

Education

– from Kindergarten to Adult Education

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NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

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Education in Norway

The Norwegian educational system aims to be among the best in the world with regards to both academic levels and breadth of participation and completion rates. The quality of our education and training is instrumental for the qualities developed in our society.

Education for all is a basic precept of Norwegian educational policy. Children and young people must have an equal right to education, regardless of where they live, gender, social and cultural background or any special needs. All public education in Norway is free of charge, while kindergartens have parental fees.

Education must be organised in a lifelong learning perspective if we are to meet changes in society constructively.

Facts and Figures about Education in Norway

- Of a population of over 4.5 million, more than 900 000 people are currently undergoing education or training. In addition approx. 1 million people participate in adult education courses each year.
- Approx. 32 per cent of the population over 16 does not have education above the lower secondary level, 44 per cent do not have education above upper secondary level, and 25 per cent have an education at university and/or university college level.
- Approx. 235 000 children have places in ordinary kindergartens or family kindergartens (2006). Kindergartens are voluntary, but it is a goal that everyone who so wishes is to have the opportunity to attend a kindergarten.
- Approx. 607 500 pupils attend public primary and lower secondary schools in the school year of 2006–2007. In addition there are almost 10 000 pupils at private primary and lower secondary schools. Never before has Norway had so many pupils at this level.
- During the school year of 2006–2007 more than 180 000 pupils attend public upper secondary schools, while there are about 14 000 pupils at private upper secondary schools. In addition there are about 32 000 apprentices.
- There are about 195 000 students at Norwegian universities and university colleges (both public and private).
- Approx. 143 000 students in Norway receive support from the State Educational Loan fund. In addition approx. 14 000 Norwegian students receive support to take full studies abroad, whereas about 8 000 receive support to take parts of a degree or to participate in exchange programmes abroad.
- Education in Norway costs 6.6 per cent of the gross domestic product, while the average for the OECD countries is 5.9 per cent (2003).



Responsibility

The Norwegian Parliament (the Storting) and the Government define the goals and decide the framework for the education sector. The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for carrying out national educational policy. National standards are ensured through legislation, regulations, curricula and framework plans.

■ ***Kindergartens***

The Government has the overall responsibility for quality development, management and financing of the kindergarten sector, and allocates earmarked funds for the running of kindergartens.

The County Governors act as links between the Ministry of Education and Research and the kindergarten sector. The County Governors implement kindergarten policy through development work, administrative tasks, supervision and guidance for municipalities.

The municipalities are responsible for providing and running municipal kindergartens, as well as for approving and supervising both public and private kindergartens in the municipality. The municipalities must also ensure that the kindergartens are operated within their approval framework and that the contents complies with legislation, regulations and the framework plan. In addition the municipalities have an active responsibility for providing guidance. Municipal authorities must ensure that public subsidies are paid on an equal basis to all the approved kindergartens in their municipality.

Kindergarten owners are responsible for the contents of the individual kindergarten. The Parents' Council for each kindergarten determines a year plan ensuring the participation of parents and staff in the framing of the educational contents. Kindergarten owners are responsible for employing adequate and qualified staff.

■ ***Primary and Secondary Education and training***

The state bears the overall responsibility for the Education Act with regulations, contents and financing of primary and secondary education and training.

The County Governors are to act as links between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training on the one hand and the education sector in municipalities and counties on the other. The County Governors are responsible for supervision and dealing with complaints related to regulations, participation in quality development, information, guidance and various administrative matters.



The municipalities are responsible for operating and administering primary and lower secondary schools, whereas the county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education and training. Legislation and regulations, including the National Curriculum, form a binding framework, but within this framework the municipal and county authorities, schools and teachers can influence the implementation of the education and training. Each school has a head teacher and various boards, councils and committees.

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is an executive subordinate agency for the Ministry of Education and Research. The Directorate's main tasks are to promote quality development, quality assessment, analysis and documentation in primary and secondary education and training, and to perform administrative tasks connected with primary and secondary education and training, in addition to bearing the overall national responsibility for supervision of primary and secondary education and training.

■ *Tertiary Vocational Education*

Tertiary vocational education is a short vocational alternative to higher education. It is regulated by national legislation and is offered partly by county authorities and partly by private parties.

Children and young people must have an equal right to education, regardless of where they live, gender, social and cultural background or any special needs.

