

NOVA-BOVA Self-Evaluation Report

**Prepared by NOVA-BOVA Self-Evaluation Team:
Vilis Brukas, Knut Wålstedt, Alvidas Sarlauskas,
Paul Jensén and Henrikas Zilinskas**

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Summary

NOVA-BOVA is a unique Nordic-Baltic university network focusing on MSc and PhD education. During its initial period in 1996-2001, the cooperation (labelled 'NOVABA' at that time) was led by NOVA and concentrated on short international MSc courses at BOVA universities. In 2001, the cooperation was reorganised aiming at expanding the range of activities and achieving a more balanced partnership between Nordic and Baltic sides. A major grant was received from the Swedish K&A Wallenberg Foundation with the main purpose to develop the administrative capacities at BOVA during 2002-2004.

This self-evaluation report assesses the NOVA-BOVA cooperation in 2002-2004, with emphasis on the development of the BOVA side. The evaluation was carried out by a 5-member team formed from representatives of NOVA and BOVA secretariats. Extensive questionnaires were sent to 38 people at member universities in August 2004 and followed up in September by interviews with most respondents. The findings of the self-evaluation team were discussed by key NOVA-BOVA stakeholders at a self-evaluation seminar in Estonia in October 28-29, 2004.

The main conclusion of the self-evaluation is that the development in 2002-2004 of the cooperation was very successful. The objective of establishing viable administrative capacities on the BOVA side has been fully achieved. Established in June 2002, the BOVA secretariat has developed well-functioning administrative routines; the recognition of its work was proved by the BOVA Rectors' decision to pool internal funds for financing the secretariat as of January 2005. This is the first time ever that BOVA allocates significant internal funds for cooperation. The link between BOVA and NOVA has been strengthened via the 0.5 position of a NOVA-BOVA coordinator. Significant external funds were raised by the central secretariats and the scope of activities was expanded. The short NOVA-BOVA MSc courses have been revitalised under support of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Development of joint MSc programmes was initiated on the BOVA side and, in 2004, two academic BOVA networks received significant external grants aimed at developing curricula of joint study programmes. In 2003-2004, more than 50 Baltic PhD students participated in NOVA PhD courses thanks to NorFA scholarships.

Not underrating the achievements of the cooperation, the underlying purpose of the self-evaluation was to conduct a self-reflective and critical analysis that would facilitate the further organisational development, beneficial for all sides involved. The self-evaluation identified a number of issues that are treated in detail in the report. Notably, the organisational set-up on the BOVA side still lags behind NOVA, primarily due to the absence of a strategy and the lack of an organisational link between strategic decision-making and operational levels. Lack of institutional and personal commitment is a severe problem at all member universities, and it is reinforced by a lack of motivation tools to engage people in NOVA-BOVA cooperation. Most academic NOVA-BOVA networks lack a common identity, the partnerships within networks typically being unbalanced and without a solid anchoring at home universities.

This report serves as a focal material for the external evaluation that, in the beginning of 2005, is expected to make recommendations for a further organisational development of the NOVA-BOVA network.

List of abbreviations

BOVA – The BOVA University – The Baltic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University – network of Baltic universities in agricultural, forestry and veterinary sciences. BOVA was established in 1996 and comprises four member universities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

EAU – Estonian Agricultural University

HU AF – University of Helsinki, HU Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry

HU VM - University of Helsinki, HU Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

KVL – The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Denmark

KUF – cf. NOVA KUF

LBH - Agricultural College of Hvanneyri, Island

LLU – Latvia University of Agriculture

LVA – Lithuanian Veterinary Academy

LZUU – Lithuanian University of Agriculture

N-B – cf. NOVA-BOVA

N-B CC – NOVA-BOVA Coordination Committee

NCM – Nordic Council of Ministers

NLH – Agricultural University of Norway

NOVA – NOVA UN – The Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network – a university network established in 1995 and comprising member universities in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

NOVA KUF – NOVA Co-ordination Committee for Education and Research

NOVA-BOVA – Network between NOVA UN and the BOVA University

NSF – The Nordic Student Forum, a student organisation in the frame of NOVA UN

NVH – Norwegian School of Veterinary Science

SLU – Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

WG MSc – NOVA-BOVA Working Group on Joint Study Programmes

1. Purpose and principles of self-evaluation

1.1 Evaluation objectives

The NOVA-BOVA collaboration is facing a dynamic institutional context due to (i) adoption of NOVA UN strategy for 2004-2006, (ii) finalisation of the NOVA-BOVA project funded (euro 240,000) by The K&A Wallenberg Foundation, which leads to (iii) the need to reconsider the organisational development of the BOVA University. *The evaluation is intended to shed light on the NOVA-BOVA collaboration in 2002-2004 and its current status as well as to provide directions for future development. The evaluation results will be used in the internal discussion to reconsider NOVA-BOVA vision, modify its organisational structures and procedures, reallocate financial and human capacities, and prioritise activities.*

Methods and format of an evaluation might markedly differ depending on whether it is directed to facilitate internal organisational changes or to stress achievements to outside stakeholders. This evaluation is mainly targeted for internal use. The expected evaluation outcomes are twofold. First, positive changes are induced during the evaluation process *per se*, through critical self-reflection, discussions among key stakeholders, generating and sharing ideas, etc. At this stage, evaluation might have profound catalytic effects even if the actual impact is less visible. Second, the self-evaluation report will be a focal material for discussions at NOVA and BOVA entities and for the forthcoming external evaluation.

1.2 Definition of NOVA-BOVA

The NOVA University (NOVA) and the BOVA University (BOVA) were established in 1995 and 1996, respectively. Initially, the cooperation between NOVA and BOVA was carried through the so-called NOVABA programme with short MSc courses being the main activity. NOVABA and BOVA were initiated by NOVA. NOVABA was considered to be a cooperation programme or project led by NOVA.

In 2001, the NOVABA programme was finalised and all subsequent collaboration activities between NOVA and BOVA were referred to as NOVA-BOVA. Through K&A Wallenberg grant, additional efforts were made to develop the capacity of the BOVA University, so that the latter would become an independent partner to NOVA. During 2002-2004, the partnership has gradually become more balanced though there still is a lack of a common perception of what NOVA-BOVA is.

From the NOVA perspective, NOVA-BOVA (in the sequel: N-B) may be viewed as an ongoing NOVA programme or project, a fraction of its many activities. The BOVA side may consider N-B as an overarching concept for the highly appreciated collaboration with the Nordic countries, while the BOVA University might be perceived as a formal tag to define the Baltic side of N-B. An outsider may perceive N-B as an organisation coordinating cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. The self-evaluation team believes that the following definition provides the most adequate meaning of what N-B really is:

NOVA-BOVA is the designation for a network between two independent organisations (networks), the NOVA UN and the BOVA University. The major aim of NOVA-BOVA is to promote cooperation activities that focus on higher education and are beneficial to the participating member universities.

The evaluation deals with N-B, i.e. the development of partnerships and activities between NOVA and BOVA during 2002-2004. However, since a major goal of the cooperation was to

strengthen the BOVA side, the evaluation focuses on the BOVA University rather than on the NOVA UN.

1.3 Evaluation principles

The self-evaluation has been conducted attempting to comply with the following principles:

- seeking to get opinion from key persons in NOVA-BOVA
- being realistic, mentioning failures and frustrations as well as successes
- being more evaluative than descriptive
- obtaining multiple dimensions by using multiple sources
- producing a concise, well organized, and coherent report.

2. Methodology

2.1 Evaluation Team

The whole evaluation is carried out in two stages. First, an internal NOVA-BOVA team has conducted a self-evaluation; its results are presented in this report and will be subject to discussion at NOVA-BOVA entities. Second, an outside evaluator will carry out an external evaluation that should provide recommendations for further organisational development.

