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Erasmus+ project European Standards for Peer Support Workers in Mental Health

Guide for the national implementation of the further training concept for peer support workers in Norway (EQF) levels 4 and 5



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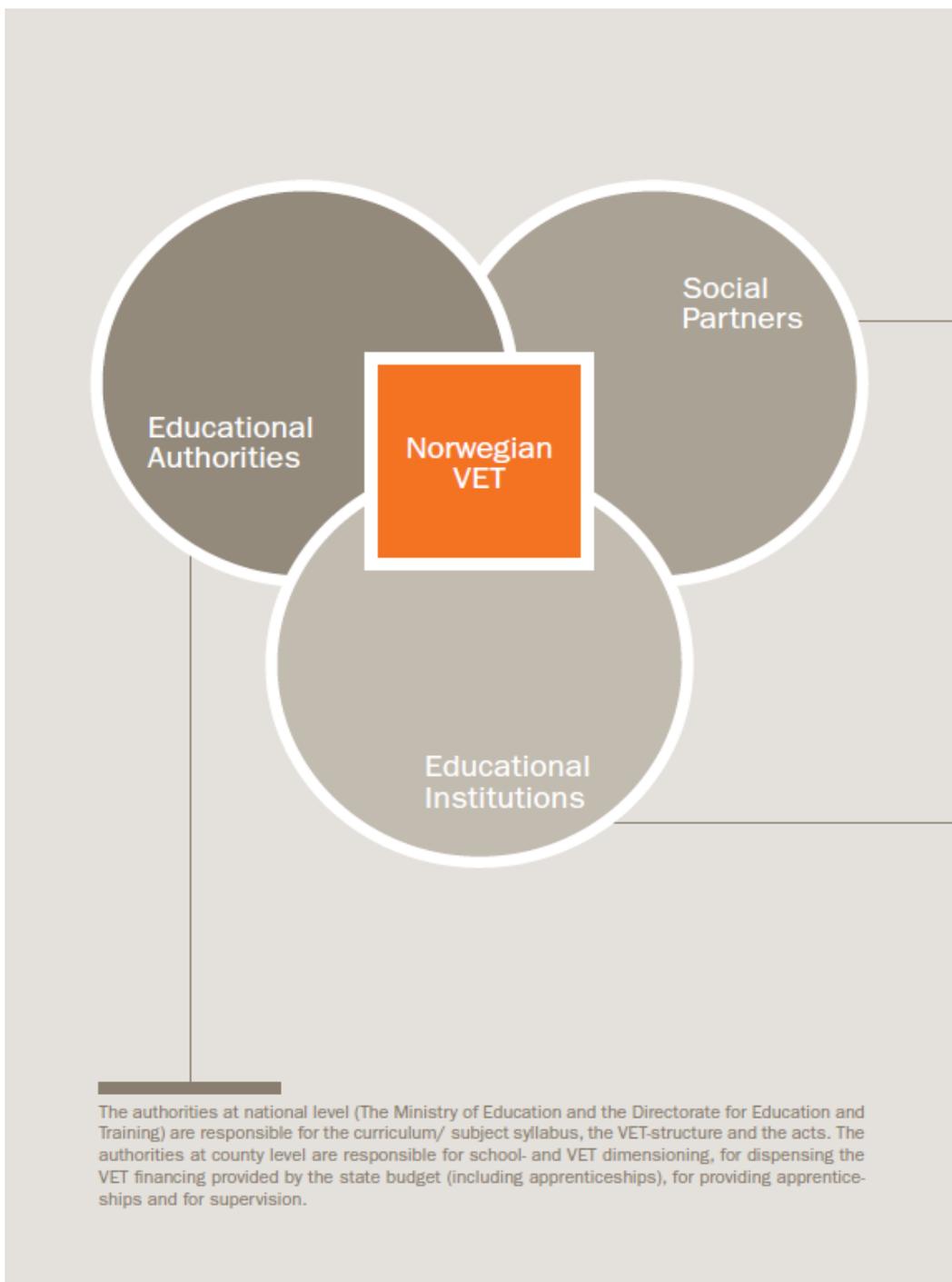
1. Description of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system in Norway

Brief overview



Cedefop (2016). Vocational education and training in Norway

Publications Office. Cedefop information series. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/norway-vet-europe-country-report-2016>



