Principles and general objectives of education

The principle of equality in terms of educational provision has a long tradition in Norway, and the Government’s vision of society encompasses a nation of tolerance and mutual respect, a society free of discrimination, where citizens master the art of living together, and where everyone may feel included and safe, regardless of cultural origin, political conviction or religious belief. The Government also has a vision of Norway as an advanced society, a knowledge society ranking among the best in the world, and a society able to make knowledge and competence available to all citizens, as well as to utilize the resources of all citizens.

The basic principles and priorities of Norwegian education policies are: a high general level of education in the entire population; equal opportunity for all in access to education; decentralization of educational administration; meeting long-term and short-term qualification requirements of the labour market; emphasis on a broad and general initial education, leaving specialization to later stages and further training at work; lifelong learning; and a comprehensive education system with easy transition between levels and courses.

The above-mentioned priorities cannot be reached without high-quality education and training available to all. Education for All is a basic precept of education policy. Norwegian education policy is also based on the recognition that people’s ability to receive and be motivated for new knowledge to a large extent depends on the content and quality of educational provision. The guiding principle for the 1990s has been to improve educational standards for the whole population by means of sector-wide improvement and consolidation of the system.

Current educational priorities and concerns

During the 1990s, education has become a priority area of the political debate. The impact of increasing technological, economic and social change is felt in Norway as well as in other European countries. With rapid changes in production methods, practical skills must be related to general knowledge and be continuously updated. This situation puts new demands on competence and qualifications. Knowledge has to be updated, in order to increase the value of national output, to maintain the level of employment, and to create new jobs. Specialization must not come too early, and systems of continued or recurrent training and lifelong learning must be developed. Education is seen as a continuous process. Emphasis is put on knowledge and skills which will provide a broad scope for renewal and continued learning in a lifelong perspective.

Extensive educational reforms have been carried out in Norway during the 1990s, involving all educational levels. Reforms in higher and upper secondary
education have been followed up by a comprehensive reform of compulsory education. Recent reforms took into account that education has to be increasingly considered in a lifelong perspective, and that systems of continued education and training and lifelong learning must be developed.

The Compulsory School Reform (Reform ‘97) has been implemented from 1997, and included four main reforms: (i) a family reform, which, by expanding the scope of school activities, provides a secure environment for children while their parents are at work; (ii) a children’s reform, which gives schools greater responsibility for the growth environment of children, richer impulses and wider scope for learning, based both on organized activities together with adults, and on the independent activities of the children themselves; (iii) a school reform, introducing ten years of compulsory education (instead of nine) from the age of 6 instead of 7 years, and a new curriculum; (iv) a cultural reform, whereby more activities in the local community, including crafts, sports and artistic endeavour, become part of the daily life of schools.

A new curriculum for primary and lower secondary education has been developed, defining the principles, guidelines and subject syllabi for the ten-year compulsory education. Many of the over-riding principles defined in the earlier curriculum guidelines still apply, such as: (i) the teaching shall be based on fundamental Christian and humanistic values; (ii) good cooperation between home and school, based on equality and mutual respect; (iii) suitably adapted education for all pupils; (iv) local work, i.e., adaptation of subject matter to local conditions at municipal, school and class levels; (v) a diversity of teaching methods, as an integrated part of the different subjects. The new curriculum consists of three parts: (a) a general part, defining the over-riding objectives for all school activities; (b) a document laying down the principles and guidelines for the teaching; (c) a set of subject syllabi, defining the objectives and the content of the education in each subject. All pupils are taught the same basic, centrally-defined subject matter, which is extended gradually in the course of the schooling. The content of the curriculum is organized into subjects. Nevertheless, the different subjects should be considered in relation to each other, to show cross-connections. The common content of the subject syllabi shall be supplemented locally, and shall be suitably adapted to each individual pupil. Education shall reflect a progression that ensures good coherence and development, adjusted to the abilities and aptitudes of the pupils in each age group.

The concept of “one school for all” is based on a balance between consideration for the community and adapted education for the individual. The principle of an all-inclusive school is that all pupils should receive equitable education based on a common curriculum, and the principle of suitably adapted education, as established by law. This principle shall be reflected in all areas of the school activities. The subject syllabi provide opportunities for adjustment to local conditions. It is important that the school makes use of the local resources, and positions itself as a “centre” for local activities. Good coherence must be ensured between the subject matter taught throughout the country and the subject matter chosen locally.

A large-scale reform of upper secondary education (known as Reform '94) have been implemented as from August 1994, and during the period 1994-1998 extensive changes took place, including among others: the introduction of a statutory right (but not an obligation) to three years’ upper secondary education for all, between

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the ages of 16 and 19, with a corresponding obligation on the part of the regional authorities to provide an adequate number of places; the considerable reduction (from over 100 to fifteen) and a better coordination of foundation courses in order to provide a broad knowledge base for specialization and lifelong learning; the coordination of school vocational training with apprenticeship training in the workplace. A general matriculation standard has also been introduced. The normal requirement for access to higher education is the completion of a three-year course in general subjects at the upper secondary level, or some of the areas of study in technical and vocational subjects.

In 1998 the Government presented a White Paper on continuing education and adult education, known as the Competence Reform. The basis for the reform is the need for competence in the workplace, in society and by the individual. The reform is aimed at embracing all adults, regardless of labour market attachment, and it has a broad and long-term perspective. The reform is implemented as a process with active participation from employers, employees and the Government. The legal right for adults to primary, lower an upper secondary education has been introduced in 2000, and the right for adults to have their practice and experience (their non-formal competence) assessed, documented and included as an integrated part of the formal upper secondary education has been introduced in 2003. A national plan of action included: improvement of the documentation of results of adult education; development of educational models for adults in lower secondary education; development of models for adults to document non-formal competence; development of educational models for adults in upper secondary education, with special focus on literacy; models for coordination of adult education within the regions and between different organizers.

In spring 1998, a Royal Commission on higher education (the Mjøs Commission) was appointed to analyze the situation of universities and colleges. Based on the White Paper of 2001, the Quality Reform of Higher Education has been implemented at all higher education institutions from the autumn of 2003. The most important components of the reform have been the introduction of the three-cycle degree structure (three-year bachelor’s, two-year master’s, and three-year doctoral degrees) in line with the Bologna process, and the establishment in 2002 of a quality assurance agency, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). As part of the reform, the Act of 1995 which regulated state universities and colleges was amended in 2001 and 2003, and finally a new Act has been adopted in April 2005.

