

# **Evaluation of the Competence Reform in Norway: Access to Higher Education Based on Non-formal Learning<sup>1</sup>**

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*From the start of the 2001-2002 academic year, people who had not completed secondary school were able to enter higher education based on documented non-formal learning, realkompetanse. Based on interviews with key personnel at selected universities and university colleges, and on quantitative data from the applicant register, this article presents results from an evaluation of this reform in Norwegian higher education. The evaluation indicates that the reform, by and large, works according to the lawmakers' intentions in providing a second chance for learners not usually linked with higher education. Still, findings suggest considerable variations in how the universities and university colleges have adjusted to the reform. Geographical location and supply of students are factors contributing to the institutions' attitude to the reform. University colleges in rural areas with a low number of applicants, in general, react more positively to the reform and it seems to be easier for applicants to be assessed as qualified for studies, in such institutions.*

## Introduction and background

Though Norway in general has a highly educated population, research early in the 1990s gave rise to concerns about the level of competence, especially in knowledge-based industries, and about the potential for flexibility and professional renewal among adults in a rapidly changing vocational landscape. On this background, the Competence Reform was initiated by The Norwegian Parliament (*Stortinget*) in 1999. The aim was to establish “a national system for documentation and appreciation of adults’ non-formal and informal competence, with legitimacy in both the labour market and the educational system” (VOX, 2002, p. 5). The purpose of this reform is to heighten the valuation and utilisation of the working population’s total competence (included the informal competence), and in that way to meet the needs for competence and skills of society, the workplace and individuals. Several measures have been launched to reduce the structural and economic barriers to adult learning by encouraging a co-operation between employers, employees and the government. The reform is still in progress in various initiatives and projects.

As part of the Competence Reform the rules of access to higher education have been changed. The Act relating to universities and university colleges has been amended so that applicants who are at least 25 years of age do not need to meet the requirement for general study competence to apply for studies at universities or university colleges, but can be accepted on the basis of *realkompetanse*.<sup>2</sup> For higher education, this reform entails a considerable potential for an efficiency increase, in the fact that well qualified adults, who have not completed secondary school, no longer have to “waste time” in secondary education. The new law came into effect in the 2001-2002 academic year. The individual institutions determine whether applicants are sufficiently qualified to study the relevant courses. If the applicant is accepted and passes an examination for a course lasting a minimum of one year, this will provide formal entrance qualifications. *Realkompetanse* may also allow a shortening of the study period, or exemption from examinations or tests.

Norwegian universities and university colleges are obliged to undertake an individual assessment of whether the applicants’ *realkompetanse* is sufficient for them to follow the desired course of study (Pettersen, 2003). Naturally, the requirements for different studies will vary. For example, it is more important to master some basic mathematics to study engineering than

to study for pre-school teaching. Similarly, experience with taking care of one's own children, is more relevant for pre-school teaching studies than for engineering studies. The assessments are, thus, supposed to be conducted locally (on every university and college) and individually (for each applicant). The universities and university colleges are therefore supposed to develop guidelines for the methods and criteria of assessment, and define concretely the type of competence that should be expected from qualified applicants.

The application process consists of two stages. First, the institution assesses whether or not the applicant is qualified for the study in question. Second, the applicants are ranked, and if the number of applicants exceeds the number of places available, admission is offered to the ones ranked highest. The institutions are not allowed to use special quotas for the applicants with *realkompetanse*, the ranking of these applicants are therefore supposed to be merged with those of the ordinary applicants. This ranking and merging are supposed to be based on discretionary assessments and rough appraisals.

