

# Transfine – National study Norway

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# 1 Summary

In Norway there has been an increased recognition of the importance of lifelong learning. This has resulted in the Competence Reform (1997-1998). The Competence Reform aims to meet the need for new or changed competence in society, in the workplace and by the individual. It is both a workplace and an educational reform and it is targeted at all adults, both employed and unemployed. It has been designed and executed based on interaction between social partners, Ministry of Education and Research, organisations and educational institutions.

According to the Plan of Action for the Competence Reform, one of its principal objectives is “to establish a national system for documenting and evaluating the non-formal learning of adults, with legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education system.”. This includes learning attained through paid and unpaid employment, organisational involvement, and organised training.

In order to accomplish this, the Competence Project has been given the mandate in 1999-2002 to form the foundations for a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Many development projects have been initiated both in the educational sector as well as in the working life and the third sector during the experimentation period. The result is a circular from the Ministry of Education and Research with information on the implementation and further development of a national system for documentation and recognition of competence. Based on the conclusions from the Competence Project it is proposed that the national system includes a shared set of principles anchored in custom-made legislation as well as a varied set of methods and tools for documentation and validation of competence.

The principles are based on the understanding that the recognition of competence is voluntary and has to be perceived by the individual as beneficial. It has to be easy in use, transparent and in line with European developments. The principles are anchored in legislation that comprises the Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.

The table underneath summarises the four steps in the procedure for recognising competence in relation to the working life requirements, the third sector and the curriculum. A critical issue is the recognition that the assessment methods have to be adapted to the individual’s needs and use of the documentation.

**Figure 1: Steps national procedure**

<b>Steps National procedure</b>	<b>Documentation at the workplace</b>	<b>Documentation in the third sector</b>	<b>Documentation in secondary education</b>	<b>Documentation in higher education</b>
<b>1: Information and guidance</b>	Information by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> <li>• Trade associations</li> <li>• Branch org.</li> <li>• Training offices</li> </ul>	Information by: voluntary organisations, local organisations informing their members	Information and guidance by: County council centers, and upper secondary schools	Information by: Higher education institutes, NOKUT, UCAS
<b>2: Identification and systemizing of prior learning</b>	Creation of CV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees</li> </ul>	Creation of CV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals</li> </ul>	Creation of portfolio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals</li> <li>• Counselor “skill center”</li> </ul>	Creation of portfolio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals</li> </ul>
<b>3: Assessment</b>	Self –assessment of actual work activities  Verified by current employer/ client	Self-assessment of experiences / voluntary activities	Assessment in relation to curriculum.  Certified by secondary/ vocational schools / counsellors at county council centers	Assessment in relation to curriculum requirements of higher education institutes. Certified by higher education institution / NOKUT
<b>4: Documentary proof</b>	Verified document « Kompetanse attest »	Self-declared document	Certificate of competence Right of admission	Recognition document / Right of admission

The initial reaction to a European-wide system is positive and explorative among the various actors , involved in Norway. There is an open attitude to be part of an experimental project to learn more in detail how and what a European wide system, based on existing experiential projects can entail. However, beside this positive attitude the most prominent reaction expresses a clear fear: WE DO NOT WANT A LARGE SUPRANATIONAL BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM!

There is a positive attitude towards the idea of using something similar to the EuroCV as an European wide standardised form of documenting all learning of an individual. Yet again the request is for flexibility and sensible use of the document (keep it short and rather add attachments and official certificates). Furthermore the documentation has to be voluntary and it is the responsibility of the individual to maintain and update it. One possible way to achieve a European architecture is in close cooperation with the sector organisations.

The architecture needs to be designed based on a transparent documentation and a tolerant attitude at the receivers end.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Norway in general

The Kingdom of Norway consist of the mainland and the arctic islands of Svalbard and Jan Mayen, and covers approximately 387 00 km<sup>2</sup>. The country's main characteristics are its long coast line of 25 148 km, including fjords, and its long stretched shape that holds a population of 4 504 000 people. Compared with other European countries, Norway is a small country, with few inhabitants, low population density and a decentralised settling. The average population density is approximately 14.3 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 35% of the population live in the Oslo region. The country consists of 19 counties, which are divided into approximately 450 municipalities. Both the counties and municipalities represent political and administrative units the Storting has delegated decision-making powers to these units within certain areas, such as public health service, transport and education and training. The county governor is the State representative and ensures that the regional and local activities are in accordance with national political decisions and goals.

Figure 2 Map of Norway



Norway is a unitary state, a monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. The constitutional foundation is Grunnloven (the Norwegian constitution), which dates from 1814. Norway is a member of NATO and EFTA. Despite a positive attitude the majority of the population (52%) voted in a referendum in 1994 against joining the EU. However, through the EEA Agreement between the EU and the EFTA countries, Norway is part of the single market and a participant in EU programmes and institutional arrangements like Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth for Europe.

A basic precept of Norwegian educational policy is *Education for all*. Wherever they live in the country, all girls and boys shall have an equal right to education, regardless of social and cultural background and possible special needs. All public education in Norway is free up to and including the upper secondary level. There are more than 1 million participants in adult education each year. Training takes place in the public educational system, adult education associations, folk high schools, distance education institutions, but also in other private institutions and in the workplace.

The Ministry of Education and Research has the overall responsibility for all public education and vocational training in Norway. Other ministries, like the Ministry of Local Government and Labour and the Ministry of Trade and Industry have also responsibilities. Municipal authorities are responsible for primary and lower secondary education for adults and for training in Norwegian language and civic life for adult immigrants. County authorities are responsible for upper secondary education. The county councils cooperate as well with education associations and distance education institutions. In total over 50 000 persons participate annually in adult education provided by municipal and county authorities.

The standard of instruction in schools and workplaces is of paramount importance for the quality of the society. It is therefore a major goal of Norway's educational policy that the Norwegian educational system shall be among the best in the world as regards both academic level and breadth of recruiting. But education must also be organised within the framework of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning and educational opportunities for adults are important principles of Norwegian educational policy. The aim is to provide suitable conditions in order to strengthen the competence of the adult population. Updated and new competence is necessary to improve competitiveness and increase flexibility in a changing working life. It is further believed that new competence can give individuals greater freedom of choice and opportunities to realise their wishes and needs.

The minister of Education and Research, Kristin Clemet (2002) explains in a speech to the Ministerial conference on Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Training and Education in Copenhagen, Nov. 2002 that there are several reasons why the Ministry of Education and Research have placed increased attention to valuing non-formal and in-formal learning:

Firstly, it is acknowledged that the Norwegian human resources constitute more than 80% of the national assets. Not taking advantage of these resources by recognising competencies achieved in informal and non-formal contexts will be a waste of the talents.

Secondly, Norway faces an ageing population and all available resources have to be used in the most optimal way.

Thirdly, due to changes in the economic and technological developments some professions disappear, while others are created. It will be very expensive if career change means that you have to start education and re-qualification from scratch.

Fourthly, education in a lifelong perspective is a part of a personal fulfilment and also gives a contribution to social cohesion, ensuring democratic participation and values.

A major challenge in the years to come will be the work involved in implementing the Competence Reform for adults was initiated during 1997 and launched in 1999. The Competence Reform aims to meet the need for new or changed competence in society, in the workplace and by the individual and embraces all adults. It is based on interaction between several actors, including social partners, Ministry of Education and Research, organisations and educational institutions.

## ***2.2 The background for the Competence Reform in Norway***

The reform is based on recognition of the fact that a well-educated population is the most important resource a country can have for the creation of new jobs, ensuring quality of life and preventing new class distinctions. But also, the rapid technical, economic and social changes are bringing about significant alterations to people's lifestyles and the way the labour market works. In this changing society, the main objective of the reform has been to help meet the needs of individuals, society and the workplace in terms of skills and knowledge and give adults more opportunity to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications. The Competence Reform is both a workplace and an educational reform and it is targeted at all adults, both employed and unemployed. It has a broad, long-term perspective, and aim for broad, differentiated opportunities for adult education and continuing education and training provided by both public and private institutions and organisations.

The reform shall take into account several objectives (OECD, 2001):

- *Competence related to working life*: The reform must have a pragmatic aim in the sense that it must make arrangement providing Norwegian industry with the necessary competence to secure progress. The needs defined by working life must be given priority. By putting working life and the individual in focus the competence reform shall bring the Norwegian society forward and hopefully also benefit the international society.
- *Co-operation working life and education system*: The competence of the working force in general should be developed. The competence includes knowledge, skills and attitudes. Important attitudes are flexibility and ability to adapt to new job situations. The needs of the small and medium-sized enterprises should be emphasised. The chosen measures must benefit and satisfy these enterprises' needs. It is therefore important to establish a closer collaboration between the educational system and the industry.
- *Maintaining social equality*: Education and competence have great importance for distribution of income and influence and upon equality between the sexes, generations and social groups. It is important to avoid creating new class-divisions. The reform, therefore, can not only include those in the labour market. It must also take into account those seeking jobs and those who represent a labour force reserve. Priority should be given to groups who have problems entering the labour market, i.e. women in part-time jobs, s, handicapped and unemployed.
- *Man as the ultimate aim*: The individual does not have value only as a highly competent wheel in a well-functioning working life. The government states that man is not the mean, but the ultimate aim of the reform. The concept of knowledge must be broad and in addition to mind and hands, it must also comprise emotions, values, spirit and social abilities. A continuous competence development must have a long-term developmental perspective for the whole human being. It is therefore an objective to enhance the population's knowledge about political, social and cultural affairs.

The Competence Reform is designed on a tripartite collaboration with a strong commitment from the social partners and the authorities. The main elements of the reform are:

- To give all adults a statutory right to primary and secondary education, and to impose an obligation on educational providers to design the education offered in accordance with the needs of adults
- To ensure the right for individual employees to obtain study leave of absence for further education
- To provide state grants and scholarship for adults on equal terms with younger students
- To establish a system for competence assessment for people without any formal certificates or degrees
- To acknowledge the workplace as an important learning arena and a place for innovation

One of the main results of the competence reform has been that The Norwegian Storting has legalised that all adults have a statutory right to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. The legal right to upper secondary education has been put in force from autumn 2000; while the legal right to primary and lower secondary education has been in force from August 2002. Also considerable efforts have been made in recent years to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups through adult education. This particularly applies to adults with especially weak schooling, various groups of physically disabled persons, adults with reading and writing difficulties and adult immigrants.

Other results are:

- All adults have a legal right to leave of absence from work for education purposes after having worked more than three years
- At the end of 2001 more than 15000 people have had their skills assessed with reference to upper secondary education.
- A competence building program to promote innovation and development in the field of continuing education and training has been established. About 150 organisations and more than 6000 people have taken part in the development of documentation methods in the workplace
- More than 11000 people have applied for university or college education admittance based on their prior learning and ca. 50 % has been accepted. These students have achieved and made the same progress as students that have been admitted only on the basis of formal qualifications.
- A system has been put in place to “translate” immigrant vocational competencies into formal Norwegian standards

According to the Plan of Action for the Competence Reform, one of its principal objectives is “to establish a national system for documenting and evaluating the non-formal learning of adults, with legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education system.” (p. 12). This includes learning attained through paid and unpaid employment, organisational involvement, and organised training.

In order to accomplish this, the Competence Project (co-ordinated by Vox) has been formed. What the Competence Project aims to achieve has been laid down in close cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Research, the social partners and representatives of the civil society/third sector. It is further based on the Storting (Parliament) resolution in connection with parliamentary discussions of White Paper no. 42 (1997–98) relating to the Competence Reform:

“The Storting asks the Government to establish a system that gives adults the right to document their non-formal learning without having to undergo traditional forms of testing.”

