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Glossary terms

Ministry of Education and Research: responsible for primary and secondary school, upper secondary and tertiary vocational education and higher education sectors, kindergartens, cultural schools, vocational education and training and adult learning

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training: responsible for the development of kindergarten and primary and secondary education. The Directorate is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research.

The National Curriculum: Curriculum containing The Core Curriculum, The Quality Framework and The Subject Content Curriculum, as well as programme subject curricula for both general and vocational study programmes at the upper secondary stage.

The Core Curriculum: A national governing document describing the fundamental values, cultural elements and learning objectives of primary and secondary education. It is of relevance to anyone responsible for planning and providing education as well as to parents/guardians and wider society. Individual subject curricula should be developed in line with the Core Curriculum in such a way that the classroom tuition reflects its core values. The Core Curriculum focuses on the interdisciplinary ambitions of the Secondary Educational system in Norway (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2011). These competencies and values should be promoted in all areas of Norwegian Secondary Education.

The Quality Framework: Is a governing document that applies to all subjects in every year of primary and secondary education. The framework outlines and elaborates on the provisions of the Education Act and its associated regulations, including the Core Curriculum. It is designed to help clarify school owners' responsibility for providing education in line with laws and regulations.

Subject Content Curriculum: Descriptions of objectives and main subject areas, definitions of core skills, attainment targets and regulations on final assessments. The Subject Content Curriculum contains the academic aims (kompetansemål or "competence aims") students must reach within a given age-range (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2016). Usually there are competence aims after Years 2, 4, 7 and 10 at the primary and lower secondary stages, and after

Levels Vg1, Vg2 and Vg3 on upper secondary general study programmes. The Subject Content Curriculum comprise the following elements:

- Objectives
- Main subject areas
- Teaching hours
- Core skills
- Attainment targets
- Assessment

The Storting: The Storting is the Norwegian Parliament. It is the supreme arena for political debate and decision-making in the Kingdom of Norway.

Research on curriculum

Norway is currently in the process of reforming and renewing its national curriculum. The new reform is set to come into force from 2020-2021. The following article describes the current 2006- reform.

Research evaluating the Knowledge Promotion Reform (education reform introduced in 2006 in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education and training) (Sivesind 2012, Nordenbo 2012) suggests that the current reform (to a certain degree) has succeeded in accomplishing the following:

- The local and regional responsibility in education has been clarified
- The current curriculum has motivated and stimulated developing work and renewal in schools
- The current curriculum has opened up for more variety in teaching and learning methods
- Subject and cross-subject aims and the focus on assessment is contributing to increased control between different educational levels and actors
- The current curriculum has increased the awareness among schools and teachers when it comes to facilitating good learning environments, and give individual guidance adapted to each student

The reports from the studies evaluating the current curriculum however also state that

- Subject and cross-subject aims has to a very low extent challenged the traditional subject-oriented teaching in schools
- The aim-based curriculum is not giving teachers and schools sufficient support when it comes to selecting, organizing and teaching academic content
- The tasks and responsibilities given to local and regional institutions when it comes to realizing the national aims contributes to maintaining differences between different educational institutions.
- The curriculum subject aims may reduce the complexity and depth with which academic content is being teach and processed. This might lead to width-oriented form of teaching at the expense of depth, and also a superficial approach to assessment and learning. Striving good scores at standardized tests can lead focus away from other important aspects of schooling.
- Increased focus on assessment and documentations takes time away from teachers. This time could be spent planning, or working with students.

Curriculum process

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (“Utdanningsdirektoratet”) designs the documents that make out the curriculum in Norwegian secondary education on the basis of the

results provided by research projects started and financed by the Ministry of Education and Research. Relevant governing documents such as white papers and recommendations to the Storting (as well as laws and regulations addressing the national curriculum must be observed when developing or revising the Subject Content Curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2016).

A draft of forthcoming curriculum reforms is sent out all relevant institutions – such as universities, unions and local industries who can provide feedback. After feedback has been given, the curriculum-documents are reviewed before the ministry approves a final version. By regulation, secondary education in Norway is at all times regulated by the current curriculum (Forskrift til Opplæringslova 2006).

Textbooks

It is not mandatory for Norwegian secondary education schools to base their education on a textbook. However, most teachers in Norwegian schools still rely on paper-based educational resources: “A majority of teachers believe teacher editions and textbooks are important when working with competence aims in lesson planning” (Gilje et al. 2016). The Education Act (short title for the Act relating to primary and secondary education) section 2-15 and section 3-1 says that that all secondary education in Norway is free for every citizen. This includes every learning resource the students need in class (The Education Act 1998). It is mandatory for every publisher of textbooks meant for Norwegian schools to make sure they cover the prescriptions in the current national curriculum.

Teaching Resources

It is a government ambition to further explore the possibilities of digital learning resources (Ministry of Education and Research 2018b). The teaching resources provided by publishers usually include, in addition to textbooks and digital resources, a teacher’s guide. When school teachers in Norway “find certain competence aims are not covered well by a textbook, they make use of additional educational resources and other learning resources to compensate for the gap (Gilje et al. 2016).

