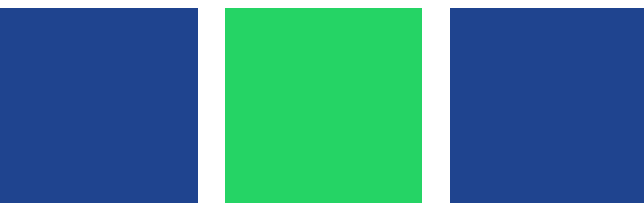
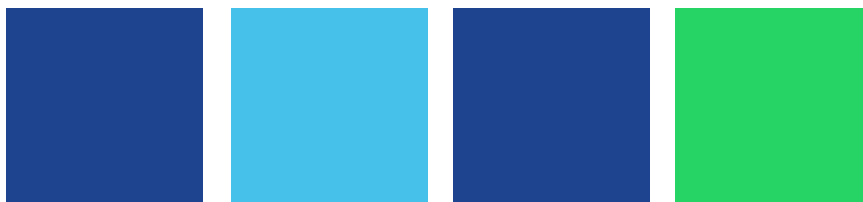

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,
flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality assured

NORWAY



Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality-assured:

Norway

[Thematic perspectives](#) provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

This thematic perspective was prepared based on data/information from 2023.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

Norway is a small country with a population of five million where national and international developments are closely intertwined. Norway is a non-EU member country; however, it maintains close cooperation with Europe through, among other means, the [Agreement on the European Economic Area](#) (EEA). Another closely related process is connected with vocational education and the follow-up on the [Osnabrück Declaration](#). Norway has developed a [National Implementation Plan](#) (NIP) that includes national visions and strategic documents that will guide Norway's efforts to align with the EU's priorities in this area.

1.1 Main challenges

Collaboration with European countries in the field of education is crucial for improving the quality of education, increasing societal value creation, addressing societal challenges, and contributing to sustainable development in society. The link between national priorities for vocational education and EU's recommendations and priorities, especially VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration, is of great importance to achieving mutual goals of an inclusive, robust, flexible and adaptable vocational education.

In the world of work, it has become increasingly difficult to get by without upper secondary education. The requirements have changed, for example related to digitalisation and automation. Projections from Statistics Norway estimate a shortage of almost 100 000 skilled workers in 2035. In 2023, the share of young people (aged 15–29) who were not in education, training or work was 6.4% ⁽¹⁾, and 23.7 % of individuals aged 16 and above in Norway only have lower secondary education (EQF3) ⁽²⁾. The current national visions and strategic documents addressing these challenges are reflected in some main documents, the [White Paper 21 \(2020-21\) – The Completion Reform](#) and the current Government's political platform, [Hurdalsplattformen](#) (2021-25).

1.2 Hurdalsplattformen

This document describes the Government's policy priorities (2021-2025) and covers the development of all sectors, including all levels of vocational education and training. It guides the implementation of measures planned by the Government.

Challenges addressed include improving the recognition of vocational education, increasing the efforts to make education more relevant to the world of work and expanding the number of learning arenas for increased flexibility. To achieve this, the Government aims to develop all levels of vocational education and training in a long-term perspective. One of the measures outlined in this political platform is establishing a national centre for vocational education and training that will continue under future governments, thus ensuring both the historical perspective and an overview of the ongoing development in vocational education and training.

One of the goals for higher vocational education it is to offer high-quality education and

(1) Link to [Statistics Norway table 09858](#) - NEET

(2) Link to [Statistics Norway table 08921 and 09430](#) – highest education level

make higher VET a real alternative to academic education, in terms of attractiveness and employment outcomes. The Government wants to ensure that higher vocational education plays a role in lifelong learning and will facilitate continued cooperation between higher vocational colleges and enterprises. The aim is to increase the number of students in higher vocational education and to improve the match between students' needs and those of the world of work. Providing flexible study programmes is a priority in both higher vocational education and upper secondary education.

