



# Flexible and decentralised education at vocational colleges, university colleges and universities





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# Preface

The green shift and digital transformation are among the biggest changes our society will face in the coming years. Together with other technological developments, these processes will result in the disappearance of many jobs, the emergence of new jobs and industries and changes to work tasks. Many of us, perhaps most of us, will need to supplement and further develop our skills at some point.

The Norwegian Government is seeking to open up the education system to a greater extent. Our goal is for education at vocational colleges, university colleges and universities to be available to all, regardless of where you reside in the country and what your current life situation is. The purpose of this strategy is to increase access to flexible and decentralised high-quality education programmes that are adapted to the various needs of the work force as a whole and of individuals.

This need for new skills has arisen for several reasons. Some people begin to work early on in life and later wish to have the education they missed out on when they were younger. Others do not have the opportunity nor the desire to move from their home place in order to obtain an education. Yet others need to be able to combine education with their working life and family life. Some people need to supplement their skills. This is just as true of the tourism entrepreneur and seafood producer in rural communities as it is of urban dwellers with small children who live near a campus.

In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that can accommodate all needs.

Education must be made available to all. This is precisely the reason for this strategy for flexible and decentralised education and why it covers programmes at vocational colleges, university colleges and universities. A more accessible education system benefits both individuals and society at large. In order for the private and public sectors to deliver good products and services to inhabitants, it is important to have access to the skills required. Just as important are educational programmes of high quality so that individuals and employers can devote time and resources to skills development.

At present, flexible education is widely available throughout the country. The Government has prioritised various measures to accelerate this development in years to come. This strategy elevates and connects the work that has already been initiated and sets the course for how to proceed in coming years. I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to this strategy. I look forward to collaborating further to offer people even more opportunities to pursue the studies of their choice in the ways that best suit them.



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# Introduction

Technological development, digital transformation, the green shift and other changes entail shifts in tasks and the way we work. Ongoing skills development is therefore important to the work force. The Commission on Employment (Norwegian Official Report 2021:2 *Skills, Activity and Income Protection*) notes that it is important for individuals to be able to engage in lifelong learning in order to develop their skills, quality of life and participation in society, better adapt within a fluid working life, and remain attractive members of the work force until retirement age. Our success at retaining jobs, creating new jobs and developing services in municipalities nationwide depends entirely on skills being up to date. This is the basic view in the Norwegian Government's white paper *Skills Reform – Lifelong Learning*. Higher education and vocational college education play an important role in the skills reform.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the Norwegian Government's primary guide for addressing the greatest national and global challenges of our time. This strategy will contribute to SDG number four: ensuring quality education that is inclusive and equitable and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The Norwegian Government's integration strategy, *Integration through Knowledge (2019–2022)*, provides guidance for a cross-sectoral effort to achieve faster and better integration. The main goal of the strategy is a higher rate of participation in the work force and in society. Knowledge, education and Norwegian language skills are the most important bases for entering the labour market and building a good life. Knowledge and a high level of skills

in the population are also decisive, both for change and future value creation and for the sustainability of the welfare society. The efforts to improve knowledge, skills and qualifications are thus the most important component of the integration strategy. The strategy will help immigrants and their descendants obtain the skills that both they and society need so that they can enter the labour market and become active, independent participants in society. Improved access to flexible and decentralised education and qualifications can also help close the skills gap that excludes many immigrants from the work force and society.

The country's need for skills varies among regions, industries and trades. It also varies among the people who need to acquire skills, depending on their life situation. Programmes at vocational colleges, university colleges and universities must, to a greater extent than is currently the case, accommodate a diversity of students and a multifaceted work force that is undergoing change.

The Norwegian Government is opening up upper secondary education, vocational college education and higher education. "Flexible education" is an umbrella term for education that is structured to be more accessible to people who are unable to study full-time on campus or at a place of study. The programmes may be session-based, module-based, part-time, web-based or decentralised. A single programme may have multiple structural components, such as topics and modules. With the growing use of digital instruction, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between full-time studies on campus/at a