The Knowledge Promotion Reform focusing on primary and secondary education, as well as teacher training is based on the White Paper Culture for Learning (April 2004). The new National Quality Assessment System (NQAS), as part of the Reform, is expected to promote quality development throughout primary and secondary education and training, on the basis of a broad concept of quality. Within the Reform, from autumn 2005 stricter admission requirements to general teacher education have been introduced. Charting of teachers’ formal competence has shown that very many teachers lack specialization in main subjects. It is also necessary to arrange enough further education courses to ensure that there will be specialized personnel in schools to strengthen education in basic skills. The Ministry, in cooperation with a number of other bodies, has defined a strategic plan for the
competence development for school management, teachers, trainers, advisors and other personnel in the period 2005-2008. The priority areas are: (i) increased competence in the management of the individual school and apprenticeship workplace; (ii) reform-related competence development among the teaching staff, and development of a learning culture in the individual school and apprenticeship workplace; (iii) and further education of the teaching staff in schools.

The Reform is to be implemented in all schools starting from 2006/07. The main aspects are: (i) basic skills (reading, oral and written expression, doing arithmetic and using ICT) will be given priority and greater attention, and shall be integrated in curricula for all subjects in all grades; (ii) the number of lessons in primary school, especially Grades I-IV, will be increased; (iii) subject curricula will be simplified to express clear objectives specifying the level of competence expected from pupils at each level; (iv) up to 25 % of the number of lessons in each subject at all levels can be used more freely according to local conditions and individual needs to allow for increased flexibility in the organization and customization of the education. In order to create better continuity and teacher cooperation in primary education, the division in two stages (lower and upper primary) has been removed. (Sources: Ministry of Education, 2004; Eurydice, 2006).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

Educational legislation has been revised in recent years as a consequence of the different reforms.

Nine years of compulsory education for all was established by the Education Act of 1969 (seven years of schooling had been compulsory since 1889). As a consequence of lowering the school starting age to 6 years, the period of compulsory education is extended to ten years instead of nine. In 1998, the Government submitted a White Paper to the Parliament, proposing a common Education Act for primary, lower and upper secondary education. The Education Act No. 61 of 17 July 1998 upholds the right and obligation to ten years of primary and lower secondary education, and the statutory right to three years of upper secondary education. The new Act has replaced previous legislation (e.g. the Act on Upper Secondary Education of 1974 and the Act on Vocational Training of 1980).

According to the Education Act of 1998, disabled pupils and pupils with special needs are entitled to instruction offered in the compulsory school, and they are integrated into the ordinary ten-year compulsory school. The municipalities are responsible for the education and training (both at the primary, lower and upper secondary levels) of children, young people and adults with special needs. Disadvantaged pupils may get up to five years of upper secondary education. An amendment introduced in August 2000 gave adults statutory right to education at the compulsory school level and to upper secondary education. From 2003 adults were given the right to have their practice and experience (their non-formal competence) assessed, documented and included as an integrated part of the formal upper secondary education.
Pre-primary education is regulated by the new Kindergarten Act No. 64 of 17 June 2005, effective 1 January 2006, which has replaced legislation enacted in 1975, 1983 and 1995. The Act lays down rules and requirements for all pre-primary establishments, including qualification requirements for staff in pre-schools.

Adult education is regulated by the Adult Education Act of 28 May 1976, amended in 1991. The Act states that the aim of adult education is: “to contribute to giving adults equal access to knowledge, insight and skills which will promote individual growth and encourage personal development, as well as strengthen the basis for independent achievement and co-operation with other people in work and community life.” As mentioned, those parts of the Act which applied to primary and secondary education for adults were included in the Education Act. Folk High Schools are regulated by Act No. 64 of 8 June 1984. The Act states that Folk High Schools, in accordance with their traditions, shall promote general education at different ages and educational levels.

The operation of private schools is now regulated by the new Independent School Act of 4 July 2003, which replaced the Act on Private School of 1985. Recognition under the Independent School Act leads to public funding. Private schools can also be approved under the Education Act, but no public funding is then available.

In 1995, a government-appointed committee presented a report assessing to what extent existing education acts were instrumental in achieving national goals of education. In particular, the use of statutory standard requirements and privilege provisions was assessed. On the basis of the recommendations of the report, the Government has put forward proposals for a new legislation relating mainly to primary and secondary education, including vocational training, with the aim of harmonizing and coordinating the provisions of the separate acts.

Act No. 22 of 1995 regulated state universities and colleges and ensured all public institutions of higher education the same degree of autonomy. The higher education system is now regulated by Act No. 15 on Universities and University Colleges of 1 April 2005. Act on Vocational Colleges No. 56 of 29 April 2003 established a new sector within the education system, and regulated vocational college education conceived as a shorter and more professionally-oriented alternative to university and university colleges’ studies.

The University/College Board is the body responsible for the management of each institution, e.g., concerning the overall organization and the national higher education and research network (Network Norway). The responsibility of the Board includes the strategy for, and the quality of, academic activity. The Board should ensure that the legal framework, regulations and provisions laid down by the national authorities are adhered to, e.g., in the appointment of staff, and that the internal organization of activities is cost-effective. The Board is also responsible for the management of funds and the yearly financial reports to the Ministry, as well as for drafting budget proposals for the following year.


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concerning teacher education are now in part under the Education Act of 1998 (teacher qualifications requirements), and in part under Universities Act of 2005.

Education is compulsory from 6 to 16 years of age.

Administration and management of the education system

The government exercises its authority in matters of education through the Ministry of Education and Research (formerly the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs). The Ministry has responsibility over the whole education system at all levels, including adult education, and administers higher education and research. It is also responsible for the policy issues. The legislative power lies with the National Assembly, the Storting. Consequently, the Storting sets the principal objectives of education.

Until 2005, childcare institutions were under the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. The provision of childcare services is the responsibility of the municipalities; most of the services are provided by private organizations under municipal supervision. The Government covers part of the annual costs of all approved private and public institutions. The remaining costs are shared between the municipality and the parents. The municipality decides whether it wishes to subsidize private institutions. Childcare institutions are co-educational. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has been transformed into the Ministry of Children and Equality on 1 January 2006 and since then the responsibility for nurseries and pre-schools has been transferred to the Ministry of Education and Research under its Department of Early Childhood Education and Care.

The Norwegian Board of Education, established with effect from September 2000, was a national centre for the education sector, replacing the former National Centre for Educational Resources and the National Examination Board. The Board had also other functions, i.e. operative responsibility for curriculum development, educational research and development work, certain topics related to information and communication technology (ICT) in education, examinations in lower and upper secondary schools, and certain tasks related to information. In June 2005 it has been replaced by the Directorate for Education and Training.

The objective of the Directorate for Education and Training, the executive agency of the Ministry of Education and Research established on 15 June 2004, is to ensure that all pupils and apprentices receive the high quality education they are entitled to. The Directorate is responsible for: the development of primary and secondary education; supervising education and the governance of the education sector, as well as the implementation of educational legislation and regulations; managing the Norwegian Support System for Special Education (Statped), state-owned schools and the educational direction of the National Education Centres; compiling national statistics concerning primary and secondary education and on the basis of these statistics initiating, developing and monitoring research and development. The Directorate is also responsible for the new National Quality Assessment System (NQAS) for primary and secondary education. The system is based on a broad concept of quality, where information about four areas (learning compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
results, learning environment, resources, and pupils’ progress) provides the basis for follow-up and improvement. The Directorate has also operational responsibility for curriculum development, educational research and development work, national examinations and assessment, topics related to ICT in education and a number of tasks related to information.