These “additional learning resources” “seem to serve other functions than textbooks when it comes to teachers’ operationalization of the curriculum” (Gilje et al. 2016). Teachers preference for either paper-based or digital educational resources is also subject-dependent. Teachers in some subjects tend to use traditional paper-based educational resources to a bigger extent than teachers in other subjects (Gilje et al. 2016).

Standards

Governance of the education system is shared between the central government and local authorities. Curriculum standards are central and local institutions have the responsibility for realizing the standards set in the national curriculum. The municipalities are responsible for running primary and lower secondary schools, while county authorities have responsibility for upper secondary schools. Within the framework of statutes and national curricula, municipalities, schools and teachers are able to decide what learning materials to use and what teaching methods to adopt (Ministry of Education and Research 2018a). Schools are tested and evaluated to make sure all the ambitions in the national curricula are met. All schools are obliged to hold national tests in reading, numeracy and English in Years 5, 8 and 9 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2018b). The results from these tests are, among other things, used to evaluate and compare different

schools in how they are performing in reaching the aims formulated in the national curriculum. Information from these tests are used to aid the development of both schools and students. Schools are accountable for the results they produce on national tests and exams.

Content

In lower secondary education hours are partitioned in the following way (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2018a):

Table describing hours partitioned in different subjects from 8th to 10th grade in Norway (numbers collected from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training) (2018a)

Subject	8.–10. grade
Christianity, Religion and Ethics Education	153
Norwegian	398
Mathematics	313
Natural Science	249
English	222
Foreign Languages/ Language In-depth Studies	222
Social Science	249
Arts and Crafts	146
Music	83
Food and Health	83
Physical Education	223
Optinal subject*	171
Class and student council work	110
Free Activities	0
Physical Activity	0
Minimum required number of hours	2622

Students can choose between five different General Study Programmes and eight different Vocational Study Programmes for their Upper Secondary education (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2018a). The number of hours and the distribution of these differ between the different programmes. An overview from the Directorate can be found in the document “Fag- og timefordeling og tilbudsstruktur for Kunnskapsløftet Udir-1-2018” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2018a). This document is regularly updated.

Assessments

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for producing various kinds of exams and national tests for Norwegian primary schools and secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Research). The process of assessing the students is described in regulations separate from the curriculum. Chapter 3 of the Regulations for Education Act states that each subject curriculum dictates if and when exams are administered. The Ministry decides how many exams are to be carried out each grade (Forskrift til Opplæringslova 2006).

The Subject Content Curriculum contain regulations on final assessments in the subject. This includes the scheduling of coursework assessments and exams. The objective of the final assessment is to obtain information about the students' attainment after completing their studies in the subject. The basis for the final assessment in a subject is the combined attainment targets in the Subject Content Curriculum. The assessment should reflect the degree to which the attainment targets have been met (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2016).

Stakeholders

All relevant institutions – such as universities, schools, unions and local industries have the ability to provide feedback on forthcoming curriculum reforms. However, The Directorate, on appointment from the ministry, has the final say in the matter. White Paper no. 30 (2003-2004); «Kultur for Læring» (Culture for Learning) states that human resources is the most important factor in Norway's workforce. It seems apparent that Norwegian school policy is highly influenced by results achieved in international comparative tests. An ambition with the Norwegian educational system seems to be an economically motivated aim of creating an internationally competitive workforce, both today and in the future (Langfeldt, Elstad, and Hopmann 2008, Elstad 2009).

Other influences

In a document issued by the ministry, explaining the need for a curriculum reform, it is stated international studies have shown that Norwegian students have lower test scores than students from other comparable countries (Ministry of Education and Research 2005). Lower test scores, compared to a selection of other countries are seen in reading, writing and math (Ministry of Education and Research 2005, Institute for Teacher Education and School Development 2006). National evaluations show that there is a noticeable and distinctive difference in performance between different Norwegian schools, and also that there are systematic differences in performance between genders, and between students with different social and ethnic backgrounds. The overall goal with the most recent reform in 2006 was to minimize the difference between schools and students, as well as making sure Norwegian schools provide students with the proper competencies and tools so that the students themselves can well prepared for their own life, but also so that

Norway as a nation can build a competent workforce that can be competitive on an international level, in what is referred to as the knowledge-society (Ministry of Education and Research 2005).

Further reading and online resources

- The Education System_
<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/education/school/the-norwegian-education-system/id445118/>
- Education – from kindergarten to adult education_
https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/veiledninger-og-brosjyrer/education_in_norway_f-4133e.pdf
- The Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult education in Norway_
https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core_curriculum_english.pdf
- The Quality Framework_
https://www.udir.no/globalassets/upload/larerplaner/fastsatte_lareplaner_for_kunnskapsloefte_t/5/prinsipper_lk06_eng.pdf
- A Guide to Curriculum Development
<https://www.udir.no/in-english/a-guide-to-curriculum-development/>
- The Education Act in Norway_
<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/b3b9e92c39581b661a019e504/education-act-norway-with-amendments-entered-2014-2.pdf>
- Education at a Glance, 2016 (Norway)
https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/norway_eag-2016-73-en#page1
- Main findings from the ARK & APP study_
https://www.uv.uio.no/iped/forskning/prosjekter/ark-app/main_findings_ark_app_engelsk.pdf
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