleges reduced their number from 26 to 19. The Government stated in a White Paper from 2014<sup>14</sup> that it wanted fewer, but more robust institutions.

In terms of research and funding of social sciences, there are considerable differences between research-performing institutions in Norway. In general, research funding in the higher education sector is closely linked to teaching positions and the number of students. Hence, the size of the funding for social science research reflects a high number of students, particularly in the disciplines of Economics and Education. The social sciences accounted for 24 per cent of the total expenditure in the higher education sector in 2015.<sup>15</sup>

Research takes place at the country's four old universities: The University of Bergen; the University of Oslo; NTNU, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim; and the University of Tromsø, as well as at three new universities: The University of Agder, the University of Stavanger, and Nord University in Bodø. In addition, social sciences fields are represented at NMBU, Norwegian University for Life Sciences, as well as at the specialised universities, NHH, Norwegian School of Economics, and BI, Norwegian Business School. In addition, there are a number of departments and other units of disparate kinds where social science research is part of the research work.

The institutions receive a significant proportion of their funding (R&D budgets) directly from the Government as core funding: in 2015, for instance, the social sciences received 76 per cent of the total expenditure on the field as core funding. Other sources of income include external funding from the Research Council of Norway, the EU and other competitive funding bodies. The research fields of Humanities and Social Sciences are the two fields in the higher education sector that receive the

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<sup>13</sup> The Research Council of Norway, Social sciences research in Norway 2010–2016: Funding streams and funding instruments. Report submitted to the principal committee for the Research Council's evaluation of the Social Sciences (SAMEVAL), report for internal use by SAMEVAL evaluators (ref. page 1, first section) unpublished report, undated (2017?): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Kunnskapsdepartementet (2015).

<sup>15</sup> The expenditure on university hospitals is included.

highest percentage of their funding as core funding. In comparison, the field of engineering and technology receives only 54 per cent of its income as core funding.<sup>16</sup>

### **The institute sector**

'The institute sector' is a common term in Norway for a rather heterogeneous group of institutions that vary in size, profile and legal status. Overall, there are around 100 institutions outside the universities, about half of which are commonly referred to as research institutes. The 100 units in the institute sector includes institutes that primarily carry out research for public sector clients, other institutes that focus on private enterprise and carry out contract research for Norwegian and foreign companies, museums and hospitals (except for university hospitals). Overall, the institute sector accounts for 23 per cent of the total national R&D. The institutions within the institute sector fall into three groups. The first group, approximately 40 institutions, falls under the guidelines for government funding of research institutes and receives its core funding from the Research Council of Norway. All research institutes in this evaluation, with one exception, receive their core funding from the Research Council. The second group consists of a few government research institutes that receive their basic funding directly from a ministry. None of these government institutes is represented in this evaluation. The third group of institutions in the institute sector consists of about 40 private and public institutions, which to a greater or lesser extent, perform R&D as part of their activity.<sup>17</sup> Only one institution in this category is included in the evaluation of social sciences – the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (Folkehelseinstituttet).

The fifteen social science research institutes included in this evaluation are mainly thematically oriented towards public policy and management.<sup>18</sup> Their activities can roughly be divided into four partly overlapping areas: 1) international affairs and foreign relations; 2) environmental policy; 3) the economic foundation, structure and development and of the welfare state, and 4) regional issues.

## **2.2 More on funding streams and instruments**

The main funding streams of relevance to the evaluation of social sciences are: 1) funding for universities and university colleges with an integrated research and development component (R&D component) (see above), and 2) funds allocated via the Research Council of Norway (see below).

### **Research Council: core funding for public research institutes<sup>19</sup>**

Unlike the universities, the research institutes rely heavily on a high share of external funding, through commissioned research and open competition. As mentioned, most of these institutes fall under the guidelines for government funding of research institutes, and receive their core funding from the Research Council. The Council manages the government core funding for all the research institutes involved in this evaluation except the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. The level of core funding varies from 6 per cent of turnover at the lowest to 21 per cent. On average, the funding is around 13

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<sup>16</sup> The Research Council of Norway, Social sciences research in Norway 2010–2016: Funding streams and funding instruments, 2017: 2, 4.

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.forskingsradet.no/prognost-indikatorrapporten/Tabellsett\\_2016/1254021688842](https://www.forskingsradet.no/prognost-indikatorrapporten/Tabellsett_2016/1254021688842); Indikatorrapporten, 2016, table B.03 instituttsektor [in Norwegian only].

<sup>18</sup> RCN (2017e). For an account of the social science institute sector, see RCN (2017b): 18–32.

<sup>19</sup> Technical term: Basic allocation to research institutes, cf. [www.forskingsradet.no/eng](http://www.forskingsradet.no/eng), read 13.12.2017; Forskningsrådet, [prosjektbanken.no](http://prosjektbanken.no), the core funding for all social research institutes was NOK 261.9 million in 2016, [www.forskingsradet.no/prosjektbanken](http://www.forskingsradet.no/prosjektbanken), read 14.12.2017.

per cent for the institutes that take part in this evaluation.<sup>20</sup> The core grant consists of two parts: a fixed amount, and an amount determined by performance.<sup>21</sup> The performance-based part of the core grant is aimed at achieving a sound balance between scientific quality and societal relevance. The distribution of this part is based on four performance indicators, weighted using a relevance component.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Research Council and the competition for national funding**

The institutes and the universities compete for the same financial support from national (and Nordic) sources, and funding from the Research Council of Norway (RCN) plays a significant role in knowledge production at the institutes. The RCN provides funding for a wide range of activities, ranging from research infrastructure and networks to programmes, projects and centres of excellence. Here, the focus will be on selected schemes for funding of general importance to the social sciences, i.e. networking, centres of excellence, independent projects (FRIPRO)<sup>23</sup> /basic research programmes; policy-oriented programmes ('handlingsrettede programmer'), and large-scale programmes ('store programmer'). Compared with natural sciences, technology and medicine, the humanities and the social sciences display a more stable pattern in their funding arrangements.

Since 2002, research groups have been selected for funding for up to ten years through a scheme for targeted centres. The first round concerned general, disciplinary and interdisciplinary centres of excellence. Subsequently, new types of thematically specialised, targeted centres have been established. All centres have the same aim: to promote research of high scientific quality. Social scientists have been part of some of these centres; many of the groups have been interdisciplinary within the social sciences, but also across other fields of science.<sup>24</sup> One spin-off effect has been the institutional initiatives, where universities have targeted existing research groups and established their own, local excellence groups and centres.

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<sup>20</sup> NIFU, FoU-statistikbanken, (NIFU, R&D statistics bank), 'Key figures for research institutes. Current income by category of funds', 2016.

<sup>21</sup> To qualify for a core grant, the unit must: undertake research of interest to Norwegian business, government or society at large; maintain disciplinary and scientific competencies as demonstrated through scientific publications; conduct research activities of a sufficient scale to permit the development of significant competence and research capacity within the organisation; have a variety of research income and compete in open national and international competitions for research funding; not pay dividends or provide either direct or indirect benefits to the owner or close stakeholders.

<sup>22</sup> Commission-based income from national sources (45 per cent); scientific publications, expressed as the number and level of scientific publications registered in the CRISTin database (30 per cent); income from international sources (20 per cent); the number of doctoral degrees gained by staff or students who are funded more than fifty per cent by the institute (5 per cent). Research Council of Norway, 'Public basic funding for research institutes', read 11.12.2018;

[https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/Public\\_basic\\_funding/1254010731867](https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/Public_basic_funding/1254010731867); NIFU, FoU-statistikbanken, nøkkeltall for forskningsinstitutter (in Norwegian), [www.nifu.no](http://www.nifu.no).

<sup>23</sup> FRIPRO is an open, national competitive arena funded by the RCN. It covers all fields of research and aims to promote scientific quality at the forefront of international research, boldness in scientific thinking and innovation, careers for young research talents and mobility for researchers early in their careers.

<sup>24</sup> The Research Council of Norway, centres of excellence: [https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/SFF\\_I/1253978073056](https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/SFF_I/1253978073056); [https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/SFF\\_II/1253978083956](https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/SFF_II/1253978083956); [https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/SFF\\_III/1253978083961](https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/SFF_III/1253978083961); [https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/Nyheter/Ti\\_nye\\_sentre\\_for\\_fremragende\\_forskning/1254025392105/p1224067001855](https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-sff/Nyheter/Ti_nye_sentre_for_fremragende_forskning/1254025392105/p1224067001855): Centres for environment friendly Energy Research (FME), [https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-energisenter/Om\\_sentrene/1222932140880](https://www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-energisenter/Om_sentrene/1222932140880).