1.3 The Completion Reform

The Completion Reform aims to increase the number of people who complete upper secondary education (EQF 4) with a qualification. The main measure considered is to expand the right to upper secondary education and the right to vocational requalification.

An upper secondary qualification is often a prerequisite for work. The reform comprises measures to equip more young people and adults with key and/or professional competences, and to prepare them well for further education and working life. Upper secondary education will be better adapted to learners through education modules allowing them to accumulate modules towards a complete degree or qualification. There will also be introduction courses for students with a short residence in Norway and weak Norwegian language skills to ensure equal opportunities.

In addition to providing more opportunities for young people and adults to complete upper secondary education, this reform brings about more relevant training and a legal right to an apprenticeship in vocational education and training.

Action will also be taken to individualise the education and increase the relevance, through more in-depth learning, to ensure an agile approach to labour market challenges.

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

2.1 Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive, and flexible VET

According to the Osnabrück Declaration VET, excellence at all qualification levels, including higher European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels, will become increasingly important to maintaining employability. The declaration also sets out the relationship between innovation in VET and new skills, curricula, education methodologies and forecasting tools. Steps taken at national level in this direction have been to renew the Skills Needs Committee's mandate and evaluate the national qualification framework (NQF).

2.1.1 Skills Needs Committee – focus on new technologies from 2023

The **Skills Needs Committee** (*Kompetansebehovsutvalget* - KBU) is a forecasting tool and has established the knowledge base on Norway's future skills needs since 2017. The committee's work is based on national and international research and forms the foundation for planning and strategic decisions, by the authorities and the world of work. A previous report, from 2020, about higher vocational education is currently used as a foundation for a White Paper about higher vocational education, planned to be published in 2025. The committee's members and mandate for the next two years were announced in February 2024. The stakeholders of this

committee include the social partners, special advisers, chief analysts, research leaders, professors and researchers. Its focus will be to investigate how new technologies (digitalisation) will affect Norway's skills needs with respect to new tasks and how to solve them. The committee will publish their findings every other year.

2.1.2 Evaluation of the national qualification framework

In Norway, the higher levels in the [national qualification framework](#) (NKR) ⁽³⁾, such as bachelor, master and PhD (levels 6, 7 and 8), are reserved for higher academic education. As a result, vocational education and training stops at level 5. This challenges the companies' competitiveness regarding qualification level when applying to call of proposals, salary and recognition. The focus on recognition from the Hurdalsplatform has resulted in an evaluation, conducted by the public body [NOKUT](#). The evaluation comprised two steps, starting in 2020 with a feasibility study, followed by the [evaluation published in 2023](#). Its goal was to provide a comprehensive picture of how the national qualification framework is currently working and provide a basis for further development.

The evaluation defines three recommendations, relevant for this priority:

- (a) ensure that all relevant educational qualifications are at the appropriate level;
- (b) allow higher academic education at level 5 and higher vocational education at levels above level 5;
- (c) consider including education not currently part of NQF and allowing various forms of continuing education and non-formal training.

The results of the evaluation are under consideration by the Ministry of Education.

2.2 Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation

The Osnabrück Declaration underlines the importance of attractiveness in VET, which can be achieved through adaptability, flexibility, high quality, inclusiveness, and permeability of training pathways. The declaration also emphasises the importance of lifelong learning. Steps taken at the national level to ensure flexibility and lifelong learning are the adoption of the new Education Act and modular VET training in VET (EQF4). Both measures are connected to the Completion Reform.

2.2.1 New Education Act

The [new Education Act](#), adopted in 2023 and entering into force on 1 August 2024, expands pupils' and adults' rights to upper secondary education. In this regard, the new act addresses the right to complete upper secondary education with a qualification, the right to change education programme and the possibility to take a second craft or journeyman's certificate. This enables better opportunities for lifelong learning and continuing vocational education.

