

SALEIE WP5 – Policy in Higher Education – Norway

1. Introduction

In this document we initially describe the Norwegian Higher Education system and the Norwegian Accreditation system.

1.1 The Norwegian Higher Education system

The structure of higher education in Norway follows the standard Bologna structure:

- Bachelor - 3 years (180 ECTS)
- Master – 2 years on top of Bachelor (120 ECTS)
- Master - 5 year integrated (300 ECTS)
- PhD – 3 years on top of Master

In Norway there are broadly two categories of higher education institution: Universities and University Colleges, having different accreditation status:

- Universities, who are fully accredited, and have the right to establish academic degrees at all levels by decisions taken by the University Board.
- University Colleges are accredited to establish Bachelor degrees, but Master degrees and PhD degrees must be applied for to NOKUT for accreditation. However, a University College who is accredited to give a PhD degree in a topic is also accredited to establish Master degrees within the same topic.
- It is possible for a University College to apply to be accredited as a University, provided it has been accredited to give 4 PhD programmes. (However, this is a political decision, which now seems to be changed with the new conservative government).

University Colleges are mainly providing vocationally oriented studies, like engineering, teacher training, various health professions etc. Classical universities are giving education in more classic academic areas, like natural sciences, history, languages, social sciences etc, without a specific vocation in mind. Some exceptions are medicine, dentistry and psychology.

A University College is similar to a (former) Polytechnic University in UK, and to a Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences) in Germany.

The higher education sector in all the Scandinavian countries have a similar structure.

1.2 The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - NOKUT

NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) is the controlling authority for educational activity at all Norwegian universities, special field

universities, university colleges and institutions with single accredited higher education programmes.

Through an evaluation procedure NOKUT decides on the recognition of the institutions' internal quality assurance systems and carries out checks to see if their educational provision meets national quality standards.

Thus NOKUT performs

- Accreditation of the institutional quality assurance systems
- Accreditation of new study programmes at institutions which are not fully accredited (Bachelor, Master, PhD)
- Evaluation of existing study programmes (Bachelor, Master, PhD)
- Analyses and reports regarding the Norwegian Higher Education landscape

(Ref: NOKUT web page www.nokut.no).

2 External Evaluation

Study programmes at University Colleges are evaluated on a regular basis – every 5 to 10 years - by NOKUT, which frequently recommends (i.e. more like dictates) changes to be made. Study programmes at Universities are not evaluated as regularly.

Each University and University College must have a quality assurance system, accredited by NOKUT, and is responsible for keeping track of the quality of the study programmes continually.

Students are involved in the quality assurance process on a regular basis, both as members of NOKUT committees, and internally on an regular basis, usually by quality checks each semester.

External professional bodies are not involved in programme evaluations, except when they are called upon to be representatives in NOKUT evaluations committees.

2.1 Accreditation of new study programmes

For accreditation of new study programmes, NOKUT evaluates an application from the institution. The application must be written in a pre-defined structure, containing elements covering all the below mentioned items.

The evaluation process covers the following themes, and evaluates that these are fulfilled according to a predefined set of criteria.

2.1.1 The legal organisation framework, covering:

- The institutional bodies responsible for the study programme
- Rules and regulation of the institution, regulating the actual study programme
- Quality assurance system
- Diplomas, diploma supplements etc
- Organizational bodies, like complaints board, student representatives etc

2.1.2 The teaching staff

- Regulates the qualifications and number of staff required
 - Bachelor: 20% must have a PhD degree
 - Master: 40% must have a PhD degree, and 10% must have full professorship
 - PhD: at least 8 full time faculty, of which at least 6 with a PhD degree, and 4 with full professorships
- The majority of the faculty must be full time permanent employees

2.1.3 The study programme (educational process content)

- The description of the study programme must comply with the National Qualification Framework, and be described using the terminology of Learning Outcomes
- The educational content (totality of modules) must be able to support all the learning outcomes
- The evaluation processes and methods (exams etc) must be able to evaluate that all the learning outcomes are met (to a certain degree)
- The study programme must be relevant for employment or for further studies
- The name of the study programme must reflect the content correctly

2.1.4 The students

- Admission requirements are satisfactory
- The study programme has sufficient recruitment basis to sustain a stable number of students over time

2.1.5 The scientific research

- The faculty responsible for the study programme must be active researchers
- The faculty must have an international scientific network

2.1.6 The material basis

- The facilities and services must be suited for the teaching activities of the study programme, in particular
 - Library facilities and access to scientific literature
 - Laboratories
 - Study areas
 - IT services
- The size and capacity of the facilities and services must be dimensioned according to the number of students

2.2 Re-accreditation or evaluation of existing study programmes

NOKUT regularly evaluates study programmes, usually within 5-10 years intervals. The evaluation process consists of a self evaluation report from the institution, and an evaluation by a committee nominated by NOKUT. The committee consists of experts in the field, as well as student representatives. The evaluation is based on

- the self evaluation report
- an institution visit containing interviews with managers, faculty and students
- input from employers or employer bodies regarding relevance

The evaluation can end up giving recommendations for improvements, or even with withdrawal of an accreditation in the worst case.

2.3 Accreditation of the institutional quality assurance system

Each higher education institution in Norway is required to have a quality assurance system covering its educational programmes. This system is evaluated on a 5-10 years interval basis. The process is similar to evaluation of study programmes, both in terms of process and outcome.