Speech - Tom Erlens Skaug, Norwegian State Secretary, Ministry of Education and research

Good choices for the individual and society

Thank you for the opportunity to share this occasion with you. It is great to see that so many are gathered here to discuss career guidance and career policy for the future.

We come from different countries and we have different challenges nationally and regionally. While Norway has relatively low unemployment rates and a relatively speaking highly educated population, we are still at a crossroads. Six out of ten Norwegians say they lack the right skills. We have a rapidly changing labour market. We are in the middle of the second wave of digitalization.
We see that changes in technology, migration and competence demands raise the threshold into working life.

However, we all have one thing in common. We are riding a new wave of uncertainty as the pace of innovation continues to accelerate and technology affects every part of our lives. The world is changing more rapidly than ever. Many children will have jobs as adults that do not even exist today.

Many jobs will require new skills.

Fears that robots will take away jobs from people have dominated the discussion over the future of work. Why do we worry, and what does career guidance have to do with it? Hasn`t working life always been reshaped by technological progress?
The answer is yes. According to The World Bank and The World Development Report 2019: The Changing Nature of Work, our worries seems to be unfounded. Companies adopt new ways of production, markets expand and societies evolve. Overall, technology brings opportunities, paving the way to create new jobs, increase productivity and deliver effective public services.

Rather than just talking about what worries us, I will talk about the steps we need to take in order for more people to enter working life and stay there throughout life.

We must enable people of all ages to acquire new skills – the kind of skills they need, when they need them. This is one of the Norwegian government’s priorities.
Also, it is more important than ever before,
to make good, well-informed decisions about education and training. That is what constitutes lifelong learning.

We must help people to make good and informed education and career choices. Choices that are good for the individual and choices that are good for the community. Choices that contribute to more people being included in the workplace – and to fulfilling themselves.

Strengthening career guidance is one of the steps we need to take. Digitalization and new technology connect the need for lifelong career guidance with the demands for new competences.

Career guidance puts each one of us in a better position to make good choices. More people are developing and using their skills. With good career guidance, transitions will be smoother.
That is why we must focus on lifelong career guidance.

OECD advised Norway to set up a skills strategy incorporating a whole-of-government approach and a strong stakeholder involvement. For the Norwegian society as a whole, the National Competence Policy Strategy (NKPS) is defining the needs. The strategy partners agree to

• Contribute to making informed choices for the individual and society.

• Promote better learning opportunities and effective use of skills in working life.

• Strengthen skills among adults with weak labour market attachment
The strategy includes a number of measures aimed at more coordination at local, regional and national level, including the establishment of a Future Skills Needs Committee.

A Skills Policy Council is monitoring the implementation of the strategy. The minister of integration and education is leading the Council. It also consists of representatives from the social partners, county municipalities and The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning.

The strategy partners agreed to develop cooperation and coordination of the national skills policy. The strategy aims at strengthening counselling and guidance services, including providing county municipalities and their career centres to play a stronger role in education choices in primary and lower secondary school.
Enabling people of all ages to acquire new skills is one of the government’s priorities.

*Some specific measures in progress in Norway:*

We are in the process of developing a digital career guidance service, which I am sure Gina and others can tell you more about. This will be a digital platform with information and interactive tools adapted to different user groups. Everyone should be able to find what they need here: Children and adolescents, adults, supervisors and parents. We will offer an e-guidance where you can chat with a career counsellor. The chat will be accessible in the evenings and weekends as well as during normal day hours. It will make access possible regardless of who you are or where you live.
We have started work on a national quality framework for career guidance. Another issue that Skills Norway are heading up and will tell you more about. This framework will be cross-sectoral (a big challenge), and hopefully then used and adapted by each sector.

I am sure that the framework for quality is a tool that will contribute to better career guidance.

Some may think that career guidance is for "the young" or "those seeking employment", but the word career means "the way you go". In a society where lifelong learning and a changing work place is the tune – everyone needs career guidance at some point.

Taking a grip on one's own development can be demanding. Maybe especially if you have not thought that your future might be different from
what you first believed. That you may have to learn something new. That you may need to orient yourself towards a new industry.

Career guidance is a part of our investment in human capital and lifelong learning.

This government is currently preparing a white paper on the skills reform. It will be presented to the Norwegian parliament next year. The overarching goal of the skills reform is to promote learning throughout life and to provide workers with updated skills. The white paper will sum up all of the actions of the skills reform – including the ones I have mentioned on career guidance.

Global mega-trends, such as an increasingly competitive international environment, technological progress and demographic changes create new
skills needs in the Norwegian labour market. As in most other countries - fewer jobs require little or no formal competence.

The Skills Reform will focus on establishing a flexible system for skills and learning opportunities. Most people will need to combine their regular jobs with learning activities.

The work on the reform is already in process. The government has launched two new initiatives

- Developing flexible continuing education in digitalization

- Two sector based programmes for industry and construction and for local healthcare
Both these initiatives give incentives to increase the supply of flexible and demand-driven education.

VET is a focus area for the Norwegian government. We want to create a new and better education. There is a gap between needs of the labour market and the educational choices made by young people. During the spring, all VET curricula in Norway will be renewed to make a better match between education and labour market through:

- early specialization for VET learners
- new education programmes
- phasing out some subjects

The common core subjects in VET are also renewed. This will make the common subjects in line with what the youth will meet in their working life and what the employers seek after.
We have appointed a committee for upper secondary. Their final report will include suggestions and assessments of the different education pathways at upper secondary education.

The Government's commitment to vocational education is also including post-secondary vocational schools - higher vocational education. Play a central role in Skills Reform by developing new modules in cooperation with business, trade and industry.

In connection with the regional reform in Norway, we will give the county municipalities a greater responsibility for career guidance service. There is also a need to recognise and utilise immigrants' skills, and provide opportunities for education.

In the end I will say – to sum up - Career guidance is at the heart and core of modern skills policy
Let me wish you good luck with your important work here in Tromsø. We need international networking and spreading of best practice, and above all, we need good career guidance in the future, accessible for all and of good quality.

Thank you for your attention!