

## 1. SUMMARY

The summary presents the main findings and conclusions from the R&D study nr. 124013 «Cooperation between local governments and institutions within higher education to increase quality and relevance in higher education.» The assignment is conducted by Rambøll Management Consulting for KS in the period June 2012 – June 2013. The main research questions are

1. To what extent is the state administration of the higher educational institutions constraining collaboration with the municipalities?
2. To what extent do municipalities and higher educational institutions collaborate on higher education?
3. How may collaboration between higher educational institutions and municipalities contribute to innovation and development of (public) services, and advance higher education in line with the municipalities' needs?

The study is based on desk studies, qualitative interviews and case studies. The desk studies include documents concerning the judicial, political and economic conditions which may have an impact higher educational institutions' collaboration. Further, 70 interviews with informants from 27 local governments, seven counties and two regional collaboration committees have been conducted, as well as 76 interviews with informants from seven (out of eight) universities and 11 university colleges (out of 28).

### 1.1 Main findings and conclusions

#### ***State administration of institutions within higher education: High degree of freedom, few incentives***

The desk study shows that there is significant attention on the prospects for increasing collaboration between higher education and the field of practice. The Act relating to universities and university Colleges (Universitets- og højskoleloven) gives universities and university colleges a high degree of freedom to exercise their mandate, including collaboration partners. There are no requirements in the sector goals for higher education to cooperate with local authorities or other parts of the society, and few economic incentives in the current financing system for practical studies and research. Thus, the main obstacle for increased cooperation seems to be lack of explicit incentives stimulating increased collaboration with the local authorities and the society in general.

#### ***The extent of collaboration is generally high, but not for all***

The local authorities' employer monitor 2012 shows that 48 per cent of the municipalities and 57 per cent of the counties do have a collaborative- / partnership- / intention agreement with institutions within higher education. The findings from the current study indicate a relatively high degree of collaboration between local authorities and institutions within higher education. Most of the municipalities and counties included in the study have an extensive collaboration with institutions within higher education, including collaboration on practical studies and R&D. Yet the study indicates variations regarding types and extent of collaboration.

- The study shows that practical studies, skills development and further education for employees are the most extensive types of cooperation between institutions within higher education and local governments. These forms of collaboration have a high degree of institutionalization. Cooperation on decentralized education financed by the institutions within higher education seems to be somewhat less extensive and less institutionalized. R&D-collaborations where local governments participate on equal terms seem to be the least extensive type of cooperation, yet have a high degree of institutionalization.

- The study shows that there is most collaboration in organizing practical studies within the health care sector and education, while there are very few examples of any collaboration within technology and engineering. The latter finding may on one hand be explained by lack of initiative among local governments to enter into cooperation in these disciplines, and the fact that students within technology and engineering tend to orient themselves towards the private sector.
- The study identifies large variations between the institutions within higher education regarding the number of local governments they are collaborating with. Among the universities and university colleges included in the study, the number of local governments which has an intention agreement or alike varied from 10 to 27 among the higher education institutions. The number of local governments participating in organizing practical studies within the nursing study program varied from 1 to 27 among the universities and university colleges. KS has been an important facilitator for promoting intention agreements between the local governments and institutions within higher education in some areas.
- The study shows that municipalities hosting one or several institutions within higher education have broad and institutionalized cooperation with these institutions. Moreover, findings show that those municipalities with short geographical distance to an institution within higher education cooperate more than municipalities with longer distance. Informants explain this pattern with the costs connected to long-distance cooperation. Thus, the study suggests that geography may to a certain degree explain the variation in the number of municipalities collaborating with institutions within higher education. Thus, municipalities far from universities and university colleges need to a larger degree to take the initiative to enter into cooperation with these institutions. Furthermore, the support and engagement of the political and administrative leadership may be more important, as well as the initiative to create viable meeting arenas.

***Collaboration between local governments and institutions within higher education for innovation and development of studies and public services***

- The findings indicate that cooperation results in increased professional, theoretical and methodical skills and competences both in municipalities and within higher education. The case studies give examples of municipalities where cooperation with a university or a university college has enhanced the learning practices and culture in local public services. Other results are increased job satisfaction, increased recruitment and reduced turn over in the services. For the universities and university colleges, cooperation with local governments and local public services yields increased knowledge about the needs and important issues in the practice field. Furthermore, a number of joint R&D-projects are documented and published in professional and/ or scientific publications, and may even lead to new products or development of methods and ways of organizing the services.
- The study shows that R&D-projects may contribute to innovation both in local public services and in higher education, when local governments, local public services and universities/ university colleges exploit their different competences and perspectives to solve important issues in the practice field.
- The findings suggests that common understanding of the needs of the local governments and local public services is a requirement for developing studies with higher relevance for the working life.
- The findings suggest that well-functioning cooperation requires active participants willing to prioritize time and capacity to engage in dialogue and coordination of joint activi-

ties. Further, the representatives of each cooperative partner should have necessary decision power to implement agreed actions.