The country is divided into nineteen counties, or regional administrative units, and 435 municipalities. The counties and municipalities have different responsibilities as regards education.

The municipalities are responsible for administering pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools, and adult education within their jurisdiction. The local authority dealing with education is the municipal council. The municipality is responsible for the building and maintenance of school buildings, and for appointing the teachers. The counties are responsible for upper secondary education for adolescents and adults. The county is responsible for the running of the schools, the intake of students and the appointment of teachers.

The State, through the Ministry of Education, has the overall responsibility for higher education. Traditionally, the administrative responsibility has to a large extent been delegated to the individual institutions in the university sector, whereas the non-university sector until the end of 1995 was administered more directly by the central authorities. With the introduction of the 1995 Act concerning universities and colleges, the non-university sector (the state colleges and, from 1997, the art colleges) has been accorded the same administrative responsibilities as the universities. The Network Norway Council, established at the beginning of 1998, was an advisory body to the Ministry of Education on issues regarding higher education, in particular quality assessment and recognition. It has been replaced in 2002 by NOKUT.

The universities and the specialized institutions of higher education are represented in the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions, created in 2000 from the former independent councils of the university sector on the one hand, and of the university colleges on the other. Its aim is to coordinate the activities of the member institutions, and to contribute to a national policy on higher education. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) was established in 2002 and commenced its activities on 1 January 2003. The Agency is an independent government body. Through evaluation, accreditation and recognition of quality systems, institutions and course provisions, the purpose of NOKUT is to supervise and help to develop the quality of higher education in the country. The establishment of NOKUT is part of the general reform of higher education known as the Quality Reform, fully implemented from autumn 2003. Through the reform, a three-cycle structure in accordance with the Bologna process is being introduced since 2003/04 and is expected to be fully implemented in 2007/08. (Eurydice, 2007).

A characteristic feature of the Norwegian education system, until the early 1990s, was a large number of advisory bodies concerned with specific types of education. Through a comprehensive revision of the education sector, the majority of these bodies were dissolved as of 1 January 1992, with the exception of the National Council for Vocational Education and Training, the Sami Education Council, and

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the National Parents’ Committee. The Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning (VOX), established with effect from January 2001, replaced three earlier institutions, i.e. the former Norwegian Institute of Adult Education, the Norwegian State Institution for Distance Education, and the State Adult Education Centre. The institute’s role is to initiate, coordinate and document research and development projects, to facilitate contact and collaboration among national actors, to establish networks for adult education, and to disseminate results.

As a result of the reorganization, a National Education Office was established in each county, headed by a Director of Education. The director is the State representative at county level, responsible for carrying out government tasks within the different fields of education, with the exception of higher education.

Decentralization of decision-making has been a general trend in education since the late 1980s. The professional autonomy of the individual schools and institutions of higher education has gradually increased. A major step in the direction of decentralization for the primary and secondary levels was made by the introduction of a new sector grant system in 1986, in which local and regional authorities receive a lump sum covering all central government subsidies for school education and culture, as well as the health service. As a consequence, the municipalities and counties now enjoy greater autonomy as regards educational provision.
Structure and organization of the education system

Norway: structure of the education system

Pre-school education

Although pre-primary education is not compulsory, about 90% of the 4- and 5-year-olds attend pre-primary institutions (data refer to 2005). From the beginning of 2006, pre-primary institutions are under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Pre-primary education caters to children below 6 years of age.


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Primary education

Children enrol in compulsory education at age 6. Primary education, or the first stage of compulsory education, covered Grades I-VI (age group 7-13) up to 1996. After the Reform '97, it has been divided into two cycles, i.e. lower primary (Grades I-IV, age group 6-9 years) and upper primary (Grades V-VII, age group 10-12). On the basis of the Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2004, the primary stage now comprises Grades I-VII (age group 6-12 years) with no division into cycles.

Secondary education

The second stage of compulsory schooling is lower secondary, comprising Grades VIII-X (age group 13-16). Students normally start upper secondary education at the age of 16. All upper secondary courses lead to higher education or a recognized vocational qualification after three years or, in the case of vocational courses, normally four years of study. Students have the statutory right to three years of upper secondary education. Vocational technical colleges under the Act of 2003 are considered as part of upper secondary education and offer short- (a minimum of six months) and two-year courses building upon upper secondary education or equivalent competence.

All the higher education institutions under the Act of 2005 are degree-awarding institutions. The universities offer degree programmes at three levels in the humanities, social and natural sciences. The lower university degree (cand. mag.), is normally obtained after three and a half to four years of full-time study. In general, higher university degrees such as cand. philol. (humanities), cand. scient. (natural sciences), and cand. polit. (social sciences), require two additional years of study. Doctoral degree programmes, normally lasting three years after completion of the higher degree, lead to the degrees dr. artium (humanities), dr. scient. (natural sciences), and dr. polit. (social sciences). There is also a traditional general doctoral degree (dr. philos.). Some university faculties and the university colleges offer professional degree programmes requiring four and a half to six years of study, e.g. in agricultural sciences, business administration, economics, psychology, medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, theology, as well as three-year doctoral degree programmes in these subjects. The state university colleges (formerly regional colleges) offer traditional vocational studies, other vocationally oriented study programmes, and traditional university studies. They can all be combined in the cand. mag. degree. Some also offer higher degree programmes in certain subjects, often in co-operation with universities. Since the 2002 Quality Reform of Higher Education, higher education institutions started offering three-year bachelor’s degree, two-year master’s degree and three-year doctoral degree programmes in accordance with the Bologna structure.

The school year for the primary and lower secondary schools consists of thirty-eight working weeks (190 days) for pupils and thirty-nine weeks for teachers. The school week consists of five days. The number of lessons averages twenty per week in the first year of compulsory schooling, and thirty weekly lessons during the final year, with some local variations. Teaching time is calculated in terms of periods lasting forty-five minutes. The school day may be split into longer spells of work separated by breaks. Within this framework, the school administration can decide the
length of the school day. In 2000/01, the minimum amount of hours of instruction per year was 570 hours at age 7; 770 hours at age 10; and 855 hours at the lower secondary level. (Eurydice, 2001).

The academic year is divided into two semesters and starts in mid- to late August and ends by the end of June (mid-summer) throughout the whole education system. In primary and secondary education, the normal school holidays are one week in October (autumn vacation), two weeks at Christmas, one week in February/March (winter vacation), and one and a half weeks at Easter.