Recently, according to the Research Council, there seems to be a tendency whereby funding through large-scale programmes is increasing, especially in the fields of climate and energy research.<sup>25</sup> The large-scale programmes are important to the social sciences. The thematic programmes are the RCN's response to the government's long-term political priorities: the seas and oceans; climate, environment and clean energy; public sector renewal, better and more effective welfare, health and care services; enabling technologies; innovative and adaptable industry, and world-leading academic groups.<sup>26</sup>

In 2016, social scientists at Norwegian institutions received NOK 117.7 million from the Research Council (excluding core funding for the research institutes);<sup>27</sup> 55.8 per cent (NOK 698.9 million) of the support from the Research Council concerned thematic programmes, and 11.5 per cent (NOK 143.7 million) were independent projects (FRIPRO). The importance of independent project funding measured as a share of total RCN funding varies across scientific fields, the mean being 9.5 per cent. The importance of independent project funding to the Social Sciences is thus close to the mean, whereas the Humanities, Natural and Medical Sciences receive a higher share of their RCN funding as independent projects. Below the mean we find Technology, Agriculture and Fisheries. On the other hand, if we compare the distribution of independent project financing between scientific fields compared to the total national expenditure within the same fields, we find that the Humanities and the Natural sciences are more than twice as big in the independent projects scheme compared to their size nationally, whereas the Medical Sciences have the same share both nationally and in the independent projects scheme. The share of the Social Sciences is reduced from 21 per cent of the total public R&D expenditure to 14 per cent of the independent projects scheme. At the lower end, we again find Technology, Agriculture and Fisheries, which have very small shares of independent project funding compared to their national size.

Researchers at the research institutes were involved to a greater extent in policy-oriented programmes than their peers at the universities, with 54 per cent (NOK 377.6 million) spent at the research institutes, and 42.5 per cent (NOK 297 million) at the universities. The same applies to involvement in large-scale programmes: social scientists at the research institutes participated more often in large-scale programmes targeting national priorities, especially in the fields of energy, climate, health and fish farming.

On the other hand, the universities received more funding from independent projects, NOK 77.7 million, as against NOK 45.5 million at the research institutes.

### **2.2.1 Internationalisation and international funding**

The main funding sources for research activities in Norway are national sources, but international funding has become more important during recent decades. This development is linked to a general trend towards internationalisation, which, since the mid-1990s has been a hallmark of the Norwegian R&D system. Internationalisation is currently a notable dimension of the domestic R&D system.<sup>28</sup> The indicators supporting this statement are many: at present more than two-thirds of Norwegian scientific articles have a non-Norwegian co-author, compared with 17 per cent in the early 1980s.<sup>29</sup> There has

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<sup>25</sup> The Research Council of Norway, Social sciences research in Norway 2010–2016: Funding streams and funding instruments. Report submitted to the principal committee for the Research Council's evaluation of the Social Sciences (SAMEVAL), report for internal use by SAMEVAL evaluators, page 9, unpublished report, undated (2017): 11 pages

<sup>26</sup> Kunnskapsdepartementet (2014).

<sup>27</sup> This description is an overview and includes funding for all areas and units defined as social sciences in Norway. It thus includes institutions and researchers not listed for this evaluation.

<sup>28</sup> RCN (2017e): 6–7; 56–61.

<sup>29</sup> RCN (2017e): 59–60; 69.

been a doubling in the number of Norwegian exchange students abroad since the mid-1990s; and the number of PhD students from abroad reflects the same trend. In the 1990s, 10 per cent of doctoral degrees were awarded to foreign candidates, while in 2017 the percentage was 38.<sup>30</sup>

From the mid-2000s, there has been a noteworthy increase in foreign R&D-funding and a strengthening of European research cooperation.<sup>31</sup> The EU research programmes have been an influential force in this context. Until the Seventh Framework Programme (2007), the EU programmes were generally of limited scope and with their main emphasis on technology and applied research. Since 2007, budgets have increased significantly, due to a portfolio of programmes that has embraced a wider set of topics and goals. The EU programmes now include a broader field of research including the social sciences. Hence, at present, the EU Framework programme is an important source of funding for many countries, Norway included. At the domestic level, several measures have been put in place to strengthen the country's participation in the programmes. As of June 2017, 1.81 per cent of the funds announced in Horizon 2020 (H2020) were granted to researchers and institutions in Norway. This return is slightly below the official target of 2 per cent.<sup>32</sup>

Of the seven societal challenges targeted by H2020, the fields most relevant to social scientists are the challenges: 'Europe in a changing world' (SC6) and 'Secure Societies' (SC7). In addition, challenges related to health and demographic change, and to climate and environment are of relevance to social scientists. Within H2020, an effort is being made to mobilise the disciplines of the social sciences and humanities across the framework programme. The motive for this is that the perspectives of social sciences and humanities are regarded as valuable in the development of interdisciplinary research approaches to European and global challenges.<sup>33</sup> The Norwegian success rate within the Societal Challenges was above the 2 per cent target. In June 2016, the success rate reached 2.6 per cent.<sup>34</sup> According to the RCN, above average success rates in SC6 and SC7 indicate clear engagement by Norwegian social scientists with these parts of the Societal Challenges.<sup>35</sup> The results in the H2020 excellence schemes are below average.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> RCN (2017e): 49, 63.

<sup>31</sup> RCN (2017e): 56–58.

<sup>32</sup> RCN (2017e): 6, 72.

<sup>33</sup> RCN (2017e): 71; The Research Council of Norway, Social sciences research in Norway 2010–2016: Funding streams and funding instruments, unpublished report, undated (2017): 11 pages.

<sup>34</sup> RCN (2017e): 71–72.

<sup>35</sup> The Research Council of Norway, Social sciences research in Norway 2010–2016: Funding streams and funding instruments, p.11. As of March 2017 the amount of funding for social scientists is: SC6, NOK 78.3 mill. + SC7, NOK 130.4 mill. = NOK 208.7 mill. of a total of NOK 1,874 mill., or 11 per cent of the total available funding.

<sup>36</sup> RCN (2017e): 11.

## 3 Institutions and research infrastructure

### 3.1 The institutional landscape: organisations and strategies

The institutions within the social science research area range from full-scale universities to research institutes via university colleges and business schools. Some research institutes and business schools are embedded in a university, while others are independent entities. This creates diversity in terms of resources, purpose and opportunities. For social science research in Norway, this diversity can be both an advantage and a limitation. On the one hand, the diversity can be utilised to ensure the right mix of basic and applied research, of theoretical and empirical research and of general/generic and field research. On the other hand, because there are so many institutions, this diversity can also turn out to be a limitation since the research environments can become too small, fragmented and divided, providing less than optimal research environments with duplication of effort /competition between them.

For an independent institution, this means that it is very important to determine what difference the institution wants to make, within which research areas it will be active, and what value it aims to add to Norwegian society. These institutional goals need to be realistic and attainable within a reasonable period. It is imperative that each institution finds its niche within the Norwegian and international research arena. Based on these goals, strategies and management/leadership structures should be developed that reflect the institution's position. When the six panels have assessed these aspects in SAMEVAL, we find that, although a fair number of institutions have indeed been able to achieve this outcome, many simply state that their goal is to achieve very high research quality and increase international external research funding. No one disagrees with such general statements. However, these latter institutions need to analyse and develop strategies that better reflect their current situation and available resources. The institutions could also benefit from defining their mission – including their teaching mission, where appropriate – in more detail: what difference do they want to make and what value-added will they provide for Norwegian society?

The universities tend to have a common management structure: a dean and vice-deans for research and education, and sometimes also for knowledge exchange. For some smaller universities and university colleges, overall responsibility for research is placed with the heads of department. However, at the departmental level, the organisation of research is often determined on an ad hoc basis by individual researchers' energy, personal passion and ambitions.

A variety of instruments are used by institutions to signal common research interests to both national and international colleagues, as well as national and international stakeholders. These include the formation of 'research centres', 'centres of excellence', 'research project consortia' etc. In some cases, these existing groupings were presented to the evaluation as research groups. In other cases, research groups appear to have been created for the purposes of the evaluation itself.

Indeed, the panels' assessments of research groups revealed considerable variation among the institutions as regards their purpose and 'social life'. While some have been functioning as a group for many years, others were largely 'virtual' collections of individual researchers in the discipline in question. Providing a constructive and enabling research environment, while maintaining the autonomy of individual researchers to develop their own research agendas, should be the most valuable function of a research group. It was noted that many of the high-scoring research groups have a good support structure within their departments or institutions, whereas some of the weaker ones lack such support. Joint activities aimed at raising scientific quality, such as regular work-in-



progress seminars, article or book manuscript review sessions, mock research grant interviews, staff retreats, and invited (international) guest speakers are ways forward.

