



EUROPEAN  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION  
OF ADULTS

# **Country Report on Adult Education in NORWAY**

Helsinki, 2011



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## Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Norway. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Norway as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info@eaea.org).



## Overview

Perhaps in keeping with the Nordic countries in general, Norway has a well developed adult education system, especially geared towards **Lifelong Learning** with the principle of '**education for all**'. Overall the general direction of policy seems to be concerned with issues of **social justice and equity, workplace flexibility**, and allowing people to keep up with changes in society and the workplace caused by **technological advances** and societal changes due to **globalisation**. [1]

**Adult learning and education (ALE)** in Norway covers a variety of activities, including formal education at **primary and upper secondary** level, and non-formal education and learning in **folk high schools** and **adult education associations** across the country. As such, a large proportion of adult education takes place besides the formal (public) education system and is more focused on **skills development** in the workplace or local communities. [2] Another aspect more recently implemented (2005) is a system of Norwegian **language training for immigrants** who meet certain requirements, who then have a legal right to these classes (indications are that around 20% of immigrants fall into this category). For more detailed explanations of the different organisations and the structure of the adult education system in Norway, refer to the section 'Structure and Providers'.

## Politics and Law

The main political body responsible for ALE is the **Ministry of Education and Research**. Within this ministry is the **Department for Policy Analysis, Lifelong Learning and International Affairs** and **VOX - the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning**. The ministerial agency responsible for formal primary and secondary education - the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training - is also within this ministry. The responsibility for immigrant education falls within the **Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion** (although formerly this was within the Ministry of Education). VOX is also responsible under this ministry for the improvement of immigrant education and works in co-operation with other relevant stakeholders. Norway itself is **divided into counties**, and each county contains **municipalities** which are responsible for delivery of formal adult education on primary level; there are currently approximately 431 municipalities. [3]

From a legal perspective, adult education is regulated by the **Adult Education Act** (originally from 1976, however a new version of the act passed the Storting in June 2009, which has been active from 2010) and the Education Act (1998). In addition, there is the **Act on Folk High Schools** (1984). Under the Adult



Education Act, the provision of non formal courses is taken care of by the **adult education associations**. The Education Act regulates primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education for all, which includes adults. [4]

The Education Act also includes **formal adult education**, defining ‘adult’ as 25 years old or over, by stating that adults **who have not fulfilled primary or secondary education have a legal right** to ask for it, and for it to be provided free of charge. It makes the **municipalities and counties responsible** for the provision of adult education and training, and must also make sure the adult learners have the opportunity to take an active part in the learning environment and their own education. [5] A key component of this Act (amended in 2009) was the Competence Reform, which came into effect in 2002, and was designed to strengthen the commitment from both the authorities and social partners involved. The main elements of this Reform were **flexibility of learning** (encouraging development of programmes which tap in to the potential of workplace learning for example), a framework for the conditions which entitle adults to a **leave of absence from their work** for education purposes, and a competence building programme in the field of continuing education and training.

An outcome of this Reform was the **National Validation Project**, which ended in 2002. It responded to the Reform’s request for documenting and **validating informal and non-formal learning outcomes**, and recognising learning through paid and unpaid work, organisational involvement or other training. As part of this project, 50 local development projects were funded and different methods and tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning were developed in three sectors; educational, working life and the third sector/civil society. Based on qualitative and quantitative data from these development projects and other surveys a new legalisation framework was developed, which was related to the **individual rights for validation and accreditation** in respect to upper secondary and higher education. It also developed methods to document non-formal and informal learning without adults having to undergo ‘traditional’ forms of testing (self assessment). [6]

## Future trends/key concerns/directions

Although seemingly well developed in theory, it may be fair to say that some in the sector at present feel there are still **challenges and limitations** to the adult education system in Norway. Recent reports suggest that there are actually a limited number of adults who decide to exercise their rights to primary and secondary education. Therefore a direction this sector may need to take in the future is **developing the infrastructure and guidance** for adults to access the education, and **support for motivation** and confidence gaining. [7] Another main priority of recent years, still in development, is the **validation of non-formal education** without the need for ‘traditional’ testing, and investigating the best practice for this validation is an ongoing concern. [8]



## Structure overview

As outlined in the section ‘Policy and Politics’, an important body for ALE in Norway is VOX - **The Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning** (an agency of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research). They **administer government funding** to educational non-governmental organisations (adult education associations etc.), including **development, research, and surveys** in this field. More directly VOX also organises conferences, courses, workshops etc on adult learning, and is an authority on the validation of non-formal education and learning. They are also (more recently) responsible for **curriculum development** in the area of immigrant education, including language training and cultural orientation. [9]

## Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

### - Folkehøgskoler - Folk High Schools

As common to most Scandinavian countries, Folk High Schools are an important part of the Norwegian education system. The Norwegian Folkehøgskoler are **privately owned** organisations providing courses lasting up to a year, where the **student lives within the school** in a ‘community’ environment. Although privately owned the schools are government funded so the fees for students are subsidised. The aim of the Folkehøgskoler is to provide ‘**learning for life**’, with an emphasis on **social and individual development** as well as academics. At present there are around 80 folk high schools spread throughout Norway, and following the general model for folk high schools they are **each free to set their own curriculum**, and choose subjects they feel best suits the needs of the school, the students, and the community of learners (including the life skills of the staff and students). [10]