**The financing of education**

For the primary and secondary education levels, a major step in the direction of the decentralization of decision-making was taken with the introduction of a new system in 1986. The former earmarking of grants to primary and secondary education from central authorities to municipality/county authorities was abolished. It was replaced by a system whereby municipality/county authorities receive a lump sum, covering all central government support for school education and culture as well as the health service. Municipalities and counties thus have considerable autonomy in their expenditure decisions.

Pre-primary schools receive earmarked grants from the Ministry of Education and Research (until 2005 from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs) through the municipalities. The costs are shared between the State, the municipalities and the parents. Primary and lower secondary education, administered by the municipalities, is financed through grants from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and municipal tax revenue. Differences in the municipalities’ economy are mainly due to size and to differences in municipal tax-revenue. Upper secondary schools are mainly financed by the county through income taxes. The costs in this sector vary considerably from one region to another.

Extra-state subsidies and provisions are also given to avoid regional disparities, e.g. to schools or vocational courses where recruitment is so low that courses cannot be organized in each county, and to schools for pupils with special needs. There are also special measures for the three northernmost counties.

Training establishments receive state grants through the county authorities, in order to cover the cost of the training component in the period of apprenticeship. They receive no financial assistance towards the component of productive work in the apprentice’s programme.

Regarding adult education, grants are given to county authorities, municipalities, organizations and institutions, companies and national associations of companies, in accordance with the requirements of the Adult Education Act. Study associations may also receive contributions from public funds, according to rules set out in the same Act. These contributions are given on the basis of implemented hours of adult education activity, and according to special applications for pedagogical development work, etc. The main source of financing of the activities carried out by the study associations is, however, the participant fees.
Higher education institutions are funded directly by the Ministry of Education and Research, generally in the form of a block grant. The block grant has three elements: the “core funding” (about 60% of the grant) takes into account the number of students and the need for institutions, particularly the universities, to invest in infrastructure for research; there is also an output-based element, both for teaching (about 25%) and research (about 15%). In addition to the funds from the Ministry, the Research Council of Norway allocates research funding on a competitive basis. The institutions have a large degree of freedom concerning the detailed internal allocations and expenditures, as long as the set goals (the expected levels of activity) are achieved. They are free to transfer allocated state funds between budget items, within the limits laid down in the relevant general regulations for all state institutions. The total amount of funding to be granted directly by the State is determined by the Storting as part of the annual budget. (National report of Norway in the framework of the Bologna process, 2007).

According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure on education represented 7.58% of GDP in 2004.

The educational process

The Ministry of Education and Research is in formal terms responsible for curriculum planning and design as well as for the practical implementation of curricula at the primary and secondary level. However, in September 2000 the Ministry transferred this task to the National Board of Education, and then to the new Directorate for Education and Training, which replaced the Board in June 2004.

According to the Core Curriculum, education should promote an integrated development of the skills and qualities that allow one to behave morally, to create and to act, and to work together and in harmony with nature. Education shall contribute to giving the individual the strength to take responsibility for his or her life, to make a commitment to society, and to care for the environment, thus thinking and acting as an integrated human being. The ultimate aim of education is thus to inspire individuals to realize their potential in ways that serve the common good in a society in development.

The large-scale reforms in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education in the 1990s made it natural to specify a common Core Curriculum for all stages of primary and secondary education, including adult education. The Core Curriculum aimed at coordinating the principal objectives of education as stated in the relevant Acts of Parliament, and underlining how the different stages of education are linked together by common goals. These common goals were thus identified, and divided into six groups: moral outlook, creative abilities, work, general education, co-operation, and natural environment. Based on these common goals, a common Core Curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education was developed and adopted in 1993. The Core Curriculum formulates the objectives of education by drawing a picture of the human personality in its various characteristics (the spiritual, creative, working, liberally-educated, social, environmentally aware, and integrated human being), all of which should be stimulated and encouraged by the educational process.
The teaching in the compulsory school is based on a more detailed curriculum drawn up by the Ministry of Education and adopted by Parliament in 1996. This new curriculum for the ten-year compulsory school implies a significant renewal of the content of primary and lower secondary education. It is based on and consolidates the principle of an all-inclusive school, “one school for all”. The new curriculum places greater emphasis on common subject matter, while giving room for local and individual adjustments. Suitably adapted education is an over-riding principle in the compulsory school. The 1997 national curriculum as a regulation is binding for the work of the school. Together with the 1997 national curriculum a specific Sami curriculum was developed and adopted, and the two curricula are equal as to status. The Sami curriculum has special relevance to the administrative areas of the country where Sami language and culture are dominant. These areas are characterized by their multicultural and multilingual situation, and the Sami curriculum aims at creating understanding among groups of people in this area.

The Core Curriculum has been retained as the general part of the 2005 National Curricula within the framework of the Knowledge Promotion Reform.

**Pre-primary education**

After the *Reform ‘97*, from 1997 children start primary education at age 6 instead of 7. Although attendance is not compulsory, in 2005 about 76% of children in the age group 1-5 years attended pre-school institutions. The coverage is low for the youngest children (some 40%), but it reaches approximately 90% for the 4-5-year-olds. As a rule, there is one pre-school teacher for 14 to 18 children over the age of 3, and one teacher per seven to nine children under that age. The number of staff must be sufficient to carry out satisfactory educational activities.

In January 2006, responsibility over pre-primary institutions has been transferred to the Ministry of Education and Research (formerly it was under the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs). In 2005 a new Kindergarten Act has been passed, replacing legislation enacted in 1975, 1983 and 1995. The Act lays regulates the authorization, functioning and supervision of pre-primary institutions, and the qualification requirements for pre-school staff. Municipalities are responsible for the development and operation of both private and municipal kindergartens and for ensuring that institutions are run according to the relevant legislation.

The two basic functions of kindergartens are contributing to the education of children of pre-school age and providing care during parents’ working hours. Children may attend full-time or part-time (about three-fourths attend full-time). Part-time attendance ranges from six to 32 hours per week; full-time attendance is between 33 and 47 weekly hours.

The previous framework plan for kindergartens recommended the following five basic learning areas: society, religion and ethics; aesthetic subjects; language, text and communication; nature, environment and technology; and physical activities and health. The plan also recommended play and social activities as important methods for learning and development. A new framework plan (national curriculum) for the content and tasks in kindergartens has been approved in March 2006. It includes seven learning areas: communication, language and text; body, movement and health;
art, culture and creativity; nature, environment and techniques; ethics, religion and philosophy; local community and society; numbers, spaces and shapes. There is no formal evaluation at the pre-school level. Teachers directly give informal information to parents once or twice a year.

