

OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising Practices

Introducing a Five-Year Master's Degree for All Teachers in Norway

Country category: Norway

Teacher education pathway category(ies): Attracting suitable candidates into initial teacher education programmes; Equipping teachers with what they need to know and do; Supporting beginning teachers

Stakeholder category(ies): teacher educator

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Norway from 24-27 April 2017.

The OECD Review Team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Philippa Cordingley (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education), Liesbeth Hens (Ministry of Education and Training, Flanders) and Danielle Toon (Learning First) – identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising Practice 1.

Introducing a Five-Year Master's Degree for All Teachers in Norway

Context

Teachers, especially those in secondary education, are increasingly required to obtain a master's level qualification to teach. In 11 of the 35 OECD countries with available data, a master's degree is required to teach at the primary level, and in 17 and 22 countries it is required to teach general subjects at the lower secondary and upper secondary levels. Only in England, France, Iceland and Italy is a master's degree required of pre-primary school teachers. (OECD, 2014_[1]).

However, the research base is inconclusive about the value of a master's level qualification with regard to teaching. Some studies report a slight positive correlation between master's qualifications and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000_[2]), whereas other research from England and the United States draws an unclear picture (Brooks et al., 2012_[3]; Ronfeldt and Reininger, 2012_[4]; Thomas, 2016_[5]). This may be because the *quality* of teacher preparation is a more important factor. For example, the extent to which an initial teacher education (ITE) programme fosters schools-based research capabilities in teacher candidates and provides opportunities for deeper school-university collaborations may better ensure preparedness for teaching. The possible long-term positive impact of policies designed to “raise the bar” for entry to the teaching profession, such as raising the status of teaching or increasing the general attractiveness of the profession, has been little researched.

Norway is transitioning teacher preparation from a four-year bachelor's level programme into a five-year master's level programme. From 2017, all teachers training for primary and lower secondary school (years one to seven and five to ten) will be enrolled in a five-year master's degree. This transition is part of a series of reforms launched in 2014 to improve the quality of teachers called the Promotion of the Status and Quality of Teachers (Ministry of Education and Research Norway, 2017_[6]). Other reforms include increasing specialist subject training (see [Promising Practice 2](#)), piloting new career paths for teachers, and building teams and strong subject-based communities within schools.

What will the new five-year master's degree in Norway entail?

Norway is introducing master's degrees to strengthen the status of teaching, raise the quality of teacher education, and ensure newly qualified teachers are better prepared for their jobs. The Norwegian government wants teachers to have better skills in using observation, research, and reflection to adjust their own and their colleagues' practices.

Prospective teachers will be trained in research methods and try out roles as researchers themselves (Toom et al., 2008_[7]). They will prepare a master's-level thesis, choosing to focus on subject-specific teaching, general pedagogy, or special needs education. Trainees will read research literature, national regulations, curricula and other sources to formulate and carry out school-based research projects for their thesis. Practical training will increase from 100 to 110 days with the new programmes.

National regulations to guide the learning outcomes of degrees (“framework plans”) (Ministry of Education and Research Norway, 2011^[8]) and more detailed national guidelines for each subject in teacher education (owned by teacher education institutions with input from the school sector through the National Association for Teacher Education) (Ministry of Education and Research Norway, 2011^[9]), were updated in 2017 for the new master’s-level programmes.

Why is it an opportunity?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Norway from 24-28 April 2017 concluded that the transition to master’s-level training for all teachers is an opportunity in that could:

- *Improve schools-based research capabilities.* The master’s programme will increase the number of school-based research projects conducted, creating an opportunity to increase research skills in teachers.
- *Provide opportunities for deeper school-university collaborations.* The focus on school-based research projects in the master’s programme will foster closer links between schools and universities.

How could it be improved?

However, the OECD Review Team also noted there could be:

- *An underestimation of the need to build capabilities and capacity.* Teacher educators and school leaders need additional capabilities and capacity in order to implement high-quality master’s-level programmes that connect deeper theory and knowledge with practice. Without investment in capabilities such as research skills, there is a risk that the new programmes will be a longer version of the bachelor’s-level approach and not improve the quality of preparation as hoped.
- *Lack of communication, understanding and coherence of reforms.* Stakeholders must know why master’s programmes are being introduced, what the reform is trying to achieve, and what the expectations are for providers and schools. There needs to be sufficient time to embed new approaches, align them with other reforms taking place, and consider the implications for schools. For example, are schools equipped to support all trainee teachers in conducting a school-based master’s research project?

For more information

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