

Ole-Anders Stensen and Odd Bjørn Ure

Social inclusion in adult education is more than implementing mainstream public policy

**A compilation of interviews
in Norwegian adult education institutions**

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Summary

Our analysis of the role of education institutions in promoting access of adults to the formal education system, also brings to the surface how non-traditional learning contexts are used for this purpose. One reason for this is the weight of study associations in Norwegian adult education. In this national report made in the frame of the EU project *Lifelong learning 2010*, we particularly address adult learners from backgrounds of social marginalisation. Fifteen staff interviews were conducted in seven adult education institutions covering all educational levels, including study associations.

The results suggest that institutions do not reach excellence in recruiting non-traditional learners if they follow a default policy that only mirrors minimum requirements and mainstream public policy. Institutions that succeed in recruiting groups exposed to social exclusion tend to define their own institutional objectives, earmark their own money and get additional funding from public (or private) programmes or initiatives. Such deliberate institutional strategies can also embrace the design of courses that support certain groups of untraditional learners. Utilization of the public framework for the appreciation of non-formal and informal learning experiences also stimulates recruitment of such learners.

Given that motivation to learn more is a crucial topic in the research literature on adult learning, we invited informants to air their views and experiences on motivational issues. Several informants asked themselves if the number of follow-up actions directed towards unmotivated students should be reduced and the resources rather concentrated on adults really wanting to learn. Motivation also has to do with problems faced by learners from other cultural backgrounds in understanding what is expected from them in a welfare society offering many social benefits.

The Norwegian educational system is characterised by statutory rights, i.a. to receive 'adapted education'. This implies that different scholastic demands are catered for during compulsory schooling and also at upper secondary level. This right leads to multiple pedagogical and administrative support initiatives, e.g. preparatory programmes, supplementary workshops and remedial classes. These initiatives contribute to motivating non-traditional learners. Tertiary education institutions are not affected by the statutory right to adapted education but they are obliged to put in place some procedures destined for adult learners, such as assessment of prior learning. For all educational levels, counselling and career advice are services of particular value for learners from untraditional backgrounds.

In their efforts to recruit and retain learners from backgrounds of social marginalisation, adult education institutions at higher educational level can normally mobilise more institutional resources than schools at lower levels of the education system. Independently of which institution under scrutiny, an issue cutting across our interviews is that social inclusion does not need to be restricted to implementation of minimum standards defined at a central level. Besides the conventional wisdom that the implementation of State strategies tends to allow for interpretations and adaptations at local levels, our interviews unveil some freedom or leeway to couple own institutional resources to the statutory rights and minimum standards coming from above.

Introduction and structure of the report

This report on adult education in Norway is written in the frame of subproject 5 of the 6th framework project *LLL 2010*¹, aiming to analyse the role of education institutions and non-traditional educational contexts in promoting access of adults to the education system, particularly adults from backgrounds of social marginalisation.

The subproject co-ordinator at the Educational Disadvantage Centre, belonging to St. Patrick's College of Dublin City University, has issued background documents emphasising that a key goal is to evaluate the main obstacles to establishing mechanisms for the recognition of prior non-formal learning and work experience for opening access of adults to the education system.

The national team in Norway carried out fifteen interviews based on a template provided by the subproject co-ordinator Paul Downes. The theories framing the template for interviews draw on the development psychological perspective proposed by the SP5 co-ordinator (cf. Downes, T. & Downes, P. 2007²); notably Urie Bronfenbrenner: *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press 1979.

In line with the requirements for defining the sample of institutions, we interviewed informants from four types of institutions. In three of the institutional types we recruited two informants from two different institutions, while in one institutional type we recruited two informants from one institution. Finally, we discussed the themes addressed with an official from a government department. The two interviews in each institution cannot nurture institutional case studies in a strict sense of the word, but rather institutional descriptions that will be grouped under the following headlines framing this report:

- Main objectives of the institution
- Target groups
- Summary of the practices observed
- Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies – barriers to entrance
- Strengths and weaknesses of the practice(s) - including financing and student support
- Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

On the subsequent pages, we will give an account of methodological choices and sketch the background of adult education in Norway. Then we present the results from the interviews carried out in seven institutions, grouped according to the types of institutions outlined above. Afterwards, we extract some common themes and contrasts across all interviews and point at institutional practices apt for transfer to other contexts. Separate annexes contain the summary of an interview with an official from a government department, alongside a short text on the possible impact of the 2008 financial crisis, which turned out to be less severe in Norway than in other partner countries in the project LLL2010.

¹Contract number 513321.

²Pedagogy of the Processed. 'In Beyond Educational Disadvantage' (2007), (P. Downes & A-L Gilligan, Eds.), Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the informants in each institution where we were allowed to make interviews. Many of the interviewees spent much more time than we expected and they often provided us with useful background information. We also benefited from valuable advice from many sources on institutions and informants of interest for our study. Finally, we are grateful for the comments and suggestions provided by the co-ordinator of the subproject in which our report is inscribed, Professor Paul Downes and his colleagues at the Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College of Dublin City University.

The methods used

The project Lifelong Learning 2010, including subproject 5, involves partners from 13 European countries having investigated the role of education institutions and partly non-traditional educational environments in the promotion of access of adults to the education system. Due to the fact that SP5 is a comparative project, many of the methodological decisions like sample selections, research questions and interview guides; were made in collaboration with the other countries engaged in the project and the leader of the subproject in question, which is the Educational Disadvantage Centre at St. Patrick's College in Dublin.

Sampling and recruitment of informants

A central idea behind this sampling was the logic of maximum variation, thus seeking to locate different educational institutions with regard to course content, gender and ethnically diverse student populations, different regions of a country, as well as national and local institutions. Most of these criteria have been met. Four of a total of fifteen informants are first generation Norwegians and four informants were men. The number of national versus local recruitment basins depend on where one draws the line, but we regard the two institutions within higher education together with the prison as institutions at a national level whereas they are, although in a very different sense, open to citizens all over the country. The remaining institutions are basically local. Despite these points, the logic of maximum variation is not reflected at a regional level of the sampling because most institutions are located within one of Norway's 19 counties. The methodological considerations resulted in a list of institutions that respects the sampling requirements. This list also contains the institutions chosen for interviews:

- Two formal education organisations (Oslo University College and the University of Oslo)
- One interview with senior government department official (Ministry of Education and Research)
- One prison institution (one high security prison)
- Two non-formal education organisations (two study associations: Folkeuniversitetet and the Association for Adapted Adult Education)

- Two organisations of our own choice (upper secondary school for adults, i.e. Sinsen, and one school that provides instructions in Norwegian and social science to immigrants).

Except for the interview with a government department official, we conducted two interviews within each institution. Consequently, four interviews were conducted within formal education organisations, one in the Ministry of Education and Research, two in the prison, and four within non-formal organisations and four within the organisations that were of our own choice. For each institution, we tried to identify one informant in a high position and another informant working with learners on a daily basis.

As a result of gathering information about the institutions from the institutions' websites, articles in newspapers and research reports; we obtained a picture of how the institutions were organized and of which employees having knowledge of the issues we were interested in. During this process, we managed to target out potential informants. Afterwards, we sent to these potential informants an e-mail containing a presentation of the project and its main research questions, while asking the person in question to consider serving as informant. In those cases where this person did not have the opportunity (no one said that they did not want to) to be interviewed, we either asked the persons whether they could suggest someone else or they did so spontaneously.

The work on recruiting informants commenced in March 2009 and all interviews were conducted by the end of June the same year. The duration of the interviews varied between three quarters of an hour and three hours.

Writing up the interview guide in Norwegian

To facilitate comparison across countries, a pivotal point has been to assure that the sample requirements and questions are the same within each institution. Consequently, all interview guides and their ensuing questions were formulated at the Educational Disadvantage Centre in Dublin and translated into the respective language of each country.

After translating all the questions in the interview guides for each institution, we assessed the questions in relation to the Norwegian context. This assessment resulted in one change and in a few cases a removal of some of the questions. In the latter case, we knew that the answers were available at the institution's website or from other sources. Hence, we were convinced that these sources would provide an answer of a similar value to what we would get from the informant. When it comes to the alteration of some of the questions, this was mainly done because we found the current wording of the question problematic for the Norwegian context. We changed for instance what we assessed as too formal language into more everyday language.

Lastly, we also changed the sequence of some of the questions into what we believed would improve the interview situation. For instance, we suspected that the informants would provide much the same answer to some of the questions. We therefore placed them adjacent to each other, so that we could use one of them as a follow-up question.

Challenges related to the comparison of institutions

One goal of subproject 5 of the project LLL2010 is to identify and discuss similarities between various institutions in the countries concerned, but also between institutions within the same country. However, given that the institutions are very heterogeneous, the latter task is com-

plicated. While the differences between a prison and a university are obvious, the similarities are less conspicuous. Nevertheless, we address this challenge in the section called common themes and contrasts, which is located at the end of this paper.

Another issue that complicates comparisons between the institutions addressed is the fact that even though our informants from various institutions are recruited with the aim of having one informant from a high position in the hierarchy and another informant interacting with the learners on a daily basis, the work tasks of such positions vary among institutions. For instance, both study associations we included in our sample count numerous member organizations, which in next turn depend on individual members. Those working at the central office seldom interact with course participants. The insight in each of the member organisations may also be limited. If we compare this situation with a department of Oslo Adult Education, we find that the situation is very different as employees in the administration work in the same building as the participants receive their instructions. So despite the fact that they might not necessarily talk to the participants on a daily basis, it is likely that they are familiar with many of the aspects of the participants' situation at the school.

The readers of this report should keep in mind that despite the fact that much of the text concerns course participants, these learners are not our informants. Hence, the assessment of learners' situation stems from appreciations made by the staff in adult education institutions. Their appreciation may or may not deviate from the learners' own experience and understanding.

Non-identification of the informants

Prior to the interviews, we were promised informants not to reveal their identity in the final report. After each institutional description was completed, all informants were contacted and asked to verify our description and our account of their statements. In addition to giving feedback on our description in general, we especially asked the informants to consider whether they felt they had been sufficiently anonymised. Most informants were satisfied on this point, while some had objections that did not alter the research design and we accordingly changed the text.

In some cases, the names of the institutions and respective departments are referred to by their actual name. We are fully aware that this increases the risk of identification of the interviewees. We will therefore emphasise that any use of real names has been approved by the informants. The initial reason for using the actual names of the institutions is the fact that information about them would have revealed the identity of the specific institution (and perhaps even name of the interviewee); based on when it was established, how many participants engage in education and training, the number of faculties etc. In other words, the choice was either to alter and remove much relevant information, or to ask participants whether they would approve that we used the name of the institution.

Background of adult education in Norway³

Contemporary adult learning in Norway calls on municipalities, counties and the State for providing compulsory education, besides training at upper secondary and higher education level. Voluntary organisations are also involved and may form part of the traditional adult education represented by study circles. Private organisations are particularly active in the market of higher education. The workplace is an important pillar in Norwegian adult education and is often served by outside vendors selected by the employer. Below, the formal education system will be covered with regard to adult education.

A unitary school system for everyone has been an important goal in Norwegian educational policy since the late 1890s. The State has been a strong actor within the educational system since the “nation building period”, and gradually became a guarantor of statutory rights to education. These rights have been introduced as a prolongation of the idea of a unitary school system. The aim has been to include everybody in the same unitary school until the compulsory school age of 16; independently of social background, skills and qualifications. This has contributed to a favourable soil for a strong public education system (Telhaug & Mediaas 2003). However, much remains to be done before the equality principles become reality for everybody, including adult learners. A separate issue in view of the individual rights accruing from national laws is whether there is an ongoing judicialisation of educational policy in Norway. Although these rights are justiciable and that they are followed up by individual rights to “adapted education” (see below), Norwegian policy for inclusive adult education is not yet a judicial matter (cf. the discussion of processes of judicialisation in Ø. Østerud ed.:2003). The reason might be that public authorities try to live up to what the law says and that there is no Norwegian jurisprudence to pay out large fines to individuals asking for compensation for erroneous treatment by public authorities.

Regarding the public-private distinction, the public institutions are emphasized in this overview since they provide the majority of formal education in Norway, especially from primary to upper secondary education (OECD 2007). Most private institutions are heavily dependent on government subsidies. As there are few completely private institutions, these are seldom treated separately in statistics (see e.g. OECD 2007, Arnesen & Lundahl 2006).

An overview of how each level of the formal education system is dealing with adult learners follows below. Given that there are many statutory rights for individuals, we will address the issue of who is responsible for financing and providing training in line with these rights.

Compulsory Education

10 years of primary and lower secondary education is today seen as one compulsory unit. A statutory right for adults to complete their primary education was introduced with effect from autumn 2002. This right also comprehends immigrants (see below). The municipalities receive a framework grant from the State to provide this education. Public compulsory education is

³The overview in this section draws on the national report from Norway in the frame of subproject 3 of LLL2010 and is primarily edited by former research assistant at Fafo, Bjørg Eva Aaslid.

free of charge (even the text books) for all learners, independently of their age. In addition to regular public primary and lower secondary schools, different competence and learning centres offer education at this level on behalf of the municipality. There are few private institutions at the level of primary and lower secondary education. According to OECD statistics (2007) private providers only serve 2 % of all pupils and students at ISCED 1+2.

Upper Secondary Education

One feature of the ambitious 1999 LLL reform (the ‘Competence Reform’) was a statutory right for 2nd chance learners to complete their education at upper secondary level. Subsequent to amendments proposed in a 2007 White Paper on ‘Early intervention in Lifelong Learning’, this right now covers all adults over 25 years, while the initial arrangement from year 2000 addressed adults borne before 1978. Counties receive a framework grant from the State for providing education and training at this level. Public upper secondary education is free of charge for those who have a formal right to education. The participants have to cover their own textbooks and study material, but they can apply for grants and loans from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund in order to cover these expenses. Moreover, adult students can receive additional financial support.

Adult education is normally located in regular upper secondary schools, often organized in collaboration with education and training networks serving adults. These networks may be labelled resource and competence centres or OPUS⁴. They can be located within upper secondary institutions, or as independent units, often in collaboration with a training office/ labour market office. Some of the adult education at upper secondary level might also be offered by enterprises (often labelled “learning enterprises”). Separate adult education institutions are not common in Norway.

There are also private institutions offering upper secondary adult education, often with a different profile than public schools. As a consequence of regulations in the Law of Private Schools (§ 2-1) many private schools at this level have a Christian foundation, or base the teaching on alternative pedagogies. These institutions receive different rates of government subsidies. Also at this educational level the extent of private schools is rather small in a comparative perspective, covering only 10,2% of the total amount of participants in upper secondary education (OECD 2007).

Tertiary Vocational Education

Tertiary vocational education institutions offer shorter, often vocationally oriented, studies lasting from 6 months up to 2 years, and builds on upper secondary education or equivalent competence. A separate law regarding vocational education and training from 2003 covers this level of education (ISCED level 4). Public institutions are under county responsibility and the training is offered free of charge. Private actors often receive government subsidies but they charge students enrolment fees. Students may apply for loan and grants from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund. Admission is allowed on the basis of upper secondary education or “real competence” (non-formal and informal competencies) and the training is

⁴Opplærings- og Utdanningssetra

often seen as an alternative to higher education. Today there are about 48 approved tertiary vocational schools.⁵

Higher Education

Different kinds of institutions offer higher education in Norway; there are 7 Universities and 24 public University Colleges.⁶ Moreover, higher education counts 6 scientific university colleges and 2 university colleges of art. In addition there are 23 private university colleges with statutory funding and 8 private university colleges without statutory funding, but with a right of examination. The State is responsible for grants to higher education institutions, as part of the annual budget procedure. In Norway public higher education is offered for free, and we find the majority of students in public schools.⁷ The Law on higher education from 2005 establishes a common regulatory framework for public and private institutions at this level. While considering all tertiary education (for practical purposes ISCED 4-6), it appears that the extent of private institutions is somewhat larger than at lower levels. Hence, statistics from OECD (2007) show that all together 30% of the participants at ISCED 4-6 are enrolled in private institutions, of which vocational tertiary education (ISCED 4) has the highest number of participants.

The higher education system (ISCED 5-7) is increasingly adapting to the study structure suggested by the Bologna process; Bachelor of three years, Masters of two, and PhD of three years. There are different practices when it comes to organizing adult education at this level. Some Universities and University Colleges have centres for further and continuing education (SEVU), set up as separate administrative units coordinating education and training for students, who increasingly require more flexible solutions. In some higher education institutions there is no coordinating unit, the responsibility for further and continuing education being delegated to each academic field, faculty or institute.

Study associations

Study associations have traditionally been a strong supplier of adult education and are referred to as “the backbone of adult education initiatives”. The Adult Education Law embraces these associations but they are separated from the public educational system. Study associations are idealistic organisations that consist of nationwide membership organisations, built upon democratic principles emanating from the voluntary sector and the civil society.⁸ There are presently 19 publicly recognized study associations with over 400 member organisations.

Most study associations offer a broad range of formal and non-formal studies and courses, of shorter and longer duration, at all educational levels both of theoretical and practical nature. Study associations are supposed to reflect the political and cultural multitude of society,

⁵ According to Norway Opening Universities 30.09.07: <http://norgesuniversitetet.no/seksjoner/laeresteder/?sortmethod=institusjonstype&ctype=Fagskoler>.

⁶ Historically university colleges have been more geared towards vocational studies compared with the universities that first were established. Today there is no clear distinction; a mix of vocational and academic study programs is often offered both by universities and university colleges.

⁷ Most institutions ask students for a term fee covering welfare activities, but this is a relatively small amount.

⁸ The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (VoFo) is the umbrella organisation, today covering about 20 approved study associations.

and traditionally many courses have been tied to Norwegian cultural traditions.⁹ The Adult Education Act of 1976 opens up for collaboration with the formal educational system, and today increasingly more study associations offer adult education that is related to the public educational system.¹⁰ At the same time, the overall activity of study associations is decreasing along with descending public subsidies (NOU 2007: 11).¹¹

The role of municipalities in adult education

To take the municipality of Oslo as one example, Oslo has gathered all education and training for adults within one organisation, coined Oslo Adult Education (OAE). OAE consists of eight schools that provide adults with the education and training they are entitled to by law. This includes Norwegian and social science classes for immigrants, and all formal education from primary education up to and including upper secondary school. According to the municipality of Oslo's web site, OAE provides education for 8000 participants annually¹².

The schools' education and training is designed according to the needs of the participants. For instance, one school belonging to OAE focuses on education for participants with special needs, while the target groups for other schools are immigrants that have the right to receive instruction in the Norwegian language as well as in social and living conditions in Norway.

In this report we refer to two of the schools (or sections within the schools) that are organized within OAE; one that teaches Norwegian and social science to immigrants and one exam related school, i.e. Sinsen. The latter of these schools have 1500 participants, while the former school exceeds this number. The majority of the participants at Sinsen either aim for a certificate for completed compulsory education or upper secondary education.

⁹ Topics of organisational training, and learning for the development of the local community have been widespread in addition to political training, culture and creative, aesthetical and practical topics.

¹⁰ E.g. if a higher education institution does not have the capacity to arrange a certain course, a study association can be hired to organize it. Study associations might have the necessary logistics, while the higher education institution might provide the teaching personnel.

¹¹ Statistikkgrunnlag [Statistics]: <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dok/NOUer/2007/NOU-2007-11/5.html?id=480443>

¹² <http://www.utdanningsetaten.oslo.kommune.no/osloskolen/voksenopplaring/>

Adult education at primary and upper secondary education level

In administrative terms Oslo is both a municipality and a county. This allows the city to concentrate its efforts to arrive at an inclusive policy of adult education and lifelong learning. All education and training for adults are gathered in one organisation, coined Oslo Adult Education (OAE). OAE consists of eight schools that provide adults with the education and training they are entitled to by law. We have carried out interviews in two departments of OAE.

Firstly, at Sinsen OAE, which is the only exam-related school within Oslo Adult Education (OAE). The department at Sinsen offers training at lower and upper secondary education level. Lower secondary education is part of compulsory education in Norway. Secondly, we had interviews with another school within OAE (Sinsen), which aims to offer immigrants instruction in the Norwegian language, social sciences as well as providing work training. Below, we cater for each institution at a time.

(1) Sinsen/Oslo Adult Education

Main objectives of the institution

The main objective of the department at Sinsen is to teach exam-related classes and to produce examination candidates. One informant believed that they were successful in doing so. Although she did not have any specific numbers, she said that they distribute many certificates. In spite of this she also added that many of the students had a hard time obtaining their certificate. According to her, many of the students at Sinsen are previously early leavers that struggle with diverse and often complex issues.

The school has approximately 1500 students whose age varies between 20 and 65. However, most of the students are between the ages of 25 to 35. Further on, about two thirds of the students originate from other countries than Norway.

Target groups

Regarding the school's target groups, one of our informants identified five groups that differ in their goals of entering adult education. She added that:

This is the target groups we are working with. It is a wide spectrum, but common for all of them is that they embark on exam related education, which is sort of our headline.

The five groups consist of students who:

1. Aim at completing compulsory education.
2. Aim at completing general education at upper secondary school, making them eligible for higher education.

3. Aim at completing vocational studies
4. Aim at receiving documentation for appreciation of prior learning experiences.
5. Aim at completing the theoretical courses embedded in the vocational studies.

The first two groups consist of students that embark on five and six subjects for completing, respectively, compulsory education and upper secondary education. To receive a certificate from compulsory education, students need to pass the following subjects: Norwegian, English, mathematics, natural science, history and social studies. Due to this, the school offers these and no other subjects. At upper secondary education they offer all subjects that students need to pass to become eligible for studies within higher education. For most of the studies within higher education, this amounts to six subjects at upper secondary school. Moreover, for some studies, like medicine and pharmacy, it is required that the students specialise in subjects like mathematics, physics, biology and chemistry, something which Sinsen also offers.

The third group is made up of persons that aim at a certificate of completed apprenticeship or at completing parts of such an education. According to the informant, it seems like the school goes to great length to fulfil the rights and needs of students:

“we offer all kinds of courses for those who are entitled to it by law. We have students within almost all areas. I think the programme for music dance and drama and the programme for sports and physical education are the only ones that no students have applied to. Some are difficult to arrange for, like jewellery, but we buy vocational training for them at other schools...”

Buying the vocational training from other upper secondary schools or private institutions seemed to be a general practice for other vocations as well, e.g. hairdresser and plumber.

The fourth group consists of students that aim at receiving documentation for their prior learning experiences. According to one of our informants the motive of the students is often that documented prior learning experiences make it easier to get a job.

The fifth group consists of students that do not follow the traditional path within vocational studies, i.e. two years of schooling followed by two years of apprenticeship. Instead, these students have been able to achieve a contract of apprenticeship after completing compulsory education. Regarding the two years of schooling the idea is that they gradually complete the various subjects, something which Sinsen enables them to. One of our informants said that, “these are sixteen, seventeen year olds that are tired of school after spending ten years within it...” In addition, the group consists of adults that have been working within a special field for many years and may become eligible for a Journeyman’s certificate by completing theoretical subjects.

Some of the students among these groups have enrolled in the different programs under the auspices of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). These students are often found in the third and fourth group. According to one of our informants, NAV was mainly present at other education and training within OAE, like introduction programmes in Norwegian and social sciences, but in regards to Sinsen, NAV is first and foremost involved when it comes to rehabilitation and re-training.

Further on, both informants seemed to agree that female students constituted the majority of the students, however, one of them said that:

“Previously we had about 60 percent female students, but now this proportion has reduced to 52-53 percent.”

She did not know why the composition of students had changed.

A final introductory comment is that we do now know how many students there are within each of the five groups identified. Further on, one and the same student may find herself in one or more of these groups.

Summary of the practices observed

Admission to all schools within OAE is mediated through a central service office. According to OAE, the service office is also prepared to help persons sign up as external candidate for public examination, provide career advice and they also place students within a specific curriculum after an assessment made by the service office.

The recruitment to Sinsen is therefore largely dependent on the service office: “Our recruitment is largely based on the advances the service office makes, like advertisement in newspapers, posters in the subway and trams.” In addition to the service office, both informants emphasised that persons obtained information about the education and training through the other schools within OAE and the grapevine. One informant said that:

“We also recruit students that have attended any of the other schools within OAE, especially from those schools were many of those with higher education attends and who wants to learn Norwegian.”, and the other informant said that, “The knowledge of our education and training goes through the grapevine.”

The same informant mentioned that they distributed brochures to organisations where they knew adults would visit:

“First and foremost we distribute them where we meet persons with insufficient education, because this is the first step in the educational ladder, so to speak.” Lastly, one of our informants mentioned that although most persons had heard of adult education, many tend to think that this is synonymous with Norwegian as a second language, which represents a potential problem as none of the classes Sinsen offers this subject.”

As mentioned above, the central service office has the task of distributing students to the different schools and educational trajectories of OAE. This office also provides testing in Norwegian, mathematics and English. Depending on students’ previous education and how they score on the tests, they receive an educational offer in a school and at a level that the service office finds appropriate. Sinsen is organised in such a way that the same person may be placed within the curriculum of upper secondary school when it comes to mathematics, while she attends lower secondary education in Norwegian. One informant said that:

“We tailor the schooling so that we do not keep them longer than necessary.”

When it comes to efforts of the other schools within OAE in advocating Sinsen for those students that wish to continue their educational ladder, both informants seemed more or less satisfied with the state of play, although there were some challenges:

“We have career advisors within adult education and also some that are specialists on the situation of minorities. Many students that enrol in our school or visit the service office talk to a counsellor and receive information about vocations and opportunities and such things. But at the same time, we see that some students know very little, they barely know

whether they are enrolled in vocational or general studies. We sometimes struggle conveying information.”

On the question of whether there existed an agenda for how the school should increase admission, one of the informants said that:

“There are no specific plans right now. The opening of the service office in 2007 presented a considerable lift for increasing the number of students.”

Both informants were satisfied with the municipality’s effort to recruit students to the school. One informant said that it “makes a great effort of informing about the opportunities and rights of persons to take education”. Consequently, the same informant asserted that when it comes to enrolment:

“... it is more related to persons’ will, whether they have the energy to embark on an educational path or whether they want to do other things”.

Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies – barriers to entrance

It looks like our informants today are less concerned about issues regarding barriers to entrance than barriers related to remaining and completing one’s studies once enrolled. This has to do with the fact that one single service office in 2007 took over the responsibility for recruitment to the schools belonging to OAE.

When it comes to recruitment, the two informants emphasised different aspects. On the question of what barriers students encounter with regard to entrance, one informant said:

“For many students it is not a great barrier, it is sort of like ‘just do it’ attitude. They have been thinking about embarking on upper secondary school for years and suddenly they decide that they are actually going for it.” The other informant, on the other hand, said that “... if the person is working alongside it is often difficult to combine with studies. Even though it is possible to attend the classes at day and in the evenings, many of our students have family and several tasks related to it. A second point is that many have probably not heard of us, although everyone that attends any of the other schools within adult education is informed about our services.”

On the question whether they had succeeded in recruiting underrepresented groups, one of our informants said:

“... we have been able to get hold of many persons from underrepresented groups. Some of our students have psychologically related problems, many have previously dropped out, some have drug related problems and so on... All our students are underrepresented in the conventional educational system. We have students that have not succeeded at previous moments; in addition to immigrants that for different reasons have not been able to complete basic or upper secondary education.”

According to the same informant the majority of the students at Sinsen would not have been able to make it in the ordinary educational system. She emphasised that the reason why they are able to keep most of their students within school is the great flexibility they can offer: “... they can enrol in one or many subjects, they can attend classes at daytime or in the evening, complete the subjects fast or slow.” The informant added that despite the fact that many

students utilised the great flexibility offered by the school, e.g. the opportunity to switch classes to a higher or lower level in a given subject, a substantial proportion of the students decided to leave. In those cases where the school had scrutinized the reasons as to why the student had left, the informant said that it was often related to private issues and therefore out of reach for the school.

Regarding barriers after entrance, i.e. staying in school and completing the exams, it seems as though the general life situation for some of the students was difficult to combine with schooling:

“... most of the students have children and a strained economic situation. I am immensely impressed by the effort they put down. We have classes both at daytime and in the evening. In the evening the classes are full of students that have two or three children, who are working at daytime to obtain educational qualification to get a better job.”