The act also clarifies learning adapted to the individual and expands the rights of young people neither in employment, education nor training (NEET). The group expands from the age 16-21, to 16-24. Following the adoption of the new act, the associated regulations were distributed for [consultation](#) from November 2023 to mid-February 2024. For upper secondary education, the regulations concern clarifications of admission to upper secondary education,

⁽³⁾ [Link to Norway's NQF compared to an EU country](#)

the content of the education, vocational education and training, apprenticeship training and the follow-up service for NEETs. The input from the consultation is under consideration by the Ministry of Education.

2.2.2 Modular training

[Modular training](#) for adults is one measure to improve lifelong learning by ensuring the system is flexible enough to allow individuals to study at a suitable pace and combine learning and working. Modular training, which started as a pilot, was included as a permanent scheme in the Education Act adopted in 2023. This new scheme will provide a better link between different measures for newly arrived immigrants, including modules on the Norwegian language, lower secondary education, upper secondary education (both vocational and general) and labour market training. The overall principle of the modular training is to provide the training needed to achieve the desired final competence. For upper secondary vocational education, [thirteen curricula](#) have been developed into modules for adults, so far. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills and the Directorate for Education and Training are responsible for the development of modular training.

2.3 Sustainability – a green link in VET

According to the Osnabrück Declaration, companies, private sector organisations and societal initiatives are major drivers of sustainability in the economy and society at large, together with initiatives to create incentives for greening VET programmes. Steps taken at the national level to further develop the major drivers and ensure incentives are the establishment of a competence reform committee and the Government's priority of studentship. Both measures are linked to the Hurdalsplattform.

2.3.1 Skills reform committee

In June 2023, the Government established a [skills reform committee](#) with members from the social partners. Its mission is to propose measures to develop skills for the green transition and to improve innovation and competitiveness. The committee will investigate how to achieve lifelong learning in working life and how to facilitate employees' skills development. The committee will propose measure for all levels of education and its first report will be published on 31 October 2024.

2.3.2 Studentship priority

On 24 March the Government published a White Paper (Meld. St. 14(2022-2023)) – [Overview of Skills needs in Norway](#). The Paper maps the most important skills needs in the world of work. With respect to the green shift the Government will prioritise more studentships in higher vocational education in technical subjects, health and the green transition. Five-hundred new publicly funded studentships were allocated for 2024.

2.3.3 Green and digital transition in upper secondary VET

The advisory training councils (see 3.1) are during their appointment period of 4 years to develop monitoring reports related to their VET programmes. Currently, the councils are monitoring and developing reports on green and digital transition related to their respective upper secondary education programme. They are also monitoring and assessing the programmes' link to higher VET. The reports are input to the education authorities and used in cooperation with the social partners when assessing the need for changes in the structure

and content of upper secondary VET.

2.4 European Education and Training Area and international dimension of VET

According to the Osnabrück declaration, transparency and comparability of qualifications and skills help competent bodies, education and training providers, employers and individuals to make informed choices and decisions. Steps taken at the national level to ensure transparency and cross-border mobility of skilled workers include the evaluation of the recognition scheme for foreign higher vocational education. A working group has looked at the possibility of a national VET centre.

2.4.1 Recognition scheme for foreign higher vocational education (White Paper 14 (2022-23) – Overview of Skills Needs in Norway)

One measure in the [White Paper](#) is to further develop the recognition scheme for foreign higher vocational education (EQF 5). As a result, the scheme was evaluated, and the evaluation report was published in August 2023. Key questions included how potential applicants understand the scheme, the benefits of recognition of education level, and how relevant employers view such recognition. The evaluation highlights some fundamental issues related to higher vocational education in an international context. The scheme has, so far, had a limited effect. The main challenges appear to be the lack of common international criteria for higher vocational education. The evaluation also shows that specific working skills are more important for employment than employees' general education level. The evaluation results will be used to further develop the scheme for recognition of foreign higher vocational education.

