

NCRC mission:

The mission of the National Consumer Research Centre (NCRC) is to investigate, anticipate and identify change and risk factors within the consumer society, in consumer behaviour and in the market, and to be a communicator of consumer research knowledge.

NCRC values:

- ◆ Top expertise and professional know-how
- ◆ Close collaboration within the organisation and with stakeholder groups
- ◆ Creativity, responsibility, independence
- ◆ Open and motivating work community which accepts diversity

NCRC vision 2011:

OUR VISION FOR 2011 IS A STRONGER, RESEARCH-BASED PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIAL POLICY AND IN THE MARKET TO ENHANCE CONSUMER WELFARE.

Besides covering NCRC's key duties of research and information services, the vision sets down guiding principles and justifications for developing our expert knowledge, effectiveness, economy, communication, and relations with our stakeholders that are necessary to realise the vision.

NCRC's core expertise will be used to strengthen the consumer perspective in the national policies on innovation, technology, consumer affairs and industry.

The vision incorporates three strategic objectives to be achieved by the year 2011. Each objective comprises critical success factors which must be met if the objective is to be attained.

Objective 1.

To raise the consumer perspective into a core element of societal decision-making and stakeholder co-operation.

Critical success factors:

- 1.1 Greater role afforded in horizontal policy to the anticipation of consumer trends and understanding of consumer affairs
- 1.2 Consumer research knowledge recognised as a starting point for consumer, competition, industrial and innovation policies
- 1.3 More attention given to the user perspective in the market and in the economy as a whole

Objective 2.

To be a nationally competitive and internationally recognised research institute in its field of expertise.

Critical success factors:

- 2.1 Systematic and interactive preparing of NCRC research projects
- 2.2 Anticipatory ability and initiativeness in planning and preparing of national and international research programmes

- 2.3 Networking at the national and the international level
- 2.4 Raising the scientific level of NCRC research, including monitoring and evaluation

Objective 3.

To be a leader in the dissemination of consumer research knowledge.

Critical success factors:

- 3.1 Availability of necessary resources and expertise meet infrastructural requirements
- 3.2 Updating and revision of NCRC's information systems
- 3.3 New service concepts and customised services

NCRC strategy:

Research strategy

Fields of research

The main emphasis in NCRC's research strategy is on comprehensive research programmes, often spanning several years, which are important to the national consumer and social policy and promote well-being and a competitive and innovative national economy. NCRC will serve the various policy sectors in its administrative branch by anticipating their research needs and meeting them.

During this vision and strategy period, NCRC research will focus on themes of special importance to consumer and social policy, and in view of the national consumer policy programme and EU research framework programmes. Our projects will investigate issues like the conditions for consumer well-being, innovations and their adoption, and market functionality and risks under the following thematic areas (see Appendix 1):

- ◆ Customership in the service society
- ◆ Consumer-oriented food economy and food culture
- ◆ Sustainable living environment
- ◆ User-driven innovations

Study projects under the theme *Customership in the service society* will approach market functionality and risks from the viewpoint of consumer welfare and consumer economy. The study topics will cover changes in the public sector, role of households in generating welfare, factors of service quality, and dynamics between various sectors of the economy. The theme *Consumer-oriented food economy and food culture* will focus on the functionality of the food economy as well as on food safety, food-related innovations and changes in food culture. Infrastructural functionality in the framework of consumers' everyday life and sustainable development will be examined under the theme *Sustainable living environment*. *User-driven innovations* will take the standpoint of consumers and users to study how consumers adopt innovations and how novelty products are institutionalised.

NCRC's multidisciplinary research is based on a broad integration of social and behavioural sciences. The multidisciplinary approach makes it possible to study a phenomenon from several, mutually complementary perspectives – e.g. economics, consumer economics, food sciences, sociology, social policy, environmental sciences, geography, social scientific technology research, and product and service research from a business economics standpoint.

