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Platform on Education Quality

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Platform on Education Quality

1.0 Introduction

Education is of benefit to society, and the society of today demands knowledge and expertise to meet complex challenges. Consequently, NSO believes that it is important to invest seriously in the quality of education. NSO also believes that sustainable development, critical thinking, new ideas and a high standard of ethics must influence education, research and development and communication at all higher education institutions. NSO calls for a change in the academic regime, and believes it is time that students were seen as a resource in research and education. Academia must make space for a learning culture in which students and staff create knowledge of a high standard together.

All higher education must be of a high quality, internationally oriented, research-based and educate students to face challenges in our society. It should have good framework conditions and must be well organised. The continual development of quality in study programmes is decisive for attracting good students and educating highly qualified, independent, reflective and ethically aware people for a domestic and global labour market. NSO believes that the main goal for Norwegian education policy should be to offer higher education, which is reliable, research-based and socially relevant in Norway. Furthermore, NSO believes it is important to participate in a broader international educational area, which is characterised by trust, continual communication and mobility across national borders.

Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in higher education in Norway. To ensure that students are a resource for the academic environment, NSO believes that the full-time student must be reinstated in Norwegian higher education. By 'full-time student', NSO means that students must be able to study full-time, and that the scope and level of education and the economic framework shall support this.

Lifelong learning should be a central principle in higher education policy, with the aim that everyone should have the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and develop abilities throughout their entire lives. Lifelong learning creates added value and flexibility to the workplace. It also contributes to social mobility.

2.0 Learning outcomes and quality of studies

The Norwegian Qualifications Framework (NKR) has defined national guidelines for learning outcomes based on education level. The descriptions of learning outcomes shall clearly state what knowledge, skills and general competence a graduate is expected to have after completing a course of study.

NSO believes that quality is defined by the degree to which higher education institutions organise and co-ordinate efforts to make all aspects of a course contribute to the achievement of the course's predetermined learning outcomes and goals. NSO also

believes that education quality can be understood as the academic outcome a student develops during a degree course. This depends on the institution's academic contribution and the accommodations made for the academic or professional development of the student.

Realistic and informative descriptions of subjects and study programmes should be available for all subjects and courses offered at higher education institutions. Descriptions of subjects and study programmes contain the learning outcomes and demands placed on both the students and higher education institutions. All higher education courses must be described using learning outcome descriptors, and these must be readily available to students and the rest of society. Ambitious learning outcome descriptions should be drawn up, and the level of difficulty should increase as the course progresses. The institution should regularly discuss and update the learning outcome descriptions in collaboration with the students. The learning outcome descriptions should be in accordance with the syllabus, teaching and evaluation methods.

Critical reflection about subjects and courses should be a natural part of the students' daily life. Lecturers can contribute by inviting them to reflect over subject content, the syllabus, and the methods of teaching and evaluation. There should be committees at study programme level for all courses of study, which continually and systematically promote quality enhancement of subjects. These committees should have a particular focus on programme design, ensuring correlation between individual subjects within courses, and a strong connection between learning outcome descriptions, the syllabus, and methods of teaching and evaluation. The committees should be arenas for academic and professional development, helping to ensure that well-organised study programmes contribute in reaching learning outcomes, and ensuring a close connection between research, development and education. It is the responsibility of management to ensure that such committees are established, and to create favourable conditions under which they can function optimally.

3.0 Frameworks and premises for quality

Higher education institutions are dependent on good, predictable framework conditions to operate. This includes having a stable financial situation and the autonomy to think strategically and make long-term plans. However, the government has the overriding responsibility for the education sector as a whole.

NSO believes it is necessary to present a long-term plan for higher education every tenth year, which should be evaluated and revised twice during this period. The plan should have a focus on quality, as well as containing concrete, ambitious goals and strategies for the development of higher education. Special attention should be paid to student opinion when preparing the plan, and input should be sought from all relevant participants within the sector.

