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Polytechnic Sector in Norway – the University Colleges

The Structure of Higher Education in Norway – today

The general structure of Higher Education in Norway:

- 4 traditional universities
- 6 professional specific universities – offering specialised professional degree programmes
- 26 colleges – denominated universities colleges in English terms
- 2 art colleges

With a population of 4 400 000 spread among a few cities and widely across the country, Norway has a strong orientation towards regional development in its policies. Norway's Higher Education system has experienced considerable changes in the first half of the 1990s and new changes are proposed in a recently presented "green paper".

The *University sector* includes four universities in the traditional sense and six universities offering specialised professional degree programmes at university level, with an estimated total of 83 000 students in 1999. The universities carry out research and offer university level instruction at undergraduate and graduate levels leading to academic degrees.

The *College sector* consists of 26 university colleges, the result of restructuring 98 public non-university institutions in 1994. The colleges vary in size; from the smallest with 170 students, to the largest with 8 050 students. Around 72 000 students attend these institutions. The colleges have previously been denominated *State Colleges*, but the Parliament has recently recommended *University College* as the correct term in English.

In addition, there are several *private Higher Education institutions*, catering for some 10% of the total Norwegian student population (about 12 000 students). Private institutions may only receive state funding for recognised study programmes, but they are not automatically entitled to such support.

The private Higher Education institutions cover a wide spectrum 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 two, the Free Faculty of Theology and Norwegian School of Management BI, can confer doctor's degrees.

Typical Subject Areas

Most programmes at the colleges are profession-specific, their graduates becoming professional or para-professional personnel in areas such as teaching at pre-school or compulsory school level, engineering, social work, health services, administration, economics, librarianship, journalism, etc.

Current Structure of Courses/Degrees

a) *Undergraduate level*

Candidatus/Candidata magisterii (cand.mag.): This degree is offered at universities and colleges. The Cand.mag. Degree normally requires four years of study, with exams totalling 80 "vektall"¹, or 240 ECTS Credits. The Cand.mag. Degree implies a general education, which means that students have considerable choice when selecting subjects leading to the degree.

"Høgskolekandidat": This is a final diploma or title awarded by the colleges upon completion of a two – three year study programme. A Cand.mag. Degree may be obtained by further study within the college system or by attending university.

Professional Titles: The professional study programmes give the right to use a professional title. Most of the study programmes last three years. Physiotherapists, prosthetic and orthotic engineers and registered public accountants must have one – two years of practice after completion of studies to be recognised.

"Høgskoleingeniør": Three years education from one of the fields of study at a Faculty of Engineering gives the right of "Høgskoleingeniør". Law protects both the professional titles and the title "høgskoleingeniør".

b) Graduate level

The colleges do in some cases award graduate degrees. Graduate degrees are based on the Cand.mag. Degree and may be earned by extending the major field of study at undergraduate level. Graduate degrees are normally awarded upon completion of two additional years of graduate study (10 vekttall/120 ECTS Credits).

A small number of colleges offer the graduate degrees of "siviløkonom" (siv.øk.) in economics and of "sivilingeniør" (siv.ing. equivalent to Master of Science) in engineering. Other graduate programmes offered by the colleges are being established.

c) Master's Degree

All the universities offer Master Degree programmes, meaning a degree programme lectured in English and offered to foreign students. Some colleges offer Master's Degree programmes in co-operation with foreign institutions.

The foreign institutions have been conferring the degree. The colleges have recently been given the opportunity to offer Master's on a trial basis. Five colleges have been approved for a degree program in certain areas and several colleges are currently in the process of applying to the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs for the possibility to introduce Master's Degree programmes from year 2000 onwards.

d) Doctoral Studies

Doctoral degrees are awarded upon completion of a three to four year academic programme at the highest level of study. Given the completion of certain criteria, colleges will from now on be able to award doctoral degrees. So far three colleges have been granted the right by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs to award doctoral degrees in specific areas.

Finance

Funding is provided almost entirely from the public budget. There are no tuition fees in the public institutions. Funding is based on the previous year's budget, with adjustments taking into account inflation and increased enrolments and incremental funding for the latter varying according to the number and level of the new study places.

The financial conditions for Higher Education are well below (20%) the OECD level measured in means per student. Since the restructuring of the non-university sector in 1994, the colleges – and universities – have experienced large cuts and a steadily declining economy.

