



Oslo, April 2023

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research's input to the development of a Learning mobility framework

Norway welcomes the European Commission's forthcoming proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Education Area initiative on Learning Mobility Framework. Norway fully supports the objective of the European Education Area of making learning periods abroad a normality, rather than the exception. This should be the focus for the forthcoming Council Recommendation.

To make international learning mobility a normality rather than exception, there is a need for different initiatives to increase learning mobility at the different educational levels. The Norwegian position is to focus on some key initiatives to overcome identified barriers on international learning mobility across the education sectors. International learning mobility represents a main driver to enhancing the quality and relevance to education, training and youth work. Young people and staff who have taken a period of training or study abroad have increased their knowledge of their field and improved their cultural and linguistic understanding. International experience and perspectives further encourage personal growth. International cooperation and dialogue across national borders are prerequisites for succeeding in handling the major global societal challenges the world is facing. Global challenges require global solutions.

From a Norwegian perspective, international competence and intercultural understanding are seen as essential for the future, as well as for the ability to resolve the challenges the world is facing.

This position paper highlights the main measures of Norwegian policy on learning mobility within all education sectors. These encompass incentives for increasing the learning mobility, such as stimulating a **cultural change in higher education**, as well as **structural changes** to support this cultural change, increasing **recognition of learning periods** abroad, as well as **improving labour market relevance**. Furthermore we suggests ways of making learning mobility more socially inclusive and environmentally friendly and highlights a couple of examples on actions taken to increase learning mobility.

Barriers

Culture

Norway presented in 2020 a White Paper on student mobility¹ in higher education. With time the goal is that **half of those completing a degree in Norwegian higher education** should have had a study or training period abroad during their studies. The overall aim of the white paper was to stimulate a cultural change in higher education by making international learning mobility an integrated part of all study programs. One of the measures is that students should actively have to opt out of integrated learning mobility stays abroad. The White Paper states that students are expected to have a learning mobility period abroad during their studies to make international learning mobility the norm rather than the exception. To ensure that the internationalisation of higher education helps to increase the quality, relevance and attractiveness of Norwegian educational institutions, student mobility must be integrated in and based on institutional cooperation. The Government expects universities and university colleges to ensure that international student mobility forms an integrated part of all study programmes and that internationalisation efforts are aligned with the institutions' plans and strategies.

Learning mobility is highlighted as an important factor for further development of both upper secondary education, initial vocational education and training and continuing vocational education and training in Norwegian policies^{2 3}. When it comes to staff, learning mobility provides access to professional international networks, which creates opportunities for acquiring knowledge and experience of how training and education take place in other countries and insight into innovative practices. The staff's learning mobility, both current and previous, can also help to promote learning mobility among pupils, trainees, and students.

Lack of financial means

Lack of financial means is a key barrier to vocational education and training (including CVET) and school education. In vocational education and training, limited access to financial means affects the schools and municipality's ability to work strategically with international cooperation, and it is therefore a challenge to establish a culture for learning mobility in relevant subjects and apprenticeships. Uncertainty regarding funding may also affect the schools and municipalities' ability to build up sufficient knowledge regarding international cooperation, and as studies show^{4 5}, the perceived lack of knowledge, time and resources may limit participation in these types of projects. In addition, several primary schools and upper secondary schools state that they do not have the finances to send pupils abroad, with accompanying persons, on learning mobility, and at the same time cover substitute teachers and special agreements (SGS1010) for employees.

¹ Meld. St. 7 (2020-2021) *En verden av muligheter – internasjonal studentmobilitet i høyere utdanning*. Kunnskapsdepartementet.

² Meld. St. 21. (2020-2021). *Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden*. Kunnskapsdepartementet.

³ Strategi for høyere yrkesfaglig utdanning – Videre vekst og kvalitet. Kunnskapsdepartementet <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/videre-vekst-og-kvalitet-strategi-for-hoyere-yrkesfaglig-utdanning/id2865542/?ch=3>

⁴ Diku. (2019). *Europeisk mobilitet i fag- og yrkesopplæringen - erfaringer og utbytte* (Rapport 07/2019).

⁵ HK-dir. (2021). *Fag og fellesskap - Betydningen av Erasmus+ skoleutvekslingspartnerskap* (Rapport 04/2021).

For adult education, the individual support rates constitute a substantial barrier. The cost associated with travel, accommodation and other expenses can be significant, and many adult learners may not have the financial resources to cover these costs. One common feedback from participants participating in the Erasmus+ program, is that the individual support rate is too low for adults in training.

Incentives

Learning mobility as a driver for quality in education

A study period abroad will help improve the quality of higher education and research, and promote the individual student's academic and personal development; it will also help evolve the society and increase capacity for change and ability to compete. Like research, education must also be developed through collaboration and comparison with good partners abroad. International exposure and cooperation adds valuable perspectives to programmes of education – and thereby also the students – that can raise the quality of education in the broadest sense.

Learning mobility should to a larger extent be seen as a driver for quality in education. An international academic environment and cooperation at staff level is a prerequisite for developing quality and relevance in higher education. **Staff mobility is a tool to push the cultural change** at the HEIs to increase student mobility. Experience from higher educational institutions show that academic staff who have been mobile, will to a larger extent encourage students to participate in learning mobility. Strategic staff mobility can be used to build knowledge of the partner institutions and increase the possibility of other types of cooperation, in both education and research. Across sectors, an international network of staff and clear priority and anchoring at the top organisational level is important to succeed.