The self-evaluation team has five members: Paul Jensén, Henrikas Zilinskas, Knut Wålstedt, Alvidas Sarlauskas and Vilis Brukas. The team is led by Vilis Brukas, employed in 0.5 position at the NOVA secretariat with the main task to coordinate the N-B cooperation. He has had the main responsibility for preparing the evaluation design. NOVA Rector Paul Jensén and BOVA Rector Henrikas Zilinskas are in charge of the respective organisations. Knut Wålstedt, the Central NOVA Coordinator, and Alvidas Sarlauskas, the BOVA Secretary, take full time positions at secretariats and have a thorough knowledge of activities or organisational routines inside NOVA and BOVA, respectively. Vilis Brukas, Knut Wålstedt and Alvidas Sarlauskas have made the major contribution in conducting the survey and preparing the self-evaluation report. During the self-evaluation, a great collaborative effort has been made by the contacted key persons involved in N-B collaboration, particularly the rectors of BOVA member universities, the BOVA coordinators and the members of NOVA-BOVA Coordination Committee.

Seeking to get an objective picture, the external evaluation will be led by an independent expert - former Rector of Wageningen University and President of ICA, prof. Cees Karssen.

2.2 Investigation method

The self-evaluation has been carried out as a case study, i.e. we have collected detailed information about a particular organisational network in a specific context without attempting to find generalizable truth. Emphasis is placed on exploration rather than scientific validation of cause-effect relationships. The research involves both review of written sources and surveys at the N-B entities.

The written sources include agreements between universities, strategies, action plans, protocols and minutes of Board, N-B CC, and working group meetings, NOVA and BOVA websites, etc. For surveying, the self-evaluation team has used semi-structured questionnaires, involving structured questions, e.g. with multiple choice options, as well as open-end questions.

Table 1. Respondents to questionnaire in the self-evaluation survey

Respondent category	No of respondents	No of responses	Response rate, %
Rectors of BOVA member universities	4	4	100
Members of N-B Coordination Committee	9	6	67
BOVA coordinators	4	4	100
Representatives of N-B academic networks	21	17	81
Total	38	31	82

Responses to questionnaires were collected and analysed during September 2004 and followed up by interviews with respondents in October 2004. The self-evaluation questionnaire was sent out to 38 respondents at the member universities; 31 responses were received, cf. Table 1. In addition, a sample of Baltic PhD students who attended NOVA PhD courses have been interviewed.

2.3 Issues to address

Aimed to assist in the organisational development of N-B, the evaluation needs to scrutinise a number of issues of varying character. The first crucial issue is strategies and overall objectives of the N-B cooperation. N-B is a complex ‘network of networks’. The NOVA UN has substantial internal financing and a newly approved organisational strategy. The BOVA University does not have an approved strategy; however the implicit objectives may be captured from the discussions among its entities. In addition, member universities of NOVA and BOVA have their own organisational strategies that, to various extents, incorporate internationalisation and N-B cooperation among their objectives. A central task of the evaluation is to clarify the role that NOVA UN, BOVA and their member universities assign to the N-B cooperation and determine the true level of ambition by relevant stakeholders.

Second, evaluation examines tasks, routines and performance of relevant institutional structures including Boards, N-B CC, secretariats, university coordinators, ad hoc working groups and university administrations. Organisational and individual commitment is an issue of particular importance. Channels of communication and effectiveness of information flow between the organisational entities should be regarded.

Third, N-B activities during 2002-2004 are assessed. Special emphasis will be placed on development of BOVA and N-B networks within the academic disciplines that were assigned a top priority by the NOVA-BOVA Coordination Committee. Performance as well as factors promoting and inhibiting network development should be examined.

In summary, the evaluation should assess the past performance and provide recommendations in relation to the following questions:

- **Pertinence:** To what extent are the objectives of the N-B network adequate in relation to the needs and challenges in its environment, and to the expectations of its beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders?
- **Coherence:** To what extent are the procedures, the resources and the means adequate to the objectives (and vice versa)?
- **Effectiveness:** To what extent do the outputs correspond to the objectives?
- **Efficiency:** To what extent are the outputs adequate to the procedures, the resources and the means (and vice versa)?
- **Impact:** To what extent do the outcomes correspond to the objectives of the NOVA UN and the BOVA University and to the expectations and needs of the environment?

3. Results

3.1 Strategies of cooperation

3.1.1 NOVA UN

In February 2003, the NOVA Rector Board agreed upon a common strategy. The benefits of the strategy development and approval are twofold: (i) during the strategy formulation process a better understanding and stronger ownership (among several new board members) of common objectives was achieved, and (ii) the strategy has set clear objectives for the cooperation and defined the responsibilities of the involved partners and bodies.

Development process

NOVA has developed a strong organisational body for its internal and external cooperation. The organisation and the cooperation activities are based on a common strategy for the period 2004-2006.

The strategy was developed in close cooperation between the NOVA rector and the NOVA board. Starting from a discussion in the board in May 2003, the NOVA rector and two of the board members worked for two days on the first draft. The draft was again discussed in the board and worked on together with the Executive committee and an external organisation consultant, and finally approved formally in the board by the end of February, 2004.

The strategy document stated that certain organisational procedures should take place during spring 2004. The procedures were evaluated, and at a seminar in June 2004 the implementation of the strategy was discussed. The seminar included the NOVA board and the NOVA rector as well as members from the Advisory committee and leaders of nine prioritised activity areas (networks).

Contents of the NOVA Strategy 2004 – 2006

Vision

The NOVA member universities shall use the NOVA University Network (NOVA UN) as one of their primary organisations for international cooperation in scientific education and joint actions. They shall have confidence in the network, and be cognizant of the benefits that NOVA membership offers. Internationally, NOVA will seek to achieve recognition – as a model, for the scientific competence and quality of its work, and for the effective and innovative ways in which the Network has established cooperation. This vision is to be fully realized by 2010.

Tasks 2004-2006

The NOVA University Network shall:

- enhance cooperation and sharing of competence in education between the Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural universities;
- facilitate the delivery of higher quality in teaching to all member institutions at equal or lower costs than each member institution can deliver on its own;
- serve as a forum for discussion of teaching and education matters among its members;
- co-ordinate, on behalf of the NOVA institutions, actions relating to common research and education issues *vis-à-vis* the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), other organisations of Nordic interest, and industry;
- work to overcome internal and external constraints that may counteract the collaboration in education, teaching and research.

Main areas for development and change

- Focus on the priority areas of advanced level/MSc education and PhD courses
- Overcoming constraints to collaboration
- External relations and finance
- The identity, profile, image and organization of NOVA UN

Organisational structure

The organisational chart of NOVA UN is presented in Annex I.

The Board

The NOVA University Network is governed by a board consisting of the rectors and deans from the member institutions and one student representative. The board defines the mission of the NOVA University Network and states the vision, the long-term objectives and the strategy.

The NOVA UN Advisory Committee (KUF)

KUF consists of one representative from each member university, and two student representatives appointed by Nordic Student Forum (NSF). All KUF members, except the students, are responsible for ensuring that the NOVA University Network is given a firm policy foundation at their home universities. KUF is responsible for the prioritising of NOVA-sponsored projects; and it supervises the progress and evaluates the results.

The Rector

The Rector serves as the executive head of NOVA University Network and the secretariat for a term of six years. He supervises the NOVA projects and the marketing and fundraising activities. He represents the NOVA UN externally.

The Local NOVA Team

As a minimum, the local NOVA team includes the KUF member as responsible leader, one main local coordinator and a student representative. The main local coordinator is responsible for maintaining contacts between member institutions and the NOVA secretariat. Beyond this, it will be up to each member university to further establish the local organization.

3.1.2 BOVA member universities

The strategies of all BOVA member universities include internationalisation as a primary objective. As a rule, strategies note N-B as an important agent for university internationalisation but do not mention the BOVA University.

