



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

## The Future of vocational education and training in Norway – Fremtiden for yrkesutdanningene I Norge

Report (<sup>1</sup>) from Oslo-workshop 1 November 2022

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of the Oslo workshop <sup>(2)</sup> was to reflect on the future of vocational education and training (VET) in Norway – towards and beyond 2035. Departing from Cedefop’s scenarios for European VET, participants were invited to reflect on possible development paths in the decades ahead, and the practical and political implications of the different alternatives identified.

The workshop was jointly organised by Samarbeidsrådet for Yrkesopplæring (SRY) and the European Centre for development of vocational training (Cedefop). The Directorate of Education provided technical and administrative support.

Following general presentations covering Norwegian vocational education and training (VET) developments (Benedikte Sterner), Cedefop (Jens Bjørnåvold and Jostein Kvisterøy) presented European developments and main 2035-scenarios identified at European level <sup>(3)</sup>. These scenarios were:

- (a) a ‘Pluralistic’ scenario seeing VET as becoming increasingly diversified in terms of purposes and delivery forms. This implies that VET is not exclusively linked to a single system or set of institutions but is becoming an aspect of skills and competence developments in general and at all levels.
- (b) a ‘Distinctive’ scenario seeing VET as independent from but complementary to other parts of education and training. VET is delivered in a separate system of committed institutions and stakeholders focussing on the supply of competent professionals to the labour market.
- (c) a ‘Special Purpose’ scenario envisaging a reduced role to be played by VET and reflecting that general education and academic education is playing an increasingly important role. According to this, VET will mainly serve special purposes and target groups, for example supporting the inclusion of vulnerable groups into the labour market and/or facilitating specialised up- and re-skilling for the labour market.

While reflecting actual (complementary as well as competing) tendencies observed across Europe, the main purpose of these scenarios was to act as reference points for a systematic dialogue and reflection on Norwegian policy priorities. To support this dialogue and reflection, participants were

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<sup>(2)</sup> See programme in annex 1

<sup>(3)</sup> See Cedefop projects [The Changing Nature and Role of VET](#) and [The Future of VET](#)

made aware of some of the key questions asked by Cedefop when originally identifying the alternative scenarios <sup>(4)</sup>:

- What do we understand by the term vocational education and training?
- What is the position of VET in education, in the labour market and in society:
  - ✓ Which qualification levels are covered?
  - ✓ What is the relationship to higher education?
  - ✓ What is the relationship between initial and continuing VET?
- How is VET anchored to:
  - ✓ Tasks and Functions?
  - ✓ Occupations and professions?
  - ✓ Wider competence fields?
- Which target groups are addressed by VET?
- Which are the implications - risks and opportunities – of different policy priorities and directions?

Building on this input, participants were divided into four groups <sup>(5)</sup>. Each group was asked to:

- Identify a probable Norwegian 2035 VET-scenario, including a clarification of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Clarify the conditions, including the risks involved, in realizing this scenario.

## 2. Norwegian VET towards and beyond 2035 – the overall vision

While differing somewhat in their emphasis, the broad scenarios identified by the four groups were quite similar and pointed in the same direction:

Also in the future, Norwegian VET is seen as forming a clearly distinct part of the overall education and training system, closely linked to occupations and their tasks in the labour market. This distinct IVET-system should, however, be complemented by a diversified (open and pluralistic) supply of continuing education and training. While still focussing on the entry of young people to the labour market, the future Norwegian VET-system must more explicitly and systematically address the need for lifelong and life-wide learning. All groups underlined the importance of step-by-step developments - building on but improving and expanding the current system. The tri-partite

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<sup>(4)</sup> A more detailed list of aspects is included in Cedefop 2019

<sup>(5)</sup> Summaries of the discussions of the four groups included in Annex 2.

governance model, attributing significant influence and responsibility to social partners, was seen as a condition for future developments. Participants underlined the need for the following main changes:

- To respond better and quicker to changing and diverse needs in the labour market.
- To reduce the 'leak' of VET candidates to general and academic education by increasing overall attractiveness of VET and promote it as an option for lifelong and life-wide learning
- To respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse group of individuals, notably by building on their prior learning and experiences.
- To remove dead-ends and unwanted obstacles in the system and clarify how lifelong and life-wide progress beyond the initial trade certificate is possible, including smooth pathways to higher academic education .
- To strengthen higher vocational education and training and to gradually develop this into a second, work and practice-oriented pillar of Norwegian higher education.

The following sections summarise these messages in more detail.