A lack of a coherent organisational structure for research throughout an institution makes it difficult to develop a research policy. Since the research groups, and consequently the research areas, have often been developed in a bottom-up way, this can result in a poor match between the institutional strategies and the research areas, unless the motivation and interests of individual researchers and enabling research groups are integrated into the overall strategy. The quality of research could be increased by developing consistent and realistic research strategies together with the necessary organisational structure for research, including leadership.

As a result of the recent mergers between different institutions – mainly between university colleges – larger institutions have been created, which creates good opportunities for reducing unit costs and increasing the quality of teaching and research. However, some of these new institutions have several campuses and are spread over large distances. Given this dispersal, it will most likely be impossible to establish research on a sufficient scale and of sufficient quality to support teaching in all areas on every campus. In such a situation, it could be considered strategic to concentrate the research effort at fewer campuses, making the others ‘teaching campuses’.

Research institutes often depend on commissioned work and mainly carry out empirical and applied research. This research is needed and in demand, e.g. by various government bodies. The current model of organising research at the national level provides both basic and applied research based on demand. The bigger institutions with substantial base funding seek to increase their basic research output, while other entities with much lower base funding ‘follow the money’, which several institutions do in a very efficient way. The point is, however, that from a dynamic perspective it can be questioned whether this model will produce applied research of the necessary quality in the longer term. It could be considered strategic to develop a model with closer ties between basic and applied research institutions.

### **3.2 Research personnel, including recruitment, training, gender balance and mobility**

The panels found that most appointments in social sciences are to permanent positions at associate professor/senior researcher level, with tenure-track systems existing particularly in the universities. The tenure track is less clear in many of the research institutes. Internal recruitment, i.e. from the same institution/department, is widespread in several areas and institutions. Although international recruitment is increasing, most institutions practise this in a rather passive way (mainly advertising the position on some international website). However, there are also good examples of very active and successful international recruitment strategies, typically in larger institutions. A tricky balance seems to exist between the need to deliver teaching in Norwegian and the need to internationalise staff, especially in the smaller and more teaching-oriented institutions. Given the typically rather attractive workloads (reasonable amounts of research time) and good facilities, there is still good potential to attract excellent candidates through more active international recruitment.

Compared to the universities, the research institutes are in a different position as regards recruitment. On the one hand, they are private institutions, and thus able to hire without complying with standard public recruitment policies. On the other hand, positions are typically permanent, and filled from the bottom up, which puts more emphasis on in-work training and career development

incentives and support. In general, the research institutes seem to have good recruitment strategies and staff support. Also in their case, however, internationalisation has met with obstacles, since a majority of the consultancy work is in the Norwegian language. Another observation was that some research institutes seem to 'lose' their best researchers to universities, although mobility in this sense should not be seen as a bad thing.

Most institutions encourage international mobility, and, for example, offer sabbaticals that can be used for longer visits abroad. Some of the institutions offer competitive funding for such stays. However, despite the incentives, researcher mobility is overall rather low in most areas, although many members of staff and PhD students do spend periods of time abroad. There seems to be a kind of social reluctance in operation as regards mobility, even despite some rather generous funding schemes offering the possibility of taking family members along. Sabbaticals are mostly pursued within research projects, and some researchers reported that they go to their cabins in Norway to write up research instead of taking the opportunity to get inspiration from international research environments. Incoming mobility of researchers is typically even less developed. Many institutions use part-time positions (professor II positions) as means of attracting international researchers. Such positions are used in an uneven manner. In some cases, they lead to a considerable amount of collaboration in terms of joint publications and funding applications, and the researchers are also used, for example, to supervise PhD students or to provide some teaching. In other cases, the integration of such researchers within the institutions appears to be rather loose, and evidence of positive outcomes is lacking. Visiting international researchers could become more fully engaged in their host research environment, while being used more strategically to support the development of its overall research quality.

In terms of diversity, the institutions reported on the balance between men and women, but said less about diversity in terms of different cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, Norwegians of migrant origin, different nationalities etc. The gender situation varies across institutions and research areas, and in some cases it is quite skewed, such as in economics and the economic-administrative research area. While the overall gender balance seems to be keeping up with the situation in other, comparable countries, this is not an excuse for not continuously working hard to achieve a better balance. Institutions typically have gender policies in place, and some go quite far in providing support and incentives for a better balance. For example, the institutions engaged in the RCN-funded Initiative on Gender Balance (BALANSE)<sup>37</sup> were well aware of the problems and had developed strategies to cope with them. The gender imbalance is partly a heritage problem, as shown by the typically better situation among younger researchers.

PhD programmes are important to ensure the next generation of researchers. There are large variations in the attractiveness of the PhD programmes across research areas and institutions; some institutions seem to be too small to provide a sufficiently stimulating environment for PhD students. The degree of formalisation of the PhD programmes also varies strongly. Despite good progress compared to previous evaluations, there is still a need to strengthen PhD education, and there appear to be untapped synergies between different institutions and across PhD programmes. Efforts should continue to the placement stage; there is very little evidence of active efforts being made to assist in placing PhD graduates in the international job market, nor of career development programmes for younger staff members.

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<sup>37</sup> The Initiative on Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management (BALANSE) seeks to promote gender balance at the senior level in Norwegian research through new knowledge, learning and innovative measures. The programme has played an important role in raising awareness of gendered processes in academia.

## 4 Social sciences: profiles, strength and weaknesses

### 4.1 Previous evaluations

The evaluation assessed the extent to which previous evaluations have been used by the Research Council and institutions in their strategic planning. Firstly, it is noted that several of them (Political science 2002; Economics 2006-2007; Social anthropology 2010; Sociology 2010) strongly emphasised the need to place more emphasis on 'free research projects' in the RCN, and that there should be a better balance between basic and applied research. The principal committee notes that the proportion of funding for 'free research projects' has remained constant since then, rather than increasing in relation to thematic research. In this context, an observation made by the panels is that the delivery of high scientific impact research output is not dependent on large-scale funding or large research consortiums geared towards resolving societal challenges.

Secondly, several of the previous evaluations also signalled a need to develop more ambitious theoretical agendas, which has happened to some extent, for instance in Social anthropology, but where there is room for further initiatives. Here, the principal committee is concerned that a more general shift towards funding targeting particular policy-driven or applied agendas might have a narrowing effect on more theoretically/analytically driven social science research.

Thirdly, previous evaluations signalled a need for more communication and networking across institutions, for instance to remedy a marked concentration of quality research in the Oslo region, and to provide more room for PhD education at the national level. In particular, the Sociology and Economics evaluations stressed the need for more collaboration across institutions in PhD education, and this has subsequently materialised in Sociology. For Sociology, this collaboration has been partly driven by the strong emphasis on interdisciplinary research in Norway, which needs to be balanced by national collaboration to strengthen the Sociology discipline, which was mentioned as a problem by the Sociology evaluation in 2010.

Fourthly, several of the previous evaluations recommended raising the international profile of social sciences by targeting journals and publishers with higher scientific impact and international profiles. Over time, considerable progress has indeed been made in this respect, but the panels still noted a relative absence across the board of Norwegian social scientists publishing in the really major international social science journals, and particularly those based in North America.

Fifthly, there is mention of the need to use existing databases to a greater extent, for example to carry out policymaking research for the Norwegian ministries (Geography), something that the SAMEVAL evaluation also believes could be better explored to attract international collaborators and produce more comparative and theoretical research.

It is interesting to note that, although several of the previous evaluations do not specifically mention the need to enlarge the funding portfolio by including international sources such as the EU, this has now become a commonly stated strategic goal of many institutions. Similarly, there is very little discussion of researcher mobility in the previous evaluations.

Most institutions reported in the interviews that they use evaluations in a positive way, for example to sound out their relative strengths and weaknesses, and take action, but there is also evidence of a

certain degree of evaluation fatigue and of scepticism about the benefits of the process for the participating institutions.

## 4.2 Research production and scientific quality

The overall scientific production and quality of the social sciences in Norway is, not surprisingly, rather diverse, but many institutions and research groups are performing well in the range of ‘good’ to ‘very good’. This pattern emerges when analysing the range of grades given by the six panels (see Table 4). The number of grades for institutions is close to normally distributed around grade 3 (given 51 times), and grade 2 and grade 4 were given with almost equal frequency. There is a slight over-representation of grade 5 compared to grade 1, indicating that there are more institutions performing at an excellent level than institutions that are performing poorly.

