



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY  
OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Summary in English: Report No. 44 (2008–2009) to the Storting

# Education strategy







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# Contents

	<b>Education strategy</b> .....	5	3.5	
<b>1</b>	<b>Summary</b> .....	6	3.6	A more integrated assessment of total qualifications at all levels .....9
<b>2</b>	<b>A varied and more practical primary and secondary education and training</b> .....	7	4	Career guidance – enhanced professionalism and better coordination .....10
2.1	A more varied and practically oriented lower secondary level .....	7		
2.2	Flexible and adapted training .....	7	<b>5</b>	<b>Tertiary vocational education: Central to the knowledge society</b> ...11
2.3	Pathways within technical and vocational training .....	7	5.1	<b>The need for a more highly-educated labour force</b> .....12
2.4	Common core subjects in vocational training .....	7	5.2	Everyone should have equal opportunities to higher education .....12
2.5	Cooperation between school and working life .....	7	5.3	Capacity in higher education .....12
2.6	Apprenticeships .....	8	5.4	Completion and dropouts .....12
2.7	Quality assessment in technical and vocational training .....	8	5.5	Teaching in higher education institutions .....
2.8	International cooperation.....	8	5.6	12
2.9	More research on technical and vocational training .....	8	5.7	Cooperation, division of tasks and concentration of expertise .....12
2.10	Young people who drop out of upper secondary education .....	8	5.8	Relevant education: cooperation with working life.....12
<b>3</b>	<b>Competence development and lifelong learning</b> .....	9		Clearer distinction between a vocational bachelor’s degree and an academic bachelor’s degree.....13
3.1	Competence policy actors – roles and cooperation .....	9	5.9	Better knowledge about education quality, relevance and learning outcomes.....13
3.2	A new chance for adults with little education .....	9	5.10	Flexible education.....13
3.3	Motivate for learning in working life ....	9		Flexible access to higher education....13
3.4	Financing subsistence for adults taking primary and secondary education and training .....	9	<b>6</b>	<b>Correspondence between education and the needs of working life</b> .....14



## Education strategy

Equal opportunities to complete education are a prerequisite if we are to sustain and further develop the welfare state on the basis of the Norwegian model, with minor social differences between people. More people must complete their education so that they can join the labour market and gain a secure footing in working life. Enhanced human capital and skills increase productivity and have hence direct economic effects through more valuable labour inputs. But increased knowledge and learning are also desirable outcomes of education and are as such beneficial to individuals and society at large. Basic skills are important for enabling people to function well in their everyday lives. Education encourages democratic participation, cultural development and individuals' self-esteem and identity. We need more knowledge and skills; both for addressing the increasingly complicated challenges in society and in order to evolve as human beings.

Norway is facing many demanding challenges. Growing global collaboration and competition, serious environmental and poverty problems around the world and national welfare issues will all demand up-to-date and new knowledge if we are to be able to create a good society and contribute to a more fair and sustainable world. Norway's economy is to a large extent based on industries that require highly skilled labour, and this will continue to be the case in the future.

The "employment strategy" is one of the pillars in the red-green coalition government. The government in Norway considers it important that the entire adult population should contribute to society through various activities and that as many as possible do so through employment. The individual's rights should not only be linked to cash benefits but also an obligation to work, participate in rehabilitation programmes or to take education wherever possible. In a knowledge-based nation like Norway, the number of jobs that do not require upper secondary or higher education is steadily declining. The competencies and skills of the labour force should be created with

the goal of achieving a better match with the requirements of the labour market. To succeed with the "employment strategy", we must first succeed with our "education strategy". It is particularly important to invest in education during times of crisis.

Factors which today lead to social disparities, lack of motivation and drop-outs must be rectified in order to succeed in offering everyone an education and, consequently, a secure platform for their future life. Education is also important in order to meet society's future needs for skills. Dropout rates and social disparities currently constitute a problem at all levels in the education system. The Government will strengthen the education system's capability to counter social differences and form a basis for lifelong learning through new measures in primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary education and training, vocational schools, higher education and formal and non-formal adult education.

