



## **Model for transitions between Vocational Colleges and University Colleges and Universities**

### ***Introduction***

The fall of 2013 the Norwegian National Council for Vocational Colleges established a working group. Their task was to develop a model for flexible transitions for students between vocational colleges and university colleges and universities. The work was based on existing experiences. They invited several vocational colleges to inform about their cooperation with Norwegian and foreign university colleges and universities. Later they invited several Norwegian, Danish and English university colleges and universities to present their experiences in collaborating with Norwegian vocational colleges.

Feedback from both the vocational colleges and the university colleges and universities has proven to be very congruent. The methodology being used is in most areas equal. On this basis the working group developed a model for flexible transitions for students based on five to twenty years of practical experience.

The model is a good basis for developing a common set of routines believed to be suitable for Norwegian vocational colleges who cooperate with university colleges and universities. The model is based on cooperation at an institutional level, combined with specific criteria for admission on an individual basis.

In this paper we focus on transition from studies in vocational colleges to studies in university colleges and universities. However, we do see a trend of university educated students signing up for studies in vocational colleges in order to specialize in a particular subject area. As such, the model described may also be suitable for the transition of students with a university college or university background to more specialized studies in vocational colleges. The model may also be used for a group of vocational colleges with a common curriculum that aim to cooperate with one or more university colleges or universities.

The model is based on:

- Establishing partnerships based on mutual quality assurance
- Comparisons of programmes and courses based on learning outcomes at an institutional level
- Individual admission requirements
- Activities to ensure that the students make well qualified and informed choices
- Collaboration between vocational colleges and university colleges and universities
- Preparatory courses, introductory programmes and specially designed tracks for students coming from vocational colleges

Below is a detailed description:

### ***Establishing partnerships with mutual quality assurance***

Before a vocational college and university college or university establishes a closer cooperation, it is customary that they enter an agreement governing their mutual obligations. As part of this process there will normally take place some form of mutual quality assurance.

### ***Comparing programmes and courses based on learning outcomes at an institutional level***

First, similar programmes between the two institutions are identified. Then a process of mapping will start. Faculty at the university/university college will map each of the courses at the vocational institution, based on the learning outcome for their equivalent course. In cooperation with faculty at the vocational institution they identify which courses match, which partly match and which don't match. This assessment identifies which courses are covered and the number of ECTS the students at the vocational college are credited for prior learning. A two-year vocational college programme will normally amount to anything from 60 to 120 credits, equal to one to two years of studies.

### ***Individual admission requirements***

In addition, university colleges and universities may set individual requirements for admission. This can be a minimum grade, approval of a portfolio and/or an interview with the student – in addition to a required grade in the language that the courses will be conducted. The requirements should be consistent with the corresponding requirements for students seeking recognition of topics from other university colleges or universities.

### ***Making sure the students make well qualified and informed choices***

It is important that the students make well qualified and informed choices. This applies in particular for students seeking studies abroad, since this in most cases will involve additional costs of tuition, relocation and getting settled in a new country. Therefore it is normal that interested students are invited to visit the appropriate university college or university in order to get to know it better. They will then follow a special program of anything from a half day to several days. In addition, it is common that representatives from the collaborating institution visit the vocational colleges a couple times a year. There they will also set up special meetings to inform about their university and their study programmes, in addition to offering individual talks and guidance with interested students.

### ***Cooperation between vocational colleges and university colleges and universities***

Within a partnership of a vocational college and a university college or university, it is normal that representatives of the institutions visit each other at different intervals - often a couple of times per year. This provides the opportunity for both management and academic staff to further develop their cooperation, update each other on developments in curricula and any new programmes, as well as to exchange best practices. Some universities and vocational colleges also practice exchange of academic staff for a shorter or longer period of time. Both must be assumed to be beneficial for the professional and educational development of the cooperating institutions.

### ***Optionally introductory programs, preparatory courses and customized tracks for students***

Several of the cooperating institutions offer various forms of activities intended to facilitate the transition from studies in vocational colleges to university colleges or universities. Examples of this are:

- Preparatory courses to enhance necessary skills within certain topics - often offered during the summer prior to starting or through online courses.
- A customized introductory program for students in connection with the commencement of the first semester.
- Development of a customized study program specifically designed for students with a vocational college background.
- Some vocational college studies and university studies follow the same program in the first semester. When entering the second semester the students are given the choice of whether to continue on the vocational college program or the university program.