

Pathways between vocational programs and universities and colleges

On January 23rd 2014 the two English universities Southampton Solent University and Teesside University, the Danish VIA University College and the two Norwegian University Colleges at Gjøvik and Buskerud Vestfold met in Oslo. They all cooperate with Norwegian Vocational Colleges; Norges Kreative Fagskole, Noroff, Fagskolen i Oslo, Fagskolen Innlandet and Fagskolen Tinius Olsen. They presented the different ways this cooperation took place. They were all invited by the Norwegian National Council of Vocational Colleges. In addition representatives from The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and NOKUT, the Norwegian Quality Assurance Agency, took part in the meeting and the following discussions.

In general there were many similarities with the ways the institutions cooperated. The English and Danish differ somewhat from the Norwegian university colleges. They have a closer institutional approach by establishing partnership agreements. This way all students with a specific Vocational Diploma can be presented a common pathway and track to attain their bachelor degree at the partnering university or university college. A typical partnership agreement will consist of:

- The vocational college will have to undergo some kind of quality assurance to be approved.
- The institutions locate similar study programs and map them course by course according to learning outcomes, and decide upon how many credits the study of the vocational colleges is to receive.
- In order for the students to qualify there is normally a set requirement for a grade at a certain level, and sometimes approval of a portfolio. Student interviews may also be required.
- The students are also often invited to visit the university in order to get an introduction to the bachelor program and get to know the university before they finally decide upon applying.
- Staff from the university normally visits the vocational college twice a year in order to keep up the relation with their partner as well as being available for interested students.
- Some universities and vocational colleges also do an exchange of staff for a limited time.

The Norwegian university colleges engage in looser cooperation with the vocational colleges, and the students are treated on a more individual basis. The staff will in many instances cooperate in order to do a general mapping of related studies, and sometime not – depending of what institutions the students come from, and what program they have taken. Some institutions also exchange lectures and utilize common labs. The students apply on a more individual basis, and the credits granted can be different from student to student.

On the next pages you will find a more detail description of each of how each of these institutions go about their cooperation with Norwegian vocational colleges.

Southampton Solent University – SSU

About Southampton Solent University

Southampton Solent University is a modern and innovative university with 150 years of history. We have 20.000 students – 3700 being coming from abroad from 105 different countries. We offer a broad specter undergraduate and postgraduate programs ranging from design, media/journalism to tourism, shipping and technology.

What systems and methods you use to determine which parts of a Norges Kreative Fagskole (NKF) degree program that can fit into a bachelor's program, which then ends up giving students an exemption for x number of subjects / topics?

Southampton Solent University has developed a partnership program that partners will have to comply with before we can start mapping each others studies. In the case of Norges Kreative Fagskole (NKF) it took one and half years to complete the whole process which included a quality assurance partnership agreement of three years, an admissions agreement and an overseas partnership notification statement.

After that the mapping process began. First, similar studies at NKF and SSU were identified. Then started a process of mapping topic for topic between the two identified studies – and agreeing upon on which match, which partly match and which don't match. This process is conducted by the course leaders and lecturers responsible for the studies on both sides.

The level of teaching and learning outcomes on the NKF was compared to the BA structure and it was agreed by both schools that a student who gained an NKF award above a grade C could proceed to a level 6 BA study i.e one year at SSU, while those who gained an award below an NKF level C would be offered level 5 BA study i.e. two years at SSU.

How do the Norges Kreative Fagskole students apply in order to get into your bachelor program, and what procedures are required?

Before they apply, both NKF and SSU make sure that the students make well qualified choices. SSU visits the various schools of NKF and informs the students and staff of various studies. Then the students are invited over to SSU so they can get to know both the studies and SSU better; when and if this offer is taken up it helps the students to make an informed decision. Only then do they apply. As discussed above, SSU requires grades at a certain level in order to be taken in to the various programmes. They also need to show and have their portfolio evaluated. (The portfolio can be viewed by a tutor or shown online).

How are the Norges Kreative Fagskole students welcomed once they arrive? Do you have a special startup programs, need to take preparatory courses or something similar?