Cedefop (2016). Vocational education and training in Norway

Publications Office. Cedefop information series. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/norway-vet-europe-country-report-2016>

National authorities (The Ministry of Education and the Directorate for Education and Training) are responsible for the curriculum/ subject syllabus, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) - structure and the acts. The county authorities are responsible for

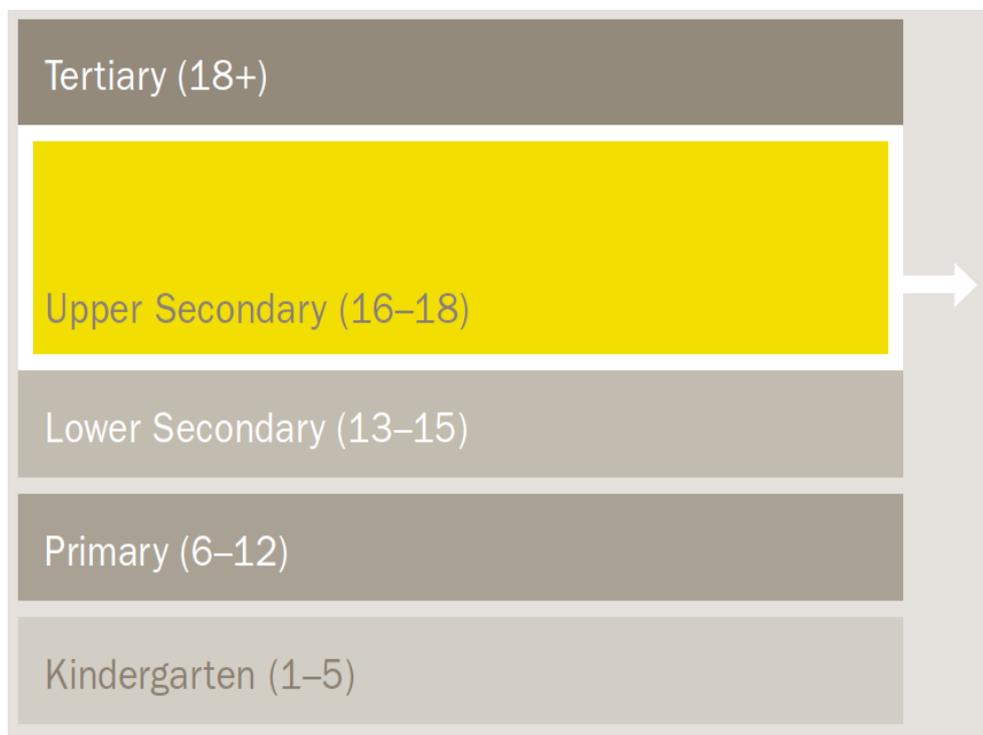
school- and VET dimensioning, for dispensing the VET financing provided by the state budget (including apprenticeships), for providing apprenticeships and for supervision.

Norway has a VET system built upon the tripartite cooperation principle. A cooperation system, mandated by the Education Act, is established both at national and regional level, involving both employers' and workers' unions.

At national level, the National Council for VET (*Norwegian [NO] Term: Samarbeidsrådet for yrkesopplæring*), a body for cooperation on vocational education and training, appointed by the Ministry, gives advice and takes initiatives within VET. One Vocational Training Council (*NO Term: Faglig råd*) exists for each VET program.

At regional level, there are county vocational training boards (*NO Term: Yrkesopplæringsnemnder*), one in each county. These boards have specific advisory tasks as stated in the Education Act. The organization of pupils/apprentices is represented in both in the National Council for VET and in the County Vocational Training Boards.

Education and training are both conducted in schools and in enterprises. Both public and private enterprises accept apprentices and are approved as training enterprises by the county. Training Offices and Training Circles, enterprise driven cooperation ensuring apprenticeship place provision, have become increasingly common.



The first stage at which VET is provided in Norway is at lower secondary level through Elective program subjects (*NO Term: utdanningsvalg*). These enable 8–10th year students to try out subjects from the different upper secondary level programs, including VET.

