Structure of the education system in Norway

Kindergartens (ECEC)

The kindergarten provides pre-school children with good opportunities for development and play. The kindergarten is both a means of ensuring good conditions for children, but also provides a service for families while parents are studying or working. Kindergartens provide education as well as offering supervision and care. Kindergartens give children a safe and stimulating community and individual support and care. Children are entitled to a place in a kindergarten from the age of one.

Compulsory primary and lower secondary education

In the autumn of 2006 the school reform called The Knowledge Promotion was introduced. The objectives and quality framework for primary and secondary education and training are laid down in The National Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion which applies to all levels of primary and secondary education and training.

A revised Curricula Renewal will be introduced gradually over a period of three years starting from the school year 2020-21. The first subject curricula that have been set consists of 40 curricula for primary school and lower secondary school, and upper secondary education Year 1. They include both the Norwegian curricula and the parallel Sami curricula.

Compulsory primary and lower secondary schooling in Norway lasts for ten years and children start school the year they turn six. Primary and lower secondary education is founded on the principle of equity and adapted education for all pupils in a school system based on the same National Curriculum. All children and young people are to share a common foundation of knowledge, culture and values. Compulsory education is divided into two main stages: Primary school (Year 1-7) and lower secondary school (Year 8-10).

Upper secondary education

Pupils who have completed primary and lower secondary education, or the equivalent, have a right to three years’ upper secondary education and training leading either to admission to higher education, to vocational qualifications or to basic skills. All these young people are entitled to a place on one of three alternative education programmes they have applied for admission to, and to two years’ further schooling that is based on this education programme. Pupils in vocational education and training can achieve the qualifications necessary for admission to universities and university colleges (university admissions certification) by taking a supplementary programme for general university admissions certification. The county authorities are legally obliged to follow up young people between the ages of
16 and 21 who neither attend a course of education nor are employed. Pupils who have a right to special needs education have the right to an extra two years of upper secondary education or training if it is necessary for him/her to achieve his/her educational objectives. This right also applies to pupils who have the right to education in sign language or the right to education in Braille.

**General studies and vocational studies**

Upper secondary education and training is available all over the country so as to ensure an equal education for all. Earlier there were a number of different types of school offering upper secondary education courses of varying length, but since 1976 Norway has had a unified upper secondary structure that coordinates general studies and vocational studies. The education and training normally takes three years.

Vocational education and training mainly leads to a craft or journeyman’s certificate, usually after two years in school and one year in-service training in an enterprise. In-service training at a training establishment is usually combined with one year’s productive work, so that the apprenticeship takes two years after Year 1 and 2; 4 years in all. If it is impossible to provide enough training places, the county authorities are obliged to offer Vg3 in school, in which case there is no productive work. The final craft or journeyman’s examination is the same as it would have been after training in a training establishment. When it comes to subjects that are not recognised trades, vocational education will only be given in school and lead to vocational qualifications. General studies take three years and lead to general university admissions certification. It is possible for pupils who have finished their vocational education at Year 1 and Year 2 to take Year 3 supplementary programme in order to obtain general university admissions certification.

**The structure of upper secondary education and training**

Upper secondary education and training is organised in 13 different education programmes.

Programmes for General Studies (2019):

- Study Specialisation
- Music, Dance and Drama
- Sports and Physical Education
- Media and Communication
- Arts, Design and Architecture

Programmes for Vocational Education (2019):

- Electrical Trades
- Design, Arts and Crafts
- Health Care and Early Childhood and Youth Development
- Building and Construction
- Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry
- Restaurant and Food Processing
- Service and Transport
- Technical and Industrial Production

**Tertiary vocational education**

Tertiary vocational education is an alternative to higher education and is based on upper secondary
education and training or equivalent informal and nonformal competence. Higher Education Entrance Qualification is not required. The education consists of vocational courses lasting from half a year to two years. Apart from the traditional schools of technical management and maritime subjects which are publicly financed (by the county authorities), most of the schools offering this kind of education are private ones. All courses must be accredited by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education ([NOKUT][1]). An up-to-date list of recognised courses can be found on NOKUT’s website.

