This chapter contains information on both upper secondary education and training and vocational college education (ISCED levels 4 and 5). General and vocational upper secondary education has a common core curriculum and are often offered at the same schools. Common characteristics of upper secondary education are therefore described in chapters 6.1 to 6.3, while special characteristics of vocational upper secondary education are described in chapter 6.4 to 6.6.

**General and vocational upper secondary education**

Upper secondary education and training covers Years 11 to 13 and normally serves the 16–19 age group. It includes general education and vocational education and training. General study programmes normally last three years and lead to a university admission qualification. Vocational education and training normally lasts four years, of which the first two years are school-based and the last two an apprenticeship.

Young people who have completed primary and lower secondary education or equivalent have the right to three years’ upper secondary education and training (four years in the case of vocational training). This right is contingent upon the student having completed primary and lower secondary education, but not upon having passed all subjects or exams.

The Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education (the Education Act,) regulates primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education and training. Section 1-1 of the Act sets out the following objectives for education and training:

*Education and training in schools and training establishments shall, in collaboration and agreement with the home, open doors to the world and give the pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and anchorage.*

*Education and training shall be based on fundamental values in Christian and humanist heritage and traditions, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights.*

*Education and training shall help increase the knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and our common international cultural traditions.*

*Education and training shall provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual’s convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking.*

*The pupils and apprentices shall develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can*
master their lives and can take part in working life and society. They shall have the opportunity to be creative, committed and inquisitive.

The pupils and apprentices shall learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness. They shall have joint responsibility and the right to participate.

Schools and training establishments shall meet the pupils and apprentices with trust, respect and demands, and give them challenges that promote formation and the desire to learn. All forms of discrimination shall be combated.

Post-Secondary education

Vocational college education, “fagskoleutdanning”, consists of programmes of short duration – corresponding to half a year to two years of full time study – at the post-secondary and tertiary levels, ISCED 2011 levels 4 and 5. Programmes at this level should by law provide qualifications that can be used professionally without further general training measures. They are an alternative to higher (university) education and are based on completed upper secondary education and/or training, most commonly on vocational qualifications from the upper secondary level. There is no automatic transfer of credits from vocational college education to higher education.

Vocational college education covers a wide range of provision and providers and is regulated by the 2003 Act on vocational post-secondary education (“fagskoleloven”). Since 2010, the counties are responsible for the administration of the vocational colleges and, as from 2018, the responsibility of the counties also includes the financing of the colleges.

On 16 March 2018, a proposal for a new law (Bill) on vocational college education was submitted to the Storting (parliament), Prop. 47 L (2017–2018) Lov om fagskoleutdanning. The main purpose of the proposal is to provide vocational college students with similar rights as those enjoyed by their counterparts at higher education institutions (universites), including for birth leave, and improve the governance of the colleges, for instance, by including student and staff representatives with voting rights in the colleges boards. In addition, there are measures to improve the quality of provision, including the streamlining of admission requirements and procedures, a possibility to exceptionally introduce three-year programmes, and changes in terminology to show that vocational college education is a valuable alternative to traditional higher education and should be referred to as higher vocational education.

The Bill is part of the follow-up of a White Paper on vocational college education submitted in December 2016, Meld. St. 9 (2016–2017) Fagfolk for fremtiden – Fagskoleutdanning [1], in which nearly fifty measures were proposed to improve the quality and governance and change the system of financing of the vocational colleges.

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for the recognition and external quality assurance of vocational college education.

In the Norwegian Qualifications Framework, vocational college education is at level 5, referenced to level 5 in EQF. Level 5 in the Norwegian Qualifications Framework is subdivided, however, with two levels of descriptors:

- sub-level 5.1 for partial level completion. The programmes of half a year and one year's duration are at level 5.1.
- level 5.2 for full level completion. The programmes of two years' duration are at level 5.2.
For the (very few) programmes of one and a half years' duration, NOKUT decides on the appropriate level as part of the recognition (accreditation) process.

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