Geographically, Norway is situated in the upper north corner of Europe with a population of approximately 4.5 million people. The population density is only 14 per km<sup>2</sup>, one of the lowest among the OECD countries. Ensuring equal opportunity for education for all, whether living in urban or rural parts of the country, is a central goal of the Norwegian educational policy. The policy has been the foundation for developing a decentralised educational system, with a distribution of higher education institutions in all parts of the country. As a result, each of the 19 counties of Norway has a university college. In addition, the four universities of Norway are situated in four different regions of the country; in the east, west, north, and in mid-Norway. However, the distribution of potential students is not equal, and while some of the institutions have a high supply of students, others face a bigger challenge competing for students. One of the issues discussed in this paper is to what extent supply of students and geographical location are connected with how the institutions have adapted to the reform.

Competence and lifelong learning are the main overall themes of the Nordic Council of Ministers' strategy for education and research cooperation in 2000-2004. Thus, documentation and validation of adults' *realkompetanse* is a highly central issue in all the Nordic countries. This matter is also given considerable attention in the EU discussion on educational policy (Pettersen, 2003). Sharing Norway's experience in working to include applicants with *realkompetanse* in higher education may be of interest outside the national borders. In this paper we discuss the effect of the *realkompetanse* reform from two perspectives: the higher education institutions and the individual student.

This article is organised in two separate sections that present the results from an evaluation of the experiences of the changes in the rules of access to higher education. First, we study how the universities and university colleges have adapted to this reform so far. Second, we analyse the differences between the *realkompetanse*-applicants and other groups of applicants, and we pose the question “who are the new students seeking entry to higher education based on non-formal learning?” The article concludes with a discussion of the main findings.

## **How have the universities and university colleges adapted to the reform?**

The study of the different institutions' adaptation to the reform is based on document analysis and interviews with key personnel at selected universities and university colleges. The data contain local guidelines from 57 of the 70 Norwegian higher education institutions, and interviews of 14 persons at 9 educational institutions, both faculty and staff. The 9 institutions were selected with the purpose of obtaining a wider range of representation regarding size, geographical location, private or public ownership, whether or not the institution is part of UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admission Service) and the institution's composition of fields of study. We conducted interviews at Finnmark University College, Oslo University College, Sør-Trøndelag University College, Norwegian School of Management (BI), Norwegian Lutheran Hospital and College, The University of Oslo, Nesna University College, Stord/Haugesund University College and The Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

By and large, the reform works according to the lawmakers' intentions in providing a second chance for learners not usually linked with higher education. Most educational institutions have taken the reform very seriously, and have done a considerable amount of work in adapting to it. Most institutions have worked out detailed guidelines for the assessment of *realkompetanse*, and they put a considerable amount of working hours in processing the applications. The persons we interviewed, who are working with the assessment and application processing, all claimed to be very concerned with being as fair and as accurate as possible. However, our study also displayed some important challenges facing the future practitioners and developers of the law and guidelines. In the following, we will sketch some of these challenges.

Firstly, we found considerable differences between different educational institutions with regards to the requirements for being assessed as qualified. Our findings suggest variations in how the different universities and university colleges view the assessment of *realkompetanse* applicants. Briefly,

we can distinguish between two main types of attitude towards the assessment of *realkompetanse*. On the one hand, there is the attitude which says “we want to give as many as possible a chance to pursue higher education studies”, and with this attitude it is fairly easy to be assessed as qualified for studies. On the other hand, we found the attitude that “it is wrong to pull the wool over the applicants’ eyes, by offering admission to people who do not have sufficient knowledge to complete a higher education”. Where the persons assessing the applicants have this attitude, it is much harder to be considered qualified. Our study suggests that there is a connection between geographical location and attitude to the assessment of *realkompetanse*. University colleges in rural areas with a low number of applicants are, in general, those that react the most positively to the reform and it seems to be relatively easier for applicants to be assessed as qualified for studies, in such institutions, than in universities and university colleges in urban areas with many qualified applicants. The personnel we interviewed at Finnmark University College (in the northern part of Norway) for example told us that the number of applicants had decreased so much since the mid-nineties that the *realkompetanse* applicants were vital to the institution’s survival. On the other hand, our interviewees at institutions in urban areas, with a high number of applicants, were somewhat more critical toward the reform, and their admission requirements were higher.