Overall, the research groups were evaluated more positively than the institutions, with 86 per cent of the grades in the 3–5 range (see Table 5). This suggests that there are a large number of research groups at the forefront of social science research, and, although this result may also reflect the fact that only the best research groups were selected for the evaluation, the absolute number of well-performing research groups is high.

**Table 4: Total number of each grade given to the institutions evaluated by the six panels.**

Panel	Grade					Total institutions
	1	2	3	4	5	
Geography			8	4		12
Economics		1	11	4	2	18
Political Science		6	10	5	1	22
Sociology	2	7	10	3	2	24
Social Anthropology		1	4	4	2	11
Economic-Adm. Research Area	1	6	8	3	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>107</b>

**Table 5: Total number of each grade given to the research groups evaluated by the six panels.**

Panel	Grade					Total res. groups
	1	2	3	4	5	
Geography		1	2	6		9
Economics			10	8	5	23
Political Science		4	13	8	6	31
Sociology	1	7	14	7	2	32*
Social Anthropology			2	5	4	11
Economic-Administrative Res.		5	7	13	5	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>136</b>

\*1 Research group did not submit material.

This good performance is confirmed by bibliometric data showing that the participating institutions and research groups in SAMEVAL are performing above the Nordic and OECD averages in terms of their Field Normalized Citation Score. Moreover, the participating institutions overall have a higher share of Level 2 publications than the nationally defined target of 20 per cent, especially when it comes to books and book chapters. Research institutes are performing best, with 36 per cent of publications in Level 2 outlets, followed by universities (25 per cent) and university colleges (15 per cent), the latter being the only institutional category that falls below the 20 per cent target.

Productivity within the social sciences increased by 23 per cent from 2011 to 2016. The growth is uneven, however, among the different institutions in the SAMEVAL evaluation. While a few of them exhibit growth rates that exceed 100 per cent, others have reduced their productivity. The respective panels' specific assessments of institutions and research groups examine in depth the many reasons for such differences, but it should be emphasised that there is no 'one size fits all'. Generally – and since the institutions and research groups were asked to submit their '10 best publications' – the research assessed in more depth by the six panels was found to be of a good to very good international standard.

There is some diversity in the evaluations of the different research areas. Institutions and research groups within Sociology and the Economic-Administrative Research Area are distributed over the full grading scale, whereas grades below 3 were not given in the smaller research areas of Anthropology and Geography, except in one case. This diversity in grading could partly be an artefact of the diversity and sheer number of institutions that are represented in the other four panels, because, for example, university colleges were not represented in the Geography and Anthropology panels (or at least only indirectly through some recent mergers with universities).

While the grading provides an overview of the assessment of the institutions and research groups, a number of observations that have led to the grading are important to emphasise. While diversity exists in all research areas, Anthropology and Economics are assessed as performing very well compared to international standards, and with a higher proportion of excellent research groups and institutions that contribute both theoretical and empirical research development to the fields. Both perform very well, with high productivity and publications in high impact outlets, and despite its small size, Norwegian Anthropology is world leading in several subdisciplines. Geography consistently performs at a good to very good level and is empirically very strong, but with less impact in terms of advancing theoretical debate in the field. The impact of publications is high, however, indicating that the empirical work has strong relevance and generates international interest.

The Economic-Administrative Research Area is one of the institutionally most diverse fields in the evaluation. This is reflected in very high diversity in performance and, apart from a few excellent groups, there is a need for a stronger focus on high-impact publications. Political Science is assessed to be doing well overall, with a majority of its subdisciplines being well covered. A strong feature of the Political Science profile is policy-oriented research that has high policy impact both nationally and internationally, making Norway a world leader in good practice. However, given the availability of human and financial resources, the full potential of Political Science research to develop innovative theories and methods is not being realised. Finally, Sociology is also a highly diverse field with good research being produced in some places. Overall, however, the research areas appear to have stagnated somewhat and do not produce innovative theoretical research. A strong focus on empirical work has not led to major impact despite it being methodologically solid research.

A general observation in most of the research areas is that much work is driven by a strong focus on Norwegian issues. This is positive and should be encouraged, but the Norwegian examples are not always convincingly placed in a wider social science context. Hence, the Norway-focused research could benefit from a broader international audience and be used to develop and advance social science theory of broader international interest. The general impact of this Norway-focused research is good, which indicates that the Norwegian examples are highly relevant and therefore deserve more effort to include them in international theoretical development.

Another general observation, which we return to in section 4.4, is that the institutions in the Oslo region and in Bergen generally stand out as the strongest in terms of research production and scientific quality. This comes as no surprise given the sheer number of researchers, and the fact that these research environments have been established longer, but there could also be other factors, such as proximity to central policymakers, that explain their advantage over more distant research locations.

### **4.3 Interdisciplinary research**

This evaluation is primarily aimed at evaluating disciplinary research within Norwegian social sciences. However, an important part of contemporary social science research – in Norway as elsewhere – is interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary research is a common and growing feature of Norwegian social science, particularly, though not exclusively, in the independent institute sector.

Interdisciplinary research institutions produce some very high-quality research in Norway. They make important contributions to international debate in areas as varied as international development, migration, environmental and climate change studies, food and fisheries, energy policy, transport and sustainable tourism. Interdisciplinary research units also produce research that has a high level of societal impact. Again, this impact is manifested across a range of different social contexts and in different parts of the world, with a particular focus on the Nordic regions and the Global South. At its best, Norwegian interdisciplinary research has the capacity to be genuinely world-leading.

Interdisciplinary research is often driven by ‘problem-oriented’ research agendas, themselves also driven by policy concerns and priorities, and funding initiatives. To this extent, interdisciplinary research has a tendency to have an applied rather than theoretical or ‘blue skies’ orientation, being responsive or reactive to funding calls, rather than proactively generating a scientific agenda. However, interdisciplinary research has also given rise to new fields of agenda-setting research, whereby contours of ‘new disciplines’ emerge at the intersection of the classical disciplines – sustainability science and political ecology are such research areas, the latter having a strong position within Social Sciences in Norway.

Generating and maintaining high-quality disciplinary research in a context where interdisciplinary research is high on the political agenda raises a number of problematic issues, at least for some of the social science disciplines. As the Sociology evaluation points out, there is a risk that interdisciplinary research focusing on practical problems generates rather mechanistic analyses – which ultimately stifles the development of cutting-edge research. As the Political Science evaluation points out, the role and contribution of particular disciplinary perspectives within interdisciplinary research can sometimes become obscured or even diluted. Particularly if researchers have a long-term involvement with an interdisciplinary team, they may risk becoming detached from the broader disciplinary communities within which they initially trained, making it difficult for them to keep up to date with developments in the field. Interdisciplinary research can sometimes also compromise the

methodological strengths of particular disciplines, for example, in Social Anthropology, where the disciplinary standard is based on long-term immersive fieldwork. Maintaining close ties with disciplinary research environments is one way to circumvent such risks.

At its best, interdisciplinary research in Norway – as elsewhere – is able to balance the complex and competing demands of funding, academic quality and disciplinary standards. Moving forward, it is important to promote and facilitate this balance at all levels. This means: making sure that the policy agenda does not eclipse the scientific agenda; developing contexts for interdisciplinary research that is not driven by applied concerns and the pursuit of societal impact; and ensuring robust disciplinary expertise that can make a full contribution to interdisciplinary research projects.

## **4.4 Research cooperation and networking**

The geography of Norway, coupled with regional policies aimed at ensuring that also sparsely populated areas of Norway can continue to thrive and flourish, presents challenging conditions but also opportunities for cooperation and networking in the Norwegian Social Science landscape. Despite some long distances and time-consuming travel between universities and institutes, we have found a lively dialogue among many scholars and research groups, where, for most disciplines, Oslo is the central node. That said, we have also found areas where cooperation and networks could well be developed further.

### **National collaboration**

In some of the evaluated disciplines, there is little collaboration across institutions within Norway, e.g. political scientists seem to look for networks with international partners rather than seeking synergies with other Norwegian institutions. In other disciplines, e.g. sociology, there are ongoing lively national networks that organise annual seminars, summer schools for PhD students and other meetings. Well-developed national disciplinary collaboration is probably of vital importance to disciplinary achievement, especially in a country like Norway where there are some larger, well-developed institutions for research, but also a fairly large number of small institutions dispersed from north to south. There also seems to be a north-south divide in many respects. At present, networks are too often oriented around individual ‘moments’ of teamwork, rather than long-term strategic enterprises. Institutions need strategies for developing external networks in collaboration with other research organisations, both within and beyond Norway. Institutions as well as the Research Council and ministries also need to develop strategies to ease the constrained mobility of research staff within Norway.