Having completed lower secondary education, a student can choose to enter one of the following nine Vocational Education Programs:

Program for Technical and Industrial Production;

Program for Electricity and Electronics;

Program for Building and Construction;

Program for Restaurant and Food Processing;

Program for Health and Social Care;

Program for Media and Communication;

Program for Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry;

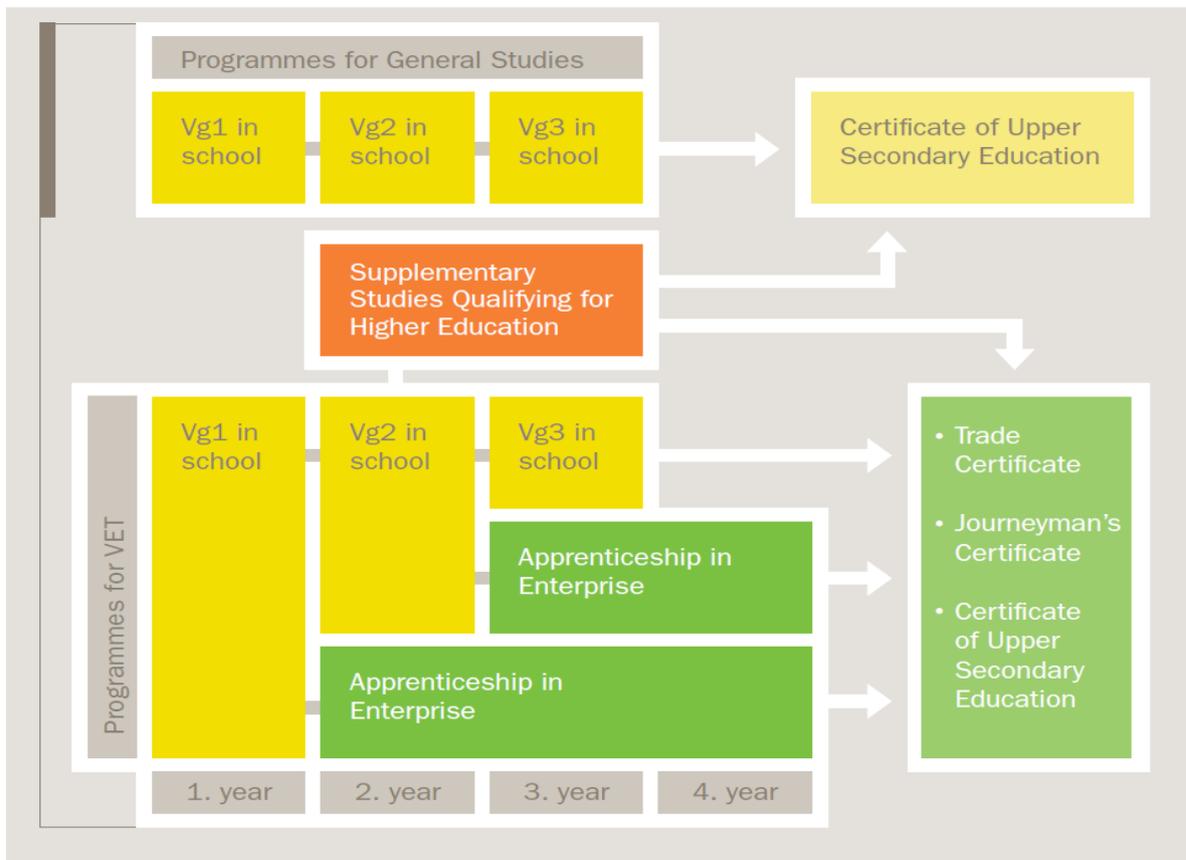
Program for Service and Transport;

Program for Design, Arts and Crafts.

The standard model for VET at upper secondary level is often called the 2+2-Model. This refers to the division of the standard 4year program into two years school-based training followed by two years enterprise-based training which corresponds to one year in school. The model carries a certain degree of flexibility depending on the different program.

After the first year at Upper Secondary level in one of the nine programs, the student has to choose between several specializations in year 12 leading to a further specialization in year 13 when the profession is chosen. The subjects within VET are divided into Common Core Subjects, Common Program Subjects and In-depth Study Project (*NO Term: prosjekt til fordypning*). As the curricula are regulations, the schools and training establishments are bound by their content.

Should a student wish to transfer to a General Studies Programme, he/she may do so by completing a year of Supplementary Studies Qualifying for Higher Education.



Experience-based Trade Certification

The experience-based trade certification scheme has existed since the 1950s and gives adults the right to pass the Trade- or Journeyman's Examination upon proof of long and relevant practice. The scheme has played an important part in the establishment of new trades and is an important recruitment tool for trainers and members of the Examination Boards.

