

synopsis of Nordic funding situation Nordita (2019-2023)

background:

Nordita, the Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics, was established in 1957 in Copenhagen, closely connected to the Niels Bohr Institute, where it thrived for 50 years.

Many more details on the history can be found on

<https://www.nordita.org/aboutus/history/index.php> and further links provided on that website.

In 2007 Nordita moved to Stockholm, where it is hosted by the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) and Stockholm University (SU) and also partially supported by Uppsala University as well as a scientific infrastructure grant from Vetenskabsrådet (Swedish research council).

Until then the Nordic Council of Ministers (NMR) supported Nordita with a yearly grant of about 2 MEuro. Starting 2007 this NMR funding was cut by 50% so that continuing the operations at the same level required non-Nordic funding which was provided in Stockholm by the actors mentioned above.

NMR announced at various instances plans to channel the funding for Nordita (and three other Nordic cooperation bodies) via Nordforsk, which funds and facilitates Nordic research cooperation (see www.nordforsk.org).

The following is a summary of the main steps in the process that has led to the highly regrettable outcome that, as of January 2024, Nordita will not receive any Nordic funding support. As an immediate consequence, the highly successful Nordita Fellowship program will have to be discontinued. In addition, this will have an effect on the funding of various Nordic networking activities, such as workshops, conferences, visiting PhD students, and distinguished visitor program.

(Note: this is a long version and can be cut down to a shortened version)

Jan 2019: NMR informed Nordita director that the Committee of Senior Officials for Education and Research (EK-U) has approved (4/18) a mandate on the preparation of decision-making documents on opportunities for the future financing of the Nordic co-operation bodies. In this connection, the former Finnish Ambassador and State Secretary Peter Stenlund was appointed negotiating person, charged by NMR to prepare a basis for decision regarding opportunities for financing the Nordic co-operation bodies. This must describe how future financing of the agencies can be designed and report the expected consequences of such a proposal in terms of Nordic benefit and/or added value compared with the current situation (to be submitted to the NMR by 1 April 2019 at the latest). As part of this, a meeting with Nordita director and leadership of the host institution was requested, which has been arranged to take place on Jan. 31. (2019). Peter Stenlund (PS) and Daniel Holmberg (NMR) have a one hour meeting with Nordita director and another one hour meeting with rektor of SU (Astrid Söderbergh Widding) and Anders Karlhede.

April 2019: PS finalized his report and recommendation which, in summary, proposes: i) Current funding continues up to and including 2020 ii) In negotiation with Nordforsk the Nordic institutes receive a budget for 2021-2023 (which is an interim phase giving the

institutes and host institutions the chance to plan for the future) iii) Nordforsk launches a new funding instrument, which Nordic institutes can apply to and can contribute to funding Nordic institutes starting 2024. It is now up to the political process whether a final decision will be taken to follow this recommendation, and by the end of 2019 this should be concluded.

(App. 1)

Fall 2019. Decision by NMR to transfer funding to Nordforsk with instructions based on the report by PS.

(Apps. 2,3,4)

Fall 2019-Spring 2020: Communication from NMR that for 2020 we will have the same budget as the previous year (approx. 1 MEuro) and that for the years 2021-2023 a budget will be negotiated with Nordforsk. In addition, Nordforsk receives instructions for a new funding instrument suitable for the Nordic cooperation bodies.

In this period, a dialogue with Nordforsk on the funding of Nordic institutes in the longer term was started. This includes the preparation of a document summarizing the Nordic benefit of Nordita and our input for a funding instrument that is appropriate for Nordic institutes with excellent research and a longer horizon of planning of activities. This was submitted in June 2020.

(App. 5)

Fall 2020: Remote meeting with the Director of Nordforsk Arne Flåøyen (AF) in Sep 2020, with the directors of the four Nordic institutes. Information about the further process that will lead to a contract (for each of the institutes) with Nordforsk for 2021 (and the subsequent years 2022, 2023). In December 2020 it was communicated that our budget for 2021 (now handled via Nordforsk after the transfer of the funding from NMR) would be essentially the same as in the previous year. Nordita sends input for future funding instrument to Nordforsk.

