

Youth policy in Norway



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Youth policy in Norway

**Report by the international team of experts
appointed by the Council of Europe**

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Preface and acknowledgements

The international youth policy review of Norway is the tenth such review in an open-ended list of countries which volunteer for this experience with the Council of Europe. The method was established by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe in 1997. It consists in principle of inviting a member country to produce a national youth report in the first place and then inviting a team of international experts to take a look both at this report and at a number of selected situations in the youth field within the country. Through this “foreigner’s eye” we believe we create a critical distance from, and positive contribution to the National Report and situation, to:

- contribute to improved good governance in the field of youth (in the case of Norway: children and youth);
- create a body of knowledge which will slowly grow into an evidence based system of youth policy and co-operation in the youth field at European level;
- promote examples of good practice;
- contribute to the development of standards on good youth policy at national, European and international level.

The first reports of this kind (on Finland, the Netherlands, Spain, Romania, Sweden, Estonia and Luxembourg) have still stood a little bit in isolation from each other. The publication of a study of all these reports (“Supporting young people in Europe – principles, policy and practice – The Council of Europe’s international reviews of national youth policy 1997-2001 – a synthesis report”, Howard Williamson, Council of Europe, 2002) has shown how much can be learnt from these reports both nationally and in view of creating a certain comparability of youth issues in Europe. Meanwhile the Council of Europe has worked on “youth policy indicators” and moved to an opportunity focused approach on youth policy and – whether a country is a member of the EU or not – there can be no doubt that the publication of the white paper on “Youth of the European Commission” has given a strong impetus to the debate of youth policy also in the Council of Europe.

In this situation, the Council of Europe and its Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ) felt particularly happy that Norway offered to be a candidate for an international review. There are many reasons for this. First of all there are not many countries amongst the 46 member states of the Council of Europe who consider policy on children and youth a priority for the whole government. Secondly, the history of the youth establishments in Strasbourg, the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest and the European Youth Foundation, is inseparable from Norway, which has, ever since the youth field became operational in the Council of Europe in 1972, been a driving force, a reliable friend and generous contributor, and a country which often set the pace for developments. With the youth field being a



co-managed sector in the Council of Europe, such a comment includes also the contribution of the Norwegian Youth Council and civil society.

Having then, finally, been invited to work in Norway, how can one develop a critical attitude? What is wrong in the state of Norway, with regard to youth and children, to paraphrase a well-known statement on a neighbouring country? To come up with an answer right away: nothing much. Norway is a leading country in Europe with regard to quality, organisation, budgets, care, legislation, concrete measures and action plans on youth and children. There can be no other conclusion, if one compares Norway with the rest of Europe, particularly that of the Council of Europe. But we all know that there is no perfect policy anywhere, and the desire to create a child- and youth-friendly participatory democratic society can never be brought entirely to fruition, it will always be a developing policy. Also, Norway is not a such a happy world on its own; it is connected to the world, exposed to European and global developments in the field of mobility of labour, finance, information technologies and media and like any other society Norway has to struggle to maintain this level and further develop its ambitions in the area of social quality.

This is the background against which the international team of experts can actually raise critical issues, pose questions and try to stimulate a debate on childhood and youth policy in Norway – not so much by comparing it with other countries and societies, but by using the standards Norwegians set for themselves and by working implicitly within the growing understanding of Norwegian society within the team.

The Norwegian authorities wanted the team to focus particularly, within their overall observation, on the following items:

- participation of children and young people at local and national level, in schools, clubs, associations, parties, media and public life;
- items related to criminal justice and related items such as substance abuse, healthy life-styles, etc.;
- the integration of immigrant communities;
- observations on the co-ordination of childhood, youth and family policies – were these just three parallel policies in Norway or did they form a new understanding of youth policy, coherent and exemplary?

The team entrusted with the work of producing the international review was:

Dr Maria Wolf, Austrian government, chair of the group and representative of the CDEJ

Camilla Blomquist, Danish Youth Council and representative of the Advisory Council of youth organisations to the Council of Europe

Dr Rupa Huq, UK, researcher and lecturer at Manchester University

Erzebeth Kovacs, Hungary, trainer in youth and adult education and a former Director of Youth in the Ministry of Culture of Hungary

Dr Howard Williamson CBE, UK, researcher and lecturer at the Cardiff School of Social Sciences and rapporteur general of the team

Peter Lauritzen, Head of Department, Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe

The work was carried out in a number of steps, which are similar to all international reviews:

- April 2003: preparation of the visits between the Ministry of Childhood, Youth and Family and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe;



- August 2003: first one week visit of the team, Oslo and Bodø;
- October 2003: second visit of the team, Oslo;
- January 2004: presentation of the national report and international review and public hearing on the results, Oslo;
- February 2004: presentation of the international review to the Joint Council on Youth Questions, composed of 48 governments and 30 NGOs, debate and conclusions, Strasbourg.

It is possible that such a review process, once concluded, may lead to a number of follow-up activities and to a critical analysis of the impact of the whole procedure some two or three years after the presentation of the report.

Meanwhile, the international review has been presented to a representative public of Norwegian stakeholders in the field of youth. The public hearing was held on 20 January as planned, in the presence of Minister Laila Dāvøy and Director General Haktor Helland, of civil servants of the ministries of childhood, youth and family, of public health and social affairs and of research and education, of the office of the ombudsman on children, the Norwegian Youth Council, officials from the Nordland region, youth centres and social work units and the research community. The international review came out as balanced and critical at the same time, underlining the strengths of the Norwegian youth and childhood policy as areas for improvement and, maybe, critical reflection and revision. During the debate a small controversy about the role of research as portrayed in the review arose; but this could be clarified. The review team did not take issue with the quality and the organisation of youth research in Norway, nor did it overlook the very clear option of the ministry for an evidence based youth and childhood policy; all they wanted to say was that there could be better communication between all actors in the youth field, including research.

Other critical items of the international review such as parallelism, the particular power of local communities, a dominance of the childhood agenda over the youth policy agenda, the situation of minority youth and indigenous people were appreciated and further developed in the debate. The public meeting on youth policy in Oslo was a success and a confirmation to continue with this habit also in reports to follow (Cyprus and Slovakia).

The international review team extends its heart felt thanks to Minister Laila Dāvøy for her support for the report and the team, for her willingness to meet the international review team and for the very frank and supportive atmosphere we found in her house. We are also indebted to the Director General, Haktor Helland, who received the team several times, gave us an instructive and very open insight into the methods, contents and problems related to governance in the area of childhood and youth. And the team is also well aware that the whole report might not have existed without the persistent, reliable and well reflected action of Senior Adviser Bjørn Jaaberg Hansen, who was always there for us, and provided, together with his colleagues in the ministry, numerous occasions for meetings and discussion. He put together a high quality programme and enjoyable social occasions and proved to be a true encyclopaedia on Norway; there was no question he could not answer competently.

Peter Lauritzen

Head of Department
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Council of Europe





Introduction

By most standards, young people in Norway benefit on their journey from childhood to adult life from respect, concern and opportunity within both family and public life. Generous resources are allocated by the public administration to their aspirations and needs. It is within this context that the observations and sometimes points of critical concern advanced by the international review team are firmly located.

Inevitably, any international review casts a “foreigner’s eye” on unfamiliar territory; its members struggle to make sense of a country’s distinctive historical, political and cultural traditions which represent the cornerstone of that country’s particular conceptualisation and application of youth policy. What follows is our reading of Norway’s youth policy. It is, wherever possible, grounded in evidence from the meetings that took place during our two visits, the material provided in Norway’s National Report and other literature made available to us. It is also, however, based on partial and incomplete impressions, which may demand rebuttal or further clarification. Nevertheless, our perspectives and perceptions are intended to raise questions about aspects of Norway’s youth policy which merit further scrutiny and debate; in sociological parlance, our purpose has been to render the familiar strange. Our task was not passively to accept what was taken for granted but, from a critical distance, to actively interrogate the assumptions and the practice of youth policy in Norway. This was the spirit in which we conducted our work. We hope that our critical remarks will be received by those responsible for the design and implementation of policies for young people in that spirit.

The international review team paid two visits to Norway. The first, in August 2003, involved not only meetings with the central administration in Oslo, but also a trip to Bodø to visit the county of Nordland and the municipality of Fauske. This gave us a feel and flavour of providing for young people in the remote and sparsely populated areas which typify Norwegian society – areas that are characterised as much by tradition as by change. Our second visit, in October 2003, was spent exclusively in Oslo, which typifies a very different Norway – a modern European city characterised by increasing ethnic diversity and one facing rapid change. Norway has relatively few contexts between these two extremes and we remain rather ignorant of the implementation of youth policy in such situations, notably within the towns and cities of Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim or Tromsø. However, we believe that attention to the contrasting positions of Bodø and Oslo has thrown into relief many of the challenges for the future development of youth policy in Norway. Balancing the tensions and contradictions of tradition and change in both rural Norway and its capital city lies at the heart of that challenge.



It is, indeed, these tensions and contradictions which provided the basis of the international review team's deliberations. There is much to celebrate within Norway's youth policy: the generous allocation of resources to young people, the strong commitment to youth participation, the respect for diversity and the distinct identity of its different minorities. In the same breath, however, running as a sub-thread within such celebration, there is a vein of concern: that things are perhaps too safe and structured for young people, that there are limitations to the wider debate on the position and future of young people, and that difference is only tolerated inside paramount expectations of what it is to be Norwegian. The most significant contribution of this review may well be to draw such issues to the surface, so that they can be interrogated more explicitly.

→ The international review process and the youth policy work of the Council of Europe

The international review of youth policy in Norway is the tenth in a series of international reviews of national youth policy that started in Finland in 1997. Since then, further reviews have taken place in the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Malta. Each review has endeavoured to fulfil a twin objective: to inform the development of youth policy in the country concerned and to contribute, drawing lessons from each country, to an evolving sense of what youth policy might mean within the broader, and expanding, Europe. Despite the very different social, economic, historical, political and cultural contexts in which these reviews have taken place, they have produced a body of knowledge that has informed the developing work of the Council of Europe on national youth policies.

Following the first seven reviews, a synthesis report was produced drawing on the material from both the national and international reports on each country (see Williamson, 2002). This offered comparisons and contrasts in the ways different countries conceptualised, framed and shaped their policies for young people. It bolstered the idea that different member countries of the Council of Europe were clearly at very different stages of thinking and development and strengthened the need for international reviews to, simultaneously but with differential balance, furnish both criticism and support in their commentary on national youth policy development. That support role has been further consolidated by the advisory missions now being undertaken by the Council of Europe in response to requests by countries for a considered external opinion on both particular and general youth policy questions.

Using the experience of the international review process as a foundation, the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe has also worked on the development of "indicators of the state of health" of national youth policy (see Council of Europe 2003a). These not only serve to provide a *prima facie* picture of youth policy in a country. They also permit the pinpointing of what have been referred to as "knowledge gaps" (where further research is clearly required) and "implementation gaps" (where policy aspirations are still struggling, for many reasons, to translate into operational reality). Indeed, it is the inter-relationship between and within the triangle of research, policy and practice which is the litmus test of effective youth policy development. Policy requires an evidence base to substantiate its rationale; in turn, policy does not rest in a vacuum, but demands efficient mechanisms (structures) if it is to be converted into effective practice. The circle is completed with evidence that practice is serving the needs for which it was initially designed. International reviews of youth policy pay particular attention to such a cycle.



This experience around youth policy development has been further consolidated by the establishment of a sub-committee of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEI) to explore and agree a framework or guidelines for the formulation and implementation of youth policies (Council of Europe 2003b). Together with the European Union's white paper on Youth (European Commission 2001), there is now a groundswell of interest and commitment to the matter of youth policy – something that was in its infancy when the first international review was carried out in 1997. Indeed, partnership agreements between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, initially on training and latterly on research and EuroMed co-operation, are indicative of the importance of this commitment. They reflect a growing recognition of the need to cement different elements of youth practice if both appropriate competence and relevant knowledge are to serve the interests of more robust youth policy development. It is within this activity and these frameworks that the international review of youth policy in Norway is firmly and unapologetically located.

→ A specific challenge for this review

The international review process has routinely commenced with a National Report on youth policy being made available to the international review team. Although the review is of youth policy, not of the National Report *per se*, it has been the National Report that has provided the initial basis for generating questions for consideration and discussion. Furthermore, the pattern of the two visits to the country concerned has generally been, first, to engage with the central administration and hear from different ministries and national bodies and, second, to address regional and municipal issues through spending some time beyond the capital city.

In Norway, for various logistical and administrative reasons, it was not possible to follow this pattern. As noted above, the first visit in August 2003 took the international review team out of Oslo to hear from a county and a municipal administration. That visit was both metaphorically and literally – because it was spent largely within the Arctic Circle – cold. A draft national youth policy report,¹ based significantly on Report No. 39 (2001-02)² to Norway's Parliament, the Storting, on the conditions in which children and young people live and grow up in Norway,³ was not available to the international review team until early October 2003. Two weeks later, with relatively little time for its digestion, the international review team paid its second visit to Norway, when the focus of its deliberations was exclusively in Oslo, both in relation to the national and the city administration.

This sequence of events did make it somewhat difficult for the international review team to absorb the detail of prevailing youth policy in Norway prior to discussions with relevant officials. It was not an insurmountable difficulty, but this did mean that the time for digestion of material and sensitising to the specific cultural context of Norway was less than ideal. Nevertheless, the international review team was able to enter into a robust and open exchange of views with all those that it met – it is from the material provided and views expressed that this report has been constructed.

1. The final national report, with some further minor revisions, was received in December 2003.

2. The final national report, with some further minor revisions, was received in December 2003.

3. Report No. 39 (2001-02) was drawn up in 2001-2 and debated by the Storting in the spring of 2003. The national report also drew on Report No. 40 (2001-02) on child and youth welfare, which was debated at the same time, and on Report No.17 (1999-2000) on child and youth crime and Report No. 50 (1998-99) on the distribution of income and living conditions in Norway. The latter two reports were debated by the Storting in 2000, which subsequently requested the government to produce a report on a coherent policy for children and young people, and on the distribution of living standards amongst children and young people.



→ Four *prima facie* imperatives

The international review team was made aware that Norway had a particular interest in an external perspective on four specific elements of its youth policy:

- the relationship between childhood/youth policy and family policy;
- the position of young immigrants and young people from minority ethnic groups;
- young offenders and the criminal justice system;
- youth councils and the challenge of youth participation.

It was noted that policy for young people in Norway, like elsewhere, is crudely (or broadly) divided into two conceptual categories:

- facilitative;
- interventionist.

Facilitative activity is concerned with the provision of, for example, funding and information for young people. At its heart, in Norway in particular, lie the participatory processes and practice outlined in Chapter 7 of the National Report. Interventionist activity relates, for example, to child welfare and protection, combating substance misuse and dealing with young offenders. It can be seen, therefore, that the four *prima facie* issues outlined above span these approaches at the level of both structure and focus.

The National Report concludes that Norway's youth policy has shifted, since the 1970s, from a structured and regulated (interventionist) approach to one more concerned with a greater (facilitative) focus on the individual. There is, of course, still a mixture of both approaches but the National Report points to a significant change in the emphasis. The request that the international review team accord special consideration to the four issues above may reflect some concern within Norway's public administration that perhaps the pendulum has swung too far too soon – at the expense of more troubled and/or troublesome young people at the margins of what is still generally (and has certainly been historically) an impressively inclusive and integrated society.⁴

→ Norway – context

Norway has been described as “a spoon-shaped country, reaching up towards the North Pole” (Flekkoy, 1991, p. 24). Some 40% of the population of 4.5 million live in the “bowl of the spoon”, the rest largely in the coastal areas. Prior to the oil boom in the 1960s, most of the population made a living by farming and fishing, despite increasing urbanisation, centralisation and industrialisation. The oil boom gave rise to new industries, the development of new technologies and further development of the social welfare system.

The social welfare system has a long history and was consolidated during the period following the Second World War. It comprises public child support, free education, health services, old age pensions and unemployment support. Governance

4. This is by no means a debate that is exclusive to Norway. At the very time that youth research has been pointing out the need for greater support for youth transitions, the EU white paper has stressed the demand by young people for greater autonomy. Both, of course, may be necessary. Young people, so the truism goes, are not a homogeneous category; for many reasons, some are disproportionately vulnerable to risk while others are more resilient. The former may need and want support; the latter may want and benefit from autonomy.



of Norway is routinely through coalition governments, and broad support for the social welfare system has been sustained – despite the tax burden and taxation concerns – as it is so firmly embedded within the psyche of Norwegian culture.

Commentators have pointed out some concerns about the strong state, social welfare traditions of Norway, three of which are of particular relevance to this review. First, the isolation of schools from other services has been observed. Second, the tradition of local control negates the capacity of the state to ensure the range of service provision to which it aspires.⁵ Third, there remains a barrier between home and family life, and the social world outside; it is suggested that the family does not wish to be intruded upon by the machinery of the public sector (cf. Gullestad, cited in Flekkoy 1991, p. 27).

The recognition of children in Norwegian law goes back 700 years. A thirteenth century penal code decreed that children should not be punished as harshly as adults (the latter were to lose both hands for stealing, the former only one!). By the seventeenth century there was provision for the public authority to supersede parental authority. Religious and moral education was legislated for by the Public School Act of 1739 and a Child Protection Act was passed by Parliament in 1900, although its intentions were soon challenged by a number of public scandals concerning the treatment of children in public care. Subsequent legislation increasingly reflected prevailing knowledge of child and adolescent development, demanding responsibilities and conferring rights at different stages. There are, today, some 25 to 30 different age limits in relation to such disparate issues as exemption from taxation, the age of criminal responsibility and the right to watch an adult film. Children and young people have come to be increasingly recognised as legal subjects, with their own legal rights. In Norway, for example, it is the child who has the right to education, a right which in many other countries is given to the parent(s) on behalf of the child.

Norway was the first country in the world to appoint an Ombudsman for Children, in 1981. The international review team met the current ombudsman during its second visit. He talked with pride about the imminent establishment of the European Network for Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC). This network of children’s commissioners’ demonstrates how far the issue of children’s voice, rights and participation has come in a relatively short time. Although the international review team displayed some concern that the needs of young people in Norway have, in some ways, apparently been subordinated to the rights of children, it is perhaps instructive to consider the perspective on young people projected a decade ago by the very first Ombudsman for Children:

“Some years ago (and in many cultures today), the moratorium called adolescence lasted three to four years. It is a phase of trying out roles, testing values and trying on opinions to find out which of them each person, individually and in groups, should adopt more permanently as adults, suited to the pattern of roles they envision for themselves in the adult world. Now this phase can last as long as pre-teen childhood does. The goal of becoming a true adult can become very unclear,

5. The tradition of local control is reflected in the combination of a sparsely populated country and the high number of semi-independent municipalities. Norway has 19 counties (though only 18 with prefects and for education) and 434 municipalities, of which only around a quarter have 10 000 or more inhabitants. Most of them have around 5 000 people, including approximately 1 500 children. Sweden, with twice the population, has only 270 municipalities. England and Wales, with ten times the population, has just over 150 municipalities.



because the time perspective involved is so long and uncertain. In addition, it is hard to tell, when the world is changing so fast, what the future will involve.

Young people in Norway are more or less dependent up to the age of 18 or even much longer. Legal parental responsibility ends at 18, but morally, parental responsibility for each child may last for many more years. Decreasing possibilities for learning to take on responsibility and the shortage of jobs for young people make the transition from child to adult last longer and it is less clearly defined. The situation can breed interpersonal as well as intrapersonal conflict, particularly if the young adult, still occupying the “nursery”, has his or her spouse, co-habitant or sweetheart move in too. With the rising cost of housing, this is not an uncommon situation, but one for which neither parents nor homes are prepared.

Children and young people, in order to be able to participate in a democratic and threatened society, need courage, optimism and the will to try. They will have difficulties acquiring such abilities as adults if they are denied the possibility of learning them when young. They need to learn how they can influence and have an impact on their small society if they are going to believe that it is possible to change a larger society when they grow up.

This learning is also necessary for children who are forced to assume adult responsibilities too early, children who must fend for themselves or support themselves – or their families – while still in their school-age years. In Norway there is an increasing, but as yet small, number of adolescents (as young as 11 or 12) who run away from home, temporarily or more permanently, mostly during summer, when living on the streets is more attractive than it is during the winter. They may also occupy empty houses, and often, owing to drug use, drift into delinquency, for example, stealing or prostitution.” (Flekkoy, 1991, pp. 38-39)

This short extract captures three critical points about the prospective, and now contemporary, position of young people in Norwegian society. First, there is the now well-argued and established issue of the complexity and duration of youth transitions: they have become extended and more imbued with vulnerability and risk, if appropriate support is not available (see Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Secondly, there is the question of democratic renewal and approaches to youth participation. And thirdly, there is the challenge of responding to the needs and circumstances of those young people who have succumbed to the risks of transition, young people who have slipped to the edge and are invariably both troubled and troublesome. Each of these is a thread which informs the following discussion.





Youth policy in Norway – a very brief historical overview

The National Report (section 1.2) provides a brief historical outline of youth policy in Norway which, it states, did not start to take shape until after the Second World War. New developments were necessary as a result of the declining participation of young people in the labour market and the expansion of education beyond formal schooling: “young people have thus acquired their own arenas and a life situation distinct from childhood and adulthood”.

The years of compulsory education were extended, first from seven to nine years and, in 1997, to 10 years. Children now start school at the age of six and can leave lower secondary school at the age of 16, although participation in upper secondary school is strongly encouraged, to which all young people have had the right since 1994. Indeed, educational participation through to higher education has increased dramatically: in 2001, over a quarter of 20- to 24-year-olds were studying at universities or colleges.

The post-war labour shortage and economic growth during the 1960s provided a buoyant labour market for young people until the early 1970s. Youth unemployment increasingly became a policy challenge, to which the expansion of educational opportunity was the major response. As a result, unemployment amongst young people has remained relatively low.

Since the war, the constructive and healthy use of leisure time has been a political concern of the Norwegian Government. The National Office for Sport was established in 1946 and, in 1950, was given responsibility for youth policy. This National Office for Youth and Sport, seeking to develop the preventive capacity of leisure policy, put in place twice-yearly youth conferences to discuss youth policy issues. These continue today under the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs which is now responsible for youth policy and, until the establishment of the Norwegian Youth Council in 1980, were “the most important platform for co-operation between non-governmental organisations and the designers of national youth policy”. Indeed, the NGOs elected a majority of members of the State Youth Council which advised the government on youth policy issues. The State Youth Council was formed in 1953 and disbanded in 1986.

Non-governmental youth organisations have, since 1960, been considered as the cornerstone of Norwegian youth policy, although the public authorities – through municipal youth programmes – have also made provision for unorganised youth. Thus the twin track of youth policy in Norway was through the direct provision of



public leisure facilities and through financial support for youth organisations which would provide services for the majority of young people.

The preventive objectives of leisure provision for young people receded during the 1970s, partially displaced by anxieties about the impact of new forms of commercialism, and a belief that more structured and purposeful youth provision should fill an opinion and identity vacuum that might otherwise have been filled by commercial forces.¹ Youth club provision expanded accordingly. The first youth club had opened in Oslo in the 1950s.

Since the 1980s there have been mixed views about the extent to which the state should shape leisure policy, on the grounds that leisure is essentially a site for individual and private decision-making and self-determination. On the other hand, it is recognised that youth organisations are not only a potential basis for local community and democracy but also a substitute for it, when family and other local ties are absent.

Indeed, a sustaining goal of youth policy has been to strengthen the involvement and participation of young people. Despite some political disagreement in recent years on what should, in fact, constitute youth policy, there remains a broad belief that the cultural and leisure activities of young people represent not only an opportunity for experience and recreation but a means of developing qualities such as initiative, self-management and self-control – qualifications both for participation in a democracy and for developing the competence and confidence to establish positive directions in individual lives.

→ The current situation of young people in Norway

“Most youngsters grow up in a secure environment which provides good possibilities for development. However, there are still some children and young people who do not have such good opportunities as the majority. For some, everyday life is characterized by insecurity and loneliness. Crime, bullying, violence, drug and alcohol problems, learning difficulties and difficulty in entering the labour market are all very real problems for some young people.” (National Report, paragraph 3.1)

Young people, we are always reminded, are not a homogenous group. They are divided by gender, age, ethnicity, geography, social and economic backgrounds and current circumstances. All young people are affected by wider social change, but they are affected differently by it. Some display resilience to life’s difficulties and challenges, turning things to their advantage and exercising a clear capacity for life management (Helve and Bynner, 1996); others succumb to existing and new risks as a result of their vulnerabilities and limited personal and financial resources. Although young people live an essentially localised existence, their lives are increasingly influenced and affected (both positively and negatively) by broader change. Of particular note, for Norway as elsewhere, are the three big trends of multiculturalism, globalisation and new information and communication technologies. Multiculturalism is not just about the migration and mobility of different ethnic groups but also about the multiplicity of cultures and values to which young people are exposed. Globalisation refers not only to economic multinationalism (with its implications for labour markets and the type and quality of

1. There are strong parallels here with analyses of the development of youth work in the UK a decade earlier. It has been argued that, in face of the onslaught of American culture – films, music, style, language – youth work represented a form of “cultural rescue” (see Jeffs, 1979).



employment available) but also to the two-way transmission of social, political and cultural ideas and ideologies. This transmission is itself facilitated by the infrastructure of the information society, which is transforming – or has already transformed – the ways in which we live and learn.

There are just over a million children and young people under the age of 18 in Norway. There are around a million and a half young people aged between 15 and 24, and this number is predicted to rise towards the year 2020. The numbers of those aged 0-24 will, however, remain at a similar proportion (some 32%) of the total population, considerably lower than the 40% this age group constituted in 1970.

As elsewhere, the period of youth has lengthened over the past few decades, with young people spending more years in education, entering the labour market later, and having children at a later age. The National Report considers a number of changes which have altered the terrain of young people's lives in Norway:

- children's rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- family structures;
- partnerships and sexuality;
- material and social conditions;
- health and lifestyle;
- identity;
- politics and social issues;
- cultural changes;
- the knowledge society;
- gender equality;
- consumption and commercialisation;
- media and communications;
- globalisation.

The account of the impact of such changes in young people – and specific groups of young people in particular, such as those with disabilities – points to some inherent tensions and challenges. There are trends both towards greater autonomy and to greater regulation. Changes in family structures and the greater participation of women in working life have led to less contact between parents and their children, yet parents are still expected to play a strong supportive role in their children's lives. Greater openness and acceptance of sexuality and different kinds of relationships has placed new pressures and created new anxieties for some young people. The wealth divide has increased, both between different sectors of society and between older and younger people. More children are receiving services from the child welfare authorities. Similarly, the health divide has also worsened, with significant increases in psychosocial disorders amongst young people (and some groups of young people in particular), although the health of young people is generally good.

With regard to values and identity, young people have many more potential sources and reference points, but are still strongly influenced by their families and social background. In terms of political engagement, there has been a clear decline in voting by young people in elections and surveys indicate widespread distrust in politicians amongst the young; this is also reflected in the diminishing



membership of political youth organisations, which halved between 1977 and 1995. Membership of other youth organisations has also declined, yet there is evidence of other, new, forms of social involvement and expression.

The ethnic composition of Norway has changed significantly in recent years, though most notably in Oslo (where children with immigrant backgrounds comprise some 40% of all children), but Norway has always been, in some respects, a “multicultural” society, with its indigenous Sami population and national minorities of long standing.

Equal opportunities are important in Norwegian society, not just in relation to minority ethnic groups but with respect to social background and gender. Social background continues to influence the educational pathways chosen though it appears not to have a significant effect on levels of attainment once a particular pathway has been chosen. Despite considerable emphasis on questions of gender equality, traditional gender roles continue to influence important decisions made by young people, especially educational and career choices.

Young people in Norway have become increasingly subject to commercial marketing, which has led to the recent action plan to combat such pressures and to the development of consumer education in schools. In the past 10 years, the mass media and new communications technology has diversified dramatically; young people favour new commercial TV channels, some 70% of 9-15 year olds have access to the Internet at home, and about half of this age group routinely play computer games every day. Most young people aged 16-24 have a mobile phone. Whatever their risks and pressures, all of this new technology provides new opportunities for both learning and communication across time and space. Young people in Norway have considerable opportunities to travel and to engage with new international and global arrangements. Many young Norwegians study abroad and are involved in international and inter-cultural exchanges, as well as contributing to debate on contemporary global issues such as human rights and the protection of the environment.

This is a brief synopsis of the changing context of the lives of young Norwegians, as outlined in the National Report (pp. 21-32). Much is hardly unique to Norway and typifies experiences across a wider Europe, and indeed across many other parts of the world. What may be more distinctive are the cultural and social traditions to which they present a challenge, the scale and severity of some of the emergent problems, and the capacity and commitment of the government (at both national and local level) to maximise positive opportunity and to minimise the risks entailed.

→ **Conceptualising youth**

The Norwegian National Report (paragraph 9.1) depicts youth as a period in which many young men and women pursue their studies and put off establishing a home with a partner and having children. It also suggests that young people function at the interface between the global and local community. Within these broad conceptualisations of youth, it is also argued that youth in Norway can be characterised as having looser ties with the labour market and working life, slower income growth than other groups in society, and increasingly preoccupied with consumption. They have significant freedoms and opportunities, but these are constrained by limited resources and, for some, heightened risks both within the labour market and in relation to their lifestyles.



There are endless debates around the definition of youth, to the point where questions are now being asked as to whether or not it is even a worthwhile exercise. The point and purpose of distinguishing age groups is both a social and a political question, for it is evident that youth is getting younger and older at the same time. Commercial pressures are drawing more children into the orbit of youthful identity and lifestyle, which now persist into the chronological period of young adulthood, not least as a result of the expansion and extension of education and reduced opportunities for full participation in the labour market. Indeed, it is quite legitimate to ask if there are such people as “classical” teenagers any more. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs was forthright in its reticence about avoiding any strict, age-based, definition of youth, maintaining that it might be viewed as the period between the ages of 12 and 29 for reasons to do with consumption and economy but emphasising that this was certainly not a legal classification. The ministry argued that it was not much concerned about age limits and suggested that sociological definitions of youth might extend even beyond 29 in relation to issues such as housing and the labour market.

The view of the international review team is that youth in Norway is firmly conceptualised as a bridge between childhood and adulthood. It is neither, in and of itself, about young people needing opportunities or presenting a problem to be solved. Rather, there is a particular understanding in Norway of young people as a resource, which is especially strong. The striking emphasis on the participation of young people in their own life domains is patently about a preparation for participation in adult life, which is a governing expectation of all individuals in Norwegian society.

-----> **Conceptualising contemporary youth policy in Norway**

The Norwegian National Report opens with the statement that “the overarching goal of youth policy in Norway is to provide secure living conditions and a safe environment for children and young people as they grow up” (p. 9). Underpinned by a range of principles concerned with respect, equality, freedom and tolerance, youth policy in Norway is concerned with providing possibilities for independence and personal development within a context of mutual responsibility. Significantly, youth policy is firmly aligned with an active family policy (p. 10).

