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**THEMATIC REVIEW OF THE FIRST YEARS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION**

**COUNTRY NOTE: NORWAY**

This Country Note was prepared by a Secretariat-led review team as input to the first stage of the OECD Education Committee's Thematic Review of the First Years of Tertiary Education. The views expressed are those of the review team. They do not commit the OECD or the countries concerned.

A comparative report for the first stage of the thematic review will be published by the OECD in the last quarter of 1997. Inquiries may be directed to OECD Publications.

## Introduction

The review team visited Norway in October 1995 in the course of the OECD multi-country thematic review, "The First Years of Tertiary Education". In conducting its inquiry, the team drew upon a most informative background report prepared by Mr. Per Olaf Aamodt of the Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education, and Ms. Anne-Marie Fetveit of the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. Other documents were made available in the course of the visit and subsequently. The team had the benefit of a Ministry briefing from Mr. Jan S. Levy and was able to engage in extensive discussions with senior personnel from institutions and representatives of employers, students, community bodies and research and development organisations. The visit concluded with a discussion with the Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Mr. G. Hernes and a briefing with senior officials.

We greatly appreciate the efforts made on all sides to prepare the visit, to host the team and to give ready access to information. The frank and open exchanges that took place throughout the visit and subsequently, provided the team with excellent opportunities to explore current issues and trends in Norwegian tertiary education. In particular we thank Mr. Jan S. Levy and Mr. Frithjof Lund of the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs for their advice and assistance throughout this exercise.

The purposes of the ten country thematic review of the first years of tertiary education as stated in the guidelines are i) to examine the extent to which the structure of provision, programmes, teaching and learning at the tertiary level are evolving to meet the expectations and capabilities of students and the needs of the economy and society, and ii) to undertake an analysis of how policies might best promote needed change. The Norwegian experience, in a period of significant structural change in its tertiary education system, provides significant insights into change processes and highlights several issues that are central to the overall cross-country analysis of trends and issues.

The term "tertiary education" has been adopted to refer to a level or broadly defined type of studies, provided through established forms of higher education but also in other ways through new kinds of institutions e.g. the "alternatives to universities", by enterprises and in other non-institutional settings. Nevertheless, it is mainly through institutions -- colleges and universities, public and private -- that tertiary education is provided. In Norway, these comprise four universities and six "university colleges" (in architecture, music, sports, veterinary medicine, business and agriculture), twenty-six state colleges and two art academies, all brought together in a still evolving framework, "Network Norway". In addition, there are several private institutions, catering for some 10 per cent of the total student population. "First years" in the thematic review refer to the three, four, five (or more) years of study normally undertaken prior to the initial award or qualification which is recognised on the labour market. An element of imprecision is inevitable, given the different structural arrangements in the system of the ten participating countries and the opportunities students may have to extend the period of study beyond the minimum time as defined in regulations.

In Norway, "first years" corresponds to the lower degree of cand. mag. in the universities (3,5 + years) and to university professional degrees of 5-6 years' duration (medicine, law, etc.), professional degrees of 4-5 years' duration in the university level colleges, and a variety of qualifications ranging from two to four years in the state colleges. As is happening in other countries, students are tending to add further periods of study to the initial qualification to improve their employment prospects and/or to increase their earning capacity. Through transfer arrangements that are further developing under Network Norway (see below) students have the opportunity to progress or move from institution to institution. Thus there is a trend towards a unified system, with ever closer integration of the separate parts.

Individuals may undertake study at the tertiary level apart from the programmes and courses offered in the mainstream public institutions. There are private providers and private higher education in Norway is regulated by legislation on the recognition of study programmes and on the state (i.e. government) funding of private colleges. The law is administered by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. Private higher education institutions may only receive state funding for recognised study programmes, but they are not automatically entitled to such support. In 1996, there were 19 private higher education institutions which received state funding for (part of) their activities, and 3 institutions with recognised study programmes without such funding. The private education institutions cover a wide spectre of study programmes, from theology and religious studies, teacher education, nursing and social work education, to ballet, music, engineering, computer technology, business administration and marketing. Though most of these institutions offer programmes at the lower degree level, some have programmes for higher degrees, and one, the Free Faculty of Theology, can confer doctor's degrees.

Several private and public higher education institutions offer part of their regular programmes and some especially designed programmes as distance education. In 1990, the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs appointed SOFF, the Norwegian Executive Board for Distance Education at University and College level, to co-ordinate and evaluate distance education at this level, and as an advisory board to the Ministry.

As in practically all the other countries participating in this review, the Norwegian experience in recent years has been one of expansion: in the '90s a strong growth in students coming directly from secondary schools; a shift over the past quarter century in the balance from young males toward mature age and female students; and system-wide structural change. There are difficulties associated with this expansion: unmet demand, queuing, repeating of courses to improve competitiveness and delayed access, high dropout and failure rates in some subjects, and extended periods of study. While progress is being made a number of problems remain. They will continue to require sustained efforts by policy makers, institutions and the wider community if Norway is to maintain and further develop the momentum of recent reforms.

## **The Country and its Education System**

Norway is a modern state but an ancient society with a long tradition of national unity. It underwent a major revivalist movement when it achieved independence from Denmark and Sweden in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The spirit of nationhood is paralleled by a marked sense of local identity which many commentators have argued remains a marked feature of the cultural landscape notwithstanding increasing urbanisation and industrialisation. This sense of localism is favoured by the distinctive topography of the country and the dispersed population. It has been reinforced by or expressed through two strands of populism, namely a people-empowering direct and local democracy and a strong commitment to social equality. Some analysts have drawn attention to the communitarian nostalgia and even isolationist elements of this populist theme. In mentioning it, however, we note the growing importance of countervailing cosmopolitan tendencies especially in the field of tertiary education where intellectual abstractions, international links and frames of reference, the use of modern technology and responsiveness to national goals and priorities are all in evidence. Also to be noted, with significant implications for the future, are school enrolment data: in 1996, 27 per cent of first time enrolling pupils in Oslo schools were first or second generation immigrant.