Development arenas

To enhance the topicality of NCRC research and to promote networking, we will revise our research processes by opening *fixed-term development arenas* around varying topics within significant and emerging research fields. These development arenas will serve as forums for

interchange between NCRC and its stakeholder groups, funders, and management and steering groups. The arenas will be tightly associated with our thematic fields of research and action groups. The aim is to combine the strategic objectives of NCRC and the Ministry of Trade and Industry to achieve increased consumer orientation both in *innovation policy and research*. Another aim is to encourage initiativeness among researchers and performance management in *anticipating emerging horizontal research questions*. The development arenas will make it possible to refocus NCRC's current research themes and to generate resourceful, high-quality research products.

At their best, NCRC's fixed-term development arenas will help to bring together the various actors in consumer research and to advance methodological development and productisation of consumer research. Thanks to their in-built interactivity the arenas will enable our stakeholder groups to play a greater role in targeting the research conducted at NCRC. Start-up of the arenas requires securing of basic funding as well as decision-making concerning internal financing.

National and international networking

In networking at the national level, NCRC will intensify its co-operation with Finnish universities and other sectoral research institutes – e.g. through the above-mentioned development arenas. We will intensify national collaboration in the preparation and initiation of scientific projects, in testing and commercialisation of research ideas, and in covering areas left untapped between research institutes. Projects studying the production and rooting of consumer innovations in the food and technology sectors will be developed in co-operation with the National Technology Agency Tekes, Finnish National Fund for Research and Development Sitra, MTT Agrifood Research Finland and Technical Research Centre of Finland VTT. Moreover, NCRC will collaborate with the Government Institute of Economic Research VATT, Research Institute of the Finnish Economy ETLA, Social Insurance Institution of Finland Kela, Bank of Finland and the Finnish Army in designing research projects of socio-political significance which promote the national economy and market functionality. The conditions, obstacles and social risks related to consumer welfare will be investigated together with the National Research Centre for Welfare STAKES. Co-operation in sustainable development projects with the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE and other interest groups will be deepened. The products of this type of collaboration will then be evolved in the development arenas into research programmes and measures for communicating the research results to the public.

In its international co-operation NCRC will focus particularly on active networking and utilisation of international study data. We will be increasingly involved in international research projects and encourage our researchers to take an active part in international expert assignments.

Raising the scientific level of research

Our research strategy stresses the scientific quality of NCRC research. We will strive at research excellence and at meeting strict scientific criteria. We intend to keep up the exceptionally high educational level of NCRC research personnel (half have researcher training, licentiate or doctorate degree) by training new researchers and by promoting international researcher exchange and post-doctorate studies abroad through academic grant applications. New recruits will be selected from among candidates with researcher training. In addition, we will actively seek feedback from our stakeholder groups and users of the research results in order to raise the quality and scientific level of NCRC research.

Teamwork in our multidisciplinary teams will be strengthened through increased interactivity, on-the-job learning, and accumulation and transfer of knowledge within and between teams and with other research institutes. NCRC's research teams will collaborate horizontally in preparing new studies and in obtaining funding for our projects, which will simultaneously advance their mutual competence. Researchers will be encouraged to publish their results in international publication series, thus enhancing their qualifications and consequently the demand for NCRC researchers in international working groups.

NCRC will promote the participation of its researchers and other personnel in external training courses to complement their professional expertise. Similarly, we will support in-house training courses and study circles, like the *article incubator* created in autumn 2005 to increase publication in international forums. We will continue to produce textbooks, scientific methodology manuals and other handbooks both within NCRC and in the context of our co-operation networks.

Information service and communication strategy

Recent changes in the field of information services and communication – such as digitalisation and new interactive channels – offer novel opportunities for NCRC’s information service and communication functions. The principle of right of access requires us to make the findings of NCRC research known to the users free of charge, in order to ensure the social effectiveness of the conducted research. To this end, it is important to continue to improve and expand the database on national consumer research, KULTU, developed and maintained by NCRC, in order to make it into the key instrument of expert knowledge in this field in Finland. Our many stakeholder groups have a need for customised research as well, and this calls for the development of new knowledge products and pay service concepts. Considerable investment into infrastructure and expertise is therefore required.