### - Adult Education Associations.

There are 20 nation-wide adult education associations with units spread throughout the country offering a **broad range of courses**, mainly aimed towards **cultural activities**, and **personal development**. The types of courses available include languages, computer skills, arts and crafts, etc. Alongside these courses the Associations also offer **courses for people wishing to set up or develop NGOs and CSOs** (Civil Society Organisations), and work with development within schools or institutions, and deliver (for instance) labour market courses. They also act to promote the needs of **at risk groups**, for instance **disabled** learners (for whom they also provide courses), or **prisoner** education, family learning, **sustainable development** or active citizenship. The associations are regulated by national guidelines and statutes when they



participate in courses connected to primary or secondary education, which they can do on behalf of the school authorities according to the Educational Act. [11]

- **Folkeuniversitetet** (FU) is the largest adult education association in Norway. Currently the Folkeuniversitetet consist of **regional departments**, within which there are member organisations, spread throughout the country. It was developed to provide university courses for those who would find traditional university courses difficult to access for geographical reasons, or for work or family responsibilities. Students are able to access **courses in their home towns**, and the courses are generally in the evening, and are flexible programmes based on participant requirements. Often these courses are directed towards **occupational training**, such as accountancy, marketing, graphic design, fashion, interior design (etc), including the Master Craftsman's certificate. In addition there are also **cultural and leisure activities** which meet the demands of the local community, for instance courses in arts and handicrafts. [12]

### Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- **The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning** (NAAL) is the national NGO **umbrella organisation** in Norway for adult learning and education, having Folkeuniversitetet and the other national wide adult education associations as members. This system consists of a network of member NGOs spread throughout the country. NAAL aim to: act as an advocate for the common interests of these associations within the government, and the relevant ministries; promote non-formal learning in society more generally; **counsel members** concerning laws or regulations; and co-ordinate projects. [13]

### Vocational Institutions and career-related training

Vocational training in Norway was influenced greatly by the **Competence Reform** which came into force in 2002 (for more details see the 'Policy and Politics' section). One outcome of this was the **National Continuous Vocational Training system (CVT system)**, where focus was directed towards improving systems for accreditation of prior learning, including job-training or informal training. This encompasses the Norwegian term "**realkompetanse**" which can be translated as "documentation and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes". However, most vocational training is not directed towards adults, except the vocational certificate (or apprenticeship certificate) which workers can gain through proving work experience in a certain occupation or craft, and by passing a theoretical test. The large majority of people achieving the certificate are over 25 years of age, and most of these adults were what is known as 'practice candidates', meaning that they already possessed the work experience required for the certificate (unlike a regular apprentice).



**Trade unions and employers' organisations** have been strongly involved in the vocational training system (mainly upper secondary training), and most of the vocational training is integrated within the **formal upper secondary education system**. At a central level there are advisory committees with representatives from social partners which play an active role regarding the development of vocational training programs, including the curriculum. There is also the **National Council for Vocational Education and Training SRY** (Samarbeidsrådet for yrkesopplæring) and currently 9 vocational and educational training councils (Faglige råd). There are also tripartite committees at county level (county vocational training board) who advise the county authorities on issues connected to the training, including the apprenticeship part of the educational programs, and on approving the training establishments. [14]

## Universities

Universities in Norway are, on the whole, aimed towards those wishing to increase their secondary education to a three year Bachelor's Undergraduate or one to two year Master's degree, conforming to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Most **Universities are state-run**, but are responsible individually for the quality of their own teaching, and the research they produce. However, a change in admissions procedure in 2001 has aimed to make higher education more accessible to adults as admission can now be granted to those over 25 years with a **combination of documented formal and non-formal competences**. This is in line with Norway's change over the past decade to try and validate non-formal learning and bring it more in line with traditional education. [15] All Norwegian public universities and colleges are free for students, and students attending private institutions may also apply for an additional loan of up to NOK 50,000 in order to finance tuition (accurate as of 2008). [16]

## Distance and e-learning

- The Norwegian Association for Distance and Flexible Education (NADE) is a **national umbrella organisation** for institutions involved in distance education. Each of these members is itself a distance education institution, a public university, or a training centre for business and industry. NADE is also a **consulting body for the Ministry of Education and Research** regarding distance education, and promotes the flexibility of distance education as its main strength, and that which distinguishes it from traditional teaching. [17]





## - Norway Opening Universities - NOU

Norway doesn't have one Open University; instead most higher education institutions have an "Open University" as a part of their system by offering distance learning options for students. The NOU is a national political initiative, through the Ministry of Education and Research, which focuses on lifelong learning through flexible education, and increasingly ICT or e-learning methods. It acts as a political advisor, as well as generating and sharing knowledge, and aims to promote the development of lifelong learning and e-learning (flexible learning) throughout higher education in Norway. [18]

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