2.4.2 National VET centre

One priority in the Government's political platform is to establish a [national centre for vocational education and training](#), with the goal for ensuring continuity in VET research, increasing the number of people who choose and complete vocational education at all levels, and strengthening the quality and links between upper secondary vocational education and higher vocational education. The Government set up a working group comprising members from the social partners to explore alternatives for developing a centre. One focus area was how to systematically combine national insight with international experiences and knowledge. The working group recommend the establishment of a centre and submitted its report to the Ministry of Education in October 2023. The findings are under consideration by the Ministry of Education.

CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments

In Norway, there is a long tradition of a tripartite cooperation, interaction between the social partners and the Government. Tripartite cooperation has been successful in a historical perspective. In line with the Osnabrück Recommendations, the social partners and relevant stakeholders are involved at all levels of VET development and implementation. The tripartite cooperation aims to ensure that the training provided to VET learners meets labour market and skills needs. The tripartite cooperation informs changes in the VET structure, curriculum development, regional structure and volume of VET provision, the examination framework

leading to trade or journeyman's certificates, and quality control at all levels.

3.1 Social partners at upper secondary level (EQF4)

Pursuant to the Education Act, the social partners have (generally majority) representation in all important advisory bodies for upper secondary VET (EQF 4). National cooperation is organised in the National Council for VET (*Samarbeidsrådet for yrkesopplæring*), ten vocational training councils (*Faglige råd*), one for each programme area, and national appeal boards (*Klagenemnder*). The vocational councils advise the National Council, which advice the Ministry in questions concerning upper secondary VET. Regional cooperation involves county vocational training boards (*Yrkesopplæringsnemnder*) and examination boards (*Prøvenemnder*).

3.2 Social partners in higher vocational education (EQF5)

For higher vocational education (EQF 5), the social partners are consulted through the National Council for Higher Vocational Education (*Nasjonalt fagskoleråd*). The Council is appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research following proposals from the social partners and relevant organisations. The Council advises the Ministry on issues of relevance for higher vocational education and has overall responsibility for, and a strategic perspective on, relevant working life skills. The council contributes to further developing higher vocational education policy and promotes cooperation between the colleges and the world of work. The Council bases its work on the [Human Resources Developments Convention, 1975 \(No. 142\)](#).

3.3 Cooperation with social partners

Although the Government formally manages upper secondary education, as part of the education system, VET is in a special position. Through the cooperation with the social partners, and various provisions in the Education Act, the Government is obliged to consult representatives from the social partners before decisions are made. Interviews with the social partners (Nyen, T. & Tønder, A. H., 2016) show that the practical implementation of the cooperation does not always work as intended and in accordance with the regulations. The interviews revealed that the national council for upper secondary vocational education felt it had few opportunities to influence key decisions, due to late involvement. In other cases, feedback has not been considered, without any clarification. According to the interviews, this lack of opportunity to influence lies both at the education authorities and the social partners. Some of the vocational councils have a strong commitment to the world of work, others play a more reactive role.

From the school year 2020/21 when the new structure of available courses and apprenticeships and new curricula in upper secondary VET were introduced, the dialogue with the councils improved after initial disagreement over the process in the development period. The [first evaluation report](#) on the VET subject renewal curricula reform from 2022 suggests this is mainly due to the agreement giving the councils "decisive influence over the content of VET curricula at upper secondary third year, including apprenticeships" in national guidelines.

CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

There has generally been good progress at all levels of vocational education and training over the last years. VET and higher vocational education are often described as a sector with a political tailwind, being regarded as one of the solutions to ensuring that individuals and society have the necessary prerequisites for our future welfare, value creation and sustainable development. Since 2020, progress has been made in relation to the EU priorities in several areas.

A key success factor for the achievements listed above is the engagement and involvement of the social partners. Another is political priorities, and VET (all levels) is high on the political agenda. There is also a long tradition of cooperation between relevant players, such as the Ministry, the directorates, the social partners, regional and local authorities, students and the education sector.