The self-evaluation has revealed that all BOVA member universities have written strategies even though the level of detail is varying. EAU has a comprehensive strategy that treats the objective of internationalisation in detail. LLU has recently adopted a strategy for 2003-2006 with trends up to 2010; due to rapid institutional changes, the LLU Senate updates the strategy every six months. In Lithuania, formal national requirements for university strategies were established in 2003. Currently, LZUU and LVA have intermediate plain strategies; however new advanced documents are under development.

Notably, strategies of all four universities stress internationalisation as a primary objective. The agricultural universities set the international cooperation in education and research to be equally important while LVA focuses on research. The reasons are that education generally makes a rather small share in LVA activities and that, due to the one-step structure of education in vet sciences, the existing two programmes at LVA are not divided into bachelor and MSc level. International cooperation at the agricultural universities mainly takes place at the MSc level.

Table 2. Share of N-B activities (in percent) in international activities of BOVA member universities (according to responses by university rectors to the self-evaluation survey)

Type of activity	EAU	LLU	LZUU	LVA
All international	25	30	30	30
International educational	45	40	40	40
International educational at the MSc level	50	80	50	45
International educational at the PhD level	30	30	50	40

Strategies of all member universities include N-B, stressing its achievements up to date and/or the potential for future. The importance of N-B was approved by the rectors' estimates of shares of N-B activities in all international activities at respective university (Table 2).

The BOVA University is not explicitly mentioned in university strategies with exception of LLU. This is an indication for a lack of anchoring of the BOVA University at member universities. In the beginning of cooperation, the NOVABA programme was essentially a Nordic project with Nordic funding. This cooperation model had been entrenched in the minds of the BOVA side representatives, which inhibits the recognition that BOVA has become an independent strong partner in the N-B cooperation.

3.1.3 The BOVA University and N-B network

Common strategies for the BOVA University and/or N-B network are not available at present; however, rectors of all member universities recognise a need for a common strategy for the BOVA University.

In contrast to NOVA UN, a strategy for the BOVA University is not yet available. The reasons are obvious (cf. also Section 3.1.2): the BOVA side had lacked its identity and commitment by member universities had been low. The ambition to strengthen BOVA emerged as late as in 2002 and the strategies of the member universities *per se* have been formulated only recently. A certain time lapse has been needed for the organisation to mature and to identify a need for a common strategy.

During the self-evaluation, the rectors of the BOVA member universities unanimously recognised the need for a common platform. According to rectors, the member universities should look closer into the common areas and common spheres of interest, e.g. taking advantage of specialisation of the Baltic universities in areas where number of MSc students is limited. According to the BOVA Rector Henrikas Zilinskas, the strategy should be a product of the BOVA Rector board. The rectors should spend sufficient time for discussion of a common platform, identifying objectives that would correspond to interests of member universities and would be realistic to achieve. The BOVA Secretariat may subsequently elaborate action plans for implementation of the strategy.

All respondents on the BOVA side share the opinion that the NOVA should be the key strategic partner of BOVA. The NOVA universities possess the critical mass and experience needed to promote the cooperation among agricultural universities in the Baltic Sea region. A possible scenario for reinforcing N-B is that, after the BOVA University has approved its own strategy, the N-B Rector Board formulates a common strategy or at least the main directions of cooperation.

3.2 Institutional set-up of N-B

3.2.1 Structures for cooperation on NOVA and BOVA sides

Comparing the administrative structures for network coordination on NOVA and BOVA sides, the most salient difference is that the BOVA side lacks an administrative body that would link the strategic (Rector board) and the operational (university coordinators) coordination. BOVA could adopt the experience of NOVA by establishing a body resembling NOVA KUF.

This Section reviews the administrative structures for cooperation within NOVA and BOVA sides, starting with the highest decision making body and ending with operational coordination.

NOVA and BOVA Rector Boards

The highest decision making bodies on NOVA and BOVA sides are the Rector boards. The NOVA board consists of the rectors and deans from the member institutions and one student representative. The composition of the BOVA board is not specified precisely. Until 2002, the board meetings included rectors, BOVA side members of the N-B Coordination Committee, and BOVA coordinators. Since 2003, the Board meetings included only Rectors of member universities; the BOVA secretary participated at the meetings as a secretary. The latter set-up has been found to be more efficient.

Another significant difference is that the NOVA board meets quite frequently, having 3 fixed meetings annually, while the BOVA board holds meetings only 1-2 times annually. Such frequency of BOVA board meetings may have been adequate in earlier years, when the cooperation with NOVA focused on short MSc courses. Today the extent of cooperation activities has increased markedly, and therefore a higher frequency of meetings could be considered.

According to rectors responses to the survey, important strengths of the BOVA rector board are rectors' common interests, good relationship between board members, and the wish to develop further. Acknowledging its merits, the N-B self-evaluation team recommends that the BOVA board consider the formalisation of its composition and the frequency of meetings.

NOVA KUF versus a potential BOVA equivalent

NOVA KUF, typically including the Vice-Rectors of Studies of the NOVA member institutions, has a crucial role in the coordination of NOVA activities. The main responsibility of KUF members is to ensure that the NOVA UN is given a firm policy foundation at their home universities.

Presently, the BOVA side does not have a body resembling NOVA KUF. This creates a gap between the highest decision-making structure (the Rector board) and the operational coordination (BOVA coordinators). The Rectors of the member universities are very positive towards cooperation and put forward appropriate strategic decisions. The BOVA coordinators do their best to implement centrally made decisions; however, they do not have adequate institutional positions to anchor these decisions at faculty and department level. If established, the 'BOVA KUF' could carry out this very important function. The Vice-Rectors of studies would, as a rule, be very suitable university representatives due to their administrative powers and competence in educational matters.

The idea of establishing a BOVA Committee on Joint Studies (BOVA equivalent of NOVA KUF) was discussed at the BOVA board meeting in September 2004. All interviewed rectors asserted that such a body would be useful for the BOVA cooperation. Before proceeding, a crucial task is to thoroughly define the Committee's role and responsibility.

NOVA and BOVA Rectors and secretariats

At large, survey respondents were very positive about the performance of NOVA and BOVA secretariats. The NOVA secretariat has 3 full-time positions for coordination of the NOVA cooperation, which represents significant administrative capacities. The secretariat is led by the NOVA Rector who, being the executive head of NOVA UN in a full-time position, has the key role in supervising NOVA UN activities. In addition, the secretariat includes 0.5 position of the N-B coordinator evaluated in Section 2.2.2.

One of the key objectives of N-B cooperation in 2002-2004 was to strengthen the BOVA human capacities including the establishment of a BOVA secretariat. The BOVA secretary entered his full-time position in June 2002. The secretariat was reinforced in September 2003 by adding a 0.25 position of the secretary assistant. In contrast to NOVA, the BOVA secretariat does not include a separately remunerated position of a BOVA Rector. Instead, one of the Rectors of the BOVA member universities acts as a BOVA Rector (Albinas Kusta from LZUU until the end of 2003, subsequently Henrikas Zilinskas from LVA).

In evaluation of the BOVA secretariat, the BOVA coordinators have appreciated effective communication, rapid spread of relevant information, and adequate follow-up of the planned activities. A strong evidence for endorsement of the secretariat performance has been the BOVA Board's (September 2004) decision to allocate internal funds for maintaining the secretariat positions after finalisation of K&A Wallenberg support at the end of 2004. This is the first time significant internal funds are allocated for the BOVA cooperation.

The most severe pitfall for the BOVA secretariat is the increasing workload. The number of cooperation activities is rising while the human capacities for coordination remain at the same level. There are three potential ways to address this issue: (i) member universities should take larger responsibility in planning, initiation, implementation, and coordination of joint activities; (ii) focus must be put on a few strong activities/networks, with considerable motivation and incentives to work on their own; and (iii) in the longer-term, the human capacities of the BOVA secretariat could be increased.