The National Report also acknowledges that the sustaining challenge for youth policy is:

“to give young people the necessary conditions to enable them to spend their youth in such a way that their transition to adulthood is instructive in the sense that they can acquire experience that will prove valuable later in life.” (p. 93)

There is recognition that (some) young people have become more marginalised in recent years and that there is a need for a more calibrated, and differentiated, policy response to different groups of young people – based on age, current circumstances, geographical location and social background. Traditional universal social planning models of youth policy need to be replaced by measures targeting particular groups and meeting the needs of individuals. To some extent, this was effected during the latter part of the twentieth century. It is not, however, a case of a complete paradigm shift but of striking a new balance between planning and organisation, control and protection, and facilitation and development.



This honest appraisal of the persisting challenges for youth policy in Norway should not cloud the fact that prevailing youth policy is, by and large, both well conceived and well-resourced. Many countries would look enviously at the range and depth of Norway's youth policy and at its structures and approaches. Yet while there are strong grounds for self-satisfaction in what has been achieved through the support and opportunity provided to young people in Norway, there are also areas of policy and practice which merit further debate and self-reflection. It is to these questions that the international report gives particular prominence.

-----> **We have got everything, and that is all we have got – a view from parliamentarians**

The guiding hand for contemporary youth policy in Norway, on which the National Report is significantly based, is Report No. 39 (2001-02), the white paper on policy for children and young people ("Det Kongelige Barne – og familiedepartement" 2002). The international review team met with four of the parliamentarians (from different political parties) who had been closely involved in the preparation of the discussion in the parliament of this document, and their observations are instructive. For although the white paper is centrally concerned with establishing a comprehensive policy which creates a safe and meaningful everyday life for children (*sic*), it is also attentive to the need for more robust corrective action in relation to the increasing problems both experienced and caused by young people. The chair of the white paper parliamentary committee distinguished between wealth and happiness. Although most children and young people in Norway live in safe and good economic conditions, lack of care, poverty, violence, drug use, sexual abuse, and difficulties at school are a part of everyday life for an increasing number of children in Norway.

The chair emphasised the importance of improving children's rights (within the framework of the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights), of ensuring educational opportunity, and of providing meeting places for young people to strengthen the opportunity for participation and influence. She drew attention to the need to protect children and young people from commercial pressures, and to tackle more effectively issues such as sexual abuse, alcohol and drug misuse, violence, racism, mental ill-health, unemployment and crime. In order to fulfil these aspirations, she placed considerable emphasis on the importance of co-ordination and co-operation between various levels of the public administration:

"Dialogue, exchange of information, research, building competence and developmental work are all important elements in the continued work for improving a policy for children and youth."

The ensuing discussion both reinforced these messages and identified issues considered by the parliamentarians to be of particular importance. There was a sense that perhaps Norway had become too comfortable – possibly to the point of complacency about the needs of those young people who were not growing up in a secure environment. Such challenges had, too often, remained invisible and needed to be brought more forcefully to the surface. The relative poverty of some young people was producing processes of self-exclusion, despite the fact that much provision in both school and leisure time continued to be free. The rise in problems around mental health and substance misuse was an increasing source of concern; it was suggested that young people took what was on offer for granted and



even if they meet a small problem in their lives, they did not know how to handle it. This point was supported by the assertion that “we have got everything, and that is all we have got”: the impression was often given, especially in the media, that everything is fine, when evidence about levels of depression and suicide clearly indicated otherwise. Labour market destinations were uncertain, particularly for those with few qualifications, yet even those young people who pursued their education could not be sure that they would find work commensurate with their qualifications. Such problems were accentuated for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. It was observed that some 75% of children from minority backgrounds do not speak the Norwegian language when they start school and many drop out in the 10th grade. A major challenge is to persuade such young people (primarily from Pakistani, Vietnamese and Somali backgrounds) to stay on in education. In the context of education, it was ironic that while minority young people, especially boys, were not doing enough, indigenous Norwegian young people were possibly now doing too much – producing a cycle of qualification inflation and educating themselves for unemployment.²

The white paper clearly sets out a broad agenda for child and youth policy and, in broad terms, the parliamentarians were united in their analysis and projection of key challenges. What the international review team found to be missing was a strategy to take this agenda forward, the operational arrangements required, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating whether or not effective interventions had been delivered. We shall return to these issues below.

-----> **Delivery of youth policy – structures and finance**

Chapter 2 of the National Report provides a brief outline of the way youth policy in Norway is organised. There are three administrative levels: central government, county administrations, and municipalities. The 434 municipalities have considerable autonomy and freedom to use available resources according to their own appraisal of local needs, priorities and conditions. Indeed, and unlike some other national structures, the National Report draws attention to the fact that the relationship between central and local government has been in the direction of:

- greater decentralisation of responsibilities;
- non-earmarked or hypothecated financing;
- reduction in detailed requirements concerning the organisation of activities.

The international review team acknowledged the merits of such local discretion and self-determination but recurrently expressed curiosity and some concern about how the aspirations outlined in the work of the central administration were ensured, rather than simply enabled in terms of local delivery. This is a point, as noted above, to which we shall return.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, established in 1991, has overarching responsibility for co-ordinating the government’s work in relation to children and young people, although most other ministries also undertake work that affects this

2. This is indeed a paradox which can be witnessed across the wider Europe. Put simply, young people generally are seeking to acquire higher and higher level qualifications to access lower and lower level employment. So while educational qualifications remain the best protective factor against unemployment and exclusion, it should be no surprise that individual young people question whether the effort is worthwhile. Given the political preoccupations with the knowledge society and lifelong learning, it might be argued that more incisive debate is required about the relationship(s) between education and the labour market in the 21st century, if young people are not to become increasingly disillusioned and demoralised.



group directly or indirectly. Co-ordination across ministries is governed by a Committee of State Secretaries on Child and Youth Issues, established in 1997.

Central government authorities have regular contact and dialogue with county (regional) and municipal (local) authorities on child and youth policy. There are imminent plans, arising from the recommendations of Report No. 39 (2001-02), to strengthen such communication and to further involve professionals, politicians, parents, non-governmental organisations and children's and youth groups (National Report, pp. 15-16).

There are three national ombudsmen responsible for matters that affect children and young people: for children, for consumers and for gender equality. They are independent of government but investigate the implementation of policies and make proposals for legislation, as well as initiate debate on issues of concern to them.

At county level, the central administration is represented by the county governor who, according to the National Report, is responsible for ensuring the implementation of national policies through effective co-ordination and legislative compliance: "County governors report back to the central government authorities on the situation in Norway's counties and municipalities" (National Report, pp. 12-13). Through the counties, central government retains direct authority for matters such as road construction, traffic safety, employment offices and national insurance benefits – all of some relevance to children and young people. The county authorities themselves have responsibility for planning, upper secondary education (and the follow-up service), cultural and leisure activities, transport and communications, and social and, until very recently, child welfare services (from 1 January 2004, responsibility for these was transferred to central government).

The operational delivery of most policy relating to children and young people is the responsibility of municipal administrations. Their autonomy means, however, that there is considerable variation in provision from one municipality to another: "reports from the municipal authorities show that variations in municipal finances and priorities have a significant impact on which services exist at the local level" (National Report, pp. 18). Such variation may, of course, reflect different local conditions but, through setting overarching goals and national guidelines, the intention of the central administration is to ensure that services for children and young people are "as equal as possible all over the country" (National Report, p. 18).

Across each level of administration and between the different levels of administration, emphasis is placed on effective and productive co-ordination and the appropriate allocation of roles and responsibilities. Report No. 39 (2001-02) stresses the importance of improving such lines of communication and of involving children and young people, parents and the non-governmental sector "to ensure that the work done for children and young people at the local level is satisfactory" (National Report, p. 19).

This, then, is the broad framework for the development and delivery of youth policy in Norway, as outlined in the National Report. What follows is some more detailed exposition of these structures arising from the information acquired by the international review team during its two visits to Norway.

Legislation

Report No. 39 (2001-02) now clearly represents the foundation stone upon which current youth policy is to be constructed and future youth policy is to be developed.



The international review team was told that there is no specific, age-related, legislation, but rather legislation relating to various themes relating to children and young people. For example, there is legislation concerning the relationship between children (up to the age of 18) and their families, and an Act for adoption. Within legislation such as the Planning and Building act 1999, provision is made for the involvement of children and young people to have an influence on planning processes.

A part from Report No. 39 (2001-02), the most directly significant piece of legislation is the Child Welfare Act, following Report No. 40 (2001-02) on child welfare, which was debated by the Storting in February 2003. This recognises the need for early intervention across a range of increasing difficulties facing young people and, from January 2004, takes institutional provision for children in need away from the counties and into the responsibility of the central administration. The Child Welfare Act is concerned with combating detrimental circumstances experienced by young people and, consistent with the overarching philosophy of Norwegian youth policy, strengthening conditions for them to grow up in a secure environment. It sets out referral criteria and procedures for early intervention on issues such as child abuse and neglect, and serious behavioural problems such as crime, alcohol and substance misuse. The latter is identified as a growing problem in Norway. The age of criminal responsibility in Norway is 15; this makes interventions on criminal matters in relation to young people under this age a particular challenge for the child welfare system (see below). The emphasis within the act is on making interventions appropriate to the problem and, where possible, on family and community-oriented interventions. It is estimated that some 80% of interventions are in the home and involve the extension of support for leisure and social, housing and education issues. It is also estimated that around 23 in every 1 000 young people under 18 receives assistance from the child welfare services.³ The Act seeks to ensure the development of evidence-based practice, such as multi-systemic therapy, that responds to the underlying causes of behavioural and other problems. The act largely places and reinforces expectations on all municipalities, which bear the costs of making provision except for away from home placements. The decision to shift responsibility for child welfare institutional provision and foster homes from the counties to central government is based on the need to ensure uniformity and standardised quality throughout the country.

Finance

Resourcing provision for young people across the broad spectrum of youth policy (that is, education, health, housing, criminal justice) was an issue to which the international review team was unable to dedicate specific attention. Suffice to say that we are aware of the generous subventions and allocations made to many areas of youth policy, just as we are aware of the difficulties faced by municipalities, especially the smaller ones, in supporting the range of youth policy provision for which they are responsible. In some areas of youth policy, financial information remained elusive (such as the financing of student grants and student debt). On the specific question of financial support to, and through, youth organisations, however, we were provided with considerable detail – and could not fail to be impressed! Including the 28 million Norwegian kroner lottery monies allocated to

3. The national report (p. 16) indicates that there has been a “steady rise” during the 1990s in the number of children receiving services from the child welfare authorities; at the end of 2001 just under 26 000 children and young people were recipients of child welfare measures and of these approximately 5 000 were in care.



youth organisations, the total allocation for national and local youth organisations appeared to be around 130 million Norwegian kroner (€15 million).⁴ The voluntary sector in Norway is, we were told, “quite big”: 90% of Norwegians have been members of organisations and clubs. In total, some 170 million Norwegian kroner is made available to support voluntary NGOs overall, so children and young people get “a big chunk”. Political youth organisations⁵ and cultural organisations receive finance from other sources, while pupil and environmental organisations can access resources both from other sources and from these funds.

The 130 million Norwegian kroner is divided into two distinct funding channels. Just over half of this sum (69 million Norwegian kroner) is designed to support the work of established youth organisations and their umbrella bodies: LNU, the Norwegian Youth Council (representing some 70 youth organisations); the Federation of Disabled Youth; and the Norwegian Association of Youth Clubs. These umbrella youth organisations receive around 7 million Norwegian kroner. Resources are also provided for an Ideas Bank (1 million Norwegian kroner) to support the National Youth Council’s campaigning and information work, for research on voluntary youth work (700 000 Norwegian kroner), and for the administration of the broader grants scheme (300 000 Norwegian kroner). This grants scheme disburses the remaining 60 million Norwegian kroner to some 60 youth organisations involving around 300 000 young people. The guidelines for distributing the grants is decided by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. The Grants Committee decides on the distribution of the grants, based on the guidelines and criteria for eligibility – which, simply put, are about having transparently democratic structures and procedures – and decides upon funding allocations, largely on the basis of membership. The National Office for Children, Family and Youth Affairs, a subordinated body to the ministry, functions as a secretariat for the Grants Committee.

A similar level of resource (61 million Norwegian kroner) is available to the National Youth Council for distribution to other youth organisations, with greater emphasis on reaching more independent and less established groups. Other ministries have similar, development funds – for example, for churches and for cultural activities. The international review team was informed that around 85% of recipients of this *frifond* (free fund), 28 million Norwegian kroner of which comes through the lottery, the remainder from the ministry, are still mainstream youth organisations and only about 15% are independent. It was acknowledged that there remained a major challenge to reach out and support independent and unorganised youth groups. A closely related problem was seen to be getting resources through to the local level. Both the ministry (through the department) and LNU had regular dialogue about these issues, and the Storting was intending to discuss the *frifond* in 2004. Different models for the administration and disbursement of such grants have already been discussed in white paper No. 48 on culture.

4. International comparisons are very difficult to make, given different overall and youth population sizes, state budgets, and costs of living. But some useful benchmarks might include the c.€1 million given to some 15 national voluntary youth organisations in Wales (state budget some €16 billion, population 3 million) or the c. €8 000 given to youth council and youth NGOs in Latvia (state budget some €1.3 billion, population 2.3 million)

5. Political youth organisations, we were told, receive their funding according to the success of their mother party in elections. Some members of LNU (the Norwegian Youth Council) argued that this was not satisfactory and that alternatives – such as a basic core funding and then additional resources according to membership – should be considered.



The international review team noted two issues of immediate interest. First, the level of funding available to any youth organisation rested almost exclusively on its demonstrably democratic structures and on its levels of membership. Yet, as the National Report itself suggests (pp. 27-28), although membership levels are in some decline, forms of activity appear to have diversified. We understand that there has already been some debate about the balance to be struck between structural, membership and activity criteria and believe that this is worthy of further discussion, particularly in order to accommodate further consideration of the activity dimension. Second, throughout many parts of Europe, there is the emergent debate around quality assurance: the validation and assessment of effective practice. Such issues, in relation to funding, were conspicuous by their absence, though when raised by the international review team, we were informed that this had led to “huge discussions last year”.⁶

Structures for delivery and development

National level

Youth organisations, however significant, are of course but one element of youth policy, though we shall return to their work below. On the broader front of youth policy, the international review team was interested in how the ideas and aspirations for youth policy, as expressed by the Storting through documentation such as Report No. 39 (2001-02), cascaded downwards, through strategic development to operational delivery. We gathered information from a range of central government ministries, from the county of Nordland, and from the municipality of Fauske,⁷ returning on the last day of our second visit to the work of the national Ombudsman for Children and an overview from the Minister for Children and Family Affairs. Some of this material is included immediately below, some has been held back for inclusion in our discussion of discrete arenas of youth policy and the cross-cutting issues involved.

In its initial briefing, the international review team was told that the two key ministries with regard to youth policy are the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. Other ministries which have some aspect of responsibility for youth are Regional Policy (especially in relation to immigrants), Social Affairs and Health, Justice, and Culture. As the Director-General for Children and Youth Policy observed, “the main challenge is co-ordination – given that education, health, social affairs, local authorities, justice, environment and foreign affairs all touch youth”. He drew attention to the policy committee of state secretaries, which meets monthly and has a number of administrative working groups. This, he argued, reflected the strong political commitment, across government and across political parties, to children and families. Without such political support, he

6. Apparently there had been very different views on this front amongst the member organisations of LNU. The dominant line taken by LNU to the international review team, however, was firmly based on the democracy building traditions of youth organisations. This perspective is encapsulated in the position that just being there and doing things has a value in itself, in the sense that broad competencies are developed, including – critically – the capacity for decision-making. This may be an important, indeed persuasive, argument but it rests on an act of faith; those who fund youth organisations are now pushing for more acts of science: they want evidence that such outcomes are the product of the work of, and participation in, youth organisations.

7. Fauske is a medium sized municipality, with a population of around 10 000 people. It was also intended that the international review team should gain some understanding of rural youth policy through meeting people from Tysfjord (population 2 000), but this did not take place.



maintained, things would be impossible, and he added that “it is essential to co-operate, and this government is good at co-operating”. Report No. 39 (2001-02) had secured cross-party support and consensus over the main political choices (although there was some disagreement over schools policy) and this has provided the future of Norway’s youth policy with a very clear sense of direction.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has four departments:

- Children and Youth Policy;
- Family, Day Care and Gender Equality;
- Consumer Affairs;
- Planning and Administration.

The department for Children and Youth Policy also deals with family affairs programmes, such as parenting (guidance on child rearing) and partnership (staying together). The department produces a publication, *One Voice*, which discusses governmental goals for children and young people; and emphasises that policy for children and young people in an inter-departmental responsibility with a specific budget allocation, although it is the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs that takes the lead. Since 1990 the government has expected each municipality to have a development plan for children and young people in order to receive state resources for allocation to youth NGOs and for local policy development through voluntary organisations, parents and young people. The Director-General acknowledged that state expectations of municipalities were high and that big burdens were placed on relatively small populations. The dissemination of good practice was critical and, to this end, the ten town strategy had been established; different communities within municipalities had applied for a share of a dedicated budget of 10 million Norwegian kroner to sharpen their policy and practice in relation to children and young people. The communities selected reflected different parts of the country. The initiative was described as “pump priming, intended to be exemplars in their region; hopefully to be emulated elsewhere ... the idea was to encourage dialogue and co-operation at local level”. Indeed, it was noted that throughout Norway, in most of the municipalities there were lots of projects with enthusiastic leaders; what was needed was a more strategic vision and more structured commitment to development through effective dialogue and co-operation.

The international review team expressed considerable interest in what, as yet, appeared to be a somewhat ad hoc approach to both horizontal (cross-departmental) co-operation at different levels and to strategies for the local delivery of national priorities and expectations. At government level, there are few permanent cross-departmental committees (those on gender equality and on Sami questions were cited) and it was considered a privilege to have one on children and youth issues. (As the Director-General reminded us, state secretaries have many things to do!) There are, of course, many working groups addressing specific issues of current concern (for example, the committee developing a white paper on immigrants). The international review team queried whether pump priming pilot initiatives such as the ten-town strategy was likely to cement broader development of youth policy across municipalities if no extra resources were forthcoming. It was also curious about approaches to evaluating whether or not such initiatives had achieved their desired goal.



More flesh was put on the bones of youth policy within the central administration during the international review team's meeting with representatives of the department of Children and Youth Policy. Beyond a detailed exposition of the grant schemes for supporting youth organisations (see above), perspectives were provided on participation, minority youth, the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and international work.

The idea of participation remains absolutely central to youth policy in Norway. Not only is this compliant with Article 12 of the UN Convention but it provides the possibility for the experience of active, democratic citizenship and for the making of effective practice. Young people are closely involved in the working processes of the department, although it was conceded that, ultimately, documentation is written by ministry officials and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. Youth organisations are generously supported on the grounds that they "have a strong role in building democratic society"⁸ and it was suggested that their primary purpose is to provide an arena for co-determination and democracy. Indeed, the sole criterion for eligibility for grant support is that applicant organisations should have a democratic structure,⁹ and beyond this they have autonomous use of the grants given (within broad boundaries; they preclude expenditure on racist or criminal activity!). The resources made available to youth organisations through central government grants are spent largely on the organisation's development and practice, the involvement of young people, and the enhancing of young people's influence and control. However, despite this extremely facilitative environment for youth organisations, their overall membership has been in serious decline – from some 850 000 in 1978 to around 300 000 in 2003.¹⁰ Grants have generally been allocated to a circle of traditional youth organisations (we were provided with a long list), but in 2003 there were 12 new recipient organisations and it was suggested that this indicated "the old static picture will change". And despite the fall in membership levels, there have continued to be budget increases, so it has been possible to support these new recipients without the old recipients having to suffer.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Norway in 1991 and, since then, Norway has produced three reports to the UN Committee, the most recent in 2003 (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs/Ministry of Foreign

8. As Malfrid Flekkoy wrote a decade ago, "Only in a group of equals does a child learn how a democracy functions, what the rules for making rules are, and which attitudes, skills, and behaviours are acceptable amongst 'equals'" (Flekkoy, 1991, p. 37)

9. The historical model for youth organisations was that they had a general assembly and an executive committee. In Norway, a democratic structure previously meant that all members had a right to vote and to hold office within the organisation. This has, however, recently been changed – allegedly weakened, some would argue – and now means all those over the age of 15 should have an equal right to influence the work of the organisation. This accommodates a perspective on democracy emanating from some Christian youth organisations in which adults listen but then decide; they do not want young people directly involved in decision-making processes. The international review team felt that these issues merit further debate. There may be many democratic ways to have influence, not just through elections and holding office. (NB Considerable developmental work has been done on these questions in the UK – see Cutler, 2002, and Kirby and Bryson, 2002.)

10. These figures are very much subject to the more widespread anxieties about lies, damned lies and statistics. They refer to an age range of 0-26, they concern membership not individuals, and different membership counting mechanisms prevailed between the two dates concerned. Thus, within further, more refined scrutiny, these figures tell us virtually nothing about youth participation in youth organisations. Furthermore, figures on membership may say little about active involvement in the organisations themselves. For example, NOVA's research suggests very high levels of membership of hunting and fishing clubs, but this is a pre-requisite for the use of weapons (see below).



Affairs 2003). Following the second report a committee produced a range of challenges for the government. Three areas of particular concern were identified:

- the absence of full incorporation into legislation of children’s self-determination (now rectified, through incorporation in the Human Rights Act 1999 and in the Child Welfare Act 2000 and Adoption Act, where the age of self-determination has been lowered from age 12 to age 7);
- the lack of application in relation to young asylum seekers (to which the government is now giving attention);
- and insufficient attention to the needs of vulnerable children and young people, particularly those suffering from psychosocial disorders (the 1999 National Programme for Mental Health should improve the services available, and the government now acknowledges the need to increase the participation of “insecure kids” and “children in difficulties”).

The 2003 report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child was underpinned by the findings of the Ombudsperson for Children’s project on life before 18 and a study by the Forum for the Convention on the Rights of the Child in preparation for the UN Special Session for Children in New York in 2001 (subsequently postponed to 2002, following 11 September). The former involved eliciting the views of thousands of children and young people from a range of backgrounds on many aspects of their lives; the latter (Donnestad and Sanner, 2001) listened in depth to the stories and perspectives of 100 young people in difficult circumstances in three areas of Norway. The two studies argue the case for both strengthened participation by young people and improved service provision for troubled, displaced and marginalised young people. Norway may be one of the best countries in the world in which to live (according to the United Nations itself) but, as both documents testify, there remain some considerable challenges around questions of participation, support and inclusion. The Department of Children and Youth Policy asserted that there was already a strong relationship, and plenty of dialogue and consultation, across government between ministries on these matters; the problem lay in the fact of municipal autonomy – “there can be too much diversity in municipal implementation of plans formulated by the state”.¹¹

The *frifond* (see above) was considered to have been an important funding development, supporting local youth organisations and focusing on international, multicultural and integration projects. It was described as very flexible and unbureaucratic; projects could do virtually what they liked with the money they received, but only small sums are involved (on average around 5 000 Norwegian kroner per project). Virtually any kind of activity can be supported through the *frifond*, the only criteria being a two-thirds focus on youth, and young people’s involvement in the planning. Groups of indigenous young people had had local projects supported through the *frifond* in relation to, for example, their engagement with the Samediggi (the Sami Parliament).

Norway faces a range of youth policy and wider challenges in relation to both its established and emergent multiculturalism. These are discussed more fully below but they surfaced in our discussion with the Department of Children and Youth

11. The international review team was told of the Youth Forum for Democracy which was described as having more vision than concrete ideas so far; but the National Report mentions this forum as having been established in 1998 but disbanded in 2001. It was mentioned during our discussions with the Department for Children and Youth Policy in the context of the serious need to develop and disseminate ideas around “good practice”.

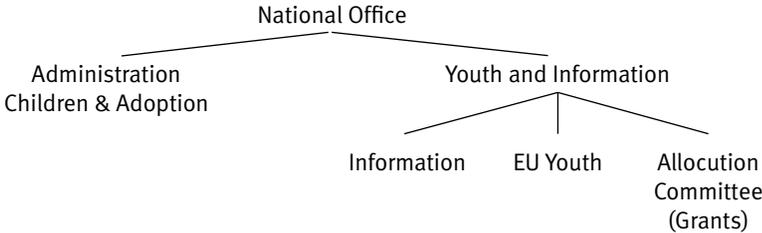


Policy when our attention was drawn to a recent four year development programme, aimed at a limited number of municipalities. Another important instrument for the department is the programme funding youth activities and projects in the 10 largest cities with a budget to the tune of 20 million Norwegian kroner. Oslo received half of these dedicated resources and was described as “really the only city with immigrant, multicultural questions, as opposed to refugee questions”. The largest minority ethnic groups are from Pakistan, Vietnam, and Serbia and Montenegro, where some cultural traditions that rest uneasily within Norwegian culture have been handed down across generations. Of particular note are issues such as forced marriages and female genital mutilation, both of which have been subject to relatively recent action plans. The difficulty once again, we were told, was that implementation of proposals had to take place at the (autonomous) municipal level, although there was some evidence that some municipalities within Oslo had started to work on the action plan on forced marriages (1998), and new resources for this agenda was likely to produce renewed impetus. In respect of the action plan on female genital mutilation, this was still the subject of inter-departmental deliberations and project proposals, with a dedicated budget, were in the process of development. Both of these areas are now regulated by law; legislative revision, it was suggested, made the illegality of such practices more transparent and clear.

Work is also in progress on increasing the participation of immigrant youth, but currently there is no additional budget to support such development.

Four issues were of particular interest to the international review team. First, it was interested to know if the practical implementation of recommendations made by the central administration was always contingent upon the provision of extra resources. Secondly, it was also rather concerned that immigrant populations were viewed as largely homogenous or whether policy took a more differentiated approach. (We were told that once a general position has been established, approaches are adapted to ensure that they are meaningful and relevant to different groups.) Third, the team wished to know whether or not diversity training was established and available within the government; the response was that there was “not much” and participation in what there was was voluntary, although there was regular dialogue about diversity when matters were being considered. Fourth, the team was interested in the extent to which preoccupations with participation meant that policy was shaped significantly by priorities and methodologies identified by young people; we were told that, although there is always a background of consultation and discussion, it is the government’s view that “ultimately prevails”.

The National Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has three areas of responsibility, including youth and information, which itself breaks down into three sections: information, EU Youth programme, and the grants allocation committee.



The grants system has been discussed under finance, above. The international review team was provided with a brief overview of the 21 million Norwegian kroner allocated to support international work and the place of the EU youth programme within its work, and then a more substantial account of its youth information work. There have been a growing number of applications to be part of the EU youth programme, and the National Office has placed a strong focus on remote and rural areas, and on more disadvantaged young people (“young people with less opportunities”). Allocations of up to €12 500 have been made, through Action 3.1 (group initiatives) to 64 of the 434 municipalities with the greatest declining youth populations. The recent impact study on the place of the youth programme in Norway, designed to inform the new generation EU youth programme from 2007-2013, reflected its importance in relation to more marginalised communities and groups of young people.

The development of youth information by the National Office has been part of compliance with Article 13 of the UNCRC – the right to information. However, the National Office has been producing a magazine for the past 10 years and is now in the process of developing on-line information for young people. This will be discussed more fully below, but schools in Norway have suggested that it is exactly “what we have been waiting for”.

The final arm – or arms-length instrument – of national youth policy is LNU, the Norwegian National Youth Council. It might best be described as a “critical friend” of government, responsible for liaison on behalf of youth organisations at national level. At the heart of its recent work on youth policy has been its response to Report No. 39 (2001-02) and its contribution to the third report on the UNCRC and the preparation for the UN special session on children. With regard to the former, LNU welcomed its emphasis on youth as a resource and focus on the importance of youth participation but was critical of its lack of specificity and dependency on the local level for implementation. LNU also felt that insufficient progress was being made on the question of reducing the voting age to 16. With regard to the latter, the position of LNU was forthright and blunt: “so many action plans and reports but young people are often still waiting for something to happen”.

“There is a lot of will in Norway to give young people power”

LNU felt that it had good relations and communication with the government and that there was a synergy effect as a result of positive collaboration and consultation. (It did point out, however, that it had limited contact with the Ministry of Education, since student organisations were strong and represented themselves.) LNU believed that it was taken seriously by the government, given respect, time and space to “do it our way”, and given real power to contribute to determining appropriate frameworks for youth involvement in decision-making. It was acknowledged that there are always questions, and sometimes anxieties, about the legitimacy of LNU in terms of its representativeness, but it contended that it could and did speak for non-organised youth at a national level and worked hard with its constituent organisations on involving all young people at the local level. Indeed, both horizontal and vertical lines of communication were constructive and productive. LNU worked closely with its partner umbrella organisations (Disabled Youth, and the National Association of Youth Clubs). It collaborated with the children’s ombudsman, with schools and with other partners. It provided the secretariat for Regional Youth Councils. LNU valued the bi-annual encounters with the Minister for Children and Family Affairs and



concurred with government that democracy-building was the main reason for supporting the work of youth organisations. Although LNU represented a broad spectrum of youth organisations, it emphasised the need to avoid party politics but, equally, the need to focus on the issues facing specific groups of young people, such as gay and lesbian youth, and ethnic minorities. LNU suggested that it would like a dedicated centre for youth research, noting its limited awareness of what research was currently taking place, and regretting the fact that NOVA (see below) “no longer gets the funding it used to”.

Following this presentation of views, the international review team reflected on a number of issues. First, the casting of sub-categories of young people into distinctive and separate groups perhaps failed to give sufficient consideration to the factors that might unite them: their exclusion and marginality. (LNU stated that, as part of the white paper process, it had convened a meeting of 40 minority ethnic young people from different backgrounds, and was currently supporting the development of a youth organisation for gay and lesbian young people.) Secondly, there seemed to be a topic by topic approach to LNU’s work which could be construed as somewhat random and almost tokenistic, rather than being rooted in a more strategic position. Thirdly, there seemed to be limited attention to the question of non-formal learning and youth organisations as a site for its practice and development. (LNU said that it had previously prioritised non-formal education and intercultural learning, but that now it was the turn of the UNCRC to command LNU’s attention.)

LNU concluded by pointing out that, unlike National Youth Councils elsewhere, it was the national Children and Youth Council and that, as a result, it had a broader agenda to address.

Exercising the minds of the international review team, after receiving information and engaging in dialogue with the key stakeholders in youth policy at the national level, were the following impressions...

- there is a Youth Ministry, with clear lead responsibility for youth affairs (the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs);
- there is a collective desire to stick to, and ensure appropriate financial support for “old” traditions concerning participation, democracy and collaboration;
- there are very positive relationships between the key stakeholders, based on proximity, trust, informal contact and mutual respect;
- this produces a very affirmative context: a shared understanding of the vision for youth policy and the procedures required to put it into effect;
- child and youth policy is clearly seen as an important instrument for regional development;

... and the following questions:

- To what extent were youth issues subordinated to the child/childhood agenda?
- What specific measures were being taken in relation to disadvantaged, minority and missing groups?
- How was municipal autonomy squared with state plans and national aspirations?
- Where such national plans were not backed up by new resources, to what extent were municipalities able to take action on these new agendas?
- How much consideration had been given to new channels for reaching and involving young people: the membership versus mobilisation debate?