■ *Higher Education*

The state is responsible for universities and university colleges, which are directly subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research. Each institution has a board which is responsible for the direction and organisation of operations. Accredited institutions have been awarded extensive academic powers and may establish and terminate their own courses of study. University colleges decide for themselves which studies and topics they are to offer at first degree level. Universities determine for themselves which subjects and topics they wish to offer at all levels, including doctoral programmes.

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education are also instrumental in the governance of the universities and university colleges.

Kindergartens

Facts

- Approx. 6 440 kindergartens (approx. 55 per cent private ones)
- Approx. 235 000 children (approx. 46 per cent in private kindergartens)
- Approx. 69 700 employees (Statistics Norway 2006)

Kindergartens were transferred from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Research in the autumn of 2005 in order to ensure coherence and continuity in the education of children and young people.



The Kindergarten Act governs kindergarten activities in Norway. The kindergarten is to be an educational institution that provides pre-school children with good opportunities for development and activities. The kindergarten is both a means of ensuring good conditions for children, but also provides a service for families while parents are studying or working. Kindergartens provide education as well as offering supervision and care. Kindergartens give children a safe and stimulating community and individual support and care.

The Kindergarten Promotion is at the centre of the Government's strategy for creating good and safe childhood and learning conditions for children and young people. The objectives of the Kindergarten Promotion are: Kindergarten places for all children whose parents so wish, high quality and low price.

Framework Plan for Content and Tasks for Kindergartens

On 1 March 2006 the Ministry of Education and Research determined the Regulation concerning a Framework Plan for Content and Tasks for Kindergartens, which came into force on 1 August 2006. It provides guidelines for fundamental values, content and tasks for kindergartens, and gives staff, parents, owners and supervisory authorities a framework for their work.

Primary and Lower Secondary Education

Facts

- Approx. 3 100 primary and lower secondary schools (approx. 4.7 per cent private)
- Approx. 620 000 pupils (approx. 2.2 per cent in private schools)
- Approx. 64 000 teachers

Compulsory primary and lower secondary schooling in Norway lasts for ten years and children start school the year they become six.

Primary and lower secondary education is founded on the principle of equity and adapted education for all pupils in a school system based on the same National Curriculum. All children and young people are to share a common foundation of knowledge, culture and values.

Universal schooling for children was introduced in Norway in 1739. From 1889 compulsory education lasted for seven years. In 1969 it was increased to nine years, and in 1997 to ten years for all children born in 1991 or later.

Compulsory education is divided into two main stages: Primary school (grades 1–7) and lower secondary school (grades 8–10).

Norway has a scattered population and many of the primary and lower secondary schools are small. The per centage of schools with less than 100 pupils has decreased from 40 to 35 per cent since 1997. Only nine per cent of the pupils attend these schools. 53 per cent of all pupils attend schools with more than 300 pupils, constituting 26 per cent of all schools.

Objectives and Curriculum in the Knowledge Promotion

In the autumn of 2006 the school reform called *The Knowledge Promotion* was introduced. The objectives and quality framework for primary and secondary education and training are laid down in *The National Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion* which applies to all levels of primary and secondary education and training and comprises:

- The Core Curriculum
- Quality Framework
- Subject Curricula
- Distribution of teaching hours per subject
- Individual Assessment

The subject curricula include competence aims for the pupils after certain grades. All the subjects have competence aims after grades 4, 7 and 10 and after each level in upper secondary education and training. Some subjects also have competence aims after grade 2.



In the subject curricula the five basic skills are integrated in a way that is adapted to each subject. These skills are: Being able to read, being able to express oneself orally, being able to express oneself in writing, being able to develop numeracy and being able to use digital tools.

Education according to the Sami National Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion

In collaboration with the Sami Parliament (the Sameting), a separate curriculum for primary and secondary education and training in Sami districts has been developed. The subject curricula are partly separate curricula, such as for the Sami language and for duodji, and partly adapted parallel curricula, such as for natural science, music etc. As well as this curriculum is ensuring that pupils in primary and secondary education and training in Sami districts receive their education in Sami, it also gives Sami pupils an individual right to learn the Sami language wherever they live.

