

NOKUT'S STRATEGY  
FOR 2023-2030

Ensure  
quality,  
build  
trust



NOKUT 



# Preface

**Since its establishment in 2003, NOKUT has helped ensure quality and build trust in Norwegian higher education. As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we are setting out our plan for how we will continue to ensure and enhance quality in Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education in the years to come.**

In the winter of 2021, the Ministry of Education and Research announced structural changes in the knowledge sector. In the process that followed, seven underlying bodies were merged into three, two of which were new: Sikt (Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research) and the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. NOKUT remained but our portfolio of responsibilities was revised. As of 1 January 2023, NOKUT's responsibilities related to recognition of foreign education was transferred to the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. NOKUT's responsibilities therefore became focused primarily on Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education. The development of a new strategy was a natural consequence of this change.

The strategy consists of four objectives, and these will inform our work for the duration of the strategy period. Overall, the objectives are intended to make sure that NOKUT ensures quality, thereby contributing to the public's trust that the country's vocational colleges, university colleges and universities provide their students with a high-quality education. The title of the strategy reflects this: *NOKUT 2030: Ensure quality, build trust.*

NOKUT's external quality assurance activities shall be impactful and encourage development. A consistent feature of the strategy is that the activities should be tailored to ensure that the educational institutions find them useful for their own quality work. The underlying principle is that accountability and enhancement are seamlessly linked. This means that NOKUT will remain a provider of knowledge on the level of quality in Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education, as well as a driving force for quality in education.

This strategy defines NOKUT's ambition to be a leading quality assurance agency in an international context. Our work is based on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Through participation in associations for quality assurance organisations, NOKUT closely monitors the development of quality assurance internationally, and will contribute to this development.

NOKUT shall be a learning, listening and development-oriented organization. This means that our measures must be adjusted to meet society's needs, and our services must adapt and develop in dialogue with our key stakeholders. In addition, as a workplace NOKUT shall be inclusive towards staff and open to new methods and processes, in order to perform its tasks effectively and to a high level of quality. The strategy is endorsed by NOKUT's management and board. In developing this strategy, we have received valuable insights from educational institutions, student organizations, employer organizations, trade unions and other stakeholders. We greatly appreciate these insights. Some have been included in the strategy, while others will be applied in the development of our organization and services.

Oslo, January 2023

Lise Iversen Kulbrandstad | Board Chair



Kristin Vinje | Chief Executive



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# NOKUT's social mandate

## Purpose

NOKUT – the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education – is a government administrative body under the Ministry of Education and Research. NOKUT has its own board and is a national administrative body which performs its tasks with professional autonomy, as defined in the Act Relating to Universities and University Colleges. In addition, we perform administrative tasks delegated by the Ministry of Education and Research.

The purpose of NOKUT's activities is to supervise quality in higher education and tertiary vocational education, as well as to promote quality enhancement, to ensure a high international level in the institutions' educational programmes. NOKUT shall contribute to building society's trust in the quality of higher education and tertiary vocational education in Norway. In its work, NOKUT shall seek to assist the institutions in their quality work.

NOKUT's ambition is to ensure and contribute to the enhancement of quality in Norwegian education by being a future-oriented and internationally leading quality assurance body for higher education and tertiary vocational education.

### **NOKUT's responsibilities as an independent administrative body are**

- accreditation and supervision of educational programmes, fields, and institutions
- supervision of the institutions' systematic quality work
- evaluation of quality in education
- assisting the institutions in their quality work and promoting quality enhancement

### **NOKUT's responsibilities as delegated by the Ministry of Education and Research include**

- regulatory administration
- national surveys and exams
- financial supervision of private institutions and student unions, as well as review activities at state institutions and enterprises

## International principles

NOKUT's work is situated in the European Higher Education Area. This means that our own quality assurance work is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Central to these standards is the close link between accountability and enhancement. This informs all of NOKUT's work:

*At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in the higher education institution's performance.<sup>1</sup>*

NOKUT also wishes to apply ESG principles in its work related to external quality assurance of tertiary vocational education, even though the ESG does not formally cover this branch of the educational system.

NOKUT is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), an official register of quality assurance bodies that meet the requirements of the ESG.

<sup>1</sup>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), s. 5





## Development

NOKUT was established in 2003 as a result of the Bologna process and the quality reform of higher education in Norway. As an independent supervisory and accreditation body, NOKUT was established to ensure the autonomy of educational institutions. In 2004, we also became responsible for external quality assurance of tertiary vocational education.