The Government emphasises early intervention as a main strategy to ensure a good education for everyone and to prevent dropouts. This entails both intervening at an early age and taking action at an early stage when problems arise during the course of the education. The basis for this strategy was laid down in the *Report No. 16 (2006-2007) to the Storting: Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning* and was further developed in *Report No. 31 (2007-2008) to the Storting: Quality in Schools*. How day care institutions can systematically contribute to early intervention was raised in the recently presented report to the Storting concerning kindergartens. This is the first report to the Storting containing an integrated overview of society's needs for competence and discussing how strategic challenges that arise from these should be managed.

Underlying documents include: *NOU 2008:18 Vocational Training for the Future*; *NOU 2007:11 Adult Education Associations – Learning for Life*; and *NOU 2008:3 An Overview – New Structure in Higher Education*

## 1 Summary

The need for a labour force with only primary and lower secondary education is low, and it seems that it will continue to decrease in the coming years. It is therefore important that more people complete upper secondary education – for their own sake and for that of society. Dropouts can be due to a number of different reasons. One group which is particularly vulnerable is that of young people who did not acquire good basic skills during primary and lower secondary school. This problem is especially acute in technical and vocational training. The Government will introduce a number of measures to achieve the goal of having as many as possible complete their upper secondary education. Closer individual follow-up of pupils and apprentices will be facilitated. Young people who have already dropped out of school will be more closely followed up than they are today. In addition, education will be made more subject-relevant and work-relevant and will allow for greater flexibility so as to make it easier to take the individual needs of pupils into account. There will also be a stronger focus on improved and closer cooperation between the education system and working life.

It is often the case that personal interests and the possibility to make use of their abilities are what govern young people's career aspirations

and choice of education. It is neither desirable nor possible for the state to dictate which studies young people should choose. Nor would it be possible to design the education system solely from projections of the future needs of the labour market. However, the Government wants to work on providing better knowledge about the needs of the labour market and for enabling young people to make choices that are as informed as possible. For some important subject areas, such as teacher training, health and social care, science and mathematics, there is in addition a need for special incentives to stimulate young people's interest and improve recruitment.

The Government proposes several important measures to contribute to ensuring that as many as possible receive as much education and training as possible. This summary of the report to the Storting has been prepared for international readers, and mentions the measures that are considered to be most relevant to them. The level of detail is less than that contained in the report which has been presented to the Storting. Some explanations of measures have been added wherever these are considered necessary.

The Norwegian Government will give priority to the following:

## 2 A varied and more practical primary and secondary education and training

- Develop the competencies of actors in technical and vocational training in the topics of understanding curricula, assessment and guidance
- Pursue the work on enhancing the quality of career guidance.
- Establish good systems for transferring relevant information about pupils between lower and upper secondary school.
- Transfer earmarked grants to the county authorities for training in basic skills.
- Motivate school owners (counties) and pupils in upper secondary schools to take advantage of the opportunity to choose subjects at university and university college level.

### 2.1 A more varied and practically oriented lower secondary level

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- Invite a selection of municipalities to try out a new and more practically oriented programme at the lower secondary level from school year 2009/2010. The programme should be practically oriented and should contribute to giving pupils who are interested a taste of technical and vocational training at upper secondary level. Pupils following the programme should be given grades.
- Set up a group to look into the mathematics subject of the future and how it can be made more relevant and engaging.
- Contribute to good use of ICT in the schools.

### 2.2 Flexible and adapted training

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- Prepare guidance material showing good practise for flexible allocation of school hours. Today it is possible to reallocate up to 25 percent of school hours, but this is done to only a negligible extent.
- Give pupils at the lower secondary level the possibility to choose subjects from the upper secondary level.
- Prepare examples of and information on the scheme for choosing subjects from the upper secondary level at the lower secondary level.

### 2.3 Pathways within technical and vocational training

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- Establish a new pathway corresponding to full vocational training where pupils receive a large portion of their training in enterprises from day one. After two years, they will receive a basic competence certificate which will qualify them for working life. The goal, however, is that they continue their training for two more years to attain the ordinary craft certificate or journeyman's certificate.

### 2.4 Common core subjects in vocational training

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- Review the curricula for the common core subjects with a view to making the competence goals more vocationally-oriented.
- Establish by regulations and entrench in the curriculum a requirement that the training in the common core subject should be relevant to the subject and should be adapted to the different education programmes. Prepare guidance material for the curricula, giving examples of how the training in the common core subjects is adapted to the subjects in the different educational programmes.
- Promote research on vocational training.