As ancillary objective, the Competence Reform intends to recognise non-formal learning in a manner that allows individuals to obtain credit toward educational requirements in upper secondary and higher education. The Ministry of Education, Research, and Church Affairs has initiated a number of pilot projects to assess non-formal learning as a replacement for upper secondary education qualification for admission to higher education. Employee and employer organisations, the public education system and the various providers of education are collaborating on this task. See Box 1 for an account of documentation of non-formal learning as experienced by the authors of the OECD, 2001:

**Box 1: Documentation of non-formal learning**

We were presented with one effort in the County of Tromsø to document non-formal learning gained through non-school activities and experiences. Non-formal learning was defined as the competence a person has built up through paid or unpaid work, continuing education or leisure activities.

A reference group was appointed, consisting of principals, teachers’ organisations, the employment service, the social partners, local education centres, and the county authorities. The project leader, from the Department of Education, was responsible for achieving the project’s objectives and ensuring quality. The project consisted of working with local education centres (OPUS) that registered adults who wanted their non-formal learning recognised as stepping stones for further formal upper secondary education.

The project had the following objectives:

- Develop a total system for recognition of non-formal learning using both interview and software technology as tools in the process of documentation.
- Start with subjects within health and social science, expand towards other subjects during the project
- Reach the target group through efficient information
- Provide adult education on the basis of the recognition of non-formal learning and the needs of the target group
- Develop flexible education models to meet the needs of the target group.

In 2003 documentation consultants have been appointed and a system of documentation of non-formal learning has been established. Several upper secondary schools offer adult education courses in the area of health education. Exam preparation courses have been developed for employed or unemployed individuals with non-formal learning relevant to health work and have been administered using software technology and the Internet. Financing of the adult education is done in co-operation with the employment service.

The Competence Project has started work in August 1999 and has been terminated July 2002. The Ministry of Education and Research is currently financing further follow up activities to implement the recommendations of the Competence Project. This is coordinated by Vox (Norwegian centre for adult learning).

### **2.3 A plural system**

It has to be emphasised that the Norwegian approach to recognition of non-formal and in-formal learning is based on extensive experimentation, conferences, interim evaluation and extensive use of tripartite network, relevant research literature and international experience. It is not a single system with one method that counts for everybody. Neither is it a finished product as it is accepted that it will have to continuously adapt to new requirements and societal demands.

The Norwegian approach to recognition of informal learning is characterised by:

- It needs to be beneficial to the individual
- It is based on respect for diversity
- Competence is contextual

The first point shows in the many discussions about giving people that have fallen off the education wagon “a new chance” and give credits for their learning in the workplace, the home or any other voluntary activities. The second point shows in the acknowledgement that not one method will suit all people and the assessor has to be sensitive to the needs of the individual. Respect for diversity is also demonstrated in the acknowledgement of many different learning arenas with different requirements to the documentation and validation of competence. The third point comes through in the resistance to treat a person’s competence as objective measurable. There has been a general understanding that competence is created in relation with other people in a particular context and can not be assessed in simple quantitative ways.

Based on the experimentation and the above mentioned key characteristics, the Norwegian framework for the documentation and validation of non-formal learning has reached a certain consensus. It contains:

- Shared laws, rules and agreements to ensure the rights of the individual.
  - The shared laws include The Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.

- Shared procedure for various forms of documentary proof and validation. This includes decisions on: who is responsible; what is the documentation based on and is there a possibility for complaints; the process of documentation and validation; and where the process takes place.
- The shared procedure comprises the following steps:
  1. Information and guidance
  2. Identification and systemisation of competences
  3. (Self) Assessment
  4. Documentary proof
- Various assessment methods, tools and documentary proof, which are suitable in relation to the requirements of the educational sector, the workplace or the third sector.
  - Diverse assessment methods in relation to upper secondary level that give a national certificate: Certificate of Competence (kompetansebevis)
  - Diverse tools for documenting competence in the workplace that give a company verified documentary proof : Verified testimony (kompetanse attest)
  - Several CV / portfolio's where both educational certificates, work experience and learning from third sector activities is compiled.

## ***2.4 Legislation and regulation on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway***

Since 1976, legislation has specified that the state must ensure that adults have access to the option of documenting their knowledge and skills at all levels and in all fields in the public education system. Up to the Competence Reform there has been a small amount of compliance with the intentions of this act.

The White Paper no. 42 of 1999 states that “it must be possible to accept non-formal and in-formal learning as equivalent to formal learning, even if it is not identical to the requirements stipulated in curricula and public examinations”.

This statement has contributed to a wide discussion on what the term equivalent competence involves and has been a central focus during the Competence Project period. The result has been that the traditional way of thinking, that knowledge is acquired only within the school system, has been extended with the understanding that knowledge is acquired during all phases of life and in all arenas'. Several acts have put their mark on the discussions around the validation of non formal and in-formal learning. The following are of particular importance.

Education Act:

- Adults who need primary and lower secondary education have a statutory right to such education from August 2002. This education must be adapted to the individual's need and life situation – as regards both when and where the education is to be provided and the rate of progression. The municipal authorities are responsible for providing this education.
- Adults born prior to 1978 have statutory right to be accepted for upper secondary education on the basis of assessed non-formal and informal learning.
- The act concerning vocational training, §3.5, allows adults with more than five years of work experience who wish to obtain a trade and journeyman's certificate to obtain formal recognition of knowledge and skills acquired over time in the context of a job. The candidate does not have to go through a formal education and training process, yet has to take the same final examination as the apprentices, including both theoretical and practical elements. An apprentice is defined as a person who has entered into an apprenticeship contract with a view to taking a trade or journeyman's examination in a trade that requires apprenticeship in accordance with regulations.

- New Act on vocational assessment 6 December 2002: Before this Act was passed, the right to accreditation of prior learning was part of the right to “free upper secondary education”. The assessment has been primarily used for applications as well as for selecting and composing courses in upper secondary education. The main idea behind the new Act is also to allow accreditation of prior learning in instances where the individual aims to continue in the working place and not in education. Immigrants who have recently arrived in Norway and registered jobseekers who are not entitled to upper secondary education will be given the opportunity for an assessment of their non-formal and informal learning, including vocational testing.

#### University and College Act:

- Since 1 January 2001, individuals have been statutory entitled to seek admission to individual courses at universities or colleges on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning. To do this, applicants must be at least 25 years old and possess no general study skills. Students have also been given the right to exemption from certain elements of their studies on the basis of documented non-formal and informal learning. Applicants accepted for courses on the basis of assessed non-formal learning and who have completed the course will be allocated general study skills. This will give them the opportunity to seek admission to any course with no special admission requirements. To do this, they must have completed one course lasting at least one year, or two courses each lasting six months.

#### Working Environment Act

- Working environment act § 68. Employees who leave their positions after giving legitimate notice to do so have a legal right to receive a written reference from their employers. The written testimony shall contain information about the employees name, date of birth, the content of the job and the length of employment
- The right to employees for study leave has been introduced in 1 January 2001 and is laid down in the Working Environment Act. All employees who have worked for at least 3 years and at least 2 years with the same employer have the right to 3 years of full or part time study leave to participate in organised education and training leading to documented competence. The training has to be related to the professional situation. These rules only apply to the right of study leave and not to the right of salary during the study leave

#### Tax Act

- Education financed by an employer is generally exempt from tax, following amendments to the Tax Act in 1999. The State Educational Loan Fund provides financial assistance for most types of education and training. The rules have been changed to make them more applicable to adult needs.

### **3 Background of the Norwegian approach to formal, non-formal and informal learning**

The Norwegian approach has been built on the idea that the documentation methods must have value for users in the areas of: Participation in working life/ carrying on a profession or trade, the education system (admission and shortening of education) and in voluntary activities.

This report is designed accordingly and describes the Norwegian approach in relation to three main learning arenas:

- The educational sector with a wish to visualise competences in relation to the national curriculum;

- The labour market (organisations and sector organisations) with a wish to visualise competences in relation to organisational requirements, sector requirements and international standards;
- The Third sector with a wish to visualise competences in all its forms

### 3.1 Background in relation to the educational curriculum

#### 3.1.1 Higher education

The majority of Norwegian higher education institutions are owned by the state. They include four universities, six specialised institutions at university level, two academies of fine art and 26 regional (polytechnic) colleges. Around 95% of the student population in Norway attend state institutions.

**Figure 3 number of students at University level: Universities. Students. 1 October 1999 and 2000**

	1999	Percentage women	2000	Percentage women
Students, total	78 969	54.1	81 561	53.8
University of Oslo	32 071	58.5	31 821	58.5
Free Faculty of Theology	980	67.3	994	64.9
State Veterinary College	443	72.0	411	73.7
Oslo School of Architecture	298	48.3	318	51.3
Norwegian College of Physical Education and Sport	781	43.7	681	44.1
Norwegian College of Agriculture	2 196	53.2	2 190	56.6
State Academy of Music	485	49.9	483	52.0
University of Bergen	15 984	56.2	16 379	56.1
Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration	2 781	33.3	2 785	34.7
Norwegian University of Science and Technology	17 070	46.5	19 426	45.6
University of Tromsø	5 880	55.3	6 073	56.0

**Source:** Statistics Norway.

A few specialised institutions at university level are private. The private sector is otherwise made up of a number of fairly small institutions. The main academic fields of private higher education are business and management, ICT studies, theology, nursing and health care and teacher education.

Norwegian higher education is regulated by two laws:

- *The Universities and Colleges Act* regulates state-owned institutions and their right to award national degrees. This law also regulates the quality assurance of higher education.
- *The Private Colleges Act* regulates private institutions' right to award national degrees and their access to public funding.

Both laws have been recently amended (2002) in connection with the Government's 'Quality Reform of higher education', following the recommendations of the Mjøs Commission (2000). The amendments represent a first stage in a process with the aim of merging the two laws into one and thus create greater equality between state and private institutions. The Quality Reform process has also

changed the degree structure in accordance with the recommendations of the Bologna Declaration, increased institutional autonomy, introduced a system of formal accreditation for all higher education and redefined national demands in the field of quality assurance.

The Universities and Colleges Act also states that applicants over the age of 25 do not need to meet the requirement for general study skills and have the right to be assessed on the basis of their documented non-formal learning with a view to admitting them for individual courses and giving exemption from parts of the course. This is applicable to adults who do not satisfy admission requirements.

From spring 2002, Norway has introduced statutory automatic issue of diploma supplements (DS) to all students on graduation. The DS is already an integral part of the electronic student registration systems at Norwegian higher education institutions, FS (the Common Student Registration System) and MSTAS. The DS shall be provided to graduates free of charge.

The Diploma Supplement has been developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the supplement is to provide sufficient independent data to improve the international 'transparency' and fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended. It will be free from any value-judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition.

### **3.1.2 Upper secondary**

Upper secondary education embraces all courses leading to educational qualifications above the lower secondary level and below the level of higher education. Since autumn 1994, everyone between the ages of 16 and 19 has had a statutory right to three years' upper secondary education leading either to higher education or to vocational qualifications or partial qualifications. Applicants are entitled to a place in one of the three foundation courses they apply for. It has been made easier for those who have opted for vocational training to acquire the necessary additional qualifications for entrance to higher education. County authorities are obliged by law to provide a follow-up service for young people between 16 and 19 who are currently neither attending a course of education nor are employed. Physically disabled pupils are entitled to more than three years of upper secondary education.

Upper secondary education is organised in two main strands:

- Three years of general academic education as a preparation for university or college studies
- Four years of vocational education and training, leading to formal certification

The four year strand includes a two-year period as an apprentice in a private organisation or public institution that has been approved by the county council as a training organisation. The first two years of training are provided at school, whereas the final specialized part (up to two years) is given at a workplace in the form of on-the-job training. If not enough apprenticeships are available, the county authority must offer training at school in the form of a third year course (advanced course II). The final examination (trade or journeyman's examination) is the same regardless of whether training has taken place at school or at a workplace.