2010 saw a shift in NOKUT's work. In addition to our review activities, greater emphasis was placed on promoting quality enhancement through supervisory activities, as well as surveys, analyses and evaluations. In doing so, we wanted to contribute to putting educational quality and quality enhancement on the agenda. This change was a result of recommendations from an external evaluation of NOKUT in 2008, as well as the development of external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

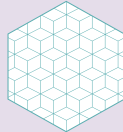
Since its establishment, NOKUT's responsibilities have included the recognition of and the provision of information about foreign education and qualifications.

Along the way, the Ministry of Education and Research has also assigned us new responsibilities, including the responsibility for national surveys and regulatory management.

Recent years have seen a restructuring process, where several bodies responsible for different parts of administration in higher education and service providers to the sector have been merged into larger units. This process led to the establishment of the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (Hk-dir) and Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. As a result of this process, NOKUT's mandate and portfolio of responsibilities now has a more targeted focus on external quality assurance and quality enhancement. As of 2023, responsibility for recognition of foreign education and certain regulatory management responsibilities have been transferred to the Directorate of Higher Education and Skills.

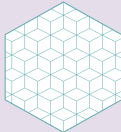
# Roles

NOKUT's social mandate can be divided into three roles:



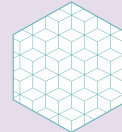
## AUTHORITY

NOKUT manages regulations and exercises public authority through its accreditation and supervisory activities.



## KNOWLEDGE

NOKUT produces, compiles, analyses and disseminates knowledge of quality in Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education.



## CHAMPION FOR QUALITY

NOKUT is a champion for quality in education. In this role, NOKUT aims to leverage the knowledge it generates to put quality issues, good practices and other important issues on the agenda. We also provide knowledge-based advice on developing regulations and other policy instruments.



## Values

**NOKUT's decisions have the potential to greatly impact institutions and society in general. As a result, our work must meet exacting requirements for quality, efficacy, and dialogue.**

**Our activities shall be based on three core values:**

### **Accountability**

NOKUT's activities are based on a robust foundation of knowledge and aim to meet high administrative standards. NOKUT's independence means that decisions made as part of our supervisory and accreditation activities are not subject to political review. This independent role requires high professional integrity.

### **Accommodating**

NOKUT's measures shall be useful for society. NOKUT emphasizes dialogue and collaboration with students, educational institutions, stakeholders in society or the labour market and other authorities. Cases are processed as quickly as possible and with high quality. NOKUT's employees are inclusive and generous

towards their colleagues. Employees share knowledge, learn from each other and work together towards shared goals.

### **Innovative**

NOKUT explores development opportunities and new ways to contribute to enhanced quality in education and to better quality work at the educational institutions. At the same time, NOKUT provides clear recommendations for regulatory amendments and changes to systems and other structural conditions when this is indicated by available knowledge. NOKUT evaluates the efficacy of its own activities, and we have a low threshold for changing priorities and adopting new technology, new tools, and new approaches.

# NOKUT's objectives

NOKUT has four overall objectives for this strategic period. The first three describe what NOKUT wants to contribute – to educational institutions as well as to society in general. The fourth describes the kind of organization NOKUT strives to be to achieve the first three goals.

NOKUT's objectives are in line with the sector objectives for higher education and tertiary vocational education, as set out by the Ministry of Education and Research. They are also in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



**Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education are of a high quality**



**NOKUT's external quality assurance activities are impactful and encourage development**



**Society is well informed about the quality of Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education**



**NOKUT is development-oriented, works knowledge-based, and collaborates well with others**

## OBJECTIVE

# 1

## Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education are of high quality

The institutions themselves are responsible for managing their academic authorizations and for ensuring and enhancing the quality of the education they offer. The Norwegian system for higher education and tertiary vocational education shows great trust in educational institutions and grants them broad academic authorizations. In return, the institutions must demonstrate that they are worthy of this trust.

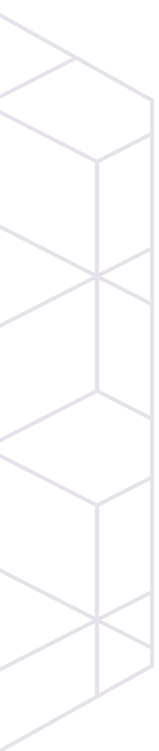
In NOKUT's external quality assurance activities we want to support the educational institutions in their quality work, stimulating a quality culture of high international standards in all study programmes.