### **PhD education**

Norwegian social science PhD programmes vary in size and structure. Many of the institutions are small and lack critical mass both for creative research and for training PhD students. Some collaborate, while others have little collective graduate-level research training. There is scope for intensified collaboration between institutions and across PhD programmes to develop a range of high level and common courses or even nationwide PhD programmes. The sociology community in Norway, with its collective winter seminars and joint PhD training at the national level, provides a good example. The principal committee recommends that support be given to collaborative PhD courses and research schools with intake from the entire country that would help to establish stronger bonds within the respective disciplines and further the disciplinary advancement of theories and methodologies.

### **International collaboration**

International visibility and impact are largely generated by extensive research networking beyond Norway, including research collaboration in the form of joint projects, publications and other output. Norwegian researchers have become increasingly internationalised over time, but more could still be done to achieve more concrete international collaboration. For instance, the bibliometric analysis shows that the share of publications that are produced in collaboration with international peers varies greatly, from 7 per cent to 69 per cent among the research institutions in SAMEVAL, with some of the highest numbers at institutions that are otherwise dominated by natural sciences (Damvad 2017). As mentioned above, Norway-focused research could achieve greater significance internationally through wider comparisons beyond Norway, thus allowing for more general conclusions and theory development.

Although there is very strong social science research in Norway, the range of comparative work could well be broader in most disciplines. The wealth of data available in many Norwegian institutions could be better used. There are opportunities to make interesting Nordic or Scandinavian comparisons, due, for example, to the presence of strong data sources, such as registry data, in all these countries. The databases are attractive to international collaborators also on the European and global level. There are prospects of longitudinal studies and international comparisons could also be used to generate theoretical development. The richness of data could also be used to produce new insights in policy design, since good and solid empirical analysis can often produce much better policy advice than purely theoretical models.

Here, provision at the national level would be welcome, to develop support systems for, e.g., Horizon 2020 applications. In the larger institutions, such support systems are at hand, but this is not always the case; some of the evaluated institutions are small and can scarcely cover this on their own. More emphasis on the European level, which could significantly benefit social science research in Norway, would also require further networking across Europe and linking up with other European institutions.

To increase international networks and collaboration, the use of adjunct professors is widespread and supported via e.g. funding from the Research Council. However, it is not always clear that these positions lead to commitments from both sides – publications sometimes make no mention of the visiting or adjunct professors' Norwegian affiliation.

Sabbatical systems seem to be in place in the larger institutions, although it is not always clear whether sabbaticals should be used exclusively for international research visits. PhD students and postdocs also seem to have reasonably good opportunities to spend time abroad.

## **4.5 Resources and funding**

Reliance on the Research Council for external funding is a typical feature across all the social sciences. This could be an advantage in that considerable domestic public funding is available, but at the same time, it makes institutions and research groups without substantial core funding very vulnerable to changes in the Research Council's funding policy. The generally lower core funding for research institutes compared to universities limits the capacity of many of the research institutes to publish in international outlets. Increasing the diversity of the funding portfolio is therefore a common goal of the majority of research units at the universities, university colleges and institutes.

The panels further noted that, if all of Norway is to have social science research of reasonable scientific quality, then more funding will be needed given the considerable variation described



above. Institutions with high levels of core funding should ensure that it is used for basic research. The government also needs to focus on both basic and applied research and to give additional support to disciplinary networking, both nationally and internationally, to support scientific quality within the social sciences. This would enable the Research Council to allocate more funds to open research, such as FRIPRO, to allow for more bottom-up research that can help to strengthen the theoretical and methodological advancement of disciplinary research across the social sciences. There is a current international trend to put most funding into strategic and thematic research rather than open research. If this trend is pursued in Norway, this could severely undermine the future development of the respective disciplines.

Similarly, there is a need to further strengthen the capacity to apply for international funding. The RCN's own analysis of research funding suggests that: 'A high number of strong applications within the national excellence scheme of FRIPRO indicate that there is capacity for excellent research in Norway, but Norwegian researchers need to submit more applications to the ERC grant schemes and increase the international visibility and impact of the Norwegian research.'<sup>38</sup> Many institutions seem not to have fully developed the necessary administrative resources and capabilities to bid for international grants. Supporting more national and international research networking – such as PhD schools/training and writing European level research applications – would help to generate such capacity to compete successfully on the international research funding arena. Such support could include providing ready access to funding opportunities, offering application support, and bringing together researchers from different institutions ahead of upcoming calls. Institutions also need to support their researchers in identifying and producing good quality research project bids through staff training, including administrative staff.

A final observation is that resources for meetings, networks etc. seem to be in place, either integrated into research project funding or made available by the research institutions themselves from their basic funding. However, since staff mobility beyond PhD students and postdoc positions is so limited at present, it might be wise to investigate whether more targeted funding towards this end could improve the situation.

## 4.6 Societal relevance and impact

### 4.6.1 General reflections

There is an ongoing debate about how to describe, assess and score societal impact, even though there is broad agreement that there is a need to address this issue when evaluating research.<sup>39</sup> For example, the relevance and potential for societal impact may vary depending on the nature of the research (basic/applied, conceptual/theoretical/ methodological/empirical, contemporary/historical, local/regional/national/global, etc.). In addition, commissioned research should probably have a more direct, and more easily assessed, impact, since it is presumably expected to address specific problems or knowledge gaps for the societal actors who are funding it. Developing solutions to societal problems does not just involve having short-term impact, but also creating institutional

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<sup>38</sup> RCN Background document to SAMEVAL: Social sciences research in Norway 2010 - 2016: Funding streams and funding instruments p.11.

<sup>39</sup> This text draws on discussions in Panel 3 and insights from Vedung (2015) 187–210; Stoker, G; Peters, G, Pierre, J (eds.) (2015) *The Relevance of Political Science* London: Palgrave Macmillan for the fourth edition of *Theories and Methods of Political Science* (2018).

capacity and critical engagement in a long-term perspective – something that lies at the heart of much social science research. Teaching is therefore an important way for academics to achieve societal impact by improving the analytical capacity of future generations. Professional training is another common practice to generate impact.

The impact of the research could be in the form of a product (that is findings and recommendations from the final reporting) or a result of a process (in which societal actors have taken part at certain stages of the research process and learned from it). A participatory research design might therefore more easily generate notable societal impact. Similarly, close links with intermediaries (such as think tanks, journalists, political parties, citizens' organisations, local communities and social media networks) are likely to boost societal impact.

However, such learning processes are often not documented both 'before' and 'after', which makes the societal impact hard to prove later. A further complication when assessing impact is that societal impact can imply a change in practices that is either conceptual (such as a new or better understanding, enlightenment or insight) or instrumental (such as direct input of research knowledge into decision-making, or practices), where the former type of change is much more difficult to document. Most research findings also need to be repackaged in a more accessible format before they can become useful, and the use of the research in practice depends on a range of factors that are beyond the control of the researchers themselves. Conducting policy-relevant research is therefore no guarantee for generating impact. Furthermore, societal impact is closely connected to the 'relevance' of research, which is influenced by its timing, the circumstances and the standpoint of the observer in relation to the research. Results that might initially appear irrelevant can – after a certain turn of events – become pressingly relevant. Research impact can therefore be a very slow-burning process, and just because a piece of research has not had impact until now, does not mean that it may not do so in future – in relatively unpredictable ways.

Given the many methodological difficulties described above, we remain humble about our attempts to evaluate the societal impact of social sciences based on the given criteria (cf. section 1.3). The principal committee acknowledges that writing up impact cases was a new exercise for some social science institutions. It basically requires monitoring or even a research design of its own that needs to be integrated into (and funded by) research projects. There was also an uneven understanding of the meaning of impact among the institutions and research groups, including the processes of generating impact.

#### **4.6.2 Review of the SAMEVAL impact cases**

In total, 234 unique impact cases were submitted to SAMEVAL by the participating institutions. We concluded that a majority of the submitted impact cases merely described dissemination activities, rather than focusing on proof of societal impact. For example, they reported a range of activities aimed at including stakeholders in the research process and disseminating the research findings. These impact cases showed societal engagement with the research, but did not qualify as 'good practice' because they only represented the first step of creating potential impact. However, there were also impact cases with well-documented changes either in concrete policy or legislation, in the ways in which the research had informed negotiations and political debates, in procedures and guidelines, or in the gathering of statistical information. Some (although surprisingly few) of the institutes have used testimonies to prove impact, while the majority have referred to policy documents that mention the specific research. The good practice cases show concrete and significant proof of impact – or at least strong evidence of *potential* impact – on society, through notable conceptual changes and/or changes in real practices.