BOVA coordinators

Coordinators at NOVA member universities have been very little involved in the N-B cooperation, if at all. In case N-B cooperation will grow, the establishment of connections between coordinators at NOVA and BOVA member universities could be an option. The present self-evaluation is more concerned with assessing the performance of the BOVA coordinators.

The coordinators carry out all-round coordination of BOVA and N-B activities at the operational /executive level; the list of their tasks is very long. According to survey, the largest share of working time for NOVA-BOVA is devoted to supporting the organisation of short MSc courses ($\geq 30\%$), supporting N-B networks ($\sim 20\%$), supporting the N-B working group on joint MSc programmes (15-20%) and engaging Baltic PhD students into NOVA courses (10-20%). The coordinators are very competent in this work and receive high credits from both, rectors, N-B Coordination Committee members, secretariats and network representatives.

Representatives of the central secretariats perceive that overload of coordinators is a severe problem, which was confirmed by coordinators' responses to the self-evaluation survey. Formally, coordinators have only 0.25 positions for BOVA coordination, and are assigned many other tasks at the home universities. The situation is gradually getting worse, as the number of activities is rising and the member universities are also expected to be more proactive in N-B

cooperation in future. Some negative consequences of increasing overload have been observed, e.g. occasional delays in communication between secretariats and coordinators, and a hasty organisation of some N-B MSc courses.

During the self-evaluation seminar in Pärnu, Estonia, (October 28-29, 2004) the coordinators concluded that overload issue differs from university to university and may not be only understood as the lack of time for carrying out the BOVA work. At LLU, the BOVA coordinator feels that she is allocated adequate time for coordination of BOVA. At LVA, the amount of work is lesser compared to the agricultural universities and overload is not too severe either. At EAU and LZUU, BOVA coordinators feel pressed since they receive increasing number of other (non BOVA) tasks being important officers at the international departments. Furthermore, there are more subtle concerns in relation to overload issue:

- Much depends on the established planning and working routines: the most severe time pressure frequently rises due to the need to push the relevant people to carry out their tasks, which often implies double or triple work for coordinators. The issue is related to, *inter alia*, the lacking system of motivation and inadequate distribution of working tasks between coordinators and other university staff involved in N-B cooperation.
- Institutional priorities at immediate working environments as well as personal priorities of coordinators differ: the share of time for BOVA expectedly could be increased if the environments and coordinators themselves would recognise the need and resolutely address this issue.
- the intensity of activities highly fluctuates during the year with October-November and April-May being the busiest periods in BOVA work.

Thus, overload turns out to be a complex issue that is difficult to resolve. However, this is a crucial question for the future cooperation. The self-evaluation identifies the following possible remedies: (i) redistribution of the tasks so that other staff takes over part of other duties enabling coordinators to focus on BOVA activities; (ii) focus on the development of fewer but strong academic N-B networks; (iii) further clarification and distinction of functions of coordinators; (iv) improved planning of activities in advance, by introducing planning meetings between coordinators and secretariats, defining clear operational priorities, and allocating appropriate weight to N-B tasks; and (v) approval of a BOVA strategy that would clarify subordination of coordinators at home universities and strengthen support by university leadership in implementing BOVA activities.

3.2.2 Coordination of N-B cooperation

The N-B Coordination Committee has played a crucial role in initiating and coordinating cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. However, during the last 2-3 years the extent and the character of cooperation have changed significantly. This creates a need for a modified coordination body that could secure strong, more operational links between NOVA and BOVA and could anchor the N-B activities in academic environments at home universities.

N-B Rector Board

Consisting of the rectors of NOVA and BOVA member universities, the N-B Rector Board is the supreme decision-making body in N-B. In August 2001, the N-B Rector Board agreed on a set of 'Statements and Conclusions' laying out the strategic directions for developing the N-B cooperation. During 2002-2004, the board has met only once, in connection with the N-B conference that took place in Vilnius, October 2003. In general, the board has had a positive influence by keeping the options for cooperation open. As a Rector of a BOVA member university put it: "The N-B board is working at a level of 'understanding the situation' in which the Nordic and Baltic countries are." As the BOVA side has made a significant advancement

during 2002-2004, the time may be ripe now for the board to become more proactive. In the short-term, an important task for a N-B rector meeting could be to produce a common N-B strategy, based on consistent NOVA and BOVA strategies.

N-B Coordination Committee:

The N-B Coordination Committee (N-B CC) is the body with the mandate to coordinate cooperation activities between NOVA and BOVA sides. N-B CC is led by the NOVA Rector and the BOVA Rector and includes representatives of the member institutions that have quite various positions at their home universities, ranging from regular faculty staff members (NLH, KVL, HU and LLU) over heads of international departments (SLU and EAU) to vice-rectors with varying areas of responsibility (NVH, LZUU and LVA).

The predecessor of N-B CC was NOVABA Steering Committee established in 1996. The Steering Committee had as an important task to motivate faculty staff to initiate short MSc courses. The Steering Committee members helped to engage relevant Nordic teachers to give courses at the BOVA universities; committee meetings monitored the planning and organisation of the short MSc courses. In 2002, the Steering Committee was replaced by N-B CC. A new mandate for N-B CC work and functions was prepared by the NOVA secretariat; however, a radical change of the decision-making routines was difficult to accomplish, partly due to the embedded institutional norms from the previous period.

As confirmed by the survey, the N-B CC work was mainly carried out during CC meetings that took place twice annually. Through the NOVA Rector and the BOVA Rector, activities at the central secretariats have been very well linked to discussions and decisions at the CC meetings. Direct networks between Nordic and Baltic teachers engaged in short MSc courses had already been established and successfully nurtured by BOVA coordinators. Thus, the previously important contribution from the CC members to building teaching networks has gradually become obsolete. When N-B activities started expanding in 2003-2004, the central issue has become the anchoring of N-B activities at faculty and department level of each member university. This function was difficult to fulfil for most members of CC, partly due to their institutional positions at home universities, partly due to lacking university policies with regard to N-B cooperation and also due to the lack of a focused systematic approach for tackling this complex issue. In result, the CC work was focused on approving annual action plans prepared by the NOVA and BOVA secretariats and on reviewing the accomplished activities on a semi-annual basis. The key coordination decisions were usually made by the NOVA Rector, the BOVA Rector and other staff of the central secretariats.

It should be stressed that the lack of anchoring at the home environment stem from structural-institutional shortcomings and cannot be attributed to lack of enthusiasm in the individual CC members who have raised important ideas and initiatives, such as applications for Vusabalt, BioLandMan and ProFood projects; have made active personal contributions to Euroforester and Economics and agribusiness programmes; etc.

In self-evaluating the CC work, CC members mentioned as the strengths of the committee: excellent leadership by Paul Jensén and Henrikas Zilinskas, effective CC meetings, enthusiasm of CC members and a common understanding of problems in the region. Weak sides are: lack of interest from home university, inability to initiate enough activities, lack of funding, and a gap between CC and the academic staff at the universities. The self-evaluation team has the impression that although the Steering Committee and N-B CC had an important role in the previous years of cooperation, the changing extent and character of activities has brought about the need for modified approaches to N-B coordination.

The interviewed BOVA side rectors and CC members recognise the need for a new structure for coordination of N-B network. The establishment of the BOVA Committee on Joint Studies could provide a possibility to link the new Committee to its NOVA counterpart KUF. The responsibility for anchoring N-B at member universities could be vested in these two bodies which should meet, e.g. once annually, to prepare the implementation of the strategies laid down by the N-B Rector board.

N-B coordinator

The NOVA-BOVA coordinator entered his 0.5 position at the NOVA secretariat in 2001 with the mandate to build up and coordinate cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. The first step in pursuing this task was elaboration of the N-B activity plan with clearly defined objectives, outputs, deadlines and responsibilities. During 2002, the N-B cooperation started to gain impetus through focused pursuit of the two principal immediate objectives: (i) to build up administrative capacities on the BOVA side, and (ii) to quantitatively and qualitatively expand N-B activities. A decisive input to the fulfilment of objective (i) was the grant by K&A Wallenberg foundation obtained thanks to efforts by the NOVA secretariat and SLU. An important task for the coordinator was to prepare applications to external donors for initiating and developing a broad range of activities (cf. Section 3.4.2).