The term "Scandinavian model" has been applied to the contemporary form of social democracy with its concern for social justice and universal social rights, the well-being of all people and a high level of public welfare. These are combined with a large, institutionalised public sector including education and the concept of a well-informed and responsible public. There is, among the Nordic countries, a frequently-remarked sense of unity, reinforced by a common language family, ethnicity and cultural heritage, although this heritage is subject to change from several sources: globalisation and migration for example. Through the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers there are agreements on a wide range of matters including free access to one another's higher education institutions. Yet each country maintains a distinctive structure and there are significant differences in policy and practice.

Norway has a population of just over 4 million people. Whilst its culture and traditions have been remarkably homogeneous (for example in religious matters 95 per cent of the population belonged in 1990 to the Lutheran State Church), geography influences politics and education. Efforts are required to sustain communications and relationships over the long north-south trajectory, reaching from the North Sea far into the Arctic. Class distinctions are probably much less marked than in many other countries thanks also to the political effort to maintain a strong welfare state. The social democratic ethic may not seem to sit easily with strong and overt competition yet in the struggle for access, the operation of a closed sector of tertiary education through numerus clausus and a definite examination orientation, competitiveness is a prominent feature.

The Norwegian economy has developed rapidly for almost two decades with the impetus of the oil industry, but economic growth while still firm has slowed from its 1994 peak. A modest inflation rate and generally high rates of adult employment, despite fluctuations, have characterised recent years.

Norway is a wealthy nation with a fairly equal distribution of income and wealth. As reported in the OECD Jobs Study Follow-Up, the shift to persistent high unemployment, experienced by most other European OECD countries, has been avoided. Employment growth has been in the public sector and Norway has the highest public sector employment of any OECD country as a percentage of total employment. At the same time, Norwegians have enjoyed a substantial decline in time at work and a corresponding increase in leisure time. This trend may be partly explained by more part-time employment but, in any case, it calls for attention in education policy: education for life, of which employment, while important, is only a part.

In common with many other OECD countries, the unemployment rate is pronounced among young people lacking post-secondary education. Since 1987, graduate unemployment has increased but is still less than half the general (very low) unemployment rate.

More generally, the employment problem for graduates is to get access to stable jobs which relate well to their fields of study. Graduates in the fields of business administration, technology and information sciences have had increasing problems in procuring stable jobs. By contrast, there is a lack of qualified manpower in the health sector, teaching and pre-school teaching. The OECD Jobs Study Follow-Up suggests that labour market signals in this situation where students are heavily subsidised need to be strengthened. From the perspective of educational policy, we draw attention below to several ways in which institutions are strengthening and might improve relations with the labour market.

The expansion of tertiary enrolments, rapid in the 1960s and again in the 1990s, reflects features of the labour market, including the public sector growth mentioned above and long term decline of employment in primary and secondary industry (oil, gas, mining in the 1980s excepted). In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the fields of humanities, social sciences and law. Graduate

unemployment, although not a major problem, has edged up in a number of fields; there are few fields of study whose graduates have no difficulty in initial job placement.

The development and consolidation of tertiary education in Norway is, in the words of a senior official, "largely a story of the post second world war years". Until 1947, it was mostly a question of students either going abroad for studies or studying at the Royal Fredriks University of Oslo or in scattered, often quite small higher technical, commercial, and agricultural training institutions. During the fifty years since then expansion has been rapid and there is now a substantial, diversified system of universities and regional (state) colleges spread throughout the country.

A distinctive feature of Norwegian economic, social and cultural policies has been the effort to maintain the strength of small communities. This has had important implications for education at all levels and helps to explain the historical proliferation of small institutions which have been a marked feature of the tertiary system until very recently. Many of these small institutions, now amalgamated, have been in place for decades. In the 1970s, when several new regional colleges were established, an explicit regional development policy provided underpinning. This became a political movement with representatives vying for institutions in their own places. It was the idea of a spread of institutions together with equal treatment of different parts of the country that prevailed, not that of the most efficient or technically rational use of resources. Many of these institutions proved to be too small to be effective and their numbers have been substantially reduced through amalgamation. In the State College sector, the 26 State Colleges are spread over 46 separate campuses (2 campuses in the same town are counted as one). Debates about the future of small campuses in multi-site institutions arise when plans are discussed for new buildings. It is the intention of the Ministry to have one-campus institutions, but this is not possible everywhere, due to local political interests. As discussed below, the reviewers believe that the benefits of amalgamation will not be realised unless there is an all round commitment to establishing new, fully integrated institutions.

Although in quantitative terms an urbanised society, in Norway most urban communities are relatively small. Fifty one percent of the population in 1990 lived in predominantly rural areas (the OECD average is 28 percent) making Norway one of the most "rural" of OECD Member countries. Of those employed in these predominantly rural areas, more than 50 percent worked in the service sector. Norway is thus rural in a modern not a traditional sense of the term. Governments have steadfastly kept to the principle of taking services to the people wherever they may be, in the cities and regional towns, in small fishing settlements along the coast and on the islands, or in farming communities and administrative centres far up in the valleys. This policy helps to explain the orientation of rural employment towards the service sector. In social, economic and cultural terms, the previous Regional Colleges, Nursing Colleges and Teachers Colleges - now merged as State Colleges -- have been and are, in this context, of great significance. There is an infrastructure of support in rural settings, for both the public and the private sector, to which it makes a significant contribution.

This movement was described by one of the deans in Bodø College as the most successful district policy project ever launched in Norway, although there have been others, for example in health. Emphasising responsiveness to regional needs, this policy was contrasted with the more cosmopolitan culture of the universities where the emphasis on "university values", meaning more abstract scholarship, was seen to be internationalist.

Again, however, it would be misleading to draw a sharp distinction since the universities also have regional roles and relations and the colleges are increasingly internationalist in outlook. Moreover, through a variety of central controls, e.g. national curricula in teacher education, nursing and engineering,

the colleges are part of a single national system. Local, regional and national features combine to form a unique blend. Tertiary education is experiencing substantial if often quite subtle change whereby local, regional, national and international roles and interests are being brought together with different emphases and balances in all institutions whether large or small, college or university.