The RCN carried out a brief descriptive analysis of the categories of impact from the submitted impact cases.<sup>40</sup> This shows that the majority of research impact had been generated by a group's research, even if some individuals had mainly contributed in an advisory role. A range of beneficiaries were targeted, with Norwegian political institutions at the top, followed by international organisations, the general public, NGOs, industries and private companies. More than half of the impact cases reported national reach, with the reporting of international reach coming in second place, and local reach in third place. Research dissemination and policy advice were the most common channels, and political change of various kinds (from local planning and development to foreign policy) was the most commonly reported effect.

The cases that were selected as 'good practice' represent impact on the global or international scale (such as climate negotiations, energy policy and global UN statistics), the national scale (such as the Norwegian Constitution, national legislation and labour market and immigration policy) and the local scale (such as the Local Government Act, voting procedures and community initiatives). Interestingly, some of the strongest impact cases were those where researchers had long-term engagement with particular communities, as in the case of social anthropologists, or with local authorities and ministries, in the case of economists, political scientists and geographers. Not surprisingly, commissioned studies were quite prevalent among the 'good practice' impact cases, as evidenced by sociologists in particular.

Despite the common difficulties of documenting and assessing impact, the panels observed in the SAMEVAL interviews that a majority of institutions were positive about having to think more carefully about how to systematically approach this issue. We were also informed that the SAMEVAL evaluation had spurred many of the institutions to think about what constitutes impact and to develop their documentation methods, which in itself is a promising result.

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<sup>40</sup> RCN (2017d).

## 5 Concluding assessments

Based on the six disciplinary evaluation reports, the principal committee finds that a large number of institutions and research groups are performing well across the social sciences and above the Nordic and OECD averages based on the bibliometric analysis (Field Normalized Citation Score). In general, productivity within the social sciences has increased from 2011 to 2016. Institutions in the evaluation referred to policy pressure and incentives for high-level scientific publishing as factors driving this increase. The evaluation of scientific quality shows a varied picture, with the research groups generally performing better than their mother institutions overall. This comes as no surprise since the research groups were submitted in order to showcase research quality at its best. The distribution of scientific grades is relatively even among the six evaluated disciplines, and centred around the two grades 'good' and 'very good', but with Social Anthropology and Economics performing particularly well compared to international standards. It is also part of the general picture that the institutions in Oslo and Bergen stand out as the strongest in social science research, which is natural given their history as well as their centrality in Norway.

All of the panels were struck by the large number of institutions pursuing social science research across Norway, which constitutes a considerable challenge. Moreover, these institutions are spread extensively throughout the country, with many separate research units even within a particular region. Creating critical mass for disciplinary research in rather small research groups and/or multidisciplinary environments is therefore a challenge that needs to be addressed. As we have discussed above, various forms of national and international networking and collaboration within the disciplines is therefore imperative. The situation also calls for more strategic thinking both by the Government and by the respective institutions about who should do what, and how this can be sufficiently funded, in order to deliver what is required in terms of both research and teaching from a national perspective. In addition, the principal committee observed that PhD education is suffering from a lack of national coordination given the small numbers of disciplinary PhD students in almost all the environments except in the Oslo region.

We believe that, in light of the rather favourable funding situation overall, there is an opportunity to get much more out of the research, to make further international impact, advance theoretical debate and develop critical thinking. Striking a balance between basic and applied research funding is a recurrent topic of discussion in the social sciences, and several of the previous social science evaluations have stressed the need to increase the room for 'free research', i.e. research as formulated by the researchers themselves rather than steered by programmatic topics. We reiterate that, also in SAMEVAL, many institutions complained about the relatively small and highly competitive funding available in FRIPRO, and the difficulties of finding ways to pursue more theoretically driven research. The current move by many research councils towards research targeting societal challenges – not least the RCN and Horizon 2020 – means that sufficient funding for disciplinary and 'blue sky' research development must be ensured as well.

We were also quite surprised to find so much interdisciplinary research within the social sciences, which seems to be a strong feature of the Norwegian research landscape compared with many other countries. In part, this could be a reaction to the stronger emphasis on strategic and/or thematic research, but it is probably also a response to the problem of having many small social science environments, some of which are embedded in larger institutions dominated by, for example, natural science and engineering disciplines. In addition, it may be a result of the strong research institute sector in Norway described above. While strong interdisciplinary research could be a considerable

asset, there are also associated risks that we have discussed above as regards how to ensure sufficient depth and methodological innovation in such research.

The panels observed that internationalisation activities in the form of publishing, networking and recruitment have increased during the studied period and that they form part of almost all the institutions' strategies. However, their implementation can still be improved. The principal committee was surprised by the low mobility among senior researchers in particular, both within Norway and in the form of longer stays abroad. Such international visits could strengthen research by enabling more comparative studies, using Norwegian research as a basis for drawing more general conclusions and contributing to conceptual development. In addition, recruitment strategies were too often found to be rather passive in terms of attracting international research staff, and, at present, some of the disciplinary environments have a quite skewed diversity distribution (including gender) among their staff, which could be improved.

The SAMEVAL evaluation was tasked with assessing the societal relevance and impact of social science research, and the institutions provided evidence of such impact in the material they submitted. The six panels found this evaluation task to be particularly challenging, and their approaches varied somewhat in light of both the submitted impact cases and varying understandings of how to assess social impact. We have discussed these considerations in more detail above. It became clear that a majority of the institutions had largely reported their communication activities, rather than the relevance and impact on different societal actors, and that there is a need to further discuss and develop the methods for and implementation of such assessments. Overall, however, there is no doubt that Norwegian social science has considerable relevance to a large range of public and private societal actors and activities, and that a large number of 'good practice' research impact cases were submitted by the social science institutions.

## 6 Feedback

In this section, the principal committee summarises the main observations and recommendations from the entire evaluation of social science research in Norway. The feedback is divided between the three main recipients of SAMEVAL: (1) the research institutions (including universities, university colleges and research institutes); (2) the Research Council of Norway; and (3) the Norwegian Government.

### 6.1 To the institutions

- The solid empirical research produced by many institutions should be continued, but an increased focus on more theory-driven and theory-developing research is strongly recommended in order to increase its broader scientific impact beyond the Norwegian cases. Pursuing comparative research in the Nordic region, utilising the high availability of registry data, and carrying out more research that addresses other regions could be ways to further enhance the value of Norwegian research.
- Particularly in institutions with substantial core funding, this funding should be directed towards basic, theory-driven and theory-developing research within the disciplines.
- Although research quality is good to very good overall, and the Norwegian publication points system encourages high impact publication, there is a fairly large group of institutions and research groups that would benefit from increasing their share of publications in higher-impact outlets to achieve more visibility and impact. Depending on the discipline, this could involve targeting higher-impact journals or book publishers.
- The institutional landscape is very diverse, and most entities need to better define their role and to find clear research niches where they can make a more distinct difference, as well as contribute to national and international research.
- Institutions' strategies and research groups' strategies are very often not well aligned. The quality of research could be strengthened by developing consistent and realistic research strategies together with the necessary organisational structure for research, including the development of research group leadership.
- Based on specified research strategies, diversification of funding sources should be pursued in all research institutions to meet the prevailing funding challenges. Institutions that lack the capacity to apply for large-scale funding should seek collaboration in order to mobilise the necessary administrative support.
- Institutions should develop a more proactive approach towards recruiting international researchers at all levels. Most institutions have some way to go to achieve truly international recruitment and placements; however, this may not be a relevant goal for all institutions.
- Norwegian researchers should be more mobile. Within Norway, mobility seems to be centred on Oslo. Institutions should encourage international mobility among their researchers. This could be achieved by:
  - establishing specific research exchange programmes with institutions overseas
  - encouraging more strategic use of sabbatical and other research leave to enable researchers to travel abroad to get new impulses
  - enabling longer-term leave to allow Norwegian researchers to take up temporary positions internationally before returning to their posts in Norway
  - developing specific training, particularly for more junior researchers, in how to secure employment overseas.