### 2.5 Cooperation between school and working life

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- Assess the possibilities for internships and exchanges of personnel between school and working life.

- Prepare a new action plan for entrepreneurship in education, with particular emphasis on higher education.
- Prepare guidance material on how entrepreneurship can be integrated in training.
- Establish a research project to examine more closely the effect of training in entrepreneurship.

## **2.6 Apprenticeships**

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- Take the initiative to renew the social contract regarding obligations to create apprenticeships with all relevant parties.
- Prepare a strategy for apprenticeships in public enterprises.
- Assess whether and how the right to an apprenticeship or a four-year training programme in schools could be carried out.

## **2.7 Quality assessment in technical and vocational training**

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- Introduce an integrated quality assessment system for technical and vocational training.

## **2.8 International cooperation**

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- Give priority to the European cooperation on technical and vocational training and follow recommendations from the EU as long as they are adaptable to the Norwegian system.

## **2.9 More research on technical and vocational training**

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- Strengthen research on technical and vocational training.

## **2.10 Young people who drop out of upper secondary education**

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- Identify and assess the schools' career guidance and the counties' Follow-up Service.
- Amend the regulations for the Follow-up Service.
- Assess the challenges and possibilities for a more systematic use of practically oriented training activities for young people who do not make use of their rights to ordinary training.

## 3 Competence development and lifelong learning

### 3.1 Competence policy actors – roles and cooperation

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- Establish a National Competence Forum with participants from the industry and education authorities, employers' and employees' organisations, KS (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities), UHR (Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions) and the Council for Tertiary Vocational Education and Training.
- Assess how skill policy cooperation between the national education authorities and the county authorities can contribute even better towards achieving regional and national skill policy goals.
- Strengthen and clarify the role of Vox (Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning) as national skill policy body.
- Maintain the grant to the adult education associations.
- Implement the new Act on Adult Education.

### 3.2 A new chance for adults with little education

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- Motivate adults to take training in basic skills.
- Extend the right to training in basic skills to adults so that it can be taken in combination with other upper secondary education.
- Initiate an information project to raise awareness among adults about rights to and opportunities for formal education.
- Provide better information on good models of flexible basic training for adults.
- Consider whether adults who *failed* upper secondary education ought to have the right to take such education once more. Today this right is reserved for adults who did not *complete* the upper secondary education.

### 3.3 Motivate for learning in working life

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- Strengthen the Open University (Norgesuniversitetet) as the link between education and working life in the area of continuing education and training.
- Take the initiative to hold discussions on the general conditions for continuing and further education through the National Forum for Lifelong Learning.
- Develop measures that can contribute to more participation in skill development and learning in working life by senior workers.
- Initiate a report to be prepared on a Norwegian version of a scheme with a network of union learning representatives.
- In cooperation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, assess measures that could contribute to strengthening the work done on skill development in small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Further develop schemes for stimulating more people with poor basic skills to take relevant training.

### 3.4 Financing subsistence for adults taking primary and secondary education and training

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- Encourage the development of more adapted courses in technical and vocational training which can be used to a larger extent by job seekers who have not completed upper secondary education.
- Invite some county authorities to take part in development work in this area.

### 3.5 A more integrated assessment of total qualifications at all levels

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- Strengthen coordination and create a more uniform practice for assessing total qualifications in basic education, higher education and working life.

### **3.6 Career guidance – enhanced professionalism and better coordination**

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- Consider creating a national body for career guidance that should contribute to knowledge

and quality development, greater cooperation between relevant parties and further development of the user-oriented services offered.

## **4 Tertiary vocational education: Central to the knowledge society**

- Increase the number of study places in state-approved tertiary vocational education by 400-450 in 2009.
- Consider whether vocational college students' possibilities for mobility can be maintained when responsibility for tertiary vocational education is transferred to the county authorities on 1 January 2010.
- Establish a joint council for tertiary vocational education.
- Strengthen the statistics and knowledge base so as to contribute to positive development of tertiary vocational education.
- Investigate whether a system of tertiary vocational education credits should be introduced jointly with the work on a national qualifications framework.

## 5 The need for a more highly-educated labour force

### 5.1 Everyone should have equal opportunities to higher education

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- Maintain the principle of free higher education.
- Carry out a new survey on living conditions for students.
- Continue the commitment to student housing.
- Ensure continued financial support to students from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund.
- Secure good general conditions for the student welfare organisations as the most important instrument for student welfare.