2. Suggestions for a national strategy on level 4 and 5 for the training of peer support workers in Mental Health Care

The following description is taken from the Qualifications Framework:

The Norwegian framework consists of seven levels. To secure understanding in relation to EQF, level 1 is kept open. This level is not described and no qualifications are placed here. The national qualifications framework therefore starts with level 2, which is completed in primary school. Level 3 is basic competence (competence certificate for parts of upper secondary education); level 4 has completed upper secondary education; level 5 has completed vocational education; level 6 is the first cycle in higher education (bachelor's degree); level 7 is the second cycle in higher education (master's degree); level 8 is a doctorate (Ph.D.) The qualification for the university college master's degree is described as a sub-level of level 6.

<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/e579f913fa1d45c2bf2219afc726670b/nkr.pdf>

Development and history

A Peer Support Worker is a person that is hired because of his/her lived experience with mental health and/or substance abuse issues. We will use the term "Peer Worker".

There are two different Peer Worker roles in Norway: the "Peer" (*NO Term: Likeperson*) and the "Experience Consultant" (*NO Term: erfaringskonsulent*). They are both Peer Workers, but the main difference is that the Experience Consultant is a paid employee and member of the multi-disciplinary team and the Peer is a volunteer with personal experience.

The intention is to bring service user experiences into the services, and to systematically provide service users/patients access to service user experience. A Peer Worker has a unique opportunity to make use of his/her experience from mental health/substance abuse services to help others in the same situation. A Peer Worker will see his/her experiences in a larger perspective and reflect on this with other staff. Through cooperation and counselling, a Peer Worker contributes to development and innovation of mental health/substance abuse services. No formal standards are required in order to work in the Peer Work field in Norway, other than personal experience with mental illness.

There are numerous possibilities for training with a non-academic profile. Different User-organizations, like *A-larm (national user organization for substance abuse)* and *Mental Helse (national user organization for mental health issues)*, have many years of experience in training Peer Workers. Several municipalities and a few Hospitals have

also created their own courses for Peer Workers. The development of some of these courses has been in cooperation between different Hospitals or organizations, or a concept has been passed on, but there is no national standard. The best-known Peer Worker educations are the *Medarbeider med Brukererfaring (MB)* (ENG Term: *Peer Worker*) -course in Bergen municipality and the Kompetansesenter for Brukererfaring og Tjenesteutvikling (KBT), a competence centre for lived experience and service development, located in Trondheim.

The first MB-course, equal to EQF level 4, started in Bergen in 2006. Out of 50 applicants, 30 were interviewed and 15 started in the program. Every participant had a long experience within the mental health service and most of them were occupationally disabled due to severe mental illness and living on pension. All of them had a strong wish to contribute to an increased focus on user's competence in the services.

Throughout one year of training, the goal of the MB-course is to make former users competent and prepared to become helpers. The school year has three modules, all integrated:

- 20 weeks of theory
- 10 + 10 weeks of supervised practice
- A final essay, where they combine own experience with new theoretical knowledge and practical work

In the 180 hours of theory, basics on psychology, psychiatry, pharmacology, law, communication, supervision, health system, professional secrecy and roles are being taught. Training mostly involves how to use their own experience, and the difference between being personal and being private. The meaning behind these modules is to start an individual process through discussions and workshops, and also to get new perspectives on their own personal experience.

The MB-course in numbers, after 13 years of experience:

- Participants started in the program: 210
- Participants graduated after theory, practice and essay: 80 %
- Participants started to work: 75 %
- Participants started further education: 14 %

Today 40 Peer Workers are employed in municipal services, they have their own network and participate in many city projects. Peers contribute to a new focus in our services and describe that this training has contributed in them feeling more ready to work as helpers, and also feeling more self-confident in their own role.

As part of the Escalation Plan for Mental Health, the User-Managed Centre in Central Norway *Kompetansesenteret for Brukererfaring og Tjenesteutvikling* (KBT) started as a project in Mental Health Sør-Trøndelag. Involved in the establishment are the user organization environments *Mental Helse, Landsforeningen for Pårørende innen Psykisk Helse, Voksne for Barn, HiST* and *St. Olavs Hospital*. The goal is to support user participation and user empowerment.