¹ At Norwegian institutions of Higher Education, courses are measured in "vektall", the Norwegian term for credit units. The normal work load for 1 semester is 10 vekttall, which is equal to 30 ECTS Credits.

a) Governance/Management

Governance in Higher Education has shifted from regulatory mechanisms to an approach emphasising strategic goals, close monitoring at the central political level and increased institutional autonomy in teaching and research. Recent legislation provides for streamlined governance arrangements, wider participation from external stakeholders on smaller governing bodies in the institutions and enhanced decision-making powers at the institutional level. Permanent administrative posts exist for Director, Registrar, etc. Academic leadership up to and including the Rector is elected for a three-year term.

The government has initiated a *Network Norway Council* to act as a general advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, with the aim of producing strategies for quality monitoring. The Council has replaced specialised bodies and councils. Wide system evaluation and quality assurance processes are still evolving, with experience gained through pilot projects and institutional initiatives.

An Executive Board governs each institution and is an institution's highest governing body. The Executive Board shall make strategic decisions on the institutions educational, research and other academic activities and make plans for scientific development in accordance with the goals established by the authorities for the sector and the institutions. The Executive Board – normally 13 members – consists of the Rector, the Vice-Rector, five members elected from among the academic staff, one member elected from among the technical and administrative staff, two members elected among the students and three external members. The Rector is the chairman of the Executive Board. An internal College Council advises the Executive Board on matters related to the principal directions of the institution's activities or raises important questions of principle relating to them. The academic staff, including Rector and Vice-Rector, constitutes the majority in the governing bodies.

b) Act relating to universities and colleges

The colleges are regulated under the same act and legislation as the universities. In 1995, a common act for both colleges and universities was passed in Parliament to replace separate acts. The act came into force in 1996.

The act became important for the self-esteem and development of the colleges. Let me give one example from the act:

§ 2 Activities of the institutions

- *The institutions to which the present Act applies shall offer Higher Education based on the most advanced scientific research, artistic development and empirical knowledge. Within a national research and higher educational network (the Norway Network), the institutions shall co-operate and complement each other's academic activities. Educational courses shall be planned and viewed in relation to other national and international educational facilities.*
- *The institutions shall engage in research and scientific and/or artistic development.*
- *The institutions cannot be instructed as to the content of their teaching, research or artistic or scientific development work.*
- *The institutions are responsible for disseminating knowledge of their activities and understanding of scientific methods and results.*
- *The institutions are responsible for offering or arranging refresher courses in their disciplines.*
- *The universities have a particular national responsibility for basic research and research training and for building up, running and maintaining research libraries and museums with scientific collections and public exhibitions. Similar responsibilities can be imposed on other institutions in their respective special fields.*
- *The language of instruction is normally Norwegian.*

c) Research

Increasing and improving research activity is a national goal for Norway and the colleges play an important role in this process with their profession-specific programmes. The colleges are by the authorities seen as important actors in regional development within areas like research and the

development of competence. They assume that colleges participate in the challenges within these fields, in order to further strengthen the regions around the country.

The institutions have been given the right and duty in the Act of Legislation to perform research and development activities. The Act of Legislation focuses on research and development in academic areas where each institution have their strength. The academic staff does not have the individual right to carry out research but generally the effort at institutional average is at 25%.

The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs has recently passed a paper to the Parliament called "*Research at the beginning of a new era*". The paper declares that the colleges have an important role to play in regional innovation and applied research and development. *The Norwegian Council of Research* has proposed a thematic research program, which will focus on profession-specific research and school-oriented research with emphases on subject- and vocational didactics.

d) Regional Links

The University Colleges have been a particular target for government policy, aiming at promoting the development and supporting the distinctiveness of regions. This implies that they should respond to regional needs in both private and public sector and also adapt their research and development work to such needs. Partnerships between education, industry and the local community are regarded as beneficial to all parties. The colleges have been a vehicle for government policies aimed at strengthening the cultural, scientific and technical basis for working life and society in general.

The Boundaries between Universities and Colleges

Several trends in Higher Education are contributing to the blurring of boundaries between university and new Higher Education institutions in Norway:

- All Higher Education institutions are regulated by the same Act of Legislation
- The colleges have been given the right (in principle) to award doctor's degrees
- Near all the colleges offer academic programmes similar to the universities and confer the same degrees
- It is becoming easier for students to progress or move from institution to institution, i.e. between different colleges or between colleges and universities
- Entry to colleges has become an attractive alternative to university entry
- The colleges have in principle the opportunity to apply for university status

The colleges are increasingly internationalist in outlook. Moreover, through a variety of central controls, i.e. national curricula in teacher education, nursing and engineering, both the colleges and universities are part of the same national system. Local, regional and national features combine to form a unique blend.

