



**National summary sheets on
education systems in Europe
and ongoing reforms**

2008 Edition



NORWAY

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1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2007, 38 per cent of the population was between 0 and 29 years. By the end of 2007 almost 250 000 children attended early childhood education and care institutions. In 2006/07, there are 619 000 pupils in compulsory education (grade 1-10), almost all children in the age group 6-16 years. There are 187 000 pupils in upper secondary education, 31 000 apprentices and 212 000 students in tertiary education.

There are three official written languages in Norway, Bokmål, Nynorsk and Sami. Each municipality decides which language is used in its schools. The minority Sami language is used in schools in Sami speaking areas.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

Education supervision is exercised at three levels. The Ministry of Education and Research has overall responsibility for all areas of education including pre-school provision (early childhood education and care, for children 0-5 years). Municipality authorities manage compulsory education and county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education. The Ministry of Education and Research manages the tertiary education institutions directly.

The Ministry of Education and Research has ultimate responsibility for supervision of education. The Ministry discusses this with County Governors in each county, who also have a responsibility for co-ordinating local guidance and development work. The Directorate for Education and Training (the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research) has the responsibility for the production of national curricula, assessment/examination, supervision/control and development of primary and secondary education.

In 2006/07, 98 per cent of all pupils in primary and lower secondary education attend public-sector schools. At upper secondary level, 92 per cent attend public-sector schools. The remaining pupils attend independent (private) schools. Approved schools have 85 per cent of their expenses covered by the government. Approximately 85 per cent of students attend public-sector (i.e. state) tertiary education institutions.

A national quality assurance agency (NOKUT) was established as from 1 January 2003, and the tertiary education institutions have been given more freedom in organisational matters.

Vox – National Centre for Learning in Working Life was established 1 January 2001 by merging the Norwegian Institute of Adult Education, the Norwegian State Institution for Distance Education and the State Adult Education Centre.

3. Pre-primary education

Pre-primary institutions, for children younger than six years, are not part of the compulsory education system. From January 2006 the pre-primary sector is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Research. A new Act on Kindergartens entered into force the same date. The institutions contribute to the education and care of young children and provide care during parents' working hours. As paid maternal leave for parents constitute almost one year, few parents apply for a place before the child is one year old. In 2007, 84 per cent of all children between the age of one and five attended pre-primary institutions. The coverage was 69 per cent for one and two-year-olds and 94 per cent for three- to five-year-olds.

Local authorities have a legal obligation to provide a sufficient amount of places. For pre-primary education, there is broad political agreement to expand the sector and reduce parents' fees. A proposition concerning the introduction of the legal right has been on public hearing and was adapted by *Stortinget* (the Parliament) in spring 2008. This amendment of the Kindergarten Act will enter into force in 2009 for children from the age of one. The state will almost fully finance development of new places in kindergarten institutions and reduced maximum parents' fees. Parents pay a monthly fee according to national regulations. From 1 January 2008 maximum parents' fee is 2 330 NOK per month, the same fee is proposed for 2009. Municipalities must have regulations concerning reduction for siblings and free attendance for those with lowest income.

The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens is a regulation to the Kindergarten Act. It states that kindergartens must lay a sound foundation for the children's development, lifelong learning and active participation in a democratic society. The kindergartens must work goal-oriented with children's development and learning, and stimulate children's linguistic and social competence. The Framework Plan outlines seven comprehensive learning areas that children should be acquainted with in the kindergarten.

Pre-primary institutions are public and private. Both private and public institutions must obey to the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens. Private institutions get financial support from the state and the municipalities.

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

<i>Grunnskole</i> (Primary and lower secondary school)	Grade 1-10	Ages 6-16
<i>Barnetrinnet</i> (Primary stage)	Grade 1-7	Ages 6-12
<i>Ungdomstrinnet</i> (Lower secondary stage)	Grade 8-10	Ages 13-16

Education is compulsory from age 6 to age 16. This compulsory period is organised in a single structure.

(ii) Admission criteria

Children start compulsory education the calendar year in which they turn six. The general rule is that pupils attend the public school that is closest to where they live or the school designated for

the area where they live. On application, the pupil may be accepted for another school if there are available places. Compulsory education is free in public schools, but pupils in private schools pay a fee.