The vision period will start with the creation of development arenas to enhance NCRC’s communication and information services. The development arenas, which will be realised as a joint activity by our researchers and stakeholder groups, will include a barometer for measuring consumer welfare and status on an annual basis, a consumer policy review every second year, a polemic yearbook, and a consumer research review issued every three to four years jointly with other Finnish research institutes. Development arenas will also be helpful in expanding the content of the KULTU database and in developing the *consumer portal*, an information channel for Finnish consumers, together with other expert organisations.

Financing and resourcing strategy

The boundary conditions for NCRC’s financing and resourcing strategy are determined by the thematic fields in the research strategy and the productivity programme, and further by the requirements of the technological, innovation, consumer and industrial policies in our administrative branch. Our financing strategy is based on direct budgetary funding and complementary income financing. Income financing is mainly obtained through research programmes, including funding by industry. We will increasingly seek funding from international sources through network collaboration. The aim is to cover 25-35% of total costs by income financing. However, raising the share of external funding is not without problems – especially considering the inputs needed for the forthcoming development arenas and for growing research challenges. These development efforts do not enjoy the risklessness and freedom afforded by budgetary funding. NCRC’s own share of financing is considerable, but it varies depending on the research project and the ministry in question.

Due to the horizontal nature of NCRC’s research field, it is not possible to apply the model of a single funding source. The weakest link in the search for financing is the small critical mass of our research teams, high concentration of top expertise, and vulnerability of research in the absence of sufficient replacement resources. These constraints grow even more important when we compete for international financing. Budgetary funding is, therefore, crucial for the long-term development of NCRC and for guaranteeing the independence of research. Our research resources need to be strengthened particularly in view of the new development arenas and in the fields outlined in our research strategy. More resources will be needed to cover the increasing health care costs due to the age structure of NCRC personnel.

It is necessary to maintain the current number of personnel to meet the continuously increasing requirements of horizontal policy, despite what the productivity programme says about restricting new recruitment. Moreover, NCRC’s salary level needs to be raised for it to be competitive. Income

from publication sales is also expected to diminish along with electronic publishing, but NCRC is currently developing new pay services as a compensatory measure.

Personnel strategy

The emphasis in personnel policy will be on strengthening the professional expertise of NCRC personnel and safeguarding their employment. The crucial question has to do with the retirement of new, skilled researchers to replace retiring employees in the upcoming retirement trend. We will have to ensure qualified human resources to manage national and international research projects and to guarantee top-level scientific expertise. We must also secure the professional competence needed for financial, data and personnel administration in view of foreseeable outsourcing trends.

Greater productivity continues to be a strong trend at NCRC which also requires some reallocation of resources. We aim to enhance the well-being of NCRC personnel by arranging flexible working hours, remote work possibilities, sabbatical months to enable further processing of research products, occupational health care services, and fitness and recreation activities. Job satisfaction and work atmosphere surveys as well as personnel inquiries in connection with the new payroll system will be conducted on a yearly basis.

Management and administration strategy

NCRC's management and administration strategy underlines the importance of managerial and supervisory work. A multifaceted, highly networked research institute like NCRC is particularly challenging from a managerial and supervisory perspective. A revision of our operating practices, raising the quality and scientific level of research, and increasing our productivity adds to the demands and pressures of supervisory work. Thus, one of our strategic goals is to practicalise work supervision both in the entire organisation and in the form of personal support through mentoring. This is even more important because of the small number of administrative personnel and consequently high vulnerability of our infrastructure. Job supervision and coaching in working practices will be emphasised to meet the growing productivity challenges.

External network services and in-house administrative processes will be developed further, most urgently in document management and expansion and in the utilisation of NCRC's pool of research data. The data administration strategy is an essential feature of our infrastructure. The administrative services which NCRC currently obtains from the National Consumer Agency free of charge will be jointly developed by improving the data systems of financial and personnel administration and electronic document management. If the National Consumer Agency outsources its administrative services, NCRC will have to secure basic financing to pay for purchased services.

Appendix 1.

NCRC's consumer-oriented thematic fields