3.1 Admission to higher education

New students must fulfil entry requirements to apply for higher education. The primary basis for admission is the Higher Education Entrance Qualification.¹ This is attained after successfully completing three years of general studies at upper secondary school, or other upper secondary education which leads to the Higher Education Entrance Qualification, supplementary studies after the completion of a vocational course at upper secondary level, or an approved foreign education. The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service² handle admissions to bachelor's degree courses and integrated master's degree courses nationally. Institutions can stipulate alternative entrance requirements if necessary, such as entrance tests in addition to grades.

There must be good alternatives for A-level students to attain the necessary qualifications to get into higher education, if this is not automatically provided through upper secondary education. The responsibility for this is divided; preliminary courses are the responsibility of universities and university colleges, while the upper secondary schools have responsibility for improvement of grades.

It must also be possible to apply for higher education on the basis of prior learning and work experience. There should be alternative entrance schemes with specially adapted courses of study for those who have completed an apprenticeship. Admission on the basis of prior learning and work experience and to alternative courses of study should be handled locally by the institution concerned. These alternative courses of study must be fully financed along the same lines as other courses of study.

Students have the right to guidance and sufficient information about courses, both before and during their period of studies. Students should have ready access to information about different approaches to subjects or the expertise available at different institutions. The information provided about courses must be based on facts, and not exaggerated or misleading in any way.

3.2 The Centres for Excellence in Education Initiative

The Centres for Excellence in Education Initiative (SFU) is a good way to draw attention to outstanding national educational communities. These centres should be integrated units working within education and research at higher education institutions, contributing to improving the quality of the entire field of education. NSO believes that the Centres for Excellence in Education Initiative should be expanded to cover more academic disciplines, and that funding for the Initiative should be increased. This applies to both new and existing centres.

¹ Generell studiekompetanse

² Samordna Opptak

3.3 Structure of study programmes

NSO believes that study programmes should follow a degree structure, in which bachelor's degrees consist of 180 credits, master's degrees consist of 120 credits, and doctoral degrees have a duration of 3 to 4 years. A bachelor's degree is an independent qualification, which should give competence for employment and the possibility to apply to courses at a higher level. The independent value of the bachelor's degree must be protected and expanded in higher education, both in academic and employment terms. NSO believes that it is necessary to strengthen the bachelor's degree. The master's degree should build onto the base provided by the bachelor's degree, giving further skills and competence for employment, as well as making it possible to apply to doctoral programmes.

The academic year should be at least ten months long. Educational activities should be spread over the entire term. The requirements expected of students must be clear, both prior to the commencement of courses and throughout their duration.

It should not be possible to make significant changes to a subject after it has commenced, such as adding mandatory activities or changing the type or date of an exam. If the dates of two or more exams in the student's course of study coincide, the student must be allowed to request a postponement.

NSO believes that all students should have the opportunity to study during the summer months. More of the higher education institutions need to prepare cost-free courses in the form of summer schools.

It is a goal that higher education institutions give students a genuine opportunity to change courses or to complete parts of their course at other institutions.

NSO believes that higher education institutions must accommodate students who wish to study part-time, either through individually-adjusted course plans or by granting partial leave from standard course plans. In the case of leave, the course progression requirements must be adjusted in accordance with the amount of leave. In special cases, higher education institutions must make adjustments to the course in question and create an individual progression plan for the student, with the aim of allowing the student to complete their studies in a satisfactory manner and prevent them from dropping out. All students must have the right to a one-year, unconditional, period of leave.

3.4 National Curriculum Regulations

Everyone who is educated according to the same National Curriculum Regulations should have the same learning outcome at the end of the course, regardless of their place of study. However, the National Curriculum Regulations should not become detailed to such degree that they prevent institutions from placing their own characteristics on learning outcome descriptions, in accordance with their academic profile. It is especially important that the National Curriculum Regulations specify the number of hours of mandatory practical training required.

The National Curriculum Regulations should not be revised until at least a year has passed since the first group of students graduated from courses which it regulates, unless an EU directive is issued requiring its revision.

3.5 Learning environment

A good learning environment allows the student to learn and develop both academically and professionally. It involves creating a good physical, psychosocial, organisational and educational framework to support the entire study situation.