This is not very surprising, nor is it necessarily a problem. However, it may be a problem if the assessments of *realkompetanse* are regarded as arbitrary and unfair. As mentioned above, the reform implies then use of individuals’ discretionary assessments and such assessments will necessarily lead to some variation, because individuals perceive things differently. However, in order to avoid being perceived as unfair, the educational authorities might benefit from trying to make the assessments at the different educational institutions more equal than they are today. Several of the people we interviewed spoke in favour of a more uniform practice. This can be accomplished in several ways, and here we will focus only on two of them. A lot will probably be accomplished simply by establishing systems for cooperation and exchange of experiences between the educational institutions. If the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research Affairs arranged for the establishment of such systems, the assessments would probably be more uniform across the country. One way to accomplish this could be to arrange seminars for the personnel involved in the application processing on a regular basis for representatives from the different educational institutions to evaluate and discuss current practices. Another way of accomplishing a nationally more uniform assessment of *realkompetanse* could be to move the decisions from the local level to some central agency (either in the Ministry itself or in an agency under the Ministry’s control such

as UCAS). This would, however, lead to radical incompatibility with some of the original intentions behind the reform.

Secondly, our study revealed that not all elements in the reform are implemented. For example, the institutions have not instituted any arrangements to grant exemption from parts of a study, based on relevant *realkompetanse*, nor does it seem likely that they are going to. The reason our informants gave was that *realkompetanse* can never be good enough to replace any part of a higher education. Another field, in which the current practice is somewhat at odds with the intentions of the reform, is the joint ranking, and comparison, of applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants fulfilling the general study requirements. As mentioned, the educational institutions are not supposed to operate with special quotas for the applicants with *realkompetanse*, and are supposed to merge the rankings of the two groups of applicants. The practice at several of the institutions of higher education is somewhat at odds with this part of the law. In several cases there is no real comparison of the two groups of applicants, and one decides how many applicants with *realkompetanse* shall be offered admission after considering the ordinary applicants. A third element of the reform, where there is inconsistency between the intentions of the reform and current practice, is the notion that informal competence can completely replace formal, school-based, competence. Most local guidelines request that some formal secondary education be completed before entering higher education. Most educational institutions require at least “knowledge similar to” specified courses in secondary education in Norwegian, English and mathematics.

Such inconsistencies between theory and practice are not necessarily problematic, and may be regarded as mere practical adjustments of the theory. The reason why institutions do not make a joint ranking of the two applicant groups may be that such a ranking is impossible in practice. However, such inconsistencies may be considered problematic if they are large. A possible reason why the institutions prefer that competence be documented in the form of some passed courses in secondary education could be that this is a far easier, and hence cheaper, way to assess the individuals' competence. When there is little time available, it is sensible to find as manageable and standardised criteria as possible. The same line of thinking applies to the use of quotas *versus* individual discretionary assessments. If more time were available for the application processing, the institutions would perhaps live up to the intentions of the reform to an even greater extent. In such a hypothetical case, they could also include other criteria of assessment and forms of documentation than the ones on paper, e.g. interviews or specially designed tests. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the outcome of such a time-consuming assessment process would be very similar to the outcome

of today's process. It is not unlikely that the same applicants would be offered admission also after such a more thorough assessment.

The academic "quality" of the applicants with *realkompetanse* is a third challenge facing the future practitioners of this reform. Several of our interviewees stated that the academic standard of the applicants have decreased just during the few years the reform has been in effect. Our knowledge on this question is limited to the impression of our interviewees, but to the extent that their impression is correct this may pose a problem in the long run. If it turns out that the academic standard of the *realkompetanse* – students are considerably lower than that of regular students (with lower throughput and poorer grades), the support for the reform may be crumbling, however strong it is today.