The regional (state) colleges are of particular interest in this review since they have been the focus of the most substantial reform measures in recent Norwegian policy. Reduced in number and increased in size through amalgamation, they are designed and located so as to provide educational opportunities in the regions for people who otherwise would be obliged to move to the small number of large urban centres. Many are now multi-campus which is important if, in succession to the numerous small institutions, they are to continue to help to sustain local communities and cultures and play an important role in local and regional economies. With a strong practical basis to their studies and a very flexible course framework and system of credit recognition and transfer, these regional institutions have been, and remain, a fundamentally important part of the country's tertiary education system. Visits by the review team to campuses in Bodø, Porsgrunn, Bø and Notodden provided encouraging evidence that these challenges are high on the agenda. Thus, the director at Telemark College preferred to think of challenges and opportunities provided by the amalgamation rather than problems. Nevertheless, since the major movement has coincided with cut-backs, the difficulties of amalgamating institutions should not be underestimated. New systems are being developed -- administrative, communications, staffing and so on but they need to be matched by, and foster staff and student commitment to the new institutions.

The colleges are faced with the need to develop a new internal culture while, at the same time responding to national policies. Network Norway, to which we return below, is a significant challenge to traditional ways of determining institutional priorities and allocating resources. But there are other challenges and the review team was interested in how these were formulated. In meeting with departments (in Bodø for example), four strands of college policy which reflect national directions emerged:

- tertiary education as an instrument for strengthening regional economic development and maintaining local population (e.g.; developing new small businesses and strengthening the fisheries industry; helping to create job opportunities which encourage students to stay in the North;
- tertiary education as an equaliser of educational opportunity (participation rates in the north, traditionally low, are increasing including through programmes which attract less academically-minded students);
- maintaining the distinctive character of a regional (state) college as a tertiary but non-university institution (for example through keeping to a certain level and type of study, although this is contentious with some parts of the institution seeking more advanced work and wishing to use the title "university" in activities and relations abroad);
- providing a more scientific and technical basis for traditionally craft-based industries.

Although "regional" in location (as indeed are three of the country's universities, at Tromsø, Trondheim and Bergen), and in the bias of some study lines, the colleges are nevertheless part of a national system. The qualifications they provide, like those of the universities, have national (and international) currency, enabling graduates to work and live in any part of the country: they are not "localistic" in the sense of meeting only local needs and interests. One result of "taking the education to the people in the regions" rather than "taking the people to education in the cities" is that, graduating from

either colleges or universities, many students stay on in the region, often for personal reasons as much as job opportunities. They thus help to sustain the policy objective of viable local communities.

We were most impressed by the determination shown both at the national level and in the local centres to implement this broad social, economic and cultural policy through the activities of the tertiary institutions. Nevertheless, there are many challenges to address and difficulties to overcome if the policy objectives of the government are to succeed and if the ambition of the institutions are to be realised.

In common with some other systems which have attempted to maintain clear distinctions of level and specialisation between the two sectors, Norway has experienced or is likely to experience a measure of academic drift. This can occur from "below" as institutions strive to make their mark nationally and internationally, or from "above" through the imposition of standardised requirements alike on the colleges and the universities. Part of the original concept of the regional college was short cycle education -- two year courses with the degree "college candidate" and also some 1 year courses at university level. The cand. mag. degree at colleges was introduced in the '80s (cand; mag. = 3 1/2 years at colleges). Some institutions in the '70s and '80s and increasingly in the '90s have sought to go beyond this and have introduced four and five year study programmes (e.g. civil engineering, economics, etc.). Nursing and some engineering programmes, previously part of the upper secondary vocational training sector, have grown into three year tertiary courses, reflecting a perceived need for longer and more substantial programmes of study. However, in several of the colleges there is a sense of status inferiority, resulting in efforts to acquire some of the features that distinguish universities -- including the title of university itself. It would be unfortunate if, in pursuit of the elusive status goal, colleges were in any way to jeopardise the highly important role they play as a genuine alternative to universities with clear missions to educate in a well defined range of studies, to undertake applied research and to sustain and strengthen regional communities and their economies. Cross-crediting and articulation arrangements including links with the universities in teaching and research are also important.

By the early 1990s what had emerged through decades of accretion through previous policies (and lobbies) was a large, complex and uneven pattern including many very small institutions and programmes not well grounded in clear principles regarding length, sequence, etc. or clearly related to one another. The need for reform was recognised and in 1994 the government substantially reduced the number of colleges through mergers. A common framework was established for all tertiary institutions (Network Norway), with a clarification of roles and responsibilities for the three broad groupings of institutions: universities, university colleges and state colleges.

The key to understanding the changes of recent years and a crucial consideration for future policy is the process of expansion which continues to lag behind demand notwithstanding strenuous efforts to achieve balance. Demand has greatly exceeded projections. For example, in 1988 it was estimated that, by 1995, there would be 105 000 students in higher education; the enrolled number in fact was 170 000. Expansion of tertiary education provision has been and remains government policy. This reflects a number of factors and forces, including very high levels of participation in upper secondary schooling, a trend which is documented in the Ministry's Background Report (in 1993, 87,2 per cent of 16/18 year-olds were in school as against a figure of 65,4 per cent in 1980). The recent (1994) guarantee of a universal right to 3-4 years of upper secondary education and to strengthen the vocational streams is expected to further enhance participation.

Demand also reflects the aspirations of previously low participating groups -- women and older students for whom new opportunities and avenues for study have been opened at the tertiary level. By no

means least, increased demand reflects changing labour market openings and requirements for higher levels of knowledge and competence in the workforce.

Since demand exceeds capacity a number of difficulties arise for access, and these are dealt with below. They will require even greater attention than hitherto since, as studies undertaken by researchers at the Norwegian Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education indicate, short and long term considerations alike point to continued growth of demand and, correspondingly, increased pressure on public policy, as on the individual institutions, to respond.