According to Statistics Norway, at the end of 2005 there were 5,069 ordinary and 1,158 family kindergartens, of which about 46% in the public sector. The total enrolment was 223,393 children, of whom about 55% in public kindergartens. The total number of staff was 64,531 (of whom 57% in the public sector). Qualified pre-primary teachers represented 33.7% of personnel. *(Source: Eurydice, 2006).*

**Primary and lower secondary education**

According to the Education Act, the purpose of primary and lower secondary education (i.e. compulsory school) is: “in agreement and cooperation with the home, to help to give pupils a Christian and moral upbringing, to develop their mental and physical abilities, and to give them good general knowledge so that they may become useful and independent human beings at home and in society. The school shall promote intellectual freedom and tolerance, and strive to create good forms of cooperation between teachers and pupils and between school and home.” The compulsory school is comprehensive and co-educational. The aim is to offer all children an education adapted to their individual abilities. This principle applies just as much to the education of children with learning difficulties or disabilities as to children with special abilities, be these theoretical, practical, physical or aesthetic.

Each class is kept together as one unit from Grade I to VII (Grade VI prior to 1997) and in many cases even to Grade X. The country has a scattered population, and a typical feature is the relatively large number of quite small school units in remote and sparsely populated areas. There are about 1,000 schools that do not have separate classes for all age groups, because the number of pupils is too small. About 25% of these schools are not graded, i.e. all the pupils are brought together in one and the same classroom but taught individually. At the lower secondary stage, most of the schools are larger, with two or three parallel classes at each level.

The National Curriculum of 1997 consisted of: the core curriculum for primary and secondary education (and adult education as well); principles and guidelines for the education in the compulsory school; and subject curricula. The curriculum guidelines indicate how much time should be devoted to the different subjects in terms of weekly lessons per subject for each stage of compulsory education. The distribution by subject of total teaching periods after the introduction of Reform ’97 is shown in the table below:
Within the framework of the Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2004, new subject curricula are being developed. The new National Curriculum which is being implemented in Grades I-IX and XI from August 2006 consists of: the core curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education (1997); the quality framework for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools as well as apprenticeship workplaces; and subject curricula.

In Grades I-IV of the primary education stage teaching is to be organized around themes containing elements from different subjects. In Grades V-VII of the primary stage the different subjects become more distinct; subject matter is to be organized into themes and project work, showing how the subjects are interconnected. The lower secondary stage (Grades VIII-X) has to ensure a smooth transition to upper secondary education; pupils are expected to acquire practice in analytical and critical methods through more detailed learning and greater coherence of the subject matter, practical and cross-subject work. The former optional subjects have been replaced by an additional compulsory subject (a second foreign language, additional language study, or practical project work), combined with time allocated for the choice of the school and the pupil. The choices made by the school or the pupils shall have a local profile, and the curriculum shall be designed by the school in accordance with the objectives of the National Curriculum. The educational process can take place in the form of projects carried out in the school and in the local community.
The table below shows the distribution by subjects of the total minimum number of hours in the two stages of compulsory education:

**Compulsory school distribution by subject of the total minimum number of hours in each stage of the ten-year programme (2005/06)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Total number of hours in each stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary (Grades I–VII)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Christianity, religion and ethics</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian language</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies and history</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and crafts</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and the environment</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second foreign language</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home economics</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class and pupils’ council activities</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme subjects</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total number of hours (minimum)              | 4,930                        | 2,566                         |

Source: "Eurydice, 2006. Teaching periods usually last 45 minutes, but they can also be merged for extended lesson periods. The municipalities are free to offer pupils more teaching periods than the established minimum.

Children from minority groups must be given the same opportunities as Norwegian pupils. As from 1997, Finnish has been introduced as an alternative second foreign language, and sign language is offered as a first language for deaf pupils. The Sami Curriculum is coordinated with the national curriculum and the two curricula have an equal status. The Sami curriculum has special relevance to the administrative areas of the country where Sami language and culture are dominant. Given the multicultural and multilingual setting, the Sami Curriculum aims at creating understanding among groups of people in these areas. It was planned to introduce a compulsory second foreign language (French or German, less frequently Spanish or Russian) at the lower secondary level, but this measure has not yet been implemented and allocated time can be used for additional English, Norwegian or Sami lessons.

The main purpose of pupils’ assessment is to promote learning and development. Pupils should play an active part in assessment and get practice in taking responsibility for and evaluating their own work. Individual assessment without marks is part of the day-to-day learning process, and is included in the regular planned conferences between teachers, pupils, and parents or guardians. In the primary education stage the assessment does not involve the awarding of marks. In the lower secondary stage, a system of marks is introduced as part of pupils’ assessment.

At the end of Grade X, students sit national examinations. Pupils are required to sit a centrally set written examination in one of three subjects: Norwegian,
mathematics or English. Most pupils also have to sit an oral examination, which is organized locally and may be in any of the school subjects, except art and crafts, home economics and physical education.

Upon leaving lower secondary school, all students receive a certificate indicating the subjects taken, the latest marks for the year’s work and the examination results. The marks are used as one of the more important criteria for further education in upper secondary school, i.e. when it comes to selecting an area of study and being admitted into a chosen school. All students leaving lower secondary school are entitled to three years of further education at upper secondary level. (Source: Eurydice, 2006).

According to Statistics Norway, in October 2005 there were 3,160 primary and lower secondary schools (of which 1,944 were primary schools) with a total of 619,640 pupils enrolled. The number of teachers was 65,376 (of whom 43,428 teachers on a full-time basis).

Upper secondary education

Upper secondary education should prepare students for an occupation and for participation in society, provide the basis for further education, and encourage personal development. It should contribute to increasing students’ knowledge and understanding of basic Christian and humanistic values, Norwegian traditions as a part of their cultural heritage, democratic ideas, and scientific method. One of the main goals of upper secondary education is to make it possible for all students to attain a recognized qualification, vocational or academic. The large majority of the upper secondary schools are public, owned by the counties (regional authorities), and most schools offer both general academic and vocational education.

All courses have three components: common core subjects; subjects related to the area of study; and optional subjects. Students choose one of the fifteen foundation courses (of which three are academic) during the first year. Specialized courses are offered in the second and third years (advanced courses I and II) and in apprenticeships. Apprenticeship schemes are parts of the upper secondary school system.

There are at present (2006) fifteen foundation courses: general and business studies; music, dance and drama; sports and physical education; health and social studies; arts, crafts and design; agriculture, fishing and forestry; hotel and food-processing trades; building and construction trades; technical building trades; electrical trades; engineering and mechanical trades; chemical and processing trades; wood-working trades; sales and service trades; media and communication. The three foundation courses which in combination with two years of advanced courses, qualify for university studies are: general and business studies; music, dance and drama; sports and physical education. Students in the vocational subjects’ area may also achieve university entrance qualifications by completing an advanced level II, general subjects.
Students in upper secondary schools have from 30 to 35 teaching hours per week. There is no national standard daily or weekly timetable. An example of weekly lesson timetable for general and business studies in 2001 is presented below:

**Upper secondary education, general and business studies: example of a weekly lesson timetable (2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of weekly hours in each form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion/ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics and ICTs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second foreign language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized/elective subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total weekly hours** 30 30 30


In the standard model for vocational education and training, the first two years are spent at school. The concluding specialized training (one or two years) is provided by vocational training in a workplace, but is often combined with some teaching at school. Divergence from the standard model occurs in certain vocational subjects.