The 19 counties are responsible for the practical organisation and management of the upper secondary schools. The majority of schools are public and are designed to make equivalent educational courses available to everyone. Previously, a number of different types of upper secondary school existed, providing courses of varying duration but, since 1976, Norway has had a uniform upper secondary school, combining general theoretical education and vocational training and giving equal status to practical and theoretical education. General theoretical education and vocational training are offered side by side, often in the same school building. During the first year, students take one of 15

foundation courses. Specialized courses are offered in the second and third year (advanced courses I and II) and in apprenticeships.

**Figure 4 Schools and pupils**

Schools	1999/00		2000/01	
	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils
Total	4 048	995 022	4 026	1 002 099
Primary and lower secondary schools	3 271	580 261	3 260	590 471
Upper secondary schools	706	223 115	696	220 174
Universities and colleges	71	191 646	70	191 454

**Source:** Statistics Norway.

Non-Norwegian speakers who have a valid Norwegian residence permit have the same right as Norwegians to upper secondary education and training. The state finances extra language training if necessary. Recognition of foreign schooling for entrance to the Norwegian upper secondary school, is given at the County Authority of the county where the person lives. If a person has completed vocational training at the upper secondary school level, the County Governor's Office in the county where the person lives can be contacted and the person can apply for a trade certificate.

**Figure 5 Trends in foreign or foreign born share of the population in Norway and OECD<sup>1</sup>, 1998**

	Thousands		Percent	
	1988	1998	1988	1998
Norway	136	165	3.2	3.7
OECD	43,677	56,872	5.7	7.0

1. Selected countries; dates vary for some countries.

Source: OECD (2000), "Trends in Migration and Economic Consequences", in *OECD Economic Outlook*, n°68, pp. 185-203, Paris.

### 3.1.3 Continuing vocational training

Beside the above mentioned education, many adults participate in training activities that fall outside the formal education and training system, such as internal training courses within their organisation and courses organised by study associations. Furthermore informal training takes place in everyday work in the workplace. This type of training is highly valued by both the national authorities and the major social partners (Farstad, 1999). Several actors are involved in supplying the training:

- Technical colleges- This are public schools, owned by the county council and regulated by the act on upper secondary education. They provide a two-year module based further education for people with a trade and journeyman's certificate and a minimum of two years relevant practical experience. Successful completion gives the status of technician
- Resource centres – provide a link between public training organisations and the local or regional labour market. They promote and provide training to private and public institutions on a commercial basis. They are mostly organised as separate departments in upper secondary schools, while only some are limited companies or foundations.

- Commissioned courses at the universities and colleges
- In-company training
- Public consultancy services
- Distance education institutions: Distance education is widespread in Norway. Traditionally this has consisted of correspondence courses, but a number of multimedia programmes are now offered. Each year, over 40 000 students complete courses held by 14 authorised distance education institutions. In the coming years, distance education will play an important part in providing alternative and more flexible facilities to meet the need for continuing education and training.
- The Norwegian Industrial and Regional Development Fund - SND
- Ministries
- Private suppliers of continuing education
- Sectoral, employers and trade organisations
- Labour market measures: Training for the labour market consists of a cooperation between the authorities responsible for the labour market and the education authorities. Courses give vocational qualifications and are provided by a number of different agencies including upper secondary schools, autonomous resource centres attached to the schools, study associations or private companies. In 1999, 22 400 persons took part in such training courses for the labour market. Such courses are financed in full by the State.
- In-service training

### **3.2 Background in relation to the requirements of organisation/ sector/ International standards**

Like most European countries competence management has existed among Norwegian organisations for a long time. The Competence reform of 1997 has however placed emphasise on the necessity for a lifelong learning strategy. The enthusiasm in Norway for lifelong learning (OECD 2001) is not only based on cultural and social arguments, but on economic arguments as well. There is a belief – widely shared by the Government as well as by the social partners -- that the high level of educational attainment of the Norwegian population is not enough to satisfy the shifts in the demand for labour in the coming years. It is argued that lifelong learning is a crucial strategy for upgrading the skills and qualifications requirements of poorly qualified adults and updating those of more highly qualified individuals to both accommodate and minimise the adverse social consequences of structural economic change. The following overview on the economic and labour market developments is based on the discussions in the OECD (2001) report Lifelong learning in Norway.

#### **3.2.1 A diversified economy**

Norway has a strong, balanced, technologically advanced and productive economy (OECD 2001). In 1999, gross domestic product (GDP) reached NOK 1 189 348 million. GDP growth in Norway accelerated in the early 1990s and, during the period from 1993-1997, average 4.2 percent, compared to an average for other OECD countries of 2.9 percent. In the late 1990s, GDP growth dropped from 6.4 percent in 1997 to -0.9 percent in 1999 (OECD 2000, *OECD Economic Outlook No. 68*, December, p. 218) . The sharp slowdown is attributable to a number of inter-related factors including a sharp drop in investment, a rise in interest rates, and rising labour costs. Norway's comparatively low levels of investment in research and development may have been a contributing factor. The economy recovered in 2000, with GDP growth rising to 2.2 percent thanks in large part to rises in oil prices and stronger growth in oil activities. In the future growth is expected to decline slightly, though there are two areas of uncertainty. One is the worry that wage increases, after a period of restraint through the late 1990s, will outpace productivity growth, thus hindering Norwegian competitiveness in international markets. The other concerns the price of oil and the volume of output. The implications of these issues for lifelong learning are discussed further below.

Norway has one of the highest standards of living of any country in the OECD area. In 1999, per capita GDP in Norway was US\$ 27 600 (using current purchasing power parities). This was well above the average per capita income for all OECD countries of US\$ 22 300, and was exceeded by only Luxembourg and the United States. But the long-term sustainability of such performance is open to question for reasons that are directly relevant to lifelong learning, namely declines in productivity. In the 1960s and 1970s, annual productivity growth in Norway ranged between 3.5 and 4.7 percent. The average over the two decades since then has been closer to 2 percent – on a par with productivity growth in the U.S. but lagging behind the rates in many European countries. It dropped from 3.5 percent in 1990 to 1.3 percent in 1998. Furthermore, against this backdrop of declining productivity, labour costs in Norway have been rising at more than double the rate of the OECD as a whole. (OECD 2000 *Economic Outlook No. 68*, Paris: December. p. 223). Indeed concern about this dreary productivity growth has been one of the motivating factors behind the concerted efforts of the social partners to address questions of human capital investment, and behind the support for the government's effort to strengthen strategies for lifelong learning.

### **3.2.2 Structural features of the Norwegian economy**

In the OECD (2001) report the overall structure of the Norwegian economy is described as similar in many respects to the other advanced economies. The share of total employment in agriculture and fishing is under 5 percent, under 25 percent in industry, and more than 70 percent in services. The components of services that have grown most are business services, education, health, and social services. During the period 1993 -1999, employment grew by 240 000, with 90 percent of this growth occurring in the private sector. Nonetheless, industry, including fish products, paper and wood products, and machinery, is a key element of the Norwegian economy. Although it is generally accepted that the labour market currently is more unpredictable in terms of skills and qualifications requirements, there has been considerable reallocation of labour in the past. A study of employment in Norwegian manufacturing and service sectors found that during the period from 1976-1992, annual job creation and job loss was equivalent to 7-9 percent of total employment.

Norway is however different from most other countries in that it has a large petroleum resource, as well as the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Norway possesses only 1.1 percent of total gas and oil reserves in the world, yet, they are seventh largest producer in the world, and the second largest net exporter, behind Saudi Arabia. In 1999 it is estimated that oil reserves will last for 18 years, and gas reserves for 85 years. The discovery and subsequent exploitation of the North Sea oil and gas resources has had a profound impact on the Norwegian economy and society. (OECD 1999, *Economic Surveys: Norway*, Paris, pp. 132-136). In 1999 crude oil and natural gas accounted for 35 percent (and in 2000 46 percent) of Norway's exports. The North Sea oil industry also provided a basis for the development of related industrial and service exports related to oil platforms and ships, exploration and drilling equipment and know-how and related technical services. It has had important positive effects by further ensuring energy self-sufficiency (Norway already enjoyed considerable independence thanks to abundant hydro-electric capacity; in 1998 fully 45 percent of Norway's energy supply was hydro). The downside has been that, with a large share of its exports exposed to the unreliability of the world petroleum market, Norway's economy is vulnerable to an extra source of turbulence. Another consequence of North Sea oil, one that is more pertinent to the implementation of lifelong learning in Norway, is revenues it has generated for the state (OECD 2001). Such revenues are raised through a tax and surtax on profits of oil producing companies, royalties, leases, and licenses. In view of the fluctuating nature of petroleum revenues, and the fact that when reserves are exhausted, future generations will be deprived of a source of revenue, the state established a Petroleum Fund in 1991. It is a trust fund financed out of oil revenues, and intended to benefit future generations by serving as a source of revenue to be transferred to central Government budget at the discretion of the Parliament

The OECD (2001) report also emphasises the role that small and medium sized enterprises play in the Norwegian economy in relation to the strategic and tactical dimensions of lifelong learning. The small overall population and its relatively wide dispersion (thanks in part to regional development policies, less than 20 percent of the population is found in the three largest cities), economies of scale are hard

to achieve. Although some large companies have multiple small sites, most enterprises are small. Table 2.3 presents data for the mid-1990s on the distribution of enterprises, employment, and turnover by size of firms; data are presented for Norway and, for comparison, two other Nordic countries and three other relatively small countries.

**Figure 6 The Place of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Norway and Selected OECD Countries**

Manufacturing Sector						
		Norway	Austria	Belgium <sup>2</sup>	Finland	Sweden <sup>2</sup>
Year		1995	1995	1997	1996	1996
<b>Distribution of enterprises by size</b>						
1-9 employees		80.8	67.4	67.7	84.5	71.3
10-99 employees	%	16.5	28.1	28.3	13.1	24.8
100 employees and over		2.7	4.5	4.0	2.4	3.9
<b>Distribution of employment by enterprise size<sup>1</sup></b>						
1-9 employees		12.2	9.7	8.1	8.8	8.5
10-99 employees	%	30.1	28.8	29.8	22.4	24.5
100 employees and over		57.7	61.5	62.1	68.8	67.0
<b>Distribution of economic turnover (production) by enterprise size</b>						
1-9 employees		6.7	4.9	5.3	4.3	5.2
10-99 employees	%	25.4	21.0	23.3	15.2	19.2
100 employees and over		67.7	74.0	71.4	80.4	75.7
1. Excluding sole proprietors in Sweden.						
2. Excluding size class "0 salaried employees" for enterprises and production.						