An induction programme has been set up by SSU to support new students coming to study. This is a two week programme which starts two weeks before the UK students arrives onsite. This gives the students a chance to become familiar within the Solent environment. During this induction the students are exposed to workshops across all practical areas from computer programmes, to screen printing, to studio camera lighting or any key area where health and safety issues need to be

considered. They also meet the full course team who run an induction project with the students to assess skills and get the students used to working with staff.

What are your experiences with the students from Norges Kreative Fagskole? How well are they qualified? How do they do they manage compared to your regular students? In what way do the students from Norges Kreative Fagskole contribute to the various learning activities at your university?

SSU finds the students from NKF to be hard working students they perform very well, many of them at the top level. Nearly all of them complete their degree (100 per cent pass rate on the Interior Design Decoration course). They are in general very well skilled. Some have to work harder with their English, but it is not a big obstacle.

Another area where NKF students have to work hard to catch up is within the area of BA standard research; this is supported at Solent by additional teaching time on top of the set timetable.

Students from NKF bring an excellent level of technical ability with them that helps Solent students to formulate their own practice within this area, this is very much welcomed and really does contribute to their skill base. This exchange of research skills and technical input helps to build on a solid foundation of exchange of knowledge.

Do you have any other activities and collaboration with Norges Kreative Fagskole?

Many of our teachers and lecturers meet on a regular basis, an excellent working staff partnership has been developed. Staff shares information regarding their courses i.e. any changes that might have occurred during the year and the different levels of attainment of each year group. During the interview stage staff at both schools work very closely together to ensure that students are making the right choices and have the right support. In terms of teaching and learning staff from both schools exchange their knowledge bases. At present two members of staff, one from each school, have started a PhD at the same time to guide each other through the process. Staffs from both schools have regular discussions on the profession in terms of industry and industry standards, allowing this information to filter through to both courses. It is indeed an exchange of knowledge that allows for a tight partnership to function so well. This constitutes a good learning environment for teachers from both institutions.

Teesside University

About Teesside University

Teesside University is located in Middlesbrough on the North East coast of England. In the past the area was a centre for heavy industry including Steel and Chemicals. Today, although the area still accommodates heavy industry, the focus has changed and Middlesbrough is now the 'Digital City' with a growth of digital companies, for example Games, Animation, Software etc.

Teesside is very much a university of applied sciences where the programs are developed together with, and in order to meet the demands of, local IT industry. The university also encourages and supports graduates to establish their own companies through business mentoring, funding support and incubation space.

What systems and methods do you use to determine which parts of a Noroff's degree program that can be fit into a bachelor's program, which then ends up giving students an exemption for x number of subjects / topics?

Teesside and Noroff have a partnership agreement that lasts for four years at a time. The program includes mapping of relevant studies, visits at least twice a year and exchange of information for any changes that occur in either study programs. Teesside has a mapping framework that is used against the final year of the Noroff course and the framework is used with interviews of Noroff students which also includes a portfolio review. The skills and experience of each student are viewed holistically to ensure a selection of modules that meets their previous studies and future aspirations.

The mapping: First, similar studies at Noroff and Teesside were identified. Then a process of mapping topic for topic between the two identified studies, and agreeing upon on which matched, which partly matched and which did not match. This process was conducted by the lecturers responsible for the studies on both sides. At the end of the process TU decide how many credits the Noroff course is given and if that allows entry to the target degree programmes. Teesside and Noroff have continued to adjust their curricula over a period of 7 years. Now a two year program at Noroff gives credits for two years at Teesside.

How do the Noroff students apply in order to get into your bachelor program, and what procedures are required?

A dedicated academic first meets any Norwegian students that visit the UK for the Animex festival. This festival is often the first point of contact and Noroff promote the festival to their students. This is a valuable opportunity for students to make sure they are well informed in all aspects of studying at Teesside before they decide to apply.

The academic then travels to Norway to raise awareness of the Teesside programmes. He returns to interview any students who would like to come to Teesside. When the student has decided to enroll, they contact Teesside admin through the university web site and they apply on line. A decision is made based on the online application and the interview documents returned by the academic and the application is processed.

In comparison to UK students, the Norwegian applications arrive late in the cycle and so, to avoid any problems with accommodation, a separate and priority process exists and a dedicated administrator processes the applications and books accommodation within a day to ensure a smooth arrival. Where possible, and if requested, the Norwegian students are placed together to assist with the transition in to the University.