NSO believes that there needs to be comprehensive national legislation in place to regulate the requirements for a good learning environment. All students must have a legal right to a student ombudsperson, who should be an independent person with legal qualifications, with the authority to report cases to the board of the institution or other relevant authorities.

It is the responsibility of the institution management to ensure a good learning environment.

Learning environment committees should carry out active and strategic work to ensure a good learning environment at the institutions. These committees need to have a clear mandate regarding their function, type and aims, so that they can make demands and offer recommendations to the institutions. These recommendations should be followed up actively by both institution management and the learning environment committee. The physical, psychosocial, and organisational conditions must all be emphasised.

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority³, or its equivalent department, must monitor the students' learning environment to a greater extent, by carrying out both unannounced visits and visits based on discrepancy reports from students. In the case of breaches, the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority makes individual decisions, fining institutions if they do not uphold the law. All institutions must appoint at least one student at each campus to act as a health and safety representative (HSR) for the students and to participate when the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority visits the institution.

There must be suitable working spaces at the institution to allow the students to study independently. All students should have access to the necessary laboratories or workshops, and the technical equipment which is used in tuition must be up-to-date and of a high standard.

NSO believes there is a need for large-scale investment in buildings at higher education institutions, both in terms of new constructions and renovation of existing ones. Funds that have been allocated to administration, rent, and renovation of higher education institution buildings must be earmarked in the national budgets, and not impinge upon the scope of the institution's activities.

³ Arbeidstilsynet

It is important that good arrangements are made for the reception of new students, which take care of both their academic and social needs. Higher education institutions have the main responsibility for carrying this out.

NSO believes that it is necessary for all institutions to have an electronic reporting system, to register both physical and academic discrepancies. The reporting system must be readily accessible on the institution's website, and should be easy to use. Input should be collected and passed on to the learning environment committee and/or other academic affairs committees at institution level, who must implement the necessary measures to deal with discrepancies.

3.6 Graduates

It is the opinion of NSO that all new graduates should have the right to take individual subjects after completing bachelor's and master's degrees.

Alumni help current students to see how they can use their qualifications and reinforcing the network of students, staff and the alumni themselves. NSO believes that higher education institutions need to work actively with alumni to show the range of employment possibilities of different courses. The alumni can also provide guest lectures in order to give new perspectives and insight into the relevance of a subject or discipline, as well as promoting cross-disciplinary co-operation.

All institutions must offer career guidance, as it is important to prepare students for employment.

4.0 Research and Development (R&D) based education and innovation

NSO believes that all higher education must be based upon leading research, academic and artistic developments, and knowledge based on experience. R&D is important to keep courses updated and relevant to the development of solutions to global, national and local challenges.

4.1 The role of R&D in education

NSO believes that a strong connection between R&D and education contributes to improving the quality of education. This requires the use of suitable teaching methods and demands that the relationship between R&D and education is consciously and systematically integrated into all study programmes.

Research-based tuition is not simply a matter of ensuring that the lecturer has research qualifications and is up-to-date with the latest research. It also involves using teaching methods that are shown to give the best learning effect. Students must be introduced to scientific methods, critical use of source material and the ethical aspects of R&D work early in their studies. This means that students must be involved in R&D work already in their first year. NSO considers that the academic environment consists of both students and

academic staff, therefore, students must be fully participating members of the academic community.

NSO believes it is necessary to balance the amount of time that lecturers use on research with time spent teaching. R&D-based education is conditional upon staff being given enough time to keep abreast of research and carry out research themselves. At the same time, it is important that academic staff are not exempted from teaching.

Universities and university colleges must work systematically in order to ensure that both master's and bachelor's degree projects are integrated into larger R&D projects. Involving bachelor's degree students in research requires the right approach and resources; academic staff must provide guidance and supervision of students. This demands that staff possess research competence and dissemination skills. The level and scale of research and research methods should increase as the course progresses.