The main strengths of the N-B coordinator position is the clear mandate; a very good anchoring at NOVA and BOVA secretariats; and experience in generating team work as well as in raising external funds.

It was intended in the original plan (Wallenberg) that administrative resources used for N-B coordination at the NOVA side should successively be transferred to the BOVA side. This has not been done due to a constant need to keep contact with different bodies on the Nordic side, such as NOVA partners and external donors. Now, when external funding of this position is terminating, there is a risk that also this position will have to end.

3.3 Cooperation activities

3.3.1 Main achievements

A number of activities were successfully developed and well functioning routines for planning and coordination were established during 2002-2004. N-B Activities are recognised at BOVA member universities and substantially accelerate the internationalisation of studies. To sustain the impetus, a concentration of activities on the strongest networks and the most promising disciplines might be necessary.

Recognised activities

N-B network has pursued cooperation in a number of areas during 2002-2004. The share of N-B activities in all international activities at the BOVA member universities is shown in Table 2. Development of joint MSc programmes, raising of external funds and organisation of intensive MSc courses for Baltic students have been the most successful activities and are recognised by BOVA member universities (Table 3). The establishment of the BOVA secretariat was particularly appreciated by BOVA coordinators (cf. Section 3.2.1).

Benefits for partners

The perception of benefits from the cooperation differs between Nordic and Baltic sides. The BOVA side still reaps the most significant benefits via activities, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Major achievements from N-B cooperation (respondents were asked to rank top five achievements, giving rank 1 for the most important option, rank 2 for the next most important, etc.)

Activity	Ranking by respondent groups			Ranking by universities					Average
	Rectors	N-B CC	Bova coord.	EAU	LLU	LZUU	LVA	Nova	
Development of joint MSc prog. initiated	2.0	2.0	3.0	1.0	1.3	3.3	4.5	2.0	2.3
External funds raised (NCM, EU Socrates)	3.3	3.7	2.5	2.0	3.3	3.0	3.0	4.7	3.2
Short MSc courses organised (8 in 2003)	3.0	3.7	3.3	3.3	2.7	4.0	2.0	4.3	3.4
Academic N-B networks established	3.5	3.3	5.8	5.0	6.0	2.7	4.0	2.7	4.1
Baltic PhD students in NOVA courses	4.5	3.3	4.8	3.7	4.0	4.7	5.0	3.3	4.1
BOVA secretariat is established	4.8	5.3	2.3	6.0	3.7	2.7	3.5	5.3	4.3
NOVA-BOVA conference held	6.0	5.7	5.5	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.6
Planning and coordination improved	6.0	5.8	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.7	5.9
Cooperation with Russia initiated	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0

The contribution of the NOVA side is particularly important in raising external funds, delivering high quality teaching in MSc courses for the Baltic students, and opening up the NOVA PhD courses for the Baltic students. At the same time, the interest of the Nordic teachers for an engagement without additional salary is declining.

Nordic CC members assert that the regional advantage can and should be exploited for educational and research projects. Formation of joint master programmes and contribution to NOVA (with further vision: N-B) PhD courses could be the most attractive areas of cooperation during the next couple of years. To sustain the impetus, a concentration of activities on the strongest networks and the most promising disciplines might be necessary. Additional effort is needed to find areas where NOVA and BOVA could cooperate in a mutually rewarding way.

3.3.2 Joint MSc programmes

Development of joint study programmes is the activity of the highest priority at the Baltic agricultural universities. The first significant steps were taken in 2003-2004 by forming teacher networks and raising external funds for the development of selected MSc programmes. Urgent tasks are: to anchor programme development at member universities; and to achieve more balanced partnerships.

Current status

MSc programmes within the N-B network may be divided into: (i) ongoing programmes that already have a curriculum and running courses: “Sustainable forestry around the Baltic sea”, led by SLU, and “Economics and agribusiness”, led by LLU; (ii) programmes under development: five academic areas have been encouraged and supported since 2003. The programme in forestry is the most successful, having several years experience and a well-developed network between teachers. Started by NLH and LLU, “Economics and agribusiness” largely remains a bilateral MSc programme between Latvia and Norway. Two academic areas, “Management of biodiversity and multifunctional landscapes, or BioLandMan”, and “Agroecology and organic farming” took important practical steps in formation of joint MSc programmes. It is expected that, in most areas, strong partnerships on the BOVA side will be established and the Nordic partners will be engaged only in the later stages of programme development.

Anchoring of MSc programmes at universities

The key rationale for developing joint MSc programmes is to raise university competitiveness by delivering courses of high quality and attracting international students. BOVA member universities lack critical mass to deliver full programmes of high quality in English, and the

need to consolidate the best teaching forces from several partner universities is obvious. A key challenge in programme development is its anchoring at the involved universities in order to mobilise the best pedagogic capacity and to secure the best possible administrative assistance.

The survey shows that, with exception of BioLandMan at EAU, programmes are rather weakly anchored even at the leading universities that take the responsibility for coordinating programme development. The very weak anchoring at partner universities presently is an outstanding problem in all MSc programmes. The self-evaluation team has observed that capable and interested people could be found at every university but a focused effort should be made to design an effective system of motivation for international activities. The issues of lacking commitment are discussed further in Section 3.5.

N-B Working Group on Joint Study Programmes

The Working Group on Joint Study Programmes (WG MSc) started its activity in May 2003. Initially, the group identified the most promising areas and then made focused efforts to consolidate BOVA side teacher networks for starting programme development. Currently, WG MSc continues its work with the main tasks to build a functional structure for joint programmes and to act as consulting body at Baltic agricultural universities. Networks working on joint study programmes recognise the importance and the successful work of WG MSc. On the other hand, continuation of its activity in the current mode is problematic as the group already faces problems that can be solved only on the level of the highest university authorities. This suggests the need for creating a body that is able to take responsibility for common decisions and anchor them at home faculties. Participation of high-positioned persons from member universities and formalisation of status and decision power of the body may secure an effective decision-making structure (cf. also considerations of BOVA Committee of Joint Studies in Section 2.2.1).

3.3.3 Short N-B MSc courses

Short MSc courses still constitute a significant activity in the N-B cooperation. The N-B network has long-time traditions and established procedures in course organisation; at the downside, strategic priorities are lacking, there are gaps in course planning, and the courses largely remain ad hoc events.

Current status

Eight joint master courses were provided by the N-B network in 2003; 6 have been conducted in 2004. More than 150 students and more than 50 teachers from Nordic and Baltic universities took part in these 14 joint courses (Table 4). Four further courses will take place in October-November 2004.

The MSc courses, that typically start with distance learning part and end with five days meetings in person at a BOVA member university, receive very good evaluations from participating students. The courses are also appreciated by authorities of BOVA member universities as they build a base for education in English language, provide valuable experience for the teaching staff, and form personal international networks between teachers and researchers. The courses require a quite significant input from the BOVA coordinators that, on average, spend one third of their N-B working time preparing 2-3 courses per year.

Table 4. Participants in short N-B MSc courses in January 2003 - September 2004

	EAU	LLU	LZUU	LVA	Total
MSc Students	51	62	21	23	157
Teachers	21	17	5	9	52

Somewhat sceptical attitudes are observed at the faculty or department level and especially by the teachers who have been engaged in the preparation and coordination of such courses. Most teachers cannot find a reasonable answer to the question: Why should I prepare and deliver such a course? The following reasons for teachers being rather reluctant can be identified:

- absence of real support from intermediate management level (faculties and departments) at university;
- mismatch between the big workload in organisation of courses and the rewards, whether in monetary support, redistribution of workload or evaluation of personal merits;
- lack of continuity in course organisation, when a huge amount of work is needed to prepare materials for a single non-repeated course.