Adults who mean they need this education have a legal right to free education and the municipality has the responsibility.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

Since 1994, the school year has been 38 weeks for pupils and 39 weeks for teachers. The school year comprises 190 days from mid August to mid-June. The school week lasts five days. The number of 45-minutes lessons per week ranges from 20 lessons in the first year to 30 lessons in the final years of compulsory education. Within this framework, the school administration can decide the length of the school day. The minimum total number of teaching hours is 4 930 hours for primary school (grade 1-7) and 2 556 hours for lower secondary school (grade 8-10). Many municipalities offer more teaching hours than the required minimum.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

Pupils are organised in pedagogically suitable groups. There are no longer rules concerning classes and maximum class size. Students can be taught by both single class teachers and individual teachers.

(v) Curricular control and content

The Directorate for Education and Training gives proposals to new curricula, before consultation process with stakeholders. The Ministry makes all decisions concerning the curricula; the Directorate is responsible for the production and distribution. The National Curriculum of 1997, placing more emphasis on cross-curricular themes, was implemented in compulsory education from 1997 to 2000. The curriculum gives certain principles on which teachers are to base their planning and educational activities. The reform of 2004, Knowledge Promotion, is giving priority to development of basic skills introduces certain changes in substance, structure and organization. Subjects throughout compulsory school include Norwegian, English, Mathematics, Natural Science, Social Science, Christianity Religious and Ethical Education, Arts and Crafts, Food and Health, Music and Physical Education. Teachers are free to decide teaching methods and textbooks.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

During the primary stage (grade 1-7) there is no formal assessment of pupils. At lower secondary stage (grade 8-10), teacher assessment is the basis for marks awarded for each subject twice a year. Promotion to the next year is automatic.

All pupils take national examinations at the end of lower secondary education, a certificate is awarded detailing all marks gained. All pupils obtaining a certificate have access to upper secondary education. National tests in basic skills in 5th and 8th grade are implemented from the school year 2007/08 in reading in Norwegian and English, and mathematics, with the aim to better adapt teaching to each pupil's needs. Starting with the 2006/07 school year, a compulsory mapping test in reading for the second grade is given. Mapping tests in arithmetic will follow.

The Directorate for Education and Training has the responsibility for, and issues guidelines on, national examinations and assessment.

5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

(i) Types of education

Videregående skole (Upper secondary school) Ages 16 – 19

Upper secondary education embraces both general theoretical education and vocational education.

General education: Advanced course 1 – Advanced course 2 – Advanced course 3

Vocational training: Advanced course 1 – Advanced course 2 – Advanced course 3 or 2 years apprenticeship.

(ii) Admission criteria

All pupils between 16 and 19 who have completed compulsory school have a statutory right to upper secondary education. Pupils can apply to schools outside their own municipality. A follow-up service is established for young people between 16 and 19 who are not employed or attending school. Pupils with special needs are entitled to more than three years of upper secondary education.

Adults at an age above 25 years, and who have not completed this stage of education, have a legal right to this education. The county has the responsibility.

(iii) Curricular control and content

The reform of 2004, Knowledge Promotion, gives priority to development of basic skills, introduces certain changes in substance, structure and organization. The Ministry of Education, through its curricular guidelines, specifies upper secondary curricula in 3 general and 9 vocational education programmes. Common core subjects include Norwegian, Religion and Ethics, English (and other foreign languages in general programmes), Social Studies, Geography, History, Mathematics, Natural Science, and Physical Education. Each educational programme comprises a more basic first year and two years of specialisation. Most vocational programmes convert the last year of specialisation into two years of apprenticeship training in enterprises. The content of upper secondary courses is subject to decentralised adaptation, in order to meet the needs of individual pupils and the local labour market, and in compliance with the principle of steering by objectives rather than by content specification. The new curriculum is implemented at grades 1-9 and 11 from August 2006, at grades 10 and 12 from 2007 and in grade 13 from 2008.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment in upper secondary education is based on continual assessment and end-of-year examinations. Examinations are usually externally set and marked. Progression between stages depends on performance (based on the continual assessment and on the final examination's marks). Schools issue certificates for courses that lead to tertiary education. The County Examination Board accredits vocational qualifications.