4.2 Innovation in higher education

Continual academic development and the development of new solutions should form the core of innovation in courses of study. Innovation can be defined as something new which can be used or implemented, and which has economic or social value. It is part of academia's role to encourage new ideas and contribute to renewing the society.

All courses of study should give the students basic knowledge and experience with innovation and developments within their own academic discipline. Courses must promote the development of each student's innovation skills, which can be characterised as the ability to apply theory, skills and competence to develop and improve society. Therefore, students must be challenged to think anew, and be given cross-disciplinary challenges to solve, with a strong link between academia and industry.

NSO believes that higher education institutions must co-operate with employers to create the right conditions for Student Incubators.

Institutions must also make it possible for students to follow up an idea, commercialise a product or start a business. This requires the assistance of staff with innovation competence, financial support, and access to facilities at the institution and contact with the business sector, industry and venture capital companies.

There should be national grant schemes for student entrepreneurship, offering both funding and access to competence and guidance for students who wish to realise an idea. Entitlement to patents and rights to intellectual property should be owned by the students involved.

Institutions need good systems to safeguard the students' intellectual property rights. They have a duty to accommodate the learning freedom of their students and to recognise the students' ownership of their own results and work.

5.0 Teaching and evaluation

In the course of their studies, students should increase their knowledge, competence and general skills. The higher education system should allow for development through varied teaching methods and forms of evaluation at all levels. It is the responsibility of the institution to make sure that lecturers are updated with regard to new teaching methods and forms of evaluation.

5.1 Teaching methods

Teaching methods are of vital importance to the quality of education; they should be used as a tool to ensure that students achieve the goals stated in the learning outcome descriptions. NSO believes that teaching methods should be varied and adjustable, to accommodate different academic disciplines. Teaching methods should feature a high level of interactivity between students and lecturers, and should be both updated and relevant to the course curriculum.

Making tuition mandatory does not guarantee that students understand and learn what is being taught. NSO believes it is necessary to use forms of evaluation that test the students' ability to practice their knowledge. Tuition should only be mandatory in cases where the learning outcome cannot be achieved through any other means than attendance, or in subjects where students working in groups or classes must be present to carry out classroom work. It is the responsibility of the institutions, through their academic staff, to justify mandatory tuition.

To ensure academic development, learning and motivation, it is important that students are followed-up throughout their entire course of study. Guidance from an academic mentor should assist the student to carry out their studies in a satisfactory manner. One-to-one academic guidance is effective and should be carried out by academic staff. All students must have the right to continual guidance of high standard. When studies commence, all students should be given an academic mentor who can follow-up students with academic advice and guidance. This mentor must be a member of the academic staff. In addition to standard guidance routines, NSO believes that academic staff should have regular weekly office hours in which students can freely seek guidance.

The unequal power relationship between students and academic mentors can lead to an abuse of power. NSO believes that institutions have a duty to establish warning systems and try to prevent unwanted situations from occurring. They must ensure that both students and staff are fully informed about these preventative measures. It is important to protect the legal rights of all parties in these situations.

5.2 Pedagogical qualifications

National requirements must describe the content of basic pedagogical qualifications. By basic pedagogical qualifications, NSO means the ability to plan and vary tuition, identify challenges and carry out development work, document and evaluate the experiences and

results of one's own teaching, be able to reflect over one's own teaching, as well as possess relevant guidance skills.

Lecturers must be given the opportunity to update their pedagogical qualifications on a regular basis. All institutions must have routines to ensure that lecturers take advantage of these opportunities.

All applicants to teaching positions is required to document their pedagogical qualification. When appointing staff and giving promotions, this documentation should form part of the basis of evaluation. In addition, a trial lesson should be carried out to show that the applicant has the necessary skills with regard to both theory and teaching. If the applicant does not fulfil the requirements of basic teaching qualifications, they may be employed on a conditional basis. This entails the applicant completing the necessary pedagogical courses within three years.

NSO believes that national guidelines for appointment committees should be established.

A national system of merit points for pedagogical qualifications must be established in order to give academic staff the incentive to develop their teaching skills. The system must specify a minimum requirement for recognition as a merited lecturer, and this should be connected to a reward scheme.