NOVA and BOVA secretariats have observed some gaps in the management of allocated grant and in the spreading of course-related information. Early agreement between course team members and announcement of course topic, date, venue and deadlines for beginning of distance learning should become a norm in course planning. Courses are still provided without strategic priorities at the universities. The latest experience of the BOVA coordinators indicate that still fewer teachers are willing to take responsibility for a course, and that the quality of the courses may decrease due to the absence of competition.

Future of the short MSc courses

To secure continuation and improvement of the MSc courses, there is a need for strong anchoring at all university levels starting from departments of studies and ending with the individual teachers. The need could be met by applying a more systematic approach to planning and provision of these courses. The first step could be to establish a body (e.g. BOVA Committee on Joint Studies) responsible for a strategic course planning, monitoring and quality assurance. The secretariats may contribute to an organisational improvement but have no power or competence regarding the educational part. Another necessary step is the creation of a system of motivation for the potential course leaders.

It is not known how long the financial support will be available from external donors but it will certainly cease some day. If N-B wishes to continue the course activity with internal funds, a rational strategy would be to prepare, at each university, a few high-quality MSc courses of a more general character, and to repeat these courses every year or every second year. Some of the courses might be developed to larger modules or advanced to PhD level and linked to NOVA PhD courses.

The situation is different in veterinary sciences where the absence of MSc studies makes PhD courses the most viable option. The key issue here is the lack of teaching and lab capacities and, in particular, a small number of PhD students at the BOVA universities. For the latter reason, the courses should preferably be more generic, e.g. in research methodology that could be applicable widely within veterinary sciences.

According to the self-evaluation survey, the universities would benefit from courses for the academic staff. Representatives of the BOVA universities give the highest priority to courses in research methodology and in scientific writing in English.

3.3.4 Baltic students at NOVA PhD courses

Supported by NorFA, the participation of Baltic students at NOVA courses has been a new and successful activity since 2003. There is an attractive but little utilised option to arrange NOVA PhD courses at the Baltic universities, enabling the participants to spare internal funds and enhance the collaboration between NOVA and BOVA.

Table 5. Number of Baltic PhD students at NOVA courses 2003-2004

	EAU	LLU	LZUU	LVA	Total
PhD Students	17	12	10	12	51

The participation of Baltic PhD students in NOVA courses (Table 5) has been a new activity highly appreciated by BOVA member universities and PhD students. Leaders of most NOVA courses kindly agree to accept Baltic students and prepare applications for scholarships to NorFA. The established application procedure works very well as BOVA coordinators personally inform PhD students in appropriate study areas and assist applicants with the preparation of documentation. BOVA secretariat monitors and coordinates the procedure. To further reduce the burden for NOVA course organisers, travel tickets for course participants could be bought by BOVA coordinators from university funds (to facilitate the reimbursement). Such a practice has been successfully applied at LZUU.

There are good possibilities to expand the N-B cooperation at PhD level by attracting a larger number of Nordic courses to the Baltic countries. As NorFA gives higher support to courses in the Baltic countries and the costs for accommodation and board generally are lower, some internal NOVA funds could be saved. Such arrangement would also attract larger numbers of Baltic participants and boost contacts between Nordic and Baltic teachers and researchers. Important requirements to pursue this development effectively are: (i) to draw the attention of NOVA KUF and its potential BOVA equivalent to these opportunities, and (ii) to encourage a Baltic initiative for the organisation of PhD courses.

3.3.5 Other cooperation activities

The N-B network pursued a number of other activities during 2002-2004 (cf. Table 3). Fund raising as well as establishment and strengthening of the BOVA secretariat are addressed in separate sections on institutional set-up and funding of N-B.

The establishment of academic N-B networks was an important instigation activity in 2002-2003 when a number of high-priority areas were identified and networking activities between the academic staff in these areas were encouraged. Since the purpose of the networks was to develop tangible cooperation (joint MSc courses, modules, and programmes, applications for funding, etc.), the network development is hard to separate from other N-B activities.

In 2003, the first N-B conference was arranged in Vilnius, Lithuania. The event involved around 65 representatives of N-B member universities and several external people, e.g. representatives of the Ministry of Education in Lithuania and Lithuanian office of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Such arrangements provide a possibility to meet for the key people involved in collaboration and can be utilised to strengthen the identity of the organisation as well as to raise N-B visibility to external stakeholders. On the downside, the organisation of such conferences requires substantial external funding as well as a significant time input by the secretariats.

In April 2004, a N-B delegation visited 4 universities in Northwest Russia. The visit resulted in a network of contact persons and, at selected universities, enabled to identify environments that are willing to cooperate with N-B. The cooperation with Russian universities might help achieving critical mass and open new funding possibilities. However, the development of such cooperation would need substantial human capacities for coordination. So far, N-B attempts to develop cooperation on a project basis.

3.4 Funding of the N-B network

3.4.1 Internal funding

Absence of internal funds on the BOVA side had been a major obstacle for the cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. The September 2004 decision by the BOVA board to allocate internal funds for the BOVA secretariat and activities is a major step towards creating a sustainable cooperation.

Since the beginning of cooperation in mid-1990s, the main discrepancy between the NOVA and BOVA sides has been the level of internal funding. The NOVA UN is annually allocated substantial internal funds from the budgets of the member universities, in latest years averaging about € 800,000 of which some 25 percent are allocated to supporting the central NOVA secretariat. Another 30-40 percent are utilised for running NOVA PhD courses and the rest for various other activities.

In sharp contrast, no internal BOVA funds have been pooled to support BOVA and the N-B cooperation in 1996-2004. Member universities made only negligible contributions in kind. This has been the main inhibiting factor for cooperation as the lack of any secure base funding put BOVA to an inferior position in the N-B cooperation. It is obvious that the achievement of a balanced partnership could never be possible under such circumstances.

At its meeting in September 2004, the BOVA Rector board made a crucial strategic decision to allocate around € 30,000 for a central BOVA pool. Around one half of this amount should be sufficient to maintain the current capacity of the BOVA secretariat, the rest being used to support various BOVA and N-B activities.

3.4.2 External funding

Significant external funds have been raised by the NOVA secretariat to develop the N-B cooperation. The first substantial grants by academic networks on the BOVA side were received in 2004. The BOVA side should further concentrate resources on preparing projects to obtain large grants for high-priority activities.

After the NOVABA programme came to an end in 2001, no external funds were available for cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. NOVA and SLU succeeded in getting a major grant from the K&A Wallenberg Foundation with the main purpose to build up administrative capacities for the N-B cooperation during 2002-2004. The grant enabled establishing the position of a N-B coordinator and building up the BOVA secretariat. A number of grants were raised in 2002-2004 for N-B activities (Table 6). Most applications were prepared on the initiative of the NOVA secretariat.

An intricate issue is the lack of funds raised on the BOVA side. The function is very difficult to fulfil for the BOVA secretariat due to overload of its staff and lack of experience in preparing large applications. In 2003, the N-B CC supported an initiative of the central secretariats to establish a Working Group on external fund raising. It was expected that the group would identify the most promising projects and appropriate donors, and engage the BOVA side academic staff into project preparation. The working group failed to achieve these tasks due to weak coordination and to the general difficulty of finding people at the BOVA member universities who were capable of preparing large applications and ready to spend the time needed for it.

In 2004, the academic networks on the BOVA side got two major grants with the purpose to develop joint MSc programmes: BioLandMan led by EAU received EUR 130,000 from EU Socrates, and Agroecology led by LZUU received EUR 27,500 from Nordplus Neighbour.