The other informant said that:

“Many of our students have loans in the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund and many work alongside. There is always a problem related to money, and when a student enrolls in the school, he loses income. So they are sort of gambling by estimating how many classes they can skip and still pass the exam.”

In addition to the economic situation of students, one of our informants said that:

“Some of the students say that they have to quit because their husband says that they are not allowed to continue, or because they need to work.”

If the main cause for this event is that the husband demands that the wife should quit schooling because the economic situation requires her to work, one could argue that this is yet another example of how the economic situation of students affects their possibility to study. However, if his reasons for demanding her to quit are related to other factors, we have yet another barrier that denies the student from continuing schooling. The informant said that although it happens, it does not happen that often, and that when it did, it was first and foremost female immigrant students that were denied attending the classes.

For another group of students it was first and foremost a long history of bad experiences from the educational system that appeared as the main challenge for succeeding. The lack of belief in their own ability to complete the educational path affected their motivation, which in next turn affected their effort. Yet another group of students struggled with mental related problems that made schooling difficult. One informant emphasised that for such groups results came over time:

“We have students that have dropped out both one and three times, and we have students with serious mental related problems. So of course, many of our students carry a heavy baggage and we have to adapt the situation to them the best we can. Some of them are students from special schools and have never been in an ordinary school. We cannot conjure to make them take the exams.”

A recurrent theme from both informants was the increased emphasis on theoretical knowledge that was introduced to the vocational studies through educational reforms in the early nineties. Both informants believed that increased demands for theoretical knowledge might contribute to push students out of school since they were not able to complete these subjects:

“Previously, there was different curriculum as the English subject was easier for the vocational studies. Then they changed this and now everyone have the same curriculum, and as a result the plumber has to read Shakespeare and everything else that students who prepare for higher education reads. Before students learned how to present themselves and their vocation in English, which is much more relevant than what we are doing now. But at the same time we try to adapt the instructions to one that they benefit from.”¹³

It is important to remember that Sinsen is a school where two thirds of the students originate from other countries than Norway. For many of these students language represents a challenge for completing their studies. One of our informants mentioned this as one of the most important reasons as to why students did not complete their educational goals. In addition to problems related to language, the same informant said that foreign students take the studies too lightly and that they lack an understanding of the demands within the curriculum:

“Later today I am going to have a meeting with a student who is receiving the grade two [the lowest possible grade while still passing] and risks flunking in a subject. He is dissatisfied because he feels that he should have a much higher grade. They do not have an understanding of the Norwegian curriculum and what is required for passing the different subjects. So understanding the Norwegian system is important for many students.”

The other informant believed that more schooling in Norwegian remained one of the key factors for enabling students to succeed. She argued that at the current state, too many students that were transferred from the schools within OAE that offer Norwegian and social sciences to Sinsen were not enough prepared. The curriculum within basic and upper secondary education demands that in addition to Norwegian, the students should learn English as well; hence the informant said that

“They should know Norwegian to such a degree that they at least know the Norwegian vocabulary when learning English words. In the same manner they need to know the concepts used in mathematics and natural sciences.”

She added that:

“I think we should warn many of our students against embarking on upper secondary school, because everybody passes the exam for compulsory education. When you have completed compulsory education, you have a lot of information concerning the educational system, so you may help your children, you have achieved an understanding of the Norwegian society, but it is far from sure that you have accomplished the theoretical knowledge that is required for continuing the educational ladder.”

The other informant regarded English as a major barrier for completing vocational studies in upper secondary school. She said that:

“... the fact that students need to complete English to become a plumber or hairdresser, is pretty complicated for many. And many of our students originate from countries where they have not become acquainted with English. It is a major barrier that hinders them in taking the apprenticeship examination.”

¹³The content of several subjects at the vocational track in upper secondary school was altered following the Reform 1994 (i.e. reform of the structure and content of upper secondary education introduced in August 1994). Put shortly, the content of these subjects were more closely aligned with the content of the same subjects in the track for general subjects (i.e. the track that prepares students for higher education).

Both informants seemed united in the view that the demands within upper secondary school were too high. One of them asserted that, "Since 1998 the demands within upper secondary school have tightened up. It is unreasonable. Persons with a great consideration for other people, who wants to become a nursing assistant, will not be able to become one because the theoretical demands are much greater than the demands to head and hands that can work. It is a real shame, but that is the way it is."

Further on, both informants said that it was not uncommon that students with immigrant background had obligations towards their family in their country of origin or that serious events took place. Sometimes the mother or father of the student was having problems, a brother had died, their grandmother was sick and so on. Naturally, such events could present a barrier for completing their educational goals.

After asking our informants about the barriers for completing the educational track, we continued asking them what the school did to help students overcome them.

On the question what measures they took to prevent dropout, one of our informants highlighted the complex nature of this concept and how it is dependent on the life situation of the student in question:

"It might be the student that finds out that he has to work. If you are a 35-year old Norwegian students who embarks on upper secondary school, you have been drifting around for quite a while. Some are persons with previous drug related problems and mental related problems. It is often persons who do not have any structure in their lives. We devote quite a lot of resources for motivating the students to complete."

The Sinsen of OAE also practices certain routines for students who do not show up to the classes. If a student has been absent two times, the school sends them a letter or calls them to ask whether they are planning to show up or whether they have quit. If the student promises to show, but fails to, the teachers tell the counsellors to flunk the student. Further on, the informants told us that some students attend 50 to 60 percent of the classes and that they in reality do not care:

"They promise to show up on the final test on Tuesday. I underline that they have to show up in due time before the test. The story ends with them not showing up, and I wonder, how much resource should we use on these students? We spend so much resource on those students that are muddling around. There is a limit. We need to use the resources on those who want and can learn."

Due to the amount of resources that were used to remedy some of the students' lack of preparedness, I asked one of the informants whether she prefers that the school is stricter on who is admitted. She replied:

"Yes, that would have been alright. Sometimes we have students that do not have the qualifications to complete the course they have applied for. They have an exclusive right for enrolment, so if they submit a complaint after we have said 'I do not think this will work out, it is better for you to transfer to a lower level', they get support from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. It all ends up with them flunking or dropping out, instead of following our advice".

Later in the interview, the same informant stated that,

“I really wish that the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and the Ministry of Education and Research and Research had more knowledge of the reality in schools.”

The main support for students who are struggling with following a given subject is the flexibility that the school is able to offer. One informant said that

“... our major support for students with challenges related to schooling is that we are able to offer all our subjects on different levels. So, if the course in mathematics one is attending is too hard, you may move down to a lower level which is easier. All our subjects are stratified at several levels.”

This approach is what distinguishes the school’s pedagogical approach from that of conventional schools:

“We have a greater flexibility; that is the main point.”

In addition to organising the subjects at several different levels, the school offers extracurricular activities through a study workshop they have established:

“We have several instructors in the study workshop in the library, the instructors are retired teachers. This is an excellent offer, the instructors are skilled and experienced and know what they are doing. It is a place where stupid questions do not exist. The instructors are at the study workshop from eight thirty in the morning to seven in the evening... In addition we place some of the teachers with available time in the study workshop.”

Despite the fact that the study workshop was a great offer for the students, the informant regretted that many of the students did not have time to use it; often because they were picking up their children in the kindergarten or were rushing to their work. The informant said that the study workshop had been adopted by other schools both in Norway and in Europe. Schools in the latter region had become familiar with the study workshop through a network of adult educational institutions that Sinsen engages in. Lastly, the school also cooperates with the practical-pedagogical services with regard to reading and writing disorders.

Strengths and weaknesses of the practice(s) - including financing and student support

When it comes to the proportion of female and male staff, the composition is skewed towards female employees as this group amount to approximately 60 percent. Both informants confirmed this and although none of them knew the exact composition they presumed that women made up around two thirds of the staff members. The school does not have any in their staff with disabilities. Further on, some of the teachers had a minority background; one of the informants estimated them to count approximately four out of a teacher staff between 40 and 50. She added that minority background was more prevalent within the administration and cleaners. On the question of whether there were any specific advantages and disadvantages related to a diverse set of staff members, one informant said that “There are only advantages. The main advantage is that it is obvious for the students, they find people that represent themselves, that we talk several languages, know many cultures.” The views of the other informant coincide with this statement as she said that,

It is a major advantage. If you visit the other schools within OAE you will see that their member of staff has a greater proportion of persons with minority background. At the service

office, I believe that it amounts to about 70 percent that are speaking a foreign language. They are dependent on it to a larger degree, but our main aim is that the students should learn Norwegian and really give a finishing touch in relation to the exam. The situation for many of our students is that Norwegian is not spoken at home, so if many of our teachers had struggled in speaking Norwegian, I believe that it would have been unfortunate.

When it comes to the relation between teachers and students, both informants said that they experienced it as a good relation and that both sides had a genuine tolerance and liked each other. When conflicts arose, it was the grading that most of the time was the source to the conflict: "Some students are very demanding and believe that they only should receive top grades". In addition the same informant said that culture might be a source to conflicts:

"Sometimes we have peculiar misunderstandings regarding cultural differences, statements from the teacher are perceived as bullying. Things that we could not imagine turns into a conflict, for instance a teacher looking over his glasses and knit his brows has been perceived as bullying. A lot of this involves culture, but we have not had any violent episodes."

We were also curious to know whether the informants thought that there were special advantages or disadvantages related to a diverse student mass. One of the informants said that it would have been easier to give instructions if students were more alike, but at the same time she said that this also was an exciting challenge. Regarding the environment among the students, the same informant said that:

"It is really good in the way that we have students that are sitting next to each other in the classroom who are political enemies, or they come from different countries that have been fighting. It is a miracle that we do not have any more conflicts, because we have very, very few of them. Many have war trauma, some have been a child soldier in Somalia, some have committed serious crimes, and some are power kegs. As you see, the students have many different backgrounds, but all in all it goes incredibly well. We work a lot with the milieu within the classroom, and tolerance and respect is immensely important."

Connections with the tertiary educational system

The informants confirmed that they had connections with institutions within higher education. For instance, both universities and university colleges visited the school prior to the deadline for the receipt of applications to higher education. None of the informants knew how many students applied to or enrolled in higher education, but one of them estimated that out of those who followed the path within upper secondary school that would prepare them for higher education, about half of them were retained.

One informant emphasised that special admission (i.e. enabling students to enrol within higher education despite the lack of certain subjects) and admission based on the appreciation of previous learning experiences were especially useful for students at the Sinsen department of Oslo Adult Education. However, one informant said that students who applied to higher education on the background of the appreciation of previous learning experiences, were not first in line for admission. As a result of this, she told us that:

"Sometimes the student says 'no, I do not want this subject approved on the basis of the appreciation of previous learning experiences. I am going apply for university and it is important for me to be able to compete with other students.' How appreciation of previous

learning experiences is being assessed within higher education we do not know, but persons often benefit from having a grade in a given subject.”

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

The sustainability of the activities at Sinsen Oslo Adult Education (OAE) partly depends on the role it is allocated within the entire organisation Oslo Adult Education. The central service office handles admission to all schools belonging to OAE. Hence, the leeway for designing its own recruitment policy is very limited and the main contribution to social inclusion of adult learners resides on the ability to assist students in passing their exams, which is the main role of Sinsen OAE. To fulfil this role, the school offers very flexible educational trajectories to the students, thus respecting the right for individual learners to be offered education adapted to individual needs. The many individual rights for students coupled with a very diverse group of learners, leads the school to target its motivational work very neatly and learners with low motivation are tightly followed up. Given that many students have problems passing their exams, the school offers extracurricular activities where retired teachers help students with their homework. All in all, the fine-tuned pedagogical activities organised at the school fall in line with priorities of State education policy and seem to be well defined within Oslo Adult Education as a whole. This points towards sustainability.

(2) Education of adult immigrants at Oslo Adult Education

Main objectives of the institution

Rosenhof, Skullerud and Smedstua are schools within the umbrella of OAE (Oslo Adult Education) that offer instructions and training for immigrants according to the Introduction Act. The main objectives of the schools are shaped according to the aims described in the Introduction Act:

“The aim of this act is to enhance newly arrived immigrants’ opportunity for participation in working life and society, and their economic independence.”

To achieve these aims the wording of the Act focuses extensively on learning Norwegian, enhancing knowledge about the Norwegian society, and work training. These three objects are reflected in the schools’ courses and general approach. The target group of the school is immigrants, but as the next paragraph will demonstrate, not all groups of immigrants have the same rights nor obligated to attend the same courses.

The following text is mainly based on interviews with two informants from one of these three schools.

Target groups

If an immigrant has newly arrived in Norway (i.e. lived there less than two years), she is included in a more extensive program, coined the Introduction Programme, that in addition to Norwegian and social science includes work training. Persons that belong to this group are also entitled to payment during their attendance in the Introduction Programme, which lasts for two years.

As the attentive reader will notice, the excerpt from the Introduction Act below the headings of “main objectives of institution” referred to newly arrived immigrants. This is because as the Introduction Act was introduced in 2004, it exclusively concerned a certain group of immigrants. However, subsequently, more precisely in 2005, the law was broadened to include instructions in Norwegian and social science for a larger group of immigrants. Unlike the groups that are defined as participants of the Introduction Programme, the new groups are not entitled to payment or work training during their participation. In other words, they receive instructions in Norwegian and social science.

The Introduction Act has defined immigrants in Norway according to whether they have the right and obligation, right but not obligation, obligation but not right to attend the instructions¹⁴. Those with right and obligation are by far the largest group.

“Right” to instructions means that the participants is entitled to free instructions and that the municipality where the participant has residence is obliged to offer the instructions.

“Obligation” means that the participant has to complete 300 hours with instructions to become eligible for applying for citizenship. Persons with either obligation, or right and obligation must attend at least 250 hours instructions in Norwegian and 50 hours instructions in social sciences. At most, a participant may receive additional 2700 hours with instructions in Norwegian.

Naturally, the target group of the schools is any person that fit into any of the aforementioned definitions in the Introduction Act of persons with either right or obligation (or both) to attend the programme. The distinctions between participants, i.e. whether they have right and/or obligation to attend, or whether they are participants in the Introduction Programme or merely join the Norwegian/social science programme, will not play a major role in the following. For the most of it, we refer to all the groups as participants.

Summary of the practices observed

In the same manner that the target groups of the schools are more or less defined by the Introduction Act, the main practices of them reflect the intentions of the act. As mentioned at the outset, the main focus remains on language training and social sciences.

When it comes to training in Norwegian language, they offer three educational tracks adapted according to the participants’ former experience of using written language, previous schooling, their native tongue, and knowledge of second language taught in school. The first track has the most gradual progress, while the third track is that fastest. Although the tracks differ in progress, the aim of them all is that participants should be able to become an independent speaker (tantamount to the B1 level in the Common European Framework of References for Languages). However, a substantial proportion of the participants are illiterate and these receive instructions combined with work practice.

¹⁴The following groups are defined as *having right and obligation*: overføringsflyktninger, persons with asylum status, personer med kollektiv beskyttelse, persons that are allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds, family reunited with any of the aforementioned groups or family reunited with Norwegian, Nordic or persons with a right of residence.

The following groups are defined as *not having the right, but obligation*: Labour immigrants outside the EEA-EFTA area and family reunited with this group.

Lastly, the rules confine the right and obligation pursuant to age, hence the following group *has the right, but are not obligated*: Persons above the age of 55.

The only group of foreigners in Norway that *does not have the right nor the obligation* to attend the programme are students, au pairs and others on temporary stay, Nordic citizens, and persons with permission of residence according to the EEA-EFTA set of rules.

According to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), the instructions in social sciences shall provide “necessary and practical information about laws and rules that form the foundation and regulates the private and public life. Knowledge to attitudes and unwritten rules in the Norwegian society shall be passed on. To impart basic values that form the basis for the Norwegian structure of society is also an important part of the training.” (UDI, 2005). The instructions are to be given in the participants’ native tongue or another language he or she understands. Topics within the social science classes are for instance immigrant in Norway, democracy, welfare and values, health, school, education and labour market, children and family, and population structure and nature. In addition, the following topics are to be taught when it is found “natural and necessary” (UDI, 2005): women’s rights, forced marriage, and genital mutilation.

Despite the fact that the schools are able to assign participants to the three different tracks already described, it is important to bear in mind that the population of participants is immensely diverse. They come from different parts of the world with, to put it mildly, various backgrounds. Hence, according to our impression, the school goes to great length in differentiating the courses and pedagogical approach to the various groups. As the next paragraph demonstrates, this has led to an institution with several different practices.

The practices we mapped out in the interviews left us with a clear impression that there are several of them within the institution. This topic touches upon already mentioned factors, but we believe that an important reason as to why there are several practices is related to the heterogeneous student mass. For instance, the school offers tailored courses for businesses in public and private sector, adapted courses for participants that are not able to utilise the ordinary courses (i.e. primarily traumatized refugees, but also participants with e.g. depression, anxiety, other mental related problems, lapse of memory, or physical pains), and the focus of yet another section remains on women with little or no educational experience, many of whom are illiterate.

The point of mentioning these three approaches is to provide some examples of the school’s many attempts of adapting the courses according to the different needs of their participants. In addition to the already aforementioned practices towards different groups, one informant mentioned other approaches of the school:

“In another section we have those who know how to read and write on their native tongue, but which is not written in the Latin alphabet, for instance women from areas in Thailand or Pakistan where they have not learned English in school. In a third section we have male participants who have not had the opportunity to go to school or do not know the Latin alphabet.”

The statement exemplifies additional courses that the school offers for participants with different needs. The same informant regarded such an approach as necessary and said the following about one of the groups:

“I believe that theory in combination with something else, practice, is the clue for adults without previous schooling, cause then they feel that they master something.”

Further on, the informant said that practice and qualification programs implied a break from theoretical instructions and the opportunity to become qualified for a job functioned as a major motivational factor for many participants:

“After the instructions are finish they [the participants in one particular section] are able to attend theoretical courses for the driver licence or join a cleaning service training course. You are dependent on a carrot, because for those who have not learned to read or write the path is severely long.”

Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies – barriers to entrance

Since 2007 all recruitment to the departments within OAE (Oslo Adult Education) has been centralized to the service office. As a result, none of the schools are concerned with this issue to a significant degree on a daily basis. Both informants seemed satisfied with this arrangement; although one informant said that it had caused some problems due to the fact that the service office is, unlike the school, located on the outskirts the city's centre, accessible by public transport. Prior to the centralization of the service office, all recruitment took place at the different schools within OAE. As the following quote demonstrates, the nearby location of the school seemed to affect the participants' probability of participation:

“At the beginning [when the centralization of recruitment was introduced], we had problems because we were declined to permit admission. The following two years after the centralization of the service office we did not have the opportunity to grant admission locally, so they [the participants] had to go up there [to the service office], but they could not find their way. What has made it possible for us to get hold of the illiterate is that they have been able to pass the doorstep and say ‘Norwegian’. We have now gained the right to grant admission again, so a great proportion of them come directly here and then we send their papers to the service office. It is pivotal that we are able to grant admission.”

When it comes to the general recruitment of participants to the school's education and training, one of our informants said that she believed that the grapevine accounted for most of it.

According to the informants, participants in the introduction courses in Norwegian and social sciences encountered several barriers for enrolling and completing their education. In the following we have categorized the most prominent ones in four categories, although they in many cases overlap. The following categories are: Lack of and barriers to motivation, participants' off-school obligations, unintended effects of public support systems, and lastly lack of social network.

Lack of and barriers to motivation

When it comes to recruitment to the courses one informant speculated whether the lack motivation constituted an important barrier for enrolling. She believed that in some cases the lack of motivation was caused by a lack of belief in that learning Norwegian would enhance chances in the labour market. Consequently, enrolling introduced itself as pointless. According to the informant, the participants often explained their belief by referring to persons whom they knew and who had made all the right steps, but remained without a job. Assessing whether the chances of getting a job are great or small is not the aim of this paper, but the views of the informant accorded with what she thought the participants believed in the sense that she argued that the tests did little to increase the chance of employment in the labour market: “If you complete the Norwegian test number two, you may apply for basic education, but it has no value for the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. So in reality it has little value.”

As the quote demonstrates, completing the Norwegian course makes participants eligible for continuing further up the educational ladder, something which could increase labour market opportunities. It might be that this is a necessary step for many of the participants because it is often required that employees have completed upper secondary school for obtaining a position. Furthermore, the informant said that many of the participants have had various vocations within their home country, but since the educational system and certification system is fairly rigid in Norway, foreigners need to have their qualifications approved by Norwegian authorities before they can apply for a position as e.g. a plumber or machinist. To conclude, a possible source to lack of motivation may be related to participants' lack of belief in that the courses offered by the schools substantially improves the chance of success in the labour market.

The other informant highlighted a different aspect that could lower motivation, namely that participants came to the school with too high expectations of what it could do to their career. Allegedly, such beliefs were prevalent even among participants with no previous education:

“Everyone makes an individual plan, and one of them wanted to become a doctor and she has four years of schooling. We have to orientate participants according to reality. We tell them: if you had had schooling from your own country you could probably have become a lawyer or anything else. Your children may become anything they want here in Norway, but you have to work in a laundry or something like that in the beginning.”

Orientating participants according to reality was an ongoing task within other schools in OAE as well, and according to our informant facing the disparity between the participants' initial beliefs and their actual opportunities was a tough and often discouraging experience for many.

Furthermore, one informant argued that waiting to enter school could severely damage participants' motivation. To start with, she drew attention to the time the Norwegian Directorate for Immigration (UDI) usually spends on assessing applications for residence, which is necessary for receiving free instructions in Norwegian:

“Another problem is that it usually takes a tremendous amount of time from the moment one arrives the country and apply for residence permit to one obtains it. And if you want to start the Norwegian classes before the residence permit is obtained you have to pay by yourself. It costs NOK 5500 for a semester that lasts for two months, so while the application is assessed you have to pay by yourself. Many do not have any money and it takes an immensely amount of time for UDI to assess the applications. It may take up to six or even nine months from the application arrives their system to the applicant is registered as a person with right and obligation to Norwegian classes, and thereby eligible for free instructions.”

Another element that kept participants waiting was the lack of childcare and available places at the school:

“Attending the Norwegian classes is not by any means a criterion for obtaining a place in the kindergarten. The waiting list for kindergarten is very long. At the same time, there is a waiting list for enrolling in the school, I believe it is three months. In my mind it is of utmost importance that you receive an educational offer at once one is motivated for it. Because when there is a waiting list for three months, some start looking for other alternatives.”

To sum up, the informants mentioned three factors that functioned discouraging with regards to enrolling and completing the introduction course. First of all, one informant said that participants did not believe that the course would significantly improve their opportunities on the labour market. Secondly, the other informant put the gist of the matter on an almost opposite mechanism, i.e. that the participants had too high expectations concerning the educational (and later occupational) opportunities the programme would equip them with. Consequently, the school's attempt to orientate them according to reality was perceived as discouraging by the participants. The third factor was waiting. For different reasons, many of the participants had to wait up to several months before they could enrol one of the schools. We have no way of knowing how prevalent any of these three factors are.

Participants' off school obligations

One informant continued to elaborate on other barriers that were current for staying in and completing school. These were first and foremost related to obligations in participants' personal life or obligations related to other authorities such as reception centres for asylum seekers. According to our informant, the coordination between the reception centre for asylum seekers and the school constituted a barrier for many of the participants. The reason for this is that there are ongoing activities and meetings at the reception centres that participants that live in them should be present at. As a result, these activities and meetings often collide with the instructions at the schools. Our informant claimed that the bad coordination was a result of the reception centres' rigidity, that they were not willing to change their arrangements although they knew that they collided with the Norwegian classes.

Work constituted another obligation that hindered participants from attending the classes:

“It might be that the job one possesses does not allow one to attend school. If you have a fulltime job you have to attend the classes in the evening, and perhaps you have to study afterwards.”

Further on, we can easily imagine that if a participant has a family in addition, the obligations might become overwhelming. For participants with a family, our informant admitted, without specifying what changes she desired, that the school has not been able to adapt their arrangements to them. Further on, by referring to the same group, she said that many of them did not manage to stay in school because there were so many things related to their family that rushed through their heads. Some were constantly thinking about their family that remained in their home country, while others were concerned about economic issues.

Unintended effects of public support systems

The lack of coordination between the reception centres for asylum seekers and the school and the time UDI spent on assessing applications for residence, could be viewed as two examples of a more general dysfunction in the relation between public institutions and arrangements. One informant apprehended the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) as bigoted as it does not regard the Norwegian courses as a measure for getting a job:

“I perceive NAV as a major barrier because they do not regard Norwegian classes as a measure for obtaining a job. Not even when the person in question is on occupational rehabilitation are the Norwegian classes regarded as a measure that enables the person to obtain a job.”

Such dysfunctions could be the result of the several different welfare arrangements that are based on the best intentions, but when these arrangements reach the surface of persons' practical life they start to cross each other and sometimes this crossing causes unintended effects, which often are unwanted as well.

The other informant drew attention to cash benefits as a measure that represented a severe barrier for attending classes for female participants. The main intention behind cash benefits is that it should contribute to give families more time and care for their own children and provide greater freedom of choice when it comes to how children are to be taken care of. More concretely, it entails that one of the parents should have the opportunity to spend time at home with their child when it is between one and three years, instead of taking it to the kindergarten. Consequently, the cash benefit is reduced or not given (depending on how much of the time the child spends in kindergarten) if the child goes to kindergarten. Our informant said that the problem with this arrangement is that families are given an economic incentive for not taking their children to kindergarten; consequently participants stay at home with their child instead of leaving their child to kindergarten while they themselves go to school:

“Of course, if you put NOK 3300 on the table and say that you may have them if you do not take your children to kindergarten, this does not indicate that you should make an effort at school, the signal is as double as it possible could be. The cash benefit should have been removed. The cash benefit causes a major barrier for women to attend Norwegian classes, because it is so much money we are talking about. For instance, if you attend a class that lasts for sixteen hours a week, they withdraw NOK 2000 of the cash benefit each month. Many of the participants do not want that; so they prefer not to attend the classes, and what is the consequence of that? Nothing.”

The informant also confirmed that participants had left the school with the aim of receiving full cash benefit:

“Sometimes we tell the participants that we have to reduce the cash benefits when they have their children in kindergarten, often they say that they are going to consider whether they are going to continue, but we never see them again.”

Our informant emphasised that although the cash benefit does not amount to a tremendous amount of money for many Norwegians, the amount of money presented itself as much more for the participants since many of them keep their consumption at more or less the same level as they were used to from their home country, in addition to the fact that the income of immigrant families often is lower than that of the majority of the population.

In addition to the assertions she made in the previous quotes, the same informant highlighted another aspect of cash benefit:

“Free kindergarten is very important because it is often men who dispose the economy of the family, including the cash benefit. If the husband does not think it is important that the wife attends, if he does not want the cash benefit reduced, he might simply say no.”

Within these assertions lies an assumption that women were responsible for care taking tasks at home, i.e. if the child(ren) did not attend kindergarten, the wife and not the husband, was the person who stayed at home to look after the child(ren). The other informant argued that husbands on a more or less general basis had an interest in denying their wives participation in the educational programs. The reason for this was that education amounted to a factor in a power game in relations, and that the less knowledge women have, the more power the

men had. Consequently, men saw education as a threat to their position in the relationship and therefore denied their wives it.

It is important to emphasise that one of the informants asserted that cash benefits did not only have a negative impact on recruitment and remaining within school, but emphasised that prior to the introduction of it, the school could offer free kindergarten, which was very attractive for many participants:

“I want to say that it in fact was possible for us to provide admission for those who said that they wanted to attend school, was great. We were able to tell participants that we had kindergarten for their children, so they might start whenever they wanted.” Consequently, in regards to recruitment, the school lost a pull-effect (free kindergarten) and received a push-effect (cash benefit).