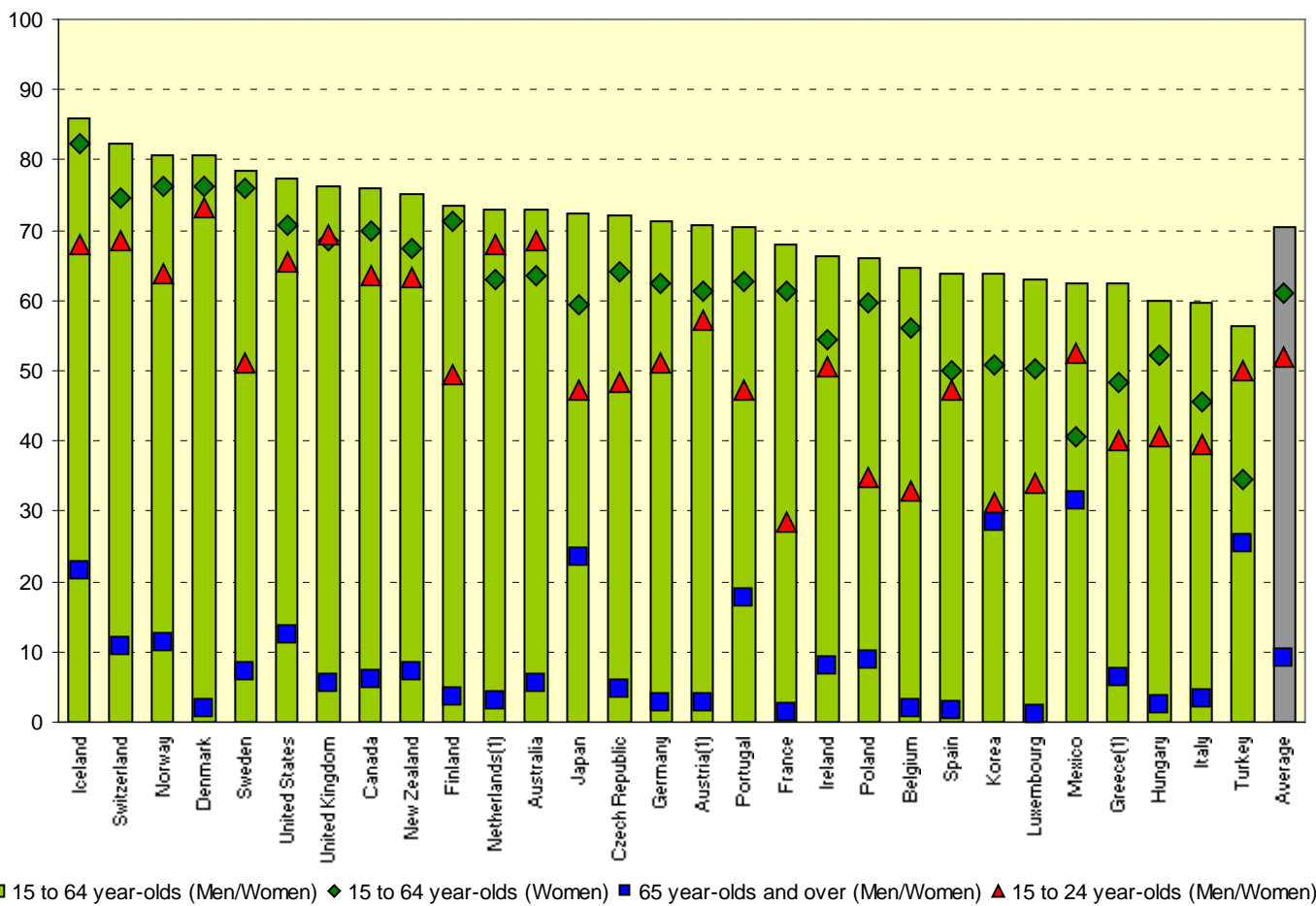
Source: OECD Database on Statistics relating to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

In 1995, more than four out of five firms in Norway employed fewer than 10 employees. These small-sized firms employed 12.2 percent of all workers in Norway, and generated 6.7 percent of the economic turnover. Norwegian authorities believe that SMEs “have a greater problem in maintaining the level of competence among leaders and staff members.” (OECD, 2001) This is because SMEs in Norway, as in other countries (see e.g. Eurostat 1997, *Continuing Vocational Training Survey in Enterprises: Results*, Luxembourg: Office des publications officielles des Communautés européennes.), train far less than other employers. Lifelong learning is conceived as a strategy to overcome the unequal opportunities for work-related training that are found in firms of different sizes.

### 3.2.3 Labour Market Conditions and Developments

Actual and anticipated labour market developments have had enormous influence in shaping current thinking in Norway about lifelong learning (OECD, 2001). With unemployment in Norway averaging 3.3 percent in 2000 (half the average for the OECD, and 1/3 the average for the European Union) and rising to 4 in 2003, social partners and public authorities have been preoccupied for a number of years with the risk of labour and skills shortages and mismatches. Lifelong learning is supported as a remedy for enhancing the capacity of the current labour force to adapt to change, and for expanding labour supply. Thus in comparison to other countries, Norway’s labour supply is running at close to full utilisation. Figure 2.4 shows that in 1999 the labour force participation rate of persons 16-64 years old was 80.6 percent, fourth highest of any OECD country. By 2000 overall participation rose to 81.5, the highest level ever attained in Norway and second highest in the OECD. It is expected to rise slightly in 2001. (OECD 2000, *Economic Outlook No. 68*, Paris.).

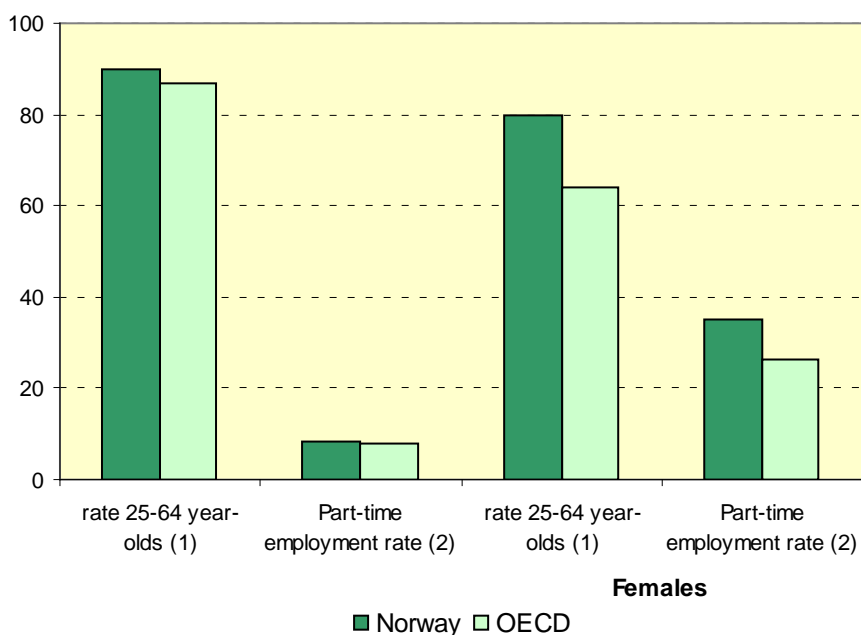
**Figure 7 Labour force participation rates, total working age population and selected sub-groups, OECD countries, 1999**



1. Data for 1998. Source: OECD Labour Force Statistics Database 2000.

See Figure 7 for a comparison of the labour participation in Norway to the average of OECD

**Figure 8 Labour force participation in Norway and the OECD, 1999 (figures in percent)**



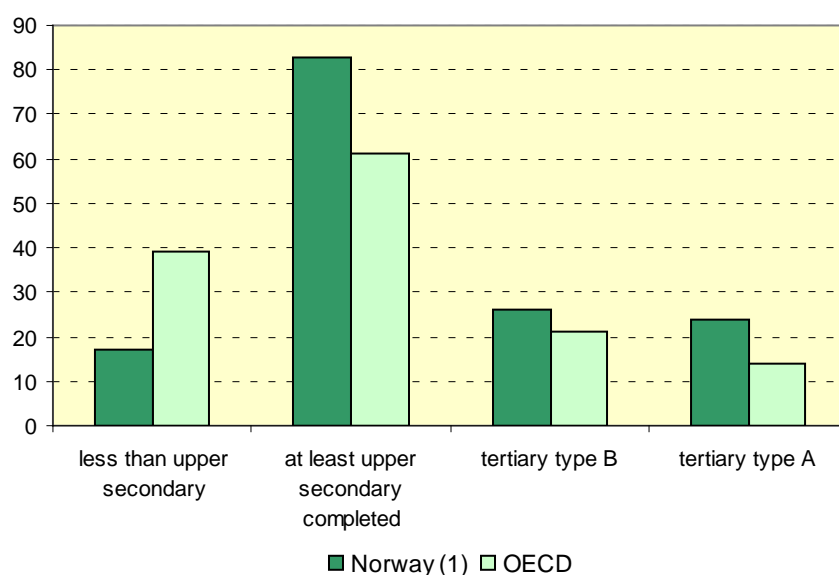
Sources: OECD (2000), *Education at a Glance*, Paris; OECD (2000), *Employment Outlook*, Table E, p. 218, Paris.

High rates of participation extend to older workers as well. With an official retirement age of 67 years Norway shares with three other countries the highest retirement age in the OECD area (OECD 1997, *Implementing the OECD Jobs Strategy: Member countries' experience*, Paris.). Partly because of the later retirement age, participation rates of workers 65 years of age and older also are relatively high. However, overall activity rates for older persons are expected to decline. Since the early 1990s, the social partners have been entering into early retirement agreements that allow persons to retire as early as 62 years of age. These agreements, which now cover 60 percent of all employees, have reduced activity rates among older workers. Among Norway's younger population, labour force participation rates are high relative to past patterns, and relative to participation rates in other countries.

Overall, the OECD report concludes with that remedies to possible labour shortages depend on (i) higher participation rates on the part of younger persons, prime-age persons, and older persons; (ii) more full-time employment by women, preferably helped by less occupational segregation by gender; and (iii) higher levels of output per worker. Lifelong learning potentially can play a role in all these areas.

Another remarkable issue is that the proportion of adults in Norway with less than an upper secondary education is less than half the average for all OECD countries. The proportion with tertiary qualifications is nearly one-and-one-half times higher in Norway. Figure 8 shows that the qualifications levels of the Norwegian population are substantially higher than the average for all OECD countries.

**Figure 9 Educational attainment of the adult population 25-64 year-olds in Norway and the OECD, 1998 (figures in percent)**



1. Data for 1997.

Source: OECD (2000), *Education at a Glance*, Paris.

More detailed data shows that Norway has some of the highest levels, based on the (low) proportion of persons with less than an upper secondary education, and the (large) proportion with some form of tertiary qualification (OECD (2001) *Education Policy Analysis*, Paris). Moreover, figures 9 and 10 suggest that relatively high levels of educational achievement have been a longstanding feature in Norway; younger persons are only slightly more likely than older persons to have completed at least upper secondary education or some form of tertiary education.

**Figure 10 Progress towards achieving a minimum educational attainment level and increasing university qualifications, 1998**

	At least upper secondary education			
	25-64 year-olds	25-29 year-olds	50-54 year-olds	Ratio 25-29/50-54
<b>Norway<sup>1</sup></b>	83	92	76	1.21
<b>OECD average</b>	61	72	52	1.56

1. Data for 1997.

Source: OECD (2001), *Education Policy Analysis*, Paris.

**Figure 11 Progress towards achieving tertiary qualifications, 1998**

	At least tertiary education			
	25-64 year-olds	30-34 year-olds	50-54 year-olds	Ratio 30-34/50-54
<b>Norway<sup>1</sup></b>	26	29	23	1.23
<b>OECD average</b>	21	24	18	1.44

1. Data for 1997.

Source: OECD (2001), *Education Policy Analysis*, Paris.

The OECD (2001) report concludes with that the questions in Norway about the extent and nature of skills mismatches, trends in qualifications requirements, and the appropriate economic role of lifelong learning all merit further investigation. It appears that the eventual economic goals of lifelong learning in Norway do not need to be confined to continuous *upgrading* of qualifications, but should be extended to *updating* of existing qualifications. The fact that the social partners have invested so much in competence development indicates that they attach importance to broader objectives. There is growing recognition that a competent workforce, whether such competence is received through an employer or through other educational providers, is critical to creating a knowledge society and ensuring competitiveness in a global economy.

In Norway the working life is increasingly seen as a key arena for learning. Employers acknowledge the value of training their employees and stimulating them to enhance their competence. Employees and organisations that represent them acknowledge the importance of learning for advancement, career mobility, and achieving a fulfilling life in and out of the workplace. Yet, as mentioned in the OECD report (2001) employers believe that the present educational system does not yet provide appropriately qualified workers in a timely, flexible, and efficient manner. Adult education in the upper secondary school system is perceived as conservative and school centred. Part of the challenge is building more effective bridges between the labour system and the formal educational system.

In looking at the labour market, employers are also worried that much needed employees will withdraw from the labour market to engage in training. Ideally, they would like to see work and study combined. With ICT and other distance education teaching and learning methods, this possibility is certainly becoming more realistic. Employers are actively addressing these concerns through activities like e-learning courses and promoting e-learning with universities and firms as partners.

