

Short country report - Norway 2012-2013

The Ministry of Education had until mid 2012 two ministers, but since then just one minister - Kristin Halvorsen from The Socialistic Left Wing Party (SV) covers the whole portfolio for the Ministry. A new Secretary of state, though, has got a special responsibility for higher education, Ms Ragnhild Setsaas, who is well known for us as a researcher at the former Norsk Voksenpedagogisk Institutt in Trondheim. Just before Christmas she gave a speech about the Governments policy on lifelong learning, where she gave emphasize to adult education and learning.

Much of the policy work at VOFO the last year was preparing for a possible change of government after the parliamentary election autumn 2013. According to the "gallups", the two right wing parties (Høyre and Fremskrittspartiet) will be the winners – and, as we know from ABBA – "The winner takes it all".

Last year VOFO initiated a "Holistic program for adult education" and presented it for the Ministry and for several of the political parties. The left wing's SV and the right wing's Fremskrittspartiet were the two parties which "caught the idea". We had meetings with Fremskrittspartiet, and they launched a proposal in the Parliament about such a plan. So far, they (we) did not succeed, but this process gave us access and some progress in our struggle to get support from FrP.

According to decisions at our annual meeting and at our board, VOFO should give more power to policy and communication work. Therefore, in spring, we hired a new communication officer, Tommy Bull Henstein, working together with Hilde Grønhovd. Since he started, VOFO have had a lot more press cover than in many years. To strengthen the communication team has so far been a success.

But from 2013 we will just have one and a half communication officer, as Hilde and VOFO have got the new contract for the NVL-work in Norway (as we had with Ellen the first NVL-period).

The three year's "waiting period" for the new Adult Education Act to be complete in action ended at the end of 2012, and from 2013 we will see some changes in the study association structure. The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning has from now on 15 study associations as members, reduced from 21 just a few years ago.

The new law has not yet brought more public funding to the field, even though we both in 2010, 2011 and 2012 have seen an increase in the numbers of participants and courses. It is still our most important struggle towards the

political system to raise the funding, even though some people are telling us that we are doing a good job being able to maintain the funding on today's level – 200 million Norwegian kroner.

The rules following the new law how to provide ALE are more flexible than the old ones. Before, no funding could be given to courses less than 12 hours and 5 participants. Now the rule is 8 hours, and no limit for participants. This is one of the reasons for increased participation.

The program for “learning basic skills at work” (BKA program) which was launched by this government 4-5 years ago became permanent from 2011, and this year more than 100 million kroner will be spent on it. The program – which is conducted by Vox – is still very popular. Many of the projects financed by the program are running in cooperation between a company and a study association, especially Folkeuniversitetet and the Workers Education Association (WEA – AOF Norge).

Last year was quite challenging for NAAL (VOFO). We have the last year been working to develop a web-based administration program for the study associations. As most ICT-projects, the expenses have become higher than the budget and much more time than planned is spent. Now the program – KursAdmin – is almost ready, and most of the association will be using it from this year. VOFO has accordingly to pay big bills to the program makers. We will get our money back from the users, but over a period of 7 years. This means that VOFO will have some economical challenges to meet this and the next years.

In the near future we will see some changes in our staff. Some of us will reach retirement age during this and the next years. Other changes might also occur during this year, and not far away we will be facing a generation shift in our administration.

Our General Assembly decided on a new constitution last year which more clearly points out our main tasks as an umbrella for the study associations, doing policy and lobby work, leadership training, communication and ICT-work. We will not do so much projects as we used to, and the Adult Learners' Week will probably from now on be done every second year.

We have still employed people in our counties. Some regions are strong, doing good work, like counties in the North, some other, e.g. in the South, are struggling.

Life in non-formal adult education and learning is as it used to be: A struggle for decent conditions – and a lot of fun.

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