- How did non-formal education relate to the formal educational pathways of young people?
- Where was the debate about the validation of non-formal learning, quality assessment and assurance, and the measurement of outcomes?

To some extent, these issues were illuminated by subsequent discussions with other ministries and with those involved in more grounded policy and practice at county and municipal level.

The Ministry of Education and Research is the other key ministry responsible for youth policy and provided the international review team with a comprehensive picture of educational provision in Norway. Secondary education in particular is high on the political agenda across the political spectrum; it was indicated that the biggest contemporary challenge was to bridge the gap between lower (compulsory) and upper (non-compulsory but desirable) education. There is now a statutory right to upper secondary education and 88.5% of young people now move into it. Upper secondary education is the responsibility of the counties (earlier education is a municipal responsibility), as is the follow-up service: it is a legal requirement to make contact with those not continuing to upper secondary education or leaving it prematurely. Some 6% of young people are contacted by the follow-up service; some return to education, others have work placements or alternative provision arranged for them. Following the reform of upper secondary education in 1994, which established foundation subjects in Mathematics, English and Science, it also became possible to follow a vocational route through either work placements or, if these were not available, through vocational provision within schools.

There are around 170 000 students in higher education, both in state institutions and some 30 private higher education establishments, of which 19 receive state funding for reasons of religion, alternative pedagogy and supplementary needs. Some higher education establishments are dedicated to particular specialisms; there are, for example, colleges for sports, music and agriculture. Norway is extremely generous in its state support for higher education, although new proposals for the governance of HE are imminent. There is also considerable debate about the level of financial support available to students; at present, Norwegian students are eligible for grants and loans of around 80 000 Norwegian kroner each academic year. They can also study in other countries while maintaining their connection to this system of financial support – some 15 000 do so, half of them in Australia.

Given the high levels of post-compulsory educational participation, the international review team was interested in the issue of qualification inflation and/or graduate unemployment, if indeed it was an issue, as it clearly was in some other countries. Graduate unemployment, we were told – or, more accurately, graduate job search difficulties – has only recently hit the headlines, following research on what happens to graduates in terms of jobs obtained (and whether or not such jobs are commensurate with levels of qualification) and how hard it was to get a job. Things do appear to be getting more difficult in the labour market, but this is not yet deterring young people from applying to study in HE. Each cohort of higher education students is around 55 000, and applications during the late 1990s were over 100 000. It was accepted that it was hard to square the increasing difficulties being faced by graduates with the increasing desire to study in HE, except to note that it is almost a cultural norm: one might as well stay in HE because “everybody else does”!



Despite the high level of educational attainment in Norway, there has been a skills mismatch which has resulted in reforms in learning and workforce development, and adult education. All adults now have a statutory right to primary and secondary (basic) education, but those who need this education often do not want it; hence the need to involve the workplace. The most significant development has been the competence reforms (see Ministry of Education and Research 2003), which seeks to establish a system for the validation of formal and non-formal learning and competence. There is a triple rationale behind these reforms:

- to ensure that skills for the labour market are properly used;
- to provide second chances for individuals;
- to enhance citizenship and democracy through ensuring a sense of justice.

Under these new arrangements, around 15 000 individuals are currently participating in upper secondary education, and some 11 000 in higher education. (The competence reforms, based on a concept of *realkompetanse*,¹² are wide-ranging and far-reaching; they are depicted in public documentation as “One system – various schemes – common principles”. Unfortunately, the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research restricted their explanation of these reforms to questions of access to further and higher education. They did make the important observation, however, that early evaluation suggests that those accessing courses on the basis of their life experiences made the same progress and reached the same levels of attainment as those with more formal entry qualifications. This was perhaps why they described such success as the “jewel in the competency reform crown”.)

The competence reforms represent a courageous paradigm shift in Norway’s thinking about learning and development, and throws into relief some time-honoured assumptions. For example, the concept of “second chance” is not a familiar one in Norway because no-one has ever been too old to start or return to upper secondary or higher education. Individuals have always been able to resit their examinations as many times as they want (in order to get better grades, not just if they have failed). Taking account of non-formal educational experiences in applications for higher education was in fact abandoned in 1991 because, after all, this was Norway, where virtually all young people had had such experiences.

It is not only the skills gap that has produced this paradigm shift. The changing ethnic and cultural composition of Norway also makes it an important development. The vocational competences of immigrants can now be validated in the context of the Norwegian structure of qualifications; indeed, people have a legal entitlement to be assessed. This is a response to concerns about (low) levels of participation by minority ethnic groups at higher levels of education, despite research evidence that those who do reach higher education produce similar levels and standards of performance.

12. *Realkompetanse* means in practice the sum of all competences that the individual has acquired via the education system, paid and unpaid work, organisational activities as well as family and social life. Individuals now have the opportunity to have such competence assessed and certificated – so that it may be applied in both education (access and eligibility) and the workplace (for occupational status, career progression and the grading of wages and salaries).



The international review team's continuing concern with the apparent parallelism (rather than integration) of non-formal and formal education was firmly rebutted. There were, it was accepted, ongoing challenges about certification and comparability, but it was asserted that non-formal learning was strongly linked to formal education. Indeed, beyond the strong presence of youth organisations in Norway, there is a lot of civil society development within formal schooling, through youth councils and other forms of pupil participation in school governance. This represented a practical approach to participation, which was strongly recognised within debates about qualifications, competence, the labour market and citizenship. Non-formal learning experiences continued to be very useful in job interviews, even if they were of more limited value as a passport for entry to higher education. The international review team remained unpersuaded and felt that this issue merited further discussion.

County (regional) level – Nordland County

The international review team had been told that it would be seeing some best practice, rather than just typical, models of youth policy implementation in Norway. It was not a complete surprise, therefore, to be taken to the “most youth-friendly county in Europe”, an accolade bestowed on Nordland County at a recent European conference on local and regional youth policy. Nordland, comprising some 40 000 square kilometres, lies within the Arctic Circle. It has a declining population which lives primarily along the 25% of the region that is coastline, working in fishing, mining, hydro-electric power and tourism. Youth policy has been actively developed within the context of out-migration and a desire to stall that outflow of young people (the population of the 45 municipalities that comprise Nordland County peaked at some 242 000 and is now around 237 000).

The county director of education is responsible for upper secondary schooling, the follow-up service, vocational training, adult education and youth information. Youth participation is central to the strategic youth policy programme which has been developed. The county faced severe unemployment in the early 1990s which demanded a strategic response. This has included information and cultural services, Young Enterprise and Junior Enterprise and Europrise (through the EU Leonardo programme) to build an international dimension, dialogue with students' organisations (including the appointment of a student ombudsman), and the development of student influence on teaching and learning through school libraries and welfare projects. Long distances and scattered populations demanded innovation in learning and training, and young people in small communities have been supported through the use of new information and communication technologies and work experience. There has also been a strong commitment to the establishment and support for Youth Councils, in order to demonstrate to young people that it is possible to change things in democratic ways within bureaucratic and administrative systems.

The strategic youth policy programme commenced in 1992 and has involved education, health, culture and business development. It has involved close collaboration between politicians, administrators and young people, and its vision and mission was developed over three years between 1992 and 1995. The first step was to analyse the characteristics and conditions of young people in Nordland, and then to hold a series of youth conferences to test out the emergent issues and establish a sense of priorities. The top ten issues were identified:

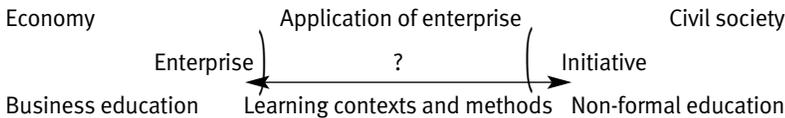
- employment;
- access to further education;



- housing;
- culture;
- information;
- business and enterprise;
- health;
- local youth services;
- internationalism;
- youth participation.

On the basis of this menu of priorities, the goals and strategies for the youth policy were formulated. Resonating with a conceptualisation of youth policy advanced in Finland (Williamson, 1999), the programme was based on the idea that young people had to take Nordland forward but Nordland had to create the conditions for them to do so. Specific funding for overseeing the strategy was allocated in 1994 (€775), dropped during the next few years, but rose again in 1999 (to €400). Discrete elements of the strategy have attracted their own independent budgets and it was argued that the strategy has been successful partly because of the extra monies it has been able to draw down from national sources. Nordland is about to embark on an evaluation of what the strategy has accomplished.

The international review team was deeply impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment with which Nordland’s youth policy programme was presented. Three immediate questions were forthcoming, each of which was mainly answered with clarity and precision. First, there was the issue of the relationship between the county’s vision for youth and that of the autonomous municipalities, but it was asserted that there was strong dialogue between them and a great deal of agreement on what needed to be done. Secondly, there was the matter of the full engagement of minorities; it was said that the Sami were properly and fully represented, though the international review team remained unclear about the position of immigrants and refugees. Thirdly, in relation to enterprise development, there was the question of the role and place of non-formal education in building the skills for enterprise:



The response was that enterprise was broadly conceived, both across the age range (from kindergarten to upper secondary school and beyond) and between the civic involvement of young people and their business involvement through work experience and self-employment.¹³ Young people in Nordland, we were told, “have a strong awareness of their locality and making a contribution to their local society, so they are enthusiastic about community enterprise”.

13. In the UK, the distinction has been made between education “for”, “through” and “about” enterprise. Clearly some activities within schools can help to prepare young people, experientially, for the world of work and self-employment, some teaching in school may be about industry and “business”, and some business activity – such as work simulations and mini-enterprise – can also be an additional pedagogical option, an additional tool for learning. The latter dovetails very comfortably into the realm of non-formal education or youth work and its claims for developing “soft” skills, namely those of communication, teamwork, problem-solving and decision-making, rather than more specific business skills such as business planning, cash flow forecasting and marketing (see Jamieson et al, 1988).



Having outlined the overall youth strategy, various players in this process made presentations to the international review team – the student union of Nordland, the student ombudsman, the Youth Parliament, the youth information service, cultural policy, and youth organisations. These will be discussed below, in the context of discrete elements of youth policy. Suffice it to say here that, with some caveats, Nordland County appears to have developed a coherent youth strategy that addresses both the social and economic issues of the region and the needs of young people. The international review team is aware, however, that not all counties in Norway will have established similar depth and breadth to their youth policy and practice.

Municipal level – Fauske municipality

Ultimately all youth policies are local, in the sense that they are dependent upon local delivery if they are to be effected and effective. It was therefore important for the international review team to witness the ways in which the idea of youth policy was actually put into practice at the local level.

Fauske municipality lies within Nordland county and has a population of just under 10 000. For over 100 years its main industries were stone quarrying and mining. These closed down in 1991, although marble is still in production. Since then, the municipality has faced significant public policy challenges around unemployment, crime, violence and drugs. There are around 200 people unemployed in Fauske, but it remained unclear how many of these were young adults. Fauske is the number three municipality in Norway for violence in conjunction with drug use (from hash to heroin): on the weekends, there is a lot of very serious violence in the bars and on the streets. As a result, it has developed new approaches to dealing with and supporting young people; inter-agency initiatives appear to have yielded considerable success in addressing a range of issues, with the police, for example, stating that there has been a 60% decrease in crime and anti-social behaviour since new measures were established.

The lead officer for schools, kindergarten and culture stressed that the municipality recognised the importance of children and young people for a good society. To this end, and through a new emphasis on inter-agency co-operation and collaboration, four key elements of youth policy could be identified:

- the setting up of a family centre to address health problems;
- the strengthening of the position of children growing up;
- prevention work – around schools, leisure and special needs;
- the development of the Youth Council.

In addition, there were particular questions concerning immigrants or, more precisely, the small population of around 100 refugees and asylum seekers arising from the requirement that each municipality should provide for some 20 refugees and asylum-seekers each year. Each of these strands of youth policy at the local level will be considered under the substantive themes of youth policy below.

Ombudsmen

The international review team met two ombudsmen – the national Ombudsman for Children and the Nordland student ombudsman from 1997-2003. An ombudsperson – often otherwise designated a children’s commissioner – has both influence and independence, though terms of reference are sometimes



contentious. In essence, they are advocates for children (and young people), operating both reactively (to issues and circumstances of which they are made aware) and proactive (on issues they consider to be of importance to the well-being and safety of children and young people). The major platform for an ombudsperson for children is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children but it can extend well beyond that. The European Network for Ombudsmen for Children, established in 1997 with 5 members and which now has 22 members, is currently addressing the issue of the parameters of their responsibility. There are different models of ombudsmen although most are based upon an act of parliament; however, the sometimes striking overlaps between the conditions and circumstances of children on the one hand, and young people on the other, calls for a reappraisal of policy and practice and, consequentially, of the responsibilities of an ombudsperson.

The national Ombudsman for Children described his job as being about revealing weaknesses in the public administration and in the private lives of children. Current issues concerned the commercial pressures to which children were subjected and new measures banning smoking everywhere, except in the wilds and, strangely from his perspective, in the home. The major challenge was to identify which department of government should be asked to take forward issues of concern – a challenge which drilled down to municipal level. The ombudsman discussed the three “Ps” of children’s rights (protection, provision and participation), arguing that action on protection usually moves fast into more appropriate provision. Participation, however, is only developed if time and resources allow, yet, in his view, best practice across the policy spectrum (health, education and so on) accrues from effective participatory practice.

The ombudsman responded helpfully to questions from the international review team about the implementation of the white paper (Report No. 39 (2001-02)). He indicated that there had been a strong feeling that a more coherent approach to working with children and young people was needed, but there remained concerns that the proposals were still too segmented and lacking a more ‘holistic’ vision. Nevertheless, the white paper did provide a checkpoint list on each area of policy. Of more concern to the ombudsman was the white paper on child welfare (Report No. 40 (2001-02)) which had been produced around the same time. His concern derived largely from the fact that most municipalities have populations under 5 000 and simply do not have the resources to support proper provision for complex child care cases. The ombudsman described the mechanisms for ensuring that the aspirations of national policy were implemented on the ground (NB this was the last day of our second visit and the first time that these systems were described). The 19 counties were responsible for checking out health, education and child welfare provision, engaging in inspections four times a year, and recording the frequency of interventions and the nature of actions taken. It was, however, quite possible to “trick around the figures”. For, despite reasonably strong reporting requirements, the autonomy of municipalities did produce very uneven provision, begging the question of how much the state should enforce and regulate what is needed for children. There used to be more earmarked funding, but this was no longer in vogue: “there has been a delegation of responsibility which is, of course, a democratic imperative; municipalities want the resources and then to make their own decisions”. The ombudsman provided illustrations of national targets that were set but, when they were not reached, no sanctions were applied to those who had not met them: “so it is easy to by-pass children when there are no minimum standards set down by law”. Additional resources did usually make some difference, but there was no guarantee that they would be used for the purpose they were given.



Municipalities, as a result, had democratic conditions but service deficiencies. The power of an ombudsman on this front was limited: the focus was more on ensuring individual rights. Since October 2003, the UNCRC has been embedded in Norwegian law, and “now the lawyers are waiting for the cases of bullying, welfare, etc. to come in”, but the ombudsman asked whether, ideally, one wanted a child welfare system that is defined in law – or in politics through case law or debate? For while advocacy for children needed a legal background and context (otherwise you have no power and “are just fooling the kids”), positive provision based on political consensus was eminently more desirable.

It was this point that led the national Ombudsman for Children to comment on the position of specialist ombudsmen at more local levels. He had noted that there were spokespersons for children on specific issues, such as planning and the environment, but suggested that there was a risk of these being often tokenistic and vulnerable to abolition. The role of ombudsmen needed to be constructed from both directions (from children’s rights and interests, and from political desire) if it was to be firmly grounded and genuinely influential.

The international review team met one such ombudsperson in Nordland – the student ombudsman from 1997-2003. Students had requested the county administration for the resources to employ someone to represent student interests. In the event, the ombudsman was in fact employed by the Director of Education. He described himself as someone in the middle and independent, advocating for students in schools and apprentices in enterprises. His first task was to produce a research report on priority issues, and his position was reviewed after two years and fully established in 2000. He was answerable to the County Council and described his role as both reactive (to complaints) and proactive, through listening to students and interpreting their issues to the bureaucracy. He had three core responsibilities:

- to train and work with student representatives;
- to participate in county planning processes as the advocate for student needs;
- to act as a watchdog on educational practice and performance.

His main achievements had been a decision in 1998 permitting students to choose their own textbooks and the production of a best practice handbook on the establishment of student councils in schools. He conceded that the former achievement had limited practical effect (there is not so much choice anyway!) but it was symbolic of an important principle: that students can and should participate in the planning, design and accomplishment of their education. When asked why he was just the ombudsman for students, he described this as a feature of administrative structures: he had been a county appointment, covering county responsibilities (that is, upper secondary education, vocational training and the follow-up service). Moreover, it was asserted that the national ombudsman for children had “not paid too much interest in education” (a point with which the national ombudsman elliptically concurred, when he noted that it had been much more difficult influencing the Ministry of Education than it had been to work in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs).

The international review team increasingly gained the impression that formal educational policy, processes and practice was significantly isolated from wider aspects of child and youth policy – with its own structures and mechanisms for consultation and involvement.



The student ombudsman maintained that the reason for the success of the post had been co-operation – there had been an “open door” to the Director of Education and other officials in the county. His concluding remark was that “people have to have faith that this is the way to go forward and relate to the post constructively”.

The Minister for Children and Family Affairs

The two visits by the international review team culminated in a meeting with the Minister for Children and Family Affairs, to whom it was able to set out some initial impressions and elicit the minister’s perspectives. She emphasised that the white paper (Report No. 39 (2001-02)) was essentially about “the kids with good resources” and therefore focused on issues such as positive participation. The child welfare white paper (Report No. 40 (2001-02)) had paid attention to children and young people in greater difficulty and, as a result, the government was about to implement some major reforms (including the state taking over responsibility for institutional provision and the 27 local teams to work across municipalities, in order to bolster the efforts of the one or two individuals “sitting alone in each municipality”). There was also an imminent white paper on family policy. There were certainly, however, some cross-cutting political concerns about the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, to which further attention would be given.

The minister was keen to correct two of the principal – and persisting – concerns of the international review team: the apparent over-emphasis on children (up to 18) at the expense of young people (up to c.25), and questions as to how national youth policy aspirations could be ensured at the local level within the context of municipal autonomy. If there was a strong focus on children, the minister argued, it was so that young adults would be well prepared to work out a future for themselves. But there was also the youth guarantee, offering work, training or education, and young people who have come into the orbit of the child welfare system before the age of 18 are entitled to support until the age of 23. Young people have been closely involved in discussion and consultation, and have put forward numerous ideas about what they need and want, within which youth participation is very prominent. The government has endeavoured to hear the voices of young people in many different contexts, including those receiving mental health support, those in the child welfare system, and young refugees and asylum seekers.

The government has also sought to get different “bits” of municipal administrations working closer together. It has suggested that each municipality should have a lead individual on child and youth matters, although exactly who this is can be decided by the municipality. That individual’s role and responsibility is to bring together other agencies to work on preventative and developmental activity. The government publishes all state budget lines that support work with children and young people, to give a clear indication of what should be done, and the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs also directly supports experimental projects in municipalities. It is also in the process of benchmarking best municipal practice. The minister was emphatic that municipalities should retain discretion and influence over precisely what is done; such democratic choice was important and the government certainly did not want to be centralising things. Some resources, however, have been earmarked (for the elderly and for psychiatric services, for example) and there continues to be a debate in the Storting as to how much regulation should be



established to ensure municipal compliance. Municipalities, however, want no strings attached, maintaining that they are all different and need to use resources in ways that are appropriate to them (after all, they argue, they may already have sufficient local provision in some policy domains).

Norway does have a generous system of support for children and young people. Indeed, it was once said that “Norway may be a small country but in youth policy it is a world power”! However, only the last six ministers have been for children and youth (and family); before that, it was only for the family. This is significant in that it has strengthened the position of Ministry of Children and Family Affairs within the government. Concerns for children and young people have grown in the public consciousness and across all political parties. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs is the driver of youth policy and the co-ordinator of youth policy across ministries.

Youth organisations

According to the National Report, “voluntary child and youth organisations in Norway run a wide range of activities and play a pivotal role in the everyday lives of children and young people” (p. 52). Participation in a voluntary organisation is part of the childhood experience of almost all children and young people in Norway, and responds not only to their sporting, musical or other leisure and recreational interests but also supports their involvement in the community and provides an opportunity for them to express their views. The National Report states, however, that many of the traditional, idea-based organisations that took part in building up Norwegian democracy are now losing ground (p. 53), and there has been a decline in membership of youth organisations in recent years. Nevertheless, non-governmental child and youth organisations have always had, since 1945, a key role in child and youth policy and, since 1950, their work has been supported – almost unconditionally because of its intrinsic value – by financial grants from the government (see above, and National Report, p. 54).

The work of LNU, the Norwegian National Youth Council, was discussed above in terms of its direct engagement with the central administration and its contribution to national youth policy. As the umbrella body for youth organisations in Norway, it also has its professional agenda of identifying new areas of work, such as supporting young people living in more remote rural areas, an issue that was addressed in a separate meeting with the international review team and is discussed more fully below.

As well as LNU, the international review team heard from other youth organisations at both county and municipal levels. In Nordland, we were initially somewhat perplexed by the presence of apparently two youth councils, until it was explained that one was essentially a youth parliament supported by politicians, while the other was an umbrella body supported by its member organisations. The international review team was informed that successful youth organisations receive support from both the political establishment and through their membership: “everything requires this two-way process, which includes the training of officials in their receptivity towards young people as well as the training of young people to equip them with the knowledge and skills for this kind of participation”.

The Nordland Youth County Council (the youth parliament for the county) is an apolitical youth organisation, although some members are clearly at the start of a



political career and may be on community lists for local elections. It was developed through collaboration with 25 of Nordland's 45 municipalities; some rationing had to take place, we were told, because of the costs attached, especially to travel, in such a large county. All 45 municipalities, however, identified one girl and one boy for potential inclusion on the council. The adult county council gave priority to the young people from the five largest municipalities in the county, and then those from 20 more municipalities were chosen, distributed across the seven sub-regions of the county so that all sub-regions were represented. It was not made clear exactly how such choice was made, nor how those municipalities that were excluded felt about this. There are, therefore, 50 young people on the council; its board consists of five individuals, plus the chair and vice-chair. The council's most prominent work to date has been in relation to environmental questions, in particular around threats to the coastline as a result of nuclear power and fishing. It has established a project called Environmental Youth which held a conference in June 2003, promoted an Environment Day to raise awareness, and plans a conference for young people from the Barents Region in 2004: "youth are aware of the issues and will not stand by".

NOBUR is the umbrella for voluntary youth organisations in Nordland and supports and represents some 40 organisations, 400 groups and 10 000 members within four categories of membership. It provides a range of services and organises a variety of activities for its constituency, the most notable of which is the annual cultural happening (Ungdommens Kulturmonstring). NOBUR described itself as being "all about renewal and development"; it was important for young people to have the chance to be involved at the county level and individuals could not represent Nordland year after year.

The other youth organisation we met in Nordland was the Students' Union of Nordland (SUN), with a membership of some 8 500, from 29 schools. Its work was "all about student democracy and participation", although levels of participation varied considerably from school to school and it was hard to say how many young people were actively involved. Nor was any information provided on participation by those from minority ethnic backgrounds; apparently it was not an issue because there were very few immigrants *per se* and those from ethnic minorities were mainly refugees and asylum-seekers. The work of the Students' Union was to maintain a website, hold meetings, engage with the media and visit schools, all with the objective of making the rights and duties of students a reality – to encourage their democratic participation in their learning environments and in their own learning and development.

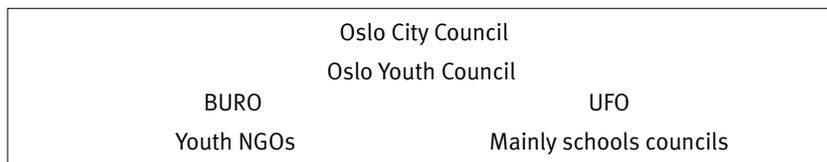
In Oslo, some members of the international review team met with the Oslo Youth Council, which represents some 49 youth NGOs but only one from a minority youth organisation, since the rules that govern regional and national youth council specify that only organisations with open access, democratic structures and (in Oslo) over 100 members can be represented. On the latter point, the Oslo City Council rules require that a youth organisation must have over 100 members to be eligible for additional financial support.¹⁴

14. And it is very generous support once this threshold has been reached: for each member paying 50 NOK, a grant of a further 750 NOK is available. No strings are attached to this funding and there was, in the past, some scandal about the registration of phantom members in order to draw down this additional funding. No faking is now possible, allegedly; each member is registered by name and date of birth, but the 100 rule still applies.



The international review team was very interested in these eligibility rules for both membership of the Youth Council and access to funding. We were told that it continues to be a matter for debate. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has applied different rules for supporting small local organisations of minority ethnic youth, but these have not (yet?) been extended to regional and national levels. It was noted that there are adult organisations for ethnic minorities but, of course, young people do not always want to be members of these. There are a number of contradictory issues impinging on this debate but the fundamental point is that minority ethnic youth organisations can be neither exclusive nor small if they wish to access state funding. The one minority ethnic youth organisation that does receive funding support from the ministry – African Youth – does so on the grounds that young people from more than one country are eligible for membership. Further debate is clearly needed on the balance to be struck between an exclusive position which may be important for culture and identity and the traditional criteria concerned with democracy and integration.

Unlike the two separate youth councils in Nordland, the Oslo Youth Council is an amalgamation of both processes. Each of Oslo’s township (municipal) youth councils sends two representatives (elected through schools) (UFO) and then there are also the representatives of the youth NGOs (BURO) – this constitutes the Oslo Youth Council (see below).



The Oslo Youth Council represents youth interests and issues to the City Council and its views are usually positively received. One recent example was the lobby for funding for sexual health information and clinics. Members of the Oslo Youth Council are, indeed, often skilled lobbyists, as a result of their prior experience with specific youth NGOs. They work constructively and collaboratively with the City Council to develop appropriate support and provision for young people.

Oslo Youth Council is one of 13 county-level youth councils, nine of which are functioning and four of which are currently dormant. In six counties they do not exist. This information took the international review team somewhat by surprise, given the paramount emphasis placed on youth participation and the importance of youth organisations. There was no particular reason, apparently, why half of the counties in Norway had dormant or non-existent youth councils; it was simply a case, we were told, of the energy and activity of youth organisations in those areas, and of the ways in which municipalities have communicated and co-operated with youth organisations in those counties.

Fauske, the municipality visited by the international review team, has had a youth council supported by municipal funding for the past two years. It has representation from schools (through pupil councils) and youth groups (through the boards of youth NGOs) and is about participation and influence, a voice, a right to speak. In Fauske there are some 43 children and youth voluntary organisations (not sports) with 300-400 members, out of a total primary and secondary school population of around 1200. There are nine members of the Youth Council. Its activities are to



-----> represent the views of young people and to advocate for their needs. It argued recently for turning a local café into a youth café (which, unfortunately, went bankrupt!) and has regular meetings with the municipal council to discuss issues and develop (environmental and cultural) projects. The Youth Council promotes its work in schools through scenario workshops in order to identify a “Top 10” of desired projects for young people. The Youth Council, it was argued, is part of a two-way process – “young people understanding the [municipal] Council, the Council understanding young people”. It serves to build democracy – “through young people’s greater understanding of society and through their acquisition of relevant skills, such as committee work and publicity”. It was also suggested, however, that municipal support for the Youth Council and for its member organisations played a significant role in preventing problems caused by young people through encouraging and making provision for the constructive use of leisure time. Not that the work of youth organisations was explicitly about prevention; it is about the development of personal, social and cultural skills, through providing opportunities that most parents would want for their kids. Youth organisations in Fauske were about open access, self-determination and inclusion, but they also connected with organised workshops on key issues of concern to young people, such as health and culture. The Fauske Youth Council was not able to say whether some groups of young people failed to engage with these opportunities and this work; it was up to individual young people whether or not they chose to take part.

The international review team acknowledged the importance of youth organisations within the fabric of youth policy in particular and Norwegian society more generally. It was concerned, however, to learn that intermediate, county structures seemed often to have broken down. It was more concerned about the absence of concrete information on the types of young people who participated in these structures and whether or not some groups of young people were, perhaps literally, left out in the cold. Speculatively, the international review team felt that perhaps there was a mainstream youth policy in Norway for ‘mainstream’ young people, within which traditional participatory practice through youth organisations remained at the heart, while more marginal and marginalised young people were subject to quite separate provision and attention through the child welfare services. Such speculation clearly merited further scrutiny and interrogation.





Dimensions of youth policy

Thus far, this report has addressed the context and structures within which and through which youth policy, broadly conceived, is developed and delivered. What follows considers more discrete domains of youth policy and the cross cutting 'issues' which underpin youth policy. It is a way of slicing the youth policy cake in a different direction. Inevitably, some points within these domains and issues have already been discussed and they will not be repeated.



Key domains of youth policy

Education, training and employment

The National Report (paragraph 4.2, pp. 35-37) describes the structure and development of schooling and formal education in Norway. It points to the overarching political goal to ensure an equal right to education and draws attention to the increasing participation in post-compulsory education: "in 1970, 7.3 % of the population over the age of 16 had completed a university or college education, compared with as many as 21.9% in 2001" (National Report, p. 35). The National Report elaborates on the broader goals of Norwegian education, provides the rationale for the reforms which took place during the 1990s (to provide greater coherence in progression and in links with training and employment), and explains why targeted differentiation is necessary for specific groups and those with special needs if the principle of integration is to be achieved. The follow-up service is described in some detail, as are the provisions for parental participation and pupil democracy.

As a result of their new statutory right to upper secondary education and increased participation in higher education, young people enter the labour market later than they did before. Nevertheless, many young people have part-time work and therefore some contact with the labour market. The National Report (paragraph 4.5, pp. 45-50) discusses young people in Norway in relation to work and unemployment. Young people who are in work (some two-thirds of 20- to 24-year-olds) often have worse organisational and physical conditions than adult employees, despite the Working Environment Act, of which few employers seem to be aware. Long-term unemployment amongst 16- to 19-year-olds is relatively low, owing to statutory educational provision, the county follow-up service and the youth guarantee, which ensures an offer of labour market programmes for young people who do not have a place in the educational system or an offer of work. A higher proportion of the unemployed are in the 20-24 age group (in 2001, about 4.6% of the total labour force). Labour market training courses and short-term vocational courses are available to this group. The National Report argues that unemployed young adults are

relatively easy to place in the labour market and therefore that long-term unemployed young people often have other difficulties in their lives, to do with, for example, drug and alcohol misuse or housing problems. They may well be in receipt of welfare benefits. The government is currently supporting measures by which municipalities can provide more coherent approaches to activating long-term recipients of welfare benefits, and has taken the lead by providing guidelines for working with young people who are clients of both the Labour Market Authority and the social welfare office (see National Report, p. 48). Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds often face more difficulties in the labour market, for a range of reasons and special educational, counselling and labour market programmes have been tailored to their needs. The same applies for young people with disabilities and other special needs. Indeed, according to Report No. 39 (2001-02), the government will continue to give priority to young people with a special need for assistance. Such measures command considerable resources, “but it is crucial for success in working with young people who have problems finding a foothold on the labour market” (National Report, p. 50). Inter-agency co-operation and ensuring that young people receive appropriate offers of work, training or education will be pivotal to this endeavour.