In 2013, KBT started a two-year project where Peer Workers were hired in two ambulatory outreach teams in the Central Norway Regional Health Authority. The project was named “Practice and attitude development through Peer Support Specialists in Outreach teams” (*NO Term: Praksis- og holdningsutvikling gjennom erfaringskonsulent i ambulante team*), and was conducted at Nidaros Distriks Psykiatriske Senter (DPS) and Tiller DPS. The DPS (*NO Term: disktriktskykiatrisk senter*) is a locally based psychiatric centre. The project’s evaluation showed that Peer Workers played a significant role in establishing personal contact with the patients. They were bearers of hope and able to provide coping strategies to the patients. (<https://kbtkompetanse.no/en/peer-support-specialist-projects/>)

During Autumn of 2019, KBT was accredited as vocational school by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). Fulfilment of KBT training leads to a certificate with 60 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. Students who complete the courses will therefore get merit and admission into higher education. This equals EQF level 5.

The vocational school for Peer Workers in the mental health and addictions field is a training program that provides both theoretical and practical competence based on the use of personal experience in helping and empowering others. There are no formal academic admission criteria, other than self-experience of receiving health and welfare services about mental health and addiction problems.

Upon completion of this training, people with personal experience as service users are officially qualified to apply their experience in working professionally with other service recipients. Alumni will be able to work as experienced consultants in municipal mental health and care services or specialized health services. This training does not lead to an experience consultant authorization. The school gives merit to higher education.

The program is offered as a 1-year full-time study, or as a 2-year part-time study. Training is online-based with 3 theoretical courses and 2 practical training courses. Supervised practice constitutes 50% of the program. Previous relevant job experience can be acknowledged and approved as a practice. In addition to the online teaching and student activities, 8 gatherings also take place throughout the academic year. (<https://kbtkompetanse.no/en/the-first-vocational-school-for-peer-support-in-norway/>)

Assessment of different courses and educations offered to Peer Workers and employees in Agder County

Praxis-Bruker is a cooperation network constituted by user organizations, municipalities, the County Governor, Sørlandet Hospital HF (SSHF), Norwegian Research Centre AS (NORCE), and the University of Agder (UiA) aiming at promoting peer support and peer experience in Agder County.

The network will work for:

- motivating public services, the university and user organizations for a joint effort to highlight and develop user knowledge in the services in Agder county
- strengthening the systematic users' participation in the municipalities
- coordinating a User Forum in cooperation with *Rom-Agder* (one out of five regional user-led Centres in Agder county) and *A-larm* (national user organization for substance abuse), and ensuring that ideas and topics, developed in the User Forum, are followed up
- being a driving force for new research and development projects, and fundraising for their implementation
- being a reference group, or sparring partner for research projects dealing with users of welfare services both at Agderforskning (research institute in Agder County) and at UiA
- being a door opener for research both in user organizations and in the municipalities
- contributing to the user perspective being revealed in the welfare education programs at UiA.

(Note, Dato: 4.nov. 2021, Vurdering av ulike kurs og utdanninger som tilbys til brukere og ansatte innen i Agder Oppdragsgiver: Praxis bruker / UiA - samarbeidet)

On 24 Aug. 2021, after a Praxis Bruker meeting, participants decided to set up a working group that would provide an overview of what is offered by training and education for users and relatives nationwide, who intended to strengthen the voice of the users. It was agreed that the working group's mandate would be to assess the programs that had already been established and also to include the already available needs and plans of Peer Workers in new approaches of schooling.

The goal is to establish a common and coordinated Peer Workers' educational system at different qualification levels (4-6). The choice of education level depends on the education Nivea of the Peer, his or her life experience and on his or her needs or wishes.

Based on the working group's recommendation, the County Governor (*NO Term: Statsforvalter*) will consider applying for funding to implement measures that contribute to strengthening the services' ability to use experience knowledge.

Representatives of the following services and organizations participated in the workgroup:

- Grimstad municipality
- Sørlandet Hospital at the Clinic for Mental Health and Substance Abuse (SSHF KPH)
- ROM-Agder (*NO Term: Råd og muligheter*, one of five regional user-controlled centre within mental health and addiction)
- A-larm (national user organization for substance abuse)
- Kristiansand municipality
- The county governor acted as an advisor to the group.