(v) Vocational colleges

Vocational colleges provide non-university, shorter education that is based on upper secondary school. Vocational colleges (ISCED 4) are sometimes classified as post-secondary education and sometimes as tertiary education. These institutions offer practical courses of training with duration half a year to two years as alternatives to higher education. The students must have completed upper secondary school or have equivalent competence from informal learning or work experience. The course must lead to an occupation, trade or profession and give qualifications that are directly

applicable in working life and society. All courses must be accredited by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). There are no direct links between vocational colleges and higher education institutions.

6. Tertiary education

(i) Types of institution

Seven universities (all public), eight specialized university institutions (two private), 27 public university colleges, two public university colleges of the arts, and 32 private higher education institutions which provide accredited study programmes of which 25 receive state funding for (part of) their activities.

(ii) Access

Entry to state tertiary education is regulated quantitatively and determined by the capacity of the individual institution. Access can be obtained through successful completion of three years of upper secondary school. For those 23 years or older, alternatives are five years of work experience, or a combination of education, work experience and training. For all, minimum requirements in Norwegian, English, history, social studies, mathematics and natural science apply. 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 (*realkompetanse*).

(iii) Qualifications

A new degree structure along the lines of the Bologna Process, with a three-year bachelor's degree followed by a two-year master's degree (and a three-year Ph.D.), was implemented from 2003. There are exceptions to the 3+2 model: Master degrees of one to one and half-year duration, the old university college two-year degree *høgskolekandidat*, five-year consecutive master's degrees, six-year professional programmes, four-year bachelor's degree in performing music and performing arts, and four-year programmes in teacher education.

The number of study credits per year is changed to 60 (from 20), and the system of marking is standardised, using a system of letters (with A to E as pass grades, and F for failure), both of the latter along the lines of the ECTS. The Diploma Supplement is compulsory. New forms of evaluation are introduced, and students have individual education plans, and a right to international mobility as integrated parts of their studies.

7. Special needs

Pupils with special educational needs are generally integrated into mainstream early childhood education and schooling, with provision for extra help in class where required. Approximately six per cent of pupils in compulsory education are recognised as having special educational needs. Only 0.5 per cent attends special schools.

8. Teachers

Pre-primary teachers follow a three-year pre-school teacher education programme at universities or university colleges leading to a pre-primary teaching certificate at bachelor degree. There are several ways to qualify for teaching at the various stages of the primary and lower secondary education. Most teachers at this level have a four-year course in general teacher education. Some have an older four- or six-year university degree or a newer three- or five-year university degree with an extra one-year course in educational theory and practice or integrated in the five years.

Teachers at the pre-primary and primary stages are most commonly generalists. At the lower secondary stage, there are some subject specialists, but most teachers are trained as generalists. Teachers at upper secondary stage are all subject specialists, either from university with a one-year course in educational theory and practice in addition to their three-year to six-year degree or integrated in their five-year degree, or from vocational training in combination with a teaching qualification.

Municipalities employ teachers of pre-primary level and primary and secondary school, while counties employ teachers at upper secondary school.

An action plan is set up to increase the number of qualified pre-primary teachers in kindergarten institutions. A strategy to increase the competence of the staff is laid down in March 2007.

9. Adult education

Equal opportunities of education for adults, and learning as a lifelong task, are the two basic principles of Norwegian adult education policy, which aims to raise the general level of education of the entire adult population. A major task has therefore been to integrate adult education into the recent school reforms. There is a tradition of cooperation between private grant-aided providers of adult education and public authorities.

10. Current reforms and priorities

Following major reforms implemented in tertiary education which have been implemented, ongoing reform work is mainly focused on primary and secondary education. The actual reform is given the name Knowledge Promotion. The aim of the reform is to sustain and develop the best in basic education (understood as all schooling from the start of primary to the end of upper secondary education), with a view to ensuring that pupils are better able to meet the challenges of the knowledge society.