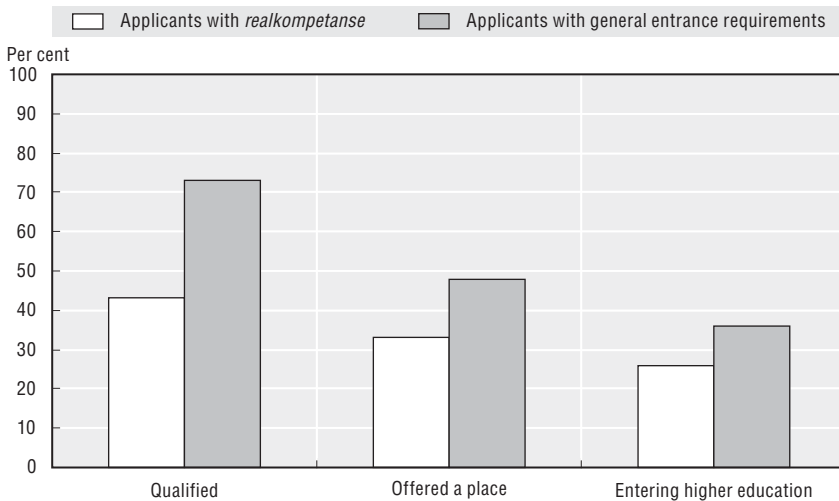
### **Who are the new students seeking entry to higher education based on non-formal learning?**

Our main focus, in this second part of the evaluation, is to analyse the differences between the *realkompetanse* – applicants and other groups of applicants. The main question in this part is: What groups of students have applied for higher education on the basis of *realkompetanse*? As one of the criteria to apply with *realkompetanse* is to be at least 25 years old, we know that these new students in general are older than the average student. But to what extent do they differ from other students in other aspects? In this part we will compare the two groups of applicants according to distribution of gender, region of residence,<sup>3</sup> country of origin, language of origin and choice of study programme in higher education.<sup>4</sup>

This part of the evaluation is based on analysis of data from the centralised application processing centre called "Universities and Colleges Admission Service" (UCAS)<sup>5</sup> (Norwegian term: *Samordna opptak*). Most applications to undergraduate studies at Norwegian universities and university colleges are processed through the UCAS. Our data concern of all applicants to undergraduate studies at Norwegian universities and university colleges through UCAS in the spring 2001 and the spring 2002, that is, all the public university colleges, the four Norwegian universities and some private colleges. In 2001 and 2002, UCAS processed the applications for 47 institutions (out of the Norwegian total of 70 institutions of higher education). The data contain information on 77 384 applicants in 2001, and 83 244 applicants in 2002. In addition to demographic characteristics, the data also consist of information about the application and application processing (such as which studies one has applied for, whether or not one is qualified for the study in question, to which study one has been offered admission, and whether or not one has accepted the offer).

Nearly two thirds of the applicants drop-out during the application process. There are several drop-out points during the process. Some applicants are not considered qualified for any of the study programmes they have applied for, others are qualified but do not have the sufficient grade level or sufficient quality of non-formal learning to pass the entry levels. Then there is a group of applicants who are offered a place at a study programme but who decide not to take the place. Here we focus on the applicants who entered a study programme in higher education. The drop-out rate during the application process among applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants with general entrance requirements is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1. **Share of all applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants with general entrance requirements**



Source: "Universities and Colleges Admission Service" (UCAS) 2002.

While about 70% of the applicants with general entrance requirements were considered qualified for the study of their first choice, the rate was only 40% among the applicants with *realkompetanse*. About half of the applicants with general entrance requirements were offered a place at the study programme of their first choice, whereas the rate was only 30% among the applicants with *realkompetanse*. Furthermore, we see that 36% of the applicants with general entrance requirements showed up at the study programme of their first choice, while the rate was 24% among the applicants with *realkompetanse*. Thus the drop-out during the application process indicates that applicants with *realkompetanse* have a higher drop-out rate than other applicants, and that a lower proportion is considered qualified.



