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**EDUCATION FOR  
TOMORROW  
HOW DO WE GET THERE?  
POLICY IMPLICATIONS  
FROM PHASE 1**



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The Nordic educational systems share both similarities and differences, but the challenges of rapidly changing societies affect them all. The importance of digital competences, the inclusion of newly arrived children and immigrant families, as well as fighting increasing social inequality are just a few of the issues that need to be addressed. Under NordForsk’s research programme Education for Tomorrow, initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2010, researchers from all the Nordic countries have come together to produce new knowledge to help the decision makers and the Nordic educational systems to meet the needs of society – today and in the future.

This report concludes the first phase of the Education for Tomorrow programme, during which six research projects and one Nordic Centre of Excellence were funded. The research conducted in this phase provides new insights into the education of immigrant students, social segregation between schools, the importance of lifelong learning and other highly topical issues.

The research findings have been mediated through conferences, publications, seminars and the media. For this report, the researchers were asked to go a step further, and make suggestions of how the knowledge generated from their research can be used to influence educational policies. By translating the findings into policy implications, the report is highly relevant for policy-makers, politicians, teacher educators and teachers, as well as for the public in general.

The second phase of the Education for Tomorrow programme “Bridging Research with Practice in the Area of Teaching and Learning in New Learning Environments” is being launched this year. The focus in Phase 2 will now switch to bridging the gap between research and practice.

The need to build the bridge between research, policy and practice is acknowledged in most research fields and is also an important objective of the Education for Tomorrow programme. Therefore, the Programme Committee is pleased to present this report hoping that it will help policy-makers and other stakeholders to define their aims for the education of tomorrow.

*Krista Varantola*  
*Chair of the Programme Committee*

# PART 1

## NORDIC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE: JUSTED POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

The Nordic welfare models attract international attention. Few other countries in the world provide such well-developed financial and social safety nets for their citizens. The idea of equal opportunities is closely linked to education, and the ideal of a common school for all. The Nordic Centre of Excellence 'Justice through Education in the Nordic Countries' (NCoE JustEd), a multidisciplinary, cross-national research network, examines these ideals as well as how systems, cultures, and actors in education enable and constrain justice in the context of globalizing Nordic

welfare states. JustEd researchers study the impact of policies, such as school choice and public accountability, on teaching and learning cultures as well as on the marginalization and engagement of learners. JustEd research focuses on issues related to agency, marginalization, and diversity in education, as well as on the influence of governance, politics, and marketization on how justice through education is understood. JustEd research contributes thus to the re-formulation of what constitutes democratic, inclusive education towards justice in the Nordic countries.

JustEd partner universities

Aalborg University (DEN)  
Oslo Metropolitan University (NOR)  
Sciences Po (FRA), Umeå University (SWE)  
University of Copenhagen (DEN)  
University of Gothenburg (SWE)  
University of Helsinki (FIN)  
University of Iceland (ICE)  
University of Melbourne (AUS)  
University of Oslo (NOR)  
University of Turin (ITA)  
University of Turku (FIN)  
Østfold University College (NOR)  
The Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD) (FIN)

The NCoE JustEd started its activities in August 2013 as part of NordForsk's Education for Tomorrow programme and is coordinated by the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. The Centre fosters extensive contacts and collaboration between all Nordic countries and international partners. JustEd has 14 collaborating partner institutions in 8 countries, and around 140 researchers publishing widely in international journals and books.

Based on a synthesis of the research by NCoE JustEd researchers, this report summarizes its implications for educational policies. Nordic educational policymakers should notice that based on our research, the recent market-based and privatization reforms in the Nordic countries have detrimental consequences for educational justice. Moreover, our research shows that discrimination against students and their exclusion is common in schools in the Nordic countries. Therefore, educational policies, curricula, schools, and teachers ought to explicitly address and counteract social segregation and



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JUSTED

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IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

marginalization in the educational system in order to promote equity in education. Furthermore, our research in Nordic classrooms indicates that to provide a high-quality education, students would benefit from more opportunities for initiative taking, autonomy and active engagement in the classroom. In addition, our research findings indicate that new technology-supported tuition practices increase differences in academic achievement between students.

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JustEd special issue | Education Inquiry Vol. 9 No 1

The Nordic countries are topping many global indexes in terms of happiness, competitiveness and equality, and are often considered as the most democratic and fair countries in the world. In a special issue in the journal Education Inquiry, JustEd researchers are raising questions about whether the Nordic countries constitute a supermodel with regard to education, and in particular, with regard to justice-related issues in education.

