Key features of the education system

Norway is a large country, with relatively few inhabitants. 100 years ago, Norway was among the poorest countries in Europe. Today, Norway ranks among the richest countries in the world. The Norwegian economic and welfare model has managed to achieve a relatively compressed wage system, low unemployment rates, high labour market participation – particularly for women - and still impressive economic growth. The Norwegian welfare system is well-developed, based on universal entitlements. The municipalities are responsible for basic welfare services, including primary and lower secondary education, and have substantial autonomy in allocation of resources between sectors and in provision of services. The counties are responsible for upper secondary education and training and post secondary vocational education, whereas the national Government is responsible for other higher education.

Norway is not a member of the European Union, but is through the EEA Agreement [1] a full member of amongst others EU's education programme, Erasmus+ [2], and the framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon2020.

Education is key to maintaining high employment rates and a productive and innovative work force. It is also key to developing and refining a democratic culture. The Norwegian school system is inclusive and it is free of charge. Children and young people have an equal right to education, regardless of where they live, their gender, social or cultural background or any special needs.

It is important that children from different family backgrounds can meet on equal terms in their local community and have the same opportunities regardless of class distinctions or cultural and religious differences. In a modern society that is otherwise characterised by cultural diversity, the education system works as a glue in the community.

**Most children attend kindergarten**

Parents in Norway are entitled to 12 months parental leave, of which 15 weeks are reserved exclusively for the father. Each of the parents are entitled to one year of unpaid leave following the first year. Children are entitled to a place in a kindergarten from the age of one. About 50 percent of kindergartens are private, but they are government funded. Fees paid by parents are moderate and are regulated by the government. Fees are the same for public and private institutions. Kindergartens in Norway take a holistic approach to the education and care of children under school age. Norwegian kindergartens are intended to promote well-being and enjoyment through play and learning, and to foster children’s natural creativity, curiosity and develop their language and social skills. Kindergartens shall also prepare children for school. Access to kindergartens of high quality is believed to benefit the children, families and society as a whole.
Inclusive education system

Primary and lower secondary school are mandatory for all children aged 6–16, whereas upper secondary school is a statutory right. Primary and lower secondary education is founded on the principle of a unified school that provides equal and adapted education for all students. There is a common national curriculum for primary and secondary education, but within this framework the municipal and county authorities, schools and teachers can influence the implementation of education and training.

The culture and traditions of the Sami community are part of the common Norwegian and Nordic culture which both the national and the Sami curricula require that all pupils are acquainted with. In areas defined as Sami districts, teaching is given according to the Sami curriculum. The Sami Curriculum shall ensure that Sami pupils receive high quality teaching based on their own cultural background and the Sami language.

There are very few special schools, and grade repetition is not practised.

The school day is short for the younger children, and municipalities are obliged to offer day-care facilities for children in in grades 1.–4. and for children with special needs from grades 1.–7. All municipalities are required to have a Culture school. These schools offer courses and training for children and youth in music, dance, theatre and resembling arts.

Culture schools often cooperate with day-care facilities for school children and offer courses for the children attending the day-care centres. Parents have to pay a fee for participation in after school day-care and in culture school activities. Fees are set by the Municipality.

Statutory right, but not an obligation to attend upper secondary education.

Pupils who have completed primary and lower secondary education are entitled to three–four years' of upper secondary education or training. There is no age limit for entering upper secondary education, but the normal starting age is immediately after lower secondary school at age 16. Adults have a right to upper secondary education if they have not already attended such education for four years. In upper secondary school the pupils can choose from three academic education programmes and nine vocational education programmes. General upper secondary school last for three years, while vocational programmes normally last four years, but some programmes last 4.5 years.

Most vocational programmes consist of two years in school, followed by two years of apprenticeship. Social partners in Norway have a certain influence on the development of the content and organisation of vocational training. Vocational education and training can also provide access to higher education after a one-year bridging course.

The folk high schools are liberal education schools outside the formal education system. Folk high schools do not have a curriculum or examinations. Folk high schools offer both short and long courses, maximum 10 months. The schools are free of charge and mostly recruit students from the age of 19, but the students have to pay for board and lodging, as well as particular equipment or material when required.

Few private schools

Norway has relatively few private schools. Almost all private schools are approved by Government and are grant-aided. The main rule is that a private school must constitute a religious or pedagogical alternative, or follow an internationally recognised curriculum, in order to be approved. Government
aided private schools can only charge limited fees and are not allowed to select children according to ability or other subjective criteria.

**Higher education free of charge**

In higher education (ISCED levels 6 to 8), the degree structure is in line with the Bologna Process, with 3-year Bachelor, 2-year Master and 3-year PhD as the main model. The post-secondary vocational colleges at ISCED levels 4 and 5 provide a variety of courses with a duration spanning from half-a-year to two years.

Due to the mere size of the country, there are relatively many higher education institutions. With the exception of a few private university colleges, all higher education institutions are publicly owned. By law, public universities and university colleges may not charge tuition fees for ordinary degree courses. Legislation is a key to ensuring that all citizens have the same right and opportunity to take part in higher education. To further support the principle of equal opportunities, all Norwegian students are entitled to financial support (grants and loans) to cover their living costs through the State Educational Loan Fund. Foreign citizens may also, upon certain conditions, receive support for education in Norway from the State Education Loan Fund.

**Lifelong learning**

Lifelong learning is an important principle of Norwegian education policy. Basic skills training and validation of prior learning play a significant part in adult education policies.

Immigrants with legal permission as asylum seekers to live in Norway and their family have a right and a duty to take courses in Norwegian language and social studies for immigrants.

**Stages of the national education system**

Compulsory education (Grunnskolen) is divided into two main stages: Primary School (barnetrinnet) and lower secondary school (ungdomstrinnet). Upper secondary education (videregående opplæring) is not mandatory, but young people who have completed primary and lower secondary education, or the equivalent, have a right to up to four years of upper secondary education and training. Vocational education and training usually consist generally of two years in school and one year in-service training. In-service training as an apprentice at a training establishment is usually combined with productive work, so that an apprenticeship lasts for two years in all. General studies last three years and lead to general university admissions certification. It is possible for pupils who have finished their vocational education to attend and pass a supplementary one year programme to obtain general university admissions certification.

Higher education mainly have a degree structure in line with the Bologna Process. Post-secondary vocational schools (fagskoler) cover a variety of courses of duration up to two years. Degrees from post-secondary vocational schools (fagskoler) at ISCED level 4 do not qualify for general higher education. Higher vocational education of a duration of two years at ISCED level 5 automatically gives access to higher education.

**Structure of the education system**
Useful links

Facts about education in Norway 2018 [3]

The Education Mirror 2017 [4]: Facts and analyses of kindergarten, primary and secondary education in Norway

This is Norway 2018 [5]

Statistics Norway [6]

Norway’s official websites abroad [7]

Common European reference tools provided by the Eurydice network

- National Student Fee and Support Systems [8]
- Organisation of the Academic Year in Higher Education [9]
- Organisation of School Time in Europe [10] (Primary and general secondary education)
- Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe [11] (Presented by grades/stages for full time compulsory education as well as by subject and country.)
- Teachers and School Heads Salaries and Allowances in Europe [12] (Salaries and allowances of teachers and school heads at pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education levels.)