## **The Current Reform**

It is against this background of decades of quantitative growth and diversification and a recent legislative reform whereby the government aimed to rationalise a national system of tertiary institutions and study programmes, that the review took place. The reform process, according to some of the observers, is something of a departure from the "Nordic model" of decision-making and governance, based on extensive commission work, the often lengthy exploration and weighing of various options, the quest for wide consensus and the back-up of research and monitoring to facilitate modifications of direction in the light of well-attested effects. The more recent trend, it was suggested, is towards more decisive and swift action, with strong central leadership not to say direction and a quest for efficiency even at the expense of consensus. Be this as it may, the international trend is towards new ways of achieving change in the public sector, and new models are displacing old ones. In 1996, a common Act for both colleges and universities was passed to replace separate Acts. The Act is very wide-ranging, addressing such matters as governance, admissions regulation, institutional patterns, career structures, curricula, and the conferring of degrees. While institutional autonomy is largely present in teaching and research and there is increased delegation of governance to the institutions, the Ministry has substantial power especially over budgets. It is expected that there will be increased pressure for results and greater visibility, in line with the overall governmental policy of results-oriented planning and budgeting.

The legislation follows on and consolidates the establishment of Network Norway whereby, in 1994, 98 state colleges were reorganised into 26 institutions and structural ties established between the college and the university sectors as well as among institutions within the sectors.

The recent reorganisation of the system, mergers and the efforts to establish a national co-operative framework, Network Norway, are one response to the growth of demand for access. It is recognised that changes are needed in structures and programmes; rationalisation and increased efficiency are targets. Close attention is being given, and will continue to be needed, to relationships among sectors, pathways, articulation of institutions and programmes, credit transfer, recognition of qualifications and the issues of specialisation and quality. In this process, there is a complex task of reconciling, first, local and regional needs and aspirations with the national character of all institutions regardless of location and the directions of national policy and, second, the increased autonomy of institutions with overall national goals and steering mechanisms. Changing labour market conditions combined with continuing expansion of provision are raising questions about the employability of graduates. Consequently, efforts are being made and will continue to be needed in course design and delivery to define and address changing employment needs. Strong interest is being taken at both national policy level and in the institutions in the recognition, assessment and improvement of teaching and in the quality of student learning. Ever greater attention will be required to new approaches in teaching and facilities for learning as the trend towards ever higher participation levels continues.

The university sector has been relatively unaffected by large scale structural changes; however, it was abundantly clear to the reviewers that issues arising out of mergers in the college sector and the changed relationships with the Ministry of Education would continue to be a major preoccupation for the colleges for the foreseeable future. There is a natural preoccupation in the colleges with issues of internal structure, management, budget and relationships among staff. There has also been a considerable diversity in response -- some departments seeing themselves as "national" rather than "local", as poised on the verge of development through more advanced work and research which would link them directly with advanced work in the universities; others satisfied with a more limited, traditional college role of teaching and study up to but not beyond the first degree; and still others very conscious of their identity, thanks to their very close and personal as well as professional links with individuals and groups in the community. The merger process and the creation of Network Norway have set in motion ambitions and aspirations which will result in a continuing dynamism in the colleges, including the quest in some instances for university status, for an enhanced research role and for more advanced levels of teaching. However, there was a widespread view that, while national priorities were needed, the resources to meet them were unlikely to be adequate and in some instances we became aware of anxieties about future role and identity. There is the possibility of a continuing tension between the integrated systemic philosophy underlying Network Norway and the preoccupation of the individual institutions with structural change, priority setting and meeting local needs.

It would be premature to draw firm conclusions about the part to be played by the reorganised college sector vis-à-vis the universities in meeting future educational needs. Both have major roles to play but the lines are not always clear-cut. The merger process has been very challenging; many opposed it and institutions are faced with very considerable changes. At Telemark College, for example, with some 4 000 students enrolled on five campuses, the immediate challenge is to gain commitment to the new institution and to put in place structures that foster inter-campus and inter-programme links built on an institution-wide development strategy. Until this is completed, established attitudes, habits and divisions are likely to predominate. When we visited, a strategic plan was in an advanced state of preparation. It would, we were assured, build on the goals and values of Network Norway, by treating the college as a single entity, defining key areas of specialised and advanced study and co-operative links with other institutions. These are difficult goals to achieve when, at the same time, a unified internal culture has to be built up. Moreover, specialisation and concentration in three or four areas (process engineering was given as an example) raise questions about the status and resourcing of other areas of study, not so well identified, which cannot count on such support and partnerships. With acute pressure on resources, would these other areas be deprived and perhaps go into decline? Such a result would inevitably affect staff morale, reduce the value of studies for students and bring into question the capacity of the institution to meet the needs of some of their students. It cannot be assumed, for example, that students are sufficiently mobile or that modern information technology and inter-institutional links overcome the need for locally-based specialist staff.

Articulation of the concept of Network Norway at the time of the review team visit had not provided answers to this or to other points, namely the impact of consolidation and concentration within individual institutions on all the other fields of study and the manner in which subjects or fields of study not designated as "specialised" in one institution might be related to those so designated in another. Similarly, the creation of a national network does bring into question the specific nature of the regional identity of the institution: in a given setting, the regional need could well be for an area of study either not offered at all in the college or treated as a minor rather than a major part of that institution's profile.

Doubtless, over time, such issues will be fully addressed and, it is to be hoped, resolved. For the present, they remain matters of concern and they call for detailed studies and more concentrated policy

analyses, both nationally and within the institutions themselves. There was in the institutions a deal of uncertainty in the minds of staff and perhaps an inadequate flow of information. We encountered criticism of the Norwegian Research Council which has defined a national research strategy that has caused dissatisfaction in several of the State Colleges. Similarly, concern was expressed -- which was characterised as "over details" -- at the prescription by the Ministry of such matters as student numbers, courses to be taught, staff and budgets. Industry representatives on the institutional governing or advisory bodies called for a corporate or business approach to strategic planning with clearer and more incisive delegation of authority by the Ministry, more streamlined internal decision making and a greater flexibility of thinking and structures. These are matters on which critics may have an incomplete understanding of policy frameworks, directions and intentions and it is natural that in a period of rapid, comprehensive change, there would be many cross-currents and divergent viewpoints. However, the concerns were certainly there.

A tradition of strong central direction through a regulatory approach is yielding to new forms of strategic goal setting and monitoring from the centre together with greater institutional autonomy. The complex and as yet unsettled relationships among previously segmented groups and separate institutions in the newly amalgamated colleges will take quite some time to work out. The very general concept of Network Norway will need much further elaboration and analysis if it is to provide a clear operational framework for concentration and nation-wide collaborative planning and provision.