Learn more: [www.justed.org/specialissue](http://www.justed.org/specialissue)

# 1. Market-based and privatization policy reforms in education do not support the social, regional, and institutional equality that is central to the Nordic model.

Our Nordic comparative analysis points out that the spectrum of market-based and privatization reforms varies, with Sweden and Denmark at one extreme, and Norway and Finland at the other, with Iceland in between. The pronounced market orientation of the Swedish education system, including for-profit schools at preschool, compulsory, and upper secondary levels, is largely contradictory to fair and equal education. The Swedish example shows that major educational reforms, decided without any previous careful investigation and consequence analysis, tend to be counterproductive and costly, and that such detrimental consequences may be difficult to correct. In Finland, privatization of education is still marginal, but new linkages between the economy, the labour market, and education and training have created new types of governance and partnerships at all levels. Research in Finland and Sweden shows how strengthened marketization and privatization of education and young people's transitions from school to work have resulted in social capital becoming more important for educational and career choices than previously, and that social justice and equality are increasingly being framed as questions of individual achievements.

## 1.1. Policymakers at national and local levels need to actively prevent and counteract the effects of school choice policies that lead to social segregation between and within schools.

In Sweden, school choice policies and local school markets at compulsory and upper secondary levels have reduced educational equality and increased segregation between schools. Local educational authorities have no influence on the establishment of private educational alternatives and therefore have fewer opportunities to counter the escalating social costs of school choice, whereas in Finland the municipal level has the means to control school choice. However, even Finland shows increasing segregation related to class, special needs, gender, and language due to the school choice system within public education, which is being introduced in some of the larger cities in the form of specialized classes and language choices.

## 1.2. Policymakers need to see higher education as a public good and provide uniformly high-quality resources to higher education institutions in order to limit the effects of market-driven funding and steering policies on institutional stratification and social bias in access.

Our research has ascertained the central role higher education plays within the changing social democratic welfare states as well as the effects of market-driven policy reforms upon it. Current reforms entail increasing institutional hierarchies and competition for status, funding, and students, and thus puts particular pressure on democratic and state-regulated Nordic higher education (HE) systems. Reform policies have been directed towards effecting greater simplicity and cost effectiveness in national student admissions systems. Degree structure reforms have implied the standardization of study programmes and integration into a unitary higher education system. Governments have promoted marketization by offering (commercial) programmes to international students and/or requiring that international students

pay a fee that local students do not pay. Moreover, increasing competition has, in some cases, triggered the development of a private tutorial market centred around student admission to public HE. These developments in higher education policy, practice, and appropriations have had stratificatory effects. They contribute to explaining the reasons for social selectivity (in terms of social background, gender, age, and ethnicity) in access to, participation in, and graduation from higher education. Recruitment patterns provide us with indicators of changing valorisations of higher education institutions, programmes, fields, and types of study. Furthermore, research and doctoral education within knowledge capitalism have resulted in the greater commodification of knowledge. Policymakers need to take an active role in mediating market-based reforms and in promoting egalitarian opportunities. More attention needs to be paid to reconsidering the advantages and disadvantages of promoting competition among educational institutions and of introducing private actors to the field of Nordic higher education.



## 2. In order for teachers, pupils, and schools to promote equity in education, discrimination and marginalization need to be addressed specifically and explicitly in local and national curricula, other steering documents, as well as in teacher education.

Our research shows that discrimination and marginalization are common in schools in the Nordic countries. Exclusion and marginalization of students are often based on differences related to social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, locality, and language. Even though these issues are superficially addressed in current steering documents and teacher education, not much has changed in schools. Beyond addressing discrimination and marginalization in steering documents, school leaders and practising teachers as well as teacher-education students need to have an understanding of how structures and practices can lead to exclusion and marginalization. They also need knowledge and tools for facilitating inclusion and a socially just education for all.

### 2.1. Teachers need knowledge and tools to identify, challenge, and change norms and power structures in order to prevent marginalization and to support inclusion.