The programs assessed are:

1. PSY921-G Recovery cooperation in social networks, UiA Health: Institute for psychosocial health.
2. SV 911 Knowledge development at the workplace ("The Network of Knowledge"), UiA Social Sciences: Department of Sociology and Social Work.
3. Peer work. UiA: Department of Health and Nursing Science (a plan exists, but not initiated).
4. Recovery-college (Pre-project carried out by Kristiansand municipality).
5. Experienced Involvement (EX-IN)/ Labour market training (AMO)- courses with support from Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), and the MB education in Bergen and at Blakstad, Oslo.
6. A-larm's Mentor/Peer Worker education.
7. Vocational school for Peer Workers/experience consultants.

Terms:

1. A cooperation on education must be anchored within municipalities, hospitals, user organisations, the university, in research (NORCE) and the county governor.
2. Information must be distributed to all municipalities and the health network in Agder County. Agder Recovery network (a network formed in 2019, consisting of municipalities in Agder County, SSHF, different user organizations, NAPHA, the

county governor in Agder can be a channel to ensure this. The municipalities participating in SV 911 "Knowledge Networks" are also relevant to draw in. NAPHA will have a key role here, being a competence centre for mental health work for adults in the municipalities. The centre documents and disseminates practical knowledge and research to employees in mental health work in the municipalities.

3. International (Example: Erasmus "Peer Worker" Project) and national plans (Erfaringskompetanse.no, NAPHA) for training peers and experience consultants must be linked as much as possible.

Evaluation

UiA provides three courses/trainings at the moment, one of which has not yet been initiated. In this overview, we have also included a brief description of the Vocational School level that is currently only offered by KBT user-controlled centre in Trondheim.

1. PSY921-G Recovery cooperation in social networks (NO Title: *Recoverysamarbeid i sosiale nettverk*)

Provider: Faculty of Health and Sports Sciences. Department of Psychosocial Health.

Review: This course started in 2018. It runs over 2 semesters and gives 10 study credits. Admission requirements are bachelor's degrees, but can be waived and only submit a course certificate.

Objective: Change of attitude – so that one can recognize and support people's own resources and efforts in their recovery process as well as promote quality of life. It emphasizes on dialogical practice, the building of relationship and cooperation.

Evaluation/ Exam: Individual project assignment.

Funding: Tuition Fee (NOK 16.000 per participant).

2. SV 911 Knowledge development at the workplace (NO Title: *Kunnskapsutvikling på arbeidsplassen «Kunnskapende nettverk»*)

Provider: UiA Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Work.

Review: The course started in 2020 after several years of elaboration through the Praksis Bruker collaboration/ BRUS project. It offers 40 study places. There is a great interest in applying for the program. It runs over 2 semesters and provides

10 study credits upon qualification. The target group is professionals and users as well.

Objective: This course is intended for professionals and peer workers in the social work/welfare field within substance abuse- and mental health services. As a student, one may define and work on a separate development project related to one's workplace, and receive guidance from the university.

Funding: Semester fee. The County Governor is also financing the program and provides salary grants of up to 20% to municipalities for participating users/experience consultants.

3. Peer work (*NO Term: Likepersonarbeid*)

Provider: UiA, Department of Health and Nursing Science.

Review: Organizations and workplaces that employ peers and/or experience consultants (in both the somatic and mental health field) are the program's target group. The course did not start as planned in 2020 due to too small applicant pool, and the COVID pandemic.

There is a need to teach the topics in the study program to different groups. This is now being evaluated to see if these can be adapted into the peer courses planned by ROM-Agder.

Financing: Tuition Fee, according to planning. NOK 15,000.

4. Recovery-college

In 2020, Kristiansand municipality received grants from the County Governor to look at the possibility of establishing a Recovery College as a Peer Worker educational centre for its municipality and the Agder region. A Recovery College establishment is one of the objectives of Agder Recovery Network (a network consisting of municipalities in Agder county, SSHF, NAPHA, the County Governor in Agder and different user organizations).

The idea behind a Recovery College is that patients and relatives can have the opportunity to "recover" through attending courses and participating in the community, rather than having the role of sick and needy. The courses will also be offered to professionals, helping them to get the same comprehension tool and be able to provide recovery support and participate in equal dialogue.

The project is currently working on mapping the needs and opportunities that currently exist in Kristiansand/ Agder and considers models to build more recovery colleges in Agder County.

Financing: Funded by the Agder County.