### **New Decision Making Procedures, New Partnerships**

New patterns of decision-making are being developed as institutions redefine their arrangements for governance and their external relationships both locally and regionally. The recent legislation has resulted in streamlined governance arrangements, greater external participation in smaller governing bodies and increased executive power. The Norwegian colleges and universities are experiencing change and challenges in these respects similar to those in other countries. The new arrangements, not always well received, are nevertheless in line with international trends. A major challenge, but by no means an insuperable one, is to ensure a blending in practice of modern governance, managerial and executive leadership approaches with the direct democratic mode of collegial decision-making. This requires skilful leadership and in practice can be difficult to achieve: managers need to be trained, governors need to undertake new roles, leadership needs to be firm and decisive but also collaborative. Staff at all levels will need assistance and advice if new styles of participatory decision-making are to emerge.

In order to meet needs for local, regional and national development, to provide a kind of education that addresses emerging as well as established employment opportunities and to achieve greater efficiencies in the use of resources, industry-education partnership of many different kinds have emerged in a number of OECD countries. Partnerships are common in professional fields whether in the university or the non-university sectors, where practical experience, periods of work, exchange of staff are a feature of courses of study in fields such as medicine, veterinary science, architecture, engineering, nursing, business studies, teaching, etc. They are much less in evidence in the social sciences and humanities, where there is a less direct or specific link between field of study and job openings. However, there is need to pursue avenues of co-operation. These are likely to result in closer attention by the institution to skills for employment and by employers to the enterprising uses that can be made of the skills and competences of graduates, regardless of field of study.

There are many examples of successful industry-higher education partnerships including close collaboration in course design and delivery in several of the countries participating in this study -- the

U.K., the U.S.A., Sweden and Australia for example. They are in some instances of reasonably long standing; several have been formally evaluated, demonstrating positive results.

By comparison with developments in several other countries, university-industry partnerships whether in R&D or in education have not been very strong in the Norwegian universities. There are exceptions, notably in professional and technical fields but there would appear to be scope for further initiative here perhaps drawing in the experience of the countries mentioned above. In the Norwegian regional colleges, we encountered examples, at the local level, of employer participation in planning or review exercises and other means used by institutions to ensure that curricula and teaching are alert to industry needs. Partnerships with industry, the professions, the public sector and other "consumers" of tertiary education occur at local level but these are quite variable. In Norway, in 1995, Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (employing less than 100 people) accounted for 99 per cent of private enterprises and almost 75 per cent of private business sector employment. This explains the overwhelming preponderance of small to medium sized enterprises in membership of the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry and for private sector partnerships would argue for a policy of small-scale, local agreements in preference to highly integrated national level agreements. What is more, with an increasing number of part-time and temporary jobs (many filled by ostensibly full-time students), relations between industry and the institutions are likely to be fluid. Signs of rising graduate unemployment, of mismatches between qualification and job openings set against a background of close links between the tertiary institutions and public sector employment, are a further indication of the complexity of the partnership issue. While the reviewers were unable to reach a definite conclusion in this very variable situation the following points would seem relevant to future policy:

- links with employment through partnerships designed to enhance students' understanding of work could help in matching educational experience and subject choices to jobs;
- in the private sector, the focus would need to be local and regional, but there is scope for activity at the national level as indicated below;
- the scale of public employment indicates a need to target more partnerships in that sector.

Nationally, there does not appear to be a sufficiently strong basis of co-operative development. We were told by the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry that, with the exception of engineering, employers' interest had been concentrated on "the skilled worker". Since, in the past, an overwhelming proportion of graduates has gone into public sector employment there has been little interest in graduates by the private sector. (This comment, however, overlooks some key professional fields such as medicine and law). The Engineering Education Council accepts that it has a strategic educational role specifically directed at the technological concentration in Trondheim (The Norwegian University of Science and Technology) and the other centres of engineering and technological specialisation. This Council, we were informed, would welcome the establishment of a central council for higher education with industry playing an active role, a topic we return to below.

There is another kind of partnership of which a striking example is provided for the inhabitants of Bø in Telemark where "town and gown" have come together in the design, building and shared use of a major facility or "Cultural Centre" containing cinema, auditorium, sports hall, swimming pool, gallery and exhibition space. This facility, combined with a new college building, brings a substantial new dimension of life to a small, rural town. There is scope for further developments of this kind which would give meaning to the abstraction of a "regional focus within a national network". Reports by the OECD

Programme in Educational Building (PEB) provide many examples of such shared use of facilities in all sectors of education.

The most ambitious if still inchoate form of partnership in Norwegian tertiary education is "Network Norway". Aimed at fostering co-operation and collaboration among institutions and providing for greater specialisation and concentration, the Network seems to the reviewers to require more practical means than exist at present in order to serve in a system-wide advisory or even co-ordinating role. The former Minister, Mr. Hernes, expressed his wish to the reviewers for significant progress not only in rationalisation of programmes and resources but also in achieving a much stronger base for inter-institutional co-operation and for the growth and dissemination of knowledge throughout the whole Norwegian society. The concept -- or ideal -- could be of far-reaching importance, as a contribution to greater flexibility in course design and internal student mobility -- itself a long-standing policy objective -- through the more systematic recognition of prior learning and credit transfer. The idea of specialised "nodes", concentrated in particular institutions but with access to all, as already indicated, poses many problems but is a valid objective in the quest for improved quality and more efficient use of resources.

The reviewers were unable to judge whether these aims were being seriously addressed since the focus of discussion was generally at the level of within-institution rather than between-institution relations. "Network Norway" has a visionary character, yet to be translated into operational terms.

National policy has a direction but there is no national structure or mechanism to foster broad, participatory discussion of issues and needs including articulation and relationships before they reach a high policy level. Creation of a national review and advisory body, could help to produce more open and objective dialogue over future system-wide directions in tertiary education, to foster studies of relations between tertiary education, the economy and society, to balance the interest groups, to monitor quality of teaching and management and to undertake or contract out research and studies on reference from the Minister or Ministry. The functions of the existing specialised Councils would need to be reconsidered or perhaps modified or adjusted in line with the authority of a general council e.g. in monitoring quality. Moreover, any new national authority would need to work closely with the existing independent agencies which are a distinctive and strong feature of Norwegian research. If, on the other hand, it is preferred to maintain the present specialist councils and not establish a general advisory and quality surveillance body, consideration should be given to strengthening representation by industry and the professions, to ensure a more comprehensive dialogue and a focused analysis of emerging issues at the national level.