Marks are given in all subjects on the basis of teachers’ assessments. These marks, which reflect the individual level of all-round competence in each subject, appear on the student’s certificate alongside end-of-year examination marks, and have the same status as examination marks. Students may be drawn by lot to sit final examinations in common general subjects, and all sit an examination in a subject in which they have chosen to specialize. An upper secondary school certificate is awarded on the successful completion of a three year course of studies, granting access to higher education. Craft/journeyman’s certificates are awarded upon successful completion of vocational training.

Vocational colleges offering two-year courses building upon upper secondary education or equivalent competence are administered as a part of upper secondary education, although they can be considered as postsecondary, tertiary-level institutions. Vocational colleges are regulated by the related Act of 2003, and they are not included under the Universities and Universities Colleges Act. In 2005/06 the total enrolment was 3,300 students.

Within the framework of the implementation of Knowledge Promotion Reform, several changes are envisaged, including: the merging of the present twelve
vocational programmes into nine programmes; the tightening of general matriculation requirements; the progression from advanced course 1 to advanced course 2 and 3, instead of from foundation course to advanced course I and II; the introduction of compulsory mathematics in the second year of the three academic programmes; and the choice for students between a theoretical and a practical approach to the subject.

According to Statistics Norway, in 2005/06 there were 475 upper secondary schools (including 88 private or independent schools); a total of 381 schools were run by the counties. The total enrolment was 182,926 students, and the total number of teachers was 26,598.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The aim of the National Quality Assessment System (NQAS), established in 2003 within the framework of the Knowledge Promotion Reform, is to promote quality development throughout primary and secondary education and training. The system is based on a broad concept of quality, where information about four areas (learning results, learning environment, use of material and human resources, and rate of progress at the upper secondary level) from all schools provides the basis for follow-up and improvement.

Results from national tests, final examinations at the end of Grade X and examinations at the end of upper secondary education are part of the NQAS. National tests assessing pupils’ basic skills in reading, writing, English, and mathematics (Grade IV and VII) were introduced in 2003/04. Results from national tests are expected to give the teachers a better starting point for adapting teaching methods and contents to individual pupils. The same applies to the results from mapping tests of reading skills of primary school pupils (Grade II and VII). New tests are being developed should be administered in 2007/08 after a two-year pause.

Higher education

Higher education is defined as education and training provided at universities, specialized university institutions, university colleges, university colleges of arts, other public university colleges and private higher education institutions. As mentioned, all the institutions under the Universities and University Colleges Act of 2005 are degree-awarding institutions. The universities offer degree programmes at three levels in the humanities, social and natural sciences. The lower university degree (cand. mag.), is normally obtained after three and a half to four years of full-time study. Higher university degrees, such as cand. philol. (humanities), cand. scient. (natural sciences), and cand. polit. (social sciences), in general require two additional years of study. Doctoral degree programmes, normally lasting three years after completion of the higher degree, lead to the degrees dr. artium (humanities), dr. scient. (natural sciences), and dr. polit. (social sciences). There is also a traditional general doctoral degree (dr. philos.).

Some university faculties and the university colleges offer professional degree programmes requiring four and a half to six years of study, e.g. in agricultural sciences, business administration, economics, psychology, medicine, dentistry, law,
engineering, theology, as well as three-year doctoral degree programmes in these subjects. The state university colleges (formerly regional colleges) offer traditional vocational studies, other vocationally oriented study programmes, and traditional university studies. They can all be combined in the cand. mag. degree. Some also offer higher degree programmes in certain subjects, often in co-operation with universities. Since the 2002 Quality Reform of Higher Education, higher education institutions started offering three-year bachelor’s degree, two-year master’s degree and three-year doctoral degree programmes in accordance with the Bologna structure.

The responsibility for quality improvement has explicitly been given to the higher education institutions themselves. However, the requirement that all higher education institutions should have their own system of quality assurance has also been introduced. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is an independent government body established in 2002. Through evaluation, accreditation and recognition of quality systems, institutions and course provisions, the purpose of NOKUT is to supervise and help to develop the quality of higher education in the country. The establishment of NOKUT is part of the general reform of higher education known as the Quality Reform, fully implemented from autumn 2003. All accredited higher education institutions are subject to accreditation control through a system of institutional audits, running in cycles of five years. The emphasis is on the institutions’ own quality assurance systems and the information about actual educational quality that these provide. A second stage in the control mechanism is the possibility of a more detailed scrutiny of individual programmes by the NOKUT where appropriate.

Most higher education institutions in Norway are public. In 2004/05 there were: six universities; five specialized university institutions; twenty-five university colleges, and two university colleges (national academies) of the arts. In addition, there were twenty-nine private higher education institutions, several of a rather small size. (National report of Norway within the framework of the Bologna process, 2004-2005).

According to Statistics Norway, in 2004/05 the total enrolment at the higher education level was 211,191 students, of whom 88,823 students in universities and 122,368 in university colleges.

**Special education**

A fundamental objective of the education policy, and a challenge to the whole education system, is to create a better school for all. In this perspective, it is important to make sure that children, adolescents and adults with special needs receive an appropriate and meaningful education, including individually adapted teaching, preferably in their home community. The main principle is that pupils with special needs should, whenever possible, be integrated in ordinary schools.

For the majority of the pupils concerned, special education is provided at the school to which the pupil belongs, most often within his/her own class. Pupils may also be taught in small groups together with other pupils with special educational needs, or individually.
Revised regulations have been introduced regarding compulsory education for the deaf and hard of hearing, with the aim of making deaf children functionally bilingual. These regulations state that deaf children using sign language as their first language have a right to be taught sign language, as well as to be taught in sign language during their compulsory education. Deaf children under school age needing special educational assistance shall be offered teaching in sign language.

It is a national responsibility to assist the municipalities and counties in their efforts for competence-building, and to provide advice and guidance regarding pupils with functional disorders. For this reason, a support network has been developed for all types of learning difficulties through the establishment of National Resource Centres. All local health centres cooperate with the Educational-Psychological Counselling Service (EPCS). The Education Act ensures the right to special education below the compulsory school age. The EPCS may be contacted by health service, preschool institutions and schools. Parents can also ask for help directly. Persons at all ages have a legal right to special education, but special education is not compulsory. Parents must therefore give their written approval before anything can be done by the EPCS concerning the child’s needs.