In order to create smooth and effective transitions between the systems of education and working life, a system or framework of qualifications, a means of documenting competence gained outside formal education, and a focus on the outcomes of learning has been created as a part of the Competence reform activities. The competence / qualifications framework will facilitate the integration of competencies acquired both through formal education and through formal and informal learning at the workplace and in civic life. The challenge however has been two-fold: first, to develop means for

formally documenting competencies obtained outside of formal education and second, to ensure that the resulting documentation has legitimacy both in the workplace and in the educational system. Such documentation ideally will be portable across both sectors. Hence the need is for documentation processes which rely on transparent and consistent assessment criteria.

Several documentation tools, both paper based and web based IKT solutions, to describe and manage competences have been developed and tried out over the last years. Many organisations have been involved in new experiments and/or further development of already existing skill management systems.

### **3.3 Background in relation to the third sector**

The third sector is a generic term for the voluntary work done in society. This applies to both participation in voluntary work and in various types of courses, and the learning which takes place by taking part in society and family life. A lot of people take part in voluntary work in the sector. A number of these people have not under-gone upper secondary education. The third sector is working hard to recruit people to work in organisational life.

The third sector is complex. Distance learning institutions are the intermediaries and distributors of formal education via the Internet, e-mail, correspondence courses or in other ways. Study associations for adult education offer their participants everything from formal education to courses related to hobbies and leisure. Folk high schools are part of the formal education system, but they implement their education without curricula set centrally or educational targets. The voluntary organisations carry out various types of voluntary work where individuals help out by providing labour. The documentation of non-formal learning in the third sector has to be adapted to suit the various needs of the many parties in the sector.

The traditions within these organisations have been to document the *professional knowledge* which participants have developed. The development of society has also challenged them to be able to document the *tacit knowledge* which is developed outside of the education system and the workplace. This is said to take place in an environment in which many people are afraid of losing their individuality and also do not want to become part of a bureaucratic red tape.

## **4 Where recognition/accreditation of competence is happening**

### **4.1 Educational sector**

#### **4.1.1 Higher Education**

Most applications to undergraduate studies at public institutions of higher education in Norway are processed by a centralised application processing centre called Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS - Samordna opptak in Norwegian). UCAS is professionally administered by a board appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, and organised as a unit at the University of Oslo. UCAS coordinates the admission to undergraduate level studies at all universities, university colleges, state colleges, and some private colleges in Norway, annually around 80.000 applicants to around 45 institutions or 600 different courses. Individual Universities or Colleges have the power to evaluate what qualifications they consider to be necessary to gain entrance. The Universities and Colleges Admission Service also provides advice and information on higher education to foreign applicants with documented qualifications.

The Norwegian agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT considers applications for general approval of foreign qualifications and Norwegian qualifications that do not fall under the Act relating to universities and colleges or the Act relating to private colleges. In connection with general approval of foreign qualifications, NOKUT shall ensure that the qualifications for which approval is applied are approved at the higher education level in the country concerned. In exceptional cases, NOKUT may grant exemptions from this. General approval may be granted for a specific period.

NOKUT has established a “closed” national database for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in Norway (NAG). NAG is a national database where all institutions for higher education register applications for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and the decisions that are made in each case. The database can currently only be accessed by authorized users at the institutions. There are plans to release a publicly available version of the database in 2004. The “closed” version is only available to authorized users/officials at educational institutions. Since the information in such a database will be of interest to the general public, employers, career counsellors and others, a publicly available version of the database will be established from which all personal data will be removed in order to protect personal privacy.

The purpose of NAG is to increase the efficiency of the work on recognition of foreign qualifications and provide quality assurance. The database will help to promote more open procedures and more uniform criteria in recognition work. It will also provide valuable input to help Statistics Norway in providing better data concerning the increased supply of competence to Norway.

#### **4.1.2 Upper secondary level**

Competence assessment in relation to upper secondary level happens in the county councils. The 19 different counties have organized their work with recognition and assessment of prior learning in different ways. The majority of the county councils have a skills centre where documentation, guidance and assessment take place. The actual assessment is done either through a dialogue, a practice based assessment in a working place (in a shop, at a hospital) or through a test in a school building. Regional authorities are responsible for issuing public documentation and providing ranges of education which are adapted to suit individuals. The regional authorities are using specialists in the relevant fields for the assessment of non-formal learning. The assessment takes place at schools, at “centres” or in companies.

#### **4.1.3 Primary and lower secondary schools**

Adults who need primary and lower secondary education have a statutory right to such education from August 2002. This education must be adapted to the individuals need and life situation – as regards both when and where the education is to be provided and the rate of progression. The municipal authorities are responsible for providing this education, and are also responsible for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning compared to the national curricula.

### **4.2 Organisations / Sectors/ International standards**

Recognition takes place in organisations and sector organisations in different ways. In relation to sector certificates and other national QA certificates, competence is generally recognised in the workplace by the official accredited independent third party organisation.

In relation to documentation of non-formal and informal learning in a “competence testimonial”, it occurs locally in the workplace by the individual employee through self-assessment. The document is signed and verified by the employer.

### **4.3 Third sector**

Voluntary work is documented by each individual through self-assessment. Adult education associations like folk high schools and distance learning institutes supply the learner with a course participation document or a standardised proof of skills.

## **5 Purpose of recognising/ accrediting competence**

### **5.1 Educational curriculum**

#### **5.1.1 Higher education**

The purpose of recognising competence is to match the learning to formal academic awards and facilitate the process to gain entrance as well as to shorten the study time. Students have the right to exemption from certain elements of their studies on the basis of documented non-formal and informal learning.

#### **5.1.2 Upper secondary level**

The purpose is to match the learning to formal qualification and shorten the study period, as well as a more streamlined and tailor-made study programme for each individual. Another purpose is to provide the individual with an accredited certificate (in Norwegian described as *Kompetansebevis* – competence certificate) to gain promotion or career improvement, find a new job or increase mobility in the working life.

Adults who want upper secondary education will benefit greatly from the assessment of non-formal learning. They will be able to see that their knowledge and skills arenas other than the education system are validated. This will provide them with the motivation to start and carry on with upper secondary education. The assessment of non-formal learning will be economical in terms of both finance and time as adults will require education involving knowledge and skills they did not acquire previously.

According to the candidates themselves, the most important consequences are that the validation process has made them believe that they can get the education they want, and that this has made it possible for them to take part in upper secondary/higher education.

Another purpose is that assessing non-formal learning at the very start of education means shorter time spent on courses. This means that the authorities will be able to reduce the amount of money they spend on the actual education. Shorter, prepared courses will also benefit working life. Companies will have access to qualified labour more quickly, and the workforce will be able to implement the training using the work-place as a learning arena.

### **5.2 Purpose in relation to organisation/ sector/ international standard requirements**

Within the working life there are multiple purposes for recognising competences. The most common purposes are (Skule and Andersen 2000; McHenry 2002):

For the organisation:

- Gain an overview of the skills of the employees
- Reorganisation, job-rotation and down-sizing
- More effective training system
- To fulfil QA / international standard requirements
- Option for search and find (telephone, projects, network)

- Measurement of intellectual capital
- Strategic competence management

For the individual:

- New employment in the external market
- New internal career advancement / project participation
- Fulfil employment requirement
- Increase of self awareness of capabilities, empowerment
- Facilitate entry into education and shorter training period
- Pro-active involvement in own learning

### **5.3 Purpose in third sector**

The purpose of the documentation of non-formal learning is to reinforce the self-confidence and inspire people to make it easier to gain access to formal educational courses as documented skills from non-formal courses or study activities can be useful in relation to the education system.

It is also believed that documentation of non-formal learning in the third sector will lead to self-awareness that is useful and important for career development in their work, as well as for taking on additional duties in voluntary organisational life. In the long term, it is believed that this may lead to the revitalisation of voluntary work.

In folk high schools, the documentation of comprehensive skills will be useful when applying for a job.

In Distance education the main purpose is for improving career opportunities in participants' own organisations and applications to other organisations.

## **6 What is being recognised / accredited?**

### **6.1 Educational curriculum**

#### **6.1.1 Higher education**

The committee at each university or college only acknowledges a written application form. The qualifications of applicants have to be assessed in relation to the subjects or the programs they wish to study. Individual institutions have the power to assess what qualifications they consider to be necessary and decide on the appropriate course of action for assessments. In some cases the applicant has to describe based on their own portfolio (CV) the amount of practice, motivation and capability. In other cases the applicant has to pass a test designed by professionals in the actual subject matter.

#### **6.1.2 Upper secondary level**

The skill centre at the County council helps the applicant to discover what kind of competences can be compared to the national curriculum and may be certified. The skill centre also aims to visualise and document the competences that can not be compared to the curriculum.

### **6.2 Organisation/ sector/ international standard requirement**

The majority of organisation documentation schemes try to describe the process and the outcome of learning through work experience, categorised as "domain specific work activities". In most instances the organisation or sector organisation has created a predefined list of relevant competence

domains, like Marketing, management, production. The individual determines however which domains are applicable and documents the actual work experiences (+ timeframe) within the domain.

There also exist a documentation scheme's that has large similarity to the EuroCV and include learning form other arena's as well.

The result is a documentation that has started to circulate under various names like: competence testimonial; competence passport; skill card; competence profile.

Documentation schemes	Technical /management domains	Social comp. domain	Level of expertise 1= beginner 4= Expert	What is documented	Ind. documentat ion	Org. gap analysis HR-system	Docu-mentary proof	Registrat ion of Time
TBL- part I documentation	X			Predefined domains + personal description of work experiences	X		Verified testimony	yes
TBL part II CV	X	X			X			
TBL/ Jærtek	X	X	X			Part III		
Nordland CV	X	X		Predefined domains + personal description of work experiences (+ level of proficiency)	X		Verified testimony	Yes
Nordland Attest	X	X	X		X			
Nordland Org.	X		X			Admin. base		
Elbus part I CV	X			Predefined domains- curriculum			Verified testimony	yes
Elbus part II Attest Self-assessment	X		X					
Elbus part III Org. counselling								

### 6.3 What is recognised in the Third sector

Non-formal learning in the third sector includes the documentation of courses and study activities, as well as the description of individual's comprehensive skills. The process of the activity is described as well as the duration of the "learning" activity.

## **7 In what disciplines**

### **7.1 Educational curriculum**

#### **7.1.1 Higher education**

In principle all adults, above the age of 25 can have their non-formal and in-formal learning assessed in all disciplines that the individual university/college is offering. The majority of applicants, however have asked for admission to college study programmes in the fields of health and teaching.

#### **7.1.2 Upper secondary level**

In upper secondary education, the national curriculum is used as a reference point in the assessment. From 1994 on, new modular curricula including the specification of standards for formal certification, have been prepared in all subjects at all levels. The models integrate theoretical and practical education. The assessment of non-formal learning is only in relation to the modularised theoretical part. The majority of the assessments comprise skills within the health care.

### **7.2 Organisation/Sector/ International standard requirement**

The domains that are described vary from organisation to organisation or branch to branch. A general trend is though to focus on so-called technical and management skills: Marketing; Purchase; Production; Research; Product development. Social skills are often not documented, even though there is an interest to learn more about this topic. The argument for not documenting social skills is the fear for negative repercussions for the individual. Several research projects have and will put more focus on this area.

As far as the development of documentation methods in the workplace are concerned, reference points are prepared internally within companies to a varying extent. In two of the projects emphasis is placed on linking documentation relating to practical work experience with external reference points such as national curricula.

### **7.3 Third sector**

In some cases the organisations in the civil society use framework plans. For visualising non-formal and informal learning in the third sector the following key words are often in use: independence and self-discipline, own efforts and cooperation, reflection and ability to put ideas into words, ICT skills, skills in environmental protection, language skills, social skills, managerial skills, organisation skills, skills in problem solving and stress management.