Earlier during the interview, one of the informants said that the cash benefits sent a double signal to the participants at the school. The reason for this is, she argued, was that on the one hand, participants were encouraged to attend school, but on the other the hand cash benefits represented an economic incentive to look after one’s children instead. The same informant asserted that one of the greatest challenges of succeeding with the education and training of the school was that other welfare rights signaled that participants did not have to perform to make a living in our society. Her views are reflected in her answer of what she would do if she had the power to change the existing arrangements:

“First of all I would get rid of the cash benefit, and then I would reduce social security benefits so that one did not have the option between such benefits and training for work. I would not have allowed that one received money for attending Norwegian classes without training for work in addition. During the introduction programme the participants receive NOK 12000 [i.e. two times the basic amount offered by the National Insurance to all participants in the Introduction Programme] each month for attending six hours of Norwegian classes every day. It is not even demanded that they perform, as long as they attend they receive a great amount of money. Further on, you may add to the picture that they already have been granted an apartment and everything else they need and they still receive NOK 12000, and still they skip classes... What are we teaching people in our society?”

As the statement from the informant demonstrates, she was very critical against many of the welfare benefits that participants can receive and she asserted that the benefits do not have the intended effect, but on the contrary contributed to shape participants’ attitudes and actions towards a sense that they were rewarded regardless of their effort.

According to our informant such attitudes are already prevalent in the Norwegian society. To exemplify it she drew attention to the role executive officers (within NAV) that follow up some of the participants played:

“It is easiest to find a job to the participants during the summer because everyone is having their vacation and the employers offer temporary positions lasting for ten weeks. It is a nice trial for our participants. When I tell the executive officer that I have been able to get hold of a summer job for the participant in question, the executive officers response is that they [the participant] want vacation as well, even though this is a great opportunity for the participant.”

Later, she added that, “The greatest racism is that we do not see the potential of these persons.” The point the informant was trying to make was that the generous welfare benefits is just the top

of the iceberg when it comes to factors that contribute to confirm the idea that one does not need to make an effort in the Norwegian society to make a living. The ideas are reflected in persons' opinions and attitudes as well, here exemplified by the executive officers who are responsible for the participants who, according to our informant, united with the participants' wish of vacation, often instead of encourage them to take the opportunity of work experience.

The point the informant made was that the generous welfare benefits is just the top of the iceberg when it comes to factors that contribute to confirm the idea that one does not need to make an effort to make a living in the Norwegian society. The ideas are reflected in persons' opinions and attitudes as well. The other informant told a story of how immigrants had adopted the idea that effort is not needed:

“One day a man burst into my office and screamed because his wife stayed at school for seven and a half hour each day. He had been in Norway for more than five years and knew that one did not work for more than five hours each day here... What is going on? It is really bad.”

Lack of social network

The last barrier that an informant identified was the lack of network which enabled participants to practice Norwegian outside the school:

“... it might be that one does not see the point of attending school as long as one does not have a network where you can practice Norwegian. In my opinion, regardless of which of the three schools we are talking about, Norwegian is taught in a vacuum. As soon as you arrive at home everything goes in your own language. If you are married to a Norwegian husband you talk in English. So they do not have an arena for practicing the language they learn here, that is an important barrier. Many of these do not have any contact with Norwegians at all.”

Strengths and weaknesses of the practice(s) - including financing and student support

After focusing on the barriers of staying in and completing school, we asked our informants to explain what changes and adaptations the school could make to help participants overcome the barriers. Some of these changes have already been mentioned in the previous section through the quotations of the informants, e.g. one of them identified the removal of cash benefits as a measure for increasing participation and completion for women.

The other informant emphasised that staying in school and completion was not only the school's responsibility, and added that participants also had to make a contribution and that the lack of motivation that some of the participants had was not a sufficient reason for not attending the classes. Furthermore, she argued that participants had to pull themselves together and realise that they were the only one who could see to that they completed the schooling.

However, she acknowledged that the school could and already was making adjustments. For instance, she said that they were improving when it comes to information that was conveyed to participants. As an example, she brought up the fact that the information regarding attendance rules had been given in Norwegian. As a result, many of the participants did not understand them and failed to follow them. She also highlighted another topic which is related to communication namely that the school often depends on substitute teachers:

“When the teacher is sick, they have to cope with new teachers. Within a short time span they may have three substitute teachers. They get used to how the teacher speaks, but suddenly there is a new teacher with a new dialect and then it all stops. And after two days an additional substitute teacher arrives and he is unaware of the [study] progression participants have been following. In the end it all becomes very frustrating.”

The same informant underlined that the courses should, in one way or another, represent the first step into the labour market. In some of the sections within the schools, the courses functioned as a step into the labour market, but the great majority of the participants exclusively received instructions in Norwegian and social sciences and no work training. Previously, the same informant had identified the Norwegian course's lack of influence on the labour market opportunities as one of the major sources to low motivations of the participants. She therefore suggested that NAV in cooperation with the schools in one way or another could and should make sure that the Norwegian course represented a first step into the labour market.

According to our informants there is not a student council at the school, we therefore asked how they received feedback from the participants and suggestions of how the school could improve. One of the informants said that all participants could give feedback to the teachers if something was not working out for them, but at the same time she acknowledged that for many participants there was a big threshold for doing so, and added that it could vary according to the culture and customs the participants in question are used to. All of the participants are supposed to fill out a client participation form, but the informant once again questioned whether the opinions of the participants were reflected in these surveys. When we asked her why she thought so, she referred to the threshold again and said that for many participants it is very unlikely that they will give negative response even in surveys.

One informant said that the most frequent feedback that the participants gave was that they, in some way or another, were dissatisfied with the instructions, e.g. some of the complaints regarded the pace of the progression, some the high number of substitute teachers, and that the participants do not thrive in class because of the teacher's attitude. The informant added that the system at school was quite rigid; as a consequence, participants were not allowed to change class without permission from the teacher.

Both informants regarded the milieu within the school as good. On the question of whether the participants thrive at school, one of the informants said,

“Yes, I believe so. Those I talk to enjoy studying, because it is also a social place where one can meet other. Some are living quite isolated, perhaps only with their family, and for many it is nice to come to a place in a different social setting.”

She added that the school yard, cafeteria and the library are popular hang-outs.

Furthermore, both informants said that the relation between teachers and participants on the overall is good. On the background of numerous conversations she had had with different participants, she told us that recognition, being seen and spoken to, asked how you are and so on, played a major role for whether the participants showed up and thrived at school.

One of the informants emphasised that they prioritized on-the-job training of their staff. Much of this training dealt with cultural issues. In relation to this, they often travelled to other countries to learn about practices and how religious and cultural topics were dealt with in other countries. The informant gave a concrete example of how these travels had paid off with regards to cultural matters that have emerged at the school:

“We are very practical inclined in our daily work and we have regular staff meetings where we discuss several issues that arise. Recently we declined a request of being allowed to leave the class because two participants said they had to pray. There is not a single country in the world where participants are allowed to leave the class because they are going to pray.”

This conclusion seemed to be, partially at least, affected by experiences the informant and the rest of the teaching staff had had as they visited other countries where some of the participants of the schools originate from.

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

One section of the school is a so-called growth and production centre whose main focus is to qualify unskilled participants to the labour market. According to the centre’s website, it is built on a “holistic view, where interdisciplinary cooperation and belief in development is central. This implies pedagogical adaptation of lectures and work. The results are measured in accordance with self-development, social awareness and economic independence”

One informant emphasised the importance of the centre’s approach:

“I believe that theory in combination with something else, practice, is the clue for adults without previous schooling, because they then feel that they master something.”

The informant added that practice and qualification programs implied a break from theoretical instructions and the opportunity to become qualified for a job functioned as a major motivational factor for many participants:

“After the instructions are finish, they [the participants in one particular section] are able to attend theoretical courses for the driver licence or join a cleaning service training course. You are dependent on a carrot, because for those who have not learned to read or write the path is severely long.”

Lessons to learn/transferable practices

Above all, the interviews at the school demonstrate the importance of being aware of the many unintended consequences that practical changes and changes in policy may have for various groups.

With regard to practical changes, both informants said that, overall, they were satisfied with the centralization of the service office. We also received similar response from other informants within OAE. However, as a previous statement from one of our informants demonstrated, the establishment of the service office did not benefit all groups. Illiterate persons had problems finding their way to the new service office. And since the school was not allowed to grant admission during the first period after the new organisation of recruitment, some participants may not have received the courses they both needed and wanted to attend. These consequences are not only unintended, but also unwanted.

In addition to potential participants who are affected by this problem, third parties, like the participants’ kids, may suffer from not learning as much Norwegian as they could have, or from the fact that their parents do not gain as much knowledge about the Norwegian society as they could. Hence, it turns out to be crucial that those who instigate changes affecting current or future participants, do this through conversations with leaders of adult education institutions, the teaching staff and participants from the different sections of OAE.

In the current case, we saw how the organisational changes (i.e. the centralization of recruitment) led to challenges for participants, especially illiterate participants because the Service Office was located at the outskirts of the city centre. Such unintended consequences are often difficult to foresee. Consequently, it seems import for OAE to practice a similar form of flexibility that they did in the case of recruitment to the school, i.e. when participants were allowed to enrol in schools located in their neighbourhood

Considering changes in policy, feedback from one of the informants was especially harsh when it came to the introduction of cash benefits. The public debate over cash benefits has been prolonged and is still ongoing in Norwegian mass media. The topic touches upon several issues, e.g. social equity, family values, child care, integration, and gender politics to mention a few. We are not sure whether the consequences of the policy were foreseen. However, it seems clear that they were not intended in the sense that the outcome (e.g. some participants' refrained from applying to or left the school) was not a result that the policy originally aimed at. If it is true that some, or even many, of the participants affiliated with the schools refrain from enrolling or continuing the educational courses due to the State cash benefits they receive, policy makers could try to counterbalance the cash benefits, by e.g. introducing other incentives for enrolling or remaining in school, or – alternatively – by changing the design of the State policy of cash benefits.

Adult education at tertiary level

In order to understand the context, the reader should have in mind that there are mainly four ways of granting admission to higher education in Norway.

By far, most students apply for higher education through a central called the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS). NUCAS collects all the applications and rank students with the same preferences (i.e. study programme) according to their average grades from upper secondary school. The students compete over the available slots within each programme, hence educational institutions and programs with a large number of applicants are able accept those with the higher grades, while rejecting those with lower ones. The threshold of granting admission to higher education varies a great deal from different institutions and programs within them; in some cases a program may have fifteen applicants per each available slot, while others have less than one.

A second way of entering the university is by appreciation of prior learning experiences. This alternative is for students above the age of 25 years without any credentials from upper secondary school.

The third way of entering the university is by applying to courses with available slots after the students admitted for a certain program have chosen the courses they wish to enrol in. This option is available for both students with credentials from upper secondary school and students that apply on the background of appreciation of previous learning experiences. Admission to these courses follows the principle first come, first serve; hence, students that fulfil the minimum criteria of entrance have equal chances for admission regardless of whether they are students with high or low grades from upper secondary school, or whether they apply on the background of appreciation of previous learning experiences.

A fourth way of receiving admission to the university is by applying to it on the background of previous completed studies from another higher educational institution, e.g. students who have completed a bachelor degree from another institution may be eligible for master studies at the university.

At tertiary level of the educational system the main providers of adult education are universities and university colleges, the latter often specialise in providing professional studies while the former have traditionally been strong in carrying out research. However, the two institutional typologies now converge and they are subsumed under the same law. Our interviews were carried out in Oslo, at the university college and at the university of the capital.

1) University College of Oslo

Main objectives of the institution

Oslo University College (OUC) offers the broadest portfolio of professional studies available in Norway. A staff of 1100 offers 12 000 students more than 50 academic degrees in the

following areas: Business Administration, Engineering, Fine Art, Design, Drama, Health Sciences, Media Studies, Social Sciences, and Teacher Education.

In the Norwegian capital the number of immigrants and their descendants has risen considerably during the last decades. The city's university college has gradually become more concerned about how the recruitment of students is reflecting the diversity of Oslo's population, which is its major recruitment source; although candidates from all over Norway are entitled to be enrolled. The bulk of the institution's eligibility rules are defined by law and the institutional leeway in terms of defining admission rules is quite limited. Remains then the possibility of *influencing* the recruitment without applying specific rules for any target groups, for example by *inviting* ethnic minorities to apply for enrolment. This is a deliberate policy of the university college and falls in line with central ideas introduced in Government white papers from shifting political coalitions in office.

However, institutions at higher education level are not formally obliged to put in place specific recruitment measures towards, e.g., ethnic minorities. Nor is there any financial mechanism to increase access for certain target groups. Mainstream political thinking is that social equality in access to higher education is (by default) regulated by loans and grants offered by the State Educational Loan Fund. Moreover, citizens are entitled to benefit from general welfare arrangements set up to ensure social equality during the life span. The assumption that the State and its regional/local bifurcations should cater for social equality in higher education is framing how higher education institutions practice their "institutional freedom".

Oslo University College has however decided that the recruited students should reflect the diversity of the city population. Moreover, this objective should penetrate into the working procedures of the institution. This social widening-up touches on barriers not only along an ethnic dimension but also in terms of gender, disabilities, socio-economic background etc.

Target groups

The policy of the university college to arrive at a more balanced ethnic recruitment is split into three strands; one centred on preliminary investigations leading to motivational work, a second on mainstreaming and a third strand devoted to adaptation of educational courses. Each strand consists of various measures or actions. Note should be taken of the fact that neither our informants nor documents issued by the university college use such an ordering into strands and measures/actions. The proposed structure is therefore a construction done by the authors of this national report in order to comply with the guidelines of the research project.

Summary of the practices observed

OUC is a huge institution, by Norwegian standards, and the practice scrutinised in our study is only one of numerous. The following text reveals, however, that the attempts to actively recruit from ethnic minorities are systemised to the extent that the practice seems to be institutionalised. In other words, it does not appear as an isolated practice on the brink of the institution's main activity.

The first strand goes back to 2003 when one post in the central administration of the university college was earmarked for recruiting more students with ethnic minority background. This means targeted information to selected immigrant groups, i.a. the Pakistani and Turkish community, subsequent to prior investigations of attitudes towards learning in such ethnic

communities. The selection is based on statistics of educational ranking among descendants from various ethnic groups. It soon turned out that identifying subcultures of the community was pertinent for the elaboration of recruitment campaigns.

The communities are approached by building on existing networks and associations as well as making use of spokespersons and opinion makers within the communities. Students with a corresponding ethnic background are engaged as role models, communicating in their familiar language at meetings with the target groups.

One informant whom we interviewed told that there is a widespread idea in immigrant communities that student fees apply at tertiary education level. This impression has to do with immigrants coming from countries with expensive education and training. Our informant pointed out that this impression is transmitted via advertisements from private university colleges where high student fees apply. Hence, while education in public higher education institutions is free of charge, although students have to pay for their educational material, - it is important to pass this message to immigrant communities.

Immigrant parents and other family members often expect that the young generation improves the standing of the family by becoming doctors, engineers or lawyers. The technical health professions are related to both engineering and health work, and nursing comes next when medicine is unobtainable. Our informant maintains that the narrow selection of studies is a challenge to their recruitment work, which is increasingly centred on widening the selection of professional studies by means of communication and the influence from role models.

The second strand will be labelled mainstreaming, defined as the systematic integration of the priorities and needs of unprivileged groups in all policies and general measures of Oslo University College (OUC), from the planning stage through to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Once this integration achieved, diversity becomes a 'normal phenomenon' in the university college, which deliberately strives to be multicultural and international.

The 'mainstreaming strand' rests on several measures introduced to boost a widened participation in each topic taught at the university college. As the university college is large by Norwegian standards, each topic is organised into departments of adjacent subjects, all of them trying to set up their own strategy for adapting the training to an increasingly multicultural workforce. Among the activities and measures contributing to mainstreaming are the following:

Intercult

Co-ordinated by the central administration, there is an activity labelled Intercult, consisting of annual call for proposals earmarked for projects primarily submitted by the teaching staff in each academic topic. The 2009 call led to the allocation of around 0,5 million euro to projects for designing a multicultural and international learning environment. The specific 2009 priority focused on the "further development of topics and courses, accomplishment of individual study plans, upskilling and increased co-operation with foreign educational institutions." This scheme is scheduled to run for four years until 2011.

Our informant from the central administration says that the implementation of the projects under this scheme is often coupled to attempts to modify attitudes among the teaching staff, e.g. by challenging preconceived ideas about immigrants' performance. The informant stressed that teachers need skills for handling multicultural environments. Teachers also require some practical tools for overcoming stereotypical ideas about immigrants. During this work it is also important to bring along the administrative staff at all levels.

Integration by means of immersion into the Norwegian language

In this regard, we interviewed an informant who works in a centre established with a view to stimulate pedagogical development in vocational and professional training at the university college. Such development is also needed for succeeding in integrating foreign speaking students. Albeit also touching on strand 1 covering recruitment, most activities of the centre gravitate around mainstreaming, so we therefore choose to present them under strand 2.

The emphasis on language training is not only linked to an appreciation of how mastering of the Norwegian language contributes to integration at the university but also to the importance of having a sound knowledge in Norwegian while practicing a profession. The latter requires insight into the everyday language spoken e.g. by patients and into linguistic differences between age groups. Furthermore, a good mastering of your own professional language has to be supplemented by a certain knowledge of how other professions speak, thus enabling the candidate to involve in multi-professional conversations that often are important while practicing in a profession.

The continuation of the project “Norwegian technical language” also emphasised training in the Norwegian language and intercultural communication. A key element was the project *Multicultural study environment*, which started in 2003. Prior to the new project, similar courses already running were assessed with a view to capture the state-of-art.

Participants are applicants to the university college who for some reason feel that they are unsure in front of their future study situation. Although ‘unsure’ has many connotations, the organisers are satisfied with the response from applicants. According to our informant, the experiences that course participants bring into the project are coherent and varied enough to constitute a fertile soil for a course lasting one week. The average age of the participants is 31, thus above the average of the total student population. The typical participant is a woman with previous job experiences. Annually around 100 participants enrol in the course. All applicants to the course are normally allowed to start up.

The course is jointly run by the pedagogical centre of the university college and teachers from its various departments. This collaboration is deemed vital for a successful integration of the project in the day-to-day activities of the institution.

The course content contributes to transmitting a realistic view of what studying at the university college actually means for each student. The result is that students develop a sound attitude to their studies, for example in terms of workload compared with their family duties and their skills level when using the Norwegian language in different learning situations.

These results may be related to the pedagogical approach used during the course, i.a. trying to stimulate multiple senses, like visual impressions. Along this line of thought, the participants are invited to make a drawing of their essay at Bachelor level and are then invited to explain their drawing before a group of participants. One pedagogical effect of this exercise is that the producers of every drawing do not simply reproduce textual phrases, as they do when writing, but instead make use of their own words and understanding of the subject. Hence, a larger vocabulary is stimulated through such exercises.

Since 2003 when the course *Multicultural study environment* was introduced, feedback from the participants has been registered at two intervals. Moreover, the teachers involved report that the course provides them with more tools for how to collaborate with colleagues and students in tackling the integration of ethnic minorities. Evaluation is otherwise integrated into the quality assurance procedures in each department of the university college.

PLUSS

Another ambitious project contributing to *mainstreaming* at the university college is called PLUSS. It is financed by Intercult and aims to link all student services and all other university college staff, including the teachers, who are involved at various stages of an educational path for immigrant students. This starts with those in charge of recruiting students and ends with those contributing to the passage into the labour market, e.g. job advisers. One informant from the pedagogical centre tells us that this is a very ambitious integration project, which is utilised by the entire student population. Coupled to the fact that it has been recently set up, there is still a lot to do. One approach chosen at the project inception stage, was to map out all institutional student support that does not fall into the ordinary education and training offered at the university college. Hence, all additional support that contributes to a multicultural study environment is put on paper with a view to assess it and ponder on how to improve the existing services.

A third strand concerns the adaptation of training in specific topics to immigrants' needs. This is done by introducing a special educational path for foreign students with certain knowledge of the Norwegian language. This training was initially started for teachers in kindergartens, labelled 'workplace based education of pre-school teachers'. The training is based on the workplace because teachers from the university college train the students on their workplace and there are only a few gatherings on the campus. This formula was later enlarged to cover pre-school teachers irrespective of their linguistic origin. Hence, also candidates with Norwegian as their mother tongue can attend this training.

Along the same line of thought, eight university colleges have set up a scheme for immigrant teachers who do not have competences equal to what is required in Norway. These immigrants normally practice as assistants while teaching in their mother tongue. The new scheme invites them to take a Bachelor degree, which later can be extended to a complete teachers' education with the duration of Bachelor + one year. Finally, a scheme for immigrant nurses without competencies equal to what is required in Norway has been introduced.

One of our informants suggests that more such offers, deemed very useful for immigrants, should be developed for other health and care professions. By this way, the immigrants could go through 'supplementary training' upskilling them to a level recognised in the Norwegian educational system.

The example of 'supplementary training' of foreign nurses in order to comply with Norwegian rules for the practicing of this profession, is illustrative in the sense that the national health service has organised training of whole classes so that these nurses soon could start working, thus compensating for a scarcity of nursery labour.

Alternatively, foreign nurses alongside whatever person with the right to attend training in Norway can apply to have their prior learning experiences appreciated. Admittance of candidates to higher education on the basis of prior learning experiences is done according to certain central rules, and an evaluation of documents added by a personal statement capturing the applicants' motivations.

Our informant underlines that more liberal admission rules are not necessarily to the advantage of learners coming from non-traditional backgrounds. She explains this by pointing to recent studies of candidates admitted to higher education with a minimum of knowledge in Norwegian. These tend to lag behind throughout their entire study and scarcely any catch-up effects are discerned. All applicants who apply on the basis of foreign qualifications have to document that they have passed a test or exam in Norwegian language and can prove adequate knowledge of the English language.

Finally, another project is also addressing nurses. It is called “*Multicultural study environments by means of good practices*” and involves the pedagogical centre alongside departments for nursery education in the whole region. It aims to develop a permanent course for applicants as well as enrolled students who need support in improving their language or communication skills.

Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies – barriers to entrance

As to the socio-economic background of students at OUC, professional tracks offered in university education colleges generally recruit more students from low-income families than the general study tracks do. The weight of studies leading to chartered professions in this university college therefore leads to a presumably high number of students from less advantaged families¹⁵. Furthermore, 18% of the students at the university college are either first or second generation immigrants. 40% of this group arrived in Norway when they were adults. The 18% share is among the highest measured in Norwegian higher education.

Students from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to accumulate at certain studies, like engineering, nursing and some technical health professions. Hence, the uneven distribution of these students among the professional studies of the university college is a challenge to the recruitment work.

Strengths and weaknesses of the practices

Instead of putting plus and minus to the observations reported above, we choose to assess what could secure their endurance and learning effects; in other words, their sustainability. A coupled of strengths/weaknesses can be discerned.

(1) Modification of attitudes

Our point of departure is that the three strands described above constitute a kind of model for how the university college approaches recruitment of students with an ethnic minority background. Then, its strengths and weaknesses can be discussed while taking into account that the model partly aims to modify attitudes, be it among possible applicants to the university college or among the staff. We have identified three aspects of modifications of attitudes.

One key element is that *immigrants’ perception of higher education* should be changed. Hence, the solution has been to target specific nationalities, namely young immigrants, their parents and even the community they form part of. The latter point is illustrated by differences between immigrant communities in their propensity to start up higher education studies. In this regard, our informant reports that ethnic communities that are unified, such as Indians, Tamils and Vietnamese, more easily develop a culture emphasising the value of educational skills, while such attitudes are less easily nurtured in, e.g., the more fragmented Somalian community.

The reputation of higher education seems to follow socio-economic barriers. Research on access to higher education shows that students with academic parents prefer to enrol in traditional universities opposed to university colleges. The latter count short professional educational

¹⁵The evaluation of the so-called “Quality reform” confirmed that higher education students from less advantaged families prefer vocational training compared with general topics.

paths that have proven to present less obstacles for candidates with low-skill and low-income parents, independently of their ethnic origin.

Against this background, our informant underlines that socio-economic factors cutting across ethnic barriers severely influence recruitment patterns. She maintains that immigrant youngsters from the city's West End almost take for granted that they will apply for enrolment in higher education.

Although their parents may not have an academic background, this is a prevalent attitude because these immigrant youngsters form part of a youth culture in which higher education is a kind of *rite de passage*, determined by how higher education is viewed by non-immigrant West End parents.

Such a positive view on higher education is not part of the youth culture on the city's East End, where the number of families with academic background is lower. Our informant enlarges on this point by referring to recruitment campaigns in other places in Eastern Norway, such as Drammen and Moss, which both are former industrial strongholds. Here, as among the East Enders referred to above, the passage from upper secondary education to university training is not considered as a natural step.

The informant maintains that the ambition to go for higher education is not only a question of attitudes and informed choice. Young immigrants settled in Norway during adolescence or as adults often have difficulties with a new language and different learning styles and expectations. They strive to qualify for admission to higher education and to fulfil their education. Economy is also a barrier, as they often lack support from their family and have familiar obligations besides their studies.

Differences between gender play an important role in determining the propensity of adults to complete upper secondary education and in recruiting to higher education. The tendency that girls perform better than boys seems to apply to all communities addressed by the recruitment policy of the university college. Our informant underlines one factor aggravating boys' lower participation in higher education: In some ethnic communities a widespread expectation is that young people should contribute to the family income. And it should be noted that the *family* is not simply a parents-children entity but a larger group of relatives, even groups of families. The eyes are then turned on young boys.

Seen together, the three aspects of modifying attitudes are deeply rooted in social inequalities that it will take time to modify. It follows from this that the recruitment and integration of students with an immigrant background in a university college is a long-term project. The long duration does however not render the recruitment model as such fragile.

2) Integration on campus

When moving from recruitment of ethnic minority students to their integration in the university college, it might be that the average age of all students enrolled, which is 27, imposes extra efforts on the institution. The point is that mature students do not convene in the evenings as easily as younger students do. Hence, it is more difficult to forge ties between ethnic groups by arranging campus activities. Note should however be taken to the fact that an average age of 27 is normal for university colleges offering a high number of professional topics, while students in traditional universities tend to be younger.

On this point our other informant stresses that students can apply for grants in order to develop study environments that favour the integration of people from diverse backgrounds. A few projects for immigrant women have emerged from such grants.

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed including financing

The three strands apt for immigrants delineated above are financed from multiple sources. The majority of the projects constituting the strands are co-financed between the University college and public institutions; such as the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and the Municipality of Oslo. The future funding therefore depends both on the willingness to allocate internal resources and on the availability of public funding.

1) Anchoring at the top level

The model described is well anchored at the top level of the organisation and forms part of a strategic plan elapsing in 2011. The ongoing work for recruiting and integrating immigrant students is supported by the rector. Moreover, various strands of the model are receiving money over several years. If mainstreaming is to be successful, all strands of the model need to be embedded in the organisation. There are signs that this will become reality at Oslo University College.

When invited to assess the pros and cons of recruiting students with Norwegian as their second language, one of our informants opinions that it is more demanding to be a teacher when the student mass is diverse. The handling of diversity relies on the communicative skills of the teachers and all staff involved becomes more apt to communication. A further advantage is that the minorities possess other competencies than ethnic Norwegian students. This is a resource to be included in institutional plans and should therefore not depend on the ability of minority speaking students to present her-/himself as a resource towards the institution.

2) Dissemination of experiences and sustainability

The present co-funding of one administrative post in the university college is linked to an obligation to disseminate the experiences gained as well as research and related issues concerning diversity in higher education. Furthermore, the dissemination is done by issuing a web based newsletter and giving lectures on various occasions . The newsletter has subscribers nationwide. The very fact that experiences and development of knowledge at Oslo University College is disseminated and linked to similar work being done all over Norway, adds to the sustainability of the model. The integration of the model in European networks for widening participation in higher education points in the same direction.

Experiences since 1996 sparked off by the pedagogical centre have been summarised and further developed into a handbook issued by autumn 2008. The handbook carries the title 'To be a student in a multicultural study environment' and is a considerable dissemination effort which contributes to the sustainability of the various integration activities at the university college.

Moreover, other university colleges have shown considerable interest in the language training projects instigated by the pedagogical centre. If these experiences are transferred to other institutions, one adaption needed is that Oslo University College is a very large Norwegian institution of this kind. OUC also co-operates with municipality services set up for foreign speaking students at upper secondary level. The fact that other education institutions show interest in the panoply of introduction and follow-up services developed by the university college, points to their sustainability within OUC as well as in other institutions.

