

Norwegian cases on offending and learning with focus on validation of prior learning

Morten, an ICT student.

Universities and University colleges in Norway may allow student without formal study admittance to seek admittance based on their prior experiential learning. The applicant must be older than 25 years of age and have at least 5 years of relevant practice from working life or other documented practice. In addition he or she must prove some motivation and ability to read and write up to a certain level to be accepted as a student.

One inmate, we can call him Morten, was in a high security prison and wanted to apply for admittance to a university based on his prior learning. He wanted to study Information and Communication Technology, ICT. He was not formally qualified as a student as he had not completed his upper secondary education. But he had some exams from upper secondary education – from school in prison - and some work experience.

To be able to apply to the university he had to document his prior learning. Morten documented his background with assistance from his counselor in prison. Morten was able to find some documentation he had been given earlier and collected some new documentary proof of work he had done by contacting former employers. Morten used his tax documentation as well. It could prove his regular income for specified periods.

Morten was imprisoned at a high security prison. If he was going to be a normal student at the university, he had to be able to attend some classes outside prison. That would imply that his status as a high security inmate had to be changed. Morten applied to the prison administration for lower security imprisoning with possibility for daytime leave from prison. He based his application on the need to participate in classes outside of prison to be able to attend his studies.

Morten's application for lower security was accepted because his plans for studies at the university was so very well prepared and spoken for. He was also accepted as a student at the university, and he was transferred to an open prison.

Morten is now a successful student in ICT at the university, in his second year.

Isak, the perfect inmate

Isak was one of these inmates who serves time, leaves, and arrives back again after a while. He was always nice to have inside; very helpful and clever at all practical things; such as cleaning and maintenance. He had no formal education other than his obligatory primary school, and had no plans to enter into education; he considered his chances to complete an education on upper secondary level as to far off.

Isak's prison was informing all inmates about validation of prior learning toward curricula in upper secondary education. The school staff was especially aware of Isak and his reluctance towards schooling; they contacted him especially to

inform him of the different curricula in subjects relevant for his experiences as a cleaner and maintenance worker. They showed him some of the learning material used in these actual courses, and made it obvious to him that he had a lot of competence relevant for this educational level.

Isak read some of the learning material and collected documentation of some of his various work experiences. The school staff engaged a valuator from the education sector in the county and set up a meeting inside prison. The valuator validated Isak's competence, both by checking his documentary proof and interviewing him, toward the curriculum in cleaning and maintenance. Isak was very well qualified and passed all the acquired objectives in the curriculum. Isak has to take his final, practical exam to be fully qualified as a skilled worker. This exam was not performed when he was imprisoned. Today he is not in prison, and the school staff does not know whether he has had his final exam or not. But they do know that Isak left the prison with a better self esteem than when he entered; he knew that his competence was worth something, even though he had acquired them in various odd works and activities in his somewhat untidy life.

Billy, the social loner

Billy was inmate in a high security prison and wanted to educate himself as a social worker for children and youths, at upper secondary school level. He wanted to study by his own in his cell. This way of self study is normally very challenging, as the social component with fellow students in a class often brings forward a great deal of motivation which the loner will miss. But Billy was strongly motivated as he had a lot of life experience and felt strongly for this kind of subject.

Billy was given the necessary study material from the school in prison and was allowed to work on his own in his cell, being released from his work duties. He had study material both on paper and electronically, as this subject had a learning platform on the web. He studied very well on his own and was very efficient by having all his daytime hours free to use for schooling. After a while he even attended classes in prison school as well.

Three months after Billy started his study he was validated towards the theoretical subjects in the relevant curriculum and was approved in 7 out of 11 objectives.

To be a fully trained social worker for children and youths Billy needed work practice. The school staff planned for this work practice before he was released. The social welfare system cooperated with the school staff in prison and was able to provide a workplace for him from the first day of release. In addition to his work he was enrolled in the local school for adults two days a week to take the remaining theoretical subjects.

Billy is now out of prison and on his way to a normal, crime free life with regular work and, hopefully in near future, a fulfilled certificate from upper secondary education.

Claus, the self-made cook

Claus was crushed when he was admitted to imprisonment. He had been working as a cook for many years, even though he did not have a formal education as one, and had even had his own catering business. The business he had to shut down when he was imprisoned. He was nothing; not educated and without business.

Validation of prior learning toward curriculum as a cook was the life saver for Claus. He started working in the prison kitchen and was discovered as very well qualified, both theoretically and practically.

Claus was validated toward the curriculum and passed all the acquired objectives. Two months later he passed his final, practical exam and became a fully trained cook.

Claus was expelled from Norway and had to leave the country after release. But he left as a fully trained cook, and will hopefully get a better start in his home country.