The same requirements for basic teaching qualifications should apply to both doctoral candidates engaged in a four-year doctoral degree course and other academic staff with teaching or mentoring responsibilities.

5.3 Teaching assistants/student assistants

The use of student assistants can be a useful supplement to tuition. Student assistants may be used to help with repetition and exercises, and give guidance as required.

Student assistants should be chosen on the basis of good grades and the ability to impart subject knowledge. Student assistants must be given sufficient training and supervision to do a satisfactory job. Each institution must have a system for the training of student assistants, covering both general and subject-specific teaching methods. The subject co-ordinator must evaluate the use of student assistants on an annual basis.

5.4 Syllabus and teaching materials

The syllabus should cover both established academic knowledge and the most relevant, high quality recent research. There should be a free choice of syllabus materials. Books which give the lecturers financial benefits must be approved by the subject co-ordinator before being put on a reading list. The reading list must be approved by a committee at study programme level. Special needs teaching materials should always be available to students who require them. The students should have some influence over the choice of syllabus materials for their subjects.

NSO believes it is necessary to establish a national licence for university and university college libraries, giving all students the same access to library databases. Controls must be in place to prevent double-billing of articles in-house at institutions. Standardised templates should be used for reading lists, with direct links to articles and libraries. It should be possible for students to assemble and order their own compendiums, so that they avoid having to buy the same article more than once.

To ensure that students are able to keep academically updated, it is important that they have access to research and subject information from other countries. The provision of good quality, relevant reading materials in languages other than Norwegian will help to ensure that students have a chance to learn international terminology.

5.5 Digitalisation in higher education / Use of digital resources in higher education

NSO believes that digitalisation of the higher education sector must be promoted systematically, by identifying the opportunities and challenges throughout the entire course process – from planning, administration, the execution of tuition and exams to responses, handling of complaints and the evaluation of academic disciplines and subjects.

If digital equipment is to be used effectively in teaching, research and administration, it is important that all users have very good digital skills and knowledge. Higher education institutions must ensure that the digital skills of users are sufficient, and offer courses to improve digital skills where necessary. Institution libraries and learning centres must offer students training in the digital services which they administer, such as archive searches.

NSO believes there is a need to focus on the digitalisation of higher education in Norway. Digitalisation of higher education has consequences beyond the digitising process itself, and the implementation of digitising measures must be seen in relation to other aspects of education. Digitalisation is not solely a goal in itself but a means to improve the ways in which education is carried out, as well as opening up possibilities for new teaching methods.

To ensure efficiency within the sector, NSO believes that all higher education institutions need a common digital infrastructure.

Digital access to education gives students greater flexibility and may improve the quality of teaching. NSO believes that all education should be openly accessible to everybody.

NSO believes that it is a positive step to use Open Educational Resources (OER), which enable students to study wherever they are, as well as giving them access to teaching resources from other institutions. Higher education institutions should encourage students to use external teaching resources, and these should provide a supplement to existing teaching activities. An educational environment with a high degree of interactivity, in which students meet fellow students and lecturers, is also important to ensure that students are a part of the academic community, feeling a sense of belonging to the academic environment and achieving learning outcomes.

NSO believes that all assignments and exams should be carried out and handed in digitally wherever possible. NSO is of the opinion that the entire exam process should be digitised, but that it should be possible to do traditional types of exams on application.

The institution must ensure that students have access to required computer software. It must be possible to install these on private computers. Where possible and practical, open-source software (OSS) should be used.

5.6 Methods of evaluation

Methods of evaluation should measure students' achievements in relation to learning outcomes, as described in the Norwegian Qualifications Framework. Evaluation is a part of the learning process in higher education and must be seen in connection with chosen teaching methods and learning outcome descriptions. All subjects must have at least two grade-based evaluations. In the opinion of NSO, both individual and group evaluations should be used, and all students should be exposed to a variety of evaluation methods throughout their studies. The choice of evaluation method should be explained in the learning outcome description.

