Education system

Norway
described and compared with the Dutch system
This document contains information on the education system of Norway. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Norway for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

Disclaimer
We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.

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### Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications applicable to admission to higher education. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree or qualification</th>
<th>Dutch equivalent and NLQF level</th>
<th>EQF level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Svennebrev (journeyman’s certificate) or Fagbrev (trade certificate)</td>
<td>MBO diploma (qualification level 3 or 4)</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitnemål for Videregående Opplæring</td>
<td>VWO or HAVO diploma</td>
<td>4+/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Høgskolekandidat (university college)</td>
<td>2 years of HBO or Associate Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (university, university college or specialized university institution)</td>
<td>WO or HBO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master (university, university college or specialized university institution)</td>
<td>WO or HBO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidatus followed by the specialisation</td>
<td>WO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB**
- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework. EQF = European Qualifications Framework.
- The EQF/NLQF level is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person’s knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: the Dutch education system.
- The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.
Introduction

Norway is a unitary constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government. The country is divided into 19 provinces, with several hundred municipalities.

The Norwegian education system is governed by national legislation. The Kunnskapsdepartementet (Ministry of Education and Research) is responsible for all levels of education, including pre-school (for children up to age five). The national government is responsible for formulating education policy, and determines the broad contours of the educational frameworks. Municipal and local authorities ensure that the guidelines and outcomes established by the government are realized. The responsibility for setting up educational programmes within higher education is largely delegated to the higher education institutions themselves, and responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT).

Over the last 30 years, Norwegian higher education has undergone major reforms as a result of the Bologna Process. Significant changes have been made to the education system as part of the Quality Reform implemented in 2003/2004. A new points system based on the ECTS was introduced, as well as a new system of degrees and a new assessment system. The higher education system was decentralized, and autonomy was increased at institutional level. NOKUT was founded as an independent body responsible for quality assurance. To reduce the dropout rate and encourage completion of studies without delays, a follow-up plan was created for school-leavers and students. A greater emphasis was also placed on internationalization as a means of improving higher education in Norway.

Education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 16. The language of education is Norwegian. Sami, the language of the Sami minority, can be chosen as a second language. In the Sami district in the north of Norway, education in Sami is also available. Higher education is offering an increasing number of programmes in English, particularly at master's level.

The academic year in Norway is 10 months long, and runs from August to mid-June.

Primary and secondary education

Norway has 10 years of compulsory education (grunnskole), equivalent to primary and junior secondary education in the Netherlands.
Primary education is provided at the barneskole (grades 1-7, for children aged 6 to 13), and lower secondary education at the ungdomsskole (grades 8-10, children aged 13 to 16). The grunnskole is completed with the Vitnemal for grunnskolen.

Upper secondary education in Norway is not differentiated by type as it is in the Netherlands. In 1974 a unitary system was introduced for the 3-year upper secondary education cycle, encompassing both general and vocational programmes. Upper secondary education is provided at a videregående skole.

Upper secondary school students can choose 1 of 12 national education programmes, 3 of which are primarily aimed at general education and preparation for academic university study. The remaining 9 programmes are more vocational in nature, and offer more subjects with a professional rather than an academic focus. The 12 education programmes are:

**General/Academic:**
- Utdanningsprogram for studiespesialisering med programområder for realfag, formgivingsfag og språk, samfunnsfag og økonomi / Programme for Specialization in General Studies
- Utdanningsprogram for idrettsfag / Programme for Sports and Physical Education
- Utdanningsprogram for musikk, dans og drama / Programme for Music, Dance and Drama