The Norwegian policy of equal right to education applies to all levels. In upper secondary education, disabled students with recognized handicaps have the possibility to spend more time in gaining a qualification (up to five years instead of three). Furthermore, syllabi are modularized to make it easier to gain partial competence. At the higher education level, each institution is responsible for the provision of advice and assistance to its disabled students.

The National Curriculum for primary and lower secondary school is based on the principles of integration, participation and decentralization. The curriculum caters to pupils with special educational needs by demanding local and individual adaptations. Approximately 6% of the pupils (or 35,000 pupils in 2004/05) in compulsory education are recognized as having special educational needs and receive adapted teaching. In the primary and lower secondary school, special education is mostly provided in the ordinary school. Only approximately 0.4% of the pupils (or 2,300 pupils in 2004/05) attend separate special schools.

In the debate on special education during recent years, there has been a call for a stronger emphasis on the content and organization of special education. The greatest challenge is now to realize the principle of adapted teaching in practice. The current international debate is also concerned with the translation of intentions and objectives into good educational practice in the classrooms and workshops of every school.

**Private education**

Compared with other countries, Norway has a few private schools and no specific private school tradition. In fact, a characteristic feature of the Norwegian system has always been the dominating position of the public system. An Act of 1985 on State grants to private schools (in force since 1986), acknowledged that private schools had a right to exist alongside public education (under the authority of the State, county or municipality). It is made clear, however, that private schools are primarily considered
as supplementary and not supposed to compete with public instruction. According to the Act, schools can be recognized and given State grants on condition that they are: (i) established on religious or ethical grounds; (ii) based on alternative pedagogical ideas; (iii) established for Norwegian children abroad; (iv) considered to fulfil a quantitative need; and (v) providing vocationally orientated education which is not offered in the public system.

Since the introduction of the Act, there has been an increase in the number of private schools receiving State grants, from 167 schools in 1987 to 209 in 1997. Private schools recognized by the State are given financial support of 85% of the running costs of equivalent public schools. The number of pupils in private schools (covering both primary, lower and upper secondary education) increased from 13,430 in 1987 to 19,300 in 1997, i.e. an increase of 43.7% over ten years. However, the number of pupils in private schools has been fairly stable over recent years, when not taking into account the increase as a result of lower starting age in compulsory education. In 1999, only about 1.6% of the pupils at the compulsory school level attended private schools.

The operation of private schools is now regulated by the new Independent School Act of 4 July 2003. Most of the criteria above are not included in the new Act, although it is required that the content must be equivalent to, and correspond to, the curricula in the public system. The Act limits the opportunity to run schools for purely commercial ends. Recognition under the Independent School Act leads to public funding. Private schools can also be approved under the Education Act, but no public funding is then available. In 2003/04 there were 121 private schools at the compulsory level with 12,350 pupils enrolled, or roughly 2% of all the pupils. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

**Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure**

Primary and secondary schools have a collection of teaching materials, including maps, overheads, computer hardware and software, and usually also a school library. Resources for this purpose are granted by local and regional education authorities. However, some expenses are covered by the state. Schools are also to an increasing degree purchasing computers which are made available to the pupils. All schools are well equipped in terms of ICT (computers and access to Internet).

In compulsory education, pupils receive notebooks and pencils free of charge, and textbooks are lent out by schools (also free of charge). Students in upper secondary education have to buy their own materials and textbooks. As regards audio-visual equipment, most Norwegian schools are considered to have a sufficient supply of television and video sets, film and slide projectors, radio/tape recorders and overhead projectors.

A special system provides support for the production of textbooks in areas with small numbers of pupils, e.g., specialized vocational subjects and parallel language editions in New Norwegian (Norway’s second official language). The support schemes only apply to upper secondary education.

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
Textbooks for primary and secondary education must be officially approved. Textbooks are evaluated to ensure that they comply with approved standards of educational quality, language and equality. In 1994 and 1995, the main focus of this activity was the large number of new books in relation to Reform ’94, and more than 400 books for upper secondary education were reviewed and approved.

**Adult and non-formal education**

The Adult Education Act is characterized by the basic principles of redistribution and equal opportunity. This implies, *inter alia*, training for special target groups, such as people with insufficient basic education, heavy family obligations, and physical or mental disabilities. Training of special target groups is arranged by municipalities, counties, study associations and other voluntary organizations.

The Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning (VOX), established in January 2001, replaced three earlier institutions, i.e. the Norwegian Institute of Adult Education, the Norwegian State Institution for Distance Education, and the State Adult Education Centre. The institute’s role is to initiate, coordinate and document research and development projects, to facilitate contact and collaboration among national actors, to establish networks for adult education, and to disseminate results. The institute has worked with documentation of non-formal learning and the Competence Development Programme (implemented during 1999-2006). Within the framework of the Competence Reform, Skills Centres have been established in municipalities and/or counties to assess the formal, non-formal and informal learning of candidates as equivalent to vocational secondary education. Dialogue-based method is combined with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and possibly vocational testing. After assessment, a plan of action as to further training or work is prepared by the supervisor together with the candidate. VOX has been active in developing the methods used.

The OECD Adult Literacy and Life-skill Survey (ALL) 2004 showed that more than 400,000 adults (age group 16-65) have so poor basic skills in reading and numeracy that they score lower than the level considered necessary to function in modern working life. Poor basic skills are especially found among the unemployed, social security recipients, older workers and immigrants, but many other employees are also at risk.

From 2002, adults have a legal right to primary and lower secondary education, and at this level adult education is organized by the municipalities with financial support as a part of national funding. Adults have also the statutory right to upper secondary education. In 2004, a total of 4,471 adults attended primary-lower secondary courses (10,973 adults in the case of upper secondary). Education for adults in Norwegian as a second language was extended in 1998, so that immigrants are given lessons sufficient to reach a minimum level of competence. Courses receive national funding and are under the responsibility of the municipalities. A maximum of 3,000 hours are offered to persons with little or no schooling from their home country, and 850 hours in the case of persons with better educational background. The courses are offered to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (except those who have Swedish, Danish or Sami as their first language).

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
Universities and university colleges provide continuing education, both short updating non-credit courses and longer credit-giving modular programmes. Generally a combination of meetings and ICT is used for flexible learning. Most participants are in employment. In 2004, a total of 50,481 learners attended non-credit courses. Labour market training courses for the unemployed provide occupational qualifications to meet the demands of the labour market. They are part of the Government’s labour market strategy, are fully financed by the State, and are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. The courses take place in upper secondary schools, in course centres attached to the schools or in business and industry. In 2005, a total of 5,990 learners attended courses.

Three types of institutions providing adult education belong to the private grant-aided sector: folk high schools, study associations, and distance education institutions.

Folk high schools offer courses in arts, crafts, performing arts, music, media, religion, outdoor activities and other areas. They are not bound by any national curricula and aim at developing different aspects of life skills. In 2005/06 there were 77 folk high schools located in the countryside in various regions. A total of 33,639 learners attended short-term and ordinary courses in 2004. Folk high schools are all boarding schools; most of them are private, run by religious organizations or independent foundations. Only ten schools are run by the counties. The Council of Folk High Schools coordinates activities and liaises with the authorities.