5. EX-IN/ AMO- courses with support from NAV (NO Term: EX-IN / AMO-kurs med støtte fra NAV, ref. MB utdanningen i Bergen)

Sørlandet Hospital at the Clinic for Mental Health and Substance Abuse (KPH), ROM-Agder and Mental Helse Agder were in dialogue with the German training course “Experienced Involvement” (EX-IN) in the period 2019-2020. Contractual requirements made it difficult to continue this work. ROM-Agder's Board of Directors decided to investigate the possibility of building an education for Peers corresponding to the *Medarbeider med Brukererfaring* (MB), or Peer Worker, education in Bergen.

This course has been held annually from 2006 and is financed by NAV. The participants of the MB course learn to use their history/experience in work and teaching, and other practical things about participating in working life and multi-disciplinary treatment teams.

GOAL: Qualification. Personal development. Job-oriented. 20 weeks practice.

- The participant must receive NAV support in order to apply
- NAV must approve the application
- Open info meetings before the applicant round starts
- Separate application forms for admission.
- Selected applicants must be interviewed in person. The selection process is very important:
 - Is she/he ready for this? What’s the motivation about?
 - Experience of psychosis/ admissions weighs positively

Financing: It is not assumed that the County Governor will fund such a model.

Our suggestion is that it should be linked to the NAV – job specialists in the specialist health service collaboration.

6. A-larm School for Peer Workers (NO Term: A-larm skolen for mentorere)

Provider: A-larm

Preview: A-larmskolen, or “Life-School”, is a training for Peer Workers, or “Mentors”, as they call themselves. It addresses to participants in our various activities and projects, to our own employees, and can be well adapted to external parties. As a main headline over the courses in the A-larm school is life skills - motivation - equipment for life itself, for more schooling and for working life. The teachers at A-larmskolen are employees of A-larm. Some have academic/ pedagogical competence and background, others have gone to life

school themselves, have personal experience in intoxicants, and have developed very good conversation and teaching competence in small groups.

The Life School consists of training at several levels:

Level 1. The participants: this recovery-orientated course is linked to the life, challenges, resources and opportunities of each individual. Participants are offered support 24/7 by their Mentor aiming at social competence and social skills development. When a participant has come far enough on his or her recovery-journey, other options like taking trainings as a group leader or as a Mentor, as experience consultant or co-researcher are possible. Mentors provide support for self-help for the participants and are living examples themselves, that there is hope and a way to recovery.

Level 2. Mentor, group leader, experience consultant, co-researcher: this training is fee-free and requires an asymptomatic period, whether it is drug issues, mental health challenges or co-dependence as a relative. One must have met and worked with one's own challenges to be able to help others, only then can the internship period begin. Guidance and qualification are key words, but the ultimate goal will only be met after training completion, only then participants are ready to re-integrate to society. This involves getting a job, going to school or a combination of experience-based work in parallel to another qualification that takes them a step further, towards "normal life".

Financing: Governmental funding.

7. Vocational school for Peer Workers/experience consultants (NO Term: *Fagskole for erfaringskonsulenter*)

A. KBT user-controlled centre in Trondheim.

It can bring up applicants from all over the country. Much is set up for online teaching.

Admission requirements include study competence or admission according to documented real experience competence. The vocational school has been approved by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), grants rights in the Norwegian State Loan Fund, and equals EQF level 5.

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education – NOKUT is a state directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research, which, through evaluation, accreditation and approval of quality systems, institutions and study programs, is responsible for controlling the quality of Norwegian higher education institutions. The Section for Foreign Education in NOKUT is responsible for approving education from foreign educational institutions.

B. Arbeidernes opplysningsforbund (AOF) Agder- Hordaland (*ENG Term: workers information association*) is investigating a new vocational school offer for Peer Workers in 2021.

The Praxis-Bruker Workgroup has participated in a meeting together with AOF. At this meeting, it was concluded that MB education in Bergen is relevant as a qualification below the vocational school level (EQF Level 4). MB education will provide counting hours into vocational education (EQF level 5) if one wishes to apply for it later. AOF wishes that the workgroup should be included in future plans for a vocational school education for Peer Workers on EQF level 5.

AOF has the authority to approve vocational education, equivalent to that of NOKUT.