The Ministry of Education and Research put forward a white paper on education and equity in December 2006. The Parliament (*Storting*) debated the white paper named 'Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning' in April 2007. The Government will pursue an active policy to reduce the differences in society. Its goals are to diminish class differences, reduce economic inequity and combat poverty and other forms of marginalisation. The Government wishes to improve the ability of the education system to meet individual needs by organising teaching and learning in a favourable way. Early intervention is one of the keys to this work. Early intervention must be understood as both an action at an early stage of a child's life and as intervention when problems arise or are revealed at pre-school age, during basic education or in adulthood.

Pre-primary education

The government has three main goals for its Education and Care on Early Childhood policy: full coverage, high quality and low parental fees. As full coverage is almost reached and parental fees are lowered significantly during the last years, the government now wants to focus on the quality of the services. The government prepares a white paper concerning the content and quality to the *Storting* in spring 2009.

Primary and secondary education

In upper secondary school, the Knowledge Promotion Reform has been implemented from the school year 2006/07 to 2008/09. The learning goals will be stated more clearly. The basic skills of pupils and apprentices will be strengthened (oral expression, reading, written expression, arithmetic, use of Information and Communications Technology). These skills will be integrated into

all subject curricula. The natural progression and coherence between compulsory schooling and upper secondary education will be made evident. Subject curricula will be continuous for the entire period of schooling wherever possible.

The School Development Programme (2005-2009) shall initiate practical development projects in primary/lower secondary schools and upper secondary schools. Its starting point is that schools can themselves improve their pupils' academic and social learning by developing as organizations. The funding, approx. 100 million NOK, is meant to give the schools a possibility to cooperate with external competence environments (researchers, consultants, local professionals etc). From the documented main challenges concerning the pupils' learning, the participants are to plan and implement holistic measures linked to organization, leadership, use of staff, roles and career plans, use of human resources in the community, use of support tools etc. Schools will be stimulated to participation in international networks, systematic cooperation with professional bodies and improved local interaction (school owners, parents, local business and working community).

White Paper on Quality in Education, St.meld. nr 31 (2007/08)

The White Paper 'Quality in Education' was launched 13 June 2008. The white paper addresses the relative low performance of Norwegian pupils in reading, math and science. The different initiatives proposed are important necessary steps to improve the quality and efficiency of the Norwegian compulsory education.

Research consistently emphasizes the importance of early intervention in order to improve learning outcomes. Policy measures intended to increase the use of early intervention are proposed, including mandatory diagnostic tests in reading and math in grades 1-3, and financing additional teaching resources for following up of unsatisfactory results in reading and mathematics. The funding will be combined with a new regulation requiring municipalities to strengthen teaching for students with poor performance in these subjects.

The importance of teacher quality and school leadership are highlighted. The White Paper proposes a permanent system for further education for teachers and school leaders, with high priority to training that leads to formal accreditation.

The White Paper proposes measures to further develop and expand the national assessment system, such as national tests in reading, math and English at grade 9 in lower secondary education, in addition to present tests at grade 5 and 8. Mandatory diagnostic tests in reading and math will be introduced in the first grade in upper secondary education. In addition, steps are taken to stimulate the actual use of performance information at the local level. The White Paper also includes proposals for increased local accountability and state support to schools with low performance. Municipalities are required to prepare an annual report on the results of their schools.

Vocational colleges

The links between vocational colleges (as part of tertiary education) and higher education institutions remains to be clarified. Part of the problem is related to the lack of a system of credit-points in the predominantly private institutions on vocational college level. This makes it difficult to assess the scope and depth of education taken, especially making comparability with higher education more difficult. In several European countries, qualification frameworks are being developed to ensure better links between and within different levels of the education system. The Ministry of Education and Research is still considering whether such a framework could be a relevant measure in the Norwegian context.