## **8 What methods and tools are used**

### **8.1 Educational curriculum**

### 8.1.1 Higher education

Most applications to undergraduate studies at public institutions of higher education in Norway are based on formal documentation and the applications are processed by a centralised application processing centre called Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS). Applicants send only one application form to UCAS. The forms are registered digitally via an optical registration system. UCAS then appoints institutions to evaluate each applicant. In a letter, applicants are asked to forward all relevant documents to these institutions. If the applicant has applied for courses at different institutions, with similar admission requirements, one institution will do the evaluation on behalf of the others. The institutions evaluate all applicants and send the results to UCAS, via the Internet. UCAS then run the incoming data on their computers, and send letters to the applicants, offering a maximum of *one* study entry. This will normally be the highest ranked study on the application form, where entry requirements are met by the applicant. The applicant is obliged to return the letter to UCAS, indicating whether or not he/she accepts the offer. If based on these answers, an institution decides that the number of entry offers for a course has not filled the number of places available, students may be recruited from waiting lists. The Universities and Colleges Admission Service also provides advice and information on higher education for the college and university sector.

Applicants with foreign secondary education, holding a permanent or renewable residence permit, must apply for admission on the regular Norwegian application form. Applicants must meet the minimum requirements for entrance to higher education in Norway (generell studiekompetanse). Applicants must also fulfil the language requirements in Norwegian and English. For admission to some study programmes you need specific subjects or work experience in addition to the general requirements.

Applicants from European countries are eligible for admission upon completion of the secondary school leaving certificate that provides the basis for admission to university studies in the home country. Entrance requirements for applicants from non-European countries may include one or two years of university studies in addition to secondary school. Applicants who do not fulfil the entrance requirements can take supplementary examinations in Norwegian upper secondary school. Applicants must document all their relevant education with officially certified copies of certificates, diplomas, transcripts etc. in the original language and authorised translations if the original documents are not in English or a Scandinavian language. Both upper secondary and higher education must be documented.

From autumn 2001, universities and colleges are under the obligation to assess adult applicants over the age of 25 with a view to admitting them for individual courses of study on the basis of their documented non-formal and informal learning. The qualifications of applicants have to be assessed in relation to the subjects or the programmes they wish to study. Individual institutions have the power to assess what qualifications they consider to be necessary and to decide on the appropriate course of action for carrying out this assessment.

If the applicant seeks admission to individual courses on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning, their application form will be sent to the current university or college. It is the committee at each university/college who decides if the applicant papers on non-formal and informal learning fulfil the demands for course entrance requirements. Applicants seeking admission on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning must be ranked in relation to applicants with general admission requirements on the basis of a rough appraisal. This means that they are to compete on equal terms with other applicants and are not just be taken on to fill any empty slots.

Applicants will be assessed on the basis of the skills they will need to complete the courses for which they are seeking admission. The assessment emphasises both the specialist content of the course and the teaching arrangements offered to students. Non-formal learning will be assessed either through self-declarations and portfolios, or by means of tests. Information on criteria and assessment methods

can be acquired from individual universities or colleges. Assessments for admission will vary from institution to institution because discretion will be exercised to a greater extent than in the case of regular admissions. Also the complaint procedure will be specific to each individual. Adults who are seeking admission on the basis of non-formal learning will not have their study points calculated. The ranking of students in relation to applicants who have had study points calculated will be discretionary.

The method for recognition of qualification of foreign applicants may either be addressed to the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) or to universities and university colleges:

- \* NOKUT assesses applications and makes decisions concerning general recognition
- \* The higher education institutions make decisions concerning specific recognition

NOKUT is empowered to grant general recognition of equivalence. On the basis of certificates and transcripts of marks, general recognition is stated in terms of ECTS credits and equivalence to a Norwegian degree, if appropriate. The general recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in Norway means that they are considered wholly or partially equivalent to Norwegian higher education qualifications. An assessment is also made of the extent of their equivalence in terms of years of study and ECTS credits compared with Norwegian qualifications. General recognition may also result in recognition of foreign higher education qualifications as equivalent to a Norwegian Bachelor's or Master's degree. General recognition requires that the foreign qualifications were awarded by a higher education institution recognized and accredited in the country where the course was taken. The qualifications must be at a higher level than is required for admission to universities and university colleges in Norway. You can read more about general entrance requirements for higher education in Norway under "Minimum requirements for recognition" here.

Specific recognition is granted by individual universities and university colleges. They recognize foreign qualifications in relation to specific subjects offered and degrees awarded at the institution. They decide whether a foreign qualification matches the specific breadth and depth requirements of the degree they award themselves. Specific recognition of foreign higher education qualifications may be necessary for admission to further studies at a Norwegian education institution. Universities and university colleges may consider whether the foreign qualifications satisfy the necessary academic requirements to be incorporated in the Norwegian degree and thereby reduce the length of the course.

Since, in certain professions, a subject-specific degree with the associated title is required, specific recognition may be necessary. All specific recognition requires that the foreign qualifications are well documented in the form of course descriptions, reading lists and any written theses.

Application for general approval shall enclose certified documents from the educational institution concerned or attested copies of such documents. NOKUT may issue further guidelines concerning requirements regarding documentation.

Recognition of a degree or other qualification does not automatically entail the right to practise a profession that is regulated by law. In such cases, authorization is required. Professional recognition does not necessarily entail academic credit. There are two forms of professional recognition:

1. De jure recognition is recognition of a completed course of education or training with a view to the practise of a profession where, pursuant to Norwegian law, official recognition or authorization or a specific Norwegian qualification is required in order to practise the profession and to use the title associated with it. This applies, for example, to professions within the health service and the educational system.
2. De facto recognition involves comparison of a completed foreign course of education or training with a Norwegian qualification in order to facilitate access to the Norwegian labour market within the non-regulated professions or, for example, with a view to placement on a salary scale

The process of recognition of foreign qualifications will result in an official recognition document. The recognition document shall contain the following:

- Personal data: Name and date of birth
- Documented foreign higher education qualifications: Here is given the year of completion of education or of a period of interrupted education, the name of the course and the name of the educational institution in the original language as well as the country where the course was taken. If the country where the course was taken has a different alphabet than ours or if considered necessary for some other reason, the course can be described in English or Norwegian. The nominal length of studies for the course in the country where the course was taken shall also be stated here.
- Decision: Here is stated the number of years of study and ECTS credits the course is equivalent to compared with a Norwegian course and, if appropriate, whether it is equivalent to a Norwegian degree.
- Grounds for the decision: Here is stated the statutory authority and the criteria on which the decision was based. Read about minimum requirements for recognition
- Additional information: If we have information concerning the course that we consider is of interest to any employers, competent authority or the like, this will be given here. This may concern academic content or what the course qualifies for in the country where it was taken.

The recognition document can be used when applying for a job. It will supply the employer with information concerning the scope and level of the foreign course in relation to Norwegian courses. However the document can also be used when applying for a study place and when applying for transfer of credit in a course. According to Circular No. F-01-03 to the Act relating to universities and university colleges, education institutions shall take any general recognition into consideration when considering applications for equivalence with a subject-specific degree. However, the recognition of a foreign qualification as equivalent to a specific number of ECTS credits does not automatically entail exemption from the same number of ECTS credits in a study programme or subject-specific degree.

The general recognition means that all or part of a foreign course of higher education is regarded as equivalent to a Norwegian course of higher education. It also includes an assessment of the extent to which it is equivalent, specified in years of study and ECTS credits compared with a Norwegian qualification. General recognition may also involve recognition of foreign higher education as equivalent to a Norwegian Bachelor's or Master's degree.

In relation to specific recognition, state institutions under the Act relating to universities and university colleges and institutions accredited pursuant to the Private Higher Education Institutions Act may recognize foreign qualifications as academically equivalent to a degree, part of a degree or a qualification awarded by the institution itself. The institution will then issue a recognition document. An applicant may hold recognition documents both from NOKUT and from an institution.

If a foreign qualification is recognized as equivalent to Norwegian subject-specific degree such recognition will also give the right to use the title attached to the degree.

### **8.1.2 Upper secondary level**

Regional authorities decide how work on the validation of non-formal learning is to be organised. Most regional authorities organise this work by means of one or more "centre". Adults can acquire information, guidance and help with the validation process from supervisors at these centres.

The following elements are recommended in the national procedure for validation of competence:

- Information and guidance
- Identification and systemising of all competences
- Assessment
- Public documentation

The following methods and tools have been developed for validation of non-formal learning in respect to the requirements stipulated in national curricula.

- Dialogue-based method: The dialogue-based method is based on discussions between assessor/specialist and adult. The specialist focuses on the knowledge and experience of teach individual and attends to specific problems and queries. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question.

This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The dialogue-based method combines with port-folio assessment, self assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates .The conclusion is that the method fits in with both vocational and general subjects, the degree of testing has to vary from person to person. A dialogue-based method covers tacit knowledge, and seems to be good for adults who have difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.

- Assessment of portfolio: Assessment on the basis of a portfolio is a method based on written documentation, photos, etc. The candidate sends a “charting” form to a “service centre” together with certificates and reports. Modules and subjects are approved on the basis of the documentation submitted, and additional education is offered so that individuals can acquire the desired certificates. This method demands good written documentation of individuals’ own skills and does not assume one-to-one meetings. Undocumented and tacit knowledge is difficult to reveal. After admission to upper secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to actual knowledge and skills.

-Vocational “testing” starts off with an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objective of the adult are charted. After the first general interview a professional specialist interviews the individual in the particular subject, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed. Working on the basis of this practice, the adult may be offered either additional education to bring him or her up to a journeyman/trade certificate level or public certificate (kompetansebevis) useful for job seeking. This method complements other methods in that the assessment of non-formal learning is also possible, and where required, parts or all of the practical side of the vocational subjects can be approved. Vocational “testing” provides adults – irrespective of their ethnic origins – with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields. This method picks up knowledge and experiences which are not documented and works well irrespective of learning and language difficulties. Vocational testing, on the other hand, requires inter-departmental co-operation between the education system, the employment service and possibly also the insurance office and social security office.

Both manual and computerised tools have been developed and tested in vocational and general subjects. The tools are used in different ways in the different methods dependent on the needs of the individual. Sometimes the assessor supplements the existing tools with locally developed tools. The manual tool is called: Akershus tool. The computerised tool is called REALDOK.

## **8.2 Organisations/sector/international standard requirements**

Many organisations have their own systems and procedures for documenting competences either as part of their HR management system or ISO requirements. Yet due to the competence reform more emphasis has been placed on the right of the individual to document non-formal learning that has been developed over time in the work context. Especially among the small and medium sized organisations. The national approach recommends to take the following procedure into use:

- Information and guidance
- Identification and systemising of all competences (CV)
- Self-assessment of work-related competences (Employee dialogue)
- Verified documentation

There exist a number of tools with varying lay-out and user-friendliness:

- Paper-based scheme for documentation of individual competence;
- Web-based scheme for documentation of competence freely available on the internet;
- Web-based scheme for documentation of competence that has to be purchased by the organisation and can be used as a part in an integrated HR system;
- Standardised CV format – similar to EuroCV

### **8.3 What tools and methods are used in Third sector**

Both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal learning in the sector are based to all intents and purposes on individuals' own efforts. Electronic tools have been developed which can be used for this work.

Individual organisations will provide *information* to students, course participants and voluntary participants within the organisation. Individual organisations are responsible for *guidance* for the people who want to make use of a documentation method, yet individuals draw up their own *CV and identify* and *describe* their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a *self-assessment* of the skills identified and describe.

The standardised proof of skills issued to participants in distance learning courses contains the following elements:

- a document including information on specialist content, scope, level and marks
- Confirmation I, a confirmation of the additional skills acquired on account of working with Internet-based distance learning methods
- Confirmation II, a confirmation which describes specifically the ICT skills acquired by listing relevant skills areas

The tool, called 3CV is a “universally valid self-declaration for voluntary work”. This tool contains

- 1) an introduction in which the methodology for completion is described,
- 2) an example of a completed form,
- 3) a form ready for completion, and
- 4) the option of creating one's own reference.