**Higher education**

Higher education is based on research and usually builds on three years’ completed and passed upper secondary education giving right to access higher education. Most institutions of higher education are state-run and are responsible for the quality of their own instruction, research and dissemination of knowledge. Since 2001, access can also be granted for those older than 25 years on the basis of a documented combination of formal, informal and non-formal competence (total qualifications).

Since 2003 the degree structure consists of a three-year bachelor’s degree, a two-year master’s and three-year doctorate (PhD). Exceptions to the model are the old university college two-year degree (college candidate), five-year integrated master’s degrees, six-year professional programmes, master’s degrees of one to one and a half year’s duration and four-year bachelor’s degrees in performing music and performing arts. The grading scale conforms to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) rating scale with the letters A (best) to E for pass and F for failed. The new degree structure and the new grading scale were introduced as parts of the Quality Reform in higher education in 2003. The reform also meant the establishment of a quality assurance agency, [NOKUT][1].

The differences between the types of higher education institutions are mainly related to their self-accreditation rights. For example, universities can without external accreditation offer study programmes at all levels, while university colleges must apply for external accreditation (by NOKUT) for study programmes at master’s and PhD level. There is also a wide range of private higher education institutions without any self-accreditation rights. These institutions provide study programmes that are accredited (by NOKUT). Apart from instruction and dissemination of knowledge the universities and specialised institutions at university level have a special responsibility for research and the education of researchers through their doctoral programmes.

**Organisation of the education system in Norway**

**Kindergartens (ECEC)**

The Government has the overall responsibility for quality development, management and financing of the kindergarten sector, and allocates earmarked funds for the running of kindergartens. The County Governors act as links between the Ministry of Education and Research and the kindergarten sector. The County Governors implement kindergarten policy through development work, administrative tasks, supervision and guidance for municipalities. The municipalities are responsible for providing and running municipal kindergartens, as well as for approving and supervising both public and private kindergartens in the municipality. The municipality authorities must also ensure that the kindergartens are operated within their approval framework and that the contents complies with legislation, regulations and the framework plan. In addition the authorities have a responsibility for providing guidance and surveillance. They must ensure that public subsidies are paid on an equal basis to all the approved kindergartens in their municipality. Local kindergarten authorities and private kindergartens are responsible for the contents of the individual kindergarten. Kindergarten owners are responsible for employing adequate and qualified staff.
Primary and secondary education and training

The state bears the overall responsibility for the Education Act with regulations, contents and financing of primary and secondary education and training. The County Governors are to act as links between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training on the one hand and the education sector in municipalities and counties on the other. The County Governors are responsible for supervision and dealing with complaints related to regulations, participation in quality development, information, guidance and various administrative matters.

The municipalities are responsible for operating and administering primary and lower secondary schools, whereas the county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education and training. Legislation and regulations, including the National Curriculum, form a binding framework, but within this framework the municipal and county authorities, schools and teachers can influence the implementation of the education and training. Each school has a head teacher and various boards, councils and committees.

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is an executive subordinate agency for the Ministry of Education and Research. The Directorate’s main tasks are to promote quality development, quality assessment, analysis and documentation in kindergartens, primary and secondary education and training, and to perform administrative tasks connected with primary and secondary education and training, in addition to bearing the overall national responsibility for supervision of primary and secondary education and training.

Tertiary vocational education

Tertiary vocational education is a short vocational alternative to higher education. It is regulated by national legislation and is offered partly by county authorities and partly by private providers. The sector is quite diverse although the number of students enrolled in tertiary vocational education is rather modest (a bit more than 16,000 students in 2018 all programmes counted).

Higher education

The state is responsible for universities and university colleges, which are directly subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research. Each institution has a board which is responsible for the direction and organisation of operations. Accredited institutions have been awarded extensive academic powers and may establish and terminate their own courses of study. University colleges decide for themselves which studies and topics they are to offer at first degree level. Universities determine for themselves which subjects and topics they wish to offer at all levels, including doctoral programmes. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku) are also instrumental in the governance of the universities and university colleges.

Home Education

Parents who wish to educate their children at home may do so, provided that they follow the ordinary curriculum. The parents do not need particular qualifications. No prior authorisation is required. Home schooling is supervised by the municipality. The municipality may summon home schooled children for special tests, and may require that the children attend school if the requirements regarding home schooling are not met.

More on home education is in the Eurydice report Home education Policies in Europe [2].
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