A norm-critical approach to teaching and learning, that is, an approach that challenges and changes taken-for-granted exclusionary norms and structures, enables teachers and students to recognize and deconstruct norms causing marginalization and exclusion. A norm-critical approach challenges the processes of othering. Teacher education and in-service training need to incorporate teaching materials and tools that enable teachers, students, and school administrators to act as change agents. All teacher educators and school personnel thus need to acknowledge their own role in upholding and dismantling unequal norms and practices. Particularly unequal norms and practices concerning aspects of diversity such as social class, gender, special needs, language, and ethnicity need to be changed.

### 2.2. Educational marginalization based on disability, social class, gender, ethnicity, as well as stigmatization of residential areas need to be explicitly addressed in educational policy, research, and practice.

Our research shows that discrimination and marginalization are continuously occurring in schools in the Nordic countries. Having an understanding of how structures and practices can lead to exclusion and marginalization is necessary but not sufficient for changing racist, classist, and sexist practices in education and in the labour market. Individuals who do not fit the ideals of normalcy are easily pathologized, or constructed as abnormal, which further establishes the positions of privileged groups. To make education more inclusive and dismantle power relations, we need to base policies, practices, and teacher education upon critical educational research. To address marginalization related to disability, social class, gender, ethnicity, as well as stigmatization of residential areas, policymakers, researchers, and teacher educators need clear theoretical and methodological guidelines on how to make the voices of the marginalized heard. Examples of such guidelines can be found, for instance, in participatory methodologies, specifically ethnographic and narrative approaches as well as the disability studies approach.

### 2.3. Knowledge about gender and sexuality needs to be integral to teacher education, and resources are needed for teachers and schools for promoting gender sensitivity.

Gender has long been addressed in legislation and curricula in the Nordic countries. However, our research shows that gender inequalities in achievement and school practices remain. Further, there is a lack of awareness of sexual and gender diversities and harassment in educational contents and practices; for example, both compulsory and upper secondary education often lack coherent protection of queer students. Gender needs to be explicitly addressed in teacher education and local education to develop knowledge of contemporary inequalities and the means of challenging them. This includes knowledge about intersections between gender and place, social background, migration, etc. Presently, gender differences in school achievement are regularly addressed by administration and the media as generalized worries about boys, ignoring research with more nuanced knowledge about the school problems of various gender groups.

### 3. The challenge of balancing the pacing of content coverage, while at the same time providing flexibility and allowing room for student initiative and active engagement in the classroom, needs to be addressed in order to provide a quality education for pupils.

Our research indicates that one of the largest challenges and disparities in Nordic teaching practices is the balance between two key aspects of justice in education – pacing content coverage and providing all students access to high quality content and at the same time facilitating students' autonomy and active participation in the classroom. Classroom practices across the Nordic countries point to distinct patterns and challenges in this respect. This is especially the case in classrooms using information technology as a part of their instructional repertoires. Technology-mediated teaching may increase rather than decrease academic differences since it tends to support individual pathways to learning.

#### 3.1. The Nordic educational systems would benefit from knowledge-sharing on pupil participation models.

Our research from lower secondary classrooms in Norway, Sweden, and Finland indicates comparatively more classroom discussions and student-initiated input in Swedish and Norwegian classrooms. However, our analyses also show that a high degree of student participation might come at the cost of keeping track of the content – thus, teachers might find it hard to balance a high degree of student engagement while still maintaining a cognitively demanding learning environment. While there are more opportunities for pupils to talk with their peers and engage in class discussion in Norwegian and Swedish classrooms, Finnish classrooms provide equity through cognitively demanding and focused tasks and assignments.

#### 3.2. Upper secondary school students need more opportunities for initiative, autonomy, and influence over their education, both at the class and school levels

Results from our study "Upper Secondary School Practices 2013–2014" in Iceland suggests that teachers and administrators need guidance in taking advantage of the professional freedom provided in the curriculum and infrastructure. Classroom layouts, teaching methods, and assessment practices were in general found to be traditional and teacher-centred with little room for student initiative, with notable exceptions that could be mediated between schools and programmes. Students do not seem to have much influence at the school level, as they do not view having representatives in the school management structure as a legitimate channel for influence. Students also seem to accept and expect their role to be non-influential within everyday pedagogic practices.

#### 3.3. The use of digital technologies and social media in secondary education must be carefully structured and reflexively adapted to finding a balance between ensuring all students equal educational access to learning-relevant content and participation in learning-relevant classroom discourse.

