

**There is broad political consensus** that formal education and skills are essential for economic growth and social inclusion at the community level. At the individual level, formal education is an important source of employment, income and social inclusion.

### **With increasing education**

the chance of unemployment and exclusion from the labour market decreases, average income increases, organisational and political participation increase, and the average health status improves. In this way, more education to more people represents an efficient investment in both the individual's and society's "human capital".

*Story by: Professor Annett Arntzen*

**In their series of educational reforms** since the 1960s, Norwegian governments have sought to increase the population's level of education and reduce educational differences arising from gender, place of residence and social background. Although major social inequalities in education still exist, the governments have largely succeeded in their task. The education system is shifting from elite education to mass education, and the significance of education has changed from being a privilege (for the few), through an option (for many), to a virtue driven by necessity (for everyone). However, it has also generated a paradox. When more and more people get more education, the consequences of not succeeding in school become more serious for the individual.

**Politicians have long expressed concern** about an apparent link between low levels of education, widespread use of social services, poor health and a weak position on the labour market. In each cohort of young people, more than 30 percent do not achieve an academic or vocational qualification in secondary education. The likelihood that these people will become involved in public welfare schemes as young adults is alarmingly high. As adults, they will be clearly overrepresented in the welfare administration's target group. This indicates that the pressure on public funding in the future will largely come from people with low formal qualifications.

**Education and health are closely related.** Education has been instrumental in many of the processes that contribute to producing healthy adult lives. However, what are the mechanisms

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Written by Karolina

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that underlie the relationship between education and health?

**The links between** education and health are very complex. Research shows that education affects people's living conditions throughout their lives, so that education contributes to determination of which health problems or health-promoting conditions people are exposed to. In addition, education contributes to the development of psychological resources, which in their turn affect health. Learning leads to coping, coping leads to health.

**Inequalities in education** and learning have an impact on health inequalities. Measures that reduce differences in education can, therefore, help to reduce health inequalities. That is why health, education, labour and welfare policy have a central goal of rearming unskilled young people and other vulnerable job seekers with more formal education.

**The Reform 94 scheme** gave all young people under the age of 24 years the statutory right to further education. Since then, the number of students completing secondary education has remained at about 70 percent. Dropout rate is higher for vocational studies than academic studies (50% in vocational subjects, 20% in academic studies). Many of these dropouts are those who do not get apprenticeships, but we know very much more about the dropout rate from academic further education: More girls than boys complete. Ethnic minority young people of non-western background drop out more often than ethnic majority young people, although not second-generation immigrants.

**We also know** that poor performance and high absenteeism in primary schools predict dropping out of further education. Many of those who leave did not get their first choice, those who choose courses on the basis of a desire to start work quickly drop out more often than those who select their subjects out of interest.

We know that **young people with problem behaviour** frequently drop out, but those with severe behavioural problems drop out less than others. These benefit from additional resources and organisation (finance, personnel, attention) that may contribute to their remaining at school. Those who manage best in the job market are those who stand the whole course. The most disadvantaged group is made up of those who drop out.

We also know that **social background** is an indicator for school leavers: The higher the

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parents' education, the better the children do at school. Having a working mother, and co-habiting parents, also has a correlation with the likelihood of completion. It is clear that drop-out rates from further education are highly influenced by a student's social background - so there is still a reproduction of social inequality through primary and secondary education (Hernes 1974). And that is precisely why it is so incredibly important that all new reforms and priority areas focus on social inequality and its prevention.