The Subjects of Primary and Lower Secondary Education

- Norwegian
- Mathematics
- Social Science
- Christianity, Religion and Ethics Education (CREE)
- Arts and Crafts
- Natural Science
- English
- Foreign Languages/ Language In-depth Studies
- Food and Health
- Music
- Physical Education
- Student Council Work
- Optional Programme Subject

English is a compulsory foreign language from grade 1. In the lower secondary school pupils can in addition choose between another foreign language and in-depth studies in Norwegian or English or Sami.

At the lower secondary level there are specially designated periods for student council work. For deaf pupils there are curricula for Sign Language as first language, Sign Language In-depth Studies and adapted curricula in Norwegian, English and Drama and Rhythm.

Day Care Facilities for School Children (SFO)

From 1 January 1999 all municipalities have been legally obliged to provide day care facilities before and after school for children in grades 1 – 4. These facilities are to allow the children to play and have cultural and leisure activities that are suited for their age, functional level and interests. Day care facilities are to provide good conditions for development for children with disabilities.



Upper Secondary Education and Training

Facts

- Approx. 450 upper secondary schools (approx. 16 per cent private)
- Approx. 190 000 pupils (approx. 6 per cent in private schools)
- Approx. 34 000 apprentices
- Approx. 23 000 teachers

Upper secondary education and training comprises all courses leading to qualifications above the lower secondary level and below the level of higher education.

Young people who have completed primary and lower secondary education, or the equivalent, have a right to three years' upper secondary education and training leading either to admission to higher education, to vocational qualifications or to basic skills. All these young people are entitled to a place on one of three alternative education programmes they have applied for admission to, and to two years' further schooling that is based on this education programme. Pupils in vocational education and training can achieve the qualifications necessary for admission to universities and university colleges (university admissions certification) by taking a supplementary programme for general university admissions certification.

The county authorities are legally obliged to follow up young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who neither attend a course of education nor are employed.

Pupils who have a right to special needs education have the right to an extra two years of upper secondary education or training if it is necessary for him/her to achieve his/her educational objectives. This right also applies to pupils who have the right to education in sign language or the right to education in Braille.

Adults born before 1 January 1978 and who have not earlier completed upper secondary education or training, have a statutory right to upper secondary education or training.

General Studies and Vocational Studies

Upper secondary education and training is available all over the country so as to ensure an equal education for all. Earlier there were a number of different types of school offering upper secondary education courses of varying length, but since 1976 Norway has had a unified upper secondary structure that coordinates general studies and vocational studies.

The education and training normally takes three years, divided into three levels: Vg1, Vg2 and Vg3 (in a few cases four years with a Vg4). Vocational education and training mainly leads to a craft or journeyman's certificate, usually after two years in school and one year in-service training in an enterprise. In-service training at a training establishment is usually combined with

one year's productive work, so that the apprenticeship takes two years in all. If it is impossible to provide enough training places, the county authorities are obliged to offer Vg3 in school, in which case there is no productive work. The final craft or journeyman's examination is the same as it would have been after training in a training establishment. When it comes to subjects that are not recognised trades, vocational education will only be given in school and lead to vocational qualifications.

General studies take three years and lead to general university admissions certification. It is possible for pupils who have finished their vocational education at Vg1 and Vg2 to take Vg3 supplementary programme for general university admissions certification



The Structure of Upper Secondary Education and Training:

Upper secondary education and training is organised in 12 different education programmes.

Programmes for General Studies:

- Programme for Specialisation in General Studies
- Programme for Sports and Physical Education
- Programme for Music, Dance and Drama

Vocational Education Programmes:

- Programme for Building and Construction
- Programme for Design, Arts and Crafts
- Programme for Electricity and Electronics
- Programme for Health and Social Care
- Programme for Media and Communication
- Programme for Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry
- Programme for Restaurant and Food Processing
- Programme for Service and Transport
- Programme for Technical and Industrial Production

Private schools

Private schools are schools that have private ownership and are approved in accordance with the Private Education Act. These schools receive financial support from the state to the tune of 85 per cent of the operating costs of publicly owned schools. The schools must be run in accordance with the Private Education Act, with the regulations to this act and with the terms of their approval decision. When applications are assessed, the public school structure and educational considerations must be taken into account.

In Norway there are about 150 private primary and lower secondary schools with a total of almost 14 000 pupils, and about 75 private upper secondary schools with approx. 10 000 pupils.