Table 1.1 displays the demographical characteristics of applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants with general entrance requirements who showed up for studies in the autumn 2001 and 2002. We are here studying the total group of applicants who showed up for studies, both those who were accepted at their first choice of study programme and those who were accepted at studies of lower priority. The table shows how the two groups of applicants differ according to gender, citizenship, first language, county of residence and mean age.

**Table 1.1. Demographical characteristics of applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants with general entrance requirements who showed up for studies in the autumn 2001 and 2002**

Per cent

	2001		2002	
	Applicants with <i>realkompetanse</i>	Other applicants	Applicants with <i>realkompetanse</i>	Other applicants
<b>Gender</b> (women)	70	62	72	63
<b>Citizenship</b> (non-Norwegian citizenship)	5	3	5	3
<b>First language</b> (other than Norwegian)	7	4	7	5
<b>County of residence:</b>				
Oslo and central Norway	18	18	19	19
Eastern Norway	25	26	26	25
Western Norway	27	35	27	35
Mid-Norway	7	11	9	10
Northern Norway	21	11	20	11
Outside Norway	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.2
<b>Age</b> (mean)	37	24	35	23
<b>Total</b> (N)	1 778	34 436	1 693	35 788

Source: "Universities and Colleges Admission Service" (UCAS) 2001 and 2002.

The table confirms the higher mean age among applicants with *realkompetanse* compared to other applicants; 37 against 24 among the applicants in 2001 and 35 against 23 in 2002. The table shows a majority of women in both groups, and especially among the applicants with *realkompetanse*. Here the percentage of women is 70% in 2001 and 72% in 2002. Among the applicants with general entrance requirements the proportion of women is around 63% both years.

Applicants with a foreign citizenship and a foreign first language represent a small share of the student population, which is natural considering the low share among the total population. Still, we find slightly higher proportions of students with a foreign citizenship or a foreign first language among the applicants with *realkompetanse* than among the applicants with general entrance requirements, in both 2001 and 2002. This is not quite as expected. On the one hand, one could expect that immigrants

with education from their home countries that had not been accepted as qualifying for entry into higher education would use the opportunity of the new reform to apply for higher education based on non-formal learning. On the other hand, it could be that the reform, which is a new measure, is less known among persons with immigrant backgrounds. If this were the case, we would expect a low share of the applicants with *realkompetanse* among the applicants with a foreign citizenship or a foreign first language. Table 1.1 indicates that this is not the case. However, we must emphasise that information on citizenship and first language is subjectively provided by the applicants. Some may not have answered the questions of citizenship and first language in the application form. In addition, the group of applicants with foreign backgrounds consists of applicants of all nationalities other than Norwegian. This includes people from Sweden and Denmark as well as people from countries farther away from Norway. Further research is necessary to determine how well known the reform is among persons with minority backgrounds.

Table 1.1 also shows that applicants with *realkompetanse* have somewhat different geographical origin than the applicants with general entrance requirements. Western-Norway and also Mid-Norway have a slightly lower share of applicants with *realkompetanse* compared to other applicants, in total 34 against 46% in 2001. On the other hand, Northern Norway has a higher share of the applicants with *realkompetanse* compared to other applicants, 21% against 11%. The geographical distribution of applicants may be related to discussions in the previous part of the article. Although everyone we interviewed expressed a positive attitude towards the content and goals of the reform, some pointed out the complications in the validation process for applicants with *realkompetanse* and, therefore, the increased amount of work for the institutions. In general, institutions with a high supply of students expressed these concerns more than institutions with a low supply of students did, and institutions with a low supply of students had a more positive attitude towards the reform, as the applicants with *realkompetanse* represented an increase in the student supply.