NSO is in favour of a grade scale from A to F, in which national guidelines decide the level that corresponds to each grade. The pass/fail option may be used when it is of central importance that students understand the core content of a subject, rather than evaluating the level of a student's knowledge. The pass/fail option may be used when the academic staff, together with the students, believe that this will give the best learning result for students. This is especially applicable to courses at higher degree level. Study programmes should have elements of the standard grade scale, so that it is possible to calculate a grade average. Periods of professional training should be evaluated using the pass/fail option. A pass should correspond to grade C or higher.

NSO is not in favour of using the normal distribution of grades in relation to individual exams, believing that it does not show the actual skills and knowledge of the student. However, the distribution of grades can be used to evaluate academic achievement in a subject over a period of time.

NSO believes that all exams should be evaluated by a minimum of two examiners, at least one of whom is external. If it is not possible to use an external examiner, the examiner guidelines should be evaluated externally. Legislation should be passed to make it mandatory to have examiner guidelines in all subjects. When evaluating students' performance in exams, all students should receive a qualitative, automatic and digitised assessment with feedback.

In the case of oral exams, results can be verified and a basis for complaints secured using film or sound recordings during exams. To ensure personal privacy, the students must give their consent to this.

NSO believes that complaints about grades should be based upon the Act Relating to Universities and University Colleges. According to the Act, when a complaint about a grade

is made, the exam response must be re-evaluated by a new examiner who does not know the candidate's identity, the grounds for the complaint, the original grade and the reasons for the grade. NSO believes that this should be standard practice in all higher education institutions. Furthermore, NSO believes that a complete national exam regulation should be prepared, which specifies time limits and the demands placed on students and institutions, both before, during and after exams. The grounds for the grade should be given in writing, unless the student desires otherwise.

National exams should only be implemented in courses which come under the National Curriculum Regulations. National exams should not be implemented in subjects or topics in which answers require discussion and reflection, when the aim is not to give a predetermined answer. The results of national exams should not be shown on the degree certificate, and should only be used for internal evaluation at institution level.

5.7 Suitability assessment

The Regulation for Suitability in Higher Education specifies and regulates the courses in which a suitability assessment is required. These are courses in which candidates, both during studies and later in working life, are required to work with especially vulnerable and exposed social groups.

In the case of courses which are already included in the Regulation, suitability assessments must be carried out throughout the duration of the course, at all levels of education, including post-graduate and further education. If there is doubt surrounding the suitability of a student, an additional suitability assessment should be carried out. The student should not be persuaded to leave their studies, but should receive guidance which specifically targets the reason for the doubt. If a student is regarded suitable after this second assessment, the student should still be offered extensive guidance after the case is concluded.

In cases of whistle-blowing, students should be allowed to remain anonymous until the case is taken up by the Suitability Committee.

Students who are in the process of being given an additional suitability assessment and students who are deemed unsuitable must be registered in the Register of Suspended Students (RUST). However, those who are subsequently regarded suitable after the second assessment must be deleted from the register.

5.8 Personal and academic formation and the interdisciplinary perspective

The critical and analytical abilities of students are strengthened through the personal development process of education. These abilities help students to participate in the democratic system, reflect on ethical questions and utilise their academic skills in an innovative manner. Therefore, all courses of study should give students the opportunity to reflect on their academic discipline and their own role in a broader perspective, and develop respect for other academic disciplines.

It is important to be able to communicate with professionals from other disciplines in working life. Consequently, collaboration between subjects, both within the same academic discipline and with other departments and faculties, should be the aim of all academic environments. This will lead to a greater sense of professional identity, allowing students to see what kinds of roles they may take on in their future employment. NSO believes that there should be more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary degrees on offer at both bachelor's and master's degree level. All courses of study should allow students to choose elective subjects from other academic disciplines. In addition, all courses of study should contain an interdisciplinary project in which students from different academic disciplines come together to solve real-life problems.

6.0 Practical training and Employability

Practical training can be defined as the utilisation of accumulated academic knowledge and experience.