Schools that want to achieve approval and state support must primarily be either of a denominational nature or offer an approved pedagogical alternative. Certified international schools can also be approved, and so can private schools providing Norwegian primary and lower secondary education abroad. The Private Education Act also allows for the approval of upper secondary schools offering special and adapted education combined with top-level sports, and of schools offering adapted education for pupils with disabilities.

In addition to private schools that have been approved in accordance with the Private Education Act, there are also private primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools that do not have the right to receive state support. However, schools offering primary and lower secondary education must be approved in accordance with the Education Act, whereas private school owners can freely establish schools at upper secondary level. In Norway there are very few private schools within these two categories.

Tertiary Vocational Education



Tertiary vocational education is an alternative to higher education and is based on upper secondary education and training or equivalent informal and non-formal competence. Higher Education Entrance Qualification is not required. The education consists of vocational courses lasting from half a year to two years. Apart from the traditional schools of technical management and maritime subjects which are publicly financed (by the county authorities), most of the schools offering this kind of education are private ones. All courses must be accredited by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). An up-to-date list of recognised courses can be found on NOKUT's website.

Higher Education

Facts

- – 7 universities
 - 7 specialised institutions at university level (including 1 private)
 - 24 state university colleges, 2 national institutes of the arts and 2 private university colleges
- 31 private institutions with accredited study programmes (22 of which receive some public funding)
- Approx. 195 000 students, of whom approximately 24 500 study at private colleges/university colleges

Higher education is based on research and usually builds on three years' completed and passed upper secondary education.

Most institutions of higher education are state-run and are responsible for the quality of their own instruction, research and dissemination of knowledge. About 12.5 per cent of students in higher education attend private institutions. Higher education builds on the successful completion of three years of upper secondary school. Since 2001, access can also be granted for those older than 25 years on the basis of a documented combination of formal, informal and non-formal competence (total qualifications).

Norwegian Higher Education and the Bologna process

The Bologna Process aims to create a common European higher education areas by 2010. Today 46 out of a total of 47 European countries are taking part in the process. In 2003 a reform was carried out in Norwegian Higher Education. The Quality Reform introduced a degree structure, grading system and quality assurance system in line with the Bologna Process.

Degree structure and grading system

As of 2003 the degree structure consists of a three-year bachelor's degree, a two-year master's and three-year doctorate (PhD). Exceptions to the model are the old university college two-year degree (college candidate), five-year consecutive master's degrees, six-year professional programmes, master's degrees of one to one and a half year's duration, four-year bachelor's degrees in performing music and performing arts and four-year programmes in teacher education.

The grading scale conforms to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) rating scale with the letters A (best) to E for pass and F for failed.

The reform also meant the establishment of a quality assurance agency, NOKUT, and a centre for internationalisation, SIU (see presentation below). A system for institutional accreditation (voluntary for the private institutions) was also introduced, which had as a consequence that some university colleges launched efforts towards becoming universities.

The differences between the types of higher education institutions are mainly related to their self-accreditation rights. For example, universities can without external accreditation offer study programmes at all levels, while university



colleges must apply for external accreditation (by NOKUT) for study programmes at master's and PhD level. There is also a wide range of private higher education institutions without any self-accreditation rights. These institutions provide study programmes that are accredited (by NOKUT).

Universities and Specialised Institutions at University Level

There are seven universities in Norway, all state-run: University of Oslo (the oldest and largest), University of Bergen, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU, in Trondheim), University of Tromsø, University of Stavanger, Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB, in Ås) and University of Agder.

There are also six specialised institutions at university level – five state-run and one private (2007). The state-run institutions are Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (in Bergen), Norwegian Academy of Music, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Norwegian School of Veterinary Science and Oslo School of Architecture and Design. So far the Norwegian School of Theology is the only private specialised institution at university level.

Apart from instruction and dissemination of knowledge the universities and specialised institutions at university level have a special responsibility for research and the education of researchers through their doctoral programmes. The four traditional universities (Oslo, Bergen, NTNU and Tromsø) are also responsible for museums.

University Colleges

There are 24 public and two private university colleges. The university colleges have an important role in decentralising access to higher education. The 24 university colleges predominantly offer 3-year professional bachelor programmes (engineering, nursing, social work, etc). There are also professional programmes of varying lengths, from one to five years, for example in teacher training and business administration. Several university colleges offer master's programmes and three have the right to award doctorates in one or more subjects. The university colleges also engage in research and development work.