**Vocational:**
- Utdanningsprogram for Bygg- og Anleggsteknikk / Programme for Building and Construction
- Utdanningsprogram for Design og Håndverksfag / Programme for Design, Arts and Crafts*
- Utdanningsprogram for Elektrofag / Programme for Electricity and Electronics
- Utdanningsprogram for Helse- og Sosialfag / Programme for Health and Social Care
- Utdanningsprogram for Medier og Kommunikasjon / Programme for Media and Communication*
- Utdanningsprogram for Naturbruk / Programme for Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry*
- Utdanningsprogram for Restaurant- og Matfag / Programme for Restaurant and Food Processing
- Utdanningsprogram for Service og Samferdsel / Programme for Service and Transport
- Utdanningsprogram for teknikk og industriell produksjon / Programme for Technical and Industrial Production
These 12 programmes consist of 10 specialisations that qualify students for further study in higher education, namely: Natural Science and Mathematics Studies; Social Studies and Economic Studies; Language Studies; Sports and Physical Education Studies; Music Studies; Drama Studies; Design, Arts and Crafts Studies; Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry Studies and Media and Communication Studies. The first 3 of these can be taken as a specialisation within the general Programme for Specialization in General Studies. The last 3 are part of the vocational programmes with the same names (marked with an * in the list above).

Education during the 3 years of upper secondary school takes place at 3 levels: Vg1, Vg2 and Vg3 (where Vg1 stands for the first year, and Vg3 for the third). After completing the first year, pupils can choose a direction in either the natural or social sciences in addition to their specialist subjects. The natural science subjects (realfag) are made up of biology, physics, mathematics and chemistry, and the social science subjects (samfunnsfag) include social studies, languages and economics. The decision of whether to take exact or social science subjects is not necessarily related to the pupil’s programme or specialisation. For example, pupils taking the Social and Economic Studies or Language Studies programme may choose to supplement their specialist subjects with exact science subjects.

The 9 vocational programmes consist of a compulsory first year, after which pupils specialise in a certain profession or trade by choosing electives in the 2nd (and possibly 3rd) year(s). Compulsory subjects within the vocational programmes are Norwegian, English, social studies, science and physical education.

Pupils are tested on their knowledge throughout the year, and final exams are taken at the end of each year. The examinations can be oral, written or practical in nature. Progression to the next year is based on achievement. At the end of the third and final year, pupils take national examinations in addition to their final school exams. Exams are usually taken in four subjects, however this varies from programme to programme.

At the end of the 3 years of upper secondary education within general/academic programmes pupils are awarded the Vitnemål for Videregående Opplaering (Secondary School Certificate). Students who obtain this certificate automatically fulfil the general criteria for admission to Norwegian higher education, regardless of the programme taken.

In terms of level, the Vitnemål for Videregående Opplaering (Secondary School Certificate) is comparable to a VWO or HAVO diploma, depending on the extent of the vocational component.
The vocational variant, consisting of 2 years of upper secondary school followed by 1 to 2 years of practical training in business or industry (often in combination with instruction at school), leads to the Fagbrev (Trade certificate) or the Svennebrev (Journeyman’s certificate), depending on the specialisation.

In terms of level, the Fagbrev (Trade certificate) or Svennebrev (Journeyman’s certificate) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 3 or 4, depending on the duration of the programme and the specialisation.

Pupils who have completed Vg1 + Vg2 in vocational education have the option of taking a supplementary 1-year general programme in order to satisfy the general admission requirements for higher education.

Alternative forms of education
Aside from (and often supplementary to) regular education, Norway also has a well-developed adult education system. This system provides programmes at primary, secondary and post-secondary level that are recognised by the government. The target group for this type of education are people who have not fulfilled the requirements of primary/lower secondary education, and those aged over 25 who have not completed upper secondary education.

Norway has a number of private schools that offer general primary and secondary education, such as Christian schools and Rudolf Steinerskolen, the latter being based on anthroposophical principles. Both adult education and education at independent schools is partially or fully subsidized by the Norwegian government. Completion of secondary education at such schools provides admission to higher education, provided that the general admission requirements are met.

The ‘folk high schools’ provide non-academic programmes of various lengths. Such institutions are not authorized to award degrees, and do not administer examinations. The schools are affiliated with independent institutions or foundations that are often religious or ideological in nature.