This form of learning gives students knowledge that cannot be easily acquired in other ways. According to NSO, practical training should be a part of all courses of study. An expanded concept of practical training could also include solving cases, collaborating with businesses when writing bachelor's and master's theses, and R&D involving students.

6.1 Connections to working life

Practical training helps to create closer contact and co-operation between academic environments at higher education institutions, the students and working life. In addition to direct contact through practical placements, higher education institutions should also aim for a continual dialogue with employers.

All higher education institutions must have a Council for Co-operation with Working Life (RSA). This functions as a co-ordinating body for the strategic work of each individual institution with businesses and industry outside of academia. One of the RSA's most important tasks is to ensure that co-operative efforts between regional businesses and industry reach academic environments, resulting in a positive effect on all courses of study. The RSA also has a co-ordinating function for other bodies at a lower level within institutions.

NSO believes that guest lecturers with relevant work experience should be included in all study programmes. Academic staff at higher education institutions should also have the opportunity to attend relevant workplaces as guest workers for limited periods.

Case studies provide a good method for improving the students' abilities to analyse relevant challenges and tasks in the light of current theory. This allows students to work with syllabus topics in a way that is closer to professional working life, making education more relevant. Students from a range of academic disciplines should work on case studies collaboratively. NSO believes that students should have the opportunity to write their bachelor's and master's theses in co-operation with the employment sector. These theses should be subject to the same requirements as other bachelor's and master's theses.

In the course of their studies, students should develop an awareness of their own competence, as well as how it can be utilised in working life. It is important that institutions arrange career days and similar activities to give students the opportunity to find out about different career options.

6.2 Mandatory practical training

Practical training is a learning situation. Students who undertake mandatory practical training cannot be seen as working under normal working conditions and as a result, cannot receive wages for supervised training at a workplace during the training period. They should receive training in real-life work situations and learn how to work in a knowledge-based manner.

Well-developed routines should be in place for the evaluation of the place of training, and of the students' learning outcome during practical training. Evaluation should be used as a resource in quality assurance work at the institutions.

Mandatory practical training should ensure that students are exposed to different aspects of daily operations, a diverse array of employees and user groups, and different professionally-relevant situations and tasks. Co-operation and reflection will help students to develop their own professional identity and competency.

The question of whether mandatory practical training should be included in a course of study should be decided on the basis of the study programme's learning outcome. It should be included in courses that prepare students for professions that require inter-personal contact. NSO believes that mandatory practical training should also be a part of studies in the performing arts, such as music, acting and dance.

6.3 Quality assurance of practical training workplaces

It remains the responsibility of the institutions to ensure students a high quality education. They have a special responsibility to ensure that logistical, placement and capacity problems do not lead to practical training placements with insufficient relevance and unsatisfactory learning outcomes.

While institutions must cover the need for relevant practical training placements for all students enrolled in studies, it is also a governmental, regional and municipal responsibility to offer placements. It should be an aim for institutions to enter long-term agreements with local employers, to ensure dependable practical training placements.

To ensure the constant improvement of quality and practical training, all faculties and departments at higher education institutions must have Practical Training Committees. The committee members should include academic staff from the faculty or department in question, institution management, administrative staff, external representatives from relevant workplaces, as well as student representatives. The committee should discuss current problems and find measures to improve practical training schemes within the faculty

or department. The institution management has the ultimate responsibility for quality assurance of practical training placements.

6.4 Distribution of responsibility, follow-up and mentoring

Good communication and co-operation between higher education institutions and practical training workplaces are necessary to maintain a high quality of education in courses involving practical training. NSO believes it is important to prepare clear, binding agreements between higher education institutions, students and practical training workplaces, which must be signed by all parties. The agreement should specify attendance requirements and the amount of time allocated by the workplace training supervisor to follow-up students. Students must have the opportunity to report criticisable training conditions to their institution, and should have strong legal protection in this regard.

The attendance of the workplace training supervisor is of high importance in order to ensure a sufficient basis for the evaluation of students' academic knowledge and their suitability for the profession.