- Institutions should encourage and promote the development of and participation in international research and publication networks, perhaps by inviting international journal editors to give talks and advice on publications strategies.
- Professor II (adjunct professor) positions are a good instrument, but they are not always efficiently used. Institutions should consider ensuring that international professor IIs are fully integrated into the local institutional research culture and contribute more effectively to research at the institutes, for example by giving seminars and advising on research grant applications and draft publications etc.
- Institutions should ensure an appropriate balance between interdisciplinary and disciplinary work to maintain high-quality scientific output. For example, strong and long-lasting links should be established between disciplinary and interdisciplinary units in a particular location.
- While much interdisciplinary work is policy-driven or applied, these agendas should not compromise scientific quality, and institutions should bear in mind that interdisciplinary research does not necessarily have to be applied or policy-driven.
- Institutions should develop career tracks and facilitate career development and promotion structures, rather than mostly relying on the individual motivations of researchers.
- As a result of the recent mergers, some institutions have several campuses, some of which are relatively small. It can be very difficult in some instances to develop and ensure research quality at smaller campuses. Hence, some of them could develop specific research profiles.
- Due to the lack of a critical mass of PhD students in many settings, there is a need for more cooperation between the various university departments and disciplinary units to provide PhD training at the national level. Sociology has developed best practice that can be learned from in this respect.
- Institutions have a very diverse view of societal impact and the communication of research. There is a need to widen conceptions of the societal impact of research, to develop ways of handling this, and to collect evidence of it more carefully. Dissemination and societal impact should not be mixed up. Consider documenting impact cases as part of the research endeavour.
- The gender balance should be improved, especially in Economics and in the Economic-Administrative area. Copy the best practices for creating diversity at institutions in the social sciences, e.g. by mentoring and through strategic recruitment.

## 6.2 To the Research Council of Norway

- This evaluation has made substantive comments on the state of the social sciences that should be taken into account in future allocations of research funding to the social sciences. However, we warn against using the numerical grading from the panels to give highly ranked institutions and research groups advantages in relation to the funding schemes. The competition for research should remain open and free for all, as some lower-ranked institutions and research groups may be on an upward trajectory, and the marginal benefits of supporting them could be high.
- The priority given to research groups in the SAMEVAL evaluation created some concern, since the principal committee sees that the research groups were set up in different ways, some being more stable and others apparently having put together for the sake of the

evaluation. Even if some research groups can serve as an inspiration, we do not recommend that research groups as constituted by this evaluation form the basis for funding strategy.

- The RCN should keep in mind the need to maintain and increase funding for social sciences. In particular, there is a need to channel more of the funding to FRIPRO, because disciplinary research otherwise risks disappearing in the longer run given the present emphasis on thematic and more policy-oriented programmes.
- Diversify the RCN funding schemes to embrace both existing large programmes, but also smaller funding opportunities. Ensure a plurality of available funding streams that cover both interdisciplinary and disciplinary, applied and basic research. Specifically targeting interdisciplinary basic research (i.e. research driven by scientific or theoretical agendas) would be valuable.
- Because it can take many years to build up a strong research team, it should also be possible to apply for longer-term research funding.
- The RCN could develop more options for applications with a global focus, hence stimulating comparative research.
- Funding is needed for writing up papers from commissioned research; this could also improve the use of databases for peer-reviewed publishing purposes.
- Develop national networks for PhD education, and provide funding for interdisciplinary as well as disciplinary courses, including more support for PhD schools.
- Funding towards stand-alone PhD studentships and postdoc positions offered on a competitive basis could be developed to strengthen disciplinary research profiles.
- Develop criteria for assessing the societal impact of research, but avoid trying to arrive at an exact measure, which can be misleading given the many ways in which societal impact can be achieved.

### 6.3 To the Government

- Social science research is carried out in all regions in Norway. In addition to good management structures and practice, securing the quality of this research will also require political willingness to provide the necessary level of funding.
- To cover the need for social science research output at the national level, the Government might encourage institutions to specialise/find their own niche and formulate their goals and purposes accordingly.
- Norwegian social science is part of an international social science community. This internationalism should be promoted and encouraged by:
  - facilitating a higher international profile for social science research *on* Norway
  - facilitating and promoting social science research by Norwegian researchers in international contexts.
- While interdisciplinary research is important for the future development of Norwegian social science, the interdisciplinary agenda should not be pursued at the cost of disciplinary research.
- The quality of PhD education could be strengthened by organising and funding PhD schools for both disciplinary and interdisciplinary training.



- Social sciences can have a high impact on societal development in many different ways. Bear in mind that impact on society also involves much more than influencing policy. Be aware that impact cannot always be planned and can often only be realised in the longer term. Do not place excessive demands on researchers for short-term policy impact.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Terms of reference

### Evaluation of research in the social sciences in Norway 2016 - 2018

#### Terms of reference

The Research Council of Norway has been charged by the Ministry of Education and Research with the responsibility for performing evaluations of research. The Division for Science has decided to evaluate research activities in the social sciences in Norwegian universities, university colleges and relevant research institutes.

#### The objective of the evaluation

The objective of the evaluation is to review the overall state-of-the-art of research in the social sciences in Norway, focusing primarily on the situation in universities, university colleges and relevant research institutes. The evaluation will also take into consideration knowledge exchange and the societal impact of the research performed. For the higher education institutions, the interplay of research and education will be assessed. The conclusions of the evaluation will provide greater knowledge about the present state of social science research, and form the basis for recommendations on the future development of research within the various fields of the social sciences in Norway.

For the institutions evaluated, the evaluation is expected to provide insight, advice and recommendations that can be used to enhance their own research standards, taking into account the different roles and purposes for universities, university colleges and research institutes. For the Research Council, the evaluation will help to expand the knowledge base used to develop funding instruments and provide input on research policy to the Norwegian Government.

*The evaluation is expected to:*

- Review the scientific quality of the research within the social sciences in an international context;
- Provide a critical review of the strengths and weaknesses of the fields of research nationally, at the institutional level and for a number of designated research groups;
- Investigate the relevance and social impact of social sciences research in Norway in general and in particular its potential to address targeted societal challenges as defined in the Norwegian Government's Long-term plan for research and higher education;
- Assess the role of organizational strategies and leadership in promoting the quality of research, education and knowledge exchange;
- Assess the extent to which previous evaluations have been used by the institutions in their strategic planning;
- Investigate the extent of interdisciplinary research at the institutions and in the research groups;
- Identify the research groups that have achieved a high international level in their research;
- Review the role of the Research Council in funding research activities in the social sciences.

The evaluation will be carried out by an international evaluation committee consisting of seven panels. Each panel will carry out the evaluation in its field of expertise.

Panel 1	Geography
Panel 2	Economics
Panel 3	Political science
Panel 4	Sociology
Panel 5	Social anthropology
Panel 6	Economic-administrative research
Panel 7	Educational research <sup>41</sup>

The panels will base their evaluations on self-assessments provided by the research institutions and a bibliometric analysis, as well as on interviews and presentations given in meetings with the involved faculties/departments and the social science research institutes. The self-assessments from the institutions will include factual information about the organisation, its resources and strategic plans, national and international research collaboration, dissemination and societal impact of the research, as well as education activities.

For a selected number of *research groups* the institutions will also provide CVs and publication lists for the group's members, a description of the scientific objectives and organisation of the group as well as a digital copy in full text of one scientific article or book

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<sup>41</sup> The evaluation of educational research is organized in a separate evaluation process using the same methods and evaluation data as the other panels. Whereas the evaluation of social science research is organized under the Division for Science, the evaluation of educational research is organized under the Division for Society and Health and its result will be reported to that board. At the same time the evaluation of educational research will be considered as a panel under the evaluation of social science research and thus be included in the report of the principal committee to the board of the Division for Science\* \*This decision was altered during the process, and the evaluation of Norwegian education research was launched as a separate report in March 2018: ISBN 978-82-12-03674-1 (pdf).

chapter for each group member affiliated with a Norwegian research organisation. The Research Council will provide data on its funding of social sciences research and supplementary information on the societal impact of the social sciences in Norway.

The panels are requested to present their findings in written reports. Preliminary reports will be sent to the institutions included in the evaluation in order to check the accuracy of the factual information. The evaluation committee's final reports will be submitted to the Board of the Division for Science for final approval.

The principal evaluation committee will consist of the chairs of each panel.

## Tasks of the evaluation panels

The panels are requested to:

- Evaluate research activities with respect to scientific quality and impact.
- Evaluate the societal impact of the evaluated research activities.
- Evaluate how research activities are organised and managed.
- Evaluate the interplay of research and education activities in the higher education institutions and ensure coordination with the evaluation on education quality.
- Give specific recommendations for the future development of research activities.