Tertiary education

The Quality Reform was evaluated by two independent research centres, and the final report was presented in January 2007. Based on the recommendations of the report, the Ministry of Education and Research presented a white paper called 'The progress report for the Quality reform in Higher Education' to the Storting in November 2007. The Storting debated the white paper on 7 March 2008. Major changes have taken place at the Norwegian Higher Education Institutions with the Quality Reform, both in relation to institutional autonomy, the follow-up of students; the degree structure, the quality assurance systems, the funding system for institutions etc., and the aims of the Quality Reform are still seen as relevant. There are, however, still challenges to be met, and work has to continue in all areas encompassed by the Quality Reform. The Ministry is amongst other things currently looking at possible changes in the system of institutional funding, and the system will be evaluated in 2009.

In May 2006, the Government appointed an official committee to evaluate the structure of higher education in Norway and make recommendations for its development within a time frame of 10-20 years. The commission will especially focus on regional aspects. The commission presented its report to the Minister of Education and Research in January 2008. The report points to a number of challenges for Norwegian higher education in the next 10-20 years. A number of small institutions outside the cities already have too few applicants, and this situation is expected to be aggravated by demographic changes combined with social preferences for urban life among young people. At the same time, fragmentation is identified as a problem with regard to research, in particular fragmentation research training, which the Commission relates to the existing standards and criteria for accreditation as a university. To remedy the situation the Commission proposes a process of mergers based on the institutions' own preferences, combined with stronger profiling supported by agreements with the ministry and changes in the financing system. Other measures proposed include consolidation of research training in research schools or similar structures, and measures to increase the quality of teaching in higher education institutions. The recommendations are currently being considered and some will be commented and some followed up by the Ministry in different processes/White Papers.

The Ministry appointed a commission to review national and international recognition issues in higher education in March 2006. The report from the commission was finalized in January 2007. There was a formal consultation of the review in spring 2007, and as a result, a number of measures have been or will be taken:

- A working group to redesign or develop a national database for recognition of higher education was set up in autumn 2007 and will deliver its report in autumn 2008.
- A bill inter alia proposing amendments in the provisions of the Higher Education Act relevant to recognition was presented in September 2008. The amendments relate to a clarification of terminology and responsibilities, as well as the issue of fraudulent documents, including diploma mills, which has lately proven to be a matter of some concern.
- From autumn 2008, a national information centre for recognition of international educational qualifications will be set up at NOKUT to facilitate information to users, the general recognition documents issued by NOKUT will be improved to further facilitate their usefulness for employers and applicants, and there will be reinforced permanent efforts relating to the review and update of the list of international qualifications satisfying the general admission requirements to Norwegian higher education ('GSU-lista').

Some issues concerning international student mobility and the general portability of loans and grants are being debated. The majority of Norwegian students abroad are full degree students as 'free movers'. It is an aim to increase the number of students on formal exchange programmes, where institutions co-operate. Rather than many Norwegian students at bachelor level abroad, more students at master and doctorate level abroad is seen as favourable for academic quality and the economy. Changes in the student financing system from 2004/05 are aimed at stimulating students on higher degrees, exchanges and placements abroad.

White papers on teacher education and on internationalization in education are being prepared by the Ministry and will be presented to the *Storting* in 2009.

Adult education

The OECD Adult Literacy and Lifeskill Survey (ALL) 2004 showed that more than 400 000 adults (age 16-65) in Norway 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.

In 2006 the Norwegian government established Programme for Basic Skills in Working Life. The programme support both businesses and public providers of adult education. It is based on the knowledge that training and education combined with a paid job often gives the best results, especially for groups with low levels of formal education. The purpose of the programme is to ensure that adults acquire the basic skills they need to meet new requirements and rapid changes in working life. The programme is currently being evaluated.

In October 2006, the Government appointed an official committee to evaluate the role of the non-governmental study associations. The Government wishes to strengthen the role of the study associations as providers of education and learning opportunities for adults, as well as their role as bearers of cultural values and traditions in local communities. The report was present in September 2007. After a broad hearing of the report the Ministry are now working on the follow up of some of the recommendations to be presented during 2009.

A White Paper on the competences needed in the coming decades is being prepared by the Ministry and it will be presented to the *Storting* in 2009.

More information in English on ongoing reforms is available at the new website from the Government and the Ministries www.regjeringen.no/en

Unrevised English

For more detailed information on the education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (http://www.eurydice.org)
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