## 2.1 What do we understand by VET knowledge for the future?

Vocational competences must be broad in the sense that they include general knowledge, task-specific (technical) skills as well as transversal (soft) competences (how to relate to and work with others). Vocational competences must furthermore be deep in the sense that they are embedded in occupational roles and tasks. Learning at work and in practice, and in authentic situations, ensure that individuals can understand when, where and how to apply specialised knowledge and task specific skills. Strong vocational competences cannot be acquired as isolated fragments of knowledge or skills but needs to evolve ("holistically") in ways which enable individuals to work autonomously and self-directed. He or she must be aware of and understand own skills and competences and be able to apply them according to the situation and context in question. Participants acknowledge that VET skills and competences cannot be reduced to narrow task specific or technical skills but increasingly require and depend on a strong basis of general knowledge. This is seen as a precondition for facilitating further education, training, and learning throughout life. Similarly, the role of transversal skills and competences ("soft skills") is seen as increasing in VET. Participants agreed that general knowledge as well "soft skills" cannot be taught and learned in isolation but must be integrated in the work and practice-based learning forming the backbone of VET.

Several participants warned against a modularisation of VET programmes. This, according to discussions, could result in a splitting up and fragmentation of learning, removing the acquisition of

skills and competences from real-life work situations and contexts, disrupting critical sequencing of learning, and potentially weakening the development of vocational competences. The scepticism towards modularisation was not universally shared, some participants pointed to its potential role in increasing flexibility and thus in supporting individual tailoring and continuous upskilling and re-skilling.

## 2.2 The anchoring of VET-qualifications to occupations

Overall, the VET system must closely mirror the way the labour market is structured and constantly evolve in response to the way it changes. Norwegian VET in 2035 is expected still to be organised in distinct VET-qualifications ('lærefag') anchored to occupations existing in the labour market. While occupations thus provide a main anchorage, it was acknowledged that not all tasks and functions in the labour market are structured according to clearly defined occupations. The constantly evolving character of tasks and functions in the labour market underline the need to be open to emerging and reshaped occupations and tasks. While distinct and occupationally related VET-qualifications (lærefag) are seen as essential also in the future, a systematic 'future assurance' cannot relate to existing structures alone. Several participants warned against a too reactive and passive attitude to change. VET should not exclusively be seen as a passive recipient but must actively pursue and promote the development and use of relevant and high-quality skills and competences in occupations and the labour market. Participants furthermore pointed to the limiting role played by the existing national qualifications framework, notably by limiting the possibility to develop advanced VET qualifications above level 5. It is argued that the need for advanced vocational skill and competences is increasing in many parts of the labour market and society, and that this needs to be better addressed in the coming decades.

## 2.3 The need for individual targeting and tailoring

A future VET system must be open to all potential candidates, irrespective of age and prior experiences. This must be combined with an openness to transition and progression. VET 2035 must combine its focus on young adults with a stronger focus on adults seeking to update their skills and competences. There will also be a need to address the diverse needs of groups at risk, notably migrants and unemployed. This implies that the same qualification can be acquired in different ways, departing from the prior experiences of individuals. While this points to an increased emphasis on recognition of prior learning ('Realkompetansevurdering'), some form of modularisation or unit-based approach seems to be required to facilitate up- and re-skilling. This latter is by many participants seen as relevant for continuing vocational education and training but as problematic for initial VET (where a particular sequencing/contextualisation of learning is seen as essential). Openness is defined by participants as horizontal (candidates must be allowed to move side-ways,

second-chance choices must be possible) and vertical (dead-ends must be removed, candidates must always be able to further develop their learning and build on their qualifications). For this openness to become a reality, the transparency of the system is a must. Candidates must at an early stage become aware of existing possibilities (which qualifications and units of qualifications exist, how are these linked to other qualifications and units, horizontally and vertically?) and become aware of how they can be used in the future. This latter points to the importance of guidance and counselling. Increased awareness is a must if VET is to be seen as a stepping-stone for a lifelong learning, and not as a dead-end. The leakage of VET candidates to general education during initial education and training illustrates the existing negative perception of VET as the least attractive path ahead.

#### 2.4 The critical linking of IVET and CVT

For VET to fulfil its role in society it must be trusted and respected. The credibility of VET depends directly on its recognised ability to qualify young people to the labour market (and to positions triggering decent pay and working conditions) and on its ability to support the up- and reskilling which is required by a continuously changing and evolving labour market and society.