Table 6. External funds raised in 2002-2004

Activity	Donor	Received support, in €
Building N-B administrative capacity	K&A Wallenbeg, Sweden	240,000
Short MSc courses	NCM	80,000
NOVA-BOVA conference	Various donors	13,100
NOVA PhD courses	NorFa	26,600
VUSABALT, virtual network	NCM	106,000
MSc programme and network in economics and agribusiness	NCM, Nordic Grant Scheme	27,000
Food hygiene and safety network	NCM, Nordic Grant Scheme	60,600
MSc programme and network in Forestry	NCM, Nordic Grant Scheme	29,600
	The Swedish Institute	65,100
	EU Socrates	103,000
MSc programme BioLandMan	EU Socrates	130,000
MSc programme in Agroecology	Nordplus Neighbour	27,500
Total		908,500

The approach of EAU in the BioLandMan project deserves a special notice, as this was a concentrated effort by university administration and faculty members, strongly encouraged and supported by the university leadership. Such an approach could be used in future fund raising activities; however, due attention should be paid to building strong partnerships with other universities at early stages of the network/application development.

3.5 Hindrances for cooperation

Surveyed N-B representatives ranked the overload of the academic staff, lack of motivation tools for international cooperation and absence of internal BOVA funds as the most severe hindrances for cooperation. A further development of the N-B cooperation strongly depends on the member universities' ability to create and implement motivation tools for the teaching staff.

3.5.1 Survey results

Table 7 shows what are the major hindrances for N-B cooperation, as perceived by surveyed key representatives of N-B administrative entities. Lack of staff in key areas and language problems were indicated as important issues by individual respondents; they were added to the list of hindrances pre-identified by the evaluation team.

3.5.2 Overloading

Overloading of the teaching staff is recognised as the main hindrance by all respondent groups. The interviews with BOVA network representatives confirmed that these people typically are heavily overloaded with the regular teaching and research, only spare time is left for BOVA activities. Rectors and CC members recognise that teachers having necessary competences and English skills are usually appointed many tasks at universities. Such people have to prioritise and their choice usually stays with those activities where an additional salary is available.

On the NOVA side, overloading of the academic staff generally is an increasing although much less severe problem than on the BOVA side. A key issue is, however, that the Nordic teachers are not offered any salaries for lecturing at N-B MSc courses nor for participating in other N-B activities.

Table 7. Major hindrances for N-B cooperation (respondents were asked to rank top five hindrances, giving rank 1 for the most severe hindrance, rank 2 for the next most severe, etc.)

Hindrance	Ranking by respondent groups			Ranking by universities					Average
	Rectors	N-B CC	Bova coord.	EAU	LLU	LZUU	LVA	Nova	
Academic staff is overloaded	1.3	1.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.3	1.5	2.3	1.4
U-ties lack motivation tools to engage teachers in international cooperation	2.8	3.5	2.8	2.0	3.0	2.3	3.5	4.7	3.1
Internal BOVA funds have been absent	3.5	4.0	3.5	4.7	2.7	3.3	3.5	4.3	3.7
U-ties lack commitment leaving too many responsibilities to secretariats	5.5	4.7	5.5	6.0	6.0	5.0	5.5	3.3	5.1
BOVA and N-B strategies are lacking	4.3	6.0	5.0	6.0	4.0	6.0	3.5	6.0	5.2
Internal university policy with regard to BOVA and N-B cooperation is lacking	5.3	5.3	5.0	6.0	6.0	5.3	3.5	4.7	5.2
Lack of staff in key areas	5.3	5.5	5.3	3.3	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.4
Language problems	6.0	5.0	5.8	4.7	6.0	4.3	6.0	6.0	5.5
Work functions of boards, N-B CC, coord. and secretariats are not clearly defined	5.8	5.7	6.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.8
Communication between secretariat and coordinators has been insufficient	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Secretariats work inefficiently	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0

3.5.3 Lack of motivation tools at universities

All respondents recognise the lack of suitable means of motivation to actively engage in international activities including N-B cooperation. Effective incentives are not available, neither at university nor at faculty/department level. Even the coordinators of academic networks involved in development of joint MSc programmes see little or no rewards for this heavy additional work. At some of the BOVA member universities, the personal evaluation schemes give extra points for teacher involvement in international activities; however, these points have negligible weight compared to usual teaching and scientific activity.

3.6 Commitment for N-B cooperation

3.6.1 Institutional commitment

The commitment on the strategic level is fairly high, and occasionally it becomes visible as general declarations and statements. At the more operative levels, faculties and departments of the member universities are little committed to N-B cooperation.

At the strategic level of the highest university authorities, there is an increasing commitment for continuing and strengthening the cooperation, both between BOVA member universities and between BOVA and NOVA. The commitment is expressed by rectors and, to some degree, it is shown in institutional strategy documents. A very important proof of the increased commitment is the decision by the BOVA board to set aside internal funding for the BOVA secretariat and networks, to be used as of January 2005.

When it comes to the operative level, the commitment of department/faculty leaders appears to be very low. Also, from listening to some respondents in the interviews, it seems that the cooperation between BOVA and NOVA is still more focused on getting help from NOVA partners, e.g. to increase teaching competence or to make joint courses more attractive, rather than becoming equal partners in cooperation.

3.6.2 Personal commitment

Personal commitment most often shows as participation in meetings and discussions; only a few individuals (secretariat, coordinators and some network leaders) demonstrate a personal commitment between such events. The lack of incentives has a negative impact on the interest of teachers and administrators in general.

The level of personal commitment might vary depending on its definition. If it is understood as a positive attitude and enthusiasm, then most surveyed persons including rectors and N-B CC members can be seen as strongly committed to N-B cooperation. The level of enthusiasm is varying among the representatives of academic networks. It should be noted that, on the BOVA side, the share of people that have a strong wish for international contacts and good language skills is not high. Most of such people already have contact networks that do not necessarily coincide with the N-B networks and activities.

If the definition of commitment is widened to include personal self-discipline and obligation to be proactive and invest time into cooperation activities, then the level of commitment is fairly low. Faculty members on the BOVA side are beginning to appreciate N-B as a way to increase international cooperation and to get access to external funding, but they often have difficulty in finding personal incentives. Also, they tend to be reactive and are waiting for Nordic initiatives; an extra push is often needed from the BOVA coordinators or the central secretariats.

Talking about the administrative N-B staff, secretariats and national BOVA coordinators are very devoted to their tasks, and they spend a lot of time on initiating and coordinating practical activities. BOVA coordinators are very active, especially in the role of supporting national course organisers or network members.

3.6.3 Potential ways for rising commitment

BOVA must find its own way of organisation, to become a clear and visible partner to NOVA and to create a basis for developing the N-B cooperation. The strong BOVA secretariat is established as a core structure, around which BOVA must constitute functional bodies on strategic and operative levels.

Appreciation must be shown to fruitful operative initiatives, both on individual and department levels. Appreciation on the department level can enable heads of departments to give extra time to BOVA network members for extending international cooperation. The most effective means to raise commitment at the level of faculty/department could be budgetary allocations, rewarding those entities that have taken significant initiatives, e.g. have made tangible progress in creating a joint international MSc programme.

BOVA as a whole should concentrate funding and administrative support on a few promising and prioritised areas.

3.7 Communication and visibility

3.7.1 Communication within the administrative structures of N-B

Communication within the core BOVA structure functions fairly well, mainly due to strong efforts from the BOVA and NOVA secretariats.

The main means of communication is e-mail; phone is used less frequently. The major part of communication within BOVA and between BOVA and NOVA is conducted by the BOVA secretariat and the N-B coordinator. The efficiency of communication with BOVA coordinators varies significantly depending on personal routines of a particular coordinator. In some cases, it

is quite difficult to get timely information from member universities; on the other hand, it sometimes works very well.

At the rector level, the communication between partners is rather scarce, between NOVA and BOVA rectors only once every second year. Communication between CC members has been almost absent between meetings.

