

OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising Practices

The Role of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

Country category: Norway

Teacher education pathway category(ies): Ensuring the quality of initial teacher education

Stakeholder category(ies): policymaker

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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 5. The Role of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

Context

Although common in other sectors, the use of quality assurance methods and setting of standards to ensure the quality and accountability of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes is relatively new – and on the rise. The agreement of ministers of education in Bergen in 2005, in particular, encouraged educational leaders to enhance the quality of teacher education by introducing systematic quality assurance mechanisms both internally and externally (Gassner, 2010^[1]).

NOKUT (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) is an independent expert body under the Ministry of Education and Research. It was formed in 2003 to evaluate and accredit Norway's higher education institutions in order to improve the quality of education they provide. In 2015-16, NOKUT received 96 applications for new study programmes (18 fewer than the preceding year), of which 53 applications were for new tertiary vocational programmes and 43 for new bachelor's and master's programmes (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2016^[2]).

Norway has four categories of accredited institutions, each of which has different powers in establishing new courses:

- Universities have the right to establish courses/programmes at all levels.
- Specialised universities have the right to establish new programmes at all levels in the areas in which they have the right to award doctorates, in addition to bachelor's degrees in all disciplines.
- University colleges have the right to establish new programmes at all levels in the areas in which they have the right to award doctorates, in addition to bachelor's degrees in all disciplines.
- Private institutions that are not accredited but have courses/programmes accredited as higher education (by NOKUT) may call themselves university colleges.
- Programmes at levels not covered by the institutional accreditation must have programme accreditation. All accreditations are carried out by NOKUT. (Ministry of Education and Research Norway, 2016^[3])

What does NOKUT do?

NOKUT normally reviews institutions every eight years as part of higher education quality assurance process. However, NOKUT is conducting a special re-accreditation of ITE providers as part of the new five-year master's programme initiative. In 2016-17, NOKUT assessed all teacher education institutions intending to offer the new master's programme, of which six were selected (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2016_[2]).

When evaluating institutions, NOKUT reviews the institutions' internal quality assurance work and culture. It also looks at how an institution systematically collects data and feedback information from several sources; how it uses that information for analysis, assessment, and reporting; and how it implements improvement measures based on that analysis. NOKUT can provide recommendations for how the institution should enhance the quality of its educational provision and quality assurance system.

Some universities are given authority to accredit their own programmes. In other cases, NOKUT evaluates programmes, and reviews whether the programme's content and structure, work and teaching methods, and examinations and other types of evaluation are aligned with the learning outcomes in the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

If required, NOKUT can sanction poor-performing institutions in three ways:

- Review an institution's programme at any time and rescind accreditation for specific programmes if there is cause for concern. This does happen on a yearly basis.
- De-accredit an entire institution, though it was reported to the OECD review team that this rarely happens.
- Take self-accreditation powers away from an institution if they are not maintaining the quality of their own programmes.

In addition to its quality assurance function, NOKUT collects data and builds capacity in higher education institutions.

Since 2013, NOKUT has conducted an annual national student survey for higher education institutions. The questionnaire is sent to more than 60 000 second and fifth-year students in 1 800 programmes in universities and university colleges in Norway. Results of the 2015 survey showed that teacher candidates enrolled in the five-year master's programme are less satisfied than students in other programmes (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2016_[2]). This information is used to develop the new ITE programmes and improve existing ITE programmes.

In 2010, NOKUT established a programme for Centres of Excellence in Higher Education, including one in teacher education (ProTed). These centres aim to stimulate the development of education and innovative approaches in higher education, especially in how university-level courses are taught (Vestøl, 2016_[4]).

NOKUT is offering support to teacher preparation providers to transition to the five-year master's-level programme through information seminars for teacher education institutions (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2016_[2]).

Why is it a strength?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Norway from 24-28 April 2017 concluded that NOKUT is a strength in that it:

- *Provides a strong national accreditation process for higher education institutions.* NOKUT oversees a national accreditation process for HEIs that entails tough consequences for non-compliance and includes a focus on continuous improvement, self-accreditation and building capacity.
- *Evaluates some national policies.* NOKUT collects national student data and evaluates some higher education policies. For example, NOKUT evaluated ProTed (NOKUT, 2015^[5]) and there is also evidence that some of the findings from national data are acted upon: for example, the student survey data was used to improve ITE programmes.

How could it be improved?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Norway from 24-28 April 2017 noted there could be:

- *Better balance between accountability and innovation.* Too much central control and detailed guidelines on the process (as opposed to the outcomes) from NOKUT and other government bodies can stifle innovation and the ability for institutions to request and act on feedback from local schools and candidates.
- *Use of data for accountability compared to continuous improvement.* NOKUT must balance its role as an accreditor and its role in building capacity and help institutions continuously improve what they do. Institutions will not openly share data in a way needed for continuous improvement if they feel it will be used to judge them.

For more information

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Vestøl, J. (2016), “Design, integration, and quality. Teacher education from the perspective of ProTed, a Norwegian Centre of Excellence in Education”, *Acta Didactica Norge*, Vol. 10/2, pp. 73-91, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/adno.2394>.

[4]