The text is saved in Word format and can be adapted to suit the individual. A glossary has been developed which can be downloaded from the Internet in which various voluntary organisations describe themselves and their skills profiles. This may help both the people completing the 3CV and the people who will be evaluating its content.

## **9 Who is doing the validation**

### **9.1 Educational curriculum**

#### **9.1.1 Higher education**

Individual institutions in higher education have the authority to assess what they consider to be necessary qualifications and to decide on an appropriate course of action for carrying out this assessment.

Foreign qualifications and documented work experiences are assessed and accredited by NOKUT, The Norwegian Agency of Quality Assurance in Education.

### **9.1.2 Upper secondary level**

In upper secondary education, the recognition process is organised in the local county council "Skill/service Centres".

Experiences from the project period have shown that the assessors need to have the following expertise to be able to carry out the work:

- Knowledge and understanding of how to communicate skills in the workplace and third sector
- Specialist skills in the subject/subjects in which the assessment will be carried out
- A good knowledge of curricula, their content and structure
- A knowledge of the philosophy behind the assessment of non-formal learning in particular, with emphasis on equivalent competence
- A knowledge of various methods and tools which can be used in the work on the assessment of non-formal learning
- A positive attitude towards the assessment of non-formal learning
- Undergone training in the assessment of non-formal learning

### **9.2 Organisations/sector/international standard requirements**

The assessment is mainly based on a self-assessment by the individual, where the individual describes the work activities he/she has been involved in during the employment period. The employer (mostly the direct line manager) is obliged by law to assess this documentation and sign it when there is agreement.

### **9.3 Who is doing the documentation in Third sector**

In voluntary organisations, it is proposed that individuals themselves describe and confirm skills that they have acquired by means of participation in activities.

In associations for adult education and distance learning institutions, courses and study activities are documented when diplomas, proof of courses or references are issued. Issuing reports allows the college to document the learning that has taken place.

## **10 What structures**

### **10.1 Educational curriculum**

#### **10.1.1 Higher Education**

In higher education the following institutions take care of the procedure: UCAS, NOKUT and a professional committee at each university/college

#### **10.1.2 Upper secondary**

At the Upper secondary level each county council has established a skill/service center. The centre co-operates with the local schools. The Ministry of Education and Research and Vox are also involved and contribute to the co-operation between the County councils

### **10.2 Organisation/ sector/ international standard requirements**

Here are multiple institutions involved. The social partners, sector organisations, Ministry of education and Research and VOX are co-operating on a regular basis.

### **10.3 What structures in third sector**

The umbrella organisations from different voluntary areas co-operate closely with VOX.

## **11 Flexibility**

The system is flexible in relation to universities and colleges in that the local institutions can decide themselves on the requirements and can thereby change practice as judged appropriate.

In relation to upper secondary curriculum the choice of method is characterised by flexibility, openness and adaptation to individual requirements. But also straight forward solutions, multiple methods and tools are in use.

## **12 Who are the owners/ key players**

The development of the “national system” has been looked upon as a legitimate activity due to the fact that representatives of the education system and social partners, organisations and a number of ministries have taken part in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the “Realkompetanse” Project.

### **12.1 In relation to Educational curriculum**

The key players are the ministry of education and Research, the county councils, the training institutes and the individual learner. The owner of the competence certificate is the individual.

### **12.2 In relation to Org/sector/international standard requirements**

The owner of the documentation is the individual. Yet, in many organisations the management have started to use the documentation as part of their HR management activities. In that case they have received permission of the individual to store the data in a shared database. In the latter case, the data falls in a grey zone between the individual and the organisation. The individual is still responsible for updating, but the organisation may use it for different purposes.

### **12.3 Who are the owners/ key players in Third sector**

The individuals are the owners. The documentation that is created is the property of the individual.

## **13 Key current debates/ tensions**

The three learning arenas Educational sector, working life and third sector face different market requirements and therefore play different roles. Working life and third sector represent the demand side and are interested in documenting what the individual can achieve. The educational sector represents the supply side and is interested to document what people are not able to do.

All sectors emphasise that guidance is important, however it is unclear who is responsible for providing guidance. The reason for this is an economical question about who is going to pay !!

In the working life the debate continues on legislation (who pays, what is the value of the verified document) as well as how to document social competence.

Some county councils are more liberal in their interpretations of the legislations because of differences in political, economic and historical reasons. This has damaging consequences for obtaining a National similarity. The following questions have been treated differently:

- Who has the legal right to have their competences assessed in relation to the curriculum
- Who has the right for further education?
- What is done if the assessor and the individual do not have an agreement regarding the result of the assessment?
- Are the methods known everywhere or are some only using one in particular?

The competence reform has had the intention to allow for equivalent competence. However the National curriculum does give space for such assessments. Therefore it has been suggested that the curricula is reviewed

The right to decide on the procedure in each higher institution gives flexibility. However it also gives room for major difference between the methods in higher education institutions and departments

## 14 Strength/weaknesses

Strength:

- Well organised in the educational sector ( rules, institutions and laws)
- Respect for individual differences, multiple assessment methods
- A lot and rich experimentation
- Tripartite cooperation
- Necessary change of laws
- Documentation is voluntary
- Recommendation for shared procedures and methods
- Shared language

Weaknesses:

- Discussions are controlled by politics
- Not enough focus on quality assurance
- Not enough experimentation with tools in working life and third sector
- Many local projects, but little reflection on shared use.

During the Competence Project from 1999-2002 numerous projects to document non-formal and informal learning have been initiated around the country at the county level as well as among several organisations and sector organisations. Despite the progress these projects have made to date, there is still a concern with the apparent piecemeal approach to the documentation and evaluation of informal learning, even though there has been an evaluation of the projects and a recommendation for the formation of national standards has been given. Yet, there is still a way to go and the focus is on shaping further the implementation of a National standard for recognition of informal and non-formal learning that is acceptable in the workplace and education system.

## 15 Future developments

The assessment of non-formal learning is still a relatively new field in upper secondary education. There is a need to encourage a shared understanding and methodology in the field. Specialists who will be carrying out the assessment work need a common platform and skills which will give them security in their work. There will be a need for continual monitoring and updating of these specialists so that problem areas discovered can be discussed with a view to coming up with joint solutions at a

national level. A training programme is being developed. The training will cover both practice and theory, and among other things it will include elements such as laws, instructions and regulations, terminology, the selection and use of methods and tools and adults with difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.

Other focus areas are:

- Equal assessment methods across the nation
- More information and dialogue among the major actors
- Cooperation between county councils and employment agencies
- Legitimacy of the different documentary proofs.

More focus has to be placed on recognition of competences and how to document the continuous development in the working life.

The future developments also need to include a deeper understanding of the value of “equivalent competence” described in a verified document. This is particular of interest for organisations, who wish to be able to communicate the competences that exist in the organisation.

Parts of the third sector rely entirely on voluntary efforts. In these organisations, there is no tradition of documenting skills, participation in courses and other activities. It is important to ensure that the responsibilities of the organisations do not become too extensive and time-consuming, create significant additional work or lead to financial expense. This may lead to the method not being used.

## **16 Discussion on transfer between formal, informal and non-formal learning in Norway**

### ***16.1 Actors involved***

The reflections presented in this report are based on discussions with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research, skill centre in the county council, education institutions, social partners, branch organisation, voluntary and youth organisations as well as several individuals that have an interest in the topic of a European wide architecture for the recognition of learning across European borders.

### ***16.2 Reaction to European-wide system***

The initial reaction to a European-wide system is positive and explorative. There is an open attitude to be part of an experimental project to learn more in detail how and what a European wide system, based on existing experiential projects can entail. However, beside this positive attitude the most prominent reaction expresses a clear fear: WE DO NOT WANT A LARGE SUPRANATIONAL BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM!

There is a general agreement that with too many official layers and rigid assessment centres that assess competence for a summative purpose, the European architecture will have no chance of survival. Instead it has to build on trust and only a limited amount of centralisation. Centralisation has to be just enough so that it becomes possible that inhabitants of a country have the opportunity to compare the own documentation arrangements with other countries. In other words, an architecture that gives space to “looking into each other’s systems” and contributes to be able to make a comparison. The architecture needs to be designed based on a transparent documentation and a tolerant attitude at the receivers end.

There is a positive attitude towards the idea of using something similar to the EuroCV as an European wide standardised form of documenting all learning of an individual. Yet again the request is for flexibility and sensible use of the document (keep it short and rather add attachments and official certificates). Furthermore the documentation has to be voluntary and it is the responsibility of the individual to maintain and update it.

### ***16.3 Can learning acquired outside the own country be recognised and is learning acquired in the own country expected to be recognised abroad?***

On both questions the answer is yes, in the understanding that it is easy to say yes, yet difficult to practice and gain legitimacy. In Norway immigrants have the option to have their competences (both formal documents and non-documented experiences) assessed and translated into an equivalent Norwegian certificate at University, Upper secondary and Compulsory level. It is in the hands of NOKUT and/or educational institutions to evaluate and make the translation. The documentation of formal and non-formal learning from another country is thus not automatically accepted as equivalent. The trend is however towards a more global education form and a more international oriented workforce. The amount of people that has been educated in foreign educational institutions has been doubled since 1980. In 1994 ca. 9.000 students studied abroad, while in 2001 ca. 16.000 students studied abroad (Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). It has also become possible to take a foreign (master) degree at a Norwegian education/training institute that functions as a satellite for a foreign educational institute. Furthermore several vocational training institutes send their students on apprenticeship missions abroad and receive also foreign students for similar activities.

Within the working life there exist multiple practices. Some organisations have a centralised career system and predefined learning paths with independent assessments on the way. Other organisations have a more ad hoc attitude to career development and learning and provide little documentation. Recruitment varies too from standardised testing to interviews where intuition plays a critical factor. In all instances though the diversity of learning is recognised and it is the receiver of the documentation that decides on the legitimacy.

One possible way to achieve a European architecture is in close cooperation with the sector organisations.

### ***16.4 What are the legal, cultural, political, economic obstacles***

This issue is at this stage difficult to describe as there is no clear understanding of what a European framework entails.

In general, the actors are aware that the recognition of non-formal and in-formal learning, due to its tacit and contextual character requires another approach to the question of reliability and validity. It is on this point that the major obstacles will arise. As long as the attitude among the Norwegian population remains critical towards recognising other forms of “proof” than the own “proof” from the national formal education, very little will happen.

There is a general fear of even more bureaucracy, yet at the same time something needs to be in place in order to gain trust in the quality of the document.

Another obstacle is the fear for loosing diversity and creating a system where everybody has to adapt to one ideal. The National requirements have to be maintained and communicated across the borders.

## **16.5 Can ECTS be used as basis for European-wide system**

The first impression is that ECTS will not be an interesting option. It is looked upon as a way of quantifying formal education in credit points. Quantifying non-formal and in-formal learning is not believed to be useful and only results in a lot of bureaucracy.

## **16.6 What timeframe is expected to have a European system in place?**

If we envision a European system that builds further on the existing transparency tools that are looked upon as legitimate in each country, the expectation is shorter than if we think about a formalised supranational and centralised system with basis in one European standard. Yet at this stage a more detailed timeframe is impossible to bring forward.

## **16.7 Negotiations and attitudes of the decision-makers**

So far, the attitude of the decision-makers is positive and supportive. The Norwegian Education Minister has made a unambiguous statement to support the Brugge / København process (see attachment 1). Mobility and life-long learning are recognised as priority areas.

## **16.8 Glossary**

The following list has been prepared by the authors and explains how terms have been used in this report. The term is first written in Norwegian and so an English term is introduced with in some instance a further description in order to capture the meaning of the Norwegian term.