When taking into account that much of the work concentrates on professional training in health and care services, it seems that the institution is able to adjust its training to labour market developments and not only to immigration patterns. The reason for concentrating

many integration projects on nurses should be understood against the backdrop of the present skills deficit in Norwegian health and care services. The propensity of students from immigrant backgrounds to take up studies in health topics is remarkable. Hence, in 2009 more than half of the registered Bachelor students in pharmacy and bioengineering were first or second generation immigrants. As reported earlier, the average percentage for all topics offered at OUC stands at 18. According to labour market forecasts the deficit in health and care skills will persist¹⁶. OUC's model for recruiting and retaining immigrant students with an interest in training for health and care services might therefore be sustained by, i.a., a steady demand for such services.

2) The University of Oslo

Main objectives of the institution

According to the University of Oslo's (UiO) home page the institution has three main tasks: education, research and to impart research. Regarding education, the university has approximately 27000 students dispersed around eight faculties and several centres. Further on the institution constitutes the place of work for almost 3400 scholars and 2600 technical-administrative employees. When it comes to research, the university conducts both pure and applied research. The research is financed by the university's own funds, The Research Council of Norway, and the private sector. Each year, approximately 250 Senior Research Fellows complete their thesis for doctorate. Throughout the university's history four scholars have received the Nobel Prize due to their research. In the university's strategic long-term plan for 2005 to 2009, the main goal of the institution's activity reads "UiO will strengthen its position as a research university of high international standing." (UiO, 2005:5). Concerning the third task, i.e. imparting knowledge, the university has agreed upon a definition: "Imparting research entails that scientists impart scientific results, ways of working and attitudes from a specialized field of research, to persons outside the field together with participating in the public debate with research based reasoning."¹⁷

Both our informants described the University of Oslo as an institution where one of the main goals was to remain the best university in Norway and assert itself on international rankings. A quote that was repeatedly mentioned during one of the interviews was that, "We maintain focus on being the best university in Norway." To achieve this, the informant emphasised that the university is dependent on recruiting competent students.

Target groups

In the university's strategic long-term plan for 2005 to 2009 a headline reads "To recruit competent and motivated students", the text underneath the headline follows:

"The main goal for UiO's recruitment work is to attract competent and motivated students to our education and training. A special effort will be made to attract:

¹⁶ Bjørnstad, R. m.fl (2008): *Tilbud og etterspørsel etter arbeidskraft etter utdanning, 1986-2025*. Oslo: Statistisk sentralbyrå. (SSB-rapport 2008/29)

¹⁷ (http://www.uio.no/om_uio/formidling.html)

- More students from minority groups with low disposition of studying
- More students to central scientific subjects with few applicants
- More foreign students to ordinary programs” (UiO, 2008:10)

This quote defines three specific groups that the university aims at recruiting: competent and motivated students, students from minority groups, and foreign students. In addition they aim at recruiting students to certain scientific subjects. With regard to competent and motivated students, the university’s annual report from 2008 emphasises the aim of recruiting such students “... we want as many applicants as possible to enable us to end up with the best students.” (UiO, 2008:13). As we will demonstrate later, our informants were well aware of the focus on attracting the best students to the university.

Summary of the practices observed

In addition to the practices related to recruitment and admission to the university, which will be described in a later section, the university has services and arrangements aimed at helping students once granted admission.

One question is how and which students are allowed through the gates of the university. Another question is what happens to the students once enrolled in the university. These two questions are intertwined. A strict admission policy could lead to a student mass less in need of follow-up from the university, while accepting more students from untraditional backgrounds could require more follow-up from the university and dropout could become more prevalent.

In the following the emphasis both informants put on two groups is reflected:

- students with disabilities
- students with a background from other countries (this being first or second generation Norwegians or exchange students)

Before we outline the approaches that the university made toward these groups, other and more general findings from the interviews are presented.

Student services

One informant told us that for the time being, a new information centre was set up. The task of this centre is to provide answers to general questions and guide students to the right instances. In addition, the informant said that each faculty had their own information desk that students could approach with questions regarding their study.

According to our informants, the university used various tools to keep students in school. Most of the tools for helping students with issues that are not directly related to academic tasks are found within the Foundation for Student Life. Examples of services that the Foundation for Student Life at the University of Oslo offers are health services, kindergarten, fitness studio, career advice, student counselling, and accommodation. Access to scarce services, like kindergarten, dentist, and accommodation, follow the principle first come, first serve. Previous investigation in the project Lifelong Learning 2010 has shown that approximately one out of five adults that participate in education and training within higher education mentioned childcare as hinder for participation. One informant said the following when we confronted with this fact: “In my opinion, kindergarten for part time students is our job number one.”

With regard to the responses from the interviews, the student counselling and health services played an important role when it comes to help students remain within university. Perhaps not surprising, considering the various problems the student counselling are ready to assist students with:

“Our experiences show that students have neither more nor less problems than the rest of the population. The consequences of becoming unexpected pregnant, prolonged illness, flunk an exam or suddenly lose someone you love can become a major burden that may be hard to solve on your own. Other times a broken heart or a fight with friends and family may lead to sleepless nights and concentration problems... None of your problems are too small. It is okay to come to us with a small problem. That is preventing a bigger one.”¹⁸

When it comes to health services, they offer prevention courses and groups that aim on mastering stress, enable students to rise and speak, and mastering and preventing depression. In addition to the offers of the Foundation for Student Life, one of our informants highlighted a recent initiative that focused on students that were falling behind:

“We have just initiated a special guidance offer for students that are falling behind. We try to sustain those students where things just stop, for instance in relation to written exams. It is a fine initiative. Someone at the institute of philosophy had conversations with 170 students and got them back in the on the educational path, an exciting project that we now hope to follow up. It concerns more than professional guidance, students are seen and asked how they are.”

Although this is a clearly positive story from the university, the same informant regarded the general effort for helping students who were striving with their educational performance in a more negative way. The informant was highly concerned with developing and increasing the resources of the faculties, and added that that the faculties do not have means to prioritize follow-up of all students in need for it:

“... when I think of mentor arrangements, better guidance and so on, these are things that I would prefer that the faculties received more resources to do... I believe that the money should be earmarked so that this issue is not being overlooked when the faculty prioritizes.”

When we asked the informant to elaborate on this topic she said that the aims were fine when it came to minority students and those who are under the wings of the adaption services, but there were students with mental related problems who needed much more attention. Based on her experiences, she estimated that approximately 20 percent of the student mass had some kind of mental related problems. She emphasised that these students were not necessarily diagnosed with a mental illness, but that they hit the wall because of e.g. pressure.

Follow-up of students

The informant continued to exemplify how changes within higher education in recent years had contributed to increase the mental pressure among students. In 2003 a reform coined the Quality Reform was introduced to higher education. One of the aspects of this reform was that students should receive increased follow-up. Consequently, tertiary educational institutions

¹⁸ http://www.sio.no/wps/portal/lut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gDfwNvJ0dTP0NXAyNDA38Tc3cD-KNAvyHZUBABhqF0M/?WCM_PORTLET=PC_7_000KBA5N1E0MH2V37P00000000_WCM&WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/migration/sio/r_dgivning/velkommen+til+studentr_dgivningen

introduced seminars in addition to the lectures. The informant explained that the intention and expected consequences of the seminars was that students would be seen and heard to a greater extent, and that this in next turn would increase their well-being at the university. But she added that an unintended consequence had emerged as some students wished to remain anonymous at the university:

“One of the things in relation to the Quality Reform is that we believed that all students would become more visible, because the groups are smaller subsequent to it [the reform]. But persons who had no desire of being seen, felt threatened by the reform, so they started occurring as independent external candidates instead... Suddenly they have to answer and participate. We have arranged for a course in presentation technique to enable students to speak in groups. Before the Quality Reform they needed not say a peep, they could just read and take the exam. But now we have received a group that feel very threaten by this and need help.”

Independent external candidates have to pay an extra fee for each course to be able to take the exams, depending on the how many credits the course is estimated to. Further on, although many of the seminars for the various courses are mandatory, it is also in many cases voluntary whether one wishes to attend the seminars or not. The informant also said that she believed that the various courses and groups that the health services of the Foundation for Student Life had initiated were both necessary and popular for the group of students that felt threatened by the reform. As we talked to the other informant, she expressed thoughts that relate to the same problems:

“Some years ago there was an article about students that quit their studies here and continued at Oslo University College because there are smaller classes there. The students in question preferred small classes prior to big auditoriums.”

If we consider the rooms and number students within it during the instructions, the informants point to two disparate mechanisms: The first informant described students that encountered problems in wake of the Quality Reform because they had to attend settings in small rooms and few students (seminars), while the other informant pointed to students that left university because they did not like big rooms with many people (auditoriums). The reason for this might simply be that the informants were referring to two different students groups. However, we speculate whether it might be because students find it is easier to get to know each other in the classes at university colleges, since students follow each other throughout many different courses, while at university the seminars following the different courses have different participants. As a result, students at university do not get the chance to get to know each other well enough to feel secure to such a degree that they feel comfortable with sharing their papers and thoughts. This hypothesis was contested by one of our informants as she said that recent initiatives to create an environment characterized by solidarity and strong bonds between students, especially at the beginning of the semesters, had proven successful. Hence, our proposition that learning communities are more prevalent at university colleges, might turn out wrong.

Considering that the informants expressed some dissatisfaction with regards to the follow-up of students at the current moment, we asked whether they believed that the authorities could impose any incentives on educational institutions for assuring that more students find their place and thrive at the university. One informant answered that:

I believe that the authorities should demand that the learning environment becomes a part of the quality criteria. The Ministry of Education and Research only demands that we report on how we treat these groups, and I do not believe that the Ministry of Education and Research provide sufficient attention when they ask for reports. But when they start asking us, what have you done? What are you planning to do? It would have been different, it would have helped us to prioritize these issues. It is easy to say that more money would have solved the problem, but the question is not only about money.

Students with disabilities

Some of the students that study at the university have disabilities that may make studying more challenging than it otherwise would be, e.g. students that have dyslexia, are hard of hearing or visually-impaired. The university's approach entails that the environment, i.e. products and services, should be available for all persons without any special adaption. An approach that, although different with some regards, entails much the same as the English notion of inclusiveness and inclusive education. Nevertheless, in some cases individual adaptation is necessary and in those cases our informants explained that there are staffs within all the faculties that are employed to help students adapting the studies and exams to their situation.

The main responsibility for adapting the study situation according to the needs of the students is held by the Adaption Service (Tilretteleggingstjenesten), but in addition there is a learning environment committee. It is, in addition to several observers, made up of four members representing the students and four members representing the university. According to one informant, the members and observers arrive from different organisations and bodies of the university, e.g. the student parliament, the technical department, the foundation for student life, the health services, the pro-vice-chancellor, vice-chancellor and the Adaption Services. The main task of the environment committee is to "give the management of the university advice in questions regarding the university's physical and psychosocial learning environment"¹⁹.

Although the committee maintains a special responsibility for students with disabilities, no seats in the committee are reserved for this group. According to our informant their interests were sustained by representatives from the Adaption Services, and added that for the time being the representative from this service happened to be visually-impaired. One of the informants regarded the effort of the Adaption Service as especially successful in adapting and assuring that recruitment of students with disabilities had increased. She describes the establishment of the Adaption Service as a success:

"The success factor of the university is that it was one of the first to establish an adaption service for students with disabilities. This entails that we have become a national enthusiast. We therefore hold a seat in the national initiate group that was established by the Ministry of Education and Research. We arrange conferences and seminars. I am also aware of that those who are employed in the adaption service obtain important roles within other organisations for persons with disabilities."

The same informant said that the number of students with reading and writing disorders had increased, and added that she believed that one important reason for this was the university's increased effort for helping these students. Further on, she said that the university stayed in touch with many of the organisations for persons with disabilities, like the Association for

¹⁹ (<http://www.admin.uio.no/sta/laeringsmiljoutvalget/>)

Dyslectics, the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, and the Association for deaf and people with hearing disorders.

Students with a background from other countries

Although minority students may have many common challenges after they enter university, one of our informants emphasised that there was a marked difference in the challenges that young and adult minorities encountered:

“Those who are born and raised here, they manage, some of them have problems, but they know the Norwegian society better than those who arrived Norway as adults. They are more adaptable as well and they know the language, the latter element constitutes a major challenge for adult immigrants, for instance at the information desk at the beginning of the semester. Perhaps there are twenty persons waiting behind you in the line, and perhaps you speak in broken Norwegian, and the person behind the desk does not understand you. You become nervous and perhaps you do not get the help you need.”

In addition to the challenges described in this quote, the same informant at an earlier point described how adult students were in a completely different life situation, which could cause barriers for their socialization at university:

“There are probably many who struggle with both their language and socialization; it is hard to get Norwegian friends. And they are older than the other students. We are talking about the postmodern student that studies and work, have children and family, they do not have time to socialize with others. If they become friends, then perhaps those with a minority background need more help with their academic tasks and ask their new friend if he or she can help, cause for many it goes without saying that they may ask for help. But it might be that many of the Norwegian students are bothered by such initiatives.”

Another important area where some of the foreign adult students encountered challenges was the extensive use of the internet:

“Here, the use of internet is so widespread, but many of the immigrants that come here as refugees and go for higher education have no experience using the internet the way Norwegian students do, we have helped many in just getting started. The first week in the semester is really hard, so much information and when they say that they have put all the information on the internet, they do not know what they are talking about.”

Preliminary conclusions

If it is true that the current admission policy is strict and that the university, as a result, is less concerned with following up the students after they have enrolled, we could imagine that such a practice is disadvantageous for those students who actually are in need of various forms of support. This issue concerns several areas at the university, and based on the information we gained from the interviews, we are not in a position to make a complete assessment of whether, and how, students are followed up. Nevertheless, the information we obtained through the interviews point to some priorities, for example students with disabilities and students with a background from other countries (this being first or second generation Norwegians or exchange students). A factor that underlines that these two groups are receiving special attention, is that both groups have their own section within the university, whose task is to take care of

their interests and rights (see also below on universally available services). In the following section we will go more into depth on students coming from a minority background.

Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies – barriers to entrance

Diversity in focus in academy (MiFA)

One service for students with a minority background and recently arrived adults to Norway, is called MiFA (“Diversity in focus in academy”). The section at the university in charge of this service also involves in many of the activities that takes place on campus to improve the situation for their target groups, and the relation between their target group and the majority. One example is how this section is involved in the social life and more concretely buddy groups for recently arrived students. As students are admitted to the university, the faculties monitor the composition of students and in case there is a large group of students that do not speak Norwegian, they try to adapt in different ways by e.g. creating buddy groups that are English speaking.

One informant emphasised that the offers MiFA provided students with on campus and pupils within upper secondary school were available for all students. With regards to courses in academic writing, the informant said that, “There are many academic writing classes here. We arranged for preliminary courses one year where eighty students attended. One quarter out of these students were majority students. It is important to create inclusion... When we pick pupils for the courses they are a diverse composite, and we are very aware of this on every step of the way.” It is important to emphasise that in addition to MiFA, which represents the University of Oslo’s main approach of recruiting and including minorities, one informant said that the university receives a lot of help and support from national centres that work with inclusion and integration of minorities in society and education.

Despite the fact that many of the students with a minority background needed help with various challenges and problems they encountered in academic tasks, one informant made it clear that many of the minority students came from resourceful families and had embarked on elite studies. According to her, approximately half of the student mass at pharmacy had a minority background, while the same share for medicine and dentistry were 14 and 21 percent, respectively. This said, she added that the reason for the great share of minority students on these studies were due to pressure from the parents of the students:

“I have received feedback from many of the students studying dentistry that they have no desire of digging in other people’s mouths, but have been forced by their parents to choose a status occupation.”

The annual report from the University of Oslo provides more information about “Diversity in focus in academy” (MiFA). Administratively, it rests on cooperation with the municipality of Oslo aiming to increase the recruitment of minority students to the university. On the question of whether MiFA was successful in reaching their goal, one informant said that MiFA’s goal was that minority students should constitute 15 percent of the student mass. In 2006 minority students made up around 9 percent of the student mass while in spring 2009 when the interview was conducted they amounted to 12 percent of the students.

The crux of MiFA’s approach of increasing the proportion of minority students remains on cooperating with upper secondary schools and schools within adult education. With regard to upper secondary school MiFA has launched a pilot project in Oslo. First and foremost, MiFA

has formed a group of students from each of the upper secondary schools they are cooperating with which aims at building up participants' knowledge about higher education and the possibilities within it, which they in next turn are supposed to bring back to their own school. MiFA cooperates with nine upper secondary schools and one lower secondary school.

Further on, there is a mentor arrangement, a pilot project where pupils from lower secondary school are assigned a student from UiO that follow them up both professional and social. At MiFA's home page, the mentor arrangement is described in the following way: "Every Wednesday from four to five p.m. a chosen group of from Hersleb School meets their UiO-mentor and through this arrangement they receive help with their school work, a little extra motivation, and perhaps a glimpse into the world of the university" (MiFA, 2010). One informant said that the proportion of minority students at Hersleb School amounted to 95 percent and that approximately twenty students attended the mentor arrangement for the time being, but MiFA had goals of expanding the arrangement so that more pupils as well as schools could join the arrangement.

When we asked one informant whether the mentor arrangement had contributed to increase the recruitment of minority students, she said that they had not measured the effect of the mentor arrangement itself, but added that another approach where MiFA had arranged for an optional course in upper secondary school had shown results as these schools could display higher increase of applicants than other schools. The informant continued to explain what kind of pupils was targeted by MiFA:

"We may divide the pupils in upper secondary school into three groups. It is those at the top who knows what they want, that aim for elite studies, they are not the main target group. Anyhow we use them because they have a major influence, we believe that they may engage and motivate other students... Those in the middle put a normal effort into school, but they do not know, or they are very unsure of what they should go for. It is these students that are our main target. And then there is a group of students that risk dropping out or flunking."

As the quote demonstrates, MiFA remains focused on the students in the middle, those who needed more guidance and information about whether and what studies to embark on, rather than follow up and guidance with their school work. Further on, they use the students that manage upper secondary school well as a sort of model for other pupils. We were therefore interested in knowing more about the third group, i.e. those who risked flunking or dropping out of upper secondary school: "We continuously discuss whether they [the third group] are in our target group. It is a question of a balance between UiO's task to recruit competent and motivated students to the university and perhaps UiO's responsibility to work against drop out in upper secondary school. Education remains the key to everything."

Despite the fact that the approach first and foremost targets the elite and middle students, MiFA had encountered upper secondary school with arrangements that were targeted at other groups:

"We are running a pilot project in an upper secondary school where in fact 38 pupils were close to flunking in mathematics. Now we have given these pupils an intensive course where students from UiO with a mathematical background are tutoring and motivating them. We have just received response that eight of the students said they wanted more tutoring, which is very good."

In addition to minority students within upper secondary school, MiFA focuses on recruiting students from schools that offered education for adults:

“There is an approach directed towards adult education, MiFA has a close cooperation with many schools both in Oslo and Akershus [the neighbouring county to Oslo]. Among many things, MiFA visits one of the schools twice a year and inform participants about the education and training of the university, how to get their education from their home country approved, what grades are needed to receive admission, everything.”

When we asked the informant about the barriers for entrance to university for these students, she said:

“The main barrier is the language. Many are struggling with gaining 450 points [in a test on mastering the Norwegian language for foreigners. It needs to be passed for getting admission to higher education]. Further on, many become frustrated because the approval of education from their home country takes a tremendous amount of time, NOKUT [Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education] carry out the general approval and then institutions within higher education makes a professional assessment. There are so many from Iran, Islamic countries, those that have a bachelor degree may lose half of their degree because there is so much Islam in it, which does not get approval, so they become frustrated.”

We were not able to obtain any information concerning how many students that made the transition from adult education to the university as, according to our informants, no such statistics exist because the Data Inspectorate would not allow the university to register such data.

The aim of attracting foreign students to the university is a part of the internationalisation of the institution, and constitutes an important tool for reaching the main goal of the university: “International education and training, international recruitment and internationalisation at home is viewed as measures for reaching the goal of becoming a leading university international.” (UiO, 2008:14)

Adult education courses at the university

When it comes to adult education, one informant said that for the most of it, these students consist of persons that previously were students at the university. As a measure for reaching these students the university collaborates with two municipalities along drawing on alumni associations. In addition they produced a catalogue and kept a web site for this target group. The university’s strategic long-term plan for 2005 to 2009, states that:

“In the near future, priority will be given to ongoing development of the basic study programmes, but UiO also has high long-term ambitions for the continuing and further education courses offered at the university. During 2006 a framework and guidelines will be developed, and a comprehensive action plan will be prepared with a focus on effective use of the university’s own academic competence and existing study programmes, and on adults’ needs for flexibility in the programmes. Cooperation with working life will be strengthened, and inspiration from job-related continuing and further education will be put to use when developing regular study programmes and courses.”

Two things should be pointed out. First of all, the university maintains focused on basic study programs, i.e. the conventional students. Secondly, within continuing and further education,

they remain focused on persons that are working and adapt the study situation according to their lives. An important question that needs to be answered is what part of the working life are we talking about? Do the notions of “continuing and further education” include groups in working life with little or no experience from higher education? For the time being (January 2010), the aforementioned home page of continuing and further education at UiO displays an overview of the courses that started in the mid of 2009 up until planned courses throughout the spring of 2010. In the description of the courses contains a listing of the target groups, prerequisites and recommended prior knowledge. Out of the 22 courses displayed on the home page in January 2010, five of them were available for persons without any form of higher education. This said, not all of the five courses were adapted or maintained persons without any higher education as their target group, but they did not rule out such persons to participate. Many of the courses were targeted at teachers in lower and upper secondary school.

Admission based on appreciation of previous learning experiences

One informant expressed her discontent with some of the current elements in the recruitment policy as she elaborated on the lack of effort from the university on giving adults without credentials from upper secondary school a chance:

“I believe that we have students who know what they want, but sometimes I feel that the university is not good enough when it comes to giving persons a second chance. There are persons in the society that have appreciation of prior learning experiences, but we are not much concerned about this group. We tell persons at the age of thirty that come and say that they want to study that they need to obtain a certificate from upper secondary school in order to receive admission. We do not admit persons on the ground of appreciation of prior learning experiences. We are very fastidious about who enters our doors.”

Our interpretation of the informant’s assertion is that the university does not grant admission on the ground of appreciation of prior learning experience, is to be understood as the practice of the university, i.e. that such students never or rarely are granted admission, and not that the university officially do not accept applications from such students. Educational institutions within higher education are by law are obliged to assess applications from students without general university and college admission certification if the person in question is above 25 years.

According to Helland and Opheim (2004:26) the University of Oslo receives comparatively speaking many applications from persons wanting to have their prior learning experiences assessed. Further on, their findings accord with the assertions of our informants as they demonstrate that not many of the applicants grant admission. Helland and Opheim speculate that the main reason for why the university gates are hard to cross for these students is that many of the courses at the university are severely theoretical, and that the university finds very few previous learning experiences sufficient for convincing them that the applicant is adequately prepared for the study.

When enlarging on this topic in our interviews at UiO, one informant maintained that the university could ease up their demands and give more students a try, instead of rejecting them beforehand. The other informant was less critical to the university’s recruitment practice of persons that applied on the background of previous learning experiences, and put the gist of the matter on students that had recently arrived Norway. According to her one of the main challenges was that many of these students met severe barriers when it came to receiving appreciation of their prior learning experiences from their home country and learning Norwegian,

and did not portray the university's allegedly strict practices concerning who enters the gates as the main problem. Due to the theoretical and competence demands of the courses at university, the informant said that she always made it very clear to potential applicants that studying at the university was far from an easy task, and added that: "I fear that we might graduate mediocre students, I am a strong opponent against lowering the demands for admission."

Above all, what seems to occur from the informants' statements and most importantly the university's own goals is that the university aims at recruiting competent students, i.e. students that have succeeded in receiving high grades from upper secondary school. In other words, we may contend that the recruitment practices remain true to a meritocratic ideal where intelligence and effort is viewed as the only valid currency for admission to higher education. On the other hand, the informants emphasised that the university maintained a social responsibility of providing educational opportunity for all groups in society. One of the informants expressed herself in the following way:

"In my opinion, the university is highly concerned with resourceful students that recently completed upper secondary school. We maintain focus on being the best university in Norway, in the end we may end up with being very excluding. We have just prepared a strategy for the coming five years, and I believe that we should start talking more about well-being and not just good students, because we want to develop our students to citizens."

We understood this latter assertion more as the informants own view of what role and responsibility the university has, rather than the official policy of the university. Nevertheless, we could question whether there is a challenge related to be an educational institution providing educational opportunity for all groups in society and at the same asserting oneself as a top university as this may involve getting hold of the best students.

Mainstreaming of diversity policies at the university

On a general basis, both informants highlighted the beneficial aspects of a diverse student mass and staff. Both informants saw a diverse student mass as favourable in itself and superior to a uniform student mass. One informant claimed that a diverse student mass provided students with competences that were crucial in today's globalized world: "The advantage is that we who are living in a globalized world may draw benefits from the fact that the diversity at the educational institution may provide us with necessary competences. The students learn a great deal through interaction. Regardless of where they work, they are working in a multicultural society." The other informant said that with a more diverse staff, the work became more interesting and exciting, but added that language amounted to a problem as Norwegian employees wished they could speak English better and foreign employees wished they could speak Norwegian better. At the current time, both groups lacked an offer for increasing their language skills.

As the student mass at the university is becoming more and more diverse, new challenges and problems are arising. Chapel at the university and alcohol at campus exemplifies two dilemmas that the university encountered as a result of a more diverse student mass. Initially, the university had a chapel that students could use to sort out their thoughts, light a candle and so on. One informant told us that during the past few years there had been an ongoing discussion at the university concerning this room. The problem seemed to be that the word "chapel" signified that this room was first and foremost for Christian students, and thereby excluding students with other religious forms. Further on, our informant continued to say that another point of the discussion had been that if Christian students had their own room for

contemplation, it entails that other religions should be entitled to one as well. Since students at the university belong to several different religions, there are not enough rooms for each and every religion; hence they changed the name of the chapel and made it into a neutral room where everyone was welcome. The other informant touched upon the same topic and explained that, "... necessary statues and other equipments are now kept in a locker, so that everyone can use the room in turn."

Since many of the students that have encountered the university in later years do not drink alcohol and, according to our informant, refrain from arrangements where alcohol is served, a growing awareness of the liquid's excluding effect has resulted in a discussion of its role at the top level of the university. The discussion has resulted in new regulations prohibiting alcohol from being served before three pm. Although a new student mass with a different relation to alcohol is one of the main reasons for the new regulations, the university also remain obliged to their agreement with AKAN (The Workplace Advisory Centre for issues related to alcohol, drugs and addictive gambling in the workplace) of not serving alcohol during working hours. These two points and the fact that research show that the alcohol consumption among students have increased during the past few years, remained the main arguments in a memo from the director general of the university as to why he ordered the reduction in the serving of alcohol at the university²⁰. One informant said that this decision had caused a lot of debate and dissatisfaction among many students.

Strengths and weaknesses of the practices observed

As outline above, the university puts a lot of effort and resources in recruiting minorities and adapting the study situation according to students with various disabilities. Further on, we have also demonstrated that students that apply on the background of appreciation of previous learning experiences have a hard time gaining access to the university. Based on the information we have received from the university's own documents and from the response of our informants, it seems as though the university puts a restricted meaning of diversity to ground as they confine it to certain groups.

In the university's strategy and annual report that we have referred to throughout this paper, the importance of attracting competent and motivated students has been repeated in both documents. Considering motivation, we may question whether there are good reasons to believe that persons that apply on the background of previous learning experiences are above average motivated for studying at university. Many of them have probably transcended several additional barriers compared to the normal students. As one of our informant emphasised, many of the adult students have several economic and caretaking responsibilities. So when these persons apply to university despite their challenges, we may contend that they are highly motivated.

When it comes to competencies, there are probably good reasons to believe that many persons that apply on the background of previous learning experiences might encounter more challenges than many students that arrive from upper secondary school. We hold this assumption on the background of the similarities between the curriculum (theoretical) and tasks (e.g. the examination form and writing essays) at upper secondary school and university. According to the NUCAS' admission statistics for the last three years, many of the university's programs were able to offer all their applicants admission, i.e. they did not have enough ap-

²⁰ http://www.uio.no/for_ansatte/ansatt/arbeidsmiljo/hms_dokumenter/UiO%20ruspolicy.pdf

plicants to create any competition between them. Further on, for many of the programs the threshold for granting admission is not terribly high. In other words, under the current conditions students that may be far away from the university's definition of a "competent student" are studying at university. If we add to the picture that previous research have demonstrated the close relationship between grades from upper secondary school and the risk of leaving higher education (e.g. Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2005), the university should have incentives to e.g. offer more follow up and additional courses to help students that struggled in their encounter with academic tasks.