Study associations offer courses to support the adult’s personal development and to increase equality of opportunity. Most of the courses are not bound by national curricula or examination systems, and cover areas like foreign languages, arts and crafts, cultural activities, use of computers, topics related to different aspects of the society and organizations. Some associations offer courses qualifying for lower and upper secondary education and higher education. In 2005/06 there were 19 non-governmental study associations with 435 member organizations offering courses in most municipalities. A total of 632,933 learners participated in 46,925 courses in 2004. The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (in Norwegian VOFO), an “umbrella” association, provides overall coordination.

The aim of private distance education institutions is to meet the needs of diverse social groups for open and flexible learning. Most distance education courses with public support are courses leading to work-related qualifications. More than two-thirds of the courses cover subjects related to management and economics, technical work, communication, social care and health care. In 2005/06 twelve private distance education institutions received financial support, and about 21,700 learners completed courses in 2004. The Norwegian Association for Distance and Flexible Learning (in Norwegian NFF) coordinates activities and liaises with the authorities. (Sources: Ministry of Education, 2004; Eurydice, 2006).

 Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
Teaching staff

Pre-service teacher training for pre-primary, primary and secondary education is regulated by the Education Act of 1998 and the Universities and University Colleges Act of 2005 (the Teacher Training Act of 1973 was repealed in 1998).

Higher education institutions (public and private universities and university colleges) offer different types of programmes for pre-primary, general subject, specialized subject, and vocational education teachers. Three-year pre-primary teacher programmes qualify for teaching in kindergartens and the first year of primary school; one additional year of study qualifies for teaching in Grades I-IV. General subject teachers (at primary and lower secondary levels) are normally trained in four-year programmes. Subject teachers are graduated from three- or four-year programmes. Teachers of general/academic subjects in upper secondary schools have completed three to five years of university or university college studies, normally covering two or three different subjects. Vocational teachers are graduated from a three-year programme; vocational subject teachers are trained in three- to four-year programmes. Long-cycle five-year programmes leading to the award of a master’s degree qualify for teaching certain subjects in Grades V-X and at the upper secondary level are also offered. Within the framework of the implementation of the two-cycle structure of the Bologna process, three-year bachelor’s degree and two-year master’s degree are also available.

Graduates from university degree courses not including a pedagogical component, have to enrol in a one-year educational theory and practice programme if they want to qualify for a teaching career.

There is a unified structure for teaching positions in all higher education, with identical requirements to all teaching staff with the same professional title, whether they are at a university or a university college. Professors and associate professors are doctoral degree holders.

The four-year general education teacher programme normally includes: (i) one and a half years (90 credits) of compulsory subject studies, i.e. Norwegian (30 credits), mathematics (30 credits), religion and ethics (20 credits), teaching of mathematics, reading and writing at the basic level (10 credits), all of them including a didactic and methodological component; (ii) six months of compulsory educational theory (30 credits); (iii) a minimum of 18 weeks of supervised practice in schools during the three first years of the programme, and a component of work practice also during the fourth year; (iv) two years of in-depth studies in optional subject(s), chosen from among the compulsory subjects in primary and lower secondary school or from other subjects relevant for teaching in primary or lower secondary school.

The municipalities employ teachers in municipal kindergartens and public schools at primary and lower secondary level. The counties employ teachers at upper secondary institutions. Employers recognize the professional status of teachers, and teachers’ professional bodies negotiate terms of employment and salary levels. In-service training courses are organized at local, regional and national levels. The organizers may be local education authorities, teachers’ associations, associations for

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
special subjects in higher education institutions, regional officer’s educational departments, county education committees, national councils or national education authorities.

The content of in-service training is influenced by current school reforms as well as by priority areas set by the Ministry of Education. In primary, lower and upper secondary schools, in-service training is often connected to innovations introduced in schools. A one-week of compulsory study and planning during the school year is the most regular form of in-service training at the local level for compulsory education teachers. Similar study and planning days are arranged for teachers in upper secondary schools, usually five per school year. Two annual staff seminars are also held, lasting two days.

Teachers’ salaries depend largely on their educational qualifications, the duration of their studies, and seniority. On the basis of the agreement of January 2002, all teachers have an annual workload of 1,687.5 hours. The teaching duty is regulated in a certain number of lessons per year and in an average number of lessons per week. The number of weekly lessons depends on the subjects to be taught and the level of education in which the teacher is employed. For compulsory education teachers, the average number of weekly hours (full-time basis) is 26 hours in primary and 21.2-25 hours in lower secondary. At the upper secondary level the weekly workload is 16.3-23.5 hours. In addition, teachers have a mandatory 150 hours at school, usually five hours per week used for meetings, planning etc., and must also be present for five planning days. On the basis of the Working Environment Act, staff at universities and university colleges normally work 37.5 hours per week.

Teachers are generally recruited from colleges of education and universities graduates. Posts are announced in official journals and bulletins. In 1997, only 3% of the posts were held by teachers without certified training. Only a limited number of teachers leave the profession. The general retirement age is 70 years, with a right to a reduced workload from the age of 64.

Establishing and maintaining high standards of performance is an essential part of a head of school. The reform programme initiated in upper secondary education in 1994 considerably changed the role of principals and other school administrators. School leaders are seen as key figures in the implementation of reforms that affect both the structure and content of education at this level, and a comprehensive programme has been organized to make leaders familiar with their new role. Currently, for headmasters there is a requirement of three years of training experience in addition to normal teacher qualifications.

Educational research and information

A national programme on educational research was completed in 1994, and a new six-year national programme was started in 1996. The reform of upper secondary education (Reform ’94) has been subject to research-based analysis and evaluation, designed to show to what extent its central aims have been attained. Contracts were signed with several research institutions, covering the following main areas: scale and capacity; pupils’ progression and levels of competence; organization and cooperation;
content and structuring of the educational programmes. Gender as well as minority issues have also been explored.

In 1998-2003 a comprehensive evaluation of the reform of the primary and lower secondary school (Reform '97) was organized by the Research Council of Norway for the Ministry of Education. Research-based evaluation addressed legal, economic, administrative, subject content and educational aspects of the reform.

Ongoing research related to higher education mainly focuses on evaluation of the Quality Reform, and is also organized by the Research Council of Norway for the Ministry of Education and Research. A comprehensive research programme 2003-2007 intends to evaluate the implementation of the reform and the effects on students, staff and higher education institutions.

In the field of innovation, research and development, the general policy is that of decentralization, i.e., each school is responsible for its own innovative work, if necessary assisted by the local and regional authorities. At the national level, the Directorate for Education and Training has operational functions in the field of curriculum development, educational research and development work.

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Web resources


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