***Factors enhancing cooperation: Leadership support, dialogue and coordinated effort***

- Support from the management is emphasized as the most important driving factor from informants both from local governments and institutions within higher education. In the municipalities, both the political and the administrative management level is important, while the important level in the universities and university colleges is the dean level.
- Findings indicate that close relations, as well as dialogue and knowledge about each other's' priorities and limits, contribute to enhance and broaden the scope of cooperation. Common meeting arenas, priority, and mutual respect are therefore important driving factors.
- The case studies show that the municipalities employ different strategies to promote better cooperation with higher education. Some municipalities establish positions or even units dedicated to coordinate and follow up projects and common efforts. Other municipalities work together, for example to purchase competence development programs. The study also displays how the state financed Centers for Development of Institutional and Home Care Services located in each county have become important platforms for cooperation between local public health services and health departments within higher education. Especially the municipalities hosting these centers may take advantage of closer ties to universities and university colleges.
- The letter of allocation in 2011 required universities and university colleges to establish councils cooperating with the working life (RSA). The mandate of these councils was to develop strategies for cooperation with the work life, in order to strengthen the quality and the flexibility in higher education. Each university and university college were free to choose representatives for their council, as well as decide how the council should operate. The councils are recently established yet to a low degree mentioned by the informants. This, together with supplement document studies, may indicate that the local governments are represented only to a limited extent in the councils.
- The study shows that many local governments cooperate with each other to request or purchase decentralized further education for their employees, or to coordinate practical studies. The findings indicate that such cooperation yields positive results, and enhances the possibility for institutions within higher education to increase the number of collaborative partners among the municipalities. It is important that the cooperating local governments make all clarifications and decisions among themselves before entering into an agreement with universities or university colleges, to enhance the effectiveness of the dialogue with the collaborative partner in higher education.

***Constraining factors: Finance, capacity, law and regulations***

- The study shows that informants from universities and university colleges find the possibilities to make changes in the program descriptions of a number of study programs very limited due to the national curriculum regulations. These programs include child welfare studies, social work studies and nursing.
- The study indicates that the current compensation scheme for practical studies constrain increased cooperation in this field between local governments and institutions within higher education.
  - Practical studies in pedagogical programs are regulated by a national circular, defining national rates for economic compensation for teachers coaching the students, as well as the host schools or kindergartens. Findings from interviews

with both the local governments and the institutions within higher education indicate that the rates do not cover the local governments actual costs connected to practical studies.

- There are no direct compensation scheme covering the municipalities' costs connected to organizing practical studies in health and social study programs. However, the institutions offering these study programs are required to make economic resources available for a joint development project scheme where the practice field may enter into cooperation with employees from the university/ university college (samarbeidsmidler). Findings indicate, however, that the large municipalities enter into such joint projects to a larger extent than smaller ones. This is explained by the fact that since smaller municipalities has limited capacity and competences to write project proposals. Thus, our conclusion is that the joint project scheme may be a good way to further develop the cooperation between local public services and higher education, but it cannot be seen as an actual compensation scheme for the municipalities' contributions to organize practical studies in health and social study programs. Thus, the conclusion is that there is a need to revise and change the financing scheme for practical studies in the health and social study programs to increase the extent of practical studies in the local public services.
- The study indicates that both local governments and institutions within higher education interpret current law and regulations to lack any obligation for municipalities to organize practical studies within the health sector. Consequently, institutions within higher education feel they may not demand local governments to organize practical studies, although they may have difficulties to find sufficient number of practical study places for all the students with the right to practical studies. The lack of a suitable compensation scheme *and* lack of clear obligations for municipalities to organize practical studies seems to be a major obstacle to implement the political signals about increased use of practical studies in local public services.
- The study indicates that the Public Procurement Act is another obstacle to some extent, as it hamper dialogue in the process of purchasing services such as further education for employees in local governments and local public services.
- Findings indicate that there are limited resources for competence development in local public services as well as to finance R&D-projects.
- Findings indicate variations in the local governments' competence to analyze needs, and to plan competence development on a longer term. Lack of such competences, as well as research competences, complicates and reduces the effectiveness in cooperation with institutions within higher education.
- Findings indicate that the institutions within higher education lack capacity to meet the local governments' needs for tailored competence development, as well as entering into joint R&D-projects with local governments.

### ***Coordinated strategy for increased collaboration between local governments and higher education***

Well-functioning collaborations between municipalities, universities and university colleges are characterized by a supportive management prioritizing time and capacity to follow up such collaborations, as well as the incorporation of this priority into long-term plans. The study shows that lack of resources, competence and capacity to initiate and follow up joint projects and collaboration are major obstacles for local governments. Furthermore, institutions within higher education request more cooperation between the municipalities

before entering into cooperation with higher education. KS may strengthen the conditions for local governments to enter into productive collaborations with institutions within higher education, as well as support the local governments to find sources willing to finance such cooperation.

The study indicates that KS may play a role as facilitator for increased and enhanced cooperation, for instance by establishing common arenas for the local governments, and for the local governments and institutions within higher education. KS may also be an important part in promoting more formal agreements for cooperation, a role which regional branches of KS has already played in some counties.

Furthermore, the central organization of KS is represented in two of the national councils reporting to The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions. Findings from the study indicate that the local governments are to a limited extent involved in the Councils for cooperation with working life (RSA), which is important to strengthen the quality and relevance in the current study programs recruiting to local public services.