The international review team acknowledged that Norway displays enormous commitment both to a lifelong learning agenda and to the activation of all young people in the labour market. Educational reforms have strengthened the possibilities of participation in post-compulsory learning. The competence reforms broaden eligibility for both further education and the securing of positions in the labour market commensurate with skills, qualifications and experience. The follow-up service for 16- to 19-year-olds, and the youth guarantee for 20- to 24-year-olds, both seek to ensure that no young people fall through the gaps. Special measures for the long-term unemployed, for minority ethnic young people and for young people with special needs seek to strengthen their participation in education and competitiveness in the labour market. There is, indeed, a robust political aspiration that no young people under the age of 25 should find themselves outside of education, training and employment and that all should be engaged in some combination of purposeful activity through both learning and employment. Two issues, however, exercised the mind of the international review team. First, there was the relationship between educational participation and achievement, and labour market opportunities – something to which Norway is now giving some attention. Secondly, there was an unanswered (and perhaps unnecessary) question as to whether there might be a hidden population of young people outside of education, training or employment.¹ The international review team was informed that state budget discussions in 2004 are likely to focus strongly on the effectiveness of state measures to address youth unemployment.

1. During the 1980s the UK also theoretically had a “guarantee” of training for 16- and 17-year-olds who were neither in employment nor in education. The UK government denied the existence of any “missing” or “disappeared” population of young people in this age group outside of education, training or employment. In 1994, however, research (Istance et al., 1994) confirmed the existence of this group, which was subsequently described as “not a residual policy problem but a significant policy challenge” (House of Commons Education Committee 1998). Further attention to this group of what came to be called “NEET” young people – those Not in Employment, Education or Training – and confirmation of the scale of the challenge led to the establishment of a new “youth support service” – Connexions – in England. Connexions is depicted as a universal service differentiated according to need and has changed the shape and focus of youth policy in England (other constituent parts of the UK do things slightly differently).



Youth work and non-formal education

Paradoxically, despite the place of youth organisations in the legend and reality of youth policy, the international review team did not hear so much about the practice of youth work and non-formal education. To some extent this was because it was subsumed within the concept of participation, especially through youth organisations and youth councils, but it was also because it seemed to be taken for granted. Somehow it just happened! In our discussion of the National Report with government officials, we asked – once more – our question about how the implementation of policy at the municipal level could be ensured. The answer was that some areas of youth policy (such as education and, indeed, music and arts) has legislative backing, but some, including youth work, does not; and it was the latter, non-regulated domains of youth policy, in which the international review team was particularly interested. Once more, we were told that these were matters for municipal autonomy and discretion. The government might collect statistical information that might indicate who is falling behind, but there was little it could do about it – there was no “stick”.² There had, indeed, been recent press coverage about the threats to youth clubs in some municipalities, but at times of budgetary pressures, it was inevitable that municipalities would cut back on those areas which are not regulated by law. The rhetorical question was posed: should the state require all municipalities to have a youth club? It was rhetorical because such a question touches the nerve-centre of how Norway is run! There is in fact a long history of providing meeting places (youth clubs and youth premises) for young people; this is described in the National Report (paragraph 5.2, pp. 61-64). Today, there are around 1000 youth clubs in Norway, most of which are run by municipal authorities; surveys show that a large proportion of young people attend youth clubs in the municipalities where they exist. Report No. 39 (2001-02) does emphasise the importance of more municipalities giving greater priority to this area: “meeting places that are open to all, where no-one is excluded on the grounds of their ability or financial situation, also reach children and young people who participate in few other organised activities in their leisure time”. (National Report, p. 63)

The international review team did visit three youth centres in Oslo which provided some flavour of provision available, although this raised rather more questions than answers. The X-Ray Youth Centre was established in 1994, following a demand by local young people for space to develop their own ideas and talent. Youth workers talked to local politicians from the township (municipality) council who took the case forward and secured the necessary funding. The old factory building acquired was converted by local young people under supervision through a government youth employment programme. Today there is much more provision for dance and music but initially the activities in the centre drew heavily on the strong street culture of the area:

- non-fighting generation group (ex-gang members advocating non-violence).
Use of street radio;

2. The international review team, like its predecessors in earlier reviews, was especially interested in how local compliance with national aspirations for youth policy (but those without regulation or legislative backing) might be secured. It drew some international contrasts (though by no means any model of effective practice!): the UK and its “big stick” (the threat of private consultants taking over!); Germany placing increasing expectations on the Lander but no more resources; Sweden with massive unevenness in local provision despite the availability of resources; the impenetrability of Spain’s autonomous regions, and the sheer absence of local capacity in Romania. There is no blueprint – but there is an overarching question as to whether policy actually reaches those towards whom it is directed.



- dancing youth (derived from street dance, now quite renowned; has received a national prize for crime prevention – not mainstream but semi-professional these days);
- (until 1998) a small group of Arab musicians;
- a table tennis club.

Since those early days there has been considerable development and the project has tapped into a range of funding sources. The centre now attracts young people from a wide area. Each group of young people using the building has a leader who becomes a member of the house board. Meetings of the house board consider views about the use of the building and how its activities should be promoted. Group leaders have full involvement in the running of the house; they have their own keys and swipe cards for access to and within the building, and are responsible for liaising with others about use of the building. They also take responsibility for rule compliance and enforcement within their group. Rules cover issues such as vandalism, theft, discrimination, weapons and drugs. Each group signs a three-page contract which, if breached by anyone in a group, leads to the exclusion of the whole group, although it can re-apply to use the building. Group leaders and a substitute are trained so that they understand the philosophy and practice of the project, within which collaboration between different groups is central – X-Ray wants different groups working with each other.

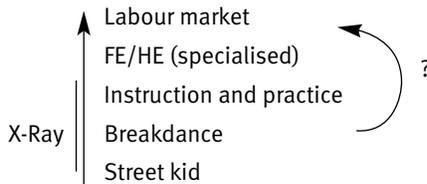
The X-Ray Centre has a co-ordinator and three advisers – for music, technology and culture – but the different user groups have “full control of their own identity and ideas”. By and large they have fulfilled their responsibilities and respected the building; as one of the advisers commented, “we believe in them and trust them, and vice versa, it is a safe environment”. The staff conceded that X-Ray is a “fairly unique place”, although they pointed out that the concept of self-ruled activity places for young people is well established in Norway. The staff have tried to keep the project non-commercial, maintaining that they are a counterbalance to those projects which have become preoccupied with products and talent. At X-Ray, they maintained, young people can do what they want to do, whatever level of talent they possess (and of course, sometimes, real talent emerges in that process). The centre does run courses to improve skill and talent but it is reluctant to consider providing accredited certification: “the young people here don’t get on well in the school system”. The staff clearly saw the project more in terms of youth work for more disadvantaged young people than as specialist arts provision. They asserted that they were first and foremost a social project, reaching out to young people with social problems and trying to help them to stay “on the right side of the tracks”. They supported young people in re-engaging with formal education and worked with follow-up service counsellors in developing individualised programmes for drop-out kids.³ Perhaps the centre itself, like the surrounding neighbourhood, had become more gentrified and it was dealing with fewer problem kids than in the past, but the staff were adamant that the balance was still around 50/50: there were still as many rappers as rock musicians! However, young people who became regular participants at the centre usually made “rapid progress and achievement – to their surprise as much as anyone else”. The example was cited of the current break-dancing group, which started as a group of bad street kids from Moroccan, Turkish and Nigerian backgrounds. The group was developed through a programme con-

3. The follow-up service, which is a county responsibility throughout the rest of Norway, is a township (municipal) responsibility in Oslo.



cerned with youth into working life (cf. Migration and Working Life) and X-Ray has supported participants in moving into specialised further and higher education around performance.

The international review team was most impressed with the X-Ray Centre and with the way the staff spoke naturally about its educative and developmental provision. This was youth work at its best, and there was no forced use of terms such as participation or democracy. Yet it was highly participatory and democratic. There was some concern, however, about it being, as the staff themselves admitted, “a fairly unique place”, although we were informed that three other inner-city areas also have “reasonable” youth centres. The X-Ray Centre had struck a skilful balance between youth work and talent spotting, and between its social mission and its specialist provision. The international review team had two immediate questions. First, why was there such resistance to commercialism: such a centre seemed to be well-placed to benefit from and exploit sources of private sector funding. Perhaps this is contrary to the spirit in which youth work in Norway takes place, but elsewhere it is the only way to maintain such provision. Secondly, how might such provision dovetail into the competence reforms; if there was a location within which the competencies acquired through non-formal learning might be validated and accredited, this was it. A pilot project to this end might be worthwhile, despite the reservations of the staff about becoming “too much like school”. It would be an option for young people, not a requirement, but the example of the breakdancers demonstrates how X-Ray might contribute to the learning and development pathways of young people towards the labour market:



The Riverside Youth Activities Centre, an Internet Café in Grunland, caters for 16-20 year olds. Riverside does not provide for young people of compulsory school age; there is a drop-in centre for 12-16 year olds just up the road. It was described as “the place to be”. The centre has been running for two and a half years and has eight staff plus a number of civil volunteers (those doing community based work as an alternative to military service). To date it has had 4339 registered users, averaging 150 a day in 2003. Nine out of 10 of its users are minority ethnic youth with Somali, Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds, largely because of its geographical location. During the day, the main aim of the centre is to “connect with those who don’t go to school”. Young people who attend the centre register; there are two follow-up service social workers based at the centre who work flexible hours and support young people with education, jobs and living. The centre also hosts a youth unemployment scheme, recycling computers and doing website design. In the evenings, it transmutes into a modern Internet café (it is a converted nightclub), with large numbers of young people queuing up to get on the machines.

Youth against Violence is a drop-in youth project providing advice, activities and guidance. It works closely with the police and, as its name implies, is primarily concerned with combating violence by and amongst young people. It is not a



campaigning organisation but very activity-focused, offering the possibility of learning self-defence, dancing and football. Homework support is also provided. Youth against Violence has four overall aims:

- reconciliation;
- the education of mediators (for schools);
- supporting young people in leaving gangs and connecting them to new values;
- working with parents and the police in supporting young people.

The project targets young people who lack confidence and who may easily succumb to negative peer group influence. It works with a lot of girls and is particularly concerned with tackling the development of girl gangs. Staff do streetwork into the night and sometimes take young people back home. There is a 24-hour phone line and interventions are often made as a result of confidential tip-offs. The project works with young people across a broad age range; there is no specified age target.

The National Federation of Youth Clubs is the umbrella body for youth clubs and projects. Although it represents the interests of such clubs and projects, it has recently tried to become a training organisation and to develop courses for youth workers. It has attempted to sell these to municipalities, largely without success, because they have been considered to be too expensive.

The international review team recognised the importance and value of the youth centres and projects it visited – across a spectrum from development to support, and across issues from culture to violence. It was therefore some surprise, given the massive resources invested in such provision, to discover that there was very limited professional training for those who worked in this field.⁴

Leisure and culture (and the media)

The national report (paragraph 4.7, pp. 52-59) maintains that young people lead an active life in their leisure time: “on the whole, children and young people are more active users of cultural facilities than other age groups, both as audiences and as performers” (National Report, p. 53). Sports organisations, in which young people are particularly active, have the largest number of participants of all voluntary organisations in Norway. On the basis of reports No. 27 and No. 44 (both concerned with central government’s relationship to voluntary organisations), special grants schemes were established in 2000 for voluntary child and youth work in the fields of sport and culture. In 2002, some 86 million Norwegian kroner from the state lottery (Norsk Tipping) was allocated to sports; all voluntary, membership-based sports clubs that run activities for children and young people are eligible for funding. For culture, around 71 million Norwegian kroner was made available in 2002 to the Voluntary Fund, which is jointly held by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, and administered by LNU (the Norwegian Youth Council), the Council for Music Organisations in Norway,

4. The national report (p. 53) does note that “quality of youth clubs varies”. As part of the effort to improve municipalities’ competence in the youth club sector, the National Youth and Leisure Association has published a guide for work in youth clubs with the support of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. The national report also states that “training and education in the youth club sector should be improved”. The government has apparently undertaken to “encourage human resource development in this area” (National Report, p. 53).



and the Norwegian Amateur Theatre Council. Additional resources from the lottery are to be made available to the Voluntary Fund.

Children and young people are key target groups for central government policy on sports; sports, physical activity and outdoor recreation “provide fertile ground for sound attitudes and purposeful engagement” (National Report, p. 55). Over four-fifths of young people under 15 do some form of exercise once a week and three-fifths take part in sports through sports clubs. The corresponding figure for 16- to 19-year-olds, however, is 30-40%, reflecting a significant decrease in sporting participation as young people get older.⁵ For many reasons, the government remains committed to encouraging children, young people and their families to take part in outdoor recreation.

Children and young people are also now a “priority target group for most art and cultural institutions, and the availability of artistic and cultural programmes in schools has increased” (National Report, p. 56). Report No. 40 (1992-93) advocated joint programmes of art, culture and music for children and young people, and in 1997 municipalities were required by law to establish music schools, although most had already done so. By 2001, all but three municipalities had such provision, either individually or jointly with other municipalities. Libraries, museums, art exhibitions, theatre and musical performances are all attentive to ensuring appropriate access for children and young people.

The Norwegian Government is responsible for a media policy that safeguards freedom of expression, diversity and quality. New forms of media and communications have great potential and “has led to new and increased possibilities of obtaining information and building expertise” (National Report, p. 58). Young people are at the vanguard of making constructive use of such opportunities⁶ but there are also risks entailed. Norway is alert to the negative aspects of, for example, the Internet and the government is involved, both directly and through international co-operation, in preventing access to unlawful and harmful material. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has developed a plan (Barn, unge og Internett – Children, Young People and the Internet) designed to ensure safer use of the Internet.

This framework for leisure and cultural policy was strongly in evidence during the visit of the international review team to the county of Nordland. Outdoor recreation was being promoted through an initiative called “Out is in”, which was described as an opportunity for the “opening of the senses”. Cultural activities took place through the Barents Chamber Orchestra and the Nordland Arts and Film School. There were library projects for children and young people, including a writing “cottage” and the Barents literature camp. Volunteer scene instructors supported young people in broadening the contents of their “cultural rucksack”. Nordland also had an annual event of cultural activities, described as a “regional cultural mustering”.

5. Recent research in the UK indicates that some 70% of 16-year-olds give up physical activity forever once they leave school.

6. In Prague in 1999, at Students' Forum 2000, a group of young people suggested that learning futures would revolve around a concept they presented as “Freud in a human envelope”. With the proliferation of information from multiple sources, young people would need support and guidance in learning how to find, retrieve, evaluate, use and defend such material.



The international review team saw parallels here with the work of the X-Ray Youth Centre and the apparent crossover between youth work and cultural activity. It raised the same question as to whether such practice was about the pursuit of excellence and achievement or about promoting more universal access and opportunity. The response in Nordland was that “we attract young people with motivation and encourage them to stick at their interests, whatever their level of talent”. It was further noted that in all municipalities there are music schools, which are now called cultural schools “where you can do whatever”. There was a very broad range of opportunities, from chamber orchestras to the Border Rock Festival with Finland and Russia which had been established through Barents Sea Regional Co-operation.

In the municipality of Fauske, the international review team heard little in detail about leisure and cultural opportunities for young people, but attention was drawn to the 188 voluntary organisations that do cultural work and to the fact that physical activity and recreation was strongly encouraged. Indeed, in discussion of the work of youth organisations in Fauske, emphasis was placed on the importance of cultural competence – from going to the cinema to making music and engaging in sports. Cultural politics in Norway, the international review team was told, is both about consumption and production: “this symbiosis is very important”.

Health

Involvement in sport and physical activity is clearly an important aspect of leading healthy lifestyles. The national report opens its section on health and social conditions (paragraph 4.3, pp. 38-43) with the statement that “although young people in Norway are healthy on the whole, many young people are struggling with problems and diseases” (National Report, p. 38). Beyond those young people who suffer from chronic health problems or disabilities, surveys show that many children and young people “develop an unhealthy lifestyle during childhood and adolescence, such as unfortunate eating habits, inactivity, risk behaviour, smoking and drug and alcohol use” (National Report, p. 38). This is also evidence of increasing mental health problems amongst the young.⁷

Early in 2003, the government submitted a special report to the Storting on health policy, where issues concerning children and young people received considerable attention. It is recognised that the creation of a healthy environment for children and young people to grow up is the responsibility of many agencies and sectors. Curative and rehabilitative practice may be a job for specialist professionals, but health promoting and ill-health preventing measures require “co-operation between municipal agencies and services, between municipal and specialist health services, and between the public and voluntary sectors” (National Report, p. 38).

Many municipalities have established youth health clinics in recent years, for all young people, usually up to the age of 20, regardless of their place of education or work. Both these and school health services address the spectrum of health issues which may affect young people, and, beyond dealing with presenting problems, are designed to help “strengthen the self-confidence, personal care, responsibility and social skills of young people” (National Report, p. 39).

7. The main focus of health concerns in relation to young people tends to be on psychosocial issues, sexual health, and substance misuse, sometimes at the expense of mainstream general health issues to do with fatness and fitness. All four of these dimensions of health provide a useful framework for considering both the breadth and depth of health policies for young people.



The Norwegian government has put in place specific measures to address different health challenges and risks amongst young people: unwanted pregnancy and abortion, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, injuries resulting from accidents⁸ and violence, suicide amongst children and young people⁹, smoking, mental health problems, and eating disorders. These are outlined in the National Report.

Drug and alcohol issues are considered elsewhere in the National Report (paragraph 5.3, pp. 65-68) – within the chapter on safe, inclusive communities. The government recognises the need for greater efforts to combat substance misuse amongst young people, and stresses “the importance of establishing and maintaining attractive, substance-free meeting places and leisure activities under both municipal and private auspices to prevent an early debut and limit consumption” (National Report, p. 65). The national report outlines the prevalence of both alcohol and illegal drug use by young people in Norway, noting that “alcohol is still the most common substance, and the one that leads to the most injuries, accidents and violence, both within and outside the home” (National Report, p. 66). Of particular interest, given wider international evidence and debate, is the finding from Norwegian research that both consumption and intoxication was significantly higher amongst young people who had first been given alcohol at home by their parents: “giving alcohol to young people at an early stage to teach them to control their drinking is probably counter-productive” (National Report, p. 67). With regard to illegal substance misuse, the National Report advocates broad-based mobilisation if efforts to deter or reduce usage are to succeed, especially as many young people are likely to encounter drugs and alcohol, and young people need to be given the tools to deal with this reality. Youth-to-youth information is considered to be an important educative practice, as is ensuring an honest debate about these realities,¹⁰ while the authorities should “take a clear stand against substance misuse” (National Report, p. 67). The most significant influences on alcohol consumption are price and availability and the National Report recognises that the unpopular measures of high prices and limiting availability¹¹ need to be continued. Indeed, this section of the National Report concludes that “the main challenge for the future is to maintain a restrictive alcohol and drugs policy”.

8. Accidental injuries remain the most common cause of death amongst children and young people in Norway (cf National Report, p. 32).

9. Suicide has become the most common cause of death among boys and young men in Norway (cf National Report, p. 33). There is also a particularly high attempted suicide rate among young gay men and lesbians. Report No. 25 (2000-01) on the living conditions and quality of life for lesbians and homosexuals in Norway proposed specific measures to address their particular needs. There had already been an action plan (produced 1999) to combat suicide and a follow-up project was established to consolidate expertise and practice.

10. It is interesting that a commitment to peer education sits closely with the advocacy of an honest debate about drug use by young people. There is, in fact, very little evidence of the efficacy of peer education in changing young people’s behaviour, though it may contribute significant to raising awareness of the issues and it certainly is a valuable mechanism for the personal development of the peer educators themselves. On the other hand, an ‘honest’ debate, allowing young people to express their perspectives on these issues and also providing the facts that square with the real experience of young people (rather than peddling an “out of touch” moralistic line, like “Just Say No”), does assist young people in managing the pressures around substance misuse. This ‘harm reduction’ approach worked well in Wales through a set of visual triggers for 10- to 13-year-olds called “Let’s Talk” (using a range of scenarios children might well experience where various legal and illegal substances might be circulating) and through a video series called “Know Your Poison”, which offered a grounded understanding of the uses and misuses of illegal drugs.

11. As the National Report recognises, this is the conclusion of cross-national research; see Edwards, G., Anderson, P. and Babor, F. (eds) (1995), *Alcohol and Public Policy: evidence and issues*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



The international review team had two opportunities to explore health policy in relation to young people in Norway. The municipality of Fauske had established a family centre, which was one of six (three in the north, three in the south) in a national project funded by the Ministry of Health and evaluated by the University of Tromsø. The project is now half way through its pilot three years and is based on an innovative multi-agency approach in the delivery of five core programmes by multi-disciplinary teams. The family centre seeks to ensure early intervention on mental health, psycho-social and psychiatric problems. The analysis by the project leader in Fauske was “so far, so good”. There is much closer co-operation between professionals. Although there are no more staff overall, the organisation of their work is very different from in the past. One multi-disciplinary team works with 0- to 6-year-olds, the other with 6- to 20-year-olds. There has been a synergy of resources both from the Ministry of Health and from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, and the family centre has established a range of new initiatives, including a psychiatric out-patients’ clinic in order to improve both competence and confidence in public health. It works on the philosophy that if it is to reach those most in need, it must develop services tailored to the needs of different groups. As a result, beyond its core programmes, it has developed initiatives such as parenting classes/courses for young parents, including some targeted specifically at immigrant mothers. (It was argued that the family centre provides a meeting point for immigrant mothers who, traditionally, have been very isolated for both cultural and religious reasons. Staff from the family centre provided transport and caught them; other professionals in Fauske commended this approach to social inclusion: “they are always the hardest to involve in anything because they are the last to learn the language”.) Participants in more mainstream parenting courses have been contacted through kindergartens.

The family centre had placed a great deal of emphasis on addressing the mental health problems of young people on account of a 1999 survey which revealed that many such disorders had hitherto been undiagnosed and unaddressed: depression, suicide and self-harm, bullying, aggressive behaviour, and eating disorders. Both the police and educationalists felt that early intervention by the family centre had benefited not only the individuals concerned but also the community at large.

There was little calibrated evidence of the nature of illegal drug use in Fauske; it was simply suggested that “drugs problems start about age 16 and become a major problem at 18+”. Alcohol use was at its most problematic amongst 14- to 16-year-olds who tended to consume 70% proof home-made liquor. Yet the ensuing discussion focused on a handful of hard drug users, with reference to the fact that methadone substitution is only available in Trondheim, which had led to some heavy-end drug users being taken to Denmark to get supertex, as this is not available in Norway. Heroin use, it was noted, remained an injecting activity; it was not smokeable heroin “as far as we know”. There was also some amphetamine use and “some girls with babies who use drugs”, but no further detail was forthcoming.

Teenage pregnancy was not considered to be a public issue in Fauske. The international review team was told that the rate had gone down, perhaps because of the free confidential advice and contraception that was now available through the Health Station. As part of the new health initiative, a health visitor now provided sex education sessions at the health station, which also provided a wider advice and counselling service. Boys as well as girls made use of these services.



The international review team was very interested in this municipal approach to health policy for young people. It was imaginative and developmental. There were, nevertheless, some unanswered questions. Above all, precisely because Fauske was part of a national pilot project, we presumed that its approach was certainly not typical of municipalities throughout Norway. At a more grounded level, we wondered how receptive individuals were to these new methods and approaches. (We were told, in relation to the parenting courses, that parents were learning to support each other and reassured that they are not alone with their concerns and difficulties; professionals were facilitating a process of self-help and mutual support, and user groups had welcomed this stronger partnership approach.) The international review team was also concerned about the apparent lack of specific knowledge of the types of drugs used by young people and their method of use; there appeared to be a general conflation of all kinds of illegal drug use – “from hash to heroin”. Nor was there a great deal of clarity about the pedagogical methods used in sex education or the “ages and stages” of advice provided, though this may have been insufficiently explored.

Healthy lifestyle policy

Some members of the international review team followed presentations and engaged in discussions with experts of the Health and Social Affairs Directorate and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Items were: alcohol consumption, drugs and substance abuse, eating disorders, teenage pregnancy and suicide.

The data were clearly presented and complete, comprehensive information provided. The international team, comparing the data with other European findings, found the objective of complete eradication of substance abuse in a certain way unrealistic; it would have been more logical to go for harm reduction and a conscious, responsible use of substances (for example, alcohol) instead. The concentration on the question of how often young people have been drunk looked also a bit limited to them; in other European countries this question would not provide a reliable answer to the possibly harmful effects of alcohol for example, because people might drink regularly without ever getting drunk. This concentration on drunkenness appeared as a cultural specificity (cp. NOVA study). When discussing reasons for suicide and eating disorders it also became apparent that some of the prevention and treatment were provided in a compartmentalised way: doctors, psychologists and social workers working on specific symptoms in a more or less isolated way, not in teams. This impression stood in contrast to the approach taken on teenage pregnancy, where the attitude presented was one of positive acceptance of sexuality and the body and hence the growing into a responsible, self-determined attitude to pregnancy and the right moment for it. The debate with four experts of the Health and Social Affairs Directorate proved very interesting and useful, because it was in itself an example of how to work on healthy lifestyle issues. Not all experts had known each other before and by meeting the experts’ team they became aware of what they are doing and how much it overlapped and required co-operation and synergy. This effect of functioning as a catalyst in a new environment can be often observed during the work of international review teams.



Family policy and child welfare

Child and youth welfare services were substantially overhauled during the 1990s and have more recently been subject to further reform and development, notably through Report No. 40 (2001-02). The national report (paragraph 4.4, pp. 43-45) discusses these developments.

The international review team initially based much of its reflection on Norway's youth policy on Report No. 39 (2001-02) which, quite explicitly and commendably, takes an opportunity-focused perspective on the conditions in which children and young people grow up and live in Norway. Only belatedly did the international review team realise that many of the problems and issues which beset young people and their communities – crime, drug misuse, social exclusion, parental separation and so on – are addressed elsewhere: in Report No. 40 (2001-02) on child and youth welfare. While the Council of Europe's thinking on youth policy has consistently advocated for a primarily opportunity-focused rather than problem-oriented youth policy, there is clearly a need for youth policy to target and respond to the problems both experienced and caused by young people – albeit preferably within a context of universalistic positive support. At first, the international review team was almost oblivious to the existence any problem-oriented focus in Norway, making the (false) assumption that somehow universal and participative opportunities had minimised the difficulties routinely experienced by young people in other countries to 'residual policy problems'.¹² Of course, effective 'opportunity-focused' policy does hold the promise of reducing the need for 'problem-oriented' intervention but rarely to a level that ceases to be a 'significant policy challenge'. The focus of Report No. 40, though clearly of a much smaller order of magnitude, is – we acknowledge – complimentary to that of Report No. 39 in the shaping and framing of youth policy in Norway.

The child welfare reforms of the 1990s strengthened legal protections for children and young people, placed greater emphasis on assistance and prevention, allowed for the development of private institutional provision, and gave renewed attention to research evidence and human resource development. The most important legal reform under the 1992 Child Welfare Act concerned the establishment of county social welfare boards (National Report, pp. 43-44). Greater inter-agency and interdisciplinary practice was developed at municipal level. After-care services, however, were accessible only up to the age of 20, although this was increased to 23 through an amendment to the act in 1998 (as the Minister for Children and Family Affairs had noted – see above). The most frequently used after-care measures are financial support, foster homes, institutions, personal support contacts and housing (National Report, p. 44). The national report makes the significant observation that "the child welfare system is not only an element of the welfare system but also an element of the official control system" (National Report, p. 44). Wherever possible it seeks to provide preventative assistance for children and families, but it also has legal powers to intervene and provide measures for children and young people outside the home.

Report No. 40 (2001-02) concludes that the child welfare system is facing some important challenges:

12. See note 19.

- intervention is still often too late to provide adequate assistance for children at risk;
- co-operation with other agencies and services is still not good enough;
- the legitimacy of the service in the eyes of the public is relatively low;
- there is too little political awareness and involvement in its work at municipal level.

Report No. 40 (2001-02) contains more than 70 proposals, across the spectrum from preventative work to legal intervention and framed around the development of evidence-based practice, professional expertise and inter-agency collaboration. From 1 January 2004, the central government will take over the responsibilities of the county child welfare authorities to meet these challenges and to ensure, in co-operation with municipalities, the delivery of a more consistent and equitable service.

The international review team heard little about the everyday work of child welfare services, except for some brief remarks and observations during a broader discussion with the department of Children and Youth Policy at central government level (see above), and a passing comment in the municipality of Fauske about social work with 18- to 24-year-olds. Its work was largely discussed, by implication, in the context of other questions to do with “troubled and troublesome” young people, notably in relation to youth crime and justice (see below).

Youth crime and justice

The international research evidence on young offenders demonstrates unequivocally that they are rarely “troublesome” but also “troubled”. Youth crime is routinely closely associated with other factors such as home backgrounds, under-achievement at school, psychosocial disorders, substance misuse and social and economic disadvantage. To hold young people accountable solely for their present offending behaviour fails to address these underlying factors, yet not to do so undermines public confidence that young people who commit crimes are being properly dealt with. Dealing with the needs of young offenders rests on the bridge between correctional services and children’s services. That threshold is determined significantly by the age of criminal responsibility, below which the latter prevail and above which the former is more prominent, although it does not mean that adult correctional practices immediately take over. In Norway, the age of criminal responsibility is 15.¹³ It is clear from the National Report (paragraph 5.4, pp. 68-72) that Norway does not believe that ‘punishment’ for those under the age of 15 is an appropriate response to their criminal or violent behaviour, yet at the same time such behaviour is giving increasing cause for concern. Children and young people involved in such activity “must be helped to stop their negative behaviour and

13. In England and Wales, the age of criminal responsibility is 10 – which horrifies many elsewhere in Europe. Yet it has allowed for legally sanctioned interventions across a broad spectrum of health and welfare, as well as justice issues. Reforms of the youth justice system since 1998 have transformed approaches to dealing with young offenders. The sole objective of the system is now the prevention of further offending and, since 1998, there has been more robust development of educational provision, mental health assessment and drugs treatment – but in the context of still holding young people accountable for their offending behaviour. Responses to youth crime are informed by the “three Rs” of youth justice: responsibility, restoration and re-integration. Responsibility is concerned with a proportionate criminal justice response to the offence committed. Restoration is about making good, ideally to the satisfaction of the victim. Re-integration is about renewing opportunity for young offenders in order to ensure conditions that maximise their chance of re-joining mainstream (legitimate) pathways to adulthood.



measures must be implemented quickly” (National Report, p. 68). Both Report No. 39 (2001-02) and Report No. 40 (2001-02) emphasise the need for greater inter-agency co-operation (“to nip a potential criminal career in the bud”), improved early intervention, strengthened follow-up services and more robust individual support. Report No. 40 (2001-02) stresses the importance of making a single agency at municipal level responsible for the co-ordination of response and provision. The national report suggests that “in most cases, it will be natural for the child welfare service to assume this responsibility, but municipalities must decide for themselves where such responsibility will lie” (National Report, p. 68).¹⁴

According to official statistics (which, in the area of crime in particular, are notoriously difficult to interpret), child and youth crime rates are low in Norway. There is, however, some indication that it is increasing, especially in some types of crime, and there is also some evidence of “a small group of seriously disturbed young people with extensive behavioural problems” (National Report, p. 69). The most serious crimes are related to theft, drugs and vandalism, and there appears to have been a marked increase in drug-related crime, and in violent crime and robbery, particularly by young people aged 15 to 20.