AOF has recently also had a meeting with Audun Pedersen, who initiated the MB education in Bergen. They report the following: *“AOF Vocational School wants to be developed in a wide area, and also applies to somatic, cancer, hearing impairment, etc. They will use the curriculum of KBT user centre as a basis. The need for qualified Peer workers is huge. Audun Pedersen (MB Bergen) mentioned in the meeting that the area between Kristiansand and Bergen has great potential.”*

Summary

There are many different initiatives to strengthen the user voice in Norway. Applications for competence development grants are sent both from public service providers and from user organizations to the state administrator and it is difficult to distinguish these from one another.

The fact that KPH SSHF represents Norway in the European Erasmus+ development project “European Profile for Peer Support Workers” (2019-2021), in order to create a European standard and guideline for Peers, has been a great support in the process.

As a mostly unregistered profession, the qualifications of a Peer Worker in terms of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), which deals with the process of obtaining qualifications, are not regulated (yet) in most European countries. Some educational programs for peer worker qualifications have already been developed in some EU countries. The project team carefully analyzed these and looked for best practices to cluster them in inspiring European proposal for qualification for peer support workers (Erasmus+ Project “Peer Workers”, IO3).

The Erasmus+ project suggests to focus on qualification level 4 and 5 in EQF for the education of Peer Workers in Europe. We strongly believe that this is also the path for Norway, but it should be considered to establish an EQF level 6 as well, based on the fact that UiA already has established two modules; PSY921-G, Recovery cooperation in social networks and SV 911, Knowledge development at the workplace. We think that an education for Peer Workers on EQF

level 6 could open up for the participation of more professionals who have experience of own illness, crisis or mental issues. The voice of Peer Experience will be strengthened within the Mental Health system through knowledge about Peer Support.

Levels 1 to 3 below equal EQF levels 4 to 6. We suggest the following levels of training for Norway:

- 1) Qualification for work and activity that is developed based on personal experience (equals the German EX-IN and the Norwegian MB), EQF level 4
- 2) Vocational school on the basis of study competence, EQF Level 5
- 3) Academic level. College/University, EQF Level 6.

The Praxis-Bruker workgroup has found that the following grading and presentation can describe the development we see as appropriate for both the professionals and the User Experience field:

Level 1. Qualification

A Recovery College is being established in parallel with the establishment of an MB school under the ownership of NAV. Participants from the MB school are important to cover the need for peers undertaking support conversations and teaching. It is proposed that the project should be supplemented with input from the professionals and Peers from the UiA "Peer Work" courses, and that development should be ensured in collaboration with Agder Recovery Network.

Level 2. Vocational school/ vocational certificate

Vocational school - alternative to a trade certificate for health and social workers and the like. Emphasis on experiential competence as a knowledge base.

Level 3. Academic field of activity - System thinking

SV911 ensures continued operation and funding is applied from the directorate. The course is important for developing systematic user participation in research and development.

The continuation of PSY921 is considered highly important due to its focus on strengthening recovery-ideological thinking for both health and the social field, upbringing and treatment choices.

The working group encourages that an application should be submitted by the State Administrator of our region to various directorates in Norway, and that it should be funded by regional funds. The working group also wants the development here in Agder County to be shaped according to European standards that SSHF is helping to shape through the Erasmus+ Project.

Agder County must take a leading role in the national strategy of strengthening Peer Support and implementing Peer Workers in both hospitals and municipalities. This primarily involves using the Erasmus + project as a standard and guideline for implementing experiential competence, as well as establishing an educational offer for Peer Workers. The cooperation with Bergen, Sandnes, Trondheim, Oslo and Bodø municipalities, all of them holding great experience in Peer Support within their own systems, must be strengthened. Also, the contact with NAPHA,

erfarings-kompeanse.no and other organizations that support the implementation of the Recovery philosophy in the Norwegian health care system and work for Peer Support must be launched. With a solid base of like-minded organizations, hospitals and municipalities that work in close cooperation with the Agder County Governor, a strong influence on both politics and other Counties can be exerted.

County Governors' support is vital for a successful national implementation. National concepts in the field of education are after all a result of an interaction between the County Governors and the Norwegian Directorate of Health. County Governors are closely connected to the Norwegian Directorate of Health (HDir), which in turn prescribes the need to involve Peer Support more in health services. This connection will further increase the possibility of financial support for future projects within Agder or other Counties and will also ensure the approval of products and guidelines.