

# Strategic plan 2021–2025

*Adopted by the Board of NLA University  
College on 9 September 2020*

The logo for NLA Høgskolen is a green circle containing the text 'NLA' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with 'Høgskolen' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. The background of the entire page is a photograph of a hand holding a green leaf against a blurred green background.

**NLA**  
Høgskolen

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# NLA University College: Strategic plan 2021–2025

The strategic plan of NLA University College comprises three priority areas that are anchored in NLA's objects and current situation, and which reflect the core tasks set out in the Universities and University Colleges Act (education, research and dissemination).

## **1. Strengthening research capacity**

NLA University College will prioritise the strengthening of research capacity and research culture. This means recruiting highly qualified staff with clear core values and strong research ambitions, as well as maintaining a stronger organisational focus on research groups and providing greater incentives for publishing research. It also entails more administrative support resources for research and a focus on external funding as well as practical adaptations to achieve greater collegial interest in research on a daily basis. Efforts to establish a PhD programme will be initiated at an early stage of the plan period. Department-based, concrete action plans for research will also be devised early on in the plan period and will form the basis of further work on research and research culture.

## **2. Flexible programmes**

NLA University College wants to achieve continued long-term growth in terms of quality, student numbers and study programmes, but the growth must be economically sustainable and balanced against the need to preserve NLA's distinctive character. The plan period will be partly affected by the process of consolidation, but the range of programmes will be strengthened and become more flexible through expanding established programmes, offering existing courses and study programmes at

additional campuses, and through providing online courses and increasing the focus on international students.

The study programmes will also be strengthened through continuous efforts to improve the quality system with innovative use of new learning systems and ICT systems.

## **3. High-profile social engagement**

As an accredited university college with core Christian values, NLA University College has a special responsibility for highlighting its achievements through disseminating its research and development work, through collaborating with other university institutions on study programmes and research, and participating in other kinds of external contact in the public domain. In doing so, NLA can impart its values to society while also gaining new inspiration from the external environment and enhancing its profile, thus becoming more attractive to students and academic staff. This interaction with society will comprise many different measures, but two will be prioritised:

- 1) **Long-term recruitment of students and staff**, and
- 2) **Internationalisation**, understood here as international academic collaboration and international co-authorship, emphasis on international and global issues in the study programmes, and a greater number of student exchanges.

***Based on Christian faith and beliefs, NLA University College shall stimulate self-formation and critical thinking, and challenge everyone to engage actively for the benefit of their fellow humans and society, nationally and globally.***

# 1. Objects and history

NLA's objects are to promote self-formation, and to empower people to meet local, national and global challenges on the basis of a Christian understanding of nature, humans, culture and society. NLA offers education to everyone, regardless of beliefs. The University College was established in 2013 as the result of a merger between four educational institutions in Bergen, Oslo and Kristiansand respectively that had developed into respected university colleges in their own areas of specialisation.

- Staffeldtsgate NLA College in Oslo was founded in 1916 as the Hauge School of Management, and mainly provided education for missionaries to start with, and subsequently musicians.
- The Norwegian Teacher Training Academy for Studies of Christianity and Education (NLA) in Bergen was established in 1968 and soon became a university college with the right to examine students in both these disciplines.
- The Gimlekollen Media College in Kristiansand, the only Nordic college of journalism based on Christian values, was founded in 1981.
- NLA Teacher Training College was established in Bergen in 1995.

NLA's staff work continuously with students to develop innovative study programmes, research and new dissemination channels within the parameters of academic freedom and the application of scientific and artistic methods and results.

The belief that all humans are created in the image of God and have infinite value is the foundation that stimulates compassion and care towards the weak and a responsibility for the best possible stewardship of the resources that we have been given. Society needs a visible and participatory academic sector that can provide useful knowledge as well as critical perspectives on development.

NLA's social mission and core activity is to provide relevant education and conduct research with an emphasis on quality, ethical awareness and knowledge. NLA will educate its students by seeing each as an individual, teach them to discover their responsibility and provide them with the tools and knowledge to fulfil this responsibility in the best possible way. NLA sums up its values in a simple motto: *Because someone needs you.*

The strategic plan sets out our course for the period 2021–2025 and describes how NLA University College will offer programmes in a study and research environment that can contribute to knowledge promotion and enhanced life quality for the individual student, employees and society at large. The plan forms the basis for our priorities in the face of changes in society. It will also establish guidelines for systematic quality work in the period. This will help NLA achieve its long-term goals, elucidate roles and responsibilities, and identify weaknesses. The strategic plan will be followed up by an annual quality report and will also constitute the starting point for several action plans, which will be specified at the beginning of the period.

## 2. Current situation

### 2.1 A university college in the process of growth

NLA University College is in a process of strong growth, with skilled academic staff and a geographical structure that forms a robust starting point for further development in three of Norway's largest cities. Since 2013, student numbers have increased by almost 50 per cent, and the number of employees by over 40 per cent.

While NLA's size and the design of its campuses ensure close interaction with students, NLA also offers academic breadth that facilitates interdisciplinary approaches to many issues.

### 2.2 Trends and development

Three different developments in society appear to be of particular relevance to the strategic plan. Firstly, society is characterised by secularisation. This means that NLA University College with its Christian profile can contribute to a significant degree to institutional diversity in the university sector. The aim is to offer study programmes that promote self-formation in kindergartens, schools, higher education and the community in order to improve theory and practice, embed existential and value-based perspectives in the lifeworld of children and adults, and help people to understand our time in light of Christian-humanist theory and the belief system of which NLA University College is part.

Secondly, the university and university college sector is characterised by increasingly large units. NLA is moderate in size, thereby also contributing to institutional diversity in this respect. The trend towards increasingly large units is typified by requirements as to student numbers, diversity of study programmes, the number of staff formally qualified for employment at associate professor/professor level and professionally qualified administrative staff.

Thirdly, there is a trend towards globalisation and major changes over a short period of time. To meet these challenges, flexibility and ever-new insights are required. In the case of higher education, this will mean less traditional classroom education. More dissemination of knowledge and more communication between students, and between teachers and students will take place online. Moreover, the need for continuing and further education will increase because a larger percentage of the population will take further education, while many sectors in the labour market are rapidly changing.

In the light of these developments, NLA's priorities in respect of alternative programmes of study, research priority areas and dissemination measures are under continuous evaluation.

### 2.3 Specific challenges and opportunities

Staff recruitment is challenging for the entire university sector, and not least for a private university college that needs highly-qualified academic staff who are also motivated by its distinctive character. This increases the need to work on systematic recruitment. Greater international orientation can lead to new and exciting opportunities for more international recruitment.

NLA has a wide range of programmes and research communities that are historically more teaching-intensive than the norm. Several of the research communities continue to have a lower research production than could be expected. Strengthening research capacity and research culture represents a major challenge in a period that will undoubtedly include a large number of new staff appointments.

The growth potential generated by prioritising marketing and visibility varies among departments and study programmes. Surveys show that labour market familiarity with our programmes and research communities varies. Teacher training programmes in Bergen, music programmes in Oslo and journalism programmes in Kristiansand are well known, and some are highly esteemed in the school sector, the music sector and the media industry. In contrast, the newer programmes in business administration offered by the Hauge School of Management are not well known in the business sector.

The need for further development of continuing and further education programmes in light of the changes in society mentioned earlier, represents strong growth potential.

There is a good student environment but students spend less time on their studies than the average for the sector. This is largely because the programme portfolio is characterised by programmes in which students' study input is also low at other educational institutions. Students' income needs may play a role as well. Regardless of the reason, it is challenging to persuade students to give higher priority to their studies and to increase student through-put and the production of graduates.



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# 3. Areas of activity

Work on the three core tasks set out in the Universities and University Colleges Act – education, research and dissemination – requires good organisation and a robust internal culture. Moreover, NLA must act in accordance with environmental requirements and assume its share of the responsibility for sustainable development at the societal level. In this respect, the work on internal organisation and external environmental problems can be seen as two areas of activity that supplement the three core tasks. The planned goals and instruments related to these five areas of activity are described below.

## 3.1 Research and development (R&D)

NLA University College will have an offensive approach to research and development that reflects the institution's core values and objects, based on the principles of academic freedom and freedom of scientific research. Research communities will be strengthened such that the University College becomes a more attractive partner both nationally and internationally.

### Research groups

- The recently established research group structure at NLA will be consolidated across the organisation.
- All academic staff will be affiliated with stable research groups which as well as encouraging individuals to conduct research, will also provide training in research management and how to become affiliated with research networks.

### External funding

- Resources for R&D administration that can support research communities in their research and in obtaining funding from national and international research programmes will be increased to a greater extent than the resources for other activities.
- The number of externally-funded research fellows will be increased over and above the average number in the university sector.

### Research competence

- An action plan for competence enhancement among the academic staff will be prepared in the first part of the plan period.
- Staff will be encouraged to enhance their research competence through emphasis on mentoring schemes, courses on methodology and writing, internal accredited development work, participation

in external research networks and projects, and training in research management.