Prior to Report No. 40 (2001-02), the Storting had already received Report No. 17 (1999-2000), a cross-ministry action plan to combat child and youth crime, led by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. This five-year plan (2000-2004) is currently being implemented and is concerned with strengthened prevention and intervention, a focus on schools and leisure time, and the development of knowledge and research. The plan recognises the need for broad-based efforts, from general preventative provision to specific programmes, such as the Olweus anti-bullying programme¹⁵ (which has been made available to all municipalities) and new methods for working with children and young people with serious behavioural problems.¹⁶ The effectiveness of these and other methods in the Norwegian context are being monitored by the University of Oslo’s newly established Norwegian Centre for Studies of Behavioural Problems and Innovative Therapy. For young offenders aged 15 to 17 who have “not yet developed a permanent pattern of criminal behaviour”, a pilot “youth contract” has been established, under which an agreement is made between the young person and their parents, and the police and the municipality. Compliance ensures that there will be no further action from the judicial authorities.¹⁷ This pilot scheme is to be reviewed in 2004. The national report also draws attention to measures adopted by the Storting in spring 2003 “to

14. Contrast this respect of municipal autonomy with the current position in England and Wales, where it is now a statutory requirement for each municipality to establish an inter-agency Youth Offending Team (Yot). The work of Yots is governed by targets and practice delineated by a national Youth Justice Board (YJB), appointed by the government but working semi-autonomously.

15. Olweus, D. and Limber, S., (1999), Blueprints for violence prevention: Bullying Prevention Programme, University of Colorado: Institute of Behavioural Science. The international review team also heard about the 2002 manifesto against bullying which has been developed and adopted by schools in Norway. See “Key issues for youth policy – safety and protection” below.

16. These include Parent Management Training (PMT), Webster Stratton, and Multisystemic Therapy (MST), which have been tested in the USA with “very good results” (National Report, p. 60).

17. The youth contract is remarkably similar to what are known as referral orders in England and Wales. These were established in April 2002. First time offenders who plead guilty can be referred by the court to a referral panel. These consist of a member of the Youth Offending Team and two community panel members (local people, specially trained) who, in discussion with the victim of their representative, and with the young offender and their parents, work out an agreed programme of reparation, purposeful activity and personal development. Compliance means that the criminal record is scratched from the record after twelve months. Non-compliance (breach) leads to the young person returning to court for sentence. Early research evidence suggests that referral orders have been very successful and there are new proposals to extend their use beyond first time offenders.



ensure more appropriate follow-up of crimes committed by children and young people and improve co-operation between the official agencies involved” (National Report, p. 71). Through amendments to existing legislation, more binding requirements have been placed upon both the police and child welfare services to make sure that young people do not slip through the net.

The national ombudsman for children was supportive of such developments, though firmly within the context of children who offend being the victims of the failure of the family and the system to provide them with adequate support. He acknowledged that ways needed to be found to make children (young offenders) responsible for their actions but this had to be done through reconnecting them with services and opportunities that would improve their life chances. Indeed, it was parents who should largely be held responsible; the ombudsman noted that kindergarten workers could usually predict with some accuracy who was likely to get into trouble later in life, though they were often reluctant to say. He welcomed the fact that the police had powers to talk to parents as well as to the perpetrator. Parents could be required to participate in certain interventions through child welfare legislation, as part of preventative approaches, and this was “placing the correct responsibility where it belongs”. The ombudsman cited children who were known to have committed large numbers of misdemeanours, yet there had been no response. There needed to be a reaction, but one which was supportive, not punishment. In his view, the age of criminal responsibility across Europe should be 18; all children who committed crimes below that age were individual cases whom parents and the system had failed in one way or another.

In the municipality of Fauske, much of the debate was taken up with the problem of crime and anti-social behaviour. The police chief informed the international review team that Fauske had a new prison (meaning a new police station, with three modern holding cells), which was often used to hold young people overnight, especially on the weekends. He said that he and his 18 officers (10 of whom are on duty at any one time) are in touch with all the local young offenders and, whenever possible, sought to give these individuals another chance. Nevertheless, they also had a responsibility to deter criminal and anti-social behaviour. There was, after all, widespread community concern about such behaviour (14- to 16-year-olds caused much of the disturbance in the city centre, 20- to 25-year-olds committed most of the violence) and the municipality has worked together “to get rid of the problem”. The police had worked in partnership with the Night Ravens, volunteer adults (often parents) who patrol the streets in yellow jackets and keep a watchful eye on young people. The Night Ravens were the front line in counteracting drinking, drug taking and “trouble”. Their interventions were a mixture of control and concern – taking care of local young people but also making sure that they “behaved in the right way”

When it was necessary for the police to intervene, a number of options were available to them. If the issue was simply a case of too much drinking, the police chief said that usually young people would be taken home and the police would talk to the parents, though there was a possibility that the child welfare services would be informed. He said that because he knew most of the young people (and their parents) he did his best to “deal with things informally and constructively”. For more regular offenders, there would be a more formal discussion with the parents, alerting them to the consequences should further offending take place, and the child welfare services would certainly be notified. If offending behaviour was more serious and/or more persistent, the police would press charges. Less serious



offences would result in the perpetrator being fined by the police in Bodø¹⁸ (the county seat/capital). Young people might be “punished” further by a one-year delay in getting a driving licence, or they could be barred from certain jobs. For first-time “official” offenders, there were mediation panels. Young people might be required to do community work, or to be guided by specially trained individuals. Should young offenders go to court, they invariably received community sentences (no young person from Fauske had ever been committed to custody); very occasionally, suspended custodial sentences had been imposed, but these had never been breached.

The international review team also heard from Youth against Violence, a local youth organisation (see above) which worked closely with the police and families, offering a range of support, guidance and activities for young people associated with criminal and violent behaviour.

The Ministry of Justice reinforced the broad framework which informs dealing with young offenders in Norway, but provided the international review team with some different points of emphasis and areas of concern. There was, it was argued, a sometimes rather uneasy tension between the twin tracks of welfare and justice for 15- to 18-year-olds.¹⁹ Those younger than 15 are solely the responsibility of the child welfare service; although they may often be picked up by the police, they cannot be punished. Up to the age of 18, however, the needs and best interests of the child are paramount: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that has now been (recently) subsumed within the Human Rights Act overrides any national legislation. Norway, quite rightly, does not believe in locking up children, but for some time there has been a view amongst both politicians and the public that there needs to be a stronger focus on stopping offending by young people and that the most disadvantaged young people in Norway have not been given sufficient attention. The child welfare system (through the Child Welfare Act) can now take compulsory measures in some circumstances, which include serious and persistent offending. Young offenders are dealt with through an administrative system, by a panel headed by a judge. Within tight conditions, the panel can require children and young people to be taken into custodial care.

Most child welfare provision remains a municipal responsibility. All costs, bar away from home placements, are borne by the municipality and it was suggested that, despite the block grant made available to them by central government for these purposes, many municipalities cannot afford to make the full range of provision necessary for individual young people, leaving their needs unattended. Multisystemic Therapy (MST), for example, was prohibitively expensive in Oslo. That the current child welfare system was not working as effectively as it should was evidenced by the appearance of young people in the criminal justice system at the

18. At this point, the international review team was alerted to the distinction between the local police service, of which the Fauske police chief was the Lehnsman, and the national police service, who were represented in Bodø. To draw an analogy from the Wild West of the USA, this was the difference between the Sheriff and the Marshall.

19. There is no separate juvenile court for young offenders in Norway. Once young people are beyond the age of criminal responsibility (15), they enter the adult justice system. However, because they are still young people, considerable effort is made to retain attention to their welfare needs. Few young people aged 15 to 18 are in custody, never more than 10. The contrast with England and Wales, where just under 3 000 young people under the age of 18 are held within what is called the juvenile secure estate, is striking. (The juvenile secure estate consists of young offender institutions (run either privately or by the prison service), secure training centres for 12- to 14-year-olds (run under private contract), and local authority (municipality) secure children’s homes.)



age of 15. Many were usually already known to the child welfare system but had not been picked up as well as they should have been. Others had simply not been referred to the child welfare system (for example, by schools) because it is not considered to be effective. (The problems resulting from the small size of many municipalities can be compounded by the fact that “the social welfare worker is likely to be your neighbour”.) There is, further, it was alleged, a crisis of human resources in the child welfare system, despite the best intentions of the government to improve professional skills and practice. Child welfare work is low status in Norway and many professionals do not do it for long. What is more, child welfare workers are reputed to give up with the most difficult cases, who surface as homeless, drug users or offenders some years later. Stories of system failure abound: for example, of a young person who was too problematic for child welfare, too young for the criminal justice system and lost to the schools system. For, although early intervention and prevention is critical, young people who are too violent even for institutional provision can find themselves rejected from that. Indeed, the response in Geneva to Norway’s 1999 report on the UNCRC criticised Norway because it either reacted to young offenders aged 15+ as adults or it did not appear to react at all. There is clearly a strong case for more robust intervention across the age range from about 12 to 18 – one that ensures appropriate services actually reach this group.

A welcome development, arising from Report No. 40 (2001-02), is the emphasis on multi-agency practice and the recommendation that municipalities should designate a lead agency to co-ordinate appropriate responses to the offending behaviour of individual young people. It has not yet been decided whether or not this should be a requirement, and there is currently a big discussion about who is to be the decisive body for addressing the needs and issues of young offenders.

The Ministry of Justice remains concerned about the lack of clarity over who takes responsibility when the police apprehend a young offender for the nth time. This is at the heart of the current debate around youth justice, for there are clearly children and young people who are both in trouble and in need who are in serious risk of falling through the net.

In a somewhat perverse way, the problem lies with the age of criminal responsibility and it was mooted that there needs to be more exploration of “how things can be made more compulsory at an earlier age”. Currently, the containment and regulation of children under the age of 15 is very difficult; they can walk out and walk away, though invariably they will be detected and apprehended again. Such children very often come from homes which are considered to be poor functioning and there is little parental control over behaviour. Those who are in foster care are looked after by carers who are trained, but the contention was that the training they receive may well not be enough for the challenges they face. In all, the view was that Norway must not continue with a system that fails to serve such children well. These children and young people need multiple interventions, provided intensively at the right time, but municipalities simply do not have sufficient resources and therefore spread what they have too thinly. If one small municipality has just two or three very demanding young delinquents to provide for, they are unable to respond. It is a matter of economies of scale – the challenge could be dealt with so much better if resources were shared across clusters of municipalities. In that scenario, services could be taken to young people or young people could be taken to the services.

It was felt that child welfare services needed to become reactive to the criminal act, and not just to the life circumstances and needs of the child. Otherwise no-one



appeared to be addressing the offending behaviour and it should therefore not be surprising that some children and young people believe that this is the life they can lead. The contrast was drawn with the Netherlands, where the age of criminal responsibility is 12: “they can compel, we can’t”. Reference was also made to the fact that new areas of criminality – namely, some forms of drug distribution and the trafficking in human beings – were being supported by young people under the age of 15, precisely because they were immune from legal prosecution: “so they can do the dirty work”.

There is in fact legislative provision (from Criminal Justice Acts of 1953 and 1993) to impose custodial sentences on minors, but such provisions are never applied. Youth prisons, even for those over 15, have a “bad and sad history”. (Young offenders in custody are held in adult prisons but kept separate from adults.) The criminal courts are, quite rightly, very reluctant to commit young people to prison and it is very much an action of last resort, for remands and even more for sentence. Sentences are kept as short as possible and young offenders are expected to engage in programmes of development. ²⁰Serious young offenders are invariably also very troubled young people in need of help rather than punishment, although ironically the few custodial sentences that were imposed were based not so much on the offences committed as on background circumstances.²¹

Because of the apparent weaknesses of the child welfare system in dealing with young offenders, Norway has seen the recent emergence of a punishment lobby, despite all the evidence that retribution makes little difference to offending careers. But it does point to the need to strengthen the powers of the child welfare system. Indeed, new legislation requires the police to investigate offences committed by those under the age of 15 (before they could see no purpose in doing so) and to refer cases to the child welfare services for further action. Whether or not this will in fact strengthen preventative and curative intervention, as the government hopes, is somewhat debatable, given the many other discernible weaknesses in the system (outlined above).

Concerns and criticism of the efficacy of the child welfare system also derived from the far end of transition pathways. In Norway there are apparently growing numbers of young adults involved in crime and violence, misusing and abusing drugs and alcohol, and experiencing prolonged unemployment. The individuals concerned have a “massive concentration of problems” and clearly these issues are often inter-related: “they never get out of childhood and into a healthy adulthood”.

20. The international review team was told that “these people are at least being cared for, perhaps for the first time in their lives”. This is a legitimate point, but in England and Wales the Youth Justice Board has argued against short custodial sentences because they do more harm than good: they are disruptive to family and community links, but allow little time for the development of relevant programmes. Instead, robust community sentences should be made; to this end, the YJB introduced as part of a community supervision order an Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP), much to the chagrin of welfare professionals but one which appears to command credibility with the courts and the public, precisely because young offenders do not appear to have got off “lightly”. ISSP is considered to be an authentic alternative to custody.

21. These perspectives resonated strongly with a debate in the UK in the 1970s, in which the paramountcy of welfare led to the administrative incarceration of young people on account of need and with limited reference to offence. At the same time, the welfare needs of young offenders were often ill-served in the community. During the 1980s there was a punishment backlash, arguing for the restoration of offence criteria in sentencing decisions. Neither punishment nor treatment appeared to have much effect on the recurrence of offending – hence the new developments in youth justice towards the end of the 1990s, which focused strongly on regulating the activities of those at risk of offending or further offending (see also note 12).



The child welfare system must be held to account for this, in that it did not intervene early or effectively enough to prevent such negative outcomes for some of those young people who are the most disadvantaged in Norwegian society.

The Minister for Children and Family Affairs wholly acknowledged the tensions that currently prevailed between the criminal justice system and the child welfare system. Indeed, this was one area where there had been some dispute in the preparation of Report No. 39 (2001-02). The minister maintained that there were two possible points of departure in future policy development. There had been calls for more law and order but she herself favoured a more robust and intensive approach with child welfare practice. Young offenders under the age of 15 should be treated in a special way but not put into institutions. New provisions allowed the police to call an offender and their parents to the police station for a discussion and to inform them that they would be referred to the child welfare services. The child welfare services would evaluate what kinds and combinations of interventions are required, including consideration of whether the child needed to be removed from home. The minister was confident that such more robust and credible measures were in the process of development.

The international review team recognised the value of new developments in relation to young offenders over the age of 15 but remained unclear about methods for dealing with those who committed offences under the age of criminal responsibility. Despite some greater effort at co-ordination and collaboration between the police and the child welfare services, arrangements still appeared to be rather ad hoc and vulnerable to chance. We tended to agree with the ombudsman that welfare needs should be paramount, but still queried how appropriate, supportive, early intervention could be guaranteed, when young offenders still seemed, too often, to fall between two stools – between the responsibilities of the police and the criminal justice system, and those of the child welfare system. Nevertheless, the international review team concurred with the minister that new arrangements under which the child welfare system would be held more accountable for provision and practice in relation to those under 15 who offended should first be properly tested.

Housing

The national report (paragraph 4.6, pp. 51-52) describes past and current trends in young people moving from dependent to independent living, a process closely related to starting a family and entering the labour market. Few young people appear to have housing difficulties *per se*, though housing expenses for students can be a significant cause of their difficult financial situation, especially for those who live in large towns (National Report, p. 52). As the pressure on any housing market increases, it is the weakest groups who are the first to suffer. The Norwegian government has, however, been attentive to the housing needs of young and more disadvantaged people and the Norwegian State Housing Bank (Husbanken) provides grants and loans, and administers state housing benefit. These are key instruments for helping young people to establish their first home and to gain access to the housing market. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development has recently reorganised the Husbanken loan schemes to target them more towards young and disadvantaged people and less towards the general population (National Report, p. 52). Such developments have been welcomed by LNU, the Norwegian Youth Council; although the international review team was told that LNU had no direct involvement in government housing policy for young people.



The international review team was somewhat surprised at both the absence of any mention of homelessness and the relatively low profile of housing issues in the National Report. This may be appropriately pitched for Norway currently, but there is a suggestion in other international youth policy reviews (cf Spain and Luxembourg) that housing issues are increasingly at the forefront of the youth policy challenge. This relates in part to homelessness being one component of the impact of social exclusion (alongside crime, unemployment and so on) but more centrally to the affordability and availability of housing for young people (the two being, of course, related). The strategy adopted by Husbanken, through the provision of benefits and loans, is one to be welcomed in that it appears to have proved, so far, effective in meeting the housing needs of young people in Norway.

Social protection

The national report says little about the structure of social protection for young people, except in relation to labour market activation of long-term unemployed young people (National Report, p. 48). It is clearly the intention of youth policy in Norway that young people should not have the option of unemployment and receipt of welfare benefits and, instead, should receive state support only through purposeful engagement with labour market and training programmes.

The international review team did not address this issue.

National defence and military service

There is no specific reference in the National Report to compulsory military service in Norway, although the Riverside Youth Centre said that it drew a number of its volunteers from those who had chosen the civil alternative to military service.

This was also a domain of youth policy that was not pursued by the international review team.

Environmental planning

It was of some interest to the international review team that the first youth policy issue addressed in the National Report is “The interests and participation of young people in public planning” (paragraph 4.1, pp. 33-35). Elsewhere, this is rarely an issue that is considered within the orbit of youth policy, despite the fact that it is the immediate local environment that is the centre of most young people’s worlds, and that there is a new emphasis on the active participation of children and young people in community planning following not only the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda (see Chawla, 2002).

The national report describes how young people’s involvement in municipal and county planning processes has developed since the 1970s. At the end of the 1980s, national policy guidelines and amendments to the Planning and Building Act sent “a strong signal from central government that the conditions in which children and young people grow up must be on the agenda at all levels of the planning process” (National Report, p. 34). Municipalities must both nominate an official to act as a Children’s Representative and ensure the active participation of young people in the planning process, although there is still “a long way to go before all municipalities meet the requirements for active participation laid down in the national policy guidelines” (National Report, p. 34).



The international review team did not pursue this issue with either the central administration or in its dialogue with county and municipal officials. It does, however, recognise the importance of involving young people in shaping the physical, as well as social, environment in which they live. The model adopted by Norway, although self-admittedly only partially fulfilled, is one to be emulated elsewhere.

→ Key issues for youth policy in Norway

Participation and citizenship

Youth participation is an absolutely central feature of youth policy in Norway. The National Report dedicates a whole chapter (and almost one tenth of the whole report) to young people's participation and influence (Chapter 7, pp. 91-100). The international review team gathered evidence from all quarters and all levels of the widespread commitment to youth participation – and the ways in which such participative practice makes a contribution to the wider youth policy agenda, from promoting democracy, planning the local environment, to combating out-migration from rural areas. The promotion of youth participation secures three broad dividends:

- it complies with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- it provides a platform and opportunity for active citizenship;
- it makes for more effective policy and practice.

Through the youth organisations who met with the international review team, the reality of youth participation was powerfully in evidence. The financial commitment of the government to youth organisations, with few strings attached, also reflected this commitment.

Participation and co-management are key principles which underpin the work of the Council of Europe's Youth Directorate. It was therefore a pleasure to see such principles being applied so widely and so deeply in Norway. There were, however, some elements of disquiet, although these never verged on allegations, commonplace elsewhere, of tokenism. LNU, the Norwegian Youth Council, confirmed that it held a valued and valuable place in dialogue with the government on most aspects of youth policy development. Nonetheless, it was noted that "it is the government's view that ultimately prevails". Of more concern was the patchiness and unevenness of the implementation of participation aspirations and the structures for that participation. In planning processes, the National Report concedes that many municipalities have still not put into effect the recommendations for participation laid down in the national policy guidelines. Many county youth councils seem to be dormant or non-existent. Indeed, for a country with such a level of political and financial commitment to participation, gaps such as these came as some surprise to the international review team.

Combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion

In comparison with most other countries in Europe, Norway is both wealthy and inclusive. The idea of social exclusion is very different in Norway from the same idea applied to the United Kingdom, let alone some of the countries of central or



eastern Europe. School drop-out, for example, refers to those who fail to continue through upper secondary school, not those who have become excluded (or self-excluded) from education prior to the minimum school leaving age. Levels of substance misuse and criminality are relatively low compared to other countries. Nevertheless, the idea of social exclusion is not an absolute but a relative concept and therefore Norway faces its own specific challenges in addressing it and promoting social inclusion. It has risen to these challenges by sharpening its practices in, *inter alia*, education (through the follow-up service), health (through greater attention to psychosocial disorders and substance misuse), crime (through changes to the child welfare system), and housing (through the restructuring of the Husbanken). It has also sought to strengthen community-based leisure and cultural opportunities for young people, to ensure their inclusion as a preventative device against exclusion.

The international review team recognised that it needed to make some mental adjustments to its thinking before it was able to consider social inclusion strategies for young people in Norway. It faced a conundrum of opposite dimensions. On the one hand, it was told repeatedly about the great pathologies that were affecting young people in Norway when what it was witnessing more often was the vast majority of young people making comfortable and supported transitions to adulthood. On the other hand, it was told of the numerous government reports and action plans devised to address the problems and challenges of young people but then informed, sometimes almost simultaneously, that concrete practice had only partially been developed, since autonomous municipalities had autonomous discretion as to how they used resources. This second point was made particularly sharply in relation to the child welfare services that are responsible for making appropriate provision for young people with and in difficulties. These services were considered to be especially weak in their response to young offenders under the age of 15 (and therefore below the age of criminal responsibility). There have been, the international review team is at pains to note, some very recent changes to this system, not least the establishment of stronger links between the police and the child welfare services, the formation of 27 local teams to work across municipalities with the most difficult young people, and the taking over by central government of those child welfare responsibilities that were formerly discharged by the counties. It is to be hoped that these new provisions are sufficiently robust to realise the government's aspirations of strengthened preventative interventions, for many of the current problems caused and experienced by young adults in Norway are firmly attributed to past deficiencies in this system. If they do not prove to be effective in ensuring more timely and appropriate provision, they will not only fail another generation of Norwegian young people but are also likely to bring renewed calls for a more punishment-oriented approach to young people who are currently undermining, and sometimes almost ridiculing, the fabric of Norwegian society.

Youth information

There is not a great deal said in the National Report about youth information, but this issue figured prominently in various presentations to and discussions with the international review team. The national report (paragraph 3.3.13, pp. 31-32) does discuss media and communications and notes that "until 1992, Norwegian children and young people grew up with the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, which was in a monopoly position as regards radio and TV broadcasting" (National Report, p. 31).



Today, around 70% of children aged 9-15 have access to the Internet at home. Their access to information, as for most young people today, is extensive. Youth information services have proliferated, in parallel, as some kind of check and balance to the commercial pressures and images which now exert such influence on young people's beliefs and lives. Norway is no exception. At a national level, the National Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has been producing a magazine for young people two-four times a year, for 10 years; it has now established a website as part of Norway's compliance with Article 13 of the UNCRC – the right to information. The website provides accessible information which is regularly updated. It was developed following a survey which indicated that although information was out there, it was often hard to find and difficult to interpret. Ideas for the website were then developed and tested on a reference group; the webpage is directed at the 14 to 20 age group. Useful information is gathered from partners, namely, other government departments and official sources, and posted on the website. There is no advertising. The project had a high-profile launch in February 2003 and secured a lot of press coverage. In the first month, there were 16 000 unique visitors to the website, which was promoted through schools, libraries, youth clubs and youth magazines. During the summer of 2003 there were special extra features, such as summer jobs for 15- to 16-year-olds, and the site had a competition in order to discern a profile of its users (mainly 14- to 17-year-olds, split equally by gender). There are plans to establish an electronic letter box and discussion forum. Currently, the webpage covers 70 subjects (such as food, crime, advertising, work, and politics) and has a regular news update covering issues, opportunities and developments affecting young people in Norway. All issues are visible on the front page. There are links back to all the organisations which have provided the information. It was acknowledged that there is still considerable scope for development: information is current only available in the Norwegian language. Questions and answers are not encouraged although the service can respond to inquiries and a psychologist is available to advise on more personal issues.

This government-run webpage is overseen by a steering group of adults and youth leaders, and a reference group of young people. It faces a number of challenges, not least to strike a balance between being attractive to young people and being serious, accurate and balanced (after all, it is government information). The project also faced the challenge of resources and it was admitted that "we have done this on the cheap". The website did not have an autonomous budget and had to apply for funding each year. Another challenge was its reach: there are 350 000 14- to 20-year-olds in Norway and the website aims to attract 10 000 unique visitors every month. The final, related, challenge was its coverage. Some 95% of young people in Norway have access to the Internet, if not in the home, then through schools (all schools are wired up). But there is still the issue of ensuring access for those who, for example, do not speak Norwegian and for those with impaired sight. The website was considered to be part of a new approach to fomenting active citizenship and the planned discussion forum would encourage participation, the exchange of views and the sharing of support. Although still in its early days, the website has already been described by teachers as "just what we have been waiting for", on the grounds that it reaches young people as individuals, not as pupils. (We did not hear any perspectives from young people on this matter!)

If young people in the county of Nordland are in need of any "klarification" on issues of interest or concern to them, they can turn for advice and information to the question page of Nordland's youth information service (www.klara.klok.no). The strong rationale behind the development of this service was that many important decisions have to be taken by young people and they need good information



on which to base them. It was therefore important to have a range of relevant and useful information in one place. The service was currently working on a Sami project, to ensure that information was suitably pitched in relation to the needs of Sami young people in Nordland. The range of information provided is very broad, as are the themes raised by young people on the question page. Young people are guaranteed confidentiality, but both questions and answers are published. It was noted with some satisfaction that 40% of questions come from boys, which shows that the service has risen to the challenge of ensuring equal gender usage. The website receives some 70 questions a day, although in all there are some 1500 unique visitors daily, so most are passive users. The success of the service was attributed to its permanency and funding base (this project does have a discrete financial allocation). The project is guided by a professional forum which establishes the principles upon which the service should be developed, and a reference group of users in order to make sure that the information provided is the right thing and on the right track.

The Oslo Youth Information Centre is located in an Internet café in the city centre. It is one office (with a staff of two and a half) within a network of 22, and 50% of its users are minority youth. During the summer time, it doubles up as a tourist information office for young people. The main issues on which it provides advice and information are education, jobs, study abroad, leisure time, and housing. The centre has recently submitted an application to the ministry to fund a co-ordinator to ensure a “better spread of information and develop new projects”. It caters for an age range of 13 to 26 and, to date, has had some 22 000 visitors.

The international review team was fascinated by the burgeoning youth information services being developed in Norway. It detected a great deal of commitment to such developments but was concerned about what might be described as “the naïve enthusiasm of splendid isolation”. Lessons were not being learned from similar developments elsewhere and this put such projects at some risk. In particular, there was concern about the absence of any formally constituted ethics committee whose role was to oversee planned information for its balance, accuracy and fairness. The existence of such an ethics committee is both to protect young people and to protect those who are collating and communicating the information. It is, in effect, a legal safeguard. When this was raised with the National Office (BUFA), the response was that “we make our own decisions” and that there are three different editors for different areas of information; moreover, “95% of what is included is already government information”. In Nordland, the co-ordinator of the service there rather over-confidently likened himself to a newspaper editor: “I am the one who will hang”. He said that he was aware of the ethical issues involved, “but have done nothing about it ... if you are thinking small, you are acting small”.

There was also concern about the duplication of energy and effort, with apparently little or no reference to other similar initiatives. BUFA said that it did have some links with European-level youth information practice (Eurodesk and ERYICA), but the Nordland service had had no contact either with the National Office or with the Finnish Youth Agency (Alliansi) which might have been particularly helpful in relation to its Sami project. Once more, we were told almost dismissively, “we have done it in our own way”. The Nordland service has been developed through Barents Sea co-operation and saw itself as “complementary to other services ... BUFA is more for public information”. The co-ordinator in Nordland may in fact be right: we were informed subsequently that “klara



klok” has now become a national totem for youth information in Norway. One of the major difficulties for any youth information service is tailoring information appropriately for different groups of young people. Beyond the obvious differences such as age, gender and geography, there are many other more subtle differences such as ethnicity, culture, religion and background. Young people are a heterogeneous group who live in different modalities: youth information has to be interpreted to meet their needs and expectations, just as they will interpret what is provided according to their own culture and circumstance. To some extent, the Sami project in Nordland takes heed of these issues, as did the information service co-ordinator when he said the user reference group existed to ensure the provision of the right thing and to keep the service on the right track. Apart from these overarching observations, however, the international review team was not aware of any sensitivity to these important problematics in the dispensing of youth information.

It is one thing to provide youth information and a question and answer page, quite another to have suitable follow-up and back-up. BUFA does have a psychologist to advice on personal matters, but that seemed to be all. Further consideration needs to be given, in our view, to how youth information services can connect young people to concrete follow-up activity, support and provision. In short, what is the relationship between learning (through youth information) and doing (being able to act on what has been learned)? For example, if a young person was exploring questions of sexuality and gay rights, how could he or she then be pointed in the direction for further support and engagement, perhaps through a relevant youth organisation? BUFA said that it did provide information on legitimate organisations, but we remained unclear about what exactly was meant by that.

Finally, the international review team felt that much of the celebration of these information initiatives was technical rather than substantive. Visits to the sites or the centre are clearly one important measure, as is the sheer fact of setting up and sustaining the service, but we had no evidence of more qualitative measures of impact and outcomes. It is these, ultimately, that should justify the efforts that have patently been invested in such provision.

Multiculturalism and minorities

The national report (paragraph 3.3.9, pp. 28-29) states that Norway has always been a multicultural society, for besides the indigenous Sami and Norwegian peoples it has also had – for the past few centuries – national minorities such as Kvens, Forest Finns, Romani (Travellers), Jews and Roma (Gypsies). The composition of the population has further diversified in recent years as a result of immigration and from receiving refugees and asylum-seekers. The definition of the immigrant population is both first-generation immigrants with two foreign parents and those born in Norway of two foreign-born parents (the latter formerly termed ‘second-generation’ immigrants). Those adopted or born abroad of two Norwegian parents are also regarded as part of the immigrant population. In January 2001, some 84% of children and young people aged 0 to 18 had no immigrant background. Most children and young people with immigrant backgrounds live in Oslo and account for just over 40% of all children and young people in Oslo.