## Aspects to be addressed in the panel reports:

The following mandatory aspects must be addressed. The panels are free to include other questions/aspects they consider valuable to the evaluation.

### 1. National level

- Strengths and weaknesses of Norwegian social sciences research in an international context;
- Research cooperation nationally and internationally;
- The scientific and societal impact of the research, including relevance for societal challenges identified in the Norwegian Government's Long-term plan for research and higher education;
- Cooperation with other sectors of society (e.g. private and public sector);
- General resource situation regarding funding and infrastructure;
- Human resources, gender balance and mobility.

### 2. Institutional level

- Organisation, research leadership and strategy, including follow up of recommendations given in previous evaluations;
- Resource situation, such as funding, staffing, infrastructure and the balance between resources and research activities;
- The scientific quality of research within the disciplines included in each panel;
- Facilitation of scientific quality, e.g. publication strategies, focus areas of research, national and international research collaboration;
- Training, mobility and career paths, e.g. policies for recruitment, mobility, career paths as well as gender and age balance in academic positions;

- Research collaboration and facilitation of collaboration and networking activities at the national and international level;
- Collaboration and contacts beyond academia, including strategies for dissemination of the research, examples of impact and the social relevance of the research;
- The interplay of research and education activities in the higher education institutions, including strategies to enhance it.

### 3. Research groups

- Organisation, research disciplines and competence of members;
- Research activities, scientific quality and production. The scientific quality of the research groups should be assessed according to a 5-point scale;
- Training, mobility and career path of researchers;
- Research collaboration and networking activities at the national and international level;
- Use of research infrastructure;
- Knowledge exchange and societal impact of the group's research, value added to partners outside of academia;
- If relevant, the groups' contribution to education activities.

## Tasks of the principal evaluation committee

The committee is requested to compile a summary report based on the findings, assessments and recommendations of the panels. This report should offer an overall assessment of the state of the research evaluated. The report should also offer a set of overall recommendations concerning the future development of research in the social sciences.

The committee is requested to:

- Summarise the overall scientific quality and relevance of the research in the social sciences in Norway. Identify which research areas have a particularly strong scientific and societal impact in a national and international context, and which are particularly weak.
- Summarise general assessments related to structural issues such as institutional and national strategies, the institutional landscape, research infrastructure, recruitment and mobility.
- Summarise how the research institutions and the Research Council have followed up previous evaluations.
- Provide assessments and recommendations at the institutional level, taking into account the different roles and purposes for the universities, university colleges and research institutes.
- Provide assessments and recommendations at the national level, including the role of the Research Council in funding research activities in the social sciences.

The committee's conclusions should lead to a set of recommendations for the future development of research in the social sciences in Norway, providing advice to the research institutions, the Research Council and the Ministry of Education and Research.



## Appendix B: Listed researchers per institution and panel\*

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Panel 1</i>	<i>Panel 2</i>	<i>Panel 3</i>	<i>Panel 4</i>	<i>Panel 5</i>	<i>Panel 6</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bergen University College		20					20
BI Norwegian business school		42				111	153
CICERO Center for International Climate and Environmental Research	5	13	9				27
CMI Chr. Michelsen Institute		15	34		10		59
Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research			15	37	6		58
Fridtjof Nansen Institute			29				29
Frisch Centre		37					37
Hedmark University of Applied Sciences				8		24	32
Institute for Social Research		12	15	18			45
IRIS International Research Institute of Stavanger			7	8		13	28
Lillehammer University College			12	28		12	52
Molde University College						30	30
NHH Norwegian School of Economics		71				216	287
NINA Norwegian Institute for Nature Research	11	7		7			25
NIPH Norwegian Institute of Public Health				19			19
Nord University, Business school		11				65	76
Nord University, Faculty of Social Sciences				63			63
Nordland Research Institute	7			9	6	9	31
Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies			21				21
Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Faculty of Social Science/ Faculty of Landscape and Society	28	6	13		7		54
Norwegian University of Life Sciences, School of Economics and Business		34				23	57
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Economics and Management		17				162	179
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management	36		32	50	11		129

<b><i>Institution</i></b>	<b><i>Panel 1</i></b>	<b><i>Panel 2</i></b>	<b><i>Panel 3</i></b>	<b><i>Panel 4</i></b>	<b><i>Panel 5</i></b>	<b><i>Panel 6</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education				12		9	21
NUPI Norwegian Institute of International Affairs		5	33				38
Oslo and Akershus University College, Centre for Welfare and Labour Research			37	101		34	172
Oslo and Akershus University College, Faculty of Social Sciences			12	41	24		77
PRIO Peace Research Institute in Oslo	12		23				35
TØI Institute of Transport Economics				7		16	23
Uni Research Rokkan Centre		6	12	10			28
University College of Southeast Norway				9		39	48
University of Agder, Faculty of Social Sciences	11		24	29		29	93
University of Agder, School of Business and Law		20				42	62
University of Bergen	27	54	66	29	39		215
University of Oslo, Centre for Development and the Environment	6		6		9		21
University of Oslo, Faculty of Law			10	6			16
University of Oslo, Faculty of Social Sciences	35	85	87	48	40	11	306
University of Stavanger		29	11	30		102	172
University of Tromsø, Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries		18		10		48	76
University of Tromsø, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education	7		26	12	13		58
VID Specialized University				20	6		26
Western Norway Research Institute	7						7
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>3005</b>

**\* Panels:**

1= Geography

2= Economics

3= Political Science

4 = Sociology

5 = Social Anthropology

6 = Economic-Administrative Research Area

## Appendix C: Overview of participating institutions, number of researchers and research groups

<i>Institution</i>	<i>No. of researchers</i>	<i>No. of research groups</i>	<i>Participating in panel*</i>
Bergen University College	20	1	6
BI Norwegian business school	153	3	2 and 6
CICERO Center for International Climate and Environmental Research	27	1	1, 2 and 3
CMI Chr. Michelsen Institute	59	2	2, 3 and 5
Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research	58	3	3, 4 and 5
Fridtjof Nansen Institute	29	2	3
Frisch Centre	37	2	2
Hedmark University of Applied Sciences	32	-	4 and 6
Institute for Social Research	45	4	2, 3 and 4
IRIS International Research Institute of Stavanger	28	-	3, 4 and 6
Lillehammer University College	52	2	3, 4 and 6
Molde University College	30	2	6
NHH Norwegian School of Economics	287	11	2 and 6
NINA Norwegian Institute for Nature Research	25	-	1, 2 and 4
NIPH Norwegian Institute of Public Health	19	-	3
Nord University, Business school	76	3	4
Nord University, Faculty of Social Sciences	63	3	2 and 6
Nordland Research Institute	31	3	1, 4, 5 and 6
Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies	21	1	3
Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Faculty of Social Science/ Faculty of Landscape and Society	54	4	1, 2, 3 and 5
Norwegian University of Life Sciences, School of Economics and Business	57	4	2 and 6
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Economics and Management	179	2	2 and 6

<b><i>Institution</i></b>	<b><i>No. of researchers</i></b>	<b><i>No. of research groups</i></b>	<b><i>Participating in panel*</i></b>
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management	129	7	1, 3, 4 and 5
Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education	21	2	4 and 6
NUPI Norwegian Institute of International Affairs	38	2	2 and 3
Oslo and Akershus University College, Centre for Welfare and Labour Research	172	8	3, 4 and 5
Oslo and Akershus University College, Faculty of Social Sciences	77	3	3, 4 and 6
PRIO Peace Research Institute in Oslo	35	3	1 and 3
TØI Institute of Transport Economics	23	1	4 and 6
Uni Research Rokkan Centre	28	4	2, 3 and 4
University College of Southeast Norway	48	3	4 and 6
University of Agder, Faculty of Social Sciences	93	5	1, 3, 4 and 6
University of Agder, School of Business and Law	62	-	2 and 6
University of Bergen	215	12	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
University of Oslo, Centre for Development and the Environment	21	3	1, 3 and 5
University of Oslo, Faculty of Law	16	-	3 and 4
University of Oslo, Faculty of Social Sciences	306	13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
University of Stavanger	172	7	4, 4 and 6
University of Tromsø, Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries	76	2	2, 4 and 6
University of Tromsø, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education	58	4	1, 2, 3 and 5
VID Specialized University	26	3	4 and 5
Western Norway Research Institute	7	1	1
<b>42 units</b>	<b>3005 researchers</b>	<b>136 research groups</b>	

**\* Panels:**

1= Geography

2= Economics

3= Political Science

4 = Sociology

5 = Social Anthropology

6 = Economic-Administrative Research Area



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