Cooperation between relevant players has resulted in new curricula for upper secondary VET (EQF4), which were adopted from 2020. Interdisciplinary topics have been incorporated, such as public health and coping with life, democracy and citizenship and sustainable development, along with increased in-depth learning. As a result, the position of VET appears to have been strengthened (NIFU, 2023).

The White Paper 21 (2020-2021) – The Completion Reform was published back in 2021, the same year the priorities were defined for higher vocational education and an Erasmus+ strategy was adopted.

The number of signed apprenticeship contracts has increased, the figure for 2022 was up 3% ⁽⁴⁾ from 2021. Additionally, how to complete VET is becoming more flexible with for example the introduction of modular training. Thirteen modular curricula ⁽⁵⁾ have been developed for upper secondary vocational education for adults.

In higher vocational education, digital studies and hybrid studies have been further developed and expanded. From 2021 to 2022, online study programmes increased by 43%, and these programmes combined with on campus teaching increased by 37%. At the same time, the number of publicly financed studentships in higher VET increased by 20 per cent from 2020 to 2022 ⁽⁶⁾. Preparatory work, in the form of evaluations, for further developing higher vocational education has also been carried out.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

The major reform in upper secondary education (the Completion Reform) is still in an early implementation phase and expanded rights is valid from August 2024. The reform is complex, and it will take time to implement all the elements. One example is adult education, which has been organised in modules as a pilot and will be implemented as standard from 2024. During the transition phase from pilot project to full scale, some challenges are already being addressed, e.g., the development of new curricula, forms of assessment ways of assessing, etc.

Both the higher vocational education sector and the social partners express impatience

⁽⁴⁾ Apprenticeship placements – news by the [Government](#)

⁽⁵⁾ [Module structured curricula – upper secondary vocational education and training](#)

⁽⁶⁾ Higher VET statistics published by [HK-dir.no](#)

concerning the national qualification framework and the possibility to expand vocational education to levels above level 5 in the framework. According to the social partners, the world of work requires a higher level of competences (level 6+ in NQF) than the higher vocational colleges currently allowed to deliver.

A second point is the great demand for skilled workers. To meet the demand, it is crucial to ensure there are enough apprenticeships. The number of signed apprenticeship contracts has increased, and the share of learners without an apprenticeship contract has decreased to 19.5% in 2023 ⁽⁷⁾. For upper secondary VET, the challenge of matching apprentices and enterprises continues. Both the Government and social partners recognise the need to increase funding for higher VET to both enhance the quality of education and increase the number of students.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

Norway is taking action in relation to the priorities set out in the Osnabrück Declaration. Based on the information in this thematic perspective, Norway is making progress on activities related to the National Implementation Plan such as flexible pathways and green transition.

The Skills Needs Committee's focus on new technologies and the evaluation of the national qualification framework are steps towards excellence at all qualification levels including the higher European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels and skills forecasting. To ensure lifelong learning and flexibility, a new Education Act has been adopted, and modular training introduced. The green link in VET was integrated in VET curricula in 2020. In 2023 a competence reform committee was established to focus on competence development for the green transition, along with prioritising new studentships for the green transition.

The evaluation of the recognition scheme for foreign higher vocational education is a step in the direction of cross-border mobility of skilled workers and will enable individuals to switch horizontally from the learning site in one country to another.

The skills needs committee and competence reform committee work on providing a solid knowledge base to meet the challenge of complex reforms. New developments are continuously evaluated to ensure the expected effect, such as the evaluation of curricula introduced in 2020. This to provide skilled workers. The pace, number and complexity of changes will be possible to solve through dialogue and cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

A White Paper for higher vocational education will be developed in 2024-2025. It is expected to suggest VET at level 5 and above. The work on this paper started in 2023 and will be published in the spring of 2025 ⁽⁸⁾, at the latest. All stakeholders have been invited to contribute to this process. To ensure relevant content and measures and set the future direction of higher vocational education.

(7) Statistics on apprenticeship contracts from [Udir](#)

(8) Information about the future [White Paper for higher VET](#)

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