One of the government’s primary goals is to ensure equal opportunities but it is acknowledged that immigrants, national minorities and Sami people still experience discrimination, “even though it may differ in nature from one group to the next” (National Report, p. 72). In 2002, the government presented an action plan to



combat racism and discrimination,²² with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development responsible for co-ordinating its recommendations across public services and within local communities. Young people have a key part to play in the development of a culturally diverse Norway characterised by tolerance and freedom from racism and discrimination. Pupils in schools have been active in promoting ideas for raising awareness and youth organisations have been supported in combating racism and organising multicultural activities through the Ideas Bank (see above) and the Urban Youth Projects (National Report, p. 73).

The international review team gleaned a range of perspectives on the (different) position of Sami young people and young people from different national and ethnic minorities. It is a complex picture, which the international review team would not pretend to fully understand. It brings to bear many of the classic debates about integration, assimilation, acculturation, difference and so on – often in simultaneously contradictory ways. For example, it seemed that anyone could become Norwegian, irrespective of ethnic background, providing they subscribed to the core tenets of Norwegian society; on the other hand, there was an overt respect for cultural difference, providing they did not clash with some of those fundamental tenets. There appears to be an uneasy tension, one that is not readily exposed to forthright debate, and certainly not generally ready for humorous dissection.²³ Indeed, although Norway still has a relatively small minority ethnic population, these are issues that command extremely serious attention.

The national report (paragraph 4.5.5, pp. 49-50) discusses the position of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds in relation to the labour market. It notes that “most young people from ethnic minority backgrounds who have grown up in Norway, in the same way as ethnic Norwegians, are able to find work without experiencing any significant problems” (National Report, p. 49). It goes on to say, however, that they face greater problems in the labour market in that they do experience greater levels and duration of unemployment, and are over-represented in low-status occupations and in occupations not commensurate with their educational qualifications. This does suggest some processes of discrimination even against those who have grown up in Norway. However, a key factor in the inequalities experienced by (at least some) minority ethnic groups was consistently identified, both within the National Report and elsewhere, as the absence of Norwegian language skills. This places some groups, and women in particular, at a significant disadvantage. At the same time, there were arguments advanced, and questions asked, about the provision of mother tongue teaching for those whose first language was not Norwegian. There are, indeed, extra resources and subventions from the state to facilitate such provision, but the decision to implement it lies with the municipalities. This issue alone throws into relief many of the issues at play in the

22. There is currently no general rule of law in Norway prohibiting ethnic discrimination, though the government will present a draft bill to this end at the beginning of 2004 (Information on Norwegian Refugee and Immigration Policies, September 2002).

23. A Pakistani-Norwegian comedienne, Shabana Rehmam, is currently tackling the dual identities and wider issues about immigration, unsettling both host and immigrant communities. She has been criticised by Liberals (whom she calls halal hippies) for her insensitivity and has received death threats from young immigrants. She has posed both in traditional Pakistani clothes and naked with the Norwegian flag painted on her body – drawing attention to the fact that both identities are external to her and that she alone could choose what and who she wanted to be (see Comedian brings Islam to West, International Herald Tribune, 15/16 November 2003).



multicultural society debate – whether to support processes of becoming more “Norwegian” or whether to respect and support cultural difference.

In Fauske, the Family Centre’s work with immigrant young mothers appeared to reconcile this tension – through recognising and working within issues of cultural difference, the staff of the Family Centre also succeeded in bringing these young women more into the orbit of Fauske’s community life. Like many municipalities beyond Oslo, Fauske has a very small immigrant population (around 100 people) although it also accepts a small number of refugees and asylum seekers (some 20 per year). Few remain in Fauske if residence in Norway is granted; most return to Oslo. The background of the minority ethnic population is mixed. Most are Muslims – from Somalia, Kosovo and Serbia. In order to engage with them and establish their needs, Fauske has a separate municipal committee for immigrants, a platform for discussing immigrant issues with the mayor. These were described, in fact, as everyday problems, such as housing, safety outdoors, and summer jobs for young people (so that they can maintain contact with the local community during the school holidays). Although Fauske receives some resources from the state for refugee support, refugees and asylum seekers, like everyone else, are expected to work, maintain themselves and contribute to local community life. There appeared to be few distinctive issues concerning minority ethnic young people in Fauske. The police chief said that there had been no racially motivated attacks on minority ethnic groups, and that minority ethnic youth was generally not a problem. He did, however, have one problem of these young people stealing from shops, but sorted it out by informing the culprits of what is acceptable behaviour in Norway. There was also an undercurrent of tension around sexual prowess and jealousy: the police chief had to remind young men that the age of consent in Norway is 16, and he also registered that liaisons between black young men and local girls sometimes incited frustration amongst the local boys. By and large, though, the small minority ethnic population was well integrated, especially through their participation and skills in sports (football, karate, and wrestling), and they “lived amongst everyone else, not in a separate ghetto”.

This was the local perspective. At the national level, the international review team met with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development Supplementary Department of Immigration Policy. The department is responsible for immigration and refugees. There is new legislation governing its work: a Nationality Act has been passed, and there is a committee currently preparing a report for a new Immigration Act. The Directorate of Immigration is responsible for both the control of entry into Norway and for the integration of immigrants who are already settled in Norway (there is some debate as to whether or not these two functions should be separated). The department has a contact committee for immigrant authorities and a committee addressing anti-discrimination measures, especially in employment. There is a desire to bring issues of equality and (anti-)discrimination closer together.

There has been a significant increase in asylum-seekers in recent years, around 17 000 in 2002 and about the same number in 2003. Some seven in 10 are from central and eastern Europe, with the largest groups from elsewhere coming from Somalia and Iraq.²⁴ This is quite a lot for a small country. Around 30% are permitted

24. T In 2001, 14 782 people from 100 different countries applied for asylum in Norway. This was a 36% increase on the previous year, and has led to major reforms of asylum procedures based on a stronger differentiation with regard to the perceived validity of asylum claims (see Information on Norwegian Refugee and Immigration Policies, February 2002).



to stay in Norway, which is a high proportion and which, according to the department, is “causing problems”. Some go to municipalities, but municipalities can decide if they want to resettle refugees and asylum-seekers. Overall, municipalities have agreed to resettle about 5 000, but the total number in need of resettlement is over 6 000 – some therefore have to stay in reception centres.²⁵ There is an increasing number of unaccompanied children and young people who are asylum-seekers although the department was not aware of precise figures; there are special centres for individuals under the age of 15. The scale of asylum-seeking is a matter of particular political concern, and politicians want to lower the numbers, especially of unaccompanied minors. (Some unaccompanied minors claim to be younger than they are: they are checked by their teeth and X-rays and between one third and a half are in fact older than they state.)

There are many reasons why Norway is a favoured destination for both refugees/asylum seekers and immigrants, though the two predominant ones are because they are channelled here by humanitarian and international organisations, and for family reunification. However, as a result of these processes, Norway has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, starting with the first influx of Pakistanis during the 1970s. The department emphasised that Norway had always been a multi-cultural country because of its national minorities but that it was perceived from the outside, and indeed perceived itself, as a homogenous country. Personal contact with immigrants does help to break down xenophobia but it was conceded that many ethnic Norwegians still gave preference to other Norwegians because they were “familiar and their credentials are known”. Norway was, however, impressively tolerant on immigrant groups (“the humanitarian motives of Norway have never been in question”) and there was little evidence of a rise in racist and neo-Nazi activity, although the National Report (paragraph 5.5.1, pp. 74-75) notes that the government is attentive to this problem. The department did not really know how people felt about the scale of immigration, but argued that “where there is contact, people are getting more positive”.²⁶ Racism and intolerance, it was argued, had in fact diminished in the last few years, “probably because the younger generation are getting used to it”.

The international review team was reminded once again that the vast majority of immigrants in Norway live in Oslo. The immigrant population is around 25 000 and between a quarter and a third of schoolchildren are immigrants. There was ongoing debate about how the government should address the question of immigrants settled in Norway. Currently, policy was definitely not about assimilation but about integration, although the latter can of course mean many things. Some argued for supporting the retention of home cultures within the broader national laws; others advocate a stronger approach to immigrants becoming Norwegian. A white paper on integration is currently being drafted. Although immigrants are not forced to learn the Norwegian language, this is to be more forcefully encouraged in the future, through the provision of courses on Norwegian language education and on the social issues of Norway, in a language that immigrants can understand. The

25. In 2002, a total of 8 231 people were settled in municipalities in 2002, including 3 450 from reception centres (see UDI – The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration’s Annual Report 2002).

26. The head of the department of Integration makes the point firmly that, “History shows that immigrants have always enriched the communities they move to. Successful integration hinges on allowing those who come to Norway to use their abilities and skills as quickly as possible on what they came here for, to create a safe and dignified life” (UDI – The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration’s Annual Report, 2002, p. 18).



basis of this new measure is that it is important to learn Norwegian in order to take proper care of children (who, after all, will be learning in Norwegian schools), to improve employment opportunities and, therefore, to get permanent permission to stay. Those who drop out of this new provision will have to renew their permission to stay and it could jeopardise their applications for Norwegian citizenship.

The department was cautious in appraising levels of racism and discrimination against young people from ethnic minority groups. There was certainly some evidence (from the Centre against Ethnic Discrimination) of discrimination in employment and in the housing market. More interpersonal discrimination was, of course, much harder to gauge, but ethnic minority young people have reported discrimination around getting into restaurants and discos; and younger children in schools also report discrimination. The international review team was interested to know if there was any kind of hierarchy of immigrants/minorities in terms of discriminatory actions against them. The two major factors, we were told, were length of residence (presumably through language competence and being “more Norwegian”) and visible difference (notably skin colour). Discrimination against the Sami (see below), it was asserted, belongs more in the past. The main factor was definitely visible difference: a Croatian or Kosovan fits in more easily than a Somali. Refugees are more welcome, but harder to integrate (presumably because they come from countries where visible difference is more pronounced); around 750 come through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and “probably get through when they would not have done so had they been asylum-seekers”. Norway does have a policy to help people to return to their home countries if they want to, but few do, “which is not surprising if they have established themselves here in work, housing and schooling for their kids”. There are, admittedly, questions about why more do not go back when the political situation has changed.

The international review team wondered whether second generation immigrants in Norway had become more assertive about their ethnic identities, their roots and their rights – a pattern that was evident in some other countries. The department’s view was that it was, in fact, the opposite. The need to assert specific cultural identities was not held to be a big issue. Norway had engineered a meeting of the ways: for example, the acceptance of the turban in the military and similar respect for distinctive minority rights and traditions in other walks of life. Young immigrants appear to be very keen to stay in Norway, to the point where they resent their parents wearing strange clothes (traditional costume) “when they came to Norway wearing suits”. Even the more assertive minority ethnic youth organisations still look very Norwegian and appear proud to have the possibility of a dual identity.

As noted, the vast majority of immigrants in Norway are in Oslo. Oslo, however, has always been different from the rest of Norway and the department did not feel that its ethnic composition significantly exacerbated – for the worse – the sense of difference between the capital city and the rest of the country. The dispersal of immigrant groups had been largely for pragmatic reasons (the availability of housing and sharing the “burden”) rather than for social engineering. The quotas to municipalities are focused on the same ethnic group in order to build a small community with the same origins in a municipality – but many people, especially young people, still come back to Oslo. Yet such patterns of internal migration are not, it was argued, so different between young immigrants and young Norwegians.





The international review team was particularly interested in the question of the dispersal of immigrants throughout Norway, although many subsequently return to Oslo. Once again the cherished autonomy of municipalities comes to the fore, although there is clearly some undercurrent of debate about whether municipalities should be somehow compelled to take at least a minimum quota of refugees. The international review team does not have a view on this issue, but urges a robust debate on the matter.

There was also considerable interest in the great effort apparently made in Norway not to impose and compel immigrants to engage with Norwegian culture, beyond the overall rule of law. This was compared and contrasted starkly with the false tolerance of Germany which permitted activity by minority groups that would not be allowed within the mainstream society, and now in Germany there was a strong debate about imposing some overarching values. In France, there is the current decision to forbid the wearing of the veil by Muslim girls in schools, on the grounds that the secular state is firmly separated from religious mores. In Austria, there is also a big discussion about the extent to which immigrants should be expected to follow the cultural rules of a country if they wish to remain there. Perhaps, then, as the department accepted, Norway is a bit idealistic. Even the language courses that are to be established were represented as an opportunity, not a demand. When asked if Muslim women who stayed at home would be required to attend, the response was “I am sure they would not be forced ... it is more to give this chance to the men, so that they have the same possibilities as Norwegian men”.

The view that prejudice was differently extended to different ethnic minority groups largely on the basis of visible difference was received by the international review team with some level of scepticism. This may be the present explanation but the underlying reasons were almost certainly more complex. Experience elsewhere would suggest that prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory practices derived from deeper perceptions and assumptions. With the former, the smell of poverty was significant: host people did not mind immigrants with resources and skills but were more hostile towards those who were likely to make financial and service demands upon the state. With the latter, there are – not wholly unfounded – assumptions that certain ethnic groups are more associated with particular deviant practices (such as drug distribution or the trafficking in women) than others. This is a reality that demands recognition and debate, not least to counteract emerging reactionary political positions which both derive from and fuel such assumptions – and increase hostility and discrimination. The department acknowledged the point, adding that Norway had always encouraged immigration to meet specific employment needs (in, for example, health and on the oil rigs), but now that unemployment was on the increase, attitudes towards immigrants were changing for the worse, especially towards those with few skills.

On the wider international canvas, there are increasing concerns that refugees and asylum seekers, especially younger people, who do not return home when the political situation becomes more stable, are denying their home countries valuable human resources and experiences which are desperately needed. Their host countries, such as Norway, increasingly benefit from their presence and skills – widening the division between the rich and poor countries of Europe and the rest of the world. There may be a case for less timid incentives to support individuals and families who wish to return home.



The international review team gained a strong impression that, beneath all the rhetoric and commitment to respecting ethnic diversity and valuing multiculturalism, the ultimate test of integration and acceptance was the extent to which groups and individuals became Norwegian and displayed their engagement and belief in the principles that underpin Norwegian society. Cultural difference was not an issue (indeed, it was to be celebrated) provided that minority ethnic immigrant groups signed up to the economic, social and, obviously, legal mores of their host country. The Tamils in Finnmark, visibly very different but fully absorbed into the economic and social fabric of local communities, offered a striking case in point.

The north of Norway has a significant Sami population. The Samis are an indigenous people constituting an ethnic minority in Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The Sami population across the four countries numbers between 50 000 and 100 000, over half of whom live in Norway, predominantly in the north. The Sami share a common language, culture and traditions; in fact there are three related Sami languages (east, north and south), 10 dialects and six written forms:

“The maintenance of the Sami language is considered to be of great importance, not just because it serves as a tool for communication between individuals and groups, but because it also conveys elements of philosophy, beliefs, social organisation and notions about the surrounding world. It is also the primary means of passing on the common history and skills of the Sami people, which are fundamental cultural elements, from generation to generation.” (Ministry of Local Government and Labour Department of Sami Affairs, 1995, pp. 7-8)

On its visit to the county of Nordland the international review team met with representatives of a Sami youth organisation. They first provided a brief overview of Sami history and culture, observing that their language had “lost ground” but that there had been recent improvements including the right to use and receive the language. Things were progressing, but there were still “enormous challenges”. In 1997, a separate Sami curriculum was established in primary schools, reflecting their distinctive language and culture (but there were still insufficient textbooks to support this welcome development). There was a general need to strengthen Sami political and administrative structures, for there continues to be a mismatch between rights, needs and the resources available. For young people, there had been some developments in higher education and the formation of a Sami student organisation at the Universities of Tromsø and Bergen. There is now an emergent Sami students’ union with a board representing the universities of Tromsø and Bergen in Norway, Umea in Sweden, Oulu in Finland, and Murmansk in Russia – although levels of Sami participation in higher education in Russia was depicted as “disastrous, almost non-existent”.

It was explained that the Sami are in a different position from other minorities because they are the indigenous people of Norway. Sami Parliaments have been established in Finland (1973), Norway (1989) and Sweden (1993). This has produced a growing transfer of responsibility and decision-making power over matters directly affecting the Sami people. There are specific criteria about who is permitted to register and vote for Sami parliamentarians,²⁷ for the Sami Parliament (the

27. At the Nordic Sami Conference in Tromsø in 1980 a Sami was defined as any person who has Sami as his or her first language, or whose father, mother or one of whose grandparents have Sami as their first language, or considers himself or herself a Sami, and lives entirely according to the rules of Sami society, and who is recognised by the Sami community as a Sami, or has a father or mother who satisfies the above-mentioned criteria.



Samediggi) is the political manifestation of Sami self-organisation. Some 10 000 Samis have registered to vote in elections for the Samediggi in Norway. It was noted, however, that the Samediggi has no voice in the mainstream political framework of Norway and is “not heard as much as it would like to be”. There are some Sami people in the Norwegian Parliament (for example, in the left SV party) but there are no dedicated Sami seats.

A key priority for the preservation and development of the Sami people, through its political and organisational effectiveness, is generational renewal or, as it was put, “to strengthen the youth profile”. To this end, a Sami Parliament Youth Policy Committee has been appointed and an annual Sami youth conference/council has been established, which was described as “a good start”, although it is just for Norway. There are different Sami political youth organisations, reflecting the spectrum of internal Sami politics (there are seven political groupings in the Samediggi) and one non-political Sami youth organisation (with around 200 members). The latter is in the process of developing good co-operation with its equivalents in Finland and Sweden, though this has proved much more difficult in relation to Sami young people in Russia. The overall challenge is to “rebuild a nation across four nations”; the geography of the Sami is horizontal, not vertical, and the Sami people are seeking to create an infrastructure in order to gain the right to govern their own interests. The starting point is to build national confidence through language and identity. Sami people come together through music, costume and handicrafts. Today, fewer than 10% of Sami are reindeer herders, yet this is the enduring image of the Sami and one which is hard for many young Sami to identify with. These are the kinds of issues to which the youth conference gives attention.

The international review team heard from a blond young man who clearly did not conform to the conventional stereotypical looks of a Sami. He came from the northern part of Tromsø, which is a gathering point for speakers of the Sami language. Sami was the primary language spoken there until the nineteenth century policy of ‘Norwegianisation’ permitted only Norwegian to be spoken.²⁸ He had grown up as a Norwegian boy but when he was about 10, there was the Sami language law,²⁹ which had created a lot of tension in his neighbourhood. Many older people did not want the language back, although it had been stolen from them, but he and some of his friends were curious about this development: “it was strange to get, be offered, another identity”. With a dozen or so friends he started to learn the Sami language but by the age of 13 he was the only one left. He said that since that time there have been enormous developments, especially for young people who are curious to find out about their roots. A lot was done through festivals and music. He had turned from being a Norwegian boy into a Sami boy – although his father spoke no Sami, both his great-grandfather and his grandfather had done so. He had rediscovered his own roots, and more and more young people are speaking Sami again.

28. It was only at this point that the more chequered history of the treatment of the Sami by the Norwegians started to surface. Although many early settlers traded with the Sami and often emulated many aspects of their way of life, attitudes changed around 1850. Not only was the use of the Sami language restricted but, from 1902, it was forbidden to sell land to anyone who could not speak Norwegian: the process of Norwegianisation was in full swing, and in the period between the two world wars the policy was practised quite aggressively. More liberal policies started to take shape following the Second World War. The Storting showed a readiness to depart from previous policies of “subjugation and assimilation” and in the 1960s the right of the Sami to preserve and develop their own culture was officially acknowledged. Further legal rights were won or conferred and official Norwegian policy is now based on the principle that although the Sami are Norwegian subjects, they constitute an ethnic minority and a separate people (see Helander, 1992).

29. Presumably the Sami Act of June 12, 1987, which established the powers and procedures for the Sami Assembly and laid down rights and obligations concerning the use of the Sami language in public affairs.



This was a romantic story but questions from the international review team revealed that it had by no means been an easy journey. He proclaimed with pride that it had required considerable personal strength to do what he had done – for the promise of acceptance in a new community also carried the risk of rejection by both new and old. It was certainly not cool to be Sami: “it is no summer holiday to be a Sami in Norway still”, and he pointed out that wearing Sami dress could, in certain places, still attract problems. His own “skipped” generational link, where his grandfather had supported his reconnection with his heritage, was not so typical, he thought, but he suggested that at festivals and in the kindergartens, older people are often invited to use their linguistic heritage to tell stories. Some Sami had retained a very strong Sami identity, especially in the very north of Norway, and had not skipped a generation; Sami was still their mother tongue.

The international review team was captivated by this account, combining as it did a reconnection with the past as well as epitomising in other ways a classic illustration of post-modern youth. Political borders, for many young people, are decreasingly co-terminus with their own sense of identity and their own linguistic and cultural borders.

This personal story was juxtaposed by an account of political engagement by young people around Sami issues. In terms of the age distribution of those eligible to vote in elections for the Samediggi, the lowest group is aged 18 to 25. Only two of the 39 members of the Sami Parliament are under the age of 30. These are matters of significant concern and, beyond the youth policy committee and the youth conference; other strategies to meet this challenge involve having younger substitutes (shadows) for parliamentarians and youth representation on Parliamentary working groups. Beyond Norway, there is the Sami parliamentary Council (representing the three Sami Parliaments of Norway, Sweden and Finland), which considers issues such as language, culture and economy, but there is a problem of contact and co-ordination on youth issues because there are no equivalent youth committees in Sweden and Finland. The best opportunity, therefore, to advance youth issues is likely to be through Barents Region Youth Co-operation, rather than Sami parliamentary processes. In Norway, the Samediggi receives an allocation of some 190 million Norwegian kroner from the Norwegian government and has budgetary freedom over the use of these resources in relation to Sami policy. It was argued that youth issues needed new and fresh resources, although the Samediggi already gives considerable priority to children and young people for reasons outlined above. Indeed, in the current budget plan, resources have been made available for educational scholarships for Sami youth, for Sami youth organisations and youth projects, for magazines for children and young people, and for the development of arts, sports, theatre and festival activities.

The international review team endeavoured to absorb this considerable detail and raised a number of additional questions.

To what extent had the “subjugation” and “assimilation” of the Sami people produced disproportionate pathologies amongst them, such as unemployment, crime or alcoholism (we drew here on knowledge of indigenous minorities elsewhere in the world)? It was conceded that the period of Norwegianisation was now viewed as “a very black (*sic*) part of Norwegian history” but that was during a time of Norwegian nation-building; and, in attitudes and treatment of the Sami people, it was not as prolonged, extensive or ruthless as elsewhere in the world and therefore does not appear to have produced equivalent



long-lasting pathologies. The Sami do, however, live in the more economically deprived areas of Norway and therefore they also experience higher levels of unemployment, like other inhabitants of these areas. They do use alcohol, but probably no more than others living in the same areas. No knowledge was forthcoming about levels of crime.

Was there any sense of exclusivity around Sami identity – despite the very broad eligibility criteria to fulfil the legal definition for being Sami, are people sometimes considered to be not Sami enough or perhaps even ‘super-Sami’? The Sami take great pride, and succour, in the fact that Norway now accepts that its first inhabitants came from the north-east and not from the south. This is very important for Sami identity – they were here first! During the 1980s there probably was a greater sense of Sami exclusivity, because that was the start of their time for nation-(re)building. Now that the Sami sense some degree of progress and development, and some control over their future destiny, there is greater openness and collaboration. Indeed, the Sami Parliament is currently working in close co-operation with the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs on questions around the living conditions of Sami children and young people.

There are clearly strong commitments to breaking down prejudices and stereotypes and to raising awareness of Sami culture and heritage – what contribution is made to this by the media? Positive and diverse images of the Sami people are projected in children’s programmes, and on some TV news programmes. The Sami are more prominent on regional TV in the regions where they are more populous. All children in Norway have some education about the Sami. It was acknowledged, however, that the extent of media and education about the Sami, as well as its content, was still an issue of some contentious debate; it was described as a small conflict.

Were Sami youth organisations connected to wider political youth structures, at local or national levels? We were told that they were involved, but not so much with youth political parties and more with local youth councils, in the organisation of youth festivals, and through cross-border international youth co-operation.

Was it possible to determine what proportion of those eligible to vote in elections for the Sami Parliament were in fact registered to do so? The answer was that it was not possible, partly because of the broad definition of a Sami and partly because the overall Sami population (and its Norwegian sub-population) was very hard to determine with any accuracy. The real issue was to continue efforts to increase the numbers on the Sami electoral register, especially younger people.

Were Sami issues considered separately or thought about as well in terms of being shared issues – with other marginal and minority groups – around access and inclusion? The Sami viewed themselves firmly as a separate indigenous people; they had little contact with immigrant, or other minority groups.

The international review team felt that this last point was certainly an issue worthy of further exploration – issues of difference and diversity, though they may demand separate attention for reasons of historical and cultural retrieval and renewal, sometimes cloud common issues of social and economic disadvantage, that demand shared efforts to secure equal access and inclusion.



Having listened to the perspectives of Sami young people in Nordland, the international review team had the opportunity to explore a range of issues further with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs Department of Sami and minority policies. Its opening assertion was that many Sami people are “very strong” because they have had to deal with two cultures. As a people, they are “very good organisers” and they have “great opportunities” within the Norwegian system too; for young Samis, there are increasing job opportunities, “especially when things have to be done in the Sami language”. There was now a broad range of courses available in the Sami language, although – as the young people had said – there is still a problem of books in Sami; things are, however, “getting better”. The Sami language is used in kindergarten work and in teacher education. There is a right to be taught in the Sami language, but “getting a whole education in Sami is more difficult”. Within Sami districts, where the Sami Act applies, things are much stronger. There is a tradition of boarding schools, which makes whole-school Sami language teaching possible, but this itself has led to controversy within the Sami population: those living in isolated areas want to retain the boarding schools, whereas those living in more populated areas want to get rid of them.³⁰

The greatest challenge for young Sami people in modern Norway is how to grow up as both Sami and Norwegian at the same time; in other words, how to be a Sami in modern society. There appears to be a significant gender difference on this front. Sami girls are more likely to sustain their education, while Sami boys “tend to still want to go out hunting because of their special relationship with nature”. There is also a geographical dimension to this challenge. It can be most difficult in coastal areas where the Sami are thinly represented and where differences between Sami and Norwegian are more explicit. It is easier in the northern areas, where there is a stronger Sami identity, and also – perhaps surprisingly – in Oslo, where there is a substantial and diverse Sami population (some 5000) who come to work and study, although many later return to their home communities. In contrast to the observation made in Nordland that “it is no summer holiday to be a Sami in Norway still”, the ministry felt that Norwegians were now proud of their association with the Sami – a major contrast to the situation that prevailed some 25 years ago. Sami young people were more relaxed and confident about disclosing their identity, which was a sign of their greater acceptance: they were “no longer seen just as reindeer herders”. Of course there were sometimes still tensions and stereotypes, but there had been dramatic improvement in relationships over the past decade, although “if you wear Sami costume in Oslo, you have to be prepared to discuss Sami politics”. The concern about the low participation of Sami young people on the Sami electoral register was not considered to be an issue for the ministry; it was an issue for the Sami Parliament. The ministry, however, has recognised that Sami youth organisations had, in the past, often been disadvantaged in receiving state financial support (because they did not fulfil the eligibility criteria of geographical coverage and membership numbers), but they could now access financial support through new grant schemes for smaller youth organisations. The ministry had also made available a limited amount of project money (1 million Norwegian kroner) and much of this had been allocated to youth organisations for festivals and cultural activities.

The ministry did emphasise that, where appropriate, it sought to encourage contact and co-operation between the Sami and Norway’s national minorities – Jews,

30. The ministry has submitted a paper to the ILO on school activities in Sami areas, as a contribution to a report on the education of indigenous and tribal peoples.



travellers, forest Finns and Kvener. The ministry does support these groups “coming together to enable their voice to be heard” – and young people’s voices would be heard alongside that of their parents. However, the different minority groups in Norway (the Sami, the national minorities, immigrants, and Swedes and Danes) appear to favour separate attention, consultation and treatment; the preferred mantra seems to be “they have their way, we have ours”. There has been some coming together, but much of the work of the ministry has been invested specifically in the Sami, primarily because of legislative responsibilities and the issue of land rights.³¹ The ministry pointed out that “the Sami do not have just one voice” and that “Sami young people are part of this broad, complex picture” of different interests and competing perspectives. However, organisations, festivals and cultural events are very important across Sami culture and this is a key platform on which to develop the interweaving of Sami youth interests with those of other young people.

The international review team found some degree of disjuncture between the views of Sami young people and the perspectives of the ministry. There were clearly many points of agreement but there were also points of departure – largely around the levels of resources and support made available to meet the needs of Sami young people. The ministry felt that it advocated strongly on behalf of the Sami people, co-ordinating the budget allocation to the Samediggi, producing information for municipalities to improve their practice in relation to the Sami community, and trying to involve the Sami in government committees and working groups. Thus, while the ministry saw that the glass was definitely half full (given developments over the past decade or so), the Sami representatives viewed it as half empty. There had not been sufficient progress, books in the Sami language were not available, access and achievement in higher education was still limited, Sami youth organisations were inadequately supported, and it could still prove challenging to express a Sami identity. For the international review team, the jury remained out: these issues could certainly be argued from two very different starting points.

Migration

The migration and mobility of young people within Norway is a particular issue for youth policy in Norway and is discussed in some detail in the National Report (Chapter 6, pp. 77-89, especially paragraphs 6.1-6.4, pp. 77-87). Four-fifths of the Norwegian population now live in urban regions (with access to centres with at least 15 000 inhabitants), and two-fifths live in major urban regions (with access to centres with at least 50 000 inhabitants). Although the population of all but three counties³² has grown over the past 20 years, the trend is towards centralisation and the number of people in the most peripheral areas has stagnated or declined in the past few years. It is projected that in at least one-quarter and possibly a half of municipalities in Norway, there will be a population decrease in the next decade.

31. It was a conflict in 1979-81 between the Sami and the Norwegian government over the development of a hydro-electric project on the Alta-Kautokeino river that provided the political and legal reform process in relation to Sami land rights and their right to participate in the use, management and conservation of their natural resources. The persisting tension relates to sub-surface resources and mineral exploitation. The ministry’s role, we were told, is to ensure that Sami get proper attention and consideration in all aspects of the government’s work.

32. The exceptions are Finnmark, Nordland and Hedmark.



The reasons for the mobility and migration of young people are complex and often a natural part of the life course of young people in Norway. Education (as a reason for moving away) and employment (as a reason for facilitating or obstructing coming home) are important but by no means exclusive reasons, although “studies often show that it is often a lack of job opportunities on the local labour market that is a young person’s greatest obstacle to realizing the desire to settle in his or her home region” (National Report, p. 78). Other factors that influence migration decisions are low housing costs, day care services, and contact with relatives, as well as the natural environment, proximity to a town and well-developed services and cultural facilities (National Report, p. 79).

The central government administration, through a number of different ministries, has made concerted efforts to support young people in remaining in, or returning to their childhood municipalities. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development has placed considerable emphasis on youth-related efforts around economic development and self-employment. The Ministry of Education and Research has developed creative Internet-based teaching programmes for rural schools and enterprise learning and activity within schools. Specific training programmes have been established to offer support and generational continuity in the agricultural sector, which is linked to the Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry programme offered by upper secondary schools (these rural development initiatives are administered by the County Department of Agriculture). The Ministry of Fisheries has also worked closely in the provision of training programmes in upper secondary education, as well as with primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has a special grant scheme for municipalities with declining populations to support youth programmes in the cultural and recreational sectors. Finally, the Ministry of the Environment has a programme to promote environmentally sound, attractive rural towns, in which “the participation of children and young people is a key element” (National Report, p. 80).

