

# **NOVA UN strategy**

## **Reflections from the NOVA-BOVA perspective**

by Vilis Brukas, NOVA-BOVA coordinator

July, 2004

### **Organisation in change**

NOVA was established in 1995 with the purpose to create a platform for systematic cooperation between relevant Nordic universities. In the course of decade, NOVA has initiated a high number of activities, where organisation of Nordic PhD courses of high quality was the most prominent. The secretariat as well as rectors of the member universities have gradually come to recognition that, to further the progress, NOVA needs a clear long-term vision, more rigid planning, monitoring and evaluation of NOVA projects and activities. During 2003, rectors of the member universities actively engaged in development of an organisational strategy. For the first time in the NOVA history, a formal NOVA UN strategy was approved by the NOVA Rector Board in February 2004. NOVA Rectors, members of the Advisory Committee (KUF) and secretariat as well as leaders of NOVA networks and projects met at a working seminar in Iceland (June 2-4, 2004) in order to discuss the future cooperation in the light of the new strategy. This essay sums up the latest NOVA developments that have many important implications for its Baltic counterpart, the BOVA University.

### **New NOVA UN strategy**

The strategy defines the NOVA mission, identifies the strategic objectives and sets priorities for 2004-2006. Importantly, the strategy clearly defines the organisational structure of NOVA UN and the roles and responsibilities of its administrative entities. The document may be downloaded at [www.nova-university.org/PDFer/Strategi\\_040329.pdf](http://www.nova-university.org/PDFer/Strategi_040329.pdf)

### **NOVA UN structure and local NOVA teams**

The NOVA Board recognises that NOVA is a network of universities rather than a university on its own. An important implication is that, even though it is important to have a strong central secretariat, a significant progress in collaboration cannot be achieved without adequate engagement by the member universities. The NOVA UN strategy defines the division of responsibilities for all organisational entities. However, particularly important roles are assigned to the newly introduced local NOVA teams at member universities that, as a minimum, should consist of the local KUF member (responsible leader of the team), the main local NOVA coordinator and a student representative. It is expected that the local NOVA teams should be the main vehicle in achieving the strategic NOVA objective stating that *'the majority of faculty members shall acknowledge NOVA as their network for scientific education within the Nordic and Baltic regions, and shall be willing to make use of their membership when this is appropriate'*.

### **NOVA networks and projects**

The strategy stresses the need to utilise resources efficiently in relation to NOVA networks and projects. First, strategy differentiates between *NOVA Network projects* that are run by NOVA networks and *Administrative NOVA projects* run by NOVA staff under the NOVA Rector. Second, strategy sets clear requirements according to which a NOVA project or network will be evaluated. The project should have clear and measurable objectives, activity plan with a time frame and individual responsibilities, specific budget, and periods of reporting to KUF. At the

seminar in Iceland, the leaders of NOVA were rigidly examined trying to assess the real network achievements up to date.

### **Course Cross-approval procedure**

Despite the declared possibilities for credit approval across Europe, the actual recognition of merits is still unsatisfactory, being an important hindrance for collaboration, not least between NOVA member universities. The NOVA working seminar has addressed the issue by introducing the concept of NOVA course cross-approval procedure. The procedure will allow the NOVA universities to fully recognise relevant courses at other member universities so that they are included in university course catalogues as NOVA courses and merits are approved automatically. It was decided that such procedure will be elaborated at all member universities and the local NOVA coordinators will have the main responsibility to get the cross-approval functioning.

### **Lessons for the NOVA-BOVA cooperation?**

The future of the NOVA-BOVA cooperation primarily depends on how the constituent institutional structures will develop in the nearest future. The BOVA University will face paramount decisions before the end of 2004, when support by K&A Wallenberg foundation will be ceased. Some of the key questions will be: whether internal resources should be pooled together to support the BOVA secretariat and activities; which areas of cooperation should be given the highest priority in the coming years; should truly joint MSc programmes be developed.

The latest significant developments within the Nordic sister, NOVA UN, provides an important source of learning for BOVA that may adopt the successful NOVA practices and avoid its mistakes. Some important points of concern might be mentioned:

- The NOVA UN Strategy for 2004-2006 could be an item for discussion at the BOVA Board NOVA-BOVA Coordination Committee and meetings.
- Elaboration of a strategy for the BOVA University might be considered as a means to streamline activities and enhance the role of the member universities. To achieve this, strategy should be a product of the BOVA Board and not of the BOVA secretariat.
- Introduction of a local BOVA team might be an important step in strengthening the commitment of member universities. High-level representatives of university administrations should be involved in, or preferably lead the team.
- BOVA and NOVA-BOVA should focus its resources on the selected most promising networks and projects. There is a need for clear criteria and a rigid decision-making mechanism to make priorities.

The members of the BOVA Board, NOVA-BOVA CC, the BOVA secretariat and BOVA coordinators as well as any interested staff of the BOVA and NOVA member universities are welcomed to share their views on the reflections in this paper. Please send them to the author at: [vilis.brukas@ess.slu.se](mailto:vilis.brukas@ess.slu.se)