### 5.2 Capacity in higher education

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- Increase the number of study places in higher education by 3,800 in 2009.
- Use the activity requirements to maintain capacities in education programmes that are fundamentally important to society.
- Consider geographical redistribution between higher education institutions to ensure that sufficient numbers of graduates are educated.

### 5.3 Completion and dropouts

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- Create a better knowledge base on completion of and dropouts from higher education, including identifying geographical differences.
- Transform the Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH) into an individual-based database, which leads to a greater potential for analysis.
- Contribute to enhanced learning between the institutions about how dropouts can best be prevented.
- Follow up the institutions' work on close follow-up of students and early intervention offered to new students.

### 5.4 Teaching in higher education institutions

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- Institutions should do more to adapt teaching and research affiliations to the learning outcomes they want the students to have.
- Encourage the exchange of good teaching experiences between the educational institutions through increasing the use of part-time positions.
- Strengthen the role of NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) in the development of the quality of the programmes.
- Establish a number of centres of excellence in teaching (SFUs).
- Develop guidance material on how the broad definition of research-based teaching should be used, in cooperation with the Norwegian Council for Higher Education.
- Encourage the active participation of students in research.

### 5.5 Cooperation, division of tasks and concentration of expertise

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- Promote professionally entrenched cooperation in the university and university college sector by means of earmarked cooperation funds.

### 5.6 Relevant education: cooperation with working life

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- Ensure that all Norwegian higher education institutions have a strategy for cooperating with working life which has been developed in consultation with the social partners and the students in the Councils for Cooperation with Working Life (RSA) at the level of a institution or groups of institutions.
- Assess the incentives for the institution to enter into a binding cooperation with working life and thereby fulfil its social obligation.

- Consider including work-related relevance as a criterion for assessing the institutions' quality assurance system for education.
- Introduce a Norwegian version of 'Representative Assemblies' (Avtakerpanel) inspired by the Danish system, in cooperation with higher education institutions.
- Introduce voluntary work experience in higher education.
- Present an action plan for entrepreneurship in education, with particular emphasis on higher education.

### 5.7 Clearer distinction between a vocational bachelor's degree and an academic bachelor's degree

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- In consultation with the Norwegian Council for Higher Education (UHR), undertake a prioritisation of the bachelor programmes which are most important to strengthen as independent vocational programmes.
- Include vocational orientation of potential bachelor's degrees in the work on developing a strategy for greater cooperation between education and working life, both locally and in the Ministry's work.

### 5.8 Better knowledge about education quality, relevance and learning outcomes

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- Develop a student survey of higher education.
- Facilitate better information from the Graduate Survey to new programme applicants.
- Contribute to more information about and attention to learning outcomes and follow up the institution's work in the qualifications framework.

- Better information on the programmes to students and applicants.
- Participate in the OECD survey Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO).

### 5.9 Flexible education

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- Increase the number of study places in continuing and further education by 800 in 2009.
- Work on encouraging the higher education institutions to give priority to developing continuing education and training programmes that meet the competence requirements of the region nearby or in the disciplines in which institutions have special expertise.
- Make sure that continuing education is given similar weight in the funding system as ordinary higher education.
- Give continuing education and training a central place in the work of the Councils in Cooperation with Industry (RSA).
- Improved knowledge base for continued and further education.
- Contribute to improved flexibility and availability of programmes at the higher education institutions.
- Propose NOK 21.3 million in the revised national budget for decentralised education and continuing and further education.

### 5.10 Flexible access to higher education

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- Continue the flexible schemes for attaining university admission certification.
- Continue and strengthen alternative qualification schemes as recruitment paths to higher education.

## **6 Correspondence between education and the needs of working life**

- Prepare a national plan for following up the completed assessment of engineering programmes.
  - Prepare a new commitment initiative to the science subjects, in cooperation with the actors in the National Forum for Science Subjects.
  - Continue the Science Centre Programme (VITEN) in the Research Council of Norway and the support to the regional science centres for the period 2010 to 2014.
  - Carry out a recruitment campaign for teacher training programmes.
  - Ensure that pupils, apprentices and students are given access to better information and knowledge about their educational and vocational alternatives.
  - Set up a system for projecting and analysing future competence requirements.
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