Another significant feature contributing to the blurring of boundaries is that universities abroad do not seem any longer to concentrate on co-operation with Norwegian universities at the expense of the colleges. On the contrary, there are examples of European Higher Education institutions appreciating the flexibility of colleges.

So far we have had a diversified binary system of Higher Education in Norway. Today there are forces and tendencies pointing in the direction of a more unified system. It is important to maintain a diversified system, under a common act. Especially when we take into consideration that Higher Education now is sought by more than 50% of the cohort and we are expecting even higher participation in the future.

The new act of universities and colleges together with the merging process, have markedly reduced the differences between universities and colleges and have also been accompanied by a so-called "academic drift". In this situation some colleges take another road, they want to become professional university colleges which are distinctly from the universities.

A valid question is whether it will be possible to maintain the present degree of diversity – or if the colleges will develop into university – like institutions.

The Institution Structure in the University- and College Sector

State institutions within Higher Education in Norway have since 1994 been divided into two sectors and two different councils have been working as their interest organisations. *The Norwegian Council of Universities* represents the ten institutions in the university sector and *The Norwegian Council of State Colleges* represents the 26 universities colleges.

As earlier mentioned the boundaries between university and new Higher Education institutions are becoming increasingly blurred and the institution structure within Higher Education in Norway has lately emerged on the agenda of several public arenas. At the Conference arranged by The Network Norway Council on the 23rd of April 1999 several speakers expressed that there were reasons to claim that the institutions structure in Norway is ready for a revision.

The Norwegian Council of Universities made on the 11th-12th of May 1999 following resolution regarding the institution structure:

“The Council finds that there no longer is a basis for a simple dichotomy between the existing university sector and the college sector in Norway. The Council emphasises the importance of a university- and college sector that has room for a diversity of institutions and for different courses of development.”

The Council sees the need for a clarification of the university concept in line with the international development and asks the Board of the Norwegian Council of Universities to work for a solution with reference to the discussion in the Council.”

With reference to, among other things, the development in Sweden and Finland the following has been proposed in the preparation of the case in the Norwegian Council of Universities as a starting point for an expanded use of the university term:

“An expanded use of the university term should have as its starting point the fact that universities are perceived internationally as institutions which allocate academic degrees at all levels and conduct basic research as well as research training. The university term is normally used in relation to institutions with significant professional diversity and corresponding size, but may also be applied to other institutions carrying national responsibility for subject areas of national and international importance.”

In Act no. 22 of May 1995 relating to Universities and Colleges the institutions are mentioned by name, the consequence being that only the Parliament can change the designations of the institutions. The use of the designation “university” is not protected by law and is already being applied to the joint ventures of the institutions, for example “The Network University”, “The Business University”, “The Scandinavian Network University” and “The Norwegian University Network for Life-Long Learning”. There have been no objections from the legislators or from the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. The Network Norway Council has made the following unanimous resolution:

“In a dynamic system for Higher Education it is, in the opinion of the Network Norway Council, disadvantageous to determine the institution structure by law. The Network Norway Council recommends an elucidation of a change in the law resulting in the institutions structure not being determined by law, but rather that the institutions are given the right to choose freely the designation they find most suitable for their activities and scientific profile”.

One National Council: Association of Norwegian Higher Education

A common body for the institutions in the university- and college sector has by many been seen as a natural development of the work laid down by The Norwegian Council of Universities and The Norwegian Council of State Colleges and the development within Higher Education nationally and internationally.

The co-operation between The Norwegian Council of State Colleges and The Norwegian Council of Universities has evolved in a positive and accelerating manner. In nearly all green and white papers

sent out on hearings by the Government, the two councils have been co-operating closely. The two executive boards have had one meeting per year in order to discuss issues and policies of Higher Education.

I would also like to draw special attention to the joint venture "*The Norwegian University Network for Life-Long Learning*". The two councils invited the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and several other labour organisations to collaborate on measures that will improve the relations between tertiary education institutions and the labour market and sustain the need for system-wide innovations in teaching and learning. This venture has shown that the two councils can and will take a common stand and work closely for the promotion of important political questions concerning Higher Education.