Judging from the university's own reports, it seems that the university's view on what constitutes a competent and motivated student is fixed, i.e. that is geared towards "one road to excellence". Although such a path might be the most cost efficient, the university might risk losing talents who could contribute positively to diversity on campus. Regarding diversity, we have seen the effort the university puts in recruiting minorities and adapting the study situation to students with various disabilities.

In view of diversity this is a positive approach, but diversity should probably not be confined to certain groups and it is worth considering expanding efforts towards diversity by including and adapting the study situation to more groups. In the same way as the university goes to a great length in adapting the study situation to students with disabilities and takes precautions in several ways to minority groups, it could take further initiatives to adapt the study situation according to the needs of adults. One informant gave a telling example of how the university has the possibility of improving on this point:

"I do not believe we have come far enough when it comes to adult persons. If a lecturer is not able to make it to a lecture or seminar, we have had some of these cases, people [students] are travelling long distances, but when they arrive the lecture is cancelled, we could have sent a text message. At the current state, adapting the family and working life as a part time student is not easy."

It seems that the university has not reached their full potential when it comes to lifelong learning, a conclusion which the following statement underlines:

"We are not allowed to see adult students as a concept here. The notion of student entails that the person is at least eighteen years and thereby adult. We have an ongoing discussion of several concepts like this. If you ask me, UiO has not taken lifelong learning seriously yet, I hope they will in the future. We are doing well when it comes to the statutory provisions of continuing and further education, but we have not incorporated lifelong learning into the strategic plans and we have not built a system for it either. We are pretty far behind compared with international universities."

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

As shown in the quote above, the informant expressed that she was satisfied with the university's approach towards lifelong learning when it came to the statutory provisions of continuing and further education. This is just one example of how the university seems to go to great length in providing good services when their provision is rooted in the legislation.

Another example is the Adaption Service and the services offered by the Foundation for Student Life. The services offered by these two units are statutory provisioned, and according to the response we received from the informants, it seemed as though the university was highly

concerned with assuring that they functioned well. Although MiFA (“Diversity in focus in academy”) seemed to be working well, one informant said that she could never be completely sure about the unit’s future because the board of the university at one moment considered closing down the project. MiFA was however able to survive by obtaining external funding.

According to our informant, a drawback of many of the current projects is that they are funded for a limited period and when the projects first get going, the funds fail to appear:

“At a similar approach [as MiFA] in another university college they were able to create so many new things, but suddenly the funds did not come and the unit was closed down... There are too many short-term projects; there are probably thousands of them. What we really should do is to create hundreds long-term projects.”

A consequence of statutory provisions is that it is possible to make long-term plans as finances are earmarked for different units. The other informant referred to arrangements within the university that aimed at following up students. However, these arrangements were not earmarked, and as a result, the informant said that they often were given low or no priority when the university had to save money. Hence, units and initiatives that are not statutory provisioned become increasingly vulnerable, mainly due to the fact that the funds may, for various reasons, disappear. In that case, little is gained from the resources invested.

Furthermore, the university seems to be highly concerned about performing well when it is being measured. This is especially clear when it comes to attempts to climb on international rankings. Then the goals and the strategy for reaching these goals are in many instances designed for remaining well ranked. Consequently other important areas may be overlooked or given low priority, because they do not make a difference with regard to what the university is being measured against. A statement from one informant seemed to confirm such an assumption, as she believed that the social environment of the university should become a part of the Ministry’s assessment of the university prior to the annual budgetary allocation.

Adult education offered by study associations

Particularly with a view to capture non-formal adult education courses we carried out interviews in two study associations. Any understanding of the role these associations today are playing has to mirror that they are increasingly interwoven in public education reforms, e.g. when public authorities purchase training courses from the study associations with a view to live up to statutory rights for adults to complete their educational trajectories.

Against this background we made investigations in two of Norway's 20 study associations. All of them are an amalgamation of voluntary organisations that arrange educational activities for their members. Normally, a Norwegian study association functions as an umbrella organisation for several smaller organisations that all arrange for educational activities for their members. In other words, the study associations have their own member organisations that recruit persons to join their educational activities. Sometimes the member organisations attach themselves to a study association because the study association is concerned with a special group of persons, e.g. the conditions for people with disabilities. For other member organisations it can be hard to pin down the similarities between them.

Our first "case" is called "Association for Adapted Adult Education". The second dates back to 1864, is now called 'Folkeuniversitetet' and it counts 20 member organisations whose activities range from band music to meditation.

(1) Association for Adapted Adult Education

On the question of what the main purpose of the Association for Adapted Adult Education is, one of our informants from the organisation said,

"That is to contribute to, how should I put it, that those who are a bit left out, that they should be able to be active participants in work life and society. That is the main object. And in that relation, adult education is a mean to overcome such barriers".

This answer was followed up by a new question regarding what the informant believed characterized persons that did not attend the courses from those that did:

"... it is about crossing some barriers, some persons manage to do it, while others do not. We have many persons that do not manage to surmount physical barriers, like persons in wheelchair and persons that have amputated, something which prevent them from participating courses with like-minded persons. In addition we have members all over the country, so geographically speaking it is probably easier to attend some places than in remote areas where you have to be transported far away to be able to participate with others.

Some persons are better at attending than others. It is very important for us to reach those who never attend.”

One of the main goals of the Association for Adapted Adult Education is to work with adult education for disabled and their next of kin. However, it is important to emphasize that the members of the Association for Adapted Adult Education is not persons, but organisations that organises persons with different disabilities. Consequently, the Association for Adapted Adult Education is an umbrella organisation for organisations that organise persons with disabilities; hence most of the courses and educational activity is not initiated and arranged by the Association for Adapted Adult Education, but by their member organizations.

Each member organization organize persons with specific challenges, e.g. aphasia, psychic challenged and their next of kin, psoriasis, eating disorders, to mention a few. Despite the wide range of challenges that the member organizations engage in, many of them have important pedagogical principles in common. One informant elaborated on this topic:

“Many of our courses focus on mastering, very many. And we have noticed that there is a greater and greater need for these courses. To be able to, how should I put it, draw on others experiences, peer work, as we call it... People that find themselves in the same situation.”

In the remaining text, we will follow a project that was initiated by the AAAE, but prior to this we will shortly elaborate on how the organisation is funded. The Association for Adapted Adult Education receives approximately 25 million NOK (approximately 3,1 million euro) annually through the state budget. In addition they receive 720 000 NOK (approximately 89 500 euro) annually through member fees and also some money through project funds. The organization’s main financial task is to allocate funds to projects that are initiated by persons in the Association for Adapted Adult Education’s member organizations. As the following two sections explain, there are mainly two ways that a project may be eligible for receiving funds.

According to section 19 of the Law on Adult Education, courses that are arranged under the auspices of the Association for Adapted Adult Education’s member organizations are eligible for financial support through a fixed rate based and adjusted according to the annual funding from the state budget, which the Association for Adapted Adult Education administers. All sections and levels of the member organizations may apply for the grants available; nevertheless, the person (or persons) in charge of a specific course has to receive an approval from the Association for Adapted Adult Education before they get going with the course if they want to be sure of receiving the fixed rate. When the course is completed, the person in charge sends in an overview of their income and expenses and number of participants. Courses with no expenses receive a minimum fixed rate (as far as the course lasts for twelve hours or more), while an additionally hourly rate is granted for courses that document expenses

Another section in the Law on Adult Education, namely section 24, provides member organizations of study associations with the right to apply for special grants aimed at special target groups like disabled and persons with special care taking responsibilities. This support is given in addition to the ordinary grants outlined in the preceding paragraph. According to the Association for Adapted Adult Education’s website this grant shall ”chiefly contribute to lowering the expenses for the organizer so that the participants do not need to pay an unreasonable participation fee to complete the course”.²¹

The total number of courses and participants during a given year allows the foundation to calculate their share of the state budget two years ahead; e.g. the educational activity in 2007

²¹ <http://funkis.interaktiv.as/studiearbeid.asp?meny=2,22,76>

makes the foundation for the support that is given in 2009. According to the secretary-general the funds from the state budget are paid out twice a year, and he added that they had a good overview over the educational activity and therefore knew how much funds they could expect for each year.

Main objectives of a promising practice

On the following pages we will present a promising practice launched by the Association for Adapted Adult Education (AAAE) in 2005 and lasting until the spring of 2006. After receiving funds from Health and Rehabilitation in 2006, the AAAE initiated a project called “Minority parents with children with disabilities”. The project saw its birth in 2007 and as it continued throughout the year, the AAAE saw the need for extending the project for another year. This project was initiated subsequent to a pilot project which aimed on assessing parents with ethnic minority background’s prerequisites and possibilities of taking care of their children with disabilities and/or chronic diseases. According to our informants, the pilot project demonstrated the need for a forum providing easy access to useful and necessary information for parents having a child with disabilities and/or a child with chronic diseases.

The (main) project’s aim would be achieved through study circles whose emphasis was on networking and self-sufficiency through peer advice. In addition, the project aimed at cooperating with the member organisations of AAAE in preparing information pamphlets concerning ethnic minorities’ situation that the member organisations could use in their further work. However, the latter initiative failed, as none of the member organisations responded positive to it, uncertain as to what reason.

Below, the participants in the project are referred to as minorities, ethnical minorities, persons with minority background or immigrants. It is important to underline that these categories cast shadow over and represent major simplifications as these labels merely refer to one characteristic that the participants have in common; that is not being a part of the majority. The justification of using such a vague label is first and foremost based on the fact that these were the labels that our informant used.

Target groups

The target groups of the project are parents with ethnical minority background whose children have disabilities and/ or chronic diseases. One of the main problems that the project aimed to overcome was minorities’ lack of the implicit knowledge that was needed to get access to the system of subsidies that exists.

Despite the fact that parents are described as the target group in both the project report and in the name of the project, in reality one were seeking any family member or other close persons that could contribute to improve the situation of the child in question. This is reflected in our informant’s response as to what the aim to the project was:

“To create a forum for parents, either man or woman, or grandmother or who it might be that have the time to join these courses. Maybe we could help them by drawing on each other’s experiences and achieve general knowledge concerning the Norwegian health care system, because they are so unaware about almost everything, and they give up very easily. So... They feel in fact very powerless.”

As the previous quote demonstrates, the organizers of the project were indifferent to the participants' sex. However it was women that in the end became their main target group. We asked the informant why:

“Men are really hard to get hold of, and they do not pick up children in the kindergartens. Secondly, you may for instance find men at the adult educational centres, but perhaps they newly arrived in Norway, they do not know how to speak Norwegian and they do not want to. It is very common that women are the ones to take these kinds of initiatives. So even though one seeks out a place where you will find men, one will realize that they are not very interested. While one could see a totally different attitude when it came to women.”

Barriers to entrance

To be able to understand why certain practices are good, it is important to have an understanding of the participants' situation and the barriers they meet. As mentioned, one of the greatest barriers concerned the participants' lack of information and adapted information. To a large degree this informational aspect concerns the rights one has by virtue of being a Norwegian citizen and having a child with disabilities. A suitable example in this relation is the opportunity of having an interpreter during appointment at the doctor's office. Many of the participants' meetings with the doctor were unsuccessful, mainly because they did not understand each other. The following scenario was not uncommon: “Many of the participants said: ‘yes, we are sitting there and nodding,’ but that did not mean that they agreed.”

Few of the participants were aware of the possibilities of having an interpreter attending these meetings, and none of them had been informed by the doctor or any other personnel in the health system about this opportunity.

With regard to language, the participants varied a great deal; some knew how to speak Norwegian and/or English, while others did not. For those who did not speak any of these languages encounters with the health system and other public instances emerged as especially demanding. Our informant explained some of the potential consequences of a restricted vocabulary:

“I know how to speak Norwegian; I can speak and know how to express myself when I am not satisfied, if I realize that the treatment my child is receiving is insufficient, I can always express myself, but what happens to those parents who are not able to do this?”

However, those participants that knew how to speak Norwegian or English were not exempted from challenges. For many of them, the problem is not to acquire information, but to direct through it:

“Let me take myself as an example. I know how to get information and everything, but it does not help to gather all the information in the world in front of me as long as I do not have anyone to help me direct through the information, and perhaps place me somewhere inside the great forum of information. That does not help. Instead a doctor has to give a concrete diagnosis, and concrete solutions or practical training, and involve more authorities that may cooperate to do a good job for the individual.”

In addition to mere rights within the welfare state, there are other opportunities that may improve the life situation of persons. For instance, as mentioned in the background template, the AAAE has several member organisations that are current for parents whose children have some sort of disability. Through these they may receive information and help according to

their situation, but none of the participants had heard of these organisations and neither had they heard of the AAAE.

The informational aspect was not confined to the formal rights and opportunities within the welfare state and volunteer organisations. According to our informant, some of the participants were unaware of the fact that there existed treatment for their child's disability. When our informant told the participants the story of how she received the right treatment for her child, many of the participants were shocked:

“As I told them about my history, they became totally shocked; ‘was your child this way [referring to some sort of disablement]? Was he about to become like this?’ I told them, yes, he almost became like this. Today, he is running almost like a normal child... And as they [the participants] heard this they said ‘wow, this is new for us, you are saying that there exists treatment for this?’ I said, yes, but you have to be active and engage yourself.”

The informational aspect was not the only challenge and barrier that the participants experienced as a parent whose child has disabilities. If this had been the case, a pamphlet with the right information would have been enough. However, there were several other aspects related to their life situation that the project had to address. Our informant told me that many of the participants felt alone in their situation; they were more or less alone with the caretaking of their child or children. In addition to feeling alone, many of the participants actually thought that they more or less were the only one in such a situation, i.e. they thought they were the only one with a child with disabilities. As the participants met each other and the two organizers from AAAE, they realized that there were many other persons in the same situation:

“They thought they were all alone. They thought they were the only one with a child that had disabilities. They never thought that there were so many others in the same situation. And what was very shocking was that they thought that Norwegians did not have these kinds of problems, that they did not have children with disabilities. So for them it was a shock to hear that the head of the project had a child with disabilities... So when we talked about how many percent of Norwegian children have disabilities, they said; ‘Wow, this is new for us.’”

Further on many of the participants stayed within the boundaries of their home. One of the main causes of why they stayed at home seemed to be a sense of shame of having a child with disabilities. They did not want others to know that their child had disabilities. Generally different strategies were applied to hide the fact that they had a child with disabilities child:

The siblings [of a child with disabilities] were not allowed to bring friends home; because the parents were afraid the friends should discover that they had a child that was not healthy. They were afraid that people in their environment would talk ill of them... In many other cultures, especially among Pakistanis, it is not allowed to talk about these things, it is forbidden. It is a taboo. You do not talk about it if you have an unhealthy child because you might lose friends, you may lose your status, people starts seeing you in a very different way. So many people hide their children at home.

However, this sense of shame was not confined to staying at home and more or less isolating oneself, but had other consequences as well. First of all, all the participants of the course were single mothers. Although the reason for why they were single mothers probably varied, our informant told me that many of these women had been left by their husbands because he was ashamed of having a child with disabilities and blamed his wife for the child's disability.

Lastly, the feeling of shame seemed to be a barrier of seeking assistance from the health system. Our informant told me that some of the participants had been advised not to attend the training programs that the welfare state offered the children. These advices were followed by an alleviation of the child's disabilities and what one could do about them:

“If they talked to each other within the milieu they would say that ‘your child will be fine, there is nothing wrong with your child. You do not need to take your child to training. That is a shame. Let your child be at home and let her or him play and do ordinary stuff. So many children who did not get the opportunity to improve through training, could have developed a certain level of ability. They could have improved that process. By them being held at home and everything being ignored and everything being normal, they did not get training. Because the doctors cannot come and say that you have to bring your child to this and that.”

Through the preceding paragraphs we have sketched the main challenges and barriers for the participants that emerged during our interview with our informant. They can be summarized under the following points:

- Lack of (adapted) information
- Language and communication
- Isolation and loneliness
- Attitudes within one's social environment (shame, taboo, distrust)

In short, being a minority parent reinforces the barriers and challenges that the majority parents with a child with disabilities encounter. But new ones do also arise. Before we continue outlining in more detail the structure of the course under scrutiny, we will describe how the target group was recruited.

Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies

One of the greatest challenges facing the project was recruiting persons with minority background. In addition to the participants' lack of information concerning the welfare system and the different opportunities within it, there seemed to be a general lack of knowledge concerning minorities and their situation on the public instances behalf and the majority population in general. One of the occasions where this came into view was during a meeting before the project was initiated where our informant and some other participants were to learn how to establish parent groups. According to our informant it was clear that a great deal of the available information and knowledge related to the theme was first and foremost meant for the majority, and not adapted to the life situation of minorities. In the following she shares her experiences during the meeting:

“We were invited to an information meeting which lasted for almost a whole day. They were talking about how groups were established, how to contact different people, but all of the information that was shared that day, at that seminar, was not concerned about how one could contact parents with immigrant background. It was something that they had tried earlier on, but failed to do.”

When asked whether parents with immigrant background were reached, our informant replied: “No, it was too difficult, because it had to be a person from the local environment which could, who knew different places and who was engaged, quite simply.

To recruit the participants they visited three kindergartens, several adult educational centres where immigrants were learning Norwegian and health stations. They handed out leaflets and talked to the women about the course and their own background. Furthermore, those who wanted to join the course could write their name on a list there and then. The women were told that they would be contacted as soon as a sufficient number of participants had decided to join the course.

In addition to information concerning the course, the leaflets contained information about the head of project and the collaborator’s background; for instance which country they came from and that both of them had a child with disabilities. Our informant emphasized that the background information and the fact that they spent time talking to the women, was very important. This way of approaching potential participants created trust and the fact that they could identify themselves with the organizers of the course was, according to our informant, highly important for recruiting participants.

Summary of the practices observed

The following points will be addressed in this section:

- Location of training activities
- Number of participants/service users annually
- Methods of feedback, evaluation
- Tutor teaching methods

The meetings took place at a kindergarten in the nearby area of the participants’ residents. This was important as many of them for different reasons did not have the opportunity to travel long distances to attend the meetings. Further on, there was arranged for childcare and interpreters during the course. Both the nanny and the interpreter functioned very well. Sometimes participants brought with them their daughters and used them as interpreters.

The project lasted for two years. During the first year there was five meetings and the second year there were four meetings. As shown in table one, the number of participants had a strong increase from the first to the second year of the project. Several nationalities were also present.

Table 1

	2007	2008
Number of meetings	5	4
Number of participants	7	30
Nationality of participants	Somalia, Algeria, Syria, China and Uganda	Somalia, Iraq, Uganda, Iran, Tunisia, Syria and Bangladesh

The meetings were shaped as conversations around a table where the participants shared their feelings, experiences and challenges. Further on there were breaks that allowed for more informal conversations where the participants could get to know each other. This way of ar-

ranging courses is coherent with the peer advice that permeates many of the courses arranged by AAAE and their member organisations. The peer advice's main principle is gathering people that more or less are in the same situation and with more or less the same experiences and have them share them.

For some of the participants this was interpreted in the way that having a child with disabilities was shameful. These participants feared that sharing one's experiences in the meeting could be the start of a rumour. The organisers were aware of this and, as an attempt of overcoming the barrier all persons present at the meetings, had to sign a declaration of confidentiality. In addition it was facilitated so that the participants who wanted to talk one-to-one with one of the representatives from the AAAE could do so during the first meeting. But on subsequent meetings this was not an opportunity as one of the goals of the course was to speak openly about the situation. As the following quotation demonstrates, it seemed as though this was achieved on the following meetings:

“The emphasis was put on peer advice, because it was awareness of one's own resources and the fellowship with persons in the same situation which gave the participants the greatest sense of security in the group. As the project developed one could see that the women felt safe and had confidence in each other and they dared talk to each other about almost everything. Each meeting had a special topic that the AAAE's two representatives and the participants chose. Examples of such topics are:

- “What kind of treatments are there for children with disabilities?”
- “Relations to family, friends and social network”.

Depending on the topic, external persons were invited to the meetings. These persons could for instance be doctors, social workers, physiotherapists or other employees in the in the public sector that was current according to the situation that the participants were in. According to our informant, these visits were immensely valuable as the participants were able to ask questions they might not have asked in another context. It opened up for a situation where the participants and the external person in question could communicate on mutual grounds. This was not always the case when the participants had an appointment at the doctor's office. The following statement demonstrates what our informant said was a typical situation:

“A woman told me that her doctor had very little time for her; ‘yes, yes, you have to leave now, I have another patient.’ The women very much felt that they did not receive good treatment by the doctor. Because when you have a child that demands much more than a healthy child, one must show some consideration and perhaps spend some time on the patient, because he or she is in a new situation that demands much more of them.”

At one meeting, a male doctor came to talk about his own situation and the health care system. He shared one basic characteristic with the participants as he had adopted a child with disabilities. The participants were surprised that he desired having a child with disabilities, and the fact that he so did, was a sort of recognition of their own child. He spoke of his child as a person with its own opinions and rights, and the reaction of the participants was that “If he dares to talk about these things, then we can also.”

This quotation demonstrates one of the benefits related to peer advice, i.e. one may, by sharing experiences with other persons in the same situation, realize that the way one interprets and view one's own situation is far from the only way to interpret it. Our informant said that the doctor gave the participants a completely new way of looking at their child.

Increased confidence, the feeling of being normal, experiencing solidarity, dissolving feelings of shame and building friendship seemed to come as result of the interpersonal interaction that took place during these meetings. But in addition the meetings addressed concrete problems and barriers that the participants encountered during their daily tasks. Appointments at the doctor's office represent a suitable example in this regard:

“In our group, I put it to them very simply: before you go to the doctor, you have to write down some points, it is not always that easy to remember everything when you are in the situation. You may become nervous when you are going to talk about something you are not too happy talking about, like your own child and the problems that are related to it.”

The project report concludes in a striking way with regard to the participants' knowledge about their rights and how the health system in Norway works: “They [the participants] simply lacked basic information about the Norwegian social and health system”. The course therefore aimed at filling this knowledge and informational gap. It also highlights how the meetings were centred on spreading information about the Norwegian health system and the rights the participants have.

Strengths and weaknesses of the practice

This section concentrates on two obvious strengths of the project, i.e. the feedback mechanisms put in place by the study association and the particular learning engendered by ‘peer advice’.

Feedback mechanisms

Feedback from the participants was given at the last meeting both years the course took place. This was conducted in the same way as the rest of the course had been arranged with the participants expressing themselves orally.

Feedback from the participants indicate that the project has been important for acquiring information of the different possibilities that parents with children with disabilities have, breaking taboos and reduce the feeling of being alone in ones situation, our informant told me the following story about one of the participants:

“I remember one woman who had a child.... And she said ‘I have been living with this child for twenty years now, but I have never received so much information as I have in this group. I have always felt alone... I have struggled a lot with this child, and I have felt so alone because I had no one to talk to. I wished that I could sit around a table where there were many parents who were in the same situation, quite simply, and to listen to them and how they were doing, how they managed everyday life.’ I remember she said ‘When my child went to school, it was very difficult for us. First we were immigrants and then my child had a diagnosis’, I do not remember what it was, but it was very serious... she behaved in a very strange way at school and since god only knows what knowledge and attitudes people had then, but it could not have been the way they are today, that I know. But she said that ‘it was really hard for us and we really tried and she came home and was always angry and did not like to go to school people look at me and laugh and she withdrew everything, and we did not understand what we could do, but today I understand. Had I only had this opportunity at that time, I believe things would have been different. I did not know that it was possible to receive treatment for my child so that she could reach her optimal level in regards to her development, I did not know that if she had practiced maybe she could

have walked today. If I for instance have had the possibility to take her to training in the swimming pool, perhaps she could have been better and stimulated her muscles, because today she is completely disabled.’ ”

Peer advice

In accordance with peer advice (to draw on the experiences from persons in the same situation) in many of the courses offered by Adapted Adult Education, both the head of the project and our informant shared some of the same challenges as the participants. Both of them had a child with disabilities and in addition our informant had a minority background. It seemed to me that these experiences had given the organizers knowledge and competence that were vital in for adapting the project to the target groups. They were better equipped for understanding the situation of the participants. Our informant told me her reaction as she was asked to be engaged in the project:

“It was very interesting for me because it was new, because it was something that I had been longing for. I have a child of my own that has not been too lucky, he has a very seldom syndrome. And I, at that time I struggled to get ahead, I felt that I had to give it all and be more than a hundred percent mother. I have had healthy children before and at the time I had him I realized that my life had been turned upside down and everything was new to me. And people that I referred to, for instance hospitals and doctors, they knew just as little as me. And I felt so alone. So at the time that I heard of this project I thought; this is great, this is something that I myself have wanted.”

This quote shows that she had experienced many of the same problems that the participants had. These problems concerned emotional aspects as well as guiding through the health system and gathering information so that her child could receive the right treatment. Having experienced the emotional aspects of being a minority mother with a child with disabilities seemed to represent a tremendous strength as these issues were addressed several times during the meetings. It was obvious that our informant drew on these experiences throughout the whole project. Among many things, she was aware of the taboo related to children with disabilities among some minority groups and fully aware that information had to be passed along in a very different way than what is the case for the persons with minority background:

“How should one impart information to people who is convinced that it is a taboo to say that I have such a child? How should one impart information to such groups? That is hard. Then you have to reconsider; how can we reach these parents?”

Our informant argued that the distributed information was not adapted according to these sorts of attitudes, but directed towards persons with the prevailing attitudes. Because she was aware of this, she was able to distribute and talk to the participants in such a way that they showed up on the meetings.

The main strength of the project and peer advice is the idea of gathering persons with the same problems. The benefits of doing this are manifold, and yet more than the organizers of the course expected. The participants were surprised that so many other parents had children with disabilities and, according to our informant, literally shocked that Norwegians had children with disabilities. The visits from the doctor who had adopted a child with disabilities had some of the same effect; it visualized for the participants that others were in the same situation, and it rendered it possible to be in a situation where deviance (having a child

with disabilities) became the normal circumstance and start viewing the situation as normal outside the meetings as well.

AAAE's peer advice practises are all about exchanging experiences acquired by oneself. These shared experiences result in practical advices, but also and perhaps most importantly, increased self-esteem, autonomy and growth. According to the statements of our informant, the participants were not only able to change their behaviour in response to their situation, but they were also able to change the way they viewed their own situation. In many senses, the Norwegian concept of peer advice shares some basic affinities with the notion of empowerment. Ure (2005) argues along these lines and holds that the main difference between peer advice and empowerment is that the former "goes beyond individual mastering and may reflect a collective empowerment based on systematisation of experiences" (ibid.)

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

Expressed in both the project report and by our informant, the need for expanding the model was consequential. As far as we can see, there is no reason to believe that the situation and barriers that the participants in this project had were unique for minority parents living in Oslo, and further on that the situation will change and the barriers evaporate by themselves. The project report also expresses the wish of expanding the model to other parts of Oslo and Norway. However, due to the limited resources, it was not possible to continue the course or expand it. The following excerpt from the project report, which was completed in February 2009, suggests why the project did not continue:

"The work with the project was therefore commenced in 2007 and the project period was somewhat extended. AAAE saw the need for an additional year. Consequently, the project was completed in 2008."

Although this citation is not perfectly clear on why the project did not continue, it seems that the AAAE thought that the work could be completed if the project was granted one additional year, which indeed happened.

(2) Folkeuniversitetet (Adult Education Institution)

Main objectives of the institution

"Students' association for free education", or Folkeuniversitetet as it is called today, was founded in Oslo 1864 with the aim of providing educational courses to persons with limited economic resources. One informant emphasized that this aim is still the basis of their activities to this day.

On FU's website the guiding principles of their work is expressed through the following preamble:

- Folkeuniversitetet Adult Education Association aims to promote adults' organized learning and cultural experiences in all areas and in a lifelong perspective
- Folkeuniversitetet wishes to work for adult persons democratic right to participate in education, acquire knowledge and attend cultural activities that are adapted to their needs, abilities and interests.