The substantial and ongoing rapid growth in participation in screen-mediated sociality in educational settings should be recognized for its potential for rich, varied, and student-controlled learning. However, our analyses demonstrate that the new technology-supported teaching practices compared with traditional teaching strategies may actually limit access, both to learning-relevant content and to participation in learning-relevant discourse. These practices fundamentally change the relations between paper-based and digital learning resources in the classroom. Technical aspects tend to occupy a large part of the instruction, and taking advantage of the full potential of digital learning resources is found to be difficult in traditional paper-based teaching and learning practices. Technology-mediated teaching tends to support individual pathways to learning that may increase rather than decrease academic differences among the students and thus challenge the institutional framing of a "common school for all".

## PART 2

# CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM 5 RESEARCH PROJECTS

**This part of the report presents conclusions and policy implications from 5 of the research projects under the first phase of the programme.**

### Achieving skills at different ages

- Investments in high-quality compulsory education provide the best possible foundation for a skilled and healthy population. If individual learners fail to achieve basic skills in their early years, the possibility of compensating for the lack of these skills later in life is limited.
- Cutting back on the financial foundation for high-quality compulsory education has severe negative consequences for future generations.
- The gender differences shown in the PISA youth survey even out over time. The differences depend on how the tests are constructed, and it is important for policy-makers to be aware of this when taking decisions based on these assessments.

**Read more:** *Skill acquisition, skill loss, and age. A comparative study of cognitive foundation skills (SASLA)* Page 14

### Communicating values in Nordic preschools

- Educators in Nordic preschools are not always aware of the values they communicate to children in everyday practice.
- To encourage and develop values, educators need to embrace a common conceptualisation of the values they communicate.
- An understanding of values needs to be incorporated into national curricula as well as teacher training and educational programmes.

**Read more:** *Values education in Nordic preschools: Basis of education for tomorrow (ValuEd)* Page 16

### Successful education for immigrant students

- The general ambition level among teachers for the education of students with immigrant backgrounds is too low.
- Many teachers are not aware of suitable approaches and educational practices for students with immigrant backgrounds and there is a need to develop teacher training to mitigate this lack of knowledge.

- Immigrant students' education should be the responsibility of all teachers, not just teachers in introductory or reception units. All teachers need to be informed about the special issues in the education of newly arrived students.
- Sufficient competency in the majority language as well as in the mother tongue is essential to achieve success.
- It is important to employ a holistic perspective of student success that gives consideration to both academic and social aspects.

**Read more:** *Learning spaces for inclusion and social justice: Success stories from immigrant students and school communities in four Nordic countries (LSP)* Page 18

### Vocational education and training (VET)

- The Nordic vocational education systems are tending to become more school-based and more separated from working life.
- There is a risk of future labour shortage due to declining enrolment in Nordic vocational education.
- It is difficult for the Nordic VET systems to provide eligibility for higher education in VET and at the same time provide access to skilled employment for 'weak learners'.
- There is a need for institutional innovation and new solutions so that VET can provide direct access both to the skilled labour market and to higher education.

**Read more:** *The future of vocational education - learning from the Nordic countries (NordVET)* Page 20

### Higher education

- The higher education systems in the Nordic countries have undergone radical changes during the past three decades and it is pertinent to ask whether a Nordic model of higher education can still be said to exist.
- Social and gender differences are quite similar across the Nordic countries. The traditional elite university programmes are still dominated by students with a higher socio-economic background, while young people from less educated families make up the majority of students in the shorter, vocationally oriented, higher education programmes.
- The higher educational systems have become increasingly important in predicting future success in life and work. It is important to find ways to distribute knowledge on how the educational systems work, and to develop systems that provide all individuals with equal opportunities to acquire the means to enter higher education.

**Read more:** *Nordic fields of higher education - structures and transformations of organisation and recruitment (NFHE)* Page 22



## Skill acquisition, skill loss, and age – a comparative study of Cognitive Foundation Skills (SASLA)

This study shows that it is extremely **important for all children to receive high quality compulsory education** early in life, since compulsory education plays a decisive role for children's learning, health and well-being later in life. A high-quality education has a lasting impact on adult literacy and numeracy performance levels, and thus lays the foundation for individual development of cognitive skills throughout adult life.

The research project shows that it is very difficult to compensate for deficiencies in compulsory education later in life. At the same time, investments in high-quality compulsory education provide the best possible foundation for a skilled and healthy population.