Further deregulation of Higher Education will, as a consequence of the Competence Reform, make increased demands on the voluntary co-operation of institutions. An example here is the Ministry's report on delegation of authority to the institutions, which implies that certain study programs may be established by an institution without approval from the Ministry.

It is not obvious that there is only one set of indicators pointing in a certain and unambiguous direction for the development of the institutions in Higher Education. This range of indicators show that there no longer exists a basis for the dichotomy between the university sector and the state college sector. For a united sector the main developments might be as follows:

- The diversity of lower degree studies together with a – possible new – common degree structure, with Master's Degree and Doctoral Degrees as the highest education, will enjoy greater recognition.
- Stronger co-operation between all kinds of institutions in order to strengthen their distinctive qualities and specialisation.
- More co-operation and joint challenges within pedagogy, including adult-pedagogy in connection with the Competence Reform.
- More co-operation in connection with research- and development projects.

On this background the Board of the Norwegian Council of State Colleges came to the conclusion that it was time to merge the two Councils. The Board of the Norwegian Council of Universities made the same evaluation.

The historic resolution was made by a unanimous vote by representatives from all the institutions of universities and colleges. The document that established **Universities- of høyskolerådet** was signed by the 36 participating rectors on 8th May 2000. A convertible English name was not decided, but it is most likely to be **Association of Norwegian Higher Education**, i.e. similar to the Swedish organisation and accordingly to the OECD definition. The new organisation came into operation immediately by electing an Executive Board and a new leadership. The Executive Board is composed of three rectors, one director and one student representative from each sector, i.e. a total of ten members.

Higher Education in Norway for the New Millennium

The Norwegian Government appointed on 30th April 1998 a national committee to supply Higher Education after year 2000. In the mandate the committee was asked to make a broad inquire into the challenges which Higher Education will face in the years to come. The national committee was composed of 18 members from universities, colleges, private Higher Education institutions, student representatives from both universities and colleges and representatives from work force organisations.

The "green" paper was handed over to the Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs on 8th May 2000. It is a voluminous document of nearly 700 pages, which have a number of proposals. Generally we can say that the college sector and the university sector are treated almost equally in nearly all the proposals.

It is too early to discuss the paper at this stage, but we can indicate the main chapters of the document and make a few points of common interest. It is also fair to say that in this document there are four distinct focuses to be observed:

- the students
- the institutions
- the international aspect
- an independent accreditation organisation

The green paper is structured into the following chapters:

➤ *Organisation of the institutions of Higher Education*

- The changes in Higher Education suggest the need for more independent institutions.
- The need for increased quality in research and learning environment requires the establishment of an independent accreditation and evaluation body.

➤ *Higher Education in an international perspective*

- The authorities should draw up a plan to increase the number of Norwegian students in other countries and at the same time attract foreign students to Norwegian institutions.
- Give incentives towards formalising co-operation between Norwegian and foreign institutions to support short-time exchange of students.
- The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be implemented.

➤ *Information- and communication technology*

➤ *Quality and efficiency in the learning environment*

➤ *The focus upon research in Higher Education*

➤ *The degree structure in Higher Education*

- The Degree system used today in Norway is to be unrolled and replaced by international degrees according to the Bologna Declaration. The paper proposes an adaptation of the English/American system with a Bachelor-, Master- and Doctoral Degree after 3 + 2 + 3 years of full time study, respectively.

➤ *Principles of size scaling in Higher Education*

➤ *Organisation and forms of connection in Higher Education*

➤ *Governing and management of the institutions*

➤ *Financing of Higher Education and research*

➤ *Institutional classification in Higher Education*

➤ *Evaluation and accrediting in Higher Education*

➤ *The libraries in Higher Education*

➤ *The museums in Higher Education*

➤ *Higher Education and arbeidslivet – life long learning*

➤ *Higher Education and research in the sami community*

➤ *Higher Education in the Finnish community*

➤ *Higher Education in a multicultural perspective*

➤ *Economic and administrative consequences*

The Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs will arrange a wide spread hearing of the green paper in their preparation for the “white paper” to the Parliament. It is expected that the Parliament will discuss all the proposals and make decisions during the spring or autumn sessions 2001.

It is fair to say that Norwegian Higher Education – universities and colleges – will face a large number of challenges and hopefully will be given the opportunities to master these in the years to come.