How are the Noroff students welcomed once they arrive? Do you have a special startup programs, need to take preparatory courses or something similar?

We run a direct entrant induction for all our students, which the Noroff students attend, but there is also a special social dinner to welcome the Norwegian students where Post Graduate Norwegian students come and join in and add to the support offered.

What are your experiences with the students from Noroff? How well are they qualified? How do they do they manage compared to your regular students? In what way do the students from Noroff contribute to the various learning activities at your university?

The Norwegian students are well qualified, well-motivated, want to learn and they contribute not just to the learning activities but to the wider life in the school. They are involved in Animex and Expotees and contribute well on a number of levels to the learning activities. A large number of Norwegian students perform to a calibre that gains them 2:1 or first class degrees and this allows them to consider post graduate level study, which many decide to follow.

Do you have any other activities and collaboration with Noroff?

Animex is an international festival of Animation, Film and Games, and Noroff have been important partners in its growth.

Currently Teesside are collaborating with Noroff in the development of Teesside course materials in Science and Engineering for Noroff's WebStudent platform. It is possible that this might be extended to computing in the future.

VIA University College

About VIA University College

VIA University College in Denmark have more than 100 international co-operative partners - nine of them being colleges in Norway. Among others VIA has established a partner agreement with Fagskolen i Oslo which includes an agreement of credit transfer program.

What systems and methods you use to determine which parts of Fagskolen i Oslo's degree program that can be fit into a bachelor's program, which then ends up giving students an exemption for x number of subjects / topics?

VIA University College and Fagskolen i Oslo have signed a partnership agreement.

The mapping: Many years ago we decided on the two year programs "Fagteknikker bygg og anlegg" at Fagskolen i Oslo as the relevant study program to map.

Then started a process of mapping topic for topic between the two identified studies – and agreeing upon on which match, which partly match and which don't match. This process is conducted by the lectures responsible for the studies on both sides. In the end they decide how many credits the Fagskolen i Oslo study is given. The mapping concluded that students from Fagskolen in Oslo after a two year program were qualified to start in the 4th semester out of a total of the 7 semesters that is needed to attain a Bachelor's degree (the Constructing Architect education). Thereby the students are given 90 ECTS credits for their two year program at Fagskolen i Oslo.

How do the Fagskolen i Oslo students apply in order to get into your bachelor program, and what procedures are required?

In Denmark there is a two year education quite similar to the Norwegian Fagteknikker bygg education. It is named the Byggetekniker education. As Fagteknikker and as Byggetekniker you are allowed to start in the 4th semester at the Constructing Architect Education. The Fagteknikker bygg education is well known and no special procedures are required.

How are the Fagskolen i Oslo students welcomed once they arrive? Do you have a special startup programs, need to take preparatory courses or something similar?

VIA has a special social program for international students to make sure they integrate with the rest of the students on campus. European research documents that VIA is on the top level in student satisfaction with a score of 8,6 out of 10.

What are your experiences with the students from Fagskolen i Oslo? How well are they qualified? How do they do they manage compared to your regular students? In what way do the students from Fagskolen i Oslo contribute to the various learning activities at your university?

VIA has a separate international program where the teaching is in English. Most of the Norwegian students follow this program. A few follow the Danish line. VIA has a problem-based learning (PBL) approach where they mix students with different background. Working in groups, students identify what they already know, what they need to know, and how and where to access new information that may lead to resolution of the problem. They students inspire and help each other in this process. Special courses are given to help them solve the various projects. Thereby the training is a lot more flexible and it makes it easier to integrate the students at the university college level.

The Norwegian students contribute positively by using their practical experience and approach, as opposed to many of the other international students that mainly have a theoretical background. Nearly all Norwegian students complete their bachelor's degree.

Do you have any other activities and collaboration with Fagskolen i Oslo?

Until now there haven't been any other activities or collaborations in between the two institutions.

Buskerud Vestfold University College (HBV)

About Buskerud Vestfold University College

HVB has four campuses and four faculties: Humanities and Education, Health Sciences, Business and Social Sciences and Technology & Maritime Sciences.

What systems and methods you use to determine which parts of a Tinius Olsen Fagskole's degree program that can be fit into a bachelor's program, which then ends up giving students an exemption for x number of subjects / topics?