Dokumentasjon – documentation, put in writing

Etterutdanning – further education, Short training with the aim to update the existing professional knowledge

Fagprøve/ svenneprøve – Trade examination and journeyman's examination. Occupations and crafts vocational training have a combined practical and theoretical examination at the end of a apprenticeship/study period, which results in a trade and journeyman's certificate.

Fagskole – vocational school – technical college (upper secondary level)

Grunnskole – 9 year compulsory primary and secondary school

Primary and lower secondary school. This contains a 10-year period of general education from age 6-16

Lærebedrift – Organisation recognised as an apprenticeship organisation

Organisation that provides training to apprentices, which lead to a recognised qualification

Opplæring - training

Opplæringskontor – Training office

Profesjon – yrke som krever høyere utdanning - profession

Realkompetanse – All formal, non-formal and informal learning that a person has acquired from the different learning arenas – educational system, working life, voluntary work and home activities.

Utdanning - Education

Verdsetting – valuation

Videregående skole – upper secondary school

Yrkesrettet utdanning – vocational education / training

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# **Attachment 1: Speech from Minister of Education and Research**

## **Ministerial Conference on Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Training and Education**

Copenhagen, 29 - 30 November 2002  
Minister Kristin Clemet - Ministry of Education and Research

### **Recognition of formal and informal learning**

Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

We are now Ladies and Gentlemen about to commit ourselves to a closer co-operation in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET). I feel honoured Madam President, being invited by the Danish presidency to give you a brief outline of some recent Norwegian experiences when it comes to the development of a system for the recognition of non-formal or informal learning. The perspective is of course lifelong learning.

And let me start with the political context: why do we find it important to value non-formal and informal learning?

I see four main reasons why valuing non-formal and informal learning is given increased attention on the educational policy agenda.

Firstly, in Norway the Central Bureau of Statistics has estimated that our human resources constitute more than 80% of our national assets. If we don't take full advantage of nurturing this resource by recognising competencies achieved in informal and non-formal contexts, we waste our talents. I don't think the situation is different in other European countries.

Secondly, the ageing population is a common challenge. We must make use of all available resources when the number of young people is gradually outnumbered by the elderly.

Thirdly, the economic and technological development creates new professions while others disappear. It will be very expensive if people when changing a career have to start their education and re-qualification from scratch.

Fourthly, education in a lifelong perspective is a part of personal fulfilment and also give a contribution to social cohesion, ensuring democratic participation and values.

Permit me to provide some information about the Norwegian approach

In Norway, lifelong learning has always been closely integrated into ongoing reform processes in the educational system. We believe that the formal system must be flexible, but at the same time transparent and accessible. Citizens should be enabled to change direction or to extend their education without going back to square one. We also believe that special attention has to be given to adults and their learning requirements. That's why we launched what we call a Competence reform for adults in 1999.

The main elements of this reform was:

To give all adults a statutory right to primary and secondary education, and to impose an obligation on educational providers to design the education offered in accordance with the needs of adults

To ensure the right for all to have their skills validated in relation to upper secondary education or for admission to universities

To introduce a right for individual employees to obtain study leave of absence for further education

To provide state grants and scholarships for adults on equal terms with younger students

To establish a system for competence assessment for people without any formal certificates or degrees.

And finally, to acknowledge the workplace as an important learning arena and a place for innovation.

Before summarising some of our achievements, I would like to comment about the methods used for implementing the reform.

Confidence and trust are keywords in this respect, together with a determination to give adults opportunities to continue their learning process and to have it accepted and recognised.

Firstly, I need to emphasise that behind every step in designing and implementing the reform we have had a tripartite collaboration. The commitment from the social partners and from the authorities has been very strong all the way. This has created an atmosphere of mutual trust.

Secondly, I might say that we had the courage to go into deep waters, without having all the solutions. We made a large-scale project nation-wide and tested out different models and initiatives. The project involved many actors such as NGO's, adult education institutions, the social partners etc.

To be able to follow-up, adjust and make correction we launched a formative research project. The researchers were also asked to give a final report on total achievements.

After three years based on research and the regular monitoring system, we have obtained the following results in some of the main areas:

The legal framework for a statutory right for adults to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education is in place. This applies also to the right to leave of absence from work for education purposes.

At the end of 2001, skills of more than 15 000 people had been recognised and validated with reference to upper secondary education.

A Competence-building program to promote innovation and development in the field of continuing education and training has been established, and around 150 companies and more than 6 000 people have taken part in the development of documentation methods in the workplace. These numbers probably don't seem significant to you, but in a country with 4,5 mill inhabitants they are indeed noticeable.

More than 11 000 adults have applied for university or college education admittance based on their formal, informal and non-formal training, and almost 50% of the applicants have been accepted by a university or college based on this validation.

Students that have been accepted based on validation of non-formal learning have achieved and made the same progress as students admitted on the basis of formal qualifications.

And we are now also implementing a system to evaluate education and competence in reference to the working life. The opportunity to have your competencies validated, and the possibility to receive certificates, will be of particular benefit to immigrants. Like most countries in Europe, the employment rate among immigrants is lower than in the overall population. A great deal of this is due to our incapacity to exploit the competences immigrants have gained in their native countries - either because it is not familiar to us, or because it does not fit into our formal education system. Immigrants in Norway will now have the possibility to get their competencies "translated" into Norwegian standards.

Let me conclude with some words about the future development and challenges

My experience from implementing the Competence Reform in Norway is that the greatest challenge for the moment is to put the bits and pieces together into one comprehensive framework. It is essential to be flexible and adaptive to different needs, but on the other hand, we cannot have one "system" for every individual.

The system must ensure equal treatments of all individuals. It must be predictable and not too complicated. The individual learner must not get lost in the jungle of providers.

Validating learning from different arenas must also ensure quality and by that confidence and trust.

Our tripartite co-operation must also continue and even be further strengthened.

The system to be developed must be compatible with international policies and trends. This is closely linked to the follow-up work at national level of the declaration we are about to adopt today.

In addition to this, there is still a way to go in order to get informal learning, experiences accepted by the universities. We have more or less solved the issue of admittance, but so far the right of learners to start their studies at their own level of competence, have in practice not been achieved. Still they follow the same courses as their younger mates even if their competencies are valued to be close to a bachelor.

Finally, in helping people to make the right choices in life-long learning strategies, we must increase the level of information, guidance and counselling. It is an important decision for the individual to change career plans and/or going "back to school". A mistake, a plan that cannot be realised - an education that leads to nothing, may be costly in economic as well as psychological terms. Improved and adapted information, guidance and counselling are important building blocks in developing a knowledge-based society.

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My hope is that the experiences from Norway in terms of recognising non-formal and informal learning may be an input to further discussions on enhanced co-operation in the development of vocational training and education in Europe. The Copenhagen Declaration clearly states that time has come for commitment, and we fully support that!

I thank you for giving me the floor and for the attention!

## **Attachment 2: Basic agreement NHO and LO**

### BASIC AGREEMENT OF 2002

#### PART A

#### CHAPTER I

#### PARTIES, APPLICATION AND DURATION

##### § 1-1 Parties

The Basic Agreement is an agreement between the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) including all its national and local associations and individual enterprises, and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) including all its unions and associations (divisions). The Basic Agreement in no way affects or alters relations between parties to other collective agreements.

##### § 1-2 Scope of Application

The Basic Agreement is the first part of all collective agreements for workers that have been or may be concluded by the organisations named in the heading and/or their members, and which are not covered by other Basic Agreements.

Part B of the Basic Agreement applies to industrial and craft enterprises in the same way as the former agreement on production committees. It is the intention that NHO and LO and the interested employer and employee associations may at any time enter into negotiations aimed at making Part B of the Basic Agreement applicable or at adapting the rules in Part B to other commercial sectors than industry and crafts.

##### § 10-7 Certificates of employment on leaving

When an employee leaves an enterprise following rightful notice, he or she shall be given a certificate of employment.

This certificate shall contain:

- a. Name, date and year of birth
- b. When employment commenced
- c. When employment ended (without stating the reason)

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- d. Trade or occupation
- e. Pay at time of leaving
- f. Dates of last holiday
- g. Information as to whether application has been made for severance pay for the employee
- h. If so requested by the employee, information describing the nature of his or her work for the enterprise.

After summary dismissal employees are also entitled to certificates on leaving, but in such cases the employer may state that the employee was dismissed, without specifying the

reason for dismissal. If the employee so requests, the employer shall consult the shop stewards.

#### § 10-11 Leave of absence for educational purposes

1. If full or partial leave of absence is necessary for purposes of education that is of value to both the person concerned and the enterprise, leave shall be granted unless there are special reasons to prevent this.

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2. Employees who have at least three years' seniority in the enterprise who, on their own initiative and according to their own wishes and needs have secured financing for advanced or further education, should be granted leave unless there are economic or production-related reasons to prevent this.

3. When applications for leave of absence are being considered, the applications shall be judged by the same criteria for all employees or groups of employees, and this also applies in respect of any financial assistance.

4. Replies to applications for leave should be given within three weeks. The reasons shall be given if an application is refused.

5. When an employee returns to the enterprise after studies lasting up to two years, the employee is - whenever practically possible - entitled to work equivalent to that he/she had before commencing the studies. If the studies last for more than two years, a special agreement shall be made concerning the type of work the employee is to have when he/she returns.

6. Employees who have leave of absence for studies and break off their studies, are entitled to return to work in the enterprise as soon as that is practically possible.

## PART B

### COOPERATION AGREEMENT

#### PURPOSE OF CHAPTERS XII-XVIII OF THE AGREEMENT

The object of this agreement is to strengthen and further develop cooperation between employees and management in the individual enterprises. The objectives expressed in § 9-1 of the Basic Agreement also apply for cooperation pursuant to this agreement. In accordance with these intentions, the central organisations have concluded the supplementary agreements listed in Part C.

Through developments in labour relations, with new forms of work and organisation, internationalisation, use of new technology and so on, the parties are confronted with new requirements regarding development of good and flexible ways of organising cooperation that will promote the objectives of the agreement.

Conditions in the individual enterprise will determine the best means of organising cooperation. Here consideration must be given to the nature of the operations, the size of the company, technology, organisational structure, decision-making system, geographic location etc.

However, the central organisations agree that a certain formalisation of the cooperation is desirable and necessary in all enterprises. A local agreement should be sought on this. If a local agreement cannot be achieved, cooperation shall be organised in accordance with the rules in this agreement.

## CHAPTER XVI

### DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE

#### § 16-1 Introduction

NHO and LO recognize how highly important wider education is for the individual, for development of the enterprise, and for the community as a whole. This applies to general education, vocational training, courses of adult education, advanced studies and rehabilitation.

Therefore the parties wish to emphasize the great value that lies in stimulating employees to increase their knowledge and improve their qualifications, and attaching great weight to

planned courses of education and training for employees, within the enterprise itself or at outside educational establishments.

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#### § 16-2 Supplementary studies and further education

Supplementary studies and further education are especially important as means of developing the competitive ability of the enterprise. At all stages of the value chain the right qualifications are necessary to enable the enterprise to accept and utilize new knowledge. Development of qualifications through supplementary studies and further education must be based on the present and future needs of the enterprise, taking as a starting point the targets set by the enterprise for its operations.

"Supplementary studies" refers to maintaining qualifications for a position already held, while "further education" refers to qualifying for new and more demanding tasks within the enterprise. Both supplementary studies and further education will benefit the enterprise as well as the individual employee and therefore they must accept responsibility for developing such competence.

#### § 16-3 Ways and means

Each enterprise must present its objectives for future development as a basis for charting the qualifications needed. Cooperating with the employees, it will be the enterprise that is responsible for charting and initiating necessary measures. Charting must normally be updated once a year. Wherever there is a gap between existing competence at the enterprise and its future needs, this should be covered by appropriate training measures or other means.

The costs of supplementary and further education must be borne by the enterprise.

Responsibility for ensuring that any competence gap is covered satisfactorily rests with the enterprise and all its employees.