While Table 1.1 showed the geographical background of the applicants, Table 1.2 shows where the qualified applicants showed up for studies. Many applicants choose to study in another region than their home region, and many start their studies at one of the four universities, which have a larger capacity and offer a broader selection of study programmes than the university colleges do. However, when comparing patterns of enrolment students with *realkompetanse* seem to be less attracted to the universities and more locally attached. A high proportion enrolls in the local university college. Among students with *realkompetanse*, 19% enrolled in a higher education institution in Northern Norway. This share was only 8% and 7% among other students in 2001 and 2002 respectively. Also in Eastern Norway the relative share

**Table 1.2. Applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants with general entrance requirements by county where they showed up for studies in the autumn 2001 and 2002**

	Per cent			
	2001		2002	
	Applicants with <i>realkompetanse</i>	Other applicants	Applicants with <i>realkompetanse</i>	Other applicants
Oslo and central Norway	24	29	24	30
Eastern Norway	23	14	23	13
Western Norway	26	31	25	32
Mid-Norway	8	19	9	18
Northern Norway	19	8	19	7
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>1 778</b>	<b>34 436</b>	<b>1 693</b>	<b>35 788</b>

Source: "Universities and Colleges Admission Service" (UCAS) 2001 and 2002.

among students with *realkompetanse* was higher than the share among other students, 23% against 14%. In the three other regions, where the three largest universities are located, there were lower shares of students with *realkompetanse*.

The geographical distribution of students with *realkompetanse* must be seen in relation to who these new learners are, and to their choice of study. As previously mentioned, the majority of students with *realkompetanse* consist of women in their mid-thirties. It is probable that this is a group where a majority of persons have a strong connection with their region of residence, due to family obligations, employment or other factors. But what do they want to study? This question is answered in Table 1.3, which compares the choices of study of applicants with *realkompetanse* and other applicants.

**Table 1.3. Applicants with *realkompetanse* and applicants with general entrance requirements who showed up for studies in the autumn 2001 and 2002, by field of study**

	Per cent			
	2001		2002	
	Applicants with <i>realkompetanse</i>	Other applicants	Applicants with <i>realkompetanse</i>	Other applicants
Health and Social Care studies	41	15	42	14
Educational studies	23	10	23	10
Business and Administration	6	7	5	6
Science and Technology	5	11	5	10
Other	25	57	25	59
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>1 778</b>	<b>34 436</b>	<b>1 693</b>	<b>35 788</b>

Source: "Universities and Colleges Admission Service" (UCAS) 2001 and 2002.

Table 1.3 shows considerable differences between applicants with *realkompetanse* and other applicants when it comes to choice of study. The majority of applicants with *realkompetanse* apply for studies in the field of health and social care and in education. Almost two thirds of the accepted and enrolled applicants with *realkompetanse* showed up in a study programme within one of these fields, and more than 40% entered health and social care studies. In comparison, only 25% of the other applicants entered these two fields of study. Almost 60% of the other applicants enter “other” fields of studies. These are mainly university studies and long term professional studies (medicine, law, social science, etc.). In general applicants with *realkompetanse* seem to be enrolled in short term study-programmes, often leading to a profession within the public sector (nurse, teacher, etc.).

## Discussion

The Competence Reform has initiated changes in the system of higher education affecting both students and institutions. The reform allowing students to enter higher education on the basis of *realkompetanse* has provided a second chance for a group of learners not usually linked with higher education. Still, findings suggest considerable variations in how the universities and university colleges have adjusted to the reform. Geographical location and supply of students are factors contributing to the institutions attitude toward the reform. University colleges in rural areas with a low numbers of applicants are, in general, the most positive toward the reform and it seems to be easier for applicants to be assessed as qualified for studies in such institutions. That the entry barriers differ according to the supply of students, in the sense that it is more difficult to enter the most popular institutions, seems reasonable. Nevertheless, the requirement for being assessed as qualified for studies should be equal in all institutions.

In addition to being related to variations in the supply of students the findings may be related to three other issues: local differences in average level of education, local differences in rate of unemployment, and the structure of the labour market.