Together, the institutions and NOKUT strive to ensure that the institutions, scientific communities, students, authorities, and the public are well informed of, and can trust in, the quality of Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education. This requires that educational programmes have adequate resources, and that knowledge and activities for quality assurance are used in a way that is transparent, effective, and useful for society.

**High educational quality is a requirement for society's ability to assess knowledge and information, to adopt and develop new knowledge and to ensure future value creation. As such, educational quality is closely linked to society's democratic preparedness, the welfare society's ability to develop sustainably and society's ability to handle future social challenges.**

Quality in education is also closely linked to participation in international collaborations. Educational programmes that maintain an internationally high level of quality help ensure that Norwegian educational institutions and enterprises have access and are attractive contributors to international collaboration on the development of education, research, and innovation. High quality educational programmes provide individuals with opportunities for personal development and self-realization, as well as for acquiring the skills required for active participation in society and for employment.

NOKUT's work is pivoting towards advising institutions and supervising quality work with a view to ensuring that they are fulfilling their obligations. Our external quality assurance work shall, through frameworks for educational quality and knowledge about quality and quality work, contribute to the institutions and society being able to cope with development and change.



The institutional landscape in Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education is heterogeneous. Several institutions have broad self-accrediting rights, but many are also small and have limited academic authorizations. The social mandates, roles and strategies of higher education and tertiary vocational education, and the different institutions and types of education vary considerably. NOKUT's activities shall be adapted to the unique nature of the institutions and types of education.

NOKUT will work to ensure that the periodic reviews of the institutions' systematic quality work are adapted to the nature and role of the institutions, both in higher education and in tertiary vocational education. Quality work at the institutional level shall help to ensure and enhance quality. In higher education, it shall enhance quality to a high national and international level. NOKUT's work shall encourage institutions to define internal quality requirements that exceed the regulatory minimum. At the same time, we will work to help more institutions obtain higher levels of authorization, for example through subject area accreditation for tertiary vocational institutions and explore further opportunities for institutional accreditation.

NOKUT will also conduct supervisory reviews of programmes and institutions based on the risk of poor quality.

NOKUT is responsible for several national student and teacher surveys. In dialogue with educational institutions and other relevant actors, we will strive to further develop these surveys to ensure that they provide useful information on quality and quality enhancement.

It is important that higher education and tertiary vocational education are accessible to people from all parts of the country, from different backgrounds and with different needs for competence enhancement. Measures that can contribute to improving accessibility include the development of digital, decentralized, and flexible educational pathways, as well as shorter and more specialized programmes of study that meet specific needs for competence enhancement. NOKUT shall strive to provide a clear framework and guidance for the quality assurance and enhancement of such educational programmes.

Digitalization also offers new opportunities for the development of teaching methods to promote quality in education. NOKUT shall strive to ensure that our measures are adapted for this development.

NOKUT evaluates quality in education as part of the national framework for evaluation of Norwegian research and higher education. We shall coordinate our evaluations with the Research Council of Norway and execute them in dialogue with the educational institutions.

In higher education, several institutions are part of European university alliances. NOKUT will monitor and contribute to international development in order to perform external quality assurance of the education provided in such alliances.

## OBJECTIVE

# 2

### NOKUT's external quality assurance activities are accurate and encourage development

**NOKUT has various activities at its disposal. Some are related to our role as a public authority, in the form of regulatory management, supervision and accreditation. These are defined in laws and regulations as tasks for NOKUT and requirements for institutions and educational programmes.**

Other activities are related to NOKUT's knowledge role and include evaluation, various surveys, analyses, and knowledge summaries to provide information about educational quality.

Even in its role as champion, NOKUT can use a range of approaches, such as the dissemination of knowledge, experience sharing, guidance and dialogue.

The full spectrum of activities aims to generate a comprehensive knowledge base. Together, they contribute to quality assurance and promote quality enhancement. NOKUT's measures for external quality assurance shall be based on the best available knowledge. We will actively disseminate knowledge about what contributes to quality and quality enhancement. Moreover, both internal and external quality assurance of educational programmes may provide key insights into what constitutes quality in education. It is therefore important that the knowledge we accumulate through our public authority role is included in the overall knowledge base.