Learning mobility should be part of the strategic work to strengthen quality and relevance in education. In higher education, mobility should be integrated in and based on institutional cooperation, encompassing both education and research where relevant. A well-adapted learning mobility period will increase the learning outcome for the student/pupil by offering new perspectives on the field of study, exposing the student to other forms of learning, and to different content than the one offered “at home”. To emphasise the importance of international competence and ensuring that all students in higher education attain this, the Norwegian government will **include a learning outcome descriptor on international competence in the Norwegian Qualification Framework**. If the learning mobility period is well-adapted to the study programme, the student may have the possibility to take courses that are not offered at their home institution, or courses where the partner institution has a particularly strong academic environment, and in this way contribute a better and more relevant education.

Structures

To increase learning mobility in all sectors, the study programme structure should have designated **mobility windows**, making it clear to the students/pupils at what time during the study program learning mobility is possible. All higher education institutions in Norway are

expected to introduce a system where students will have to actively deregister if they cannot or do not want to go abroad, a so-called **opt-out solution**.⁶

The higher education institutions should to a greater extent **develop and make use of pre-approved course packages** for learning mobility for their study programs. Such packages should ensure that students know in advance that the study period abroad has been quality-assured, and that it will be fully recognised as part of their degree at home. Recognition of study periods abroad is an important challenge for students choosing to participate in learning mobility, and the uncertainty for the students as to whether their study period will be accepted in their national/HEI system upon return, is perceived as a barrier. This issue at the higher education level has been raised through both the Bologna process as well as through EU policy documents, and beyond, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention from 1999 (UNESCO/CoE) has improved the situation.

A more flexible approach by the higher education institutions, as well as continued work at EU, national and HEI institution level to facilitate automatic recognition procedures is important, to remove actual and perceived barriers to recognition.

In addition, the higher education institutions should also ensure that the study periods abroad are relevant and has a clear link to the domestic study program. It must be made clear to the students what the expected learning outcome of the stay abroad is, and how the courses taken abroad contribute to the overall learning outcomes for the study program.

Labour market relevance

International cooperation and international perspectives are necessary to address the global challenges facing society today linked to e.g. climate change, technology, demographics and democracy. A study period abroad will provide students with international experience that will make them better equipped to participate in a globalised working and business landscape. In Norway, the society and the workplace are becoming increasingly international, and the importance of the kind of knowledge, expertise and skills that greater internationalisation can help foster will only increase in the future. However, employers give insignificant priority to learning mobility as such in a recruitment phase⁷. A Finnish study from 2014 made a similar observation – a learning mobility period abroad contributes to a large extent to qualities employers look for in a candidate, but employers fail to perceive the link to international experience⁸. Giving the students adequate tools to describe the skills acquired through their international experience can help them in promoting these skills.

⁶ At the bachelor's programme in European Studies at the University of Bergen (UiB), an opt-out solution has already been in use a couple of years with good results. In 2020, before the pandemic, 75 % of the graduates from this study program had a mobility period abroad during their studies (in 2018 and 2019 the results were 54 and 50 %). An opt-out solution is being piloted by several Norwegian higher education institutions from autumn 2023.

⁷ Wiers-Jensen, J., Tillman, M. & Matherly, C. (2020). Employability: How education abroad impacts the transition to graduate employment. Ogden, I., Streetwiser, B. og Van Mol, C., (red.), Education abroad: Bridging scholarship and practice (kapittel 9).

⁸ Cimo (2014)

https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/32427_faktaa_1_2014_hidden_competences.pdf

Making learning mobility more socially inclusive and environmentally friendly

There is a need to identify incentives on how to overcome barriers, also in the perspective of making learning mobility more socially inclusive and more environmentally friendly. To increase inclusion in learning mobility, mobility periods can be offered in flexible time frames to make learning mobility more accessible and higher grants could be given. In higher education, learning mobility periods of three months have long been the norm. However, students report of equally high learning outcome from shorter learning mobility periods⁹.

Ensuring that more people can participate in international learning environments is also about strengthening the European dimension in all learning arenas, both formal and informal. Not everyone is able to travel abroad, but strengthening the international dimension in all national learning arenas will allow more people to gain international experience. Foreign students and pupils staying in Norway contribute positively to the learning environment by introducing different ways of learning, asking questions about teaching methods used in Norwegian institutions and offering different academic and social perspectives. In this way, international students and pupils provide new perspectives and international expertise and experience to Norwegian institutions. Youth mobility that takes place as part of a project involving the local community can help youths and other citizens to see themselves in a new light.

Digital opportunities

New digital opportunities broaden the scope of who can participate in international cooperation to include participants not able to travel. However, some of the learning outcomes of the learning mobility period are not as easy obtainable through digital tools, and digital international cooperation should be considered as a complement to physical mobility.

Environmentally friendly learning mobility

The increase in travel because of increased international learning mobility must be weighed up against the changes currently being implemented at higher education institutions and in society in connection with the green transition. Norway nevertheless believes that the value of international learning mobility justifies it being given high priority. A learning period abroad may be the most important trip a student makes during their entire lifetime, and this recognition must lie beneath a student's decision to take all or part of their education abroad. However, it is important to make conscious choices about physical travel, and there are financial incentives to encourage green transportation to nearby countries/areas.

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⁹ Diku & NOKUT (2018). Utbytte fra utveksling og andre utenlandsopphold. En analyse av data fra Studiebarometeret 2017 (Diku-rapport 3/2018 og NOKUT-rapport 4/2018). <https://diku.no/rapporter/diku-rapportserie-03-2018-utbytte-fra-utveksling-og-andre-utenlandsopphold>