



**Choices and Responsibilities:
Higher Education in the Knowledge Society**

Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE)

Evaluation of the Competence reform in Norway:
Access to higher education based on non-formal learning.

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From the start of the academic year 2001-2002, people without completed secondary school were enabled to enter higher education based on documented non-formal competence. The change to the rules of access to higher education is part of the Competence reform in Norway. Norwegian universities and colleges are under the obligation to assess adult applicants over the age of 25 with a view to admitting them for individual courses of study on the basis of their documented non-formal learning (their "Realkompetanse").

Based on interviews with key personnel at selected universities and colleges, and on quantitative data from the applicant register, the paper presents results from an evaluation of this reform in Norwegian higher education. Central research questions include: How have the universities and colleges adapted to this reform? What differences are there between the applicants who make use of this opportunity and other groups of applicants?

The evaluation indicates that the reform, by and large, works according to the lawmakers' intentions in providing a second chance for learners not usually linked with higher education. Still, findings suggest considerable variations in how the universities and colleges have adjusted to the reform. Geographical location and supply of students are factors contributing to the institutions attitude to the reform. Colleges in rural areas with a low numbers of applicants are, in general, the most positive to the reform and it seems to be easier for applicants to be assessed as qualified for studies, in such colleges.