

**REFINE NORWAY – SHORT REPORT October 2004**

*In general the Norwegian project is moving along in the scheduled direction, although somewhat behind the scheduled time. We are therefore not able to present any results with regard to candidates yet. Below we present a report of what has been done and the present status of the project.*

Refine Norway has taken as its objective to examine the situation with regard to exemptions from degree programs or diplomas based on non-formal or informal background, what in Norway is called "Realkompetanse". See the project description.

The Universities' and Colleges' Act states the right of individuals for admission and exemptions based on *Realkompetanse*. A recent study (NIFU skriftserie 6/2004) shows that the institutions on the whole accepts Realkompetanse as a criterion of admission, but that there are many unsolved problems, especially connected to concretization of the criteria for ranking purposes.

With regard to exemptions, the above study shows that this on the whole is non-existent, although with a few minor exceptions in very specialized institutions, such as The Norwegian State Academy of Music.

One could say that the project in Norway started with a seminar with representatives of the Ministry, VOX (Norwegian Institute for Adult Education, NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) and others, held on April 29<sup>th</sup>. At the seminar was presented and discussed the European trends and the ambitions of the Refine project. As the NIFU report was soon to document, very little had been done with regard to exemptions, although the Ministry did not have any clear picture of the situation. It was also made very clear that these matters were internal affairs, within the autonomy of the institutions, and that the Ministry had no plans to intervene or give directions with regard to this.

In June a letter was sent to all Higher Education Institutions in Norway, (4 universities, 6 University Colleges, 28 State/Regional Colleges and one private institution, The Norwegian School of Management (BI)), informing about the project and inviting them to take part.

The response to the invitation was quite positive (partly to our surprise, it might be added). 13 institutions expressed their interest in the project, while a few declined on the grounds of poor capacity etc. All in all the response was thus better than what was expected.

Even though many institutions were willing to go along, to take on such a large number of institutions (and candidates) would exceed the capacity of the project. It was therefore decided to limit the number of candidates to about 10 and the number of institutions to about 5. But as we could not choose from a large number of potential candidates nor pick any institution of our choice, we could not establish the "perfect" match of institutions, study programs and candidates.

The County Council of Nordland has been fairly active with regard to *Realkompetanse*, although primarily within the Secondary School System, and was

eager to take part in the project. On August 30<sup>th</sup> there was a meeting in Bodø with representatives of the County Council, Refine, the 3 state colleges of that county and trade union and employers organizations.

The meeting discussed the matter of exemptions both on a general level as well as practical, and some potential candidates were presented briefly and a preliminary distribution of candidates between the institutions was made.

On September 10<sup>th</sup> there was a meeting with the candidates in Nordland., to inform them in more detail about the project and to assist them in filling out the documents.

Since these meetings there have been some changes in the list of candidates; some have dropped out for outside reasons while some have been added.

On October 5<sup>th</sup> the project group had a meeting with BI. BI is the largest private institution in Norway in higher education, and works in the fields of management, economics, marketing etc. BI has close connections with the business and industry and has been concerned with the issues of our project for some time. However, being a private institution it has been very reluctant to be at the forefront in matters such as this, because it feels it is being scrutinized very closely.

The University of Bergen is a broadly based “standard” university. It has of late received a couple of applications for exemptions, but has so far not known how to handle these. The Refine project will therefore play an important part in putting this question on the agenda.

We have made it very clear both to the institutions and the candidates that the process which the project has initiated, although with real candidates and real institutions, are not actual admission/exemption processes.

At the moment the project thus cooperates with the following institutions:

The State College of Nesna  
The State College of Narvik  
The State College of Bodø  
The Norwegian School of Management (BI)  
The University of Bergen  
(The Norwegian State Academy of Music)

The candidates apply for exemptions within the following areas:

Teacher training	3 candidates
Nursing	1 candidate
History	1 candidate
English	1 candidate
Bachelor of arts	1 candidate
Master in Health Care	1 candidate
Bachelor of Management	1 candidate
Master of Management	1 candidate
(Music studies	1 candidate)

As the process has been somewhat slower than anticipated the objective is now to have the process of candidate evaluations finished by the end of November, and the report more or less finished by the end of this year.

Follow up activities:

As part of the project we will arrange a dissemination seminar in March 2005. The main target group will be all institutions in higher education, but also The Ministry, other governmental bodies and other organizations with an interest in these matters.

We will also propose to the Ministry a follow up project on a larger scale. This project would build on the results of the Refine project, but would, both with regard to time and scale exceed the boundaries of Refine. Given the interest that we have noted, including the Ministry's willingness to co-finance the activities we are confident that this will become a reality.

Yours sincerely

Frank Moe