National Institutes of the Arts

There is one Institute of the Arts in Oslo and one in Bergen. Both are state-owned and have a varied range of courses of study in visual art and design. The National Institute of the Arts in Oslo also offers programmes in the dramatic arts (theatre, opera and ballet).

Private higher education institutions with accredited study programmes

In addition to the private specialised institution at university level and the two private university colleges, there are 25 private higher education institutions receiving public funding for all or some of their programmes. NOKUT features a list of all accredited programmes at private higher education institutions.

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)

NOKUT was established in 2002, operative as of 1 January 2003. It is an independent agency with the task of carrying out external quality assurance of higher education and tertiary vocational education in Norway. NOKUT also handles applications for general recognition of foreign qualifications.

NOKUT performs this task through a variety of mechanisms:

- Accreditation of higher education institutions
- Accreditation of higher education programmes and courses
- Revision of accreditation
- Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions
- Evaluation of specific types of educational provision or defined aspects of such
- Recognition of tertiary vocational education
- General recognition of foreign qualifications

The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU)

SIU was established as an administrative agency under the Ministry of Education and Research in 2004. The Centre is Norway's official agency for international programmes and measures related to education and training. SIU administers international collaboration programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning Programme, within education and research on behalf of both KD and others.

In addition to programme administration SIU is responsible for promoting Norway as an education and research destination, as well as providing information and advisory services within the field of internationalisation in education.

Education and Training for Adults

Facts:

- Approx. 10 000 adults each year receive education at primary and lower secondary level
- Approx. 20 000 adults participate in upper secondary education and training each year
- Approx. 15 000 students attend continuing education courses at public universities and university colleges
- Approx. 70 000 participate in supplementary training courses

Lifelong learning and opportunities for education for adults are important principles in Norwegian education policy. The aim is to make it possible for the adult segment of the population to strengthen their competence throughout their career pathways. The age boom in the working community makes it even more important to adapt conditions to make it possible for adults also to take part in training, education and competence development.

The Competence Reform gave all adults who need it a statutory right to primary and lower secondary education (from 2002), and those who were born before 1978 were given the right to upper secondary education and training if they have not completed this kind of education earlier. The education and training is to be reduced on the basis of the individual's formal, non-formal and informal qualifications, and be adapted to the individual's needs. From 2001 adults over 25 were also given the right to admission to universities and university colleges based on formal, non-formal and informal qualifications.

Municipalities are responsible for primary and lower secondary education for adults, while the county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education and training. Adult education associations and distance education institutions also offer courses at these levels. In addition, the universities and university colleges are important providers of continuing and supplementary courses above primary and secondary level. Seen as a whole, the number of adults taking part both in regular study programmes and in continuing education has increased since the beginning of the 1990s.

One of the main challenges in the years ahead is the task of making good courses for adults with poor basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic and the use of ICT. Municipalities can offer this kind of education. The Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life funds enterprises and public institutions that initiate education in basic skills for their employees or potential employees.

Adult Education Associations

An adult education association is a voluntary, ideal organisation with adult education as its main concern, and consists of two or more member organisations. The approximately 20 adult education associations receiving state grants have about 400 member organisations. The courses include a number of different topics varying from leisure activities to courses at university and university college level and courses leading to vocational qualifications. The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning is a national umbrella organisation for the adult education associations in Norway.

During recent years there have been about 600 000 participants in the different courses organised by the adult education associations, almost 300 000 taking part in courses at upper secondary level, and approximately 40 000 taking courses at university college/university level.

Folk High Schools

The folk high schools have approximately 7 000 places divided between about 80 schools throughout the country. Most of them are boarding schools and are run by different types of organisations, independent foundations, counties and Christian organisations. Folk high schools provide young people and adults with general courses but do not organise any formal examinations.

Distance Education

Distance education is common in Norway. Traditionally this has consisted of correspondence courses, but today more and more distance education courses are Internet-based. Each year approx. 20 000 participants complete courses run by more than ten authorised distance education institutions. By offering alternative and more flexible paths to education, distance education helps meet the need for continuing and supplementary education and training. The Norwegian Association for Distance Education and Flexible Education is a membership organisation for among others the independent distance education institutions.