The government is now proposing to the Storting (National Assembly) a new council for higher education, the Network Norway Council. This is to be an advisory body to the Ministry, and the idea is that it should also work on strategies for quality monitoring and further development of the system of higher education. The existing specialised councils (in engineering and health and social work) will not be maintained in the proposed new structure (an exception will be made for the council for teacher education which will be discussed in connection with a later proposal on changes in teacher education). The University Council and the State College Council will exist as voluntary organisations representing the interests of the different types of institutions. The Storting as yet to react to the proposition.

### **Institutional Management (in the new state colleges)**

The New Act establishes governance and management structures which are consistent alike for universities and for state colleges. Permanent administrative positions of Director, Registrar, Director of Studies, etc. contrast with the pattern of elected academic leadership up to and including the Rectors who

cannot stand more than twice. This is a time-honoured practice in Norway as in many other Continental countries but how appropriate is it in the newly merged and restructured colleges? These institutions, if they are to fulfil the expectations that lay behind their restructuring, will require strong leadership, a high level of competence in institutional management and a renewed capacity for external relations and linkages. Profiles of institutional leadership are needed that may go beyond the traditional academic model of *primus inter pares*. As the institutions become more autonomous the capacity of an elected leadership to manage the conflicts between, for example, areas which must be supported to expand in teaching or research - because they are nodes in the Norway network -- and those which must be constrained, is questionable.

One possible solution to some of the problems these merged colleges inevitably will face is to reshape their governing bodies, the Boards, to allow them to have more significant, perhaps indeed majority, representation from outside the college. There is a tradition, which can be built on, of external members or college governing bodies -- by contrast with the universities. By this means, the communities gain a major stake in vital decisions and the likelihood is reduced of possible paralysis because of stalemate between opposing internal forces. Management and decision-making structures may need to pay greater attention in future to a new balance between governing bodies with significant community membership, academic committees and the management and leadership roles of the most senior executive officers. We have suggested that the time-honoured election system may not be the most appropriate given the new environment and the demand it engenders.

Significant devolution of financial decision making is evident but this may cause difficulties in the new State colleges as they seek to gain corporate control of resources. Each merger partner is well used to managing a budget and will be reluctant to allow the transparency which is necessary if resources are to be allocated in line with collective priorities. In addition, the specificity of the framework curricula in place in some key professional areas like teacher education makes it difficult to see how institutional managers will be able to make any significant resource shifts to meet emerging priorities in some colleges.

Geography is a significant consideration in some colleges where the opportunities to effect some economies of scale or some improvements in depth of offerings will be impeded by the distance between groups and the identification of one campus with a single professional programme.

There is overwhelming evidence of major differences in the academic traditions, approaches to teaching the subject and academic staff qualifications among the former single purpose professional colleges of Nursing, Education and Engineering and between them and the former regional colleges. This is a very significant issue when one contemplates the responsibility of Boards in setting corporate directions for these institutions. At every point -- resource allocation, profile shifts, new course development, staff development, research policy and industry links -- issues related to the cultures of the merger partners will surface until the new colleges establish a clearer identity, acceptable to opinion leaders in their institutions and to the wider community.

## **Quality Assurance**

In all countries participating in the thematic review, moves are afoot to establish or strengthen procedures for system-wide and institution-focused quality evaluation. New agencies have been established to concentrate resources and intensify efforts to evaluate teaching outcomes and overall institutional performance. In the U.K., for example, there is a competitive framework for assessing quality in teaching and research. However, each country adopts its own approach and it is not possible to say that

any particular structure or set of procedures yields the best results. The whole movement is in a relatively early phase and is still evolving.

In Norway, while there are many examples of departmental-level reviews in the tertiary institutions, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that some form of national level quality/performance monitoring is lacking. This is needed to give greater coherence, consistency and perhaps rigour to the present arrangements. Independent external reviews single institutions certainly have a place but such reviews can be quite expensive and are not a substitute for system-wide approaches in which internal, self-assessment by every individual institution would play a key part. The reviewers believe there would be value in adopting a form of monitoring and review whereby every institution would participate by following a publicly declared set of procedures as is the case in some other countries participating in the thematic review, Sweden and the U.K. for example. The present arrangements are focused very much on publicly-provided inputs of resources and curriculum regulated through the specialist national councils within a framework of national legislation and regulation. There is no corresponding system for monitoring delivery and evaluating outputs and outcomes. Student evaluation of courses at the institutional level is widely practised and it has considerable merit, but it touches only one aspect of quality -- individual and collective student perceptions of courses taken. A more comprehensive approach is needed. At present, it is not possible to provide systematic data on overall quality, achievement of national priorities and efficiency, nor to pin-point where effort is needed to bring about improvements, especially at the interface between teaching and learning. A national authority in which the institutions themselves are well represented could overcome this weakness.

It is primarily in the institutions -- the colleges and universities -- that the educational needs of individual students and of the society are directly addressed. Their policies, procedures and decisions are instrumental in achieving a match between economic needs, societal aspirations, academic goals and criteria, and student interests. Responsibility does indeed reside in the institutions, but this does not preclude a more definite approach, nationally, to quality issues. With due representation in the design and implementation of national procedures there need be no concern about a threat to the independence of the institutions. Since the time of the review visit, the Ministry has been assessing the results of pilot evaluation projects and considering ways to move ahead on a more secure system of quality assurance. In its assessment of the project, the Ministry has concluded that national monitoring of quality is important and that a system for participation by the institutions is crucial. Future evaluations will be more in the direction of auditing and evaluations of institutions than was the case in the pilot project. We understand that emphasis is being given to quality audit, where the onus is on the institutions themselves. We support this approach since it lightens what can be a very heavy and costly process and identifies the need for action at the appropriate level i.e. teacher-student interaction and the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution.