In order for NOKUT's quality assurance activities to be impactful, educational institutions and society in general must perceive them as being fit for purpose and contributing to quality enhancement. Our processes shall be transparent and be conducted without unnecessary use of resources. To achieve this, NOKUT will, firstly, systematically ensure that our activities are based on good and updated knowledge. Adjustments and changes shall be based on research, national and international experiences, and insights from educational institutions, other authorities, and stakeholders. Secondly, NOKUT shall use its knowledge to prioritize which activities are best suited when there are indications of poor quality, and for stimulating quality enhancement. Thirdly, NOKUT shall strive to ensure more educational institutions are able to adequately fulfil any wider self-accrediting rights they may be granted.

NOKUT shall further develop its periodic reviews of the institutions' systematic quality work to ensure that they are adapted to each institution's specific nature and academic authorizations. In this work, we shall also strive to adapt our methods in accordance with international developments in external quality assurance.

NOKUT manages a wide range of regulations. Our regulatory development work shall be knowledge-based, systematic and long-term, and it shall contribute to quality enhancement at the institutions. The regulations shall provide a good framework for quality assurance and enhancement, and they shall be predictable and easy to understand and comply with.

NOKUT will only regulate what is necessary to ensure a high-quality framework for higher education and tertiary vocational education. At the same time, the regulations must also allow for the effective application of other measures to stimulate further development.

OBJECTIVE

3

## Society is well informed of the quality of Norwegian higher education and tertiary vocational education

**By providing relevant and updated knowledge and information about quality, NOKUT works to ensure that society has trust in the quality of higher education and tertiary vocational education.**

Knowledge gained from NOKUT's supervision, accreditation, evaluations, surveys, analyses, and other available data contribute to the knowledge base for quality work at the institutions, for the public discourse and for educational policy. This knowledge shall be readily available and shall be communicated in such a way that it is useful for the institutions, other authorities, and society in general.

Through collaboration with educational institutions and other stakeholders, NOKUT shall identify themes and target groups that should be prioritized in our efforts to put quality and quality enhancement on the agenda. By developing and creating arenas for the dissemination of information and knowledge, we strengthen our contact with – and guidance to – all types of institutions, and we promote the exchange of information between institutions.

NOKUT shall strive to summarize and systematize available knowledge, and we shall use this to raise awareness of good practices, quality challenges and particularly relevant issues. We shall also work with other actors to establish and exchange knowledge about educational quality. This creates opportunities and challenges in academic, technical, and legal contexts. NOKUT shall collaborate with educational institutions and actors in knowledge management to develop and strengthen good management and exchange of data. We will work to ensure that more data is made available, while at the same time prioritizing privacy and data protection.

NOKUT will work to raise awareness of tertiary vocational education in society in general, and to promote a quality perspective in tertiary vocational education. This will primarily entail using knowledge sharing, guidance and experience sharing to highlight vocational colleges' responsibility for ensuring and enhancing their own educational programmes. However, we will also use NOKUT's various activities to underpin this.

OBJECTIVE

4

## NOKUT is development-oriented, works knowledge-based and collaborates well with others

**NOKUT's ambition is to ensure and contribute to the enhancement of quality in Norwegian education by being a learning, future-oriented and internationally leading quality assurance body for higher education and tertiary vocational education.**

We actively participate in ENQA, exchange experiences with other European and international quality assurance bodies and contribute to the development of quality assurance in Europe. This requires the ability to adapt to change, to apply and share new knowledge, and to enhance and develop methods and processes to handle these tasks effectively and to a high quality.

This further requires our employees and leaders to have high competence of the right kind. Competence encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes. NOKUT shall use and enhance the employee's competence in a way that increases motivation and generates good results.

Our organizational culture shall be characterized by generosity and trust. This requires good interaction and communication. Internally, NOKUT's employees generate good results, contentment, and a good working environment

by appreciating and utilizing each other's competencies and by encouraging collaboration, knowledge sharing and interdisciplinary problem-solving across departments and sections. Good interaction and communication with the sector, other authorities, and stakeholders, both nationally and internationally, contribute to legitimacy and mutual trust.

Within the framework of its mandate, NOKUT shall prioritize the tasks that best support objectives 1 through 3 for the greatest possible impact. Our work shall be characterized by us seeking out and adopting new methods to enhance quality and efficacy in our measures and processes. This includes further development of the organization's digital competence and our digital services and processes.

NOKUT shall be more conscious of sustainability, based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. In addition to the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, this also means looking for ways to reduce our carbon footprint, prioritize sustainability in acquisitions and further develop measures for inclusion and individual adaptation in the workplace.



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