All universities and university colleges are expected to offer flexible ICT-supported courses. A national agency for stimulating universities and university colleges to develop flexible education was established in 1990. Called Norway Opening Universities (before 2004: SOFF), it awards project funds, disseminates information and prepares reports, creates meeting places and facilitates experience sharing in this field. At the universities and university colleges the number of distance education courses offered has increased greatly as ICT-supported learning has developed, and by the end of 2004 all state-owned and the larger private education institutions had acquired digital platforms for learning management systems (LMS).

Training for the Labour Market

Registered job-seekers who need certification can be offered courses in training for the labour market. The aim is to qualify participants for vacant positions. The training usually takes the shape of shorter, vocational courses. Job-seekers undergoing vocational occupational rehabilitation can receive labour market training inside the regular education system for a period of up



to three years. In recent years the annual average number of people taking part in labour market training courses has varied from about 4 500 to 7 000. The annual average number of occupationally handicapped people taking part in training was just under 27 000 in 2006. Participation on these courses is organised by the local offices of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV).

Vox – the Norwegian Institute of Adult Education

Vox is an agency under the Ministry of Education and Research that works to promote participation in community and working life by improving the competence level of adults. Vox develops, analyses and disseminates knowledge about adult learning. Vox is especially concerned with improving adults' basic skills, adults' right to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education and training, and formal, non-formal and informal qualifications. Vox administers grants for educational organisations and distance education institutions, and awards funds for educational development in these organisations. Vox is also responsible for the subject curriculum in Norwegian and social sciences for adult immigrants, and collaborates with other agencies on initial education for immigrants.

Additional Information

Competence Development

A separate policy plan for competence in the kindergarten sector has been drawn up. The aim of this policy plan is to focus on the kindergarten as a learning organisation. The policy plan also aims to be a tool for the further development of contents and tasks in kindergartens. It is also meant to stimulate competence development in municipalities as kindergarten authorities, and among kindergarten owners, institutions of higher education and research environments.

Teachers in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education and training are significant factors for how much pupils learn, and here too there are goal-oriented initiatives for competence development, development and experiments. The most important scheme is the policy plan called *Competence for Development* which is being implemented in collaboration between the major parties in the educational sector. The national authorities spend significant sums on this policy every year, with the municipalities and county authorities spending equivalent amounts.

Study Financing

The State Educational Loan Fund was founded in 1947. The Fund provides financial support for educational purposes in the form of loans and grants. This support can be given to pupils in programmes for both general studies and vocational education, students in tertiary vocational education and in higher education in both public and private schools. In addition, adults may receive support to take primary and lower secondary education. The State Educational Loan Fund helps make it possible for everyone, irrespective of their social or economic background, to take an education. Financial support may also be awarded for studies abroad.

Equal Opportunities

Genuine gender equality is a major educational objective.

Kindergartens follow a separate plan of action for gender equality, involving the kindergartens, the owners, municipalities, university colleges and County Governors. The goal is to increase the number of male employees in kindergartens, and to have equality and equity as a foundation for all activities and pedagogy in the kindergarten.

Equality is also a natural part of the Education Act, the Core Curriculum and the various subject curricula. Education and training are to be organised so that everyone can choose an educational path and a vocation that suits their own interests and abilities, irrespective of traditional gender role expectations. Equality is to be integrated in all education so that everybody is ensured the same conditions and opportunities. There must be a foundation for everyone to have the same rights, obligations and opportunities, both in working life, in community life and private life.

The topic of equal opportunities is just as important in higher education. The Universities and Colleges Act states that «Universities and university colleges are to work actively, purposefully and systematically to achieve gender equality for all job categories at the institution».

Language Minorities

Increased immigration has meant an increased number of children and young people from language minorities. The Government has the goal that more children from minority language backgrounds should attend kindergartens. For pre-school children from minority language backgrounds the kindergarten is the most important arena for inclusion and for learning languages. There are therefore grants to fund measures for improving this group's understanding of language, as well as grants for providing a kindergarten place for the children of refugees who have recently arrived in the country.