## **Teaching and Learning**

We have already touched upon a number of issues to do with teaching and learning. These arise in a situation where institutions appear to have received adequate funds to support the great increases in the numbers of students entering higher education in the last five years - but not to absorb the backlog of unmet demand. There is a generally high standard of physical provision, both buildings and equipment. We heard few if any complaints about the quality of applicants or their readiness to meet the demands of higher education. Indeed, many academic staff commented on the high quality and motivation of those entering. Thus, by contrast with some other countries participating in this study, there does not appear to be any particular need for special programmes for some proportion of this enlarged cohort. There are

some preparatory programmes for potential applicants to Engineering courses in colleges but we encountered little if any evidence of a need for such approaches elsewhere.

It was said of the universities in particular that the major impact of growth is not overcrowding, although that does exist, but the opportunities foregone to move from the traditional transmission model of teaching to problem-based or student-centred models. Some institutions said that they have not moved as quickly as they might, had circumstances been more stable, to greater innovation in teaching. In both the universities and the colleges the undergraduate programme gives a strong emphasis to teacher input and to the formal, written examination as the primary means of assessment. However, it could be just as well argued that change in context and conditions requires change in institutional behaviour, that innovation in teaching would be a practical if not indeed a necessary response to growth of numbers if learning needs are to be well met.

Our impression is that there is considerable unrealised potential for taking up questions relating to quality, standards and relevance of the teaching-learning environment. We have already suggested that, at the national level, several structural changes could be advantageous: a more comprehensive approach to quality, its definition and monitoring; funding targeted to stimulate high quality teaching; clarification of the purposes of Network Norway and further development of its operations, and strengthening of administrative apparatus to promote the effective implementation of policy, more emphasis on overall strategic goal and priority setting and a resolute attack on the dysfunctional and wasteful system of extended queuing to gain entry to the institution and programme of one's choice.

As for the institutions, although generalisation is hazardous, the reviewers are of the view that insufficient attention is being given to innovation in teaching, a common problem across the OECD. In the perspective alike of student motivation and social and economic need, greater emphasis should be given to forms of teaching and learning in which students have more responsibility for their own learning in well-structured settings and in which overall emphasis is placed on problem-definition and problem-solving, in small groups, project assignments involving field work, partnerships with industry, etc., and more varied and learning-focused forms of assessment are adopted. For these purposes, programmes of training for new and inexperienced staff and continuing development of all staff are needed. The moves already taken in these directions provide a basis for further efforts. We were interested in the attention being paid, for example in universities, to the orientation needs of first year students. With smaller intakes and a tradition of individual care for incoming students, the colleges have been relatively successful in this regard but large first year classes in the universities constitute a very real challenge. In a positive move, the universities are introducing more guidance, smaller classes, better teacher-student and student-student interaction. These are steps in the right direction but it seems to be generally agreed that much remains to be done.

The need is:

- to create a better learning environment,
- to strengthen relationships between the student and the institution
- to maintain a good mix between full and part-time students
- to care for the growing number of students both undergraduate and graduate

These refer to conditions that underlie widely shared institutional development goals and they constitute, in our view, a reasonable challenge to policy makers and institutions alike. Exhortation is not

enough. The question we wish to pose is whether adequate incentives are in place and whether the career structure of academics pays sufficient attention to teaching.

In one field, innovation in teaching and course design and delivery has been conspicuous but with potential yet to be fully realised. Norway has played a role, internationally in the development of strategies for distance education. In 1990, the government established the Norwegian Executive Board for Distance Education at University and College Level (SOFF). Its purpose is to give advice to the Ministry, maintain a register of existing and planned distance education courses, provide guidance on technical possibilities, suggest projects, stimulate pedagogical and methodological development and recommend grants.

This wide remit could enable SOFF, with government backing, to play a more substantial role than hitherto in fostering system-wide innovation in teaching and learning. The fundamental role of the institutions is acknowledged as is the need to build technologies of design and delivery into curricula and pedagogy (rather than vice-versa). However, there appears to be need for a more comprehensive strategy, targeted toward the greater application of relatively low cost technologies and cost efficiencies in achieving learning outcomes. Lacking system-wide application and economies, SOFF might become very largely a course registry and grant awarding agency. Its potential is, however, considerably more than that.

Distance education is rightly seen as a plank in national policy designed to improve access and establish more flexible arrangements for learning. As yet, it is on a relatively modest scale and focused on meeting the needs, mainly, of teachers and others who already have initial qualifications and are upgrading. The middle course chosen by Norway follows a review of options. The single purpose, national distance education university model (e.g. Britain's Open University) is not favoured but nor is it simply left to institutions, whether public or private, to do what they will. Instead, with the establishment of SOFF there is a national structure for addressing issues of policy and recommending grants, i.e. an "innovations-type" programme, not necessarily confined to distance programmes. As indicated above, the mandate gives scope for a more comprehensive approach (to keep abreast of international trends, provide institutional guidance, co-ordinate, suggest future projects, evaluate). It is recognised that there is need for a strategy for infrastructure development which is said to be underway.

Norway has adopted an interesting, forward-looking approach based on the belief that the older distinctions between on/off campus are no longer valid and that distance education is not a stop gap but a procedure that established institutions could well develop as part of a more comprehensive strategy of access and increased, flexible study opportunities. Distance education could be further exploited, as part of the regional development philosophy, within Network Norway, to strengthen access nation-wide on grounds of social justice and efficiency and as a way to stimulate innovation in teaching. This potential is partially recognised (but there is still resistance to the inclusion of courses/programmes with a strong practical component e.g. teacher education, nursing). Experience in other countries would support a more open-minded approach to such issues.

## **Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

Norway is in population terms a small country. Governance is transparent. There is an intact system of informal contacts and networks which facilitates agreements and shared purposes. There has been strong development over several decades of a broadly accepted knowledge base to provide a framework for political discussions and negotiations (hence the "Nordic model" of informal, consensual

governance). The country is wealthy, with low unemployment, a high standard of living and a relatively light experience of the economic and social problems that plague many large, heavily industrialised countries. These are very considerable assets, providing a solid foundation for further growth and development.