Similarly, individuals with a college degree have much stronger and more well-developed literacy and numeracy skills at age 35 than those who do not have a degree, in particular, when

compared to persons who have been unemployed for an extended period of time.

In general, young people's skills increase substantially during the first 10 years after compulsory education, that is, from the age of 15 to 25. After that, skills decline – regardless of which education a person has completed later in life. However, participation in education, in particular higher education, has a positive impact, whereas more than one year of unemployment and/or sickness has a negative impact. The results also suggest that poor literacy skills are associated with an increased likelihood of experiencing poor health.

In the PISA youth surveys, female students are doing much better than male students. While these differences seem to even out over time, becoming much smaller in the PIAAC survey of adult skills, the results show that some of the test items in PIAAC are not gender-neutral. An important task for future research, and for the construction of unbiased test batteries, is to investigate whether the gender differences in the PISA and PIAAC surveys are age-specific or age-invariant. In both cases, educational systems as well as skill surveys will need to be partly restructured. The changes

will most likely have to be much more far-reaching if the gender differences are age-invariant. It is important for policy-makers to be aware of this when taking decisions based on these assessments.

Other policy implications of the study are that there is a need for continuous investments in high-quality compulsory education in order to maintain a skilled and healthy population in the Nordic countries. There is also a need to develop forms of adult education and training that help adults to update their skills to keep up with new demands in their working and everyday lives.

Enhancing and updating the education of older adults with low proficiency levels is especially crucial, as countries will need to keep them longer in the workforce.

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## Values education in Nordic preschools: Basis of education for tomorrow (ValuEd)

This research study has deepened the understanding of institutionalised fostering of values in Nordic preschools, and reveals that educators are not always aware of the values they communicate to children in everyday practice. Furthermore, the study shows that there is a need to conceptualise these values and incorporate them in the national curricula.

Democratic values are formulated differently in the national educational plans of the different Nordic countries. Nonetheless, Nordic preschool educators share certain notions and values regardless of which country they live in. The values communicated in Nordic preschools include care, democracy, competence, efficiency, individuality and collectivity. However, it is important to realise that values cannot be encouraged and developed if educators lack concepts for them. Within the framework of this research project, educators were encouraged to develop a space to discuss and reflect together on communication of values.

One unexpected value that stood out as significant in the communication between adults and children was the value of **efficiency** (working effectively). This value caused conflicts for the educators, who often felt squeezed between the value of efficiency and other core values. Furthermore, the educators' communication with the children was dominated by the value of **individualisation**, such as the child's individual interests and needs and right to individual care. Neither of these values is currently part of any national curricula in the Nordic countries studied.

The policy implications of the study are that there is a need for educators to conceptualise the values they communicate to the children more clearly. Understanding of values also needs to be incorporated in the national curricula and in Nordic teacher training and educational programmes.

### CONTACT INFORMATION



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**Key references:** *Values education in Nordic preschools: Basis of education for tomorrow*

## Learning spaces for inclusion and social justice - success stories from immigrant students and school communities in four Nordic countries (LSP)

Over the past decades, all of the Nordic countries have evolved into **multicultural societies**, which is reflected in preschools and schools, and in compulsory and upper secondary level education. Despite this, this study shows that teacher training in the Nordic countries in general devotes too little attention to diversity in schools and many teachers are not aware of suitable approaches and educational practices for students with immigrant backgrounds.

Due to distinctive educational systems and the differing make-up of their immigrant populations, **the Nordic countries face different challenges** regarding immigrants in Nordic schools. However, this study shows that the general level of ambition in terms of educating students with immigrant backgrounds is too low. There is a need to promote the involvement of all teachers, not just those who work with newly arrived students in reception classes.

The project involved 27 schools from Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden considered to be successful measured by indicators such as average grades, test results and dropout rates. The project has encompassed schools at the preschool, compulsory and secondary levels with the intention to learn from the success stories of students with immigrant backgrounds.

The implications of the study are that teacher training in the Nordic countries in general needs to devote more attention to inclusion and social justice. Furthermore, teachers need more formal training and higher competence in multilingualism and multicultural education, as well as in pedagogies that build bridges between diverse languages and cultures.

It is essential for immigrant students to have sufficient competency in the majority language in order to achieve success. Adequate pedagogy for the majority languages as second languages is needed, as well as for heritage language teachers to support students' mother tongue languages. Schools also need to initiate and sustain partnerships with parents, e.g. through school-parent participation and language support for families.