Distance education is a popular option for people requiring flexibility in their learning. Institutions offering distance education are sometimes eligible for government subsidies. The available courses vary from hobbyist courses to those leading to tertiary-level qualifications. The majority of course participants take courses at upper secondary or tertiary level.
Admission to higher education

Admission requirements for higher education are determined by the government. Admission is competitive for many programmes, as interest in certain programmes often exceeds the number of places available.

A distinction is drawn in Norway between general admission requirements (generell studiekompetanse) and specific admission requirements (spesielle opptakskrav) for higher education.

General admission requirements
To satisfy the general requirements for admission to higher education, students must either have completed the 3 years of upper secondary education (in any specialisation), or have obtained a recognised vocational qualification (trade or journeymen’s certificate).
As part of these qualifications (or supplementary thereto), a certain level needs to have been reached in certain subjects, expressed in the total number of hours during 3 years (årstimer). These subjects are the following general subjects: Norwegian (393 årstimer), English (140 årstimer), mathematics (224 årstimer), science (140 årstimer), history (140 årstimer) and social studies (84 årstimer).

Pupils who have studied 2 years of upper secondary vocational education (Vg1 +Vg2) are able to take a 1-year supplementary programme (consisting of Norwegian, mathematics, science, English and history) in order to become eligible for general admission to higher education. People aged 23 and over may also be eligible for entry to higher education, if they have been working and / or studying for at least 5 years full-time. As of 2001, people aged over 25 have also been eligible for admission to higher education based on recognition of prior learning (realkompetanse).

On general or vocational upper secondary school certificates obtained after 2006, the mention of “har oppnådd generell studiekompetanse” serves to indicate that the pupil has fulfilled the general admission requirements.

Additional admission requirements
Universities or university colleges may set additional requirements for candidates, depending on the programme in question.
Additional requirements are formulated in terms of subject codes made up of the name of the subject, possibly followed by the subject cluster and the number of years that the subject needs to have been taken. In the formulation of additional requirements, a relevant distinction is made between subjects taken as a realfag (R) (natural sciences programme) or as a samfunnsfag (S) (social sciences programme).
Higher education

Higher education in Norway is provided at universities, specialised university institutions, university colleges and institutions with accredited programmes.

Norway currently has 7 national universities, as well as 9 specialised university institutions (called vitenskapelige høgskoler) that provide education at university level. These institutions provide programmes at master's and PhD level in the following specialisations: architecture, theology, music, business studies, sports science and veterinary science.

In addition to the universities and specialised university institutions, there are currently 35 høgskoler (also known as university colleges) that primarily offer 3-year bachelor's degree programmes with a professional focus in specialisations such as nursing, social work, communication studies and engineering. These institutions also offer shorter and longer programmes (1 to 5 years in length), such as teacher-training programmes and economic-administration programmes. Various university colleges also offer degree programmes at master's level; a select number are also authorized to award PhD degrees. University colleges also include two kunsthøgskoler (national academies for the arts), the Norwegian Police University College (Politihøgskolen) and Military Colleges.

Higher education in Norway does not make any major distinction between institutions for academic research and institutions for professional education. This can be seen from the fact that the general admission requirements are the same for all types of higher education institutions. University colleges also conduct academic research, and some colleges are authorized to award PhD degrees. However, traditional academic and PhD programmes are still primarily given by the universities and specialised university institutions. In general, the university colleges and other higher education institutions offer programmes with a more practical focus.

University colleges and vitenskapelige høgskoler can apply for full university status from the government. Former university colleges that have been given university status within the last 5 years are the University of Stavanger (2005) and the University of Agder (2007). One formerly specialised university institution that has been granted university status is the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (2005). Students at public higher education institutions do not need to pay any tuition fees, however they do need to pay an annual student services fee. Students at private institutions might be charged for a tuition fee.
University and higher professional education

The degree system in Norwegian higher education was completely restructured in 2002 / 2003 as part of the Bologna Process. The basic structure of the current degree system follows the 3+2+3 model, representing a 3-year bachelor’s degree programme, a 2-year master’s degree programme and a 3-year PhD. In addition to this, traditional programmes are still offered that consist of one single cycle of 4 to 6 years. There are also undergraduate programmes of relatively short duration.