VET qualifications must for the above reason reflect occupational roles and their tasks and functions in a transparent way, but must also demonstrate the ability to adapt to the way these are changing and evolving into new occupational roles. As already indicated in 2.2 above, VET must improve its ability to respond to labour market needs in areas where occupational roles are weakly structured and/or in the process of reshaping. This latter forms a particular challenge as existing stakeholders may be unaware of developments and new stakeholders not in a position to articulate needs.

The credibility of the 2035 VET system requires (notably) the link between initial and continuing VET to be further developed and clarified. CVET plays a critical role in responding to the diverse needs of a heterogenous group of users. CVET must be able to balance between increased pluralism of training suppliers (involving a wide group of training suppliers inside and outside traditional VET institutions) and strengthened transparency and transferability (making it easier for candidates to overview alternative offers as well as making it possible to combine outcomes from different suppliers in a systematic way). The above implies striking a balance between increased flexibility and necessary stability and predictability.

The strengthening of CVET implies a blurring of borders between general and vocational education and training. There will, for example, be a need for individuals with an academic background to add technical skills and practice-based competences to their existing profile and qualifications. For others there will be a need for additional theoretical knowledge to supplement their vocational profile and qualifications. In some cases, CVET will play a key role in reaching a higher qualification or degree. In

other cases, CVET will not require formal certification, but add to regular (non-formal) competence developments at work and elsewhere.

Participants overall agreed, as indicated above, that a modular structure is needed for CVET to combine the need for transparency/transferability and the need for relevance /quality. A modular structure is important for both skilled/qualified and unskilled/unqualified individuals. A skilled/qualified individual must be able to choose training relevant to his immediate needs, an unskilled/unqualified individual must be allowed to enter the system according to own needs and capabilities.

## 2.5 The second pillar of higher education - expanding VET at higher levels

The future standing of VET in Norway depends on an opening up and expansion to higher levels, in part by easing transfer into existing higher education programmes, in part by developing a second pillar of higher education offering advanced practice- and work-based education and training above the current level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework. The existing 'glass-ceiling' at level 5 prevents the delivery of advanced VET qualifications at levels 6-8. This points to the de facto monopoly of universities to offer higher level qualifications and seriously undermine the provision of advanced vocationally relevant skills and competences. The structural limitation posed by the NQF puts Norwegian VET at odds with developments in several neighbouring countries (for example Germany and Switzerland) where advanced and higher level VET is becoming a priority. Developing a vocationally oriented HE-pillar reduces the perception of VET as a dead-end option, signalling that initial VET is a stepping stone opening up to a variety of future education and career options.

Participants pointed to several conditions to be met if a second pillar is to be realised:

- Developing and strengthening a second pillar must be combined with improved links between IVET and existing higher education delivered by universities. The aim is not to create a new silo but also to open and broaden the routes from IVET to traditional, academic higher education.
- Expansion of VET to levels 6-8 must closely reflect existing and emerging skills and competence needs in occupations and in the labour market.
- Expansion to levels 6-8 must connect to and build on the existing qualifications at levels 4-5, identifying clear learning paths to potentially be followed by individual learners.
- Expansion to levels 6-8 will have to build on existing institutions (like Fagskoler) but also include other providers, Master-crafts can for example play a key role in this expansion.
- The development and strengthening of a new HE pillar requires more awareness being paid to the character of advanced vocational skills and competences as well as VET for excellence.

- Realising a second pillar requires more focus on the role of validation (Realkompetansedokumentasjon- og vurdering) and guidance/counselling. Paths from IVET into higher levels must allow for individual tailoring and be based on flexible institutions and structures.

While agreement was expressed regarding the need for a strengthening of HVET, participants saw lacking political understanding and awareness as a main obstacle to success. Many stakeholders take for granted that the current (university dominated) HE system is the only possible and don't see the need to give priority to the development of advanced, practice and work-based skills and competences. A condition for success is to increase awareness among key stakeholders of the importance of advanced VET skills and competences. This process of awareness change must start with a revision of the NQF and the removal of the 'glass ceiling' between levels 5 and 6.

## 2.6 Governance

The future of Norwegian VET cannot only be seen through the lens of education policies but reflect priorities set by a wide range of stakeholders in the labour market and in society. There is agreement that the tri-partite governance of initial VET should continue and be strengthened as this is seen as a pre-condition for shared ownership and overall legitimacy of the system. The role of tri-partite arrangements for HVET and for CVET, given the increasing diversity and pluralism in this part of VET, is not given and need further reflection on the time to come. There is agreement that governance arrangements need to become more dynamic in the years ahead. Participants saw the existing system as too rigid and as reacting too slowly to changes in skills demands. Improving the 'future assurance capabilities' need to balance flexibility and speed with the need for transparency, stability and predictability of the system. Participants underlined the need for gradual and incremental change, normally building on occupations, and established VET-qualifications (Lærefag). Change can in most cases, it was argued, be absorbed by offering new specializations and by individual tailoring and flexibility at the school level. Several participants pointed to the need for increased focus on lower secondary education and the importance of seeing this as a stepping stone into VET.