In order to sustain knowledge and good practices, there is a need for systems where the expertise of key people working with immigrant students in schools is transferred to and shared among relevant actors. Creating such a system could be a long-term objective at the policy level.

Finally, students' success and failure should be considered from a holistic perspective, where both social and academic aspects are included.

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**Key references:** *Learning spaces for inclusion and social justice: success stories for immigrant students and school communities in four Nordic countries.*

## The future of vocational education – learning from the Nordic countries (NordVET)

In all four Nordic countries studied, vocational education and training (VET) **has tended to become more school-based and more separated from working life**. The research conducted within this project has shown that it is difficult for the Nordic VET systems to provide eligibility for higher education in VET and at the same time provide access to skilled employment for ‘weak learners’. In three of the four Nordic countries studied, **the enrolment in VET is declining**, which creates a risk of future labour shortage. One reason for the declining enrolment is that VET appears to some students to be a dead-end in the education system. Another reason is that VET appears to be an option of lower value than the academic programmes.

VET has been formed by the state in interaction with a multitude of stakeholders with diverging interests and goals. The policy goals in VET have multiplied, and it has become increasingly difficult to devise coherent policy solutions that address the multiple goals simultaneously. This has resulted in shifting and inconsistent reform patterns.

VET has been given little attention in public policies in the Nordic countries, and there is little comparative research on Nordic VET. Policy learning across borders has been limited.

A combination of school-based and work-based training in the VET programmes is important for the students’ transition to employment. It is, however, difficult to engage employers in high quality occupational training. There is often little coordination between school-based and workplace learning in the alternating VET-programmes. Successful introduction of new VET-programmes requires that the employers are engaged and that positions for students are opened in the work organisations.

The implications of the study are that there is a need for institutional innovation and new solutions, so that VET can provide direct access both to the skilled labour market and to higher education. A robust collective skill formation system requires strong state commitment as well as strong involvement of the labour market organisations. Intermediary institutions, such as the Norwegian training agencies and the Danish training centres, can bridge education and the labour market by supporting the students’ transitions from school to work and assist in the distribution of training placements.

There is a potential for policy learning between the Nordic countries taking into account the significant differences in the four VET-systems. Due to the divergent development paths of the Nordic VET-systems, however, direct policy transfer is not likely to succeed.

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**Key references:** *The future of vocational education - learning from the Nordic countries (NordVET)*

# Nordic fields of higher education – structures and transformations of organisation and recruitment (NFHE)

The higher education systems in the Nordic countries have undergone radical changes during the last three decades. Introduction of student fees, declining Nordic recruitment among the students, privatisation and severe cuts in funding are all issues that undermine the Nordic model, and it is pertinent to ask whether a Nordic model of higher education can still be said to exist.

The higher education systems have rapidly been transformed from cohesive, standardised systems administered largely within the state into diverse, complex national and international higher education landscapes. In addition to the growth in numbers and size of institutions, the general trend has been one of overall diversification. At the same time, there are more students than ever in higher education.

Social and gender differences are quite similar across the Nordic countries, and there has been very little change during the last decades. Furthermore, the traditional elite university programmes are still dominated by students with a higher socio-economic background, while young people from the working class make up the majority of students in the shorter vocational programmes.

The study shows that the fields of higher education in the four Nordic countries studied are all characterised by a two-dimensional structure. The first axis describes the division of men and women and separates education in technology and natural sciences from education aimed at professions in health, education and care. The second axis displays a social hierarchical dimension with social groups rich in economic, social and cultural assets, in contrast to groups with fewer resources of that kind.

An important finding is that the elite tracks in higher education, defined according to both meritocratic and social criteria and including for instance programmes in medicine, law, and engineering, have become more selective. Traditional and newly-established institutions and programmes have recognisable status differences with regard to student recruitment.

Given the larger social differences in society, the higher educational systems have become increasingly important in predicting future success in life and work. Thus, knowledge of how the system works can be seen as a public asset that needs to be dispersed widely. The researchers recommend that policy-makers seek to give priority to finding ways of distributing such knowledge. This would promote the development of an educational system that offers equal opportunities to all individuals to acquire the means to enter higher education.

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**Key references:** *Nordic fields of higher education. Structures and transformations of organisation and recruitment*



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