- The course activities may be unbound from any syllabus preparing for formal exams
- Folkeuniversitetet wants to cooperate with public authorities and the private trade and industry, with public and private institutions and organisations.
- Folkeuniversitetet is unbound with regard to questions concerning faith and political views.

Folkeuniversitetet is one of Norway's 20 study associations. In addition to the courses and educational activity offered by the member organisations of the study associations, some of the study associations organize courses of their own. Folkeuniversitetet is a large supplier of educational courses that range from purely hobby courses to higher education. Furthermore, Folkeuniversitetet is the largest study association in Norway. It embraces 20 member associations, eight regional offices as well as 70 local antennas.

The analysis of Folkeuniversitetet Adult Education Institution, which offers both non-formal and formal training, builds on two interviews. One of the interviewees is heading a regional office covering three of Norway's 19 counties. The second interviewee has a high position in the central office of Folkeuniversitetet (FU), situated in Oslo.

Target groups

Folkeuniversitetet aims to address a large number of target groups. They do not single out a special group or segment but try to reach out to very many target groups. This is reflected in the description of the association on its website:

- Folkeuniversitetet's courses can be attended by everybody including adults who have not yet completed an approved course of study.
- Folkeuniversitetet has broad experience in designing and carrying out courses for private and public sector companies and organisations.
- According to the Norwegian Law on Occupational Training, adults who have been in employment a long time may take an examination which, if passed, qualifies them for a skilled craftsman's certificate ("svennebrev")
- Folkeuniversitetet is more and more appealing to those who have finished their professional career and wish to take up some form of studies or leisure activities.
- Folkeuniversitetet designs special courses for people who would normally have difficulty in following ordinary courses. Such people may include the physically disabled, or those who for a variety of reasons reside at special care institutions.
- In addition to language training for individuals, Folkeuniversitetet also provides employees from both the public and private sectors with targeted training designed in line with the results of a language test and needs analysis.
- Folkeuniversitetet arranges courses in Norwegian as a foreign language for those residing temporarily, or permanently, in Norway.

These points only reflect a few of the target groups addressed by Folkeuniversitetet. Whereas Folkeuniversitetet is targeting many different groups, it was hard for our informants to pin down their target groups when asked about this. As stated by the informant in the central

office of FU: “Our target groups are everyone that wishes to learn”. However, he added that they were strong in language courses and that tertiary education did not constitute a great proportion of their total amount of courses. The same question asked to the leader of a regional office, revealed that the association utilises multiple channels to reach out to target groups:

“...we use advertisements and the web is gaining importance in our work. Today, young people as well as grown-ups frequently search for web based information(...) Compared with an enterprise introducing a product on the market, we do not invest a lot in marketing. So, much can be achieved by drawing on other people and, then, the importance of having positive (learning) experiences comes to the forefront. This is, I would say, is the most important thing.”

Summary of the practices observed

The broad range of target groups implies that FU has to develop an array of training courses, encompassing both non-formal and formal learning. One category of courses is devoted to leisure activities (hobbies etc.) A second category relates to various certificates, e.g. for navigating small boats. Albeit useful for manoeuvring pleasure boats, such certificates can also point to commercial activities; and consequently to employability. A third category is made up by courses leading to qualifications approved in the formal education system.

Our interviewees were eager to point out that learners may start out with non-formal courses but as they become more confident with learning environments separated from their daily life, they gradually build up courage to enrol in formal education. By offering formal and non-formal training, FU is able to cater for both needs, possibly in the same learning institution.

Both informants considered one strong point of Folkeuniversitetet to be the wide range of courses, from pure hobby courses to educational courses at tertiary level. This does not merely allow persons to choose a course according to their own taste, but also enables them to start with basic courses before moving on to more advanced courses. Hence, any course could be of special importance for giving persons with little scholastic achievement the confidence and desire to continue the educational ladder. The head of the regional office whom we interviewed commented on this:

“We often see that people start up by attending a hobby course and then proceed to other courses (....) It might be that such a trivial training activity is the start of process of increased self-confidence.”

She then told the story of five women smoothly proceeding to exams at lower secondary level, then upper secondary level and finally graduating at Bachelor level. Three of them are now teaching in an upper secondary school. With the words of the interviewee in the central office of FU:

“A Spanish class or cooking class could be one way of breaking the resistance towards learning... The point is that we offer persons to choose their own courses.”

This statement also says something about the course content. The general policy of the association is to promote ‘organised learning’ for adults as well as their cultural experiences, both in a lifelong learning perspective. The latter is mainly achieved by means of training courses

in cultural subjects, such as cooking and insight in foreign cultures by means of language training. The leader of the regional office explained this from her perspective:

“Actually, we have close to 3000 members in what we call “the good life and the university for seniors”, offering lunches together with authors, training in languages and cultural subjects, - sometimes winded up by travels. There is a high demand for such training; we do not have to advertise for it.”

The impact of staff conditions was illustrated by looking at the regional office covering three counties. This office only counts 16 teachers on full-time employment contracts. The majority of the teachers are on part-time contracts with the status as self-employed. Teachers may be employed in other education institutions and are often hired in on a contract basis, thus ensuring flexibility. The total number of teachers during one year may reach 1200. The head of a regional office explains the staff policy in an organisation counting a majority of teachers of part-time contracts:

“This implies that when we offer them a course, like in computing, they can also use the newly acquired skills towards other employers (...) We are very concerned that our staff should enjoy working with people, so it is not enough to show us a good diploma. We have incredible many capable teachers. Many of them have actually left their jobs, for example in upper secondary schools, set up their own companies and they now almost work full-time for us.”

She also explains what kind of training is offered the teaching staff at FU. After reporting on training in subjects such as data and computing, she goes on:

“The same applies to our language teachers. (...) Many of them teach their mother tongue without prior training in pedagogy. In that case, we design for them a kind of pedagogical toolkit as well as some suggestions for how to do their job in a better way. Occasionally we also send them on training seminars, particularly related to tertiary vocational schools, and then we pay for their training.”

The methods of feedback and evaluation applied are not yet very systematic. Nevertheless, they touch upon feedback from learners and from institutions offering training to individuals.

Feedback from individual learners

According to one informant there is great variation in how feedback and evaluation are given after a course. He suspected that in many cases feedback was given orally at the end of a course. However, there is an ongoing work within the organisation and other study associations to improve feedback from the participants. But for the time being he admitted that “formalized feedback is not yet put in any form of system in our organisation”.

Formalizing feedback is also important in light of the increased demands of accountability. Our interview in one of the regional offices of the association confirmed that the feedback mechanisms are quite simple, such as asking students to fill in an evaluation sheet at the end of the course. The regional informant pointed however out that the success of the association among public offices had to do with the high completion rate in courses delivered by this association, compared with e.g. ordinary education institutions.

Feedback from institutions (intermediary organisations) offering training to individuals

The latter point alludes to how FU's 'customers' representing individual learners, give feedback. Such mechanisms also include the way in which local stakeholders are consulted prior to the design of training courses. For this purpose, *competence councils* composed of local stakeholders are used as a working method in the region covered by the interviewee. Each town in the three counties has one such council.

Outreach to marginalised groups – recruitment strategies – barriers to entrance

Regarding marginalized groups, the informant in the central office said that "reaching out to these groups will always be a challenge". However, he remained confident that a great deal of this challenge was handled by their member organisations and by the local departments of Folkeuniversitetet, which both are situated in and familiar with local communities.

Furthermore, the association finds support for this work in a programme specially set up for adults lagging behind in literacy, numeracy and computing skills. For this purpose, FU has applied for money from a public training programme targeted for low-skilled employees and has collaborated with the institution in charge of this programme, i.e. Vox.

The regional informant pinpointed that special treatment of vulnerable groups are sometimes assured by allocating more resources to the design of courses for these groups, for example in terms of adapting the course content to special needs for, i.a., refugees. In this context, care arrangements for their children can also be set up.

One approach for delineating vulnerable target groups is to have a look at the courses commissioned by public authorities. Subsequent to competition in open calls for tenders, the association is awarded contracts for delivering training courses to public institutions and agencies. Such publicly financed courses are often targeted for learners covered by individual rights to attend training. The target groups can e.g. be unemployed (covered by services of NAV) or refugees benefitting from services offered by the municipalities.

It is worth noticing that FU has such a broad outreach strategy that it also delivers training to private enterprises. The informant in a regional FU office gave examples from the travelling industry, represented by hotels and airlines. Thus, FU is also competing on the market of private training services.

Strengths and weaknesses of the practice(s) - including financing and student support

The way ahead i.a. depends on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of FU. Starting out with the strengths, the ability to adapt to needs among customers is explained by the informant in the central office as follows:

"(Our) strength is flexibility, to be close to the market and to people who are being trained. Closeness. And that we can choose teachers and instructors from time to time, the best ones. That the members of our administrative staff have also been attending adult education. That they are able to and know how they should arrange for adult training. And that that we have a quality assurance system..."

However, offering a wide range of different courses also constitutes a challenge for Folkeuniversitetet; as this requires that they know how to adapt themselves to different markets and being aware of their competitors. Some of the competitors of Folkeuniversitetet are public

institutions and organisations, and some are private firms. Our informant told that public institutions and organisations are financed in a different and more beneficial way than study associations. In many cases the different finance mechanisms made it difficult for Folkeuniversitetet to be retained in public call for tenders. He also said that the public sector has to acknowledge that Folkeuniversitetet is serving a public demand and that the public sector should change some rules and procedures preventing Folkeuniversitetet from offering training to different public organisations. When it comes to competition between public institutions and Folkeuniversitetet, it is important to keep in mind that while the public education and training for the most of it are free of charge, in most cases, participants themselves have to pay fees for attending the offers of Folkeuniversitetet.

One example of the frustrations that arose from the relation to public bodies was Folkeuniversitetet's dependence on contracts from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. Allegedly, different NAV offices have adopted their own strategies for using external training providers. This dispersion complicates the work of Folkeuniversitetet, particularly the ability of the central office in Oslo to coordinate, at a national scale, the provision of courses to NAV. The importance of funds from NAV to Folkeuniversitetet can be illustrated in the region of three counties where we conducted interviews. Here, 15 million of the annual 78 mill NOK turnover came from NAV.

Voluntary/professional work

Another potential weakness of Folkeuniversitetet was, according to our informant in the central FU office, that they were: "...dependent on skilled and knowledgeable representatives that are willing to use their competences without getting very much paid".

Further on, he said that a great deal of the work that is being done throughout the organisation is carried out by volunteers, and that Folkeuniversitetet is dependent on these to survive as an organisation. This problem appears to be more acute in the non-professional branches of the organisation.

As people enter the organisation they acquire valuable knowledge and competencies. The problem is that when they leave the organisation, they take the knowledge and competencies with them, leaving the organisation with a gap to fill. As this is voluntary work, FU is not able to hire people and give a certain position to the right candidate. Instead, FU depends on enthusiasts and ardent souls. As this informant said, these are few and it is difficult to find them. As a consequence, it is hard to achieve continuity within the organisation and this makes it vulnerable.

Financial issues

The funding sources may be separated in two parts, public subsidies and fees from the participants. The public subsidies are allocated each year over the state budget and constitute around three percent of the annual turnover of the association. More concretely, the public subsidies derive from the Ministry of Education and Research and Research.

Folkeuniversitetet is a non-profit organisation without any private owners. For this reason, no dividend is paid and all resources are to be used for providing a broad spectrum of educational courses.

At the same time as the public subsidies for the study associations have shrunk during the last years, their activity (measured in the number of courses, hours of courses and number of participants) has decreased. One of our informants said that the cause of this situation is far from obvious and that it has resemblances to the chicken or egg situation: the decrease in

activity could be a result of lower subsidies. However it could be the other way around, as the activity makes up the basis for calculating the subsidies.

This said, the informant argued that, in reality, the negative trend was a result of politicians' lack of willingness to prioritize the sector. One of the reasons for this, the informant argued, was that the outcomes of the activities carried out by the study associations are not measurable in the same way as other educational activities: "How do you measure the effect of a course in cooking?" our informant asked, and he added: "What is the purpose of adult education, what does the Adult Education Act of 1976 say?"

These rhetorical questions should be put in the context of recent development within the educational sector and perhaps the society in general, implying that institutions and organisations become more and more accountable for their output, e.g. how many students pass their exams on schedule, how many degrees (or ECTS points) they are able to produce each year.

The main aim of the Adult Education Act of 1976 is that it should enable individuals to lead a more meaningful life, and although one may argue that the study associations contribute to this, it is a difficult task to measure it in quantitative terms. The point made by our informant is that it is hard, if not impossible, to hold study associations accountable for many of their activities in the same way as other institutions and organisations, e.g. universities. Despite this, the political climate is more or less demanding this from them and the situation is frustrating for the study associations. Our informant pointed out that higher esteem among public authorities and people in general was one of the main challenges for Folkeuniversitetet in the coming years.

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

The basic idea behind the present model is to serve a wide array of student groups and customers able to pay, at the same time as FU lives up to some basic ideas of NGOs and study associations. The expansion of the model partly depends on relations with the formal education system.

Today, publicly recognised educational institutions are the only one that may produce certificates at upper secondary level. This constitutes the main entrance requirement for tertiary education in Norway. One of our informants argued that the necessity of linking up to formal education institutions for having the course certificates recognised, complicates the work of study associations and have certain repercussions on course participants. The reason is that the issuing of educational certificates takes time and engenders fees.

Our informant therefore sketched an alternative implying that certain qualification standards should be identified and if a person fulfils these, s/he should be given a certificate that could grant him/her a Certificate of Upper Secondary School. Further on, once these qualifications are identified, other institutions than the public ones should be allowed to produce such certificates.

A crucial challenge for the organisation in the coming years is that they remain able to offer educational services with the same preambles as the Adult Education Act of 1976. To be able to do this, our informant identified three important aspects that the organisation needs to focus on:

1. "For the time being we are dealing with a restructuration process, and we will have to continue with it."
2. "It is important to evaluate how our resources are being used"

3. “We also have to make sure that we are strong enough to offer what businesses and people are demanding”

On the third point, another informant formulated the approach of FU in the following way:

“....we go out to people, speak with them and (then) present an offer to them....”,

while adding that:

“...a broad range of activities is, so to say, a part of our primary purpose...”

In this regard, the impact of the recession is not yet manifest. To the contrary:

“Hopefully, it may function as an opening for the acknowledgement that we are a sector that may be used for training”.

Adult education for prisoners

The prison we conducted the interviews in was established several years ago. Since then, the capacity of the prison has increased substantially and by spring 2009 the prison incarcerates hundreds of male prisoners. It is a high security prison.

Education in a high security prison for male inmates

Main objectives of the institution and target groups

The prison consists of three main units. These are the reception and custody unit, the living unit and the “path finder”. All prisoners arrive at the reception and custody unit. During the first couple of days, prisoners’ health and educational prerequisites are assessed. The main aims are to draw a picture of the risk related to the prisoner and his needs. Some prisoners are swiftly transferred to one of the other units, while some stay in custody for a longer period, depending on their sentence.

The living unit is the largest unit and consists of several departments whose focus varies according to the situation and certain characteristics of the prisoners. In one of the departments most of the prisoners have a foreign citizenship and are to be expelled from Norway after completing their sentence. Another apartment is mainly for senior prisoners and senior prison officers. Further on, one apartment is adapted to prisoners that desire to work on their drug related problems. Some of the departments within the living unit are intended for prisoners that do not function in any of the other departments within the living unit.

The “path finder” is for prisoners with drug related problems that desire to use their sentence to go through a change. The main focus is put on creating a drug free environment that opens up for learning, growth and development. Prisoners from the whole country may be eligible for transfer to this department. The prisoner in question must be willing to undergo treatment after the sentence is completed.

It is important to emphasize that which of the units and the departments within the units the prisoner in question belongs to, and his general condition and situation, have consequences for the educational activity, work and leisure activities he may attend. Prisoners in custody may be restricted to many of the educational activities that take place within other parts of the prison. Further on, prisoners that have been incarcerated at an earlier point have their own department within the living unit and may attend courses that are especially designed to prevent prisoners from returning to prison once again. The condition and situation of the prisoner may also have consequences for the educational activities that he may participate in, e.g. a prisoner with mental related problems may participate in special programs and the same goes for prisoners with drug related problems. In the following, the educational activities are described in a general manner, i.e. not specifying which prisoners do and do not have access to them.

On the question of how our informants would assess the offers of education at the prison compared to other prisons, one of our informants said that:

“The division goes between low and high security prisons. With regard to low security compared to high security, low security is preferable. But if we compare our prison with other high security prisons, it is a good place to be, anyway that is what the prisoners that have been transferred to us say.”

Concerning the presence of references to lifelong learning and rehabilitation in official documents, one of our informants said that:

“Such documents are first and foremost reports to the Storting [i.e. white papers to the Storting, i.e. the Norwegian parliament], and in the last one, Report to the Storting No. 37, it is clear that education is to be run in prison. Research referred to in this document has proven that learning functions best in prisons that have the highest degree of openness, which is the lowest security level. Further on, we have few failures in Norwegian prisons; few escape their serving of sentence. By the way, the Report to the Storting No. 37 is called ‘Punishment that works’ and the report is fine, but they are wrong in the headline, because punishment does not work”.

Summary of the practices observed and links to public services

The educational system in the prison is divided into three different parts: The public educational system, programs arranged by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) and lastly programs offered by the Norwegian Correctional Services.

All prisoners have a duty of activity. This means that prisoners have to work, attend courses or do some kind of activity of public utility or something that will prevent criminal behaviour in the future. In reality this boils down to work or engaging in any of the three mentioned education and training at the prison. The prisoners are not forced to attend specific programs, educational courses or to work, but they have to choose one of these options. One of our informants described this as “a choice between a rock and a hard place”.

The duty of activity corresponds to a normal day’s work. Despite the fact that prisoners have a duty of activity, not all prisons, and not the one in question, can offer the options “work” or “educational courses” for all prisoners. As for the prison, one of our informants said that:

“For the time being there are 150 prisoners that do not have the opportunity to attend work or educational courses. The reason for this is that we do not have enough facilities for offering school and work for so many prisoners”.

However the informant added that the current government had granted money for a new activity building that would have four class rooms, two stores that are to be run by the prisoners and lastly music and drama room.

Previously, the duty of activity used to be duty of work. In other words, one would lose one’s daily compensation if one attended programs or courses instead of going to work. Since work, programs and courses today are juxtaposed, inmates who attend training courses do not lose any payment compared with inmates preferring to follow work or program activities.

Links to public education

In principle, prisoners have the same right to services and facilities as the rest of the population. Social services, health care, education and cultural facilities are therefore provided to inmates or convicted persons by the same public agencies that otherwise are responsible for these services in society at large.

That incarcerated persons maintain the same rights to education as citizens outside the prison is called the principle of normality. As a consequence, the municipality has established a division for public adult education within the prison. The division is therefore autonomous with regard to the prison system. This autonomy is among many things reflected in the way the employees dress (which is casual clothes and not prison officer uniforms), the way they interact with the prisoners and their responsibility with regard to security. The school issues certificates from basic to upper secondary school and arranges exams in the prison. Exams at tertiary education level are also carried out within the public school and sent to the higher educational institution in question.

Despite the fact that prisoners have the same rights to education as every other Norwegian citizen, one of our informants said that “for the time being the school only has space for 85 students”. The reason for this was lack of economic resources, but our informant said that they were applying for more money so that they could make way for 100 new students.

Most of the 85 students take subjects to complete upper secondary school, e.g. mathematics, Norwegian, natural science, English, social science and history. In addition the school offers specialized tracks within upper secondary school for students that desire to immerse themselves in subjects like design and craft, technique and industrial production and lastly music, dance and drama.

The school also organizes classes adapted for minorities in the following subjects: Norwegian and social sciences, mathematics, computer courses, basic reading and writing and English. There are mainly two reasons why some classes are preserved for minorities. First of all, some of the prisoners with minority background are to be returned to their home country after having completed their sentence and are therefore incarcerated in their own apartment. Secondly some minorities have the right to attend classes in Norwegian and social science.

In addition to upper secondary school and the courses for minorities, the school offers courses within basic education and arrange so that students may attend university or university colleges if they wish to do so. Lastly they also arrange for and assess whether the prisoners' prior learning experiences may qualify for certificates.

Links to the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration organises courses that are valuable currency in the labour market. These are often short in time span and examples of such courses are scaffolding training courses, computer courses and truck driving courses.

Norwegian Correctional Services

At the Norwegian Correctional Services' website one can read that “Programmes are a term used to describe correctional service initiatives for convicted persons and remand prisoners in the form of education, skills training and structured interviews.”²² One informant mentioned drug and violence prevention to exemplify programs offered by the correctional services.

²² <http://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/home.78580.no.html>

A broad range of programs is offered, depending on the needs and demand for them. At the correctional services website the following programs are listed:

- New Start - a cognitive programme to improve coping skills
- My Choice - a drug and alcohol abuse programme run by the probation service
- RIF - a drug and alcohol abuse programme run by the prison service
- Breaking with Crime - a cognitive programme aimed at general crime prevention
- WIN - a programme for women
- One-to-One - a programme for use in prison and while on probation
- Discussion groups for violent and sexual offenders based on the Alternative-to-Violence model
- Anger Management Programme - to prevent violent crime
- Stress Management Programme - a programme for use in prison
- Sexual Offences Programme - a treatment programme for sexual offenders
- Drunk Drivers' Programme - a programme run by the probation service

The list contains several programs. Many which aim at minimizing the risk for criminal behaviour to occur again. It is important to keep in mind that this list of programs offered by the correctional services is not necessarily available at the prison we visited. An obvious example is the "WIN-programme" which is adapted to women. On the question whether they ask the prisoners for contributions on how to design programs, one of our informant said that:

"We do not, but I know that other prisons do. It is obvious, and I believe research has proven this, that what the inmates first and foremost want is vocational training so that they will be able to get a job afterwards."

Continuity of education

A main challenge following a completed sentence is continuing the life outside the walls of the prison. Education is by no means an exception. According to one of our informants, the prison administration does what it can to arrange so that the prisoners are able to continue their educational program after they are released. However it seems as the main problem is tied to elements out of the prison administration's control:

"I believe that we are doing a good job with this overlap, but it is hard for the inmate. It is a totally different situation outside the prison and the instructions given are poorly adapted to previously inmates".

The other informant discarded what was referred to as the principle of normality and called it a dissimulation:

"Another thing is that we have to question the principle of normality, it is claimed that the prisoner have the right to imported services so that the he shall maintain the same rights as those outside prison, but that is, that is a pure dissimulation... Even though we can offer education, you cannot take the courses you want; in this place prisoners can study six subjects, if he is lucky. When you exit the prison you need five years of work experience to receive university admission certification. Most of our students have never had an employment contract..."

To put the quotation in the Norwegian context, there are two ways to complete upper secondary school: Either to study fulltime for three years, or to complete a lower number of core subjects and use these together with five years of work experience. The latter path is sort of an alternative for adults who have not completed upper secondary education at an earlier point. Instead of studying three years full time for completing upper secondary school, adults may be assessed on the background of their work experience and the mentioned core subjects. In the prison they only offer these core subjects. They do not offer enough subjects so that the prisoner may achieve his upper secondary certificate solely on the basis of subjects. In other words, it is only the alternative path (core subjects + work experience) that is available for the prisoners. He therefore needs five years of work experience after he is released. Since very few of the prisoners have had a job before being incarcerated, and as they may be maladjusted to many spheres of society when they exit the prison, our informant argued that the principles of normality have little value in reality and therefore function in a dissimulative way.

Distance education

The prisoners are allowed to use computers at school, but computers are not allowed in the cells. We asked one informant whether they had plans for increasing the access to computers, the informant answered that:

“... There is an ongoing project for the time being called IFI, internet for inmates. This enables inmates to use internet as usual, but certain pages and functions are removed. This project should have been initiated long ago, as long as one limits the opportunities of internet, it is merely a technical problem. This said, it costs a lot of money, the cells do not have cables for internet”.

If such a system was introduced, the informant maintained that there would be few obstacles to distance education. For the time being, prisoners that study at tertiary level have their own computer room next to a prison workshop:

“For the students we have been granted a room. Surely, not sound insulated but where they sit with computers... so then they are called up at eight o'clock and sit there until half past eleven, and then there is one hour break and then they continue from half past twelve to three.”

We were invited up to this room and talked for half an hour with the students. One of them was a foreign citizen and studied at Indiana University: He was the first student of the prison who had enrolled in a foreign university. Since he was to be expelled from Norway, he was not eligible for support from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund after completing his sentence. However, he had a sponsor who gave him economic support.

Although distance education seemingly worked fairly well for the prisoners whom we talked to, several barriers exist. One is predictability, or the lack thereof. Even though the teachers at the public school go out of their way to help the students complete a degree at tertiary level, the lack of predictability concerning the prisoner's situation complicates this.

One concrete example is a teacher who made an appointment with a university college to discuss a prisoner's educational trajectory. The prisoner in question, the teacher and a prison officer attended the meeting. The problem with the educational program the prisoner had enrolled in was that it contained group assignments and obligatory classes. They managed to settle a deal where he could do the group assignments individually and not attend the obligatory classes. However, later in the educational trajectory he was transferred to another

prison and at that time a vital part of the study implied visiting companies in order to see their solutions to problems that were relevant for the study. At this point the teacher had expected that the prisoner would get admission for joining the visits at the companies. But since he had been transferred to another prison, the rules were different, and he could not complete his education. Our informant said “It is always the prison that owns the prisoner”.

Future directions of prisoners’ education

When it comes to expectations concerning the future, one informant said that:

“Modulated courses are the offers of education one should go in for in the future. Two thirds of the inmates serve sentences that are less than four months. Given this one should arrange for short courses that provide course certificates one may use on later occasions.”

Lack of economic resources was the main obstacle for offering more prisoners education. In this regard, the economic crisis seems to be positive for the prison, as the government has intervened to improve the correctional services as part of the general economic recovery package.

Support services in prison

As mentioned, prisoners’ health and educational prerequisites are assessed as prisoners enter the prison. However, one of our informants admitted that they were not able follow up everyone:

“The inmates are being referred to the different services that carry the assessment, but as mentioned, it happens that this come to nothing.”

The prison has a section for sick prisoners and a health section, and one informant added that:

“Many of the inmates have mental problems, and many become psychologically ill from serving their sentence.”

Profiles of prisoners who attend training

As to the profile of the prisoners that engage in education, one of our informants said that:

“Regrettably many of the young prisoners do not desire to take part in the educational courses. Persons above 35 years who do not have drug related problems and who have been incarcerated before, are the ones that most often take part in the educational courses. Other than that, it is obvious that the most eager students are those who study at a university or university college.”

The other informant reflected along the same lines:

“It is not the 19 years old that show up, they are often between 25 and 30, 35, I believe. Many have long narcotic sentences.”

Even though it seems hard to pin down the groups that participate in the education and training, they apparently agree that the youngest prisoners tend to refrain from education and that students in tertiary education are the most motivated ones:

“I look at those who manage to start reading; they read around the clock, some of them can read at any time.”

Disciplinary problems were few. As formulated by one informant:

“Of course outbursts happen, but given the situation, this is not strange. In many ways I imagine that it must be tougher being a teacher at lower secondary level. We do not have more disciplinary problems than I believe we should tolerate.”

Tutors in the prison

The tutors in the prison come from the public school, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration and the Norwegian Correctional Services. The aim of their instructions and the way that they teach, accordingly vary.

Strengths and weaknesses of the practice(s) - including financing and student support

Studying in prison

According to one of our informants, studying is incredible hard:

“In my opinion to study in a prison is one of the hardest things you can do. There are so many things that work against you. One thing is our own mental state; you slide into apathy, right? It is boredom, it is routines.”

