



Nordic Institutes for Advanced Studies: A Policy Brief

Introduction

This policy briefing is one outcome of the [Beyond Advanced Studies series of workshops](#) funded by an Exploratory Workshop Grant from the Joint Committee for Nordic research councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOS-HS). These workshops explored notions of interdisciplinarity and developments in research careers. They also investigated the possibility of developing a “Nordic Model” of Institutes for Advanced Studies (IASs) based on a number of similarities across the Nordic countries such as highly developed welfare states, trust in public institutions and business practices, and relatively low population sizes in geographically similar locations. This policy brief sets out to inform policymakers about the potential for a range of organisations of working with Nordic Institutes for Advanced Study as unique interdisciplinary units which attract and the best and brightest academic talents to/in the Nordic regions.

This is the modern world

The contemporary world can be characterised as facing a number of “wicked problems”, that is a range of complex issues which require responses from a number of academic disciplines, rather than just one. These problems include issues such as climate change, pandemics, refugee crises and conflict situations such as the war in Ukraine. Rather than being the domain of one academic discipline such problems require interdisciplinary approaches wherein researchers from different disciplines come together to learn from one another and postulate solutions to seemingly intractable problems. This is not merely desirable, it is necessary and the IAS model offers a unique way of addressing such problems.

Institutes for Advanced Studies - mixing individual working and interdisciplinarity

The first Institute for Advanced Study was established in Princeton, USA, during the 1930s. Funded by local philanthropists, it was soon home to a number of Jewish scholars who had fled from Nazi Germany, of which the most prominent was Albert Einstein. The Princeton model – that of providing funding so that individual scholars could follow their thinking wherever it went unencumbered by such things as teaching or administrative duties – effectively set the benchmark for future IASs to try and follow.

Since then various models of IASs have been established, with different funding models, different research foci, different funding periods for Fellows etc. However, the vast majority have been dedicated to allowing individual scholars the freedom to pursue their research by providing dedicated Fellowships - sometimes permanent, more often for time limited periods. Importantly, while individual scholars were given this freedom, in order to learn from other disciplines and to develop ways of interdisciplinary working they were simultaneously encouraged to engage across disciplines with other Fellows within their host institutions. Importantly this meant not only the provision of seminars and debates across disciplinary boundaries, but also socialising and forming the mutual bonds that underpin the best academic work. Thus, when the first Nordic IAS - the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, formed in 1985, a key part of its vision was that the Fellows mix socially via daily lunches, on site living and numerous social events. Such an ethos characterises what is now the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS) to this day.

The original Princeton ethos was that scholars work best when they are permitted to produce apparently “useless knowledge”, the usefulness of which only becomes apparent in later years. According to Princeton’s first Director, Abraham Flexner, examples of this included invention of radio, electricity, various developments within mathematics, bacteriology and industry and a number of key developments in the arts. While the aspiration to let Fellows follow their research wherever it leads remains an important point of reference for many IASs, it should also be noted that many have actively sought to engage in more “real world” issues, via such things as dedicated symposia on relevant contemporary themes or via more interdisciplinary working which attempts to address pressing contemporary issues. Thus, IASs are home to both “blue skies thinking” and to more problem-based approaches. In many ways this is a unique combination.



Introducing NordIAS – the Nordic IAS Network

The Nordic region currently hosts eight Institutes for Advanced Studies (IASs)¹. These are as follows:

- [Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies](#)
- [Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters](#)
- [Danish Institute for Advanced Study, University of Southern Denmark](#)
- [Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies](#)
- [Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies](#)
- [Swedish Collegium for Advanced Studies](#)
- [Tampere Institute for Advanced Study](#)
- [Turku Institute for Advanced Studies](#)

Figure 1: Map showing Institutes for Advanced Study (IASs) across the Nordic region



In May 2022, at the end of the Beyond Advanced Studies workshops, these IASs pledged to develop programmes which see joint working and collaboration. Two further meetings have followed and led to the establishment of a network of Nordic IASs which aims to share best practice, engage in joint collaboration and seek partnerships within and beyond the network. This network is known as NordIAS - nordias.net. We plan regular future meetings of the network, the next of which will be in Aarhus in June 2023. In the longer

¹ In addition the University of Turku is home to the Turku Collegium for Science, Medicine and Technology (TCSMT, www.utu.fi/tcsmt).



term we aim to develop a “Nordic model” for IASs built on the sort of cooperation, trust and friendship which has characterised the best joint Nordic approaches. We are also seeking partners to join us in this adventure.

Policy Implications

The Beyond Advanced Studies workshops and the formation of NordIAS have demonstrated the unique positions which IASs occupy in the Nordic educational framework and – via their interdisciplinary nature - the enormous potential which they have for helping government (at all levels), business and the third sector come to terms with and move towards overcoming “wicked problems”. This has a number of implications at various levels:

- At the Nordic level, the Nordic Council of Ministers should seek to foster ways of working with IAS. The proposed Coalition (see below) offers one means of starting this process.
- At national level governments should review the provision of IASs within their borders and seek to foster their growth.
- At city and regional level, government should foster ways of working with their local IAS and develop joint working.
- Business and third sector organisations should also seek to foster working relationships with IAS, with whom they can partner in order to address their own “wicked problems”.
- Nordforsk should consider ways of work with Nordic IASs, including via the promotion of interdisciplinary initiatives and exploring ways it can help facilitate closer collaboration models between the Nordic IASs.
- Universities should consider ways to enhance and articulate the various ways in which universities and IASs complement and reinforce one another, and how knowledge and cutting-edge research can best be promoted by joint initiatives.
- At all levels IASs and potential partners should seek to both develop new funding models and to secure funding for joint working via traditional funding models.

Join Us!

We are now seeking partners who wish to work with us at individual, joint and collective levels.

To find out more about individual Nordic IASs please consult the websites above.

To find out more about NordIAS please visit nordias.net.

To find out more about the collaboration between the Nordic IASs please contact Professor Martin Cloonan, TIAS, University of Turku: martin.cloonan@utu.fi.

We look forward to hearing from you!