Municipalities themselves have recognised the importance of combating the prospective out-migration of young people through strategic measures to strengthen their involvement and opportunities. Not only have they promoted better links between schools and local industry, but they endeavour to stay in touch with young people who have moved away and to ensure more effective participation of young people in considering the range of measures that will enhance the chances of young people remaining in, or returning to, those municipalities in the future:

“Acknowledgement of the fact that jobs are not a sufficient incentive in the competition for young people as future residents has been a significant factor. The lessons learned in the campaign for outlying municipalities show that there will be keen competition to attract young people to those municipalities in the future, but that municipalities that develop a full range of services and facilities, thereby rendering themselves attractive, are likely to emerge as winners” (National Report, p. 82).

The international review team was told, in its opening exchange of views with the Director-General for Children and Youth Policy in the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, that centre-periphery questions were not just a matter of *laissez-faire*. There is considerable migration by young people towards the urban centres, but “there is a unitary philosophy in Norway and a political desire to produce sustainable communities, and this demands good policy for children and young people”.



Much of the current direction of this policy derives from a 1993 white paper which had a section on rural youth, although clearly many further initiatives have been established since.

In the visit to Nordland, the international review team was informed very directly that the strategic youth political (policy) programme had “been developed in the context of out-migration”. And in its second discussion with LNU (the Norwegian Youth Council), the international review team focused significantly on issues concerning young people living in the more rural areas of Norway. The secretary-general of Rural Youth outlined its work and the challenges and issues it encountered. Rural Youth has some 4 000 members,³³ though “not so many from the north”. Its work is largely around the development and provision of activities – “young people making activities for themselves”. The age range of its membership is 15 to 30; the organisation’s main appeal is for socialising and competitions (which revolve around both agriculture and culture!). The aim of Rural Youth is to make young people more open-minded (it has a current project “Gay in the Countryside”), more creative (to develop ideas for self-employment), more confident and more self-directing. Young people in rural areas, it was argued, have many more possibilities than ever before, and it is now a question of taking advantage of those possibilities. Young people do leave the countryside to pursue their education but many do return afterwards; however, there is definitely a trend towards remaining in more urban areas – from the villages to the district cities, and from the district centres to more sub-urban contexts. It is this trend that Rural Youth contributes to halting, perhaps even reversing, by keeping opportunities in the districts more attractive: “to make things happen, in order to create a good impression of growing up in the countryside”. There is quite a lot of focus on youth participation, and Rural Youth is very active in supporting the development of local youth councils. It does not, however, have a completely localised perspective; it also works on international solidarity and currently has a project based on contacts and relationships with Guatemala.

The big challenges for rural youth in Norway revolve around jobs, housing availability and affordability, access to education and, increasingly, drugs. On the latter, the point was made that “people used to say it was a city thing, but now it is all over the country”.³⁴ In terms of jobs, traditional employment opportunities in farming are in sharp decline, although farming remains the foundation of living in the countryside – the mainstay of the rural economy. The secretary-general suggested that the challenges facing rural youth (and Rural Youth) are not dramatically different from those facing young people in the city. Their character and scale may be different, but the issues are much the same. Even the multicultural challenge is becoming more prominent although there are “not so many” from ethnic minorities in the countryside, the government is increasingly committed to getting rural areas to play their part in immigration processes and integration.

33. The secretary-general of Rural Youth maintained that it existed as a youth organisation because the countryside cannot sustain big enough numbers for a range of political youth organisation (each would be too small to be effective); Rural Youth could attract all young people because it was not party political. Young people in rural areas also join 4H Clubs but these tend to cater for a younger age group (up to 18, though most leave at around 15/16). There is also the Norwegian League of Youth, but this is based more on cultural activities, such as theatre and dance, and it uses new Norwegian as its official language.

34. Although the international review team does not have the evidence to make direct comparisons with Norway, it is clear elsewhere that patterns of substance misuse – especially if alcohol is included in the equation – are as much of a challenge in the countryside as in urban contexts. Young people often have little else to do but to spend their time drinking and, as distribution and price makes them more available and affordable, taking drugs.



The secretary-general felt that the overarching challenge was to engender a sense of possibility and self-belief in young people that they themselves could “get things done”, whether in leisure time or in employment. Young people needed to develop the competence and confidence to get things to come true – to get a result. Rural Youth helped young people to “open their eyes about what is available and about what can be done”. It had established projects to address these issues and to develop skills in pro-active problem solving. Because small communities had only small populations of young people, as many young people as possible had to be involved. Rural Youth had to try to inspire the commitment of young people and involve them in the execution of new ideas. It had, first, to encourage young people to be more accepting of new ideas, to “think the unthinkable” and then to devise creative methods to implement them. For example, a year ago it started to educate a group of “fantasy agents”, to support young people in thinking up new ideas and to think through the processes required to make these a reality. These fantasy agents are now out and about in the clubs – spreading the message. Few concrete practices have yet materialised, but it was argued that “thought processes were being opened up”: “we have a long tradition of organising things for ourselves because we have never had others organising things for us – like discos and night-clubs. We have to do things for ourselves”.

Urbanisation

On the other side of the fence is the question of how to address the changing needs of young people who now live in rapidly changing urban contexts. The National Report (paragraph 6.5 pp. 83-89) describes discrete policy directed towards young people in major urban communities, the rationale for which is that “certain large towns are afflicted with adverse living conditions, which may create a difficult environment for children and young people and make local neighbourhoods unsafe” (National Report, pp. 83-84). As a result, the central government administration has assumed a special responsibility for improving these conditions, through special grant schemes, additional sports initiatives, housing measures, and environmental developments. Apart from children and young people who grow up in towns and cities, these centres also attract young people from rural areas, especially for the purposes of education, and therefore, “seen as a whole, this means that the transition from youth to adulthood is increasingly taking place in a large urban environment” (National Report, p. 84). Such environments provide many urban benefits³⁵ but also experience urban problems.³⁶ The National Report notes that the actual situation is very complex, emphasising that the balance of advantages and disadvantages varies considerably within urban contexts and between different neighbourhoods. Report No. 39 (2001-02) places importance on good, reasonably-priced youth facilities and activities, and youth centres “where young people can become involved in constructive activity through labour market, employment or training programmes” (National Report, p. 85).

The international review team had some contact in Oslo with youth services and projects, such as the X-Ray Youth Centre and the Riverside Youth Activities Centre (see above), which sought to improve support, services and opportunities for young people in the urban environment. At the municipal level, the international

35. The national report cites “a good financial situation, fewer low-wage workers, more educational opportunities, more job opportunities, a broader range of services and more cultural and recreational facilities” (National Report, p. 72).

36. The national report cites “noise and pollution, cramped housing or poor housing standards, fewer social relationships and more crime and insecurity” (National Report, p. 73).



review team learned about how the small town (but relatively large municipality) of Fauske had tried to establish a more coherent youth policy to address issues affecting young people. Much of this has already been discussed (above); the pertinent issue here is how Fauske has endeavoured to accommodate around 150 young people who have come to the town to pursue their upper secondary education. When they arrive, they are introduced to the police and the council and told of what is available to them and what is expected of them. Beyond the routine youth activities and youth organisations in which they can participate, there is a centre for voluntary work which encourages them to get involved. This organisation is independent of the council and has its own board. It is a partnership of humanitarian organisations (such as the Red Cross, and family organisations) that, over time, has diversified and provides a range of social services. In particular, it assists the elderly in Fauske in a number of ways, and needs young volunteers to support this work. Officials in Fauske described this as just one example of how the municipality attempts to engage young people in purposeful and constructive activity, particularly those who may not have family support immediately to hand. It was acknowledged that this initiative had not met with great success (“not many young people actually do voluntary work”) but asserted that it was still another attempt at synergy and symbiosis in its approach to youth policy.

Safety and protection

Linked closely to policy initiatives designed to promote positive experiences within the urban environment are concerns about the safety and protection of children and young people. The National Report recognises that violence and crime are issues for all young people throughout Norway, “affecting many children and young people, both as victims and perpetrators”, although the problems are more comprehensive and complex in the largest towns (National Report, p. 68). There has been a major national initiative on bullying and violence in schools where, historically, teachers have been reluctant to acknowledge the scale of the problem or, if they were aware of it, were unclear about the action to be taken. The government has now established a manifesto against bullying, to which schools are encouraged to sign up, and which involve a range of good practice around teacher intervention, peer mediation and the importance of children feeling comfortable about reporting.

Despite a comprehensive presentation on the anti-bullying strategies in Norway, the international review team remained very unclear about both the prevalence of the problem and the effectiveness of the programme. There was a great deal of philosophical assertion (about the importance of tackling bullying) and administrative information, but little detail about the nature of bullying and the methods by which effective interventions were made.

At a different level, the international review team heard of the recent four-year initiative targeted at the large cities of Norway. This is the Urban Youth Projects scheme, which we first heard described as the “ten-cities project”³⁷ (that had started, initially, with five cities but was later expanded to ten). The National Report

37. The ten urban municipalities of Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Drammen, Tromsø, Skien, Fredrikstad and Sandnes. The scheme also comprises a special programme currently being carried out in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim (National Report, p. 75). The international review team was told that the scheme has a total budget of 20 million Norwegian Kroner, of which half goes to Oslo, the rest to the other nine cities, although there is a small reserved budget for immediate response funding.



(paragraph 6.5.2, pp. 87-88) elaborates on this initiative. The grant scheme targets young people aged 12 to 25 and, beyond the usual emphasis that projects to be supported should dovetail with broader youth policy and that youth participation should be promoted, it places priority on preventing undesirable social behaviour such as violence, bullying, crime, substance use and racism, combating prejudice and discrimination, and promoting mutual respect, the participation of groups of young people who make little use of available cultural and recreational facilities, inclusion and the establishment of alternative learning arenas, equality and equal opportunities for girls and boys, equal opportunities for disabled persons and work and programmes aimed at reaching young people with poverty problems (National Report, pp. 87-88)

The National Report goes on to state that “young people at risk will have priority in the urban youth projects scheme, and efforts will to a greater degree be directed towards towns and areas where the needs and adverse living conditions are the greatest” (National Report, p. 88).

There is clearly a deep concern for protecting children and young people in Norway, wherever possible through prevention and participation. This is, of course, a laudable policy aspiration but it does produce (at least) two questions. First, can there be a point at which children are overprotected – protected too much, to the point that they do not have the opportunity to develop coping and social skills. The observation was made (usually cautiously and rather tentatively) to the international review team on more than one occasion that the majority of young people in Norway were so safe and comfortable that they simply did not know how to deal with relatively small difficulties when they arose. Secondly, the concept of a risk society – now so influential elsewhere – does not appear to be discussed, let alone accepted, in Norway. Norway continues to maintain expectations that many other European countries have long since abandoned: full employment, a drug-free society, the best education for all. There is usually a one-dimensional aspiration for public policy, rarely a “yes, but” discourse which accepts that other scenarios are more probable and may require policy attention with different outcome expectations (such as vitiating unemployment, or harm reduction in relation to substance misuse).

The international review team struggled, and juggled, with the competing perspectives it constantly received; that, on the one hand, most young people in Norway are integrated, educated, healthy and involved, yet policy was being developed because they were taking drugs, contributing to the trafficking in women, bullying and being bullied, operating in gangs and committing violent crime. These were, of course, serious areas of concern and our juxtaposition is a crude one, reflected far better in the duality of Report 39 (2001-02) and Report 40 (2001-02) to the Storting. The key question for the international review team, perhaps, which lay unanswered, was how much these opposing characterisations of young people in Norway are firmly associated with different groups. Is the majority of young people “in” on virtually all counts, and a small minority “out” for a repertoire of different reasons. Or are there much more permeable boundaries between the two?

Equal opportunities

Throughout the National Report there is constant emphasis on ensuring equal opportunities, for young women, young people from minority ethnic backgrounds



and for young people with special needs. Gender and other differences in, for example, educational or labour market participation are highlighted, but these are argued to be far more the product of personal choice and decision, than with the overt or covert structures of opportunity in Norway. Indeed, it is frequently emphasised in the National Report that if individuals depart from the same starting line (such as educational qualifications or linguistic competence) they have the same chance of arriving at the same destination. There are some caveats, of course – such as discrimination in the housing and labour markets, especially against those from ethnic minority backgrounds. But in terms of the public administration and the endeavours of public policy towards young people, there is an overarching and cross-cutting commitment to equal opportunities. Observed obstacles to this principle in areas of practice such as education, employment, housing or health will be robustly challenged and tackled through legislation and, sometimes, positive discrimination in favour of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (including young people).

Mobility and internationalism

For a relatively small country, Norway and Norwegians have always had – for many different reasons (trading and shipping, emigration, education abroad) – a strong international presence. The National Report (Chapter 8, pp. 101-106) considers international contact and co-operation in the youth sector. It describes the general influence of internationalism on Norway and the rationale for young people experiencing the cultural and social conditions of other countries directly. It also argues for the value of international dialogue and co-operation in the specific field of youth policy. The Norwegian authorities have traditionally left much of the work relation to international co-operation on youth issues to non-governmental child and youth organisations (National Report, p. 102). It provides considerable funding to this end, notwithstanding the alternative sources of finance that may be available and accessible. The National report goes on to describe the different ways in which Norway is involved in various forms of youth and youth policy co-operation at Nordic, European Union, Council of Europe and global levels (National Report, pp. 103-106).

Perhaps because the international review team was composed of individuals from all corners of Europe, the assumption was made that it did not need a comprehensive presentation on these issues. Instead, the information it gleaned was snatched and partial, emerging almost by chance in different meetings. We learned from the National Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (BUFA) that there has been a growing number of applications through the European Union youth programme.³⁸ BUFA is the national agency for this programme, filtering and refereeing these applications, and it has sought to give a strong focus on remote and rural areas and on young people with less opportunities. It has made allocations linked to action 3.1 of the programme (group initiatives) to 64 municipalities with the greatest declining youth populations, each of which has received a maximum of €12 500. The recent impact study on the youth programme in Norway was, the international review team was told, very positive.³⁹ (Beyond the resources available

38. Although Norway is not a member of the European Union it has, through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, participated in the work of the European Commission in the field of youth since 1994, and has been involved most significantly in an extensive youth exchange programme and, to a lesser extent, in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme (see National Report, p. 89).

39. All countries participating in the EU youth programme recently carried out impact studies in order to contribute to the debate about the shape and structure of the EU youth programme which will succeed the current one, from 2007-2013.



through the EU, the Norwegian government itself makes 21 million Norwegian kroner available to BUFA to support and develop international work – see financial structures, above.)

-----> Supporting youth policy

In the synthesis review of the first seven international reviews of national youth policy (Williamson, 2001), three areas were identified as potentially lending support to the emergence and maintenance of effective and relevant youth policy.

Youth research

Towards the end of its second visit to Norway, the international review team met with staff from Nova, the Norwegian youth research institute. Until that moment, it had heard virtually no reference to it, beyond a brief comment by LNU (the Norwegian Youth Council) that LNU would “like a dedicated centre for youth research” and “was sorry that Nova no longer gets the funding that it used to”. We were never clear exactly what that meant.

Nova is involved in youth research in three ways: empirical and theoretical interdisciplinary research; the publication of a professional journal twice a year, in Norwegian (though abstracts are available in English) and the holding of a potential writers’ seminar; and a national network for youth research, which holds thematic meetings on issues such as the relative effects of social background and individualisation, and gender relations. It had endeavoured to engage more internationally (through the Nordic NYRIS conferences, and the European Youth Research Network), for both Swedish and Norwegian youth research has been criticised in the past for remaining too insular.

Both Report No. 39 (2001-02) and Report No. 40 (2001-02) draw attention to the issues that require more research inquiry and evidence. Although most children and young people in Norway are well and do well, some remain marginalised – in terms of bullying, substance misuse, crime and racism. There are also new areas for research, such as commercialisation and sexualisation. It is very clear from the white papers that there are some poor families and disadvantaged young people in Norway and that the old grand narratives of social reproduction – gender, ethnicity and social class – still contribute to social inequalities. Nova wants to build up more school based survey research; there are already studies on youth culture and specific pathological issues. The Norwegian Youth Research Centre, which was established in the late 1980s, did conduct large scale studies of youth from 1992. The first study became a baseline reference study and there have been two more since, as well as more qualitative and small-scale studies on specific issues.

The 1992 study was a general survey of young people, involving 12 000 young people aged 13 to 19 from 67 schools. The survey achieved an impressive 97% response rate.⁴⁰ Young people were asked to complete a huge questionnaire on a vast range of topics,⁴¹ which included a number of so-called sensitive issues but most were answered. The original research design was intended to be replicated and there have been follow-up studies in 1994 and 1999, with the intention of extending this longitudinal approach.

40. Of the 6000 young people under the age of 16, who required parental consent, only 50 refused to participate.

41. Topics included, for example, parental characteristics, school adjustment, educational aspirations, consumption patterns, youth cultural orientation, religion, sexuality, peer networks, leisure, drug and alcohol use, anti-social behaviour, mental health, and gender role identity.



There has, however, been a study of a new generation of young people, using a comparable sample to that of 1992.⁴² A 2002 study covered 12 000 young people from 73 schools and achieved a 93% response rate.⁴³ Its questionnaire included the topics from the previous cohort study, to permit a comparison of the changing conditions and experiences of young people across time, but added new ones, to get some baseline data on new phenomenon and new issues of political concern.⁴⁴

The international review team listened to various findings of this recent research (and comparisons with the situation in 1992), much of which confirmed earlier perspectives and impressions provided, some of which came as something of a surprise, particularly the apparent absence of change in many areas of young people's lives:

- leisure time: as might be expected, and with some differentiation by gender and by age, young people spent their leisure time with friends, at home, shopping, in cafes, doing sports, organising meetings and at youth clubs. In spite of access to and use of NICT since 1992, much seemed to have remained the same in terms of use of leisure time;
- membership of youth organisations: just under two-thirds of young people were current members of a youth organisation and a third had formerly been members. Only 7% had never been a member. This research suggested that retention was the challenge, not recruitment. By far the most common organisations that young people joined were sports clubs (40%), then youth clubs (9%) and then brass bands, choirs and orchestras (9%);
- participation in political activities: the highest participation was in action-oriented activities, such as signing petitions (45%), followed by conventional activities such as schools councils (33%). There was limited participation in illegal activities, such as graffiti and spray-painting (9%). Young people appear to be as concerned today about political issues as they were 10 years ago, but they are more concerned about specific issues and less with the general political system;
- substance misuse: 71% of young people did not smoke (much the same as 1992); 63% have been drunk at some point in their life and more than half had been drunk in the past year. There were, of course, gender and age differences here but overall there were significant increases in problem drinking behaviour since 1992. There were also significant differences in the use of illegal drugs – cannabis, harder drugs, and solvents. 15% reported having used illegal drugs;
- involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime: 66% of young people reported having been in a state of drift, 56% had experienced school opposition, 33% had been involved in theft and vandalism, 54% had participated in some kind

42. Studying youth demands different choices of methodology which yield different types of conclusion. Here a single cohort longitudinal study (1992, 1994 and 1999) has been supplanted by a potential snapshot comparison of two cohorts of similar young people at different points in time. The same cohort over time (producing a sense of change in young people over the life course) versus. different cohorts and different times (producing a sense of change for young people over time). There are, of course, other frameworks for youth research, serving other purposes: see Smith et al (1996).

43. One school was afflicted with high absenteeism through illness; were this one not included, the response rate shifts upwards to an even more impressive 95%! The researchers maintained that a school-based sample was still very representative in Norway because “the vast majority of Norwegians (99.1%) go to junior high school, except for those with learning difficulties and immigrants”.

44. These included uses of New Information and Communication Technologies; indicators of poverty (subjective views of material position); participation, influence and interest in political issues; violence victimisation; and attitudes to and experiences of homosexuality.



of violence and 11% had been in contact with the police. However, only about 2% had been registered with the police. Although there were considerable age differences in the nature of anti-social behaviour, the research suggested that patterns of anti-social behaviour have been relatively stable since 1992 and that self-reported breaking the law (in relation to a set of relatively serious offences) has only marginally increased. Girls are more likely to have had contact with the police, but the prevalence and severity of their offending does not appear to have changed very much.

The international review team found these strong threads of continuity amidst some elements of change very striking, particularly in the light of recent research from Germany and the USA which point to dramatic changes in young people's attitudes and behaviour.

It was, however, somewhat concerned that some of the findings were relatively blunt instruments for the purposes of policy development (as many survey conclusions are). More calibrated conclusions on, for example, political activity would have been welcome. There is, after all, a world of difference, between some of the radical actions of vegans and the activism of some advocates of animal rights, just as there are major differences between national and international activity and those engaging in small protests at a local level.

Similarly, typical survey questions about drunkenness and drug consumption often fail to engage with the cultural context of the response and with important distinctions (for policy purposes) between triers, users and problem users. Does 'drunkenness' really mean inebriation or the quantity of alcohol that has been consumed? When young people report that they have been drunk and/or taking an illegal drug, is this always cause for concern, for they may never have done so again. For policy purposes, a more sophisticated and calibrated qualitative understanding of these, and other issues, is required to supplement the broad brush of survey findings such as these.

The international review team engaged in further discussion with the Nova researchers, especially on the matter of minority ethnic young people. The Nova research indicated quite clearly that those young people with minority languages are the losers in the school system, with lower attainment and non-completion of courses. Language competence cannot, of course, be completely isolated from other factors, such as the capacity of parents to provide the requisite support and encouragement,⁴⁵ the culture of the home, and the socioeconomic circumstances of minority students. Indeed, there are quite large differences in the socioeconomic position of minority students (defined as those with two foreign-born parents, excluding those from Sweden and Denmark⁴⁶) and this produces a socially significant achievement gap. This gap vanishes almost completely, however, when comparisons are made between minority and majority students whose parents have a similar socioeconomic position. There is, very clearly, a process of polarisation of educational background and achievement within the immigrant population. Some arrive in Norway with good credentials, which often produces a virtuous

45. Their own language competence in Norwegian is also likely to be limited.

46. Contrary to the information presented by the Directorate of Immigration and some of its publications, the researchers said that "most are from beyond Europe". This may, however, be true of the children and young people of immigrants, rather than immigrants themselves, where the majority are unequivocally from central and eastern Europe.



circle of positive participation in the labour market and better language competence – which all lead to the improved learning of their children. For others, the cycle works the other way and produces a vicious, exclusionary circle which is reproduced in the opportunities and achievement of their children. The Nova research indicates that minority youth are a little more nervous about going to school and feel a little more isolated. They also appear to do more homework and to aspire to progressing within the educational system and achieving high status jobs. However, the researchers were unable to differentiate between different minority groups; it may be that these negative and positive orientations towards education derive disproportionately from the less and more advantaged minority groups to which they had referred earlier.

Indeed, the international review team requested further differentiation in relation to these perspectives on educational participation and achievement. Little had been said about urban-rural differences, and it was then confirmed that “things are much worse ... the prevalence of underachievement is much greater, in Oslo”. However, observations returned to the question of linguistic competence and the extent to which this could be supported in the home. The policy issue was about the capacity of families to support learning and aspiration and the need for more integration between the home and the school, especially in relation to disadvantaged and immigrant families.

Moreover, the international review team returned to the absence of thinking in Norway about risk society. Has Norway really had 10 reasonably stable years, while the rest of Europe has experienced dramatic change in the life conditions and circumstances of young people? Norway’s definition of what count as youth problems would be considered almost laughable in many other parts of Europe. This is neither to criticise nor compliment the position in Norway, which remains very favourable for most young people, but it is to raise the question about the capacity of a still relatively homogenous Norway (except for Oslo) to adapt to the rapidly changing context of heterogeneity, mobility and migration. The case study for judging the effectiveness of policy in these circumstances could well be in the ways that Norway relates and responds to its minority groups, notably those which are facing the most difficulty in integrating and taking the opportunities that Norway strives to make available to them.

The parliamentarians who had been involved in the preparation of Report No. 39 explicitly supported this contention, maintaining that there was a clear need for more research on the effectiveness of practice.

The position of the international review team is that further research is needed at two ends of the policy cycle: first, more policy-useful research that indicates more precisely where expenditure and effort should be located and focused; secondly, more evaluation research to explore which forms of practice and intervention are best at producing the desired outcomes.

Training

The international review team learned little about the professional training courses available to those who worked with young people. Given the enormous political and financial commitment to what might broadly be referred to as youth work practice, it was quite staggering to discover that there is limited human resource development in this area.



The government has acknowledged the need to act in this area, which the international review team fully endorses.

The dissemination of good practice

The international review team did not really get a feel for the ways in which good practice was disseminated. It was aware that the central administration sought to ensure – through publications and conferences – that ideas were communicated across counties and municipalities. It was also aware, however, that no strings funding approaches and municipal autonomy also sometimes led to the reinvention of the wheel – and that it was not always a very round one! There are always, of course, some advantages in going round the course once again, in that this provides a sense of ownership and commitment to an idea; this may achieve objectives around democracy and participation, but it may be less effective in combating drug misuse or promoting social inclusion. The international review team was also aware of some resistance to instruction from the centre, while the centre itself (Oslo) is apparently very defensive about its own autonomy. Thus the plethora of action plans and reports produced by the government may find difficulty in drilling down effectively to the recipients of its deliberations, even when these are firmly backed by additional resources. Competitions and awards for best practice can only go so far. The government’s position is, however, that it “never wants to be prescriptive about how things should be done, it just wants to say what should be done”. To this end, the municipality that won the accolade for being the best child and youth friendly municipality in Norway receives government resources to publish a booklet describing what it has done. These are distributed to all other municipalities in order to raise awareness and provide at least one model of what might be emulated.

Developing youth policy within a European context?

The purpose of the international review process is both to provide an external perspective on the national youth policy under review and to draw lessons from a national youth policy to inform ideas for youth policy with the broader European context. During its two visits to Norway, the international review team took time out to reflect on its engagement with the Norwegian context from the perspectives, experience and expertise of the constituent members of the team. What follows, therefore, is a pot pourri of the issues we discussed, some of which were clarified later through reading and discussion, some of which remain on the table for consideration both within Norway and further afield.

Interesting issues

- What is the overarching frame of reference for youth policy provision? Participation and democracy? (As against nation-building, identity or inclusion?);
- An opportunity-focused youth policy? Norway is clearly committed to providing good conditions for young people to establish a direction to their lives. But where problems emerge, a professional response is immediately required, and does not always appear to be forthcoming;
- Dominance and predominance of the child agenda through the UNCRC? To what extent should youth policy, (indeed, does youth policy need to) be separate from “child policy”? To what extent is there a dedicated policy response to the



18-25 age group, addressing the possible chronic crisis of young adulthood rather than the anxieties of adolescence?⁴⁷

- Involvement of young people in planning their urban as well as social environment. A model worthy of further development elsewhere;
- Migration – the urban/rural dichotomy;
- Co-ordination and co-operation at national, regional and local levels. This is recently emphasised in central government documentation, but was not always apparent. Is youth policy all-encompassing or insular and boxed in? There is a wealth of strong analysis and policy aspirations but considerable gaps in communication and co-ordination;
- Why was the Youth Forum for Democracy abandoned in 2001?
- Some rigidity in the conception (and criteria for the funding) of youth organisations. There can be many democratic ways to exert influence. Membership Mobilisation – new channels to reach and involve young people. To what extent should levels of activity, as opposed to levels of membership, govern funding decisions? The inclusive criteria for funding, ‘disadvantaging’ exclusively immigrant youth organisations. The 100 threshold for receiving public support;
- Youth information services – duplication, confusion, ethics, access, language(s), relationship between learning and being able to do;
- The place and practice of the Norwegian Youth Council (LNU). Parallelism is not enough: LNU’s (lack of) links to formal education;
- The absence of any problematising and more self-critical approach; collective affirmation of systems and processes. Sticking to old traditions;
- Minority groups are strongly categorised – what about unity and division between and within such groups?
- Quality, validation, assessment – in non-formal education. An absence of debate and the potential for a pilot programme through projects such as the X-Ray youth centre;
- The place and role of youth research? Somewhat peripheral to the debate?
- The balance between addressing mainstream and marginalised youth?
- Lots of very positive (but personal) relationships. Proximity and trust. Affirmation once again;
- Not yet any critical debate about expansion of higher education and graduate unemployment;
- Competence reform – widening participation or assessing competence?
- The place of non-formal education within the competence reforms? (But this is Norway where virtually everybody has such experience.)
- Parallelism rather than integration of qualifications;
- Parallelism rather than integration of structures: a different committee, council, consultation process, for every different group (for example, separate Fauske committee for immigrants; separate Sami Parliament); on the other hand, a one size fits all mentality when there may need to be greater calibration and differentiation according to the needs of different groups;

47. These were concepts first developed by one of the international review team during the mid-1980s (see Williamson, 1985).



- Control versus. autonomy – great emphasis on youth participation but few adult-free zones. Envelopment or emancipation of young people?
- Municipal democracy versus. financial capacity to make the necessary provision – hence centralisation of some services;
- No youth worker training/minimum standards/professional career;
- Tolerant and democratic versus. banning and prescription. Toleration of diversity or core expectations about being a Norwegian?

→ Conclusion

Despite the caveats and questions posed throughout this report by the international review team, and what will be considered in Norway to be some very transparent gaps in its knowledge and understanding, the overarching conclusion about youth policy in Norway is one that is very positive. There is enormous commitment to young people, a commitment supported by very generous resources.

Nevertheless, there remain some particularly prominent points of concern, which emerge from some of the questions and issues posed above. These are:

The dominance and predominance of the child agenda

In contrast to the distinctiveness of youth policy in many other countries, Norway's policies for young people are firmly connected to wider policies concerning children and families. The synthesis report of the first seven international reviews of national youth policy (see Williamson, 2001) was in fact critical of the fact that family policy is often overlooked, for young people increasingly stay at home long after they have ceased to be children. However, the recurrent conjunction of childhood, family and youth policies in Norway did give the impression that youth as a distinctive concept and category was often subordinated to these other agendas, unless it was in relation to specific problems such as drop-out from education, unemployment, substance misuse or crime. Whether there is a case for a more overarching young adult focused policy agenda is debatable, but the international review team believes it merits a more considered debate.

Protection and provision, participation and power

The three ps of protection, provision and participation were cited often. Norway accords great weight to the idea of youth participation through youth organisations but this seems to be under the banner of protection and prevention, despite the denials of LNU which described its mission as to “build children and young people for its own sake, not to prevent or protect”. Yet if protection becomes too dominant, then there is a strong possibility that young people fail to develop the skills, and therefore lose the capacity, for resilience and self-management. Those young people who succumb to the vulnerabilities and risks of modern life await something to happen – for others to do something for them. The contrast with the position of young people in central and eastern Europe, who are framed by a very limited infrastructure of protection and support, could not be more striking: they have had to learn the skills of life management for themselves. Some (many more than in Norway) still succumb to risk and Norway's concern for its young people is in many ways, of course, to be welcomed. Nevertheless, the point was often made, symptomatically quietly and off the record, that life was almost too safe for the majority of young people. They did not have to struggle for, and win, power; it was handed to them on a plate. Too often, as a result, they took it for granted. This is a



major conundrum for any government's policy but, in a world of increasing individualisation (and corresponding risk), some attention to manufacturing the experience of risk, within broadly safe parameters, rather than believing that young people can be protected from every problem through preventative measures, is perhaps required.