NSO believes it is necessary that workplace training supervisors have formal mentoring qualifications. They must be given enough time to develop their mentoring skills and to carry out their supervisor duties. Only professional personnel with relevant work experience of over three year's duration should be appointed as workplace training supervisors.

6.5 The administration of practical training

To ensure that everyone has equal access to higher education, higher education institutions must cover all extra expenses in connection with mandatory periods of practical training. The public sector, through municipalities, county administration and the government, as well as regional employers and businesses, have a joint responsibility together with higher education institutions, to ensure that there are sufficient practical training placements which do not result in extra expenses for students. Institutions must offer special practical training placements to students who require it. The criteria for this must be readily available to students.

NSO believes that students should have the opportunity to carry out one practical training period abroad during their studies. It must be possible to get a grant from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund for practical training periods of less than three month's duration.

7.0 Quality assurance and student participation

It is the joint responsibility of the national authorities, higher education institutions, lecturers and students to maintain a high level of quality in higher education. The students must also contribute to the quality enhancement in academia through close communication and co-operation with their fellow students, lecturers, institution management, research communities and workplaces. Students are the best judges of whether the quality of

education they experience is good enough. There should be a continual enhancement of quality, and national and institutional surveys should be evaluated.

Universities and university colleges are meant to be democratic institutions, and students are a part of the academic community. Local student democracy, including student committees at faculty and institution level, should actively participate in the running of institutions at all levels.

Institutions must ensure that students are able to participate as student representatives at local and national level. This involves permitting absence from tuition on account of mandatory meetings or granting leave to students who have full-time elected positions. This should be regulated by a co-operation agreement between the student democracy and the institution.

Students should make up at least 20 percent of the members of all collegiate decision-making bodies at universities and university colleges.

7.1 The responsibility of the institutions

All higher education institutions must have a functioning quality-assurance system. They have a responsibility to allocate funding in their budgets to safeguard the quality of courses and the learning environment. The institutions also have a responsibility to make sure that their staff are competent to carry out good quality teaching. It is the responsibility of the institution to work systematically on the development of study programmes and subjects, to ensure a high standard. If a study programme fails to achieve a satisfactory level of quality over a period of time, it is the responsibility of the institution to terminate it.

The students' primary role in quality assurance is to evaluate subjects and study programmes. The institutions should make it clear to students how the evaluation is going to be used. The subject co-ordinator must carry out mandatory evaluations of each subject in every term it is on offer. The aim of evaluation is to measure how well the institution organises teaching to fulfil the learning outcomes for each subject.

All study programmes and subjects must have a concluding evaluation, in the form of a report written by the course co-ordinator. In addition to evaluation results, the report should contain suggestions for improvements based on students' feedback. The course co-ordinator and the appropriate student representatives should work on these suggestions together. The head of department has the main responsibility for making sure that improvements made based on the students' feedback. The content of the report should be made public. The students must be kept informed and included in follow-up work after the evaluation has been carried out. It is the duty of higher education institutions to follow-up deviations in quality.

Evaluations should be repeated over a period of time, to give a statistical basis for comparison. Focus groups should be used to evaluate the quality of surveys. A half-way evaluation must be carried out in all subjects. This may be carried out verbally but should be documented in a written summary. If a subject lasts for more than one term, evaluations

corresponding to the half-way point and end-of-term point should be carried out at the appropriate times. NSO believes that specially-adjusted or alternative course progressions should be quality assured according to the same requirements as other courses of study offered by the institution.

There should be committees whose task is to follow-up quality assurance systems and quality improvement at all levels within institutions. These should be academic co-operative bodies, consisting of student representatives, academic staff, members of institution management and preferably representatives from the profession, industry or field of training.

7.2 National measures

Surveys conducted among the students and staff, as well as graduate surveys, are useful information tools. National student surveys (studiebarometeret) should be carried out annually in order to contribute to quality enhancement within education and make comparison between higher education institutions possible. These surveys should make it possible to track development over time. Student democracies at institutions should be central in the process of evaluating survey results, and openness concerning results and methods should be encouraged.