The following qualifications are offered within the current system:

Høgskolekandidat
This traditional degree is still awarded by university colleges upon completion of a (usually professionally-oriented) 2-year undergraduate programme. This degree might allow students to continue on to the third year of a bachelor’s degree programme.

In terms of level, the Høgskolekandidat degree is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO), or to an Associate Degree.

Bachelor
Bachelor’s degree programmes are offered by universities, specialised university institutions, university colleges and institutions with accredited programmes. Since the introduction of the 3+2+3 model, bachelor’s degree programmes are usually 3 years in length (180 ECTS). One exception to this is the 4-year bachelor’s degree in teaching offered at university colleges. The titles used under Norwegian legislation refer directly to the field of study (e.g. Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Biology).

In contrast to the universities, university colleges often offer professionally-oriented bachelor’s degree programmes.

In terms of level, the Bachelor obtained at universities, specialised university institutions, university colleges or institutions with accredited programmes is comparable to a WO or HBO bachelor’s degree, depending on the field of study.

Master
Since the introduction of the bachelor’s-master’s degree structure in 2002 / 2003, master’s degree programmes now usually take 2 years (120 ECTS). As with bachelor’s degrees, Norwegian master’s degrees refer to the field of study (e.g. Master of Education). However, some institutions of higher education use the term
Master of Science (MSc). One of the major requirements for the master's degree is the completion of an independent research work of at least 30 ECTS credits. Master's programmes are provided by the universities, specialised university institutions, institutions with accredited programmes and increasingly also by university colleges. The latter mainly offer master's programmes with a practical focus.
In addition to the new 2-year master's programmes, there are also a number of master's programmes that last 1½ years, as well as integrated master's programmes lasting 5 years in specialisations such as secondary school teacher training, dentistry and pharmacy.

In terms of level, the Master obtained at universities, specialised university institutions, university colleges or institutions with accredited programmes is comparable to a WO or HBO master's degree, depending on the field of study.

**Candidatus (professional qualification)**
Alongside the 1½- to 2-year master's programmes and the 5-year integrated master's programmes, professional programmes are also available that last from 5½ to 6 years. This is the case for programmes in theology, psychology, medicine and veterinary science. Graduates from this type of integrated programme are awarded the professional qualification of candidatus followed by the specialisation, abbreviated to cand. theol./psych./med./med. vet. The term ‘professional’ is used here to indicate a programme that prepares students for the profession of physician, psychologist or theologian, and must not be confused with the higher professional programmes offered in the Netherlands (HBO).

In terms of level, the professional qualification Candidatus followed by the specialisation (…theologiae / psychologiae, medicinae…) (Master) is comparable to a WO master's degree.

**PhD**
Norwegian PhD programmes last for 3 years following the attainment of a master’s or candidatus degree. The PhD programme consists of classes on research skills, and the writing and public defence of a doctoral thesis. The traditional Norwegian degree of doctor philosophiae (dr. phil) may be conferred to graduates who have qualified themselves for a the doctoral degree without formal research training or normative study length.
The degree is awarded on the basis of an approved scientific dissertation, two approved trial lectures (one on a self-chosen topic and one on a prescribed topic) and a satisfactory public defence of the dissertation.

Assessment systems

General upper secondary education uses a grade system from 1 to 6, with 6 meaning ‘excellent’ and 1 meaning ‘unsatisfactory’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study load is indicated in terms of study hours (timer). The following are terms that appear on the secondary school certificate grade list (Vitnemål for Videregående Opplaering):
‘Deltatt’ means ‘taken’ (indicates that the student took part in the subject);
‘Bestått’ means ‘pass’;
‘Ikke Bestått’ means ‘fail’;

Also: the letter S stands for a written exam, M for an oral exam and P for a practical exam.