Reach and relevance – ensuring, rather than just enabling

Perhaps the greatest hot potato within Norway's youth policy is the sanctity of municipal autonomy. Beyond some areas that are regulated by law, the government cannot compel specific actions by the municipal authorities; it seeks to win consent rather than coerce compliance. To do so, it provides a range of financial incentives, but these are often insufficient to guarantee the necessary reach of relevant initiatives. Indeed, initiatives are unlikely to be fully implemented unless the cheque completely covers the costs; most municipalities simply do not have the capacity or the resources. The defence for municipal autonomy is the democratic imperative, but while this may serve the needs and wishes of the majority, it does few favours for the vulnerable minority, including the vulnerable minority of young people. The international review team failed to grasp precisely how local youth policy was developed, whether this was through a real analysis of the local needs of young people or by the strength of lobbying by interest organisations, leaving the voice of isolated, vulnerable and unattached young people out in the cold. What we did hear were frequent illustrations of how desired services failed to reach young people most in need, especially in the child welfare system. The Health and Social Affairs Directorate presented an excellent analysis of a range of health challenges relating to young people⁴⁸ and relevant policy plans, but there was little sense of the mechanisms by which their reach might be sufficient to connect with the young people who needed the most attention. This illustration is but one example; the same pattern was discernible across many of the issues that were discussed. The shift of responsibility for some child welfare services from the counties to the centre suggested to the international review team that if services are to be guaranteed (ensured) to a certain consistency and quality then central government will have to take more control, despite the opposition of the Minister for Children and Family Affairs to any further centralisation. Otherwise, the enabling aspirations of a host of initiatives will remain patchy and unpredictable.

Parallelism

Despite all the rhetoric and assertion of horizontal and vertical communication, the international review team was concerned, at times even shocked, at the insularity of thinking and development on a range of interconnected youth policy and wider policy issues. The National Report talks time and again of cross-ministry initiatives with one particular ministry responsible for overall co-ordination. Yet the officials we spoke to often seemed to have little awareness of this wider canvas and concentrated exclusively on their small pocket of responsibility. It would be invidious to present too many concrete examples here, but some general illustration can be provided. Formal education, for example, appeared to be quite disconnected from the non-formal educational arena; even LNU, the Norwegian Youth Council said it had limited contact with the Ministry of Education and Research because "this was left to the student organisations". This is quite amazing, given the increasingly complementary learning strategies across formal schooling (and beyond) and the

48. Alcohol and drugs, eating disorders, psychiatric treatment, teenage pregnancy, and abortion.



youth NGO sector. The lifelong learning debate is firmly focused on the crossover and mix between hard academic and vocational qualifications, and the soft qualifications that derive from more experiential and self-directed activity. Thus it also came as some surprise that, in the arena of validation and competence (where Norway has pioneered some impressive reforms in relation to formal education and the workplace), non-formal learning seems not to have entered the equation. It was certainly true that those in youth organisations and youth projects were uneasy about any moves towards specifying and measuring the outcomes of their work, but that should not preclude, or deny the legitimacy of, at least some debate.

Even this example is limited in its span, for it remains focused on the educational arena. Of even greater importance are the connections between different policy domains, for research informs us increasingly that both opportunity and disadvantage is the product of the complex interrelationships between, for example, education, health, housing and family life. Therefore the apparently limited crossover debate between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Child and Family Affairs on the incontrovertible relationship between youth crime and child welfare was perplexing; although we understand that new developments on this front are in hand. Indeed, the fact that Report No. 39 (2001-02) on the conditions in which children and young people grow up and live in Norway was so often presented to us as the basis of youth policy in Norway (and is certainly the driver of the National Report), when in fact Report No. 40 (2001-02), on child and youth welfare is equally significant, is symptomatic of these points.

Ethnic minorities and being Norwegian

The international review team appreciates the reasons why Norway firmly emphasises the distinctions between its indigenous people, its national minorities, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Further distinctions within these classifications could clearly also be made. There are massive sensitivities around debating issues and developing approaches towards any ethnic minorities and some hard home truths are often desperately suppressed although, for any decent discussion to take place, they need to be brought to the surface. Norway has no problems in tackling, through action plans, cultural traditions of forced marriages and female genital mutilation, but on many other fronts fights shy of delineating a forthright position. Are there privileged ethnic minorities in Norway, who capitalise on their special position, and do not want to be associated with others, precisely for this reason? Are there ethnic minorities in Norway who have been instrumental in worsening levels of violence, crime, drug use and the trafficking in women? Casual conversations would answer both of these questions in the affirmative, but they are circumvented in official debate. Elsewhere in Europe, there is decreasing interest in multiculturalism and special treatment and a shared campaign by minority groups of many complexions for equal rights. There is also – as witnessed in recent political developments in Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark – a growing lobby not just against immigration, but about what constitutes the acceptable behaviour of immigrants if they are to be made welcome (and allowed to stay). In Norway, this position appears to be, cautiously, related only to the learning of the language, although the international review team felt that in fact it was implicitly more than this. Being first and foremost a Norwegian remains culturally very important – irrespective of ethnicity and cultural roots. Perhaps because of Norway's sad history around Norwegianisation, there is considerable reluctance to make this explicit and a reverse inclination to respect and accommodate as much difference as possible. This does not square with the information we received about young



people in Norway who, almost irrespective of ethnic background, are proud to be Norwegian. From a policy perspective, however, the common circumstances of many young people from ethnic minorities (greater social disadvantage, lower educational achievement, the experience of discrimination, and therefore a greater propensity to social marginality) have to be squared with a more calibrated response to the needs of particular groups, but not necessarily just in the ways that currently prevail.

Research, policy and practice

Many of those within the administration emphasised that Norway had only really changed in the past 10 years, calling for new political agendas to deal with changing circumstances and needs. In contrast, the Nova survey of young people pointed as much to continuity as to change. Admittedly the Nova research is about young people primarily of school age and no doubt others would argue that the most significant change has taken place in relation to young adults: opportunities in education and the labour market, the availability and affordability of housing, mobility and migration, violence, crime and substance misuse. Research evidence on these issues, rather like the policy that should flow from it, appears to be fragmented and insular. The international review team was unaware of any big debate on either youth or childhood involving all three interested corners of the triangle: government, NGOs and research. Indeed, Nova seemed to be working in some isolation and excluded (or self-excluded) from making a structured contribution to such debate. Elsewhere in Europe there is a strong emphasis on evidence based policy and practice⁴⁹ and we were aware of glimpses of this in the Norwegian context (for example, the development of multisystemic therapy). The international review team, while aware of events that bring government, LNU and municipalities together, would suggest that closer dialogue and contact between the central administration, those responsible for implementation and youth researchers is put on a more structured footing.

49. In the UK, for example, there is a research, policy and practice forum on young people, co-ordinated by a steering group composed of representatives from government, youth agencies and research institutions. It holds two “invited” conferences a year – a large one on a major thrust of government policy (that is, social inclusion, community cohesion) and a smaller one on topical elements of practice (that is, mentoring, or alcohol and drug misuse). There is a round table debate, interspersed by contributions from researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, which seeks to sharpen understanding, focus and direction and to address areas of dissonance between the three corners of the triangle.



Appendices



The Council of Europe's youth policy indicators

Towards the end of 2002, the Council of Europe's Youth Directorate concluded a first attempt at identifying a range of indicators on youth policy. These are listed below, with a brief annotation of how the international review team considers Norway's performance in relation to each of them. Since further guidance as to the use of such indicators has not yet been developed, these are cursory and provisional observations.



Youth policy

1. The number of young people active in lifelong learning, both in formal and non-formal education, and indiscriminate of gender, origin and social and cultural background shall increase. Qualifications acquired in structured and curriculum based non-formal education offers shall be recognised as part of lifelong learning.

The perspective here is mixed. Clearly, there are very large numbers of young people in Norway who are, or have been, involved in youth organisations and a significant proportion of young people pursue formal education beyond the compulsory age. The point of concern is the extent to which participation in non-formal learning is structured and evaluated in ways that permit it to be recognised as part of lifelong learning. The Department for Education and Research was of the view that such non-formal learning participation was virtually taken for granted in Norway, because so many young people were involved. However, the international review team remained unclear about how such experience was accommodated within the credentials for future participation in education and the labour market.

2. The number of young people having access to new technologies and being trained in using them to the best of their advantage shall increase.

Norway does very well here. The vast majority of young people have access to the Internet in the home and all schools are fully equipped.

3. The proportion of young people in member countries who receive specialist personal advice and support and vocational guidance shall increase.

The international review team is unable to comment on this indicator. There are certainly numerous points of access to information, advice and guidance in Norway, both physical and virtual.





4. The number of youth information centres, youth information services in the media and youth information contact points in member countries and the proportion of young people making good use of this offer shall increase.

The international review team visited the Oslo Youth Information Centre, and learned about the government youth information website and the youth information provision in Nordland (Klara Klok). All are well subscribed to by young people. The main issue appears to be ensuring effective links between such services and connecting to the lessons of youth information services that have been developed in other countries and at a European level.

5. The number of young people deciding to live a healthy lifestyle shall increase and so shall the health and social protection services providing guidance and assistance.

There are concerns that young people in Norway, who are generally fit and healthy, are increasingly adopting unhealthy lifestyles, though the numbers remain relatively low compared with other countries. Alcohol and drug misuse, and psychosocial disorders (such as eating disorders and suicide) are particular issues of concern. There is evidence that innovative developments in youth health services are being established, though how widespread these are, and the extent they reach young people most in need of them, remains in question.

6. The proportion of local authorities, which in co-operation with central government care for creating access to suitable housing schemes for young people shall increase.

The Norwegian government's instrument of housing policy, Husbanken, has revised its housing strategies for youth, through grants and loans, to address the changing housing needs of young people and given more priority to young people and disadvantaged groups. Municipalities are aware that to combat the out-migration of young people, appropriate housing provision is one piece of an important jigsaw in maintaining their localities as attractive places for young people to live.

7. The number of young people finding access to paid work must increase.

The policy aspiration in Norway is for no young people to be unemployed. Most young people can find work, though some is not ideal (despite government attempts to ensure proper protection of young people in the workplace); those who do not have access to various education and training, and labour market activation programmes, in order to improve their competitiveness in the labour market.

8. The number of opportunities of mobility of young people in order to enlarge their intercultural and personal experiences and their professional qualifications shall increase.

Norway provides generous levels of support for young people to study abroad and to assist their participation in international and intercultural exchanges. Within Norway, support for study is equally generous although policy seeks to balance the extension of educational opportunities with the retention of young people in their home communities. Out-migration from remote rural areas and in-migration to more urban contexts (often, at first, for reasons to do with learning) is a matter of some concern.

9. The number of countries introducing specific youth legislation and practicing a youth justice system shall increase.



Norway does not have any specific youth legislation but young people are given central consideration in a range of wider legislation. Norway does not have a specific youth justice system. Young people under the age of 15 are below the age of criminal responsibility and the responsibility of the child welfare system. Those above the age of 15 are subject to the adult jurisdiction, although there are special measures for young adult offenders committed to custodial provision. Few are in fact sent to prison and preference is still given to addressing the needs of young offenders through the child welfare system, including follow-up to age 23 if need be. Reforms of the child welfare system, and greater synchronicity with the police and criminal justice system are in hand, but the issues concerning the balance between youth crime and youth welfare almost certainly require further attention.

10. The number of central and local government measures aimed at giving young people real opportunities to practice active citizenship, to participate in public life and to use freedom of speech and association shall increase.

Norway is perhaps exemplary in this regard. The central administration dispenses a generous grants scheme for youth organisations, and promotes the active participation of young people in all aspects of public services that affect their lives. In schools, municipalities, counties and the central administration, there are structures which ensure the involvement of young people in contributing to dialogue and decision-making.

11. The opportunities for young people to take part in recreational and cultural opportunities and/or to become active in social and voluntary services shall increase.

Once again, Norway has a robust policy framework to provide opportunities for young people to participate in sporting, leisure and cultural activities – and the vast majority of young people do avail themselves of these opportunities.

12. Occasions to practice sport and outdoor activities shall increase, and where they do not exist yet, be created.

Young people in Norway have extensive opportunities to take part in sport and outdoor activities.

13. Young people shall be given opportunities for stays away from home from a very young age and their proportion to take part in international exchanges in the forms of both studies and practical experiences shall increase.

The international review team has no direct evidence of opportunities for young people in Norway for away from home experience, although we suspect that these are provided in a significant scale through a variety of youth organisations.

At an international level, the Norwegian Government fully and financially supports international engagement by young people, including through exchanges. The National Office (BUFA) serves as the national agency for the EU youth programme and encourages participation in exchanges by groups of young people from the most remote areas of Norway.

14. The proportion of young people who are victims of crime and violent acts and the proportion of young people who are perpetrators of violence shall decrease.

As in many other countries, this is an emergent area of concern for youth policy in Norway. There are strong indications that violence has increased considerably in



recent years, with young people both as victims and perpetrators, although concrete evidence is hard to come by. The NOVA research says that 54% of young people report having been involved in some kind of violence. In response, the government has developed anti-bullying strategies in schools and the Urban Youth Projects in ten cities of Norway are focused on creating safer environments for young people and combating racism and violence.

-----> **Youth research**

15. Evidence-based policy making is only possible if the evidence is available and accessible. European youth research, as the evidential reference for European youth policy-making, must currently work with a highly uneven and disparate information and knowledge base. Comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated policies and action in favour of young people throughout Europe require comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated evidence and expertise. In this respect, and to improve the quantity, quality and balance of information and knowledge about young people it is recommended to establish a comprehensive European database and a regular reporting system and to support European youth research by structured co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The partnership agreement on youth research between the Commission and the Council of Europe represents a significant step forward.

The tentative feeling of the international review team was that the current structure and focus of youth research was unlikely to assist the formulation and evaluation of youth policy. Closer links and dialogue between youth research and government (and those responsible for implementing youth policy) are recommended, in order to establish a more coherent agenda.

16. The Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe comprises 48 signatory parties. These vary substantially in their collections of statistics on young people. It is still a long way to arrive at the comprehensive European database on young people recommended above. When using data one should not insist on absolute comparability, because this would be unrealistic. Instead, data should be used which have proven comparable in a reasonable high number of member countries. Also, the UN Human Development Index (HDI) should be used for young people as a subgroup to general population studies (cf. International review of Lithuania, 2002).

The international review team is unable to comment on this.

17. The Council of Europe invites all European and international organisations working with youth policy indicators (EU, OECD, World Bank, Unesco) to enter into dialogue and exchange on the feasibility of the approach suggested here, its potential for further development, its political wisdom and its appropriateness in term of practical use and efficiency in knowledge production on young people in Europe and the world at large. This dialogue must include youth organisations and the civil society at large as well as the business community. A European conference of experts on indicators and their use in European youth studies is proposed for 2004, within the partnership agreement between the European Commission and the Council of Europe on youth research.



→ Youth policy indicators

18. Indicators are meant to show what countries are doing for young people and how they are doing this. They need to be appropriate to describe both governmental measures and activities of civil society and the market, and moreover, the interaction between them.

19. Indicators have to serve political postulates of good governance such as accountability, effectiveness, coherence and transparency.

20. Indicators, youth policy interpretation and youth policy components are different dimensions of understanding and conceptualising youth policy. These dimensions inform each other and are a prerequisite for the construction of youth policy packages of opportunity and experience. Scope and content of these packages need to bridge the gap between intended youth policy objectives and concrete achievements.

21. All youth policy indicators should be broken down by gender, minority/majority status and urban/rural divide.

22. Indicators need to show within the mechanism of implementation and delivery of youth policy, how the arrangements within member countries promote access and inclusion or, how they fail in achieving this objective.

23. Any use of indicators needs to be made subject of an intercultural examination, considering the development of youth policy in a country by using knowledge related to historic understanding, religious and cultural norms and habits, effects of long lasting styles of governance of a very recent past, economic facts and figures before being used in reviewing youth policy in a country. In other words, indicators need to be attuned to situations and processes, without ever leaving the core understanding of youth policy to be democratic, value based and promoting gender equality and minority rights.

24. It is desirable that ongoing work on indicators in the Council of Europe should become part of the guidelines on the production of national youth policy reports and international reviews as well as of the youth policy advisory missions. Indicators should also be used within the new policy of the European Union following the publication of the white paper “A new impetus for European youth”.





A core package of opportunities and experiences

The Council of Europe's document on youth policy indicators makes reference to a core package of opportunities and experiences which were also adopted in a subsequent document on guidelines for the formulation and implementation of youth policies:

Youth policies should provide a minimum package of opportunities and experiences to which young people should have access in order to promote the probability of their successful integration into both the labour market and civil society. These opportunities and experiences constitute the scope for action (the key domains of intervention) of youth policy. According to the final report on youth policy indicators, they are as follows:

- learning: (lifelong, formal and non-formal) education and training, recognition of non-formally acquired skills and competencies;
- access to new technologies;
- specialist personal advice and support, career guidance;
- information;
- access to health services and social protection;
- access to housing;
- access to paid work;
- mobility;
- justice and youth rights (for example, to assistance);
- opportunities to participation and active citizenship;
- recreational, cultural and social;
- sports and outdoor activities;
- away from home, youth exchange and international experiences;
- safe and secure environment.

The international review team subscribes to the view that youth policy in Norway displays a strong commitment to making such a package available to its young people. Its Achilles heel, perhaps, relates to Justice and youth rights (for example, to assistance), for there were recurrent allegations and criticisms that the speed, intensity and quality of delivery of support and welfare services were inadequate. The other point of concern lay with the question of the recognition of non-formally acquired skills and competencies, where issues to do with outcome expectations and validation of learning clearly merits further debate.





The five 'c's (components) of effective youth policy delivery

In the synthesis report of the first seven international reviews of national youth policy (Williamson, 2002), five core components of effective youth policy are advanced as a framework for thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of national youth policy. Below, Norway's youth policy is considered within this framework.



Coverage¹

The general view is that there is considerable coverage in relation to most dimensions of youth policy. In other words, the aspects and aspirations of youth policy which command most coverage in the National Report (and in Report No. 39) do extend well beyond the capital city and the larger towns, and into some of the most remote areas of Norway.² However, the international review team was concerned about the quality and depth of some provision in the smaller municipalities. In terms of coverage of the age range, it appeared to be very comprehensive for school age young people and very satisfactory for those at upper secondary school level (the follow-up service was considered to be an important development). There were, however, some gaps in opportunity and service delivery for the oldest teenagers and young adults. In short, childhood policy, up to the age of 18, was well articulated and a strong focus of political attention. There appeared, however, to be some weaknesses in the conceptualisation and development of youth policy, especially for young people who did not, or could not, follow the mainstream routes of transition.



Capacity³

Norway potentially has almost unlimited capacity to deliver effective youth policy, across domains of policy and between the central administration, the county level and the municipalities. But some of the internal divisions between government departments appear to create barriers that impede this capacity, despite claims of cross-departmental collaboration (see below). Moreover, many individual municipalities are simply too small to respond to and deliver the expanding youth policy

1. This relates to geography, age groupings and social groups.

2. One reason for initially considering the 'c' of coverage was because in some countries the breadth and depth of youth policy works well in the major clusters of population but never reaches young people who live in more dispersed communities.

3. This relates to the horizontal and vertical structures for the delivery of youth policy.

agenda. There may be an argument that the intervening level of administration – the county level – needs to be strengthened, in order to establish economies of scale for some of the more specialised services that are being considered. But the transfer of some county responsibilities (for example, for child welfare) to the central administration does not reflect a confidence in this level, and there is also the establishment of 27 local teams to meet some child welfare responsibilities for ‘the most difficult kids across municipalities. This theoretically heralds another level of service delivery and, before it goes too far, may demand a radical reconsideration of current arrangements – perhaps to restructure county arrangements and to cluster municipalities into population densities of, for example, some 200 000 people. The international review team recognises the sensitivities around just raising such issues, particularly when our focus is solely on youth, but changing policy imperatives across the spectrum may demand attention to whether or not current arrangements are sacred cows (to be slain) or cherished traditions (to be defended). It did seem to the international review team that the undoubtedly strong capacity of the public administration in Norway was still not always capable of delivery – drilling down deeply enough to reach its targets.

-----> **Competence⁴**

The international review team felt, like the government, that this had to be developed, especially for those who are working in youth clubs and projects at the local level. This, after all, is the first point of contact for many young people, where a range of needs can first be identified and addressed. If early intervention for the purposes of prevention is considered to be a policy priority, then the skills of workers at that first point of contact need to be enhanced. They need to be multi-skilled, as organisers, counsellors, facilitators, initiators and motivators. A repertoire of skills is required, not just as local (non-formal) educators, but also in relation to, for example, alcohol and drug misuse, child protection, and procedures in the criminal justice system. The international review team was unclear about how youth workers addressed such problems, but was convinced that more leaflets in schools were not the answer. We were told that such work is relatively low status, attracting a relatively low income, so there is limited career progression. Elsewhere, there is growing interest in the idea of professional apprenticeships, whereby young adults involved in youth projects can develop, over time, a range of professional competences in working with young people. This, however, requires engagement with theory and policy, as well as everyday practice, which in turns demands a training infrastructure – a centre of knowledge and excellence, responsible for teaching, training and research. The international review team felt that there was a relaxed use of terms such as participation, advocacy or empowerment, with little grasp of the conceptual issues, and pedagogical or methodological processes by which these might be achieved.

-----> **Co-ordination⁵**

The international review team felt that there was good horizontal communication and co-ordination at senior levels in different ministries but that at a lower level, within government departments, such contact was less impressive. Indeed, while

4. This relates to workforce development issues: the professional skills of those charged with the coalface delivery of services to young people.

5. This refers to both the horizontal and vertical links in the administration of different youth policy domains, such as education, health, housing or criminal justice.



there was impressive knowledge and awareness of specific departmental issues, there seemed to be little acknowledgement, or even acceptance, that these were integrally related to other aspects of young people's lives. There was also concern that vertical co-ordination, to ensure as well as enable, was less than self-evident. Those we spoke to at government level were often quite unable to tell us how ideas, plans and aspirations actually panned out in practice. We were often left with the unsatisfactory remark that "it is up to the municipalities", with no real idea of whether and how the resolutions of the central administration in fact reached the ground. Even at the county level, there was a sense of doing it our way and being somewhat resistant to ideas that emanate from Oslo. Securing the implementation of youth policy plans through effective co-ordination, rather than through legislative decree, seemed to be a somewhat hit and miss affair, dependent on the persuasiveness of an idea and the commitment of dedicated individuals (such as the Director of Education in Nordland) to seeing policy through to fruition.

-----> **Cost⁶**

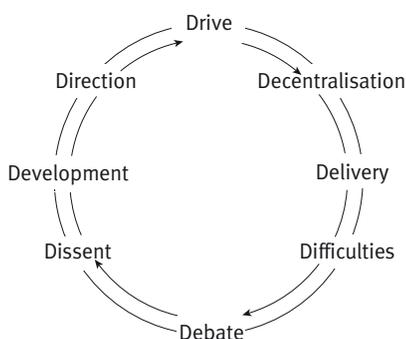
Norway is a wealthy country and commits considerable resources to supporting the aspirations of its policies towards young people. It is extremely generous in its allocations to youth organisations, with few strings attached and, in most domains of policy, does seek to ensure adequate resources are made available to secure desirable delivery. That some services appear not to be effectively delivered stems not from inadequate resources but from less than effective co-ordination and a different sense of priorities at the local level.

6. This obviously relates to the budgetary support attached to particular youth policy aspirations. In other international reviews it has become quite clear that politicians can wave policy documents and resolutions around to the satisfaction of their audiences, when in fact there are no resources dedicated to transforming such ideas into reality.



The four 'd's (dynamics) of effective youth policy development

In the synthesis report on the first seven international reviews of national youth policy (Williamson, 2002), there is a proposition that effective youth policy is dynamically developed through a complementary cycle that involves four (or eight) 'd's:



The youth policy development dynamic can be initiated at any point and, equally, at any point can grind to a halt. Without political drive, for example, even the best ideas are never likely to take off. Delivery will be impossible if there is not the capacity and infrastructure to take ideas and aspirations from the centre to the ground. Practice on the ground, which inevitably encounters difficulties, will stagnate and be rendered ineffective unless there is some possibility of critical reflection and debate. But debate can go on for ever, and dissent has to be settled if further development is to be established. And unless politicians are given a strong steer and direction, they are unlikely to invest new ideas with the necessary political drive. And so the circle turns.

In Norway, there is clearly – in broad terms – a positive cycle of youth policy development, notwithstanding the many caveats already mentioned by the international review team. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, in collaboration to some extent with other ministries, sets the agenda and the minister is clear about where she wants to go. There appears to be strong cross-party political support for the opportunity-focused and preventative youth policy described in the National Report, based largely on the Report No. 39 (2001-02) and to a lesser extent on Report No. 40 (2001-02).

Delivery appears to be the burning policy challenge and the possible pinch point in policy aspirations. Structures for decentralisation are weak because the centre has limited authority to impose its will. There are both practice and financial report requirements but much hinges on the commitment of municipalities to fulfilling the government's agenda. There is clearly some debate arising from the difficulties presented by these arrangements, but that debate appears to be both latent (in that it touches a major political hot potato) and limited. Despite much talk of synergy and symbiosis, the voice of some key players (youth researchers, and practitioners) seems rather mute, despite the bi-annual national youth conferences convened by the ministry and by LNU. BUFA's website might be a mechanism by which such debate could be opened up. The international review team certainly did not get a great deal of information about the realities (and difficulties) of local youth policy from people at the sharp end. Youth policy development looks very much like policy from above, with numerous action plans and a top-down flow of information but little forthcoming in the reverse direction, from municipalities and young people themselves. Indeed, there was a picture of relaxed confidence and self-affirmation amidst central government. This sat uneasily with the very different picture of (a relatively small population of) young people who, for a variety of reasons, have not managed, or managed themselves, to take advantage of the safe and comfortable conditions that the government has organised for the majority of its young people.






Review of Norwegian youth policy by the Council of Europe



Visit by the group of experts 25-31 August 2003

Programme

Monday 25 August

Arrival

Tuesday 26 August

10.00 Meeting in the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Akersgata 59, Meeting room D 2618.

General information about the Norwegian Government, administrative structure and the responsibilities at local, regional and national level.

Information about the Child and Youth Policy Committee of State Secretaries.

Information about the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs.

11.00 Information about the work of the department of Children and Youth Policy by members of the staff.

13.00 Lunch at the ministry.

14.00 Meeting with representatives from the National Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs.

16.00 Meeting with the Norwegian Youth Council and some of their member organisations.

18.00 Return to the hotel.

20.00 Dinner hosted by the ministry.

Wednesday 27 August

09.30 Meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research.

13.00 Visit the Township Grünerløkka at the X-Ray youth activity centre.

16.55 Departure from Gardermoen airport to Bodø.

Thursday 28 August

09.00 Departure from Bodø to Kjerringøy.

10.30 Meeting with representatives from the Nordland County Council and the non-governmental sector in the county.

17.00 Guided tour, Kjerringøy Museum.

18.15 Departure from Kjerringøy to Bodø.

20.30 Dinner hosted by the Nordland County Council.

Friday 29 August

07.45 Departure from Bodø to Fauske.

09.00 Meeting with representatives from the municipality of Fauske.

12.00 Lunch.

13.00 Meeting with representatives from the Sami Parliament.

15.30 Departure from Fauske via Bodø to Oslo.

Saturday 30 August

Free time.

Internal meeting – discussion about the second visit of the group.

Sunday 31 August

Departure.





Visit by the group of experts 20-26 October 2003

Programme

Monday 20 October

Arrival.

Tuesday 21 October

- 09.30 Meeting in the ministry, Akersgata 59, to discuss the programme.
- 10.30 Meeting with the Oslo Youth Council and the Youth Information centre.
Lunch at Riverside (Youth Activity Centre).
- 13.00 Meeting with the National Federation of Youth Clubs.
- 14.30 Meeting with the Youth against violence organisation.
- 16.00 Summary of the first day at the hotel.

Wednesday 22 October

- 09.30 Meeting in the ministry. Information to and discussion with all members of the group.
- 10.00 Meeting in the ministry about the National Report
- 11.30 Meeting in the ministry with researcher from NOVA (the appendix to the report and the survey "Youth in Norway").
- 14.00 Meeting with parliamentarians, members of the committee responsible for children and youth (among other fields). Parliament building.

You will meet the following representatives:

May Elisabet Hansen (SV – Left Socialists)
Eirin Faldet (A- Labour)
Afshan Rafiq (H – Conservative)
Karin S. Woldseth (FrP – Progressive Party).

- 15.30 Summary of the day.

Thursday 23 October

The group will split in two for the most of the day.

Group I:

- 09.30 – 10.30 (Internal meeting).

- 11.00 – 12.00 Action plan against drugs and alcohol related problems, Representative from the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- 12.00 – 13.00 Time for some lunch.
- 13.00 – 15.00 Directorate for Health and Social Affairs (teenage pregnancy/abortion, suicide/psychiatry, drugs and alcohol)
- 15.00 – 16.00 Supplementary information from the department of Child and Youth Policy (grants to NGOs, participation, support to activities in larger cities).

Group II:

- 09.30 – 10.30 (Internal meeting).
- 11.00 – 12.00 Youth and criminality, representative from the Ministry of Justice.
- 12.00 – 13.00 Time for some lunch.
- 13.00 – 14.00 Bullying, violence at school, Centre for Education.
- 14.00 – 15.00 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Department of Sami and minority policies.
- 15.00 – 16.00 Supplementary information from the Department of Child and Youth.

Policy (grants to NGOs, participation, support to activities in larger cities).

Friday 24 October

- 09.30 – 11.00 Meeting with the Ombudsman for Children.
- 11.30 – 12.30 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development Supplementary, Department of Immigration Policy.
- 12.30 – 14.00 Lunch.
- 14.00 – 15.00 Meeting with the Minister, Ms Laila Dāvøy.
- 15.30 – 17.30 Meeting with the National Youth Council.
- 18.00 Summary of the day (hotel).

Saturday 25 October

- 10.00 Internal meeting at the hotel.
- 14.00 Free time.

Sunday 26 October

Departure.





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Other materials

Handout on reform 97

Information leaflets on reform 97 (x2)

Information on Norwegian refugee and immigration policies (February and September 2002)

Towards a child-friendly society, Norway's report to the Council of Europe in connection with the 1999 Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Family Affairs

Powerpoint presentation on the education system in Norway (by Ministry of Education)

The Norwegian behavioural project: Parent management training (PMT) and multi systemic therapy (MST) – intervention programs for youngsters with serious behaviour problems

The Oslo challenge – Ensure that the power of the media for good in the lives of children is identified, encouraged and supported, while the potential harmful effects are recognised and reduced

The Sami Parliament's Youth Policy Committee

Who is entitled to vote?

LNU – The Norwegian Youth Council (booklet)

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (leaflet)



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