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When I started to work with education and gender issues in the Ministry of Education back in 1997, the situation for boys and girls /women and men concerning their educational choices was in many ways the same as today.

We had – and we still have gender-segregated educational choices in our country. And as a result of that - a gender segregated labour market. Especially when it comes to vocational training and careers. But this is also a mixed picture:

We see that the advancement of women into higher education might also be described as a “silent revolution”; a gradual increase that has totally changed gender representation in higher education over the last 30-year period. For example, today, women attend earlier male-dominated professions like medicine and law to a large (and even dominant) extent. However, this is not today’s situation for professions in computer science and engineering.

Back in 1997, girl’s interest in the use of computers were considered fairly low and as a potential problem for equity. Gender issues (with focus on girls and women) were therefore considered important to get integrated in the national IT- and later ICT- strategies.

The Ministry of Education and Research have had three general strategies concerning (IT and) ICT and education in the period from 1996 until today:

In the first two strategies from 1996 – 1999 and 2000 – 2003 we had an integrated girls/women perspective (but not a gender perspective). The activity focused on increasing girls/women’s interest in - and use of ICT. The way boys/ and men used the computer were considered as a standard - and the norm in many ways.

In the period from 1996 – 2003 we had several projects – but most of them small scale projects:

- The Ministry financed research on girls and women’s experiences with ICT in primary and secondary education and at university level
- We also had development projects with focus on girls and women’s experiences with ICT in the same sector areas. (The University of Oslo and The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim.)
- National conferences focusing on measures to strengthen the interest in ICT among girls and women – and especially female teachers

In 2004 the Ministry ordered a report (about the existing knowledge base) to find out if there had been a change of the gender situation compared to 8-10 years earlier. This was crucial since back in 1996, the Internet was considered as a new phenomenon.

The report showed us that a lot had happened from 1996 to 2004 - especially due to the emergence of Internet and of new communication tools; girls and women had become keen users of technology.

The Norwegian researcher Tove Kristiansen, who was responsible for the report, concluded that the use of technology had increased both for boys and girls in Norway. The differences that were found between the genders in the 1990's were not longer visible in 2004.

But there were differences within the gender groups – those differences were apparent in the way some girls and some boys used the technology. The author of the report pointed out that there existed several forms of digital competences across the gender dimension. The author also concluded that it seemed that schools which maintained a gender-neutral but broader ICT focus and approach - seemed to gain more success both for girls and boys - than those who ran projects mainly related to girls.

Interestingly, what still existed in the same way as ten years before, was a huge lack of interest for girls and women to choose computer science at the university and college level. The girls were more like users than producers of ICT.

I think that Tove Kristiansens findings are very similar to what have been pointed out as the present situation in many of the OECD countries, both by Cathrine Tømtes background paper, and by many of the presentations at this meeting.

What we did back in 2004 was that the strategy that was developed for the period 2004-2008 – “Programme for digital competence” – did not include projects towards girls and women – or gender projects – per se - but had a more gender neutral perspective. The gender perspective was mainstreamed – and perhaps mainstreamed away.

In the last four and a half years we do have had a policy toward recruiting young women to ICT studies at university and college level through other action plans (like the plan for A Joint Promotion of Mathematics, Science and Technology.)

The last year we have felt the need (as the State Secretary pointed out yesterday) to reinforce the work on gender, technology and education in Norway. This has been urged both by the approach by the OECD, the PISA results - and how we can critically examine the observed gender gaps.

A move from “gender neutrality” to “gender sensitivity”:  
It is important to see the use of ICT in schools - and the understandings of ICT as a tool to reduce un-equity and create equity. We need more knowledge, more research – which also have been pointed out in the background paper for this meeting and several of you to manage this. We need to explore how ICT can be better targeted in order to address gender-specific challenges, (e.g. how ICT can be used to improve the performance of male pupils).