The degree and assessment system for higher education was reformed in 2003 in line with the Bologna process. The ECTS-system has been in use since that time. Prior to the introduction of ECTS, a points system was used in which 20 points (vektall) equalled 1 year of study, or 60 ECTS. In the new studiepoeng system, 60 studiepoeng are worth 60 ECTS. More information on the ECTS system is available in the ECTS User’s Guide issued by the European Commission.

Since 2003/2004, study results in Norwegian higher education have used a grading scale from A to F, with A being the highest score and F being unsatisfactory. For some examinations, marks in terms of “pass” or “fail” are given.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information about the value of foreign grades can be found on our website (Dutch only).

**Bologna process**

The bachelor’s-master’s degree structure was introduced in Norwegian higher education in 2002/2003, with retention of the traditional høgskolekandidat and candidatus degrees. More information on the implementation of the bachelor’s-master’s degree structure in Norway is available on the website of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

**Qualification frameworks**

Norway has established a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning, the Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonssammeverk for livslang læring (NKR), which gives an overview of the Norwegian educational system and its levels of qualifications. Efforts to link the Norwegian education system to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) will be completed in the coming years, enabling a comparison of Norwegian qualifications to those of other European countries.

The Norwegian qualifications framework has 7 levels. All levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes in the categories of knowledge, skills and general competences. The qualifications vary from those obtained at the end of primary and lower secondary education (level 2) to the doctorate (level 8). The three highest levels correspond to higher education levels as defined within the European Higher Education Area. Norway has no qualifications at level 1.

More information on the development of the NKR Qualifications Framework can be found on the NOKUT website.
Quality assurance and accreditation

In Norway, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen, NOKUT) is responsible for implementing the quality assurance and accreditation system in higher education and tertiary vocational education.

Norwegian education has a university and a non-university sector. The university sector consists of the universities and specialised university institutions (vitenskapelige høgskoler). The non-university sector encompasses the university colleges and institutions with accredited programmes. The distinction between these two sectors is primarily related to autonomy with respect to accreditation.

University sector
Institutions within the university sector (universities and specialised university institutions) are autonomous in terms of the accreditation of their own programmes of study. These institutions are authorized to create new educational programmes at all levels (bachelor’s, master’s, PhD) without needing to apply to an external accrediting body. However, these programmes are subject to internal quality control.

This is also referred to using the term ‘institutional accreditation’
Non-university sector
The university colleges (statlige og private høgskoler) also have the right to accredit their own programmes (institutional accreditation) but not at all levels. These institutions are authorized to create their own bachelor’s degree programmes, however they must apply to NOKUT for the external accreditation of new master’s and PhD programmes. Institutions with accredited programmes must apply to NOKUT for the creation of all new educational programmes.

To find out whether a particular master’s programme, offered by a university college, is accredited, please visit one of the following websites (only available in Norwegian):
- www.nokut.no/databaser-og-fakta/akkrediterede-studietilbod/
- www.nokut.no/publikasjoner/akkreditering-og-tilsyn--hoyere-utdanning/

International treaties

Diploma Supplement
Norwegian higher education institutions have been obliged to issue the Diploma Supplement since 2005. More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the website of the European Commission.

Composition of file
It is common for Norwegian secondary and higher education institutions to issue documents in both English and Norwegian. It is advisable to have documents submitted in both languages, particularly in higher education.

Overview of higher education institutions
Website of NOKUT, with an overview of recognised higher education institutions.

Useful links
- Website of NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, with a detailed description of the Norwegian accreditation system. NOKUT is also the Norwegian ENIC/NARIC, the institution responsible for the evaluation of international higher education qualifications.
- Website of the Norwegian Ministry of Research and Education.
• Website of the University and Colleges Admission Service (Samordna opptak), with updated information about additional requirements for admission to higher education.

• Website of the Counties' Information Service for Applicants to Upper Secondary Education and Training, with information on all the current secondary school programmes in Norway.