The other informant described the prison as an educational arena in the following way:

“The prison is in itself a regime that works against learning and which may counter rehabilitation. It is a place that is experienced as pressing and declares to be without legal capacity; one simply cannot stand it, and have a hard time getting motivated. This said, many survive the situation by taking part in different initiatives, so if one abstains from these initiatives due to low motivation; one may end up in a vicious circle. Further on, it is no secret that many of the educational initiatives have not reflected the needs of the inmates. Many of these have bad experiences from school and easily become unmotivated of theoretical courses... ”

This answer was followed up by a statement on what the informant regards as the most important motivating factor for attending education and whether the prison took any special measures to spur participation:

“First of all it is about doing something meaningful. Learning may create such a meaning. For many of the inmates the instructions is a ‘normal place of refuge’, one gets a break from being labelled as an inmate and is able to be a student instead. We see that this is very important for the inmates. Secondly, the training may turn out to be useful the day one leaves prison. But perhaps this last function is exaggerated by us [working] in the prison administration.”

That the education and training inside the prison may function as a place of refuge, i.e. an opportunity to be viewed and view oneself as something else than a prisoner, was also supported by the other informant when it came to students at tertiary level:

“... they have a strong motivation, they are very motivated, because once they start studying, they are not merely a prisoner but also students.”

Students in basic education were apparently harder to motivate as their experience with the school system had been severely negative:

“... the job is very much about rendering learning as harmless, rendering harmless those things that concern the school. We work in small groups and adapt for every single one...”

On the question which teaching methods that functioned well for the prisoners, the informant said that:

“... it is important to have teachers with background in special needs education, teaching in a prison is qualitatively different from teaching other persons in other contexts. Secondly, we have seen that master craftsman works well. If one is making a chair, it works much better if the inmate follows a teacher, sees what she or he does, and tries do to the same. It opens up for another relation and teaching than having the teacher up on the black board, telling how to make a chair. Further on, the latter method is often very abstract and theoretical, something which does not suit many of the inmates.”

The other informant, who teaches classes and therefore interacts with the prisoners on a daily basis, said that the methods were basic teaching methods:

“I follow the curriculum pretty tight, set up goals for each class that we try to reach and then summarize it. So that is basic; I draw on their understanding and use it during the classes, and I use a log to see whether they have reached the goals.”

The same informant was also engaged in how prisoners could discover how they learn and said that it was very important that they became aware of this:

“... how do I learn best? What should my situation be like? How do I equip myself to be able to learn? ... I am not a teacher who tells people what do to, but one who tries to make them wonder, ask questions. How others work it out, I do not know.”

As mentioned, prisoners have the same rights as every other citizen and libraries is by no means an exception. Statistics show that prisoners use the libraries much more than the average citizen. By comparing prisoners with adults outside the prisons, the former lends 20 times as many books and media from the libraries as the latter (ABM-utvikling 2003:41).

Sustainability of the most promising practices observed

As previously mentioned, there is an antagonism between the need for security and prisoners' wish for higher education. Many of the classes within higher education demand attendance and much of the interaction between students is mediated through the internet. The number-one job of the correctional services is to make sure that prisoners do not constitute a threat to the public. On the other hand, the task of the educational system is to make sure that everybody wishing to study is offered this opportunity. Both informants highlighted challenges and problems related to the balance between security and the opportunity of education. They acknowledged that the current situation is far from ideal. Judging from the response of the informant from the correctional services, increased funds could contribute to enhance the capacity of the prison. Likewise, arranging for internet access could ease some of the current problems. At the moment, it seems as the balance between security and education often turns to the advantage of security. Despite the fact that reaching such a balance might alleviate some practical problems, it is far from sure this would solve all shortcomings.

According to one informant, there are additional challenges related to education. More specifically, it concerns the relation between prison officers and the prisoners. The informant argued that when the prisoners educated themselves, they became too knowledgeable for the prison system, i.e. they became better educated than the prison officers:

“Culturally speaking, they become far more knowledgeable than the prison officers. One does not even need higher education to become a prison officer. So they become more knowledgeable than the prison officer, perhaps they are at the outset, but they become even more knowledgeable than the prison officer.”

According to this informant, in some respect this could turn the hierarchy between the prisoner and the prison officer upside down.

Common themes and contrasts across the interviews

Throughout the following section we will shed light on common themes and contrasts among the various institutions. Consequently, we rely on previous sections to describe each institution and explicate the idiosyncrasies as we now aim to present a compiled account. Our approach presented in figure 1 is to put the gist of the matter on recruitment and retention/completion from the perspective of institutional practices and individual factors. In doing this, we highlight both measures for and barriers against recruitment and retention practices in line with a perspective of social inclusion in adult learning²³.

Figure 1: Analytical scheme with examples of how institutional and individual factors influence recruitment and retention.

	Recruitment	Retention
Institutional practices	General practices for recruitment and admission Appreciation of previous learning experiences: Interpretation of central rules and definition of own rules.	Flexible arrangements Pedagogical approaches (e.g. peer advice, special needs education) Adapting education to all groups (e.g. cultural awareness)
Individual factors	Information in order to enroll Motivation Economic and time constraints Gender related issues	

As we analyse how various institutions practice recruitment and retention, we suggest explanations for patterns of similarities and differences. Concerning individual factors, we have centred them around various themes related to enrolment (recruitment) or remaining within the training course (i.e. retention). These themes were common in many institutions. Since themes and issues, such as economic constraints, often influence both enrolment and the probability of remaining enrolled in a particular course, the distinction between recruitment and retention is less pronounced in the section that deals with individual factors than in the following section addressing institutional practices. With regard to institutional practices, it is easier to put them in the categories recruitment or retention, due to the fact that they both are an integral part of the institutions. As a result, many practices aim at improving these aspects in one way or another.

²³In addition to recruitment and retention, it is possible to argue that completion could constitute a third factor. In the following discussion we will however refrain from distinguishing between retention and completion, but rather analyse these two aspects as one single process. Despite the fact that the notions are analytically discernable, our experience is that they have a tendency of floating into each other.

Institutional practices for entrance to adult education

We will in this section focus on recruitment within the various institutions. An important question regarding this topic is to what degree institutions manage to include adult students that are marginalized in one way or another. Further on, we enquire on how different institutions practice recruitment based on appreciation of previous learning experiences, and to what degree they treat this as a valid ticket for admission.

General recruitment practices

Institutions at higher education level are not formally obliged to put in place specific recruitment measures towards, e.g., ethnic minorities, and mainstream political thinking is that social equality in terms of access to higher education is (by default) regulated by loans and grants offered by the State Educational Loan Fund. Moreover, citizens are entitled to benefit from general welfare arrangements set up to ensure social equality during the life span. The assumption that the State, and its regional/local bifurcations, should cater for social equality in higher education is framing how higher education institutions practice their “institutional freedom”.

Our interviews at Oslo University College revealed however a decision to recruit students in line with the diversity of the city population. Moreover, this objective should penetrate into the working procedures of the institution. This social widening-up touches on barriers not only along an ethnic dimension but also in terms of gender, disabilities, socio-economic background etc.

An important step for reaching the aim of the University of Oslo, i.e. improving its scorings on international ranking lists and strengthening its position as a research university, is to recruit competent students, i.e. students with high grades from upper secondary school. In other words, the university cultivates a meritocratic ideal implying that efforts and merits remain the only valid admission ticket. According to our informants, the university went to great length in adapting the study situation for various groups as long as they qualified for admission (i.e. high grade average from upper secondary school). For instance, one of our informants said that the number of students with reading and writing disorders had increased. She believed that one important reason for this was the university’s increased effort for helping these students. Further on, she added that the university stay in touch with many of the organisations for persons with disabilities, like the Association for Dyslectics, the Norwegian Association of Blind and Visually Impaired, as well as the Association for Deaf and People with Hearing Disorders.

At the same time it seems as though the university is reluctant to granting admission based on appreciation of previous learning experiences. One informant told us that the university was little concerned with adult applicants who applied on the background of prior learning experiences and that, instead, these students were encouraged to obtain a certificate for completed upper secondary school. This coincides with another statement made at OUC in which one informant underlined that more liberal admission rules are not necessarily to the advantage of learners coming from non-traditional backgrounds. She explained this by pointing to recent studies of candidates admitted to higher education with a minimum of knowledge in Norwegian. These tend to lag behind throughout their entire study period and scarcely any catch-up effects can be discerned for this group.

Just like students who apply on the background of their average grade point from upper secondary school, persons applying on the background of prior learning experiences have to compete with other applicants to enrol in study programme. While it is easy to decide which

one of two students with a certificate from upper secondary school should be allowed to enrol (i.e. choosing the one with the highest grade point average), comparing a student's prior learning experiences with a given grade point average from upper secondary school, is most likely a much more demanding task.

The decision of granting admission to a person who applies on the background of previous learning experiences at the expense of a student that applies on the background of their certificate from upper secondary school, is an approximate assessment made by each institution. And throughout our interviews, it also became clear that informants from the University of Oslo and Oslo University College agreed on the need to stick to certain standards for assessing prior learning experiences. According to the informants, such standards assist students in acquiring the necessary skills for completing higher education.

As recruitment to higher education in Norway is mainly grounded in competition based on grade point average from upper secondary school, it is likely that those who apply on the background of previous learning experiences will have a lower probability for enrolment in institutions and degrees with many applicants. A conclusion in the latest annual report from Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, supports such an assumption:

“Nevertheless, it seems as if it is harder for students that apply on the background of prior learning experiences to be admitted to studies where there are high entrance requirements. This is for instance the case for law degrees.” (Vox 2009:33).

A statement of one of the informants from the Sinsen department of Oslo Adult Education demonstrates that the proposition that applicants with a certificate from upper secondary school are being preferred to those that apply on the background of previous learning experiences, is perceived as a fact among potential applicants:

“Sometimes the student says ‘no, I do not want this subject approved on the basis of the appreciation of previous learning experiences. I am going to apply for [admission at a] university and it is important for me to be able to compete with other students.’ How appreciation of previous learning experiences is being assessed within higher education we do not know, but persons often benefit from having a grade in a given subject.”

If Oslo University College accepts more candidates on the background of previous learning experiences, it might simply be because they have fewer applicants per available place. As a result competition is attenuated and the probability of being granted admission on the basis of prior learning experiences increases. And if it is true that the University of Oslo is reluctant to granting admission to persons who seek admission based on prior learning experiences, it might be because the threshold for being admitted to a degree in general is high. In other words, educational institutions' opportunity for practicing an inclusive recruitment policy may to a large degree depend on the demand for the courses and educational programmes they are offering.

Another point is that it may be more risky to enrol students that apply on the background of previous learning experiences. In view of two of UiO's main goals, i.e. to improve its position on international rankings and affirm itself as a research university, the institution is interested in recruiting students with high probability of academic success. Admitting students who have followed a traditional educational path (i.e. completed upper secondary education), may therefore turn out to be a more secure and perhaps profitable investment for the university, than accepting applicants that apply on the background of previous learning experiences. To conclude, having control over which students are recruited seems like an important element

for reaching the goals of the institutions. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following, to some extent this is not unique for institutions within tertiary education.

Proceeding then to the two departments at Oslo Adult Education: In view of the resources used at the Sinsen department to remedy some of the students' lack of preparedness, we asked one of the informants whether she would prefer that the school was stricter when it came to which persons were admitted. Her reply was:

“Yes, that would have been alright. Sometimes we have students who do not have the qualifications to complete the course they have applied for. They have an exclusive right for enrolment, so if they submit a complaint after we have said ‘I do not think this will work out, it is better for you to transfer to a lower level’, they get support from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. It all ends up with them flunking or dropping out, instead of following our advice.”

Even though the department of Oslo Adult Education at Sinsen differs a great deal from the two institutions in higher education where we conducted interviews, their success as an institution is not only measured against their ability to include and adapt their education and training to all participants. At least for their upper secondary education and training, their success is measured according to how many students drop out and how many are able to complete. Consequently, they are, although to a significant lesser extent, shaped by some of the same factors as the two institutions within higher education. We believe that factors such as the student drop-out rate have certain consequences for the institution. The most important aspect with regard to recruitment is that the institutions obtain an interest in who enters the doors. For instance, higher education institutions receive funding from the government based on how many students they are able to graduate. As a result, it is important to recruit students who are able to complete. In this aspect, the students are a mean for reaching the institution's goals.

When it comes to the other institutions under scrutiny, our impression is that they tended to consider participation in training courses as a goal in itself. For the two study associations, inclusion and recruitment of potentially marginalized groups seemed to be at the forefront of their overall approach. Hence, Folkeuniversitetet sets up programmes specially for adults lagging behind in literacy, numeracy and computing skills. And most of the courses offered by the Association for Adapted Adult Education are developed according to the needs of the participants.

At the school within OAE offering Norwegian and social science for immigrants, the situation was largely the same as for the two study associations: barriers to entrance could seldom be related to the institution's wish to restrict enrolment or to any explicit sorting mechanisms (like in the case with grade point average in higher education). This situation may be seen as a result of the institutions' mission.

A central measure for the performance of all three schools mentioned in the last paragraph, is how many students enrol in their education and training programmes. The two study associations' financial situation is more or less dependent on how many participants they attract to their education and training during a year. E.g., the purpose of offering Norwegian and social science for immigrants is that as many as possible with the right or duty (or both) to attend do so. And even though passing the Norwegian exam at the schools within OAE that offer Norwegian and social science for immigrants is important, the main goal of the schools is to recruit as many candidates as possible who either have the right or duty (or both) to attend

their education and training programmes. In other words, the institution has no incentive to restrict enrolment in order to achieve higher rates of completion.

In the case of Folkeuniversitetet it should be mentioned that many participants pay a substantial fee for attending a given course. Most likely, such a fee functions as a sorting mechanism in the sense that only participants who are able to pay by themselves (given that the place at school is not paid by anyone else, e.g. public authorities) are able to enrol. Secondly, we assume that paying a substantial fee leads participants to consider more closely whether they believe that they are able to follow a course and that their probability to leave the course decreases.

Appreciation of previous learning experiences as an admission ticket

To shed more light on the previously described practices for appreciation of previous learning experiences (APLE) in the two higher education institutions, we now shift the focus to APLE practices at one of the study associations, namely Folkeuniversitetet. Even though Folkeuniversitetet is not a tertiary educational institution, they offer courses that are based on the syllabus of courses within higher education. The participants of these courses are then external candidates at a university or university college, but they follow the instructions given by Folkeuniversitetet. We asked the leader of a regional office of *Folkeuniversitetet* how they collaborate with the formal education system when their applicants' non-formal and formal competencies are assessed. Our interviewee stated:

“...the application for using prior learning experiences as a criterion for enrolment in a higher education institution is submitted to us. If we have doubts about the applicant's eligibility, we consult the educational institution in question. Provided that we assess the application positively, we give a green light to the applicant. It should be noted that all such applications, including the enclosed documentation, are later handed over to each educational institution (....) My impression is that universities do not approve such applications as easily as university colleges but I think the co-operation is good. My only objection is that [the procedure] sometimes takes too much time.”

Only publicly recognised upper secondary schools are entitled to produce certificates at this level. This constitutes the main entrance requirement for tertiary education in Norway. One of our informants argued that the necessity of linking up to formal education institutions for having the course certificates recognised, complicates the work of study associations and have certain repercussions on course participants. The reason is that the issuing of educational certificates takes time and engenders fees.

The general recruitment practices of the prison were very different compared with all the other institutions. Despite the fact that prisoners have the same right to education as citizens who are outside the prison walls, 150 of the prisoners did not attend education and training or work due to lack of facilities. Further on, the education and training was limited to 85 participants due to economic constraints. Although one of our informants said that this situation will improve because the prison has been promised government grants to expand their facilities and increase the capacity of the public school, we believe there are reasons to ask whether such a situation would have been accepted outside the prison walls.

Summary of recruitment practices in adult education institutions

The theme entrance to education can be elucidated by different theories; emphasising either political, economic, sociological or psychological variables (cf. M. Souto Otero 2007). The

two last variables i.a. bring to the forefront second chance learners' personal motivation to enrol in training (cf. the discussion at the beginning of this chapter).

As to the contribution from political sciences with open eyes for institutional practices, and while considering all our observations on recruitment practices; it appears that institutions do not reach excellence in recruitment if they follow a default policy that only mirrors minimum requirements and mainstream public policy on recruitment. Institutions succeeding in recruiting groups exposed to social exclusion tend to define their own institutional objectives, earmark their own money and make use of public programmes stimulating certain recruitment practices. Such deliberate institutional strategies can also embrace the design of courses that support certain groups of untraditional learners. At the same time, our findings point to the fact that the goals and mission of a given institution contribute to framing the degree of freedom which various institutions have in terms of designing their own recruitment strategies.

Utilization of the public framework for the appreciation of learning experiences also stimulates recruitment of such learners but, again, it is appropriate to mobilise institutional resources in order to reduce the normally lengthy period for assessing prior learning experiences. The discrepancy between the (traditional) universities and university colleges on this point partly reflects that the latter are often strong on vocational training and, therefore, might be more inclined to accept candidates applying on the background of their non-formal and informal learning experiences.

The reluctance expressed by staff members across all types of institutions to enrol candidates who later face problems in following university courses that, by nature, are an abstraction from everyday knowledge, - is probably a sign of transmitting realistic expectations to applicants on what they can perform in higher education institutions. This assumption ensues from our impression that the interviewees on this point did not air views that easily can be labelled 'academic arrogance'.

Institutional practices for retention of the enrolled students

In a national education system characterised by statutory rights for individuals guaranteed by the State, it is pertinent to investigate whether the adult education offered by various training institutions is primarily "defined from above"; or if adult education also carries distinct traits of the institutions involved in transmitting courses to adults. Below, we will therefore shed light on the freedom of adult education institutions to introduce measures aiming at social inclusion.

The freedom of each institution to introduce measures aiming at social inclusion

Almost all of the institutions we visited took measures to increase retention. Due to the fact that time constraints represent one of the major challenges for remaining within the school, flexibility constituted one of the main tools for assisting students in completing their educational goal at both schools within Oslo Adult Education (OAE) that we visited. Flexibility did not only function as a remedy for participants' time constraints, but in addition it made it possible for participants to choose between different levels in all subjects taught at the schools. Such offers are partly available due to the fact that these two schools drew advantage of economy of scale. These offers were especially apparent at the Sinsen department of Oslo Adult Education, which approximately has 1500 students. One of the informants from this school explained the arrangement in the following way:

“... our greatest support for students with challenges related to schooling is that we are able to offer all our subjects on different levels. So, if the course in mathematics one is attending is too difficult, you may move down to a lower level which is easier. All our subjects are stratified at several levels.”

In addition to the flexibility at Sinsen, the school had also initiated a workshop in the library where retired teachers offered instructions to the participants from eight thirty in the morning to seven in the evening. Furthermore, the school has put in place a series of actions for assisting students in completing education and passing their exams, i.a. by means of counselling and career advice. In addition, the school has five counsellors, two within basic education and three within upper secondary school. According to the informants, these counsellors are prepared to help the students with a wide range of issues, like admission, applying for grants and loans through the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, along practical issues ranging from where to enquire for purchase of residence, how to obtain a passport or visa, - to applying for a leave of absence.

In the same vein, well-targeted and flexible courses lie at the core of the other school within Oslo Adult Education as it offers three tracks of training in Norwegian language, all adapted to the students' experiences in writing this language, their previous schooling, native tongue and their knowledge of a second language taught in school. The first track has the most gradual progress, while the third track is that fastest. Although the tracks differ in progress, they all aim to empower students to become independent speakers, tantamount to the B1 level in the Common European Framework of References for Languages. However, a substantial proportion of the students are illiterate and these receive instructions combined with work practice.

In addition to the fact that the school is able to assign students to the three different tracks already described, it is important to bear in mind that the participants come from all over the world, carrying a range of needs and experiences with them. Consequently, the school goes to great length in differentiating the courses and pedagogical approaches to the various groups. For instance, the school offers tailor-made courses for enterprises in the public and private sector, adapted courses for participants who are not able to utilise the ordinary courses. In the last category, we primarily find traumatized refugees and participants with depression, anxiety and other mental related problems, lapse of memory or physical pains. The speciality of yet another section of the institution is women with little educational experiences and illiterate.

Judging from the statements from one of our informants at Folkeuniversitetet, it seems as though they are able to offer some of the same flexibility as the schools within OAE. This flexibility is first and foremost a result of the great variety of courses they could offer to their participants; from hobby courses to tertiary level. The informant told us a story of five women who had embarked on lower secondary education and then proceeded up in the educational system until they ended up with a Bachelor degree. Our informant held that the analogy of learning to walking before one learns to run, was valid as a guiding principle for these and similar participants; an analogy that was assured by the flexibility Folkeuniversitetet was able to offer.

A distinct learning activity is peer advice. In the Association for Adapted Adult Education a main strength of their peer advice is the idea of gathering persons with the same problems. AAAE's practises for peer advice are all about exchanging experiences acquired by oneself. Sharing experiences results in practical advices, but perhaps even more important is increased self-esteem, autonomy and growth. The benefits of doing this are manifold, and yet more

than the organizers of the course expected. According to the statements of our informant, the participants were not only able to change their behaviour in response to their situation, but they were also able to change the way they viewed their own situation.

As mentioned during our interviews at the prison, one of the main problems experienced by the staff was that they did not have enough capacity to provide education and training to all the inmates. Despite this, measures for assuring that as many as possible of those who actually engaged within the education and training, completed their educational goals, were introduced. One informant from the prison described the pedagogical approach as quite standardised; and emphasised that an important ingredient was to draw on the participants own knowledge and understanding. The other informant stressed the following characteristics of the teachers:

“... it is important to have teachers with background in special needs education, teaching in a prison is qualitatively different from teaching other persons in other contexts. Secondly, we have seen that master craftsmen work well. If one is making a chair, it goes much better if the inmate follows a teacher, sees what she or he is doing and tries to do the same. It opens up for another relation and teaching than having the teacher up on the black board, telling how to make a chair. Further on, the latter method is often very abstract and theoretical, something which does not suit many of the inmates.”

Considering APLE (appreciation of prior learning experiences) at primary and upper secondary level, it is pertinent to return to the Oslo Adult Education/Sinsen. The appreciation of previous learning experiences seemed highly important for enabling students to complete their education, as witnessed by one of our informants:

“We often tell students that there is no need for them to follow the classes of a given subject, because they are able to get it approved on the basis of prior learning experiences. It is in our blood that we are very aware of this opportunity in our school.”

The staff sets up a meeting once a month for students who apply to have their previous learning experiences assessed. Our informant tells about the purpose of this meeting:

“...the participants receive information concerning how to move on in the process. Students apply for approval of one or more subjects, and almost every day I am signing approvals. Yesterday I held [in my hands] a certificate where the person in question had not followed any of the classes, but had all subjects approved based on his previous learning experiences. This said, most students get some of their subjects approved based on previous learning experiences.”

Appreciation of previous learning experiences also applies to apprenticeship training or just parts of a subject or vocation taught at upper secondary level. According to the informant, the school extensively practices the appreciation of previous learning experiences and is able to assess the applications rapidly, as it usually takes two and seldom more than four weeks to handle an application.

Retention and cultural diversity

Dealing with cultural diversity emerged as a distinct topic that also was related to retention. The situation at the University of Oslo shows how the topic may require specific measures in order to adapt the study situation to all students. In this regard, religious practices and Norwegian alcohol culture have been brought up for discussion. For the sake of neutral lear-

ning environments, the university has even put relics related to the State protestant religion in a locker. Not only the now neutralised chapel at the university, but also consumption of alcohol at the campus, exemplify dilemmas that the university has encountered as a result of a more diverse student population.

Initially, the university had a chapel that students could use to sort out their thoughts, light a candle and so on. One informant told us that during the past few years there had been an ongoing discussion at the university concerning this room. The problem seemed to be that the word “chapel” signified that this room was first and foremost for Christian students, and thereby excluding students exercising other religious forms. Our informant said that the discussion point had been that if Christian students had their own room for contemplation, this entailed that other religions should be entitled to one as well. Since students at the university belong to different religions, there are not enough rooms for each and every religion; hence they changed the name of the chapel and made it into a neutral room where everyone was welcome.

Alcohol remains an important ingredient in many of the social arrangements at the university, particularly for freshman students and the buddy groups. Many students join them at the beginning of the semester. However, the role the liquid plays in a more diverse student mass has recently led to alterations of the buddy groups’ conception of alcohol’s role in them. Hence, one of the informants elaborated on how buddy groups now approached the question of alcohol’s role within the university:

“...we encourage them to let all students know that the culture of drinking alcohol go way back and is impossible to change. But at the same time it is important that those who do not drink and those who abstain respect each other. We have had a couple of meetings at the Faculty of Law where we have raised the issue that some of the meetings concerning subjects are being called beer meetings, that such a name is excluding in itself.”

Since many of the students who have joined the university in later years do not drink alcohol and, according to our informant, refrain from arrangements where alcohol is served, a growing awareness of the liquid’s excluding effect has resulted in a discussion at the top level of the university. The discussion has resulted in new regulations prohibiting alcohol from being served before 3 p.m.

Finally, it is pertinent to divulge one opinion on the state’s role in providing beneficial learning environments. This voice is also from the University of Oslo (UiO p. 15). Considering that the informants expressed some dissatisfaction with the current follow-up of students, we asked whether they believed that public authorities should impose any incentives on educational institutions for assuring that more students find their place and thrive at the university. One informant answered that:

“I believe that the authorities should demand that the learning environment becomes a part of the national quality criteria. The Ministry of Education and Research only demands that we report on how we treat these groups, and I do not believe that the Ministry pays sufficient attention when they ask for reports. But when they start asking us: ‘What have you done? What are you planning to do?’ This would have been different; it would have helped us to prioritize these issues. It is easy to say that more money would have solved the problem, but the question is not only about money.”

Summary of institutional practices to retain students

The reason why we found the most prominent examples of retention practices in two departments of Oslo Adult Education is probably that these institutions are specifically targeted for adults from backgrounds of social marginalisation. Considering the response from our informants, the flexible approach in adapting the training to individual needs definitely yield results. Several informants struggled with the question of how much follow-up should be offered to unmotivated students compared with those really wanting to learn. Motivation also had to do with problems among learners from other cultural backgrounds in understanding what was expected from them in a welfare society offering many social benefits.

In the preceding section we particularly emphasised retention in terms of exercising institutional freedom, while some of the measures to improve the study environment largely ensue from the existing legislation, such as the Law on university and university colleges, which i.a. addresses counselling of students and how they can benefit from various adaption services. In the following discussion on retention we start out by reviewing efforts to improve the study environment, before addressing how the content of the courses are designed in view of enticing students to complete their educational tracks in due time.

In sum, what appears from the interviews centring on retention is that specialised courses are required for those with special needs and that counselling and career advice should be offered to these learners. This might be bad news for the public purse and for possible attempts to introduce economies of scale in education. However, the specialisation coincides with individual rights to receive education adapted to possible special needs. A statutory right to adapted education according to individual needs has been important in the context of lifelong learning and social inclusion (Law on Education, §4A-1²⁴), exemplified by the ‘inclusive school’ (Law on Education, §4A-1²⁵). This is a universal right.

The statutory right to ‘adapted education’ implies that different scholastic demands are catered for during compulsory schooling, also at upper secondary level. This right covering students at ISCED levels 1-3 leads to multiple pedagogical and administrative support initiatives, e.g. preparatory programmes, supplementary workshops and remedial classes. These initiatives may contribute to motivating non-traditional groups of learners. Institutions providing learning at ISCED level 5 and 6 are not affected by the statutory right to adapted education but they are obliged to put in place some procedures destined for adult learners, such as assessment of prior learning. One consequence is the development of specific pedagogical arrangements for adults within the public education system. In addition, private and voluntary organisations have set up arrangements and educational tracks that are especially suited for adults.

Moreover, a widespread idea in Norwegian social policy, particularly around the recently amalgamated NAV (The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) is that it costs more to let young and old early school leavers receive social benefits than trying to include them in the labour market by means of (costly) education programmes.

Furthermore, our interviews feature more of a plea for qualified teachers having access to continuing training than a request for a panoply of new teaching methods. Perhaps this picture would have been different if the learners instead of the institutional staff, had been interviewed. In addition to paying teachers’ training, which is already done in ambitious programmes ranging from primary to upper secondary education in the frame of the sweeping

²⁴ Adopted in 1998.

²⁵ Adopted in 1998.

Knowledge Promotion reform, the State is called upon to reward institutions doing something extra in setting up favourable learning environments.

The specificity of study associations comes to the forefront in the case of the Association for Adapted Adult Education, which more than other study associations delivers non-formal learning, e.g. in the form of peer advice. The latter method seems highly beneficial for the persons with disabilities involved in these courses.