The Education Act determines the right to education for pupils from minority language backgrounds. The revised policy plan called *Equal Education in Practice!* was issued in February 2007. It is a policy plan for improved learning and greater participation in kindergartens, schools, education and training on the part of language minorities. In order to improve the education provided for language minorities, there will be a new, level-based curriculum in Norwegian (*Basic Norwegian*) from the start of the new school year in the autumn of 2007 and a new level-based curriculum in the mother-tongue.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

ICT is a priority area throughout the whole educational sector. The framework is decided by the Programme for Digital Competence (PfdK) 2004–2008. The vision for this programme is: «Digital Competence for All».

The main objectives for the programme are that by 2008:

- Norwegian education institutions are to have access to high quality infrastructure and services. The learning arenas are to have technical equipment and Internet connections with adequate bandwidth. Development and use of ICT in learning work are to be supported by secure and cost-effective operative solutions.
- digital competence is to be central to the education at all levels. All pupils, students and apprentices, in and outside schools and universities/university colleges, are to be able to use ICT in a secure, conversant and creative manner so as to develop the knowledge and skill they need in order to be full participants in the community.
- the Norwegian education system is to be among the world's best with respect to development and educational use of ICT in teaching and learning.
- ICT is to be an integrated instrument for innovation and quality development in Norwegian education, based on organisational and working methods that promote learning and innovation.

ICT is integrated in the Knowledge Promotion as one of the five basic skills and as part of the competence aims of the subjects. In higher education ICT is used to a great degree as an instrument for communication as well as for professional and pedagogical development work.

Children, Pupils and Students with Special Needs

Kindergartens are educationally important for children with disabilities. A child with disabilities has first priority for admission to kindergarten if a place is deemed to be of use for him/her. There are also grants to help pay for special educational help for children with functional impairments in kindergartens.

Education in school is to be adapted to the individual pupil's abilities and capabilities. Pupils who do not, or cannot, achieve a satisfactory learning yield from the ordinary teaching, has a right to special needs education. Special needs education is as far as possible to be planned in collaboration with the pupil and parents.

The municipal educational and psychological counselling service (the PP-service) is the expert and advisory authority in these matters. Special education resource centres can after referral from the PP-service help municipalities and schools in their work with children, young people and adults with special educational needs. The resource centres are to develop special educational competence by making surveys, counselling, training and development work, etc.

The Act relating to Universities and Colleges states that it is the universities and colleges themselves that are responsible for the students' learning environment. This also means they are responsible for students with functional impairments. The Act says that the institutions shall «... to the extent possible and reasonable... facilitate an adapted and flexible learning environment that is designed according to the principles of universal design».

Home – School

The National Parents' Committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education (FUG) acts as an independent advisory body for the Ministry of Education and Research in questions concerning home-school cooperation. FUG is to work to safeguard parents' interests in school matters. FUG is also to work to strengthen parent involvement and parental influence in primary and lower secondary education by giving parents information, training and advice. The Committee is especially responsible for stimulating the dialogue between homes and schools. It is an important task for the Committee to help involve all parents in this work.

Relevant websites:

The Ministry of Education and Research
– www.kunnskapsdepartementet.no

The Internet Gateway for Education – www.utdanning.no

The Directorate for Education and Training
– www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no

The County Governors – www.fylkesmannen.no

The School Web – www.skolenettet.no

The Internet Gateway for applicants to upper secondary education
– www.vilbli.no

The Parents' Web – www.foreldrenettet.no

National Parents' Committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education
– www.fug.no

Statistics Norway – www.ssb.no/utdanning_tema

Norwegian Council for Higher Education – www.uhr.no

Universities and Colleges Admission Service – www.samordnaopptak.no

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
– www.nokut.no

Centre For International University Cooperation – www.siu.no

Norway Opening Universities – www.norgesuniversitetet.no

State Educational Loan Fund – www.lanekassen.no

Norwegian Folk High School Council – www.folkehogskole.no

Norwegian Association for Adult Education – www.vofo.no

Norwegian Institute of Adult Education – www.vox.no

PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Education and Research

Additional copies may be ordered from:

Government Administration Services

Kopi- og distribusjonsservice

www.publikasjoner.dep.no

E-mail: publikasjonsbestilling@dss.dep.no

Fax: + 47 22 24 27 86

Publication number: F-4133E

Desig/layout: Sissel Sandve / Basta

Photo: Sveinung Bråthen / Tank Design AS, Svein Erik Dahl / Samfoto

Printed by: Zoom grafisk AS – 11/2007

Impression: 1000 ex

