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To cite this article: Solveig Marