

## *How the Norwegian Centre for Advanced Study operates*

Ole-Jørgen Skog, Scientific Director, Centre for Advanced Study

Elite research institutions are new constructions in Norway, which is a country with strong egalitarian traditions. In fact, the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters was the first of its kind in Norway, having been founded only ten years ago.

As several of the articles in this publication bear out, the establishment of the Centre was by no means a quick and easy job. At that time, many supporters suspected that the initiative could never succeed. Fortunately these sceptics were proven wrong. At present the climate is rapidly changing, and today the idea that the best researchers deserve special treatment is receiving increasing support. Several new elite research institutions are in the process of being established. Hopefully, this is just the beginning of a new trend that will continue to develop in the years to come.

The Centre is organized as an independent foundation. The Board of Directors is appointed by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters and the Norwegian Council for Higher Education. In addition, the Research Council of Norway appoints one member of the Board, representing the State. The Centre has a small, but un-bureaucratic and efficient administration and is located in the Academy's magnificent villa in central Oslo.



*The Centre occupies modern and beautifully converted premises with individually designed offices in the Academy's mansion. (Amdahl Strøm & Cappelen Arkitekter AS)*

Although the Centre's budget is still limited, both compared to the budgets of similar institutions in other countries, and in relation to the original plans, the situation has gradually improved in recent years. In 2002 the total budget is close to 11 million Norwegian kroner, and most of the funds come from direct governmental appropriations. Another 4 or 5 million will be needed to fulfil the Board's ambitious goals in the future.

As opposed to many other Centres, the CAS in Oslo does not invite individual scholars. All fellows are members of project groups, and the Centre hosts three groups simultaneously each year – one in mathematics and natural sciences, one in social science and law, and one in the humanities and theology. Each group can consist of up to 8 fellows at the same time. The groups stay for one whole academic year, but the duration of the individual fellow's stay varies considerably. The core members typically spend the whole year at the Centre, while others may participate for a few weeks or months. In addition to the senior scientists, the groups are expected to include one or two post-doctoral students.

The selection of scholars at the Norwegian Centre is organized as a three-step process. The process is initiated nearly three years before the groups will start their work at the Centre. In the autumn, all the universities are invited to nominate group leader candidates. Nominations are normally proposed by Deans or Heads of Department, or by individual university professors (often former fellows at the Centre). Furthermore, at each of the four universities, the Centre has a number of contact persons who ensure that the process runs smoothly. The initial proposal can be quite short, simply including the title of the project and CV for the potential project leader. Typically, the number of nominations each year varies between 20 and 30.

Among the proposals, the Board selects a number of candidates who are invited to submit a more detailed description of their project and the team they wish to invite. On the basis of this material the Board selects approximately three candidates from each of the three categories. They will then submit the final outline of their project, aimed at experts in their own field, plus an overview of the senior members of the team, including their CVs and letters of intent. After an international peer review, where each proposal is evaluated by at least 4 or 5 experts, the Board makes its final selection early in the summer the following year. The selection is made solely on the basis of scientific merit.

This process leaves the invited groups with two years for finalising the details of the plans for their work at the Centre. The Centre rents a number of small and some larger apartments for visiting scholars (and their families, whenever necessary) close to the Centre. The administration takes care of all kinds of practical arrangements, including helping scholars to find appropriate schools for their children.

Regarding the fellows, the Centre operates on a “no loss – no gain” principle. Accommodation and travel expenses (as well as expenses relating to school or kindergarten, whenever necessary) are paid by the Centre, and visiting scholars receive a stipend to cover extra expenses during their visit. The Centre may also reimburse expenses for replacements for foreign scholars who are unable to have an ordinary sabbatical from their own university. However, in the case of Norwegian scholars, cooperative agreements between the Centre and the Universities of Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, ensure that they are entitled to an extraordinary sabbatical during their stay at the Centre. These agreements represent an important part of the Centre’s economy.