

Terms of reference



International evaluation of the National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NRCWE) in 2008

1. Background and purpose

On 4th October 2006 the Danish government decided to restructure and merge some universities and government research institutes. Among the government research institutes that were reorganized was the former National Institute of Occupational Health (in Danish Arbejdsmiljøinstituttet, abbrev. AMI) which became The National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NRCWE). In accordance with this decision it was also decided that The Danish Council for Strategic Research would conduct a quality assessment of the research of NRCWE. Also, the government decided that a certain share of NRCWE's present government funding should be exposed to competition from 1 January 2009 and onwards¹. The quality assessment will serve as basis for a decision on the size of this share. The share of NRCWE's government funding will, in practice, be transferred to the Danish Working Environment Research Fund. NRCWE can submit bids for this fund on equal terms with other research organisations.

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The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (VTU) and the Ministry of Employment (BM) have subsequently agreed that the international evaluation of NRCWE, which was to take place in 2009, will take place in 2008, so that the evaluation can be part of the basis for the decisions about the level of exposure to competition from 2009.

VTU will conduct a broad evaluation in 2009 of the whole process of restructuring and merging of universities and government research institutes in accordance with the government decision on 4th October 2006 and in accordance with decision V9 of the Danish Parliament. The results of the international evaluation of NRCWE will be included in this general evaluation.

The evaluation will be carried out in accordance with the executive order regulating evaluation of government research institutes.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the quality and relevance of the research and the dissemination of research results, and in addition – because of new tasks laid on NRCWE – to assess whether NRCWE meets the goals in the government decision of 4th October 2006 regarding the reorganizing of NRCWE, the contribution to further education, and the counselling and assistance to the Ministry of Employment. Furthermore, the various fields of research should be assessed in relation to their potential regarding the decision on exposure to competition.

Also, the evaluation should give recommendations for improving the organisation and the strategic path of NRCWE. The evaluation and the

¹ The government initiative is intended to improve the quantity and quality of research in general, and it supplements the exposure to competition which already is widespread among research organisations, like NRCWE, when they compete for external funding by submitting bids for national and international research funds and programmes.



recommendations are expected to address the various fields of research as well as NRCWE as a whole.

The criterion of relevance refers to NRCWE's organizational and political framework. This means that the research, the dissemination of research results, and the government tasks will be assessed with regard to the demands and needs of the Department of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Employment, The Danish Working Environment Authority and the other important actors in the working environment field. The demands and needs are expressed in e.g. the national strategy for the working environment and the management performance contract. The relevance of the contribution to further education should be assessed in relation to the demands and needs of the universities.

The evaluation will cover the period 2005-2008. The latest international evaluation covered the period 2000-2004.

2. Form and participants

The basic principle of the evaluation will be peer review performed by a panel of 5 highly acknowledged international researchers within the working environment research field. It is desirable that at least one of the evaluators took part in the evaluation of NRCWE in 2005.

The evaluators must in combination cover the entire range of research fields of NRCWE and must be experienced in research management and in research-on-demand by government agencies and other stakeholders.

Because of the research scope of NRCWE the research projects are grouped in a number of related "clusters". Each cluster will be covered by an evaluator. The strategy of NRCWE in the evaluation period comprises the following research fields: occupational accidents, absence and expulsion from the labour market, work-related musculoskeletal disorders, psychological working environment, organization and management from an OSH perspective, and chemical exposures in the working environment, noise and new technologies. Across the research fields there is a focus on intervention and implementation research as well as on epidemiology and surveillance of the working environment.

The panel will be independent of the Ministry of Employment, including NRCWE.

The board of NRCWE will appoint the panel on basis of nominations from The Danish Council for Strategic Research.

Scope and main tasks

Since the evaluation will take place on basis of the government decision mentioned above, the evaluation will encompass not only the research and dissemination of the research results but also the organization of NRCWE, the



contribution to further education, and counselling of and assistance to the government.

The questions listed below, and in particular the wording “sufficiently”, must be seen in the context of the organizational and political framework which NRCWE operates within (see the criteria of relevance mentioned above).

The evaluation must address the following questions:

Relevance

- Are the research and the research strategies in the evaluation period relevant with regard to the needs for counselling of the Ministry of Employment both in relation to immediate advice and to strategic counselling in the context of the national strategy for the working environment?
- Are the research and the dissemination of the research results relevant to social partners, working environment advisers, and the enterprises?
- Are the resources used in accordance with NRCWE’s strategic priorities?
- Are the above mentioned stakeholders “sufficiently” involved in the prioritization, formulation and carrying out of research projects?
- Are teaching and supervision made available to universities to a “sufficient” extent?
- Is the general public aware of the research results of NRCWE?

Effect

- Does research-based counselling from NRCWE to a “sufficient” extent contribute to the formulation of policies and the exercising of authority by the Ministry of Employment?
- Does research-based counselling from NRCWE to a “sufficient” extent contribute to the knowledge-base of the social partners, working environment advisers, and enterprises?
- Does NRCWE encourage the practical use of research results to a “sufficient” extent?
- Does NRCWE to a “sufficient” extent contribute to undergraduate, postgraduate and ph.d.-education at the universities?

Research quality

- Is the research quality of high standard when compared to similar national and international groups of researchers?
- Are the researchers in possession of the required scientific qualifications?
- Are the researchers to a sufficient extent networking – including for fundraising purposes – with strong research groups at other universities and research centres in Denmark and abroad?



- Is the infrastructure in terms of laboratory equipment, administrative assistance etc. sufficient?
- Is the research interdisciplinary to a sufficient extent?

Also, on the basis of the questions listed above the evaluators are expected to make an assessment of the potential regarding exposure to competition of the various fields of research.

Background material

NRCWE will provide the necessary background material such as:

- The by-laws of NRCWE
- The government decision of 4th October 2006
- The international evaluation of 2005 and the follow-up statement from the board
- The AMI research strategy and activity plan 2005-2008
- The AMI/NRCWE strategy 2006-2010
- "The working environment of the future" from April 2005 by the Danish Working Environment Authority
- Report on Future Working Environment 2010, the Government, 2005
- Management performance contracts and annual reports from the period 2004-2008
- Bibliometrics

Procedure

The evaluation will be conducted in collaboration between NRCWE and the Department of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Employment.

An independent academic consultant will assist the evaluation panel during visits to NRCWE and in drawing up the evaluation report. The secretarial assistance to the evaluators will be independent of NRCWE and the Ministry of Employment.

NRCWE will organize site visits to NRCWE and will provide practical assistance to the evaluators. It is a prerequisite that the panel involves the stakeholders when evaluating the relevance and effect of the research.

Time schedule

The evaluation report must be submitted to the senior management of NRCWE and the board no later than 1st October 2008.

The details of the time schedule will be discussed with the evaluators when the panel has been appointed.

Financing

The evaluation will be financed by the Ministry of Employment.