

NORWAY

Implementation of the elements of the Bologna Process

In March 2001 a White Paper containing the principles of the so-called “Quality Reform”, was presented to the Norwegian Parliament, the Storting. Through the Quality Reform, the follow up of the Bologna Declaration has taken place in higher education in Norway. Two legal bills and five White Papers were presented to the Storting, and through the ratification of these, the necessary legal changes have been made in order to fully implement the Bologna Declaration in Norway. With the Quality Reform, the Norwegian government has implemented most of the elements from the Bologna Declaration.

The Bologna Declaration

I. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

The introduction of a new degree structure with the degrees bachelor and master facilitates transition from Norwegian higher education institutions to other European institutions as the degrees to a much greater extent will be comparable (cf. number 2 below). Norway ratified the Lisbon Convention in April 1999 and The Diploma Supplement, which helps facilitate cross-border credit transfer between institutions, has been introduced in Norway as of 2002. Norwegian Higher Education institutions are obliged to issue Diploma Supplement to every graduate upon his/her request.

II. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles

A new degree structure is being introduced in Norway, replacing most of the existing degrees. The new structure is based on the system agreed upon in the Bologna Declaration, consisting of two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. The new structure consists of a lower degree awarded after three years of study (bachelor) and a higher degree awarded after a further two years of study (master). Thus the main cycle of the Norwegian degree structure will be 3 years + 2 years. In addition the doctorates will be awarded the degree ph.d. (philosophiae doctor) after a further three years of study.

The bachelor’s degree is a three-year degree consisting of 180 credits. Most of the higher education institutions will have set Bachelor programmes into which students are accepted, but there will also be more general Bachelor degrees where various subjects are put together in order to form a Bachelor degree.

The general rule in the Norwegian degree structure is that the Master degree is a two-year degree, encompassing 120 credits. There are, however, certain exceptions to the rule, as some Master degrees are one and a half year degrees carrying 90 credits, but for these degree at least two years of relevant work experience is required. In a few exceptional cases some institutions have been allowed to continue awarding one year Master degrees, but strict rules apply in relation to the subject area of the degree, language of teaching etc. In a few subject areas, students will enrol for a five year integrated degree course (Master), e.g. odontology, technology and pharmaceuticals.

A limited number of study programmes are exempted from the new bachelor +master/ 3+2-model. The Storting has decided that some of the degrees from the former degree structure shall persist and retain their former names starting with the Latin phrase

“candidata”/”candidatus”. This includes the degrees and titles in medicine, theology, psychology and veterinary science.

While most institutions have already incorporated the new degree structure from the academic year 2002/2003, all institutions are obliged by law to incorporate the new structure by the start of the academic year 2003/2004. For a number of years, both the old and the new degree structure will exist side by side, in order to ensure a smooth transition for the students already in the system.

III. Establishment of a system of credits

The former system of credits consisting of 20 credits per year has been replaced by a system of credits in which a full academic year equals 60 credits. In addition, a new, standardised grading system has been introduced, with a descending scale from A to E representing passes and F representing fail. The new system of credits and the new grading scale are both equivalent to those of the European Credit Transfer System.

As a means of facilitating and encouraging student mobility between higher education institutions in the country, degrees can be conferred on the basis of studies from a combination of higher education institutions. The higher education institutions are legally obliged to reciprocally recognise each other's study programmes on a time for time basis, provided there is no overlap in the content of the studies concerned.

IV. Promotion of mobility

The aims of the Quality Reform of Norwegian higher education and the aims of the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Process when it comes to mobility of students and teachers are identical and therefore reinforce each other. As a result, Norwegian higher education institutions are working on their international strategies as well as reviewing and renewing their co-operation agreements with partner institutions abroad. Norwegian higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to participate in European and other international education and research programmes.

The Norwegian government has decided that each student is entitled to a period of study abroad as an integrated part of his/her Norwegian degree programme. It is the responsibility of the Norwegian higher education institutions to arrange for these stays abroad.

Norwegian higher education institutions are encouraged to increase the number of academic courses offered in English at their institutions in order to attract more foreign students to Norway.

One of the most important steps taken, however, is that student mobility has become one of the criteria for the national financing of higher education institution through the new financial system. The new funding formula for higher education institutions incorporates measures designed to promote internationalisation in Norwegian higher education. The institutions receive NOK 5000 (approx. Euro 700) per incoming and outgoing exchange student. The aim is increased and more balanced student mobility and exchange.

For Norwegian students and teachers going abroad, language is sometimes considered an obstacle, especially in relation to non-English speaking countries. In order to encourage stays in non-English speaking countries, The National Educational Loan Fund awards grants for language courses.

V. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT, was established by the Storting in 2002 and commenced its activities on 1 January 2003. NOKUT is an independent government body, established with the aim of supervising and developing the quality of higher education in Norway through evaluation, accreditation and recognition of quality systems, institutions and course provisions. NOKUT have the following responsibilities:

- To assess the quality assurance system of the higher education institutions.
- To accredit private institutions as well as state owned institutions applying for a change of status
- To accredit academic courses when such accreditation is not within the authority of the individual institution. (All state owned colleges and universities in Norway have the right to establish bachelor programmes without applying to NOKUT or the Ministry. The universities can establish new programmes at all levels, while the state owned colleges who have the right to award the degree ph.d. can establish master programmes within the subject area of their ph.d. The private colleges still have to apply to the Agency, but a revision of the law has opened for accreditation of some of the bigger private institutions with similar freedom of establishment as the state owned colleges from Jan. 1.2003 onwards.)
- To monitor as well as review accreditations already given
- To recognise foreign education/diplomas (includes the Norwegian ENIC/NARIC, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention information unit.)

VI. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education

The development of joint degrees and co-operation between Norwegian higher education institutions and other European higher education institutions is encouraged. Norwegian higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to participate in European and other international education and research programmes, and Norwegian institutions are to an increasing extent participating in various networks of co-operation between institutions in various European countries.

The Prague Communiqué

I. Lifelong learning

The Norwegian government applies various policy measures to stimulate the development, delivery and availability of education in order to realise lifelong learning as a possibility for the individual citizen.

The development of flexible learning paths and information about possibilities

The Norwegian Agency for Flexible Learning in Higher Education (SOFF) was established in 1990. SOFF's main task is to promote the development of flexible learning

and distance education based on pedagogical use of ICT. SOFF administers an annual grant and is an advisory agency for the Ministry within its field of action.

The Quality Reform in higher education introduces a new structure of the study programmes and a new modularity, which facilitate flexible delivery and promotes the introduction of ICT in education.

The Norwegian University Network provides a nation-wide course database on continuing education for Lifelong learning (NU). NU was established in June 2000 as a partnership between The Norwegian Council of State Colleges and Universities and the social partners.

The Government is planning an overall network for the education and training sector (“National Learning Net”) that will provide uniform access to information and study resources, where the individual parties can maintain their sites as well as collaborate with each other. First step was launched 31 of March 2003 with the opening of a Portal on higher education.

Entry requirements, right to leave of absence and funding

Since autumn 2001 persons aged 25 and above without upper secondary education may apply for university level education. Based on the applicants’ non-formal learning the university or university college in question, will determine whether applicants are qualified to enter a relevant course.

Since 2001 employees who have been working for at least three years, and who have been employed by the same employer for the last two years, have a right to full time or part time leave of absence of up to three years to participate in organised education and training. Education beyond primary and lower or upper secondary level must be work-related and employees cannot claim the right to leave of absence if this interferes with the employer’s opportunity to plan production and organise personnel.

In recent years, changes have been made to adapt the rules in the public financing (managed by the State Educational Loan Fund) to fit adults' needs for competence building. Thus the income which students may have without the Loan Fund grant being reduced has been raised. And so has the limit for the means of testing family supplements for children on the basis of the income of a spouse or cohabiting partner.

II. The social dimension

Student participation in the governance of higher education has been strengthened as a result of the revised Act of Higher Education. The board of higher education institutions will consist of 11 members out of which there are two student representatives. Student representatives should constitute at least 20%, two at the minimum, of the total amount of representatives in all executive bodies of the institution.

The physical learning environment of the students’ has been guaranteed. An equal number of student and staff representatives will at the institutional level form a Learning Environment Committee to ensure the best possible learning conditions. The Labour Inspection Authority will monitor the learning environment.

The individual student will to a much greater extent be given continuous feedback throughout the academic year. Teaching methods will to a much greater extent involve student activity, and the institutions are obliged to enter into agreements with students, the so called Individual Study Plan, clearly outlining the rights and obligations of the students and the institution in relation to one another.

An improved system of financial support has been introduced. The allowance consists of a combination of loans and grants. Students will be eligible for a grant equivalent to 40 % of the maximum cost-of-living allowance. 25% is payable upon commencement, and the remaining 15 % are conditional upon timely completion of courses and will be converted from the loan already paid out to the student. There are no tuition fees at state owned higher education institutions. Loans will continue to be available to cover the tuition fee for courses at private higher education institutions, or part of the tuition fee. Norwegian students have the possibility to bring their student loans to higher education institutions abroad should they wish to do so.

Other elements include organised student accommodation, accessibility for disabled students, kindergartens for the children of students etc.

III. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

Increased participation in international education and research programmes, as well as participation in joint degree programmes is being encouraged, cf. IV and VI under “The Bologna Declaration”.