It also turns out that the majority of students have to sacrifice something when higher education institutions increasingly adapt to minority student groups, who allegedly are offended by phenomena like the majority's drinking habits and the exposure of relics reflecting the State protestant religion. This points to cultural factors, which more and more are drawn into discussions on adult education.

Individual factors: Enrolling, retaining students and completing education

Throughout the previous paragraphs, we have first and foremost emphasised the role of institutions when it comes to recruitment and retention. At the beginning of this chapter, we announced that also individual factors centred on the situation of adult learners would be addressed. It should be noted that the observations on individual learners are based on how the staff in adult education institutions understand and interpret the situation of the learners.

Individual factors are certainly influenced by several societal processes. One example is cash benefits. One of our informants suspected that whereas cash benefits were given to those who kept their children out of kindergarten, potential participants would refrain from embarking on educational trajectories offered by schools. Although it is an individual who, perhaps in collaboration with or under influence of others, makes this decision, the public service of cash benefits contributes to shaping the action.

Within sociological theory of educational choice, the work of Gambetta (1987) remains a classic. One of the main reasons is that the work in an exemplary way pins down a major controversy that has been, and still is, haunting the very core of sociology, namely:

“... to what extent can educational behaviour be represented as a product of intentional choice or, conversely, to what extent is it the result of processes which, in one way or another, minimize the scope for a socially meaningful choice at the individual level?” (Gambetta, 1987:7).

In viewing educational behaviour first and foremost as an intentional choice, emphasis is put on the factors that instigate individuals to make certain choices by realising their beliefs and desires. The other approach puts the gist of the matter on push factors that are outside control of the individual, but still exert a major influence on their behaviour. Based on the response from our informants, it is clear that both pull and push factors influence enrolment, retention/completion mechanisms in the educational institutions we visited. For instance, one informant held that,

“For many students it is not a great barrier, it is sort of like ‘just do it’ attitude. They have been thinking about embarking on upper secondary school for years and suddenly they decide that they are actually going for it.”

Other informants highlighted factors that more or less pushed participants out of the training course:

“... if the person is working alongside, it is often difficult to combine with studies...”

Information in order to enrol

If we start off by looking at the relation between participants' situation and enrolment, our findings demonstrate that our informants' assumptions concerning the participants' reasons for embarking on a given educational trajectory vary a lot. This was expected because we have been talking to staff in a wide array of institutions and within each institution the learners are highly heterogeneous. One important aspect was participants' information about access to education and training. This has been covered in reports from Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, i.a. pointing to the fact that 74 percent of Norwegian employees are not aware of the opportunity of getting one's prior learning experiences assessed.²⁶ Yet another report from the same agency demonstrates that there is a social divide as to information about this opportunity. As expected, persons with little education are least informed about this opportunity and those with higher education are the most informed.²⁷

Awareness of a training course is a prerequisite for enrolling. The degree to which lack of awareness emerged as an important factor for explaining why persons did not attend different courses, varied. It is also likely that our informants' knowledge concerning this theme is limited given that their knowledge first and foremost has to do with persons that actually have enrolled and therefore must have had some information about the educational offer. In many institutions, the standard response from our informants about how participants had gained information about the educational offer was "through the grapevine". The only institution where we can be more or less sure that lack of information did not constitute a major reason for absence to education and training, was the prison. However, this did not entail that the prisoners were overwhelmingly interested in attending education and training. For instance, both our informants in the prison regretted that the youngest prisoners refrained from attending any course.

The situation was close to opposite for the pilot project initiated by the Association for Adapted Adult Education, whereas one of the main reasons for launching the project was the conviction that many of the intended participants needed information. The project aimed at increasing participants' knowledge about issues such as the Norwegian health and welfare system. In addition, the organizers of the project contended that potential participants remained uninformed about the project and the AAAE in general. Participants therefore had to be recruited in various social arenas, such as kindergarten.

At the Sinsen department of Oslo Adult Education, one informant complained that their education and training often was confused with those departments within OAE that offered Norwegian and social science. According to the informant, there was a tendency to see adult education as tantamount to basic instruction for immigrants. Further on, there seemed to be a lack of information about Sinsen's offers within the other schools in OAE:

"A second point is that many have probably not heard of us, although everyone that attends any of the other schools within adult education is informed about our services."

Motivation

Although the motivation for enrolling in a given training course or educational path varies between institutions, it seems as though the opportunity for qualifying oneself for work remained one of the main motivations in most institutions. In the case of the OAE depart-

²⁶ <http://www.vox.no/templates/CommonPage.aspx?id=2087>

²⁷ <http://www.vox.no/templates/CommonPage.aspx?id=932>

ment at Sinsen, many participants approached the school with the aim of having their prior learning experiences documented. In another school within OAE, in which Norwegian and social science for immigrants is taught, one of our informants emphasised that the courses that qualified participants for a specific job (e.g. driver's license or cleaning service training) functioned as a motivational factor.

The opportunity for work appeared as an important motivation for attending education and training within prison as well. One informant said that, "... It is obvious, and I believe research has proven this, that what the inmates first and foremost want is vocational training so that they will be able to get a job afterwards". This said, the same informant mentioned that "... training may turn out to be useful the day one leaves prison. But perhaps this last function is exaggerated by us [who are working] in the prison administration".

Even though none of our informants from the two institutions within higher education mentioned it explicitly, we find it highly likely that the opportunity for work (e.g. re-education) as a motivational factor is prevalent among adults that enrol in any one of the institutions in higher education. For instance, many of the persons who apply to Oslo University College on the background of previous learning experiences, are heading for the professional study programmes.

Even though work related educational activities remained an important motivation for many participants, our findings demonstrate that the participants were motivated by a broad range of issues. When it comes to the study associations, the motivation for attending the education and training varies to a greater extent than at the aforementioned institutions. This is natural due to the fact that many of the courses offered by the two study associations focus on topics that are not directly related to work or education, but rather for the benefit of participants' opportunity for pursuing a hobby or self-reliance. This said, our informants from Folkeuniversitetet emphasised that courses, such as the one featured in this report, often provide participants with a positive experience that leads some of them to pursue advanced courses that might qualify for certificates or completed formal courses. Further on, Folkeuniversitetet arranges for courses that qualify participants for a given vocation.

In the prison our informants told us that attending the education and training was a golden opportunity for the prisoners to escape their identity as prisoners. One of our informants claimed that education and training functioned as a form of refuge:

"... one gets a break from being labelled as an inmate and is able to be a student instead," and the other informant reasoned in the same way: "... they have a strong motivation, they are very motivated, because once they start studying, they are not merely a prisoner but also students."

Judging from the statements of our informants, this motivation was first and foremost prevalent among those prisoners who attended tertiary education. We have not come across data confirming this observation, but if it is correct it is puzzling that prisoners who attend other education and training are not able to escape from their identity in the same way as those that study at tertiary level. However, according to the statement of one informant, it seemed that attending educational courses benefitted the prisoners, although this did not necessarily facilitate their escape from their identity as prisoners:

"The prison is in itself a regime that works against learning and which may counter rehabilitation. It is a place that is experienced as pressing and declares to be without legal capacity; one simply cannot stand it, and have a hard time getting motivated. This said, many survive

the situation by taking part in different initiatives, so if one abstains from these initiatives due to low motivation; one may end up in a vicious circle.”

Although many participants were reported to be highly motivated, a broad range of factors functioned as barriers for motivating them to learn. One of our informants described the prisoners’ options between attending specific programs, educational courses or working as ”a choice between a rock and a hard place”. Most persons do not appreciate being forced to attend any activity. And in some cases, an activity that one might have found joyful provided that one choose it, might become dreadful because one is forced to engage in it. However, elements of coercion are not unique for prisoners. As a matter of fact, it is also present in the case of many immigrants that either have the right or duty, or just the duty, to attend classes in Norwegian and social science. The reason for this is that attending the Norwegian and social science classes is a prerequisite for obtaining a permanent residence permit or Norwegian citizenship (alternatively, one might display sufficient knowledge in Norwegian or Sami).

Some of the barriers for the participants’ motivation were the discrepancy between their own beliefs and reality. This was especially apparent when we talked to our informants at the school within OAE that offers Norwegian and social science to immigrants. The information gained from the interviews points to two opposite tendencies in participants’ expectations. Whereas one informant expressed that participants had low motivation for attending education and training due to their belief that enrolment and attendance would do little to alter their chances for work, the other informant said that participants had too high expectations of what could be achieved from attending the school. While the former group, judging from the response of our informant, did not receive any objections for their belief, the latter group were quickly orientated according to reality (by the school’s staff) after they embarked on the courses.

Economic and time constraints

For many of the participants at the various institutions, time, or the lack thereof, seemed to represent one of the main barriers for completing a given educational course. One of the main differences between adult and young learners is probably the amount of off-school obligations that the former group has. Within tertiary education, one of our informants said that availability of kindergarten services was pivotal for enabling part time students to attend the education and training.

Informants from both schools within Oslo Adult Education (OAE) mentioned time constraints and off-school obligations as one of the major sources to dropout and lack of preparedness. At Sinsen, one of the results from the participants’ lack of time was that some did not have the opportunity to attend the extracurricular activities held by retired teachers. Instead, participants had to rush for work or to pick up their children from kindergarten. An informant from the same institution uttered that at a general level, combining family life with studying was a demanding task:

“... if the person is working alongside it is often difficult to combine with studies. Even though it is possible to attend the classes at day and in the evenings, many of our students have family and several tasks related to it.”

The situation was much the same for the other school within OAE that offers instruction Norwegian and social science for immigrants. But in addition to family and work related issues, many of the participants engaging in this training experienced time constraints because

of the allegedly inflexible attitudes at the reception centres for asylum seekers. According to one informant, there was a tendency that meetings at the reception centre concurred with instructions at the school, and that the reason for this was lack of willingness in the reception centres to adjust their arrangements to the school's schedule.

Although none of the informants from the prison mentioned the aspect of time explicitly, we interpret it as implicit in some of the statements they made concerning education in the prison, for instance:

“In my opinion to study in a prison is one of the hardest things you can do. There are so many things that work against you. One thing is our own mental state; you slide into apathy, right? It is boredom, it is routines”.

Based on the statement above it seems like time represents a barrier for prisoners when it comes to their ability to study, but in an opposite way than for the participants from the aforementioned institutions. For the prisoners, it is not the lack of time that is the problem, it is the abundance of it.

Time constraints seemed in many cases to be intertwined with economic constraints. Many of the participants are dependent on working full time or part time in addition to the training course they engage in. As a result, what in reality is a question of economic constraints becomes a question of time constraints. One informant from OAE/Sinsen had experienced some of the consequences from combining working and studying:

“Many of our students have loan in the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund and many work alongside. There is always a problem related to money, and when a student enrolls in the school, he loses income. So they are sort of gambling by estimating how many classes they can skip and still pass the exam.”

Gender related issues

In this section, we will address two topics related to gender. The first topic concerns a tendency that was found in many of the institutions, namely that women were overrepresented compared with men. The other topic, which was less common, but still prevalent, regards the phenomenon that relations between female participants and their male partners sometimes lead to difficulties for the women to enrol in or complete the training courses.

Naturally, the prison did not have any female participants due to the fact that it is a prison for men, but all our informants from both of the study associations confirmed that women were in majority. When we asked why only women ended up as participants, although this was not initially intended, one informant who had been involved in a project for the AAAE, gave the following reply:

“Men are really hard to get hold of, and they do not pick up children in the kindergarten... It is very common that women are the ones to take these kinds of initiatives. So even though one seeks out a place where you will find men, one will realize that they are not very interested. While one could see a totally different attitude when it came to women.”

Gender related issues occurred during the interviews we had with informants from the school within OAE that offers Norwegian and social science to immigrants. This said, these did not specifically concern the proportion of men and women at the school. However, according to statistics published by Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, female participants have, at an aggregated level, been heavily overrepresented in courses offering Norwegian and

social science to immigrants. For 2006, 2007 and 2008 the relative proportion of men and women in Norway attending the courses has been stable with women constituting approximately two thirds of the participants.²⁸ In other words, women are twice as likely as men to participate in this particular training course.

At the other school within OAE, namely Sinsen, one of our informants said she believed that during the last years the proportion of male and female participants had become less skewed: "Previously we had about 60 percent female students, but now this proportion is reduced to 52-53 percent". She did not know the reason for this change.

Considering higher education, it is a well-known fact that female students make up the majority of the student population, although there is a vast variation among educational fields.²⁹

We now turn to the second topic concerning the relationship between female participants and their male partners. Unsolicited, this was a theme that emerged during some of the interviews. It is important to emphasise that in the same way as all other topics that come out of a qualitative interview, we have no way of knowing the prevalence of this topic. At OAE/Sinsen, one informant said that

"Some of the students say that they have to quit because their husbands say that they are not allowed to continue, or because they need to work."

As previously discussed, this could be the result of economic constraints, i.e. that the family is dependent on incomes from both of the parents, rather than the husband for some other reason denying the wife's participation. However, this could imply that the husband remains in control of the family's financial assets. At the other school within OAE, statements from one of the informants point to such a relation as the informant argued that:

"Free kindergarten is very important because it is often men who dispose the economy of the family, including the cash benefits. If the husband does not think it is important that the wife attends [training], if he does not want the cash benefit reduced, he might simply say no."

The other informant from the same institution pointed to a more direct relation between female participants and their male partners. According to her, husbands' attempts to deny their wives attending education are allegedly a factor in a power game, as our informant presumed that the less knowledgeable a woman is, the more power her husband possesses. As a result, men see education as a threat to their position in the relationship and therefore deny their wives attending various forms of learning.

Summary of individual factors

Our preceding discussion confirms that participants who expect to get some output from attending the classes, are also the most motivated. Again, it should be noted that the observations on individual learners are based on how the staff in adult education institutions understands and interprets the situation of the learners.

Our informants maintain that adult learners often have major household obligations, thus challenging the possibility to complete their training in due time. It is reported that course

²⁸ <http://www.vox.no/templates/widepage.aspx?id=3807&cepslanguage=NO>

²⁹ E.g. <http://kifinfo.no/c42441/nyhet/vis.html?tid=70073>

participants may have to negotiate with their families in order to find time for learning and the completion of their learning trajectory partly depends on patience from family members. The reason why many participants in the first place engage in training is that they want to enable themselves to take care of their families.

Practices to be transferred to other contexts or countries

In this section, we will extract institutional approaches and methods, which seem to sustain some promising practices that we observed. This is done with a view to pinpoint practices that may be transferred to other contexts and even to other countries. Below, we will briefly summarise these approaches and methods for each institution where we conducted interviews.

Oslo Adult Education/ Sinsen

The many individual rights for students coupled with a very diverse group of learners, lead the school to target its motivational work very neatly and learners with low motivation are tightly followed up. Given that students' problems in passing their exams are often related to their social life in general, the school is offering extracurricular activities held by instructors, who often are retired teachers. All in all, the fine-tuned pedagogical activities organised in the school fall in line with priorities of State education policy. The pedagogical approach applied at the Sinsen department of Oslo Adult Education seems to be well defined within the entire organisation of OAE.

Oslo Adult Education/ instruction in Norwegian and social science for immigrants

Our interviews in one of the three schools offering such instruction shows that OAE is able to offer formal training, which necessarily implies some theory, but also practical instruction implying that students feel they master something. The practice and qualification programmes represent a break from theoretical instructions and the opportunity to become qualified for a job functions as a major motivational factor, particularly for participants who recently have learned to read or write. In this environment, it is crucial that those who instigate changes affecting actual or future participants, do this through conversations with leaders of adult education institutions, the teaching staff and students from the different sections of OAE.

Oslo University College

The present co-funding of one administrative post in the university college is linked to an obligation to disseminate the experiences gained as well as research and related issues concerning diversity in higher education. Furthermore, the dissemination is done by issuing a web based newsletter and giving lectures on various occasions. The newsletter has subscribers nationwide. The fact that experiences and development of knowledge at Oslo University College is disseminated and linked to similar work being done all over Norway, adds to the sustainability of the model. The integration of the model in European networks points in the same direction. Experiences since 1996 sparked off by the pedagogical centre of OUC, have been summarised and further developed into a handbook issued by autumn 2008.

The University of Oslo

The Adaption Service and the services offered by the Foundation for Student Life are statutory provisioned, and it seems that the university is highly concerned with assuring that these services function well for the students.

Institutional practices that go beyond the statutory provisioned services, e.g. arrangements at the university to follow up certain student groups, could be allocated an earmarked sum. Otherwise, they may be given low priority when the university has to save money. In times of austerity, administrative units and initiatives for social inclusion that are not defined as statutory provisioned may become vulnerable.

The Association for Adapted Adult Education

Feedback from the participants was given at the last meeting during the two years' course. This evaluation was conducted in the same way as the rest of the course had been arranged, allowing the participants to express themselves orally. The feedback suggests that the project has been important for acquiring information on different approaches adopted by parents in order to improve the living conditions of children with some disabilities, for breaking taboos on having such a child and for reducing the feeling of being an isolated parent in a unique situation.

Folkeuniversitetet

A crucial challenge for the organisation in the coming years is that it remains able to offer educational services with the same preamble as the Adult Education Act of 1976. To live up to this, a couple of actions seem pertinent for the organisation, i.a. making sure that the institution offers what individuals and businesses are demanding. This involves going out to people, speaking with them and afterwards developing training in a broad range of areas, before presenting (tailor-made) courses to potential users.

The prison

In view of the structural constrains emanating from the difficulty to balance security and opportunity of attending education, it appears that the prison has managed to get much out of this dilemma. This has been mainly been achieved by linking the prison education to public institutions and the services they offer. The principal institutional arrangement is that prison education in Oslo is set up as a department within Oslo Adult Education. Alongside other correctional services, the one in Oslo collaborates with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) in terms of labour market training. An asset for prison education is the opportunity for prisoners enrolled in training courses to make use of public library services. By such institutional arrangements, the high security prison is positioned in such a manner that prisoners who are willing to study can benefit from some universal public services offered by the Norwegian welfare state.

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Annex1: Interview with official from government department

It is important to emphasise that the opinions and assertions that our informant made during the interview is his own, and not official views, although these sometimes may converge. Furthermore, some of our questions concern specific issues while others are more general. The former type of questions was often difficult to provide an answer to for our informant, as they have a broad range, at the same time as they are specific. The answers to the latter type of question often reflect the informants' general thoughts around problems and challenges related to lifelong learning, and he seldom referred to specific arrangements within the educational system or the labour market.

The relation between the labour market and educational institutions

At several occasions our informant emphasised the importance of education and work and the relation between them: "The point is that in a society like ours there are two systems that are decisive for enabling persons to succeed. Either you are in the educational system or you are in the working life. If you do not have education, your chances in the labour market are worsen." Further on, he made it clear that the importance of education was not confined to the individual, but on the contrary one of the main determining factors of the nation's future: "It is a lot of talk of the importance of knowledge, and when we are talking about these issues; lifelong learning, appreciation of prior learning experiences, the competence of the Norwegian people and so on, what it really boils down to is the future of Norway."

One of the consequences of the importance he attached to education was that students in upper secondary school should not be allowed to quit their studies without an alternative plan. Every municipality in Norway have a unit called the follow-up service. This unit cooperates with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration and the upper secondary schools to provide an alternative for those students who do not wish to enrol in upper secondary school and those that have dropped out from it. Our informant asserted that this service was highly important for supervising students that had dropped out from school, but it seemed as though he preferred stronger measures.

"... why should anyone in Norway be allowed to quit their educational path without a completed degree or vocational qualification? I belong to those who say no, it is not a right to quit school with nobody following were you go... What I mean is that one should use the same methods as with unemployment, it should not be a human right to sit and watch TV. In my opinion students should enrol in other educational courses that contribute to enhance qualifications. I am very stern on this question."

This suggestion was followed up by a general assertion that the relation between institutions within the welfare system should be strengthened and that the government should take measures to make sure that this was realized. As an example he highlighted the relation between universities and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration:

“I believe that we should develop modules that enable persons to study for a month or two, receive points for completing these modules and then return to the working life. The authorities are able to force institutions to develop such modules. I do not understand why everyone should commence their studies in August or January.

You would prefer a more flexible system?

Yes, it is the society that is paying the universities, so in my mind the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration could have signed contracts with educational institutions and said that we want this number of slots at the following points, and then the institutions would receive money for the participants.”

At a general level, he felt that decision makers and employers had a lack of understanding of the importance of investing in human resources, and argued that all employees should be receiving education throughout their career:

“... In my opinion we should have systems that make sure that persons return to universities after a while. I have been working within the state all my life, but I have never been enquired by persons from the department of economics whether I would like update myself on economic issues. And I have never had an employer asking me whether I wanted to study... Everyone understands why it is important to update software on computers. Why is it so hard to make the same reasoning when it comes to human beings?”

As this quote exemplifies, the importance of continuing education was not limited to public institutions, but also something that all organisations and companies should be concerned with. Among many things, he referred to companies that had put their commitment to ongoing education of their employees down on paper, and argued that we should learn from these. For many companies this might first and foremost be a question of economy and not will.

“In the oil business, persons are being paid for their doctoral research. I believe that companies such be much more concerned with this, to continuously educate their staff. One may therefore question whether companies should be given the opportunity to apply for funds for supporting such initiatives. One option is to increase employers’ contribution and earmark the extra money for a fund that companies could apply for.”

Economic incentives

To achieve inclusion of all groups in the educational system, our informant was first and foremost concerned with the economic incentives for realizing this. As an example of what he regarded as a successful economic incentive within the educational system, he brought up a reform that was introduced to higher education in Norway in 2003 entailing several changes in the finance system:

“Earlier, universities were financed according to input, they received funds according to the number of students enrolled, and the result did not matter. Following the Quality Reform, the system was transformed into one that put much more weight on the output, that students actually received a degree, a qualification”

On the question of what approaches to take with regards to inclusion of marginalised groups, he argued that differentiated funding of students should be applied:

“I believe that we should be more creative and constructive and perhaps say that not all students should be financed in the same manner. If a student possesses certain characteristics, the institution should be eligible for higher economic funding.”

More concretely, he asserted that students who were admitted on the background of appreciation of prior learning experiences perhaps required more follow-up than other students, and as a result, the institution in question should be entitled to receive more funds.

Appreciation of prior learning experiences

Besides asserting that institutions within higher education should receive more funds for students who were admitted on the background of their prior learning experiences, our informant said that he was not impressed by how institutions within higher education in Norway took care of their students:

“... we have many examples that results improve drastic as students are supervised, rather than being neglected. Therefore, when it comes to students who are admitted on background of prior learning experiences, institutions have to provide resources and staff to follow up students. It is possible to use graduate students; they do that in the United States. I have no faith in that laissez-faire approach, which leaves students alone. Universities are applying it at their own expense, and I have no faith in it.”

On the question of what he thought about the possibilities for students who applied for admission on the background of their prior learning experiences, he said that

“... it all boils down to how the person in question presents herself, if the person cannot spell her name correctly and display bad language, the chances are rather small that the person will be admitted. This is related to the fact that our society is very formalistic. Whether a student is admitted or not probably varies a great deal from institution to institution.”

As this answer demonstrates, institutions within higher education are autonomous with regards to their assessment of appreciation of prior learning experiences as an admission ticket. This deviates from the normal practice of enrolment where all students apply through the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS) and are assessed on the background of their grades from upper secondary school. Consequently, tertiary educational institutions have limited control over what students that are admitted. However, this is different from students who apply on the background of their prior learning experiences. We therefore asked our informant whether he believed that tertiary educational institutions should be entitled to choose what students are admitted on the background of prior learning experiences, or whether this assessment also should be organized under NUCAS:

“You may say that at the moment a student is admitted to an educational institution, it is the institution’s responsibility to lead you through the educational path, so in defence of the institution, they must have some idea of whether they believe the student is able to complete. There is no sense in forcing an institution to admit a student they do not want:”

Country specific questions emanating from previous subproject

Information from subproject 3 of LLL2010 formed the basis for three country specific questions that we put forward to our informant.

The first question regarded the fact that 17 percent of adults that participate in education and training from lower secondary school to tertiary education state that transport is a hinder for their participation. We therefore asked our informant of what he thought public policy could contribute with to overcome this challenge. He responded that Norway built the Bergen railway (i.e. railway between Oslo and Bergen) when the country was impoverished and that most of the subway system in Oslo was built during the sixties, consequently it should be possible to improve the public transport system today.

Another information that came out of the previous project was that 18 percent of the same group reported that the lack of childcare constituted an obstacle for participating. Again we asked our informant about how public policy could contribute to overcome this challenge. He answered that,

“We should build more kindergartens, look to France, they have kindergartens nearby their homes. The problem in Norway is that we have such high demands for the standard.”

The last question concerns the fact that 11 percent of the same group stated that family related problems were a problem for participating in educational activity. We asked our informant how he thought public policy in this area could contribute to offering guidance services that go beyond the subjects taught at the institutions. Our informant responded:

“Many students have psychologically related problems and students have a high suicide rate. For many, being a student is a lonely affair. It goes without saying that the healthcare services must be equipped with a professional staff. Personally, I believe that public authorities should pay for private services, so-called public management. Often, the private provides better services than public ones.”

Annex 2: Possible impact of the economic crisis

The impact of the 2008 financial crisis, which later penetrated the entire economy albeit with fewer consequences than in other European countries, might affect the recruitment of adult learners. Although the crisis has hit Norway quite gently, we raised this issue in the prison (OP: 9). One interviewee stated that lack of economic resources traditionally has been the main obstacle for offering more education to prisoners. In this regard, the economic crisis seems to be positive for the prison because the government has intervened to improve the correctional services as part of the general economic recovery package.

The same question asked in Oslo Adult Education (Sinsen: 11) provoked the following statement:

“The economic crisis may affect us in such a way that we are not able to provide access to all the students, - that is the greatest problem.”

In other words, the informant believes that as a result of the economic crisis, more students would want to access or return to the educational system. The informant said that there are two possible solutions if the number of applications outnumbered the available student places. First of all the school might apply for more funds, so that they could hire more teachers, property and so on. Secondly, if the school did not receive more funds, students might have to join a waiting list for being enrolled.

We asked her whether such a solution, i.e. to put students on a waiting list, is in accordance with the law. Her reply was that the law reads that the right of students is to receive an educational offer within “reasonable time”.

Our interrogation at the University of Oslo if the economic crisis influences recruitment and admission to the university, one informant replied that more persons from now on will apply for admission. She added that many of them would be well qualified persons having lost their jobs or continued to study, because the job opportunities now are poor. As a result of these processes, she feared that the selection to the university would become tighter and that only the students with very good credentials from upper secondary school would be able to enter. The other informant was more concerned with students who had completed their degrees and were facing a hard time getting a job. She did not think that the number of applicants would significantly increase as a result of the economic crisis.

The divergence in opinions featured above probably shows that the availability of education and training courses has not been stimulated by means of public rescue packages. The main effect on the Norwegian school system has been that public money was channelled into construction and maintenance work of schools³⁰. Otherwise, the crisis has a twofold effect: students now tend to delay their entrance into the labour market and, secondly, non-experienced people with few diplomas more eagerly enrol in schools because their chance of finding interesting and well-paid jobs is meagre.

³⁰ Cf. St. prp. nr. 37 (2008-2009) *Om endringer i statsbudsjettet 2009 med tiltak for arbeid*, p. 56f.

Social inclusion in adult education is more than implementing mainstream public policy

Norwegian adult education institutions do not succeed in recruiting learners from backgrounds of social marginalisation and non-traditional learners if they follow a default policy that only mirrors minimum requirements and mainstream public policy. This is the main conclusion in this national study from Fafo in the frame of the EU project Lifelong learning 2010.

After interviewing staff at all educational levels, the authors maintain that institutions succeeding in recruiting and retaining groups exposed to social exclusion tend to define their own institutional objectives, earmark their own money and get additional funding from public (or private) programmes or initiatives. Such deliberate institutional strategies can also embrace the design of courses that support certain groups of untraditional adult learners, for example by using the public framework for appreciation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. The institutional freedom to put in place such strategies varies according to education levels. Despite the 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform allowing for more leeway in institutions below tertiary level, universities and university colleges have better conditions for this. If they use the opportunity is often a question of will.