3.7.2 Communication within academic environments

Academic networks within the BOVA structure have, with few exceptions, been incapable of identifying themselves as homogeneous groups with good internal communication.

A number of academic networks have been launched during the project period, aiming first of all to develop joint MSc activities (courses and/or programmes). The communication within these networks has not been functioning well. There are numerous examples indicating that networks do not identify themselves as homogeneous groups with a mutual responsibility for communication.

During 2003-2004, the central secretariats and the Working Group on Joint MSc Studies organised two extended meetings where representatives of the most promising/active academic areas were brought together. These meetings were in general quite successful; in many cases, Baltic colleagues met each other for the first time. However, between such events, many of the networks have not been able to organise meetings and other types of communication, in spite of financial offers available.

3.7.3 Internal visibility

Except for the fact that NOVA-BOVA is mentioned (briefly) in the national BOVA strategies, BOVA and N-B cooperation has a quite low visibility in the BOVA member environments. One example is that hyperlinks to BOVA website are given low priority on most national websites.

The evaluation group has observed a lack of visibility/recognition on behalf of proactive and prosperous academic networks. The strongest BOVA networks for the development of joint MSc programmes could be taken as examples of lacking visibility. EAU give big internal recognition to their network BioLandMan, but very little recognition of network partners from other member institutions. LZUU show very little recognition (internal as well as external) of their network in Agroecology.

3.7.4 External visibility

The NOVA-BOVA cooperation is well known in Nordic organizations like NCM, NorFA and Nordplus, and it has received considerable funding over the past years.

The NOVA Rector and secretariat have made a considerable effort to make the N-B cooperation visible at the Nordic organisations including the central office of the Nordic Council of Ministers and its institutional branches, NorFA and Nordplus. High rates of success in receiving project grants is an indication for recognition of N-B by the mentioned bodies

On the BOVA side, an extra effort to introduce N-B to outside stakeholders was made at the N-B conference. More focused outreach activities are needed to inform pertinent national ministries and other relevant stakeholders in the Baltic countries.

4. Summarising remarks

The self-evaluation team has no doubts that the development of the N-B network has been very successful during 2002-2004. The major objective of the K&A Wallenberg project – to establish viable administrative capacities for coordination of BOVA and N-B cooperation has been fully achieved. The BOVA secretariat is established and successfully functioning; moreover, the BOVA Rector board has made a crucial strategic decision to allocate internal funds of member universities to finance the BOVA secretariat, starting from January 2005. This is the first time ever that the BOVA side pools together significant internal funds.

Facing almost complete standstill in 2001, N-B has been capable of developing a number of tangible cooperation activities just in the period of 3 years. The network has laid foundations for the development of joint MSc programmes on the BOVA side and, subsequently, between the BOVA and NOVA sides; short MSc courses have been successfully revived and their quality was raised by introducing more extensive distance learning components; more than 50 Baltic PhD students participated in NOVA PhD courses with the support of NorFA; significant external funds were raised to finance collaboration; notably, two BOVA side academic networks have been able to raise remarkable funds to educational projects by their own effort (for the first time in the BOVA history); the list of achievements should also include arrangement of the first N-B conference and productive working seminars on pedagogical/administrative matters; and establishment of promising contact network with universities in Northwest Russia.

However, the main purpose of this self-evaluation has not been to stress the achievements of N-B network during 2002-2004. Rather, the purpose was to conduct a self-reflective and critical analysis that would facilitate the further organisational development, beneficial for all sides involved. A number of urgent and critical issues are addressed in detail in the preceding sections of the report; the forthcoming section concludes the main findings of the self-evaluation. It is expected that, based on this report and other relevant materials, the external evaluator will provide recommendations on how the organisation could be developed in the coming years.

5. Conclusions

The findings of the self-evaluation survey as well as discussions at the self-evaluation seminar among key N-B stakeholders (Pärnu, Estonia, October 28-29, 2004) enable the self-evaluation team to draw the following conclusions:

C1. The N-B cooperation has made a major advancement during 2002-2004. A number of activities were successfully developed and well functioning routines for planning and coordination have been established during 2002-2004. Significant external funds have been raised to develop the cooperation. N-B activities are recognised at BOVA member universities and substantially accelerate the internationalisation of studies.

C2. The N-B network has achieved the strategic objective of strengthening the administrative capacities on the BOVA side. The BOVA Secretariat is established, functioning very well, and positively evaluated by the great majority of people involved in N-B cooperation. Links between BOVA and NOVA have been strengthened through the N-B coordinator.

C3. Absence of internal funds on the BOVA side had been a major threat for cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. September 2004 decision by the BOVA board to allocate internal funds for the BOVA secretariat and activities is a major step towards creating a sustainable cooperation.

C4. A necessary condition for a successful long-term development is that the member universities have a common vision and strategy. On the NOVA side, a significant progress was achieved in 2004 by adopting the NOVA UN strategy. The BOVA University has neither an approved strategy, nor are its objectives reflected in the strategies of member universities.

C5. There is a salient disparity in the institutional set-up at NOVA and BOVA. The NOVA Rector board meets frequently to take-up strategic questions and the NOVA KUF, consisting of Vice-Rectors of Studies, closely monitors and evaluates NOVA projects and activities. On the BOVA side, Rector board meets only 1-2 times annually, and there is no administrative body that would link the strategic (Rector board) and the operational (university coordinators) coordination, like NOVA KUF.

C6. The N-B Coordination Committee (CC) has played a major role in coordinating cooperation between NOVA and BOVA. However, during the last 1-2 years the extent and character of cooperation has been rapidly changing. This creates a need for modified coordination body that could secure strong, more operational links between NOVA and BOVA and could anchor N-B activities in academic environments at home universities.

C7. The BOVA University is not well anchored at the member universities. The main working load falls on BOVA coordinators (in 0.25 positions) who are very competent but often overloaded with other duties at home universities. Besides lacking strategy (C4), too little effort is made to raise visibility of the BOVA University and N-B cooperation, e.g. websites of most member universities do not provide adequate hyperlinks to the BOVA website. There is a general lack of interest for N-B activities at the NOVA member universities.

C8. NOVA and BOVA secretariats are strongly proactive in initiating joint activities, while the member universities largely are reactive. To enhance progress, the relationship should at least partially be reversed, i.e. the member universities should suggest activities and secretariats should assist in implementing them. The issue is linked to the lack of common vision (C4) and insufficient institutional anchoring (C7).

C9. While the institutional commitment on the strategic level is fairly high, at more operative levels, faculties and departments of the member universities are very little committed to N-B cooperation. Further development of N-B cooperation is strongly dependent on whether member universities will be able to create and implement motivation tools for the academic staff.

C10. Communication within the core executive BOVA structure (secretariats and coordinators) functions rather well. Academic networks within the BOVA structure have, with few exceptions, not been capable of identifying themselves as homogeneous groups with good internal communication. BOVA and N-B cooperation is given quite low visibility in the BOVA member environments.

C11. Development of joint study programmes is the activity of the highest priority at the Baltic agricultural universities. The first significant steps were done in 2003-2004 by forming teacher networks and rising external funds for development of selected MSc programmes. The very urgent tasks are to anchor programme development at member universities and to achieve more balanced partnerships.

C12. Short MSc courses still constitute a significant activity in N-B cooperation and courses receive very high evaluations by participating students. At the downside, there are gaps in course planning and the courses largely remain ad hoc events.

C13. Participation of Baltic students at NOVA courses under support of NorFA has been a new successful activity since 2003. There is an attractive but little utilised option to arrange NOVA PhD courses at the Baltic universities, enabling to spare internal funds and strengthen collaboration between the NOVA and BOVA.

C14. The key N-B stakeholders were supportive during the self-evaluation process and share the expectation that N-B cooperation will successfully develop. The majority of interviewees see the need for further strengthening the BOVA University as building up cooperation between NOVA and BOVA sides.