### Research production

- Work on strengthening the publication of accredited research must be given a high priority in all research communities.
- During the period, research production will be increased to the average level for private and public university colleges.
- The percentage of Level 2 publications will be more closely aligned with the average level for the university sector.
- The scope of international co-authorship will be substantially increased from the present level.

### Research culture

- Department-based action plans for strengthening research capacity and research culture will be drawn up.
- Expectations as to time allocated for R&D must be clarified at department level.
- Research efforts will be incentivised by NLA centrally and at department level.
- Research results and development work will be highlighted in internal and external dissemination.

### PhD programme

- Academic and policy-related work will be carried out with a view to financing and establishing PhD studies in the period, possibly in collaboration with VID Specialized University and other private university colleges.
- While the programme portfolio will continue to reflect broad research production, establishing PhD studies will naturally entail greater academic specialisation in the research community than at present.

## 3.2 Education

### Range of programmes

NLA University College aims to continue to provide a broad range of programmes with many attractive study options and research communities that meet accreditation requirements. The university college's core values are reflected in ways that are adapted to the individual programme.

- The programme portfolio will be assessed continuously, but will have approximately the same academic breadth as at present.

- Efforts will be made to expand the study programmes and research communities by offering existing programmes at additional campuses.
- Vulnerable Master's and Bachelor's degree programmes with a declining number of applicants will be consolidated through special measures and increased cooperation across campuses and departments.
- NLA University College will be strengthened as a national actor through the further development of online courses, flexible programmes with a view to students' academic progression and greater emphasis on continuing and further education.
- Our aim is to increase the number of online students to approximately 500 in total.

### International involvement

The global perspective will be strengthened in all NLA's core activities by means of a number of measures.

- Students should gain exposure to international trends and ideas in all study programmes
- More online study programmes will be established for international students and exchange students.
- The number of international assignments and projects will be increased.
- The percentage of students in exchange programmes should be increased by up to 20 per cent.
- Externally-funded international projects will be continued on the 2020 level as a minimum, and at least one online study programme with an international target group will be established.

### Study environment

- All programmes of study will incorporate self-formation perspectives via the learning outcome descriptors and more specific measures adapted to the individual programme.
- The study environment will be further developed with an emphasis on academic standards, collaboration and respect for the individual's beliefs.
- The programmes will be characterised by high quality and clear requirements for students.
- Measures will be implemented to ensure that students feel that they receive good academic follow-up, and that NLA gains a high score in national surveys in this area, especially in the case of indicators of student engagement and involvement, and labour market relevance.

### 3.3 Dissemination and social engagement

- Academic dissemination to the public at large in the form of lectures, feature articles and other contributions to the public discourse will make NLA more visible and will strengthen its reputation.

- Active efforts will be made to create good relations with future students and staff, owner organisations and the media.
- Dissemination activities will be encouraged by means of an internal award system.
- Dissemination and visibility in the media will be increased by 25 per cent based on normal reporting requirements in the Cristin database.

### 3.4 Organisation, internal culture and recruitment

- The organisation plan of NLA University College will be revised at the beginning of the period with a view to strengthening the academic departments and the collaboration between campuses and departments.
- A long-term action plan will be devised in the first part of the period for the recruitment of students and staff who are motivated by the university college's objects.
- Work on student recruitment will take place in cooperation with owner organisations, and will draw on their services for schools and young people.
- Academic networks that are developed through increased focus on the internationalisation of study programmes and research will be utilised in efforts to increase international recruitment.
- The additional costs of new campuses will be funded as far as possible by efficiency improvements that do not impact on academic activities.

### 3.5 The environment and sustainability

Environmental considerations and sustainability encompass both material and immaterial values, and are expressed in NLA's values through its Christian stewardship responsibility. This safeguards sustainability and the environment, and safe, stable social development, and will be of key importance in the study programmes and R&D.

- Self-formation perspectives and ethics, including sustainability and the environment, will be incorporated into all programme descriptions.
- New buildings in Oslo and Bergen will have environmentally-friendly solutions, and will be environmentally certified according to the BREEAM standard. New, functional premises will give a significant reduction in energy consumption and environmental impact, and can also contribute positively to our reputation. Total energy consumption for all campuses in 2025 will be reduced by 50 per cent measured against the energy consumption of existing campuses.
- NLA University College will have a noticeably improved environmental profile, and by 2025 we will have reduced emissions resulting from travel to a considerably lower level than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.