The reviewers had the benefit of wide-ranging open discussions with students, academics, administrators, researchers, local government and community representatives and employers in a sample of institutions: university, college, national, local, urban, rural, large, small, and a range of academic disciplines covering a wide field of applied studies. From these discussions there emerged two broad lines of interpretation. There is much satisfaction at the level of the individual course, programme or institution. Standards of provision are generally high, teachers and students interact often in small groups, and there is very often, especially in the regional level institutions, a close working relationship with the community and employers.

There are, however, a number of problems which call for attention. The reviewers were concerned by the queuing problem and the apparent lack of concern in a situation where many young people must wait three or four years before they have access to the course of their choice and hence the careers of their choosing. Relations between tertiary education and the labour market are not as close as they might be. While directives policies whereby students are channelled into programmes and courses where labour market demands are high are not the way ahead, there are many ways in which students, institutions and the employment sector can gain a better understanding of needs and opportunities and more active policies in this regard would yield good results especially in the matters of clearer signals on the one hand and admission and course policies on the other. The traditional orientation towards passing examinations rather than good teaching and rich learning experience, and the lack of a clear profile in many degree programmes (due to the numerous possibilities for variations and combinations, cross-crediting, etc.), are all matters for concern. Despite the endeavours -- by the Ministry -- to achieve results-oriented financing and mandating student evaluation of courses, and by the institutions to provide better orientation, guidance and support for students, and to introduce required training standards for teachers, several challenges remain.

There is a fairly weak economic base for educational policy; policy is much stronger on personal growth and development of the individual and equalisation of opportunity (geography, social factors, sex); demand has been the driving force but it is not fully met in policy responses.

The focus of this report has been the regional colleges since that is where major structural changes have occurred and will continue for some time. However, the universities are of course major players in the evolving tertiary education system. As in other countries, there may be a tendency for them to continue teaching as in days of low numbers, keeping much the same degree structure as of old. This is not to say that teachers aren't working hard, caring for students. However, it seems that too little resource goes into teaching (the universities, it was said, are "research institutions conducting exams"; the teaching semester ends in October; the rest is exams). Yet there is little feedback effect despite the precise grading. This has many features of a certification system wherein students tend to work only for exams and their legal rights (re. exams) are strong so teachers must be careful. Nevertheless, there can be too much measuring and not enough development of knowledge, especially knowledge of the kind that comes from courses and study programmes in the field, the community, the workplace and various other practical settings. This is really an issue of the purpose, value and utility of degree courses. The competences needed of graduates must be employment-related, but not only employment related. There is a challenge to institutions to continue the review and further development of their academic programmes not only from the standpoint of the individual disciplines and professional fields but taking into account both

personal goals and broader civic, social and cultural values. This may be happening in the universities but, if it is, we received little information about it.

An obvious way into the rather general question of the underlying purposes of the students' education is institutional and especially department/faculty self-evaluation within the framework of national quality appraisal. Such evaluation is occurring but we think it could be very usefully extended, made more systematic and given a national character as is happening in several countries. We therefore suggest that consideration be given to establishing a national agency, independent of but closely related both to the Ministry and the institutions and reporting to the Parliament and the Minister. The agency would have mainly an audit function, to ensure adequate institutional practice but might also have a direct role in organising evaluations e.g. in broad fields or disciplines. It would be necessary to put in place adequate monitoring and follow-up procedures including provision for staff in-career development.

In both the university and the college sector there are very considerable challenges to institutional management. As in other countries, there is need to strengthen the education, training and support services for people occupying increasingly demanding and responsible positions of management and leadership in institutions. The processes of institutional amalgamation and consolidation, the intention to carry forward the Network Norway initiative, the growing scale and diversity of daily operations, the internationalising of activities and the need to better integrate the institutions into the changing socio-economic environment are only some of the reasons for an enhancement of qualities and procedures of institutional life.

The cand. mag. in the universities, of 3 1/2 to 4 years' duration has low esteem on the labour market and in seeking to strengthen it the University of Oslo, for example recognises a problem. The answer does not lie, as in several other countries, in an extended period of initial study -- indeed 3 1/2 - 4 years is a very sound target in this respect, but in the review of its purposes and value, the revision of curricula, organisation and teaching with an emphasis on addressing and meeting the well-defined needs of students and the society. In short, as client orientation combined with a readiness to rethink basic structures and long established habits. This would not be easy and it would require a national approach including full partnership with the major interested parties.

On the subject of costs, there are strong differences among countries participating in this thematic review regarding the issue of "user pays". Norway belongs to the group wherein high levels of public funding including favourable provision of loans for student support are preferred to a fees regime. The arguments for the latter are not only to do with meeting the costs as numbers increase and constraints as imposed on the public exchequer; they also refer to incentives to students to make practical choices, to study hard, complete in the minimum time, and to take an active interest in the quality of the educational provision. Fees can also produce a new spirit of entrepreneurship in the institutions and a readiness to compete in the quality market. We think these are relevant arguments but they do not necessarily lead to the introduction of fees which fall directly on students. There are deferred payment schemes (as in Australia) and there are ways of targeting student subsidies (as in the U.S.A.). Our point in raising this is not to recommend fees, for which indeed no case was made during our visit, but to indicate that there are cost issues than can be addressed and efficiency gains made by taking an open-minded attitude towards the principle of new ways of sharing the increasing costs of tertiary education.

Given the uncertainty not to say scepticism we encountered over the reality of "Network Norway" and the potential value of greater co-operation among institutions, we welcome the initiative now under way to give the concept more substance and to provide a direction through the establishment of a national agency. An opportunity exists to achieve a degree of institutional specialisation, greater

rationalisation in the use of resources, the wider application of new information and communication technologies and of distance education. The Network would doubtless embrace all the institutions in both the college and university sectors and sustain the important linkage established locally and regionally.

In common with other countries, Norway has been seeking to devolve central Ministry power. There is scope for less regulation and control of details, consistent with the strengthening that has occurred of the college sector but also in recognition of the value of a more entrepreneurial role and more self-management in the universities. Devolution also implies a strengthening of the strategic, steering role of the Ministry and other central bodies with emphasis on longer term goals and directions. The Ministry might also seek to strengthen relationships between education and other policy domains, strengthen monitoring and data analysis and the preparation of strategic options for the future directions of the system.

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