The operational role of the regional level (Fylkeskommuner, opplæringskontorer, prøvenemnder) must be paid more attention. Participants observed significant differences in the ability of regions to take forward national objectives and thus indicating a scope for increased mutual learning. Given a scenario where IVET expands to higher level and interacts more closely with CVET, the role of the regions in the planning and execution of VET policies becomes even more important.

### 3. Some concluding remarks

There is a strong agreement that vocational education and training in Norway in 2035 (as today) is based on a distinct IVET system anchored to occupations and structured around clearly defined VET-qualifications (Lærefag). Vocational education and training has, however, expanded to higher levels (potentially also to levels 6-8 of the NQF) and is interacting much more closely with CVET, addressing the need for upskilling and reskilling and lifelong learning. The expansion requires a more pluralistic approach, inviting in a wider diversity of providers and (potentially) introducing new forms of coordination and governance. Overall, the Norwegian Vet system must be opened up to horizontal and vertical progression closely reflecting needs of individual learners of different ages and in different situations.

There is disagreement on the future role of modularisation. While most participants see modularisation as a must for CVET, its role in IVET is highly controversial ('will lead to fragmentation') and (by some) also questioned in relations to HVET.

The four groups only in passing addressed the changing role of regional and local stakeholders in realising the 2035 vision. While this may reflect the selection of participants in the seminar (regional and local stakeholders missing) it points to a blind spot in the discussion which have to be addressed in the time to come.

# Fremtiden for yrkesfag i Norge

01. november 2022

Thon Hotel Vika Atrium

Munkedamsveien 45

0250 Oslo

## Program

09:00 – 09:15 Velkommen

*Trude Tinnlund (Leder SRY), Rebekka Borsch (Nestleder SRY), Jens Bjørnåvold (Cedefop)*

Europeiske yrkesfag – hovedtrekk og utfordringer

*Jens Bjørnåvold og Jostein Kvsterøy (Cedefop)*

Norske yrkesfag – hovedtrekk og utfordringer

*Benedikte Sterner (LO) og Ingrid Paaske Gulbrandsen (Spekter)*

09:45 – 10:30 Cedefop's fremtidsbilder; hva forteller de oss og hva kan de brukes til?

*Philipp Grollmann (Bundesinstitut für berufsbildung - BIBB) og Jens Bjørnåvold (Cedefop)*

10:30 – 12:30 Første gruppearbeid: visjoner og valg frem mot og etter 2035

Hver gruppe utfordres til å skissere et fremtidsbilde for norsk yrkesutdanning frem mot og etter 2035. Hensikten er å tydeliggjøre hva som er forbundet med en slik visjon og hvilke valg vi står overfor og hva den medfører av muligheter, begrensninger og dilemmaer.

12:30 – 13:00 Første plenumsrefleksjon

Kort (4x5 minutter) gjennomgang i plenum av gruppens foreløpige konklusjoner .

Refleksjoner om framtidens yrkesfag: Sindre Lysø, Statssekretær Kunnskapsdepartementet

13:00 – 14:00 Lunsj

14:00 – 15:00 Andre gruppearbeid: hvordan virkeliggjøre visjonen

Med utgangspunkt i konklusjonene fra formiddagen utfordres gruppene til å tydeliggjøre forutsetningene for og konsekvensene av de identifiserte fremtidsbildene.

15:00 – 15:15 Kaffepause

15:15 – 16:45 Norske fremtidsbilder – hvilke retninger kan vi velge?

Gruppene presenterer sine hovedobservasjoner og konklusjoner. Med utgangspunkt i dette oppfordres deltakerne til å reflektere over seminarets hovedspørsmål:

***Hvilke valg må tas for å styrke og videreutvikle yrkesfagene frem mot og etter 2035? Trenger vi en nasjonal strategi for å fremme praksisbasert og arbeidslivsnær kompetanseutvikling i Norge?***

16:45 – 17:00 Veien videre

## Annex 2 Written summaries (in Norwegian) of workshops



Scenario A  
Bjornavold.docx



Scenario B  
Norwegian VET 2035.Norwegian VET 2035.Norwegian VET 2035.



Scenario C



Scenario D