(App. 6)

May 2021: AF sent information related to the process of a future funding instrument to which Nordic Institutes can apply.

(Apps, 7,8)

Sep 2021: Medio Sept. deadline for sending remarks to Nordforsk on the future funding instrument. Nordita director and Rektor of SU send strong comments in response to existing draft of the funding instrument.

(App. 9)

Nov 2021: Nordforsk sends an updated version of **Nordic research cooperation 2024-2028 - new instrument**. This final version has some minor alterations, but in essence none of our concerns and comments have been taken into account.

(App. 10)

March 2022: The directors of NORDITA, NIFs, NIAS and NORDVULK send a common letter for the attention of the Secretary-General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which summarises concerns about our future funding.

(App. 11)

May 2022: The General Secretary of NMR replies on the common letter mentioned above. The reply says that the decision for transfer of the funding to Nordforsk has been taken, and hopes that we are able to constructively adapt to the new instrument.

(App. 12)

Sep 2022: Nordforsk announces the call for pre-applications to the new instrument (deadline Nov. 2, 2022), which is called **Nordic University Cooperation**

<https://www.nordforsk.org/calls/university-cooperation-call-pre-proposals>

(App. 13)

Oct 2022: After input from Nordita board and Nordita faculty, Nordita seeds two applications for the University cooperation call. Each of these consist of a consortium of three partners (with Nordita included) and includes 200% co-funding in total. The applications are focused on excellent and forefront research areas, and include funding for researcher mobility and networking, and have strong components of Nordic added value. The total funding for Nordita in case of success of both applications would be a bit less than half of the previous Nordforsk funding.

March 2023: The results of the pre-application are announced. None of the two applications that Nordita was involved are invited to submit a full application. It should be noted that the success rate to go on to the next round is approximately 40% (more precisely: 20 out of 52 pre-applications that are submitted). Nordita and its board are shocked and surprised to hear this negative result. This essentially means the end of 65 years of Nordic funding to Nordita, which has had a tremendous impact on Nordic research in theoretical physics, broadly defined.

June 2023: Following the May board meeting and in consultation with the applicants of the two consortia, a formal letter of complaint is sent by Nordita director and chair of the Nordita board to the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers. A similar letter of complaint is simultaneously sent by the director of NordVulk (one of the other Nordic cooperation bodies that submitted an application to the Nordforsk call, which did not pass the pre-application round either).

(App. 14)

July 2023: Reply from NMR informing us that NMR does not have possibility to question expert evaluations and furthermore directs the question back to Nordforsk.

(App. 15)

Appendices

1. Stenlund report (April 2019)
2. NMR document on proposal for Nordic cooperation bodies (Fall 2019)
3. statement of NMR on the future of Nordic cooperation bodies (Oct. 2019)
4. NMR document to Nordic council on recommendation for future funding of Nordic cooperation bodies (Dec 2019)
5. Letter from Nordforsk on the process for future funding (June 2020)
6. Input from Nordita to Nordforsk in regard new funding instrument (2020)
7. Communication from Nordforsk on proposed new instrument (May 12, 2021)
8. Draft and principles of Research cooperation instrument from Nordforsk (May 2021)
9. Letter from Rektor SU and director Nordita to Nordforsk commenting on proposed instrument (Sept. 14, 2021)
10. Final version Nordforsk instrument on University cooperation (Nov. 21, 2021)
11. Joint letter from Nordic cooperation bodies to Secretary General NMR (28 Feb. 2022)
12. Reply from General Secretary NMR in response to joint letter directors (May 2022)
13. Call text of Nordic University Cooperation Call (Oct. 2022)
14. Formal complaint letter to NMR on the handling of the Nordforsk call (June 2023)
15. Reply from NMR (July 2023)