The level of education in Northern Norway is in general slightly lower compared to the country as a whole (Statistics Norway, 2003).<sup>6</sup> This may imply a higher need – or potential – for higher education in the adult population in this part of the country and thus a higher number of adults who could benefit from the new opportunity to enter higher education provided by the reform. Another explanation for the geographical variations indicated by the findings involves the local differences in rate of unemployment. In general Norway has a low rate of unemployment.<sup>7</sup> However, in the period covered by the analysis the Northern region is recognized with a somewhat higher unemployment

rate compared to other regions (Statistics Norway, 2003). Taking into account that education may reduce the risk of being unemployed a high level of unemployment may increase the benefit expected of education. In addition the rate of unemployment may reduce the relative cost of education. While one of the costs of education for the individual is lack of income during time of studies, the relative cost of education is reduced if the alternative is being unemployed.

Turning to the demographical differences between applicants with *realkompetanse* and other applicants, this could be related to the structure of the labour market. Is it purely a coincidence that a high share of the applicants with *realkompetanse* are women applying for studies within the field of health and social care and within education? Or could this be a result of the structures of the labour market and differences in the validation of formal qualifications between different sectors? In Norway as well as in a number of other OECD countries both health and social care services and the education sector have a high proportion of women employees. In addition they are primarily services within the public sector. The public sector is normally recognised as having more regulated systems for determining occupational status and salary compared to the private sector. Thus, it may be argued that formal qualifications are more important for determining occupational status and salary in the public sector than in the private sector and that obtaining or increasing one's individual formal qualifications may be more profitable among public sector employers.<sup>8</sup> Following this line of reasoning our findings could indicate that the reform has increased the possibilities among low paid unskilled workers within the social care services and the education sector to obtain formal qualifications and thus to increase their salaries and occupational status. However, it is still too early to measure the full effects of the reform. To what extent the reform will have had these effects depends on both the achievement and progression of the students with *realkompetanse*, and on their transition from education and (back to) the labour market.

Evaluating how the universities and university colleges have adapted to this reform and studying what groups of new students are seeking entry to higher education based on *realkompetanse* are important both for gaining information of the effect of the policy changes as well as for improving future policy.

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## Notes

1. This paper is based on a study previously published in Norwegian, see Helland and Opheim, 2004.
2. The Norwegian term *realkompetanse* include the total sum of a person's formal, non-formal and un-formal learning. The concept of *realkompetanse* includes all kinds of knowledge and skills acquired through education, in paid or unpaid work (e.g. caring for own children), through active participation in society, organisations or other voluntary work or through other channels. Thus, *realkompetanse* is a broader concept covering more than just non-formal learning.
3. The counties of Norway are divided into seven regions: Oslo and central Norway correspond to the counties of Akershus and Oslo. Eastern Norway corresponds to the counties of Hedmark, Oppland, Østfold, Buskerud, Vestfold and Telemark. Western Norway corresponds to the counties of Aust-Agder, Vest-Agder, Rogaland, Hordaland, Sogn and Fjordane and Møre and Romsdal. Mid-Norway corresponds to the counties of Sør-Trøndelag and Nord-Trøndelag. Northern Norway corresponds to the counties of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark.
4. The data do not contain any information on the applicants' social background.
5. Information on UCAS is available at [www.samordnaopptak.no/english/](http://www.samordnaopptak.no/english/).
6. In 2002 the percentage of persons who completed tertiary education was 22.3 for the whole country. In the Northern region the percentage was slightly lower; 19.3% (Statistics Norway, 2003).
7. In 2001 and 2002 the general unemployment rate was 3.6 and 3.9 (Statistics Norway 2003). In the Northern region the rate was slightly higher; 4.3-5.4%.
8. However, the monetary rate of return to education is higher in the private sector (Høgsnes 1999).

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**From:**  
**Higher Education Management and Policy**

**Access the journal at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/17269822>

**Please cite this article as:**

Opheim, Vibeke and Håvard Helland (2006), "Evaluation of the Competence Reform in Norway: Access to Higher Education Based on Non-formal Learning", *Higher Education Management and Policy*, Vol. 18/2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/hemp-v18-art14-en>

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