



Evaluation of the Norad Fellowship Programme

Executive Summary



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Since the Norad Fellowship Programme (NFP) was established 40 years ago it has provided fellowships in Norway to several thousand students from developing countries. At the same time higher education in Norway has become much more internationalised. An evaluation team comprised of consultants from NCG AS, DECO AS and Nuffic was selected through an international competition to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the entire programme, emphasising the period after 1998. The evaluation is based on desk studies, assessments of questionnaires from key stakeholders, interviews, meetings and field visits to Bangladesh, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa.

Key Findings

Clearly demarcated objectives and indicators for measuring results have never been defined for NFP. This makes impact measurement a priori an impossible undertaking. There is little formal evidence of the impact of training programmes on poverty alleviation, or improvements to the economy or society.

The impact of training depends on the degree of rigidity, inefficiency, openness to reform, transparency and good governance in the civil service and education sectors. In cases where training is not embedded in manpower development plans, and a critical mass of persons trained is not achieved, development impacts are modest, as observed in the case of the Bangladeshi civil service. In contrast, the Tanzanian energy supply sector offers a good example of the impact of a long-term, focused training scheme.

The completion rates of fellows are usually high in scholarship and fellowship programmes. The vast majority of candidates return to their home countries and employers when these are committed to providing positions to returning fellows.

Compared to other international fellowship programmes, NFP is fairly small. Institutions of higher education in Norway are satisfied with the programme and the opportunities it offers to attract foreign students. However, they would welcome an expansion of the programme to include not only master's but also PhD level courses.

Parallel to NFP, Norway operates a relatively large undergraduate-, master's- and PhD stipend scheme called the Quota Programme, supporting a total of 1100 students per year from 77 countries in 2003/04, including developing countries as well as Central- and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The scheme is financed by the Ministry of Education and Research (MOER). As of 2005, student administration of the Quota Programme was transferred to the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU). Funding for student slots over NFP is comparable to what universities would have received had the courses been financed directly through MOER.

Conclusions

NFP has gradually changed character from a professional manpower development programme with a strong vocational element, to an academic capacity building institutional cooperation support programme. This has been amplified by the transfer of programme administration from Norad to UHR, with SIU in charge of day-to-day operations. The appointment of a NFP Programme Board consisting exclusively of academic staff members to advise SIU on the selection of NFP courses, has strengthened Norwegian educational institutions in their efforts to internationalise. Course leaders select students in this decentralised NFP-system. This transition has made it more difficult to demonstrate the direct developmental relevance of a highly diverse NFP.

NFP is thus largely a supply driven fellowship programme. Norwegian Embassies are responsible for distributing information on courses offered and application forms, but outreach practices vary between eligible countries. There are no transparent mechanisms to ensure that emerging needs, e.g. the private sector's crucial role in PRSPs, are identified and prioritised.

Exchanging staff between institutions in developing countries and training institutes in the host country would probably increase NFP's "change agent" impact.

Several Norwegian institutions integrate opportunities and funding from the Norwegian Council of Universities' Committee for Development Research and Education (NUFU), NFP and the Quota Programme in creative, constructive and complementary ways in order to promote and implement North-South research cooperation and training. The Quota Programme has become a mechanism for selecting fellows for research collaboration between institutions in Norway and abroad. As a result, some key differences between NFP and the Quota Programme have been gradually reduced. However, the financial and administrative terms and conditions of NFP and the Quota Programme are different. With the recently proposed reform of Norway's State Education Loan fund (SELF), barriers to further harmonisation and cost-efficient coordination may prove difficult to remove. Nevertheless, this evaluation identifies areas where there should be scope for more harmonisation and cost-efficient administration of the schemes.

Providing education in Norway under NFP is a costly affair compared to nearly all other alternatives, primarily due to high general cost levels in Norway, although differences may also reflect quality variations. Nonetheless substantial quality upgrading should be possible with, for example, the nearly NOK 200,000 unit cost difference per student that separates NFP from the Master of Public Administration programme at Makerere University (Uganda).

Recent experience from outsourcing courses in a "sandwich" model to educational institutions in the South, e.g. University of Oslo (UiO) collaboration in South Africa, Mozambique, and Tanzania, is encouraging.

The evaluation reaches the following conclusions:

- The development relevance of NFP should be made more visible. This must be secured through course location and the selection of course topics. The trend is to build knowledge and learning capacity in the developing world itself.
- A second trend is the globalisation of higher education and capacity building. Globalisation lessens differences between schemes like the Quota Programme and NFP, as both are in the same global knowledge market. Emphasis on harmonisation and effectiveness points to reducing unnecessary administration. Differences between NFP and the Quota Programme currently appear artificial and unnecessary.
- NFP needs specific objectives regarding achievements and assessment indicators. Norad should focus on development criteria and concentrate on issues at the higher level.
- The prime target group(s) of the fellowships are institutions and employer organisations in the South. To make NFP more demand driven, the whole programme must be "moved closer" to the South.
- With a small number of fellows from a large number of countries and institutions, it is difficult to achieve development effectiveness and impact. Norway should limit the number of countries, sectors and courses to those where genuine societal "value added" impact is realistic.

Recommendations

To increase the developmental impact, effectiveness, relevance, and cost-efficiency of NFP, five categories of measures are identified in the evaluation report. These are: policy framework, embedding of training in institutional development, training localities, training modalities, and harmonised administrative arrangements.

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