The Norwegian Framework for Engineering education says that students from adequate technical vocational colleges are granted admission if:

- The exam is from old system (before 1999)
- New system and extended courses in science

In the mixed (Kongsberg) model we can offer fully integrated program between the vocational college and the University College in Kongsberg. There the students from the Vocational College and the University College follow the same program for the first semester. From the second semester the students must decide if they are to follow the 3 year bachelor program at the University College or the 2 year program at the vocational college. Before March 1st it is possible to be transferred from the University College bachelor program to the Vocational College, but not the other way around.

The motivation is to get better recruitment of students, increased flexibility for the students, more students to pass their exams and make better use of each other lab facilities.

We also take in students from other technical vocational colleges. They are mapped on an individual basis. They receive up to 60 credits depending on courses they have taken previously. We adjust the sequence of the courses to match the background of the students. Every year about 10-12 of these students graduate.

How do the Tinius Olsen Fagskole students apply in order to get into your bachelor program, and what procedures are required?

Approvals are done on an individually basis and based on control of learning outcomes from the students curriculum from the two year Vocational College. The Technical Vocational College learning outcomes are compared to the learning outcomes for the bachelor study. If accepted the students can get up to 60 STC credit for items from the Technical Vocational College when entering the bachelor study. They will need extra courses in math. But for marine studies the students from the Vocational Marin College gets full credit with 120 credits for a two year program, partly because they require less math.

How are the Tinius Olsen Fagskole students welcomed once they arrive? Do you have a special startup programs, need to take preparatory courses or something similar?

When the students reach their second semester they continue having two technical modules at the Technical Vocational College and start modules in mathematics and physics/chemistry that are similar to what our other students coming from secondary school have. The learning outcomes are the same for all students having "Mathematics 1" and "Physics and Chemistry". However, the students coming from vocational college start at a lower level and have a steeper progress through the modules.

What are your experiences with the students from Tinius Olsen Fagskole? How well are they qualified? How do they do they manage compared to your regular students? In what way do the students from Tinius Olsen Fagskole contribute to the various learning activities at your university?

Our experience is that we get more motivated students. But it also requires hard working students. The vocational students are practical at first and later more scientific in their approach in the end of the study. A general impression is that the students with vocational background do better than the students that come from secondary school because they are more motivated. Close collaboration between the two schools are essential both on an administrative as well as a scientific level is essential.

Gjøvik University College

About Gjøvik University College

Gjøvik University College (GUC) has approximately 3000 students and 330 employees. GUC is a Norwegian university college with an international perspective. Currently, there are 30 countries represented among our staff.

What systems and methods you use to determine which parts of a Fagskolen Innlandet's degree program that can be fit into a bachelor's program, which then ends up giving students an exemption for x number of subjects / topics?

The mapping is done on an individual basis for each student and linked up to the program the student is applying for. Depending on the program they are applying for 30, 40 or 60 ECTS can be approved.

How do the Fagskolen Innlandet students apply in order to get into your bachelor program, and what procedures are required?

In general Gjøvik University Colleges gets more students for their engineering studies with a vocational background than the traditional background from the theoretical secondary school. This group of students with a vocational background seems to be increasing.

How are the Fagskolen Innlandet students welcomed once they arrive? Do you have a special startup programs, need to take preparatory courses or something similar?

The students coming from vocational colleges need to take a 6 week math course and pass an exam in this course the summer before they start up. Then they have a specially designed program with extra courses in physics the first semester, and additional physics in the second semester. From the third semester until the sixth and last semester they follow the same program as students that come from the theoretical secondary school. Students from Fagskolen Innlandet who have finished a special designed course (voluntary) at their institution do not need to take the summer course in math and physics in the first semester.

What are your experiences with the students from Fagskolen Innlandet? How well are they qualified? How do they do they manage compared to your regular students? In what way do the students from Fagskolen Innlandet contribute to the various learning activities at your university?

Our experience is that the students with a vocational background are engaged and have a more practical approach. They ask more "How" than "Why". They have to work harder to attain the academic skills and scientific approach. But when it comes to exams the students with a vocational background do just as well as students with an academic background.

Do you have any other activities and collaboration with Fagskolen Innlandet?

We exchange teachers and give lectures to each other students. In addition we also collaborate in the use of laboratory equipment.