



NATIONAL SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE AND ONGOING REFORMS

NORWAY

I. Description of education system

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2003/04, there were 620,000 pupils in compulsory education (grade 1 – 10) – close to 100 per cent of the population in the age group 6 – 16 years. There are almost 200,000 pupils in upper secondary education, and nearly 210,000 students in tertiary education. There are two official Norwegian written languages, *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk*; each municipality decides which language is used in its schools. The minority *Sami* language is used in schools in *Sami* speaking areas.

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

In 2003/04, 98 per cent of all pupils in primary and lower secondary education attended public-sector institutions, at upper secondary level some 95 per cent attended public sector institutions. The remaining pupils attended private institutions, and most of them have 85 per cent of their expenses covered by the government. The share of students in public (i.e. state) tertiary education is approximately 90 per cent.

Education supervision is exercised at three levels. The Ministry of Education and Research, assisted by advisory bodies including County Governors in each county, has overall responsibility for all areas of education except pre-school provision, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. Municipality authorities manage all aspects of compulsory education, county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education, and 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 and discusses this with County Governors in each county, who also have a responsibility for co-ordinating local guidance and development work. As from June 2004 a new Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education has the responsibility for the production of national curricula, supervision/control and development of primary and secondary education.

3. Pre-primary education

Pre-primary provision, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, is not part of the education system. Early childhood institutions cater for children from birth to five. Parents pay a fee according to regulations given by the Norwegian Government and parents' income. Institutions are public and private. Private institutions get financial support from the state, and sometimes from municipalities.

Participation is voluntary, and there is a shortage of places. In 2004, 72 per cent of all children between the age of one and five attended early childhood institutions. As paid maternal leave for parents constitute almost one year, few apply for a place before the child is one year old. The coverage is low for the youngest children, and peaks at approximately 90 per cent for the five-year-olds. The local authorities have a legal obligation to provide a sufficient amount of places. There is no individual legal right to a place. The state grants have increased in order to reach a goal of full access in 2006.

4. Compulsory full-time education

(a) Phases

Grunnskole (Primary and lower secondary level school) Ages 6 – 16

Barnetrinnet (Primary stage) Ages 6 – 9

Mellomtrinnet (Intermediate stage) Ages 10 – 12

Ungdomstrinnet (Lower secondary stage) Ages 13 – 16

Education is compulsory from age 6 to age 16.

(b) Admissions 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 catchment 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 institutions pay a fee.

(c) Length of school day/week/year

The school year comprises 190 days between mid/late August to mid-June. The school week lasts five days and the number of lessons per week ranges from 20 (15 hours) in the first year to 30 in the final years of *grunnskole* (compulsory education). Within this framework, the school administration can decide the length of the school day. The minimum annual taught hours are 789 (ages 6-9), 1 026 (ages 10-12) and 1 140 (ages 13-15). Many municipalities offer more hours than the required minimum.

(d) Class size/grouping

Pupils are organised in pedagogically suitable groups. There are no longer rules concerning classes and maximum class size.

(e) Curricular control and content

The Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education gives proposals to new curricula. The Ministry takes all decisions concerning the curricula, and the Directorate is responsible for the production and distribution. The National Curriculum of 1997, placing more emphasis on cross-curricular themes, was phased in throughout compulsory education from 1997 to 2000. The curriculum gives certain principles on which teachers are to base their planning and educational activities. The subject syllabuses throughout compulsory school includes Norwegian, Mathematics, Social Studies, Arts and Crafts, Natural Science and Environmental subjects, English, Music, Home economics, Physical Education and Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education.

(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

During the primary school there is no formal assessment. At lower secondary level, 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 and 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 4th, 7th and 10th grade were introduced in 2004, with the aim to better adapt teaching to each pupil's needs. The Directorate has the responsibility for, and issues guidelines on, national examinations and assessment.

5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

(a) Types of education

Videregående skole (Upper secondary school) Ages 16 – 19

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

General education: Foundation course – Advanced course I – Advanced course II

Vocational training: Foundation course – Advanced course I - Advanced course II or 2 years apprenticeship or 1 year general studies.

(b) Admissions criteria

All pupils between 16 and 19 who have completed *grunnskole* (compulsory school) have a statutory right to upper secondary education. Pupils can apply to schools outside their own municipality. A follow-up service for young people between 16 and 19 who are not employed or attending school is established. Physically disabled pupils are entitled to more than three years of upper secondary education. No fees are payable for public upper secondary education, but private schools may issue fees.

(c) Curricular control and content

The Ministry of Education, through its curricular guidelines ('Reform 94'), specifies upper secondary curricula in 15 programs of general or vocational study. Common core subjects include Norwegian, Religion, languages, Social studies, Geography, History, sciences, Mathematics and Physical education. Each programme of study comprises a foundation year and two years' 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.

(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment is based on continual assessment and end-of-year examinations. Examinations are usually externally set and marked. Progression between stages depends on performance. Schools issue certificates for courses that lead to tertiary education. The County Examination Board accredits vocational qualifications. National tests in basic skills are conducted during the first year, with the aim to better adapt teaching to each pupil's needs.

6. Tertiary education

(a) Types of institution

Six universities, six specialised university institutions, 25 university colleges, two university colleges of the arts, and 32 private higher education institutions provide tertiary education.

(b) 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 (*videregående skole*), or five years of work experience, or a combination of education and work experience, education and training. For all of the above, minimum requirements in Norwegian, English, history, social studies, mathematics and natural science apply. Admission can also be granted on the basis of a combination of formal, in-formal and non-formal qualifications.

(c) Qualifications

As of autumn 2003, 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 was implemented. In a transition period, there are exemptions from the new degree structure for students already part of a study programme before autumn 2003. The old university college degree *høgskolekandidat* of two years is kept. There are also a few exceptions to the new 3+2 model; five-year consecutive master's degree in odontology, pharmacy, landscape architecture, architecture, and industrial design, a few six-year professional programmes (psychology, medicine, theology, and veterinary medicine), four-year bachelor's degree in performing music and performing arts, and four-year programmes in teacher education.

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 leading to a pre-primary teaching certificate. There are several ways to qualify for teaching at the various stages of the *grunnskole* (primary and lower secondary education). Most teachers at this level have a four-year course in general teacher education. Some have a university degree with an extra course in educational theory and practice (total of five years). Teachers at the pre-primary and primary (*barnetrinnet*) levels are most commonly generalists. At the lower secondary (*ungdomstrinnet*) level, there are some subject specialists, but there too, most teachers are trained as generalists. Teachers at upper secondary level (*videregående skole*) are all subject specialists, either from university, with a one-year course in educational theory and practice in addition to their four to six-year degree, or from vocational training in combination with a teaching qualification.

Municipalities employ teachers of pre-primary level and primary and secondary school (*grunnskole*), while counties employ teachers at upper secondary school (*videregående skole*).

II. Ongoing Reforms and Topics of Debate in Education in Norway

Following major reforms in tertiary education which have been implemented, ongoing reform work at the Ministry of Education and Research is mainly focused on primary and secondary education. The 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.

Pre-primary education

In recent years the political debates have been about the financing of the sector. The *Storting* (national assembly) has made an agreement concerning public financing and parents' fees. According to this agreement the parents' fees should not cover more than 20 per cent of the total running costs. The state should cover the rest. Regulations concerning parents' fees and equal economic treatment between public and private institutions entered into force in 2004.

The Norwegian Government (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs) will present a bill on early childhood education and care in April 2005.

Primary and secondary education

A Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education was established in 2004, with the responsibility for national curriculum, assessment/examination, supervision/control and development of primary and secondary education. The Directorate is now developing new national curricula for primary and secondary education based on the principles proposed in a white paper ('Culture for Learning') presented to the Parliament in 2004. More emphasis on basic skills and knowledge, greater diversity with regards to working methods and organisation and education better adapted to each pupil are essential elements in the new curricula and in the *Knowledge promotion* reform. The new curricula will be implemented at grades 1 – 9 and 11 from August 2006, at grades 10 and 12 from 2007 and in grade 13 from 2008.

A national system for quality evaluation was introduced in 2004, including national tests for assessing the students' basic skills in reading, writing, Mathematics and English and surveys for mapping the learning environment at schools. Results at school and municipal level are published together with development resources at www.skoleporten.no (operated by the Directorate).

Tertiary education

Through the Quality Reform, a new financing system for tertiary education has been introduced, as well as a new degree structure according to the criteria of the Bologna Process (3+2+3 model). 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. 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. In March 2005, the *Storting* passed a common act for all higher education institutions, both private and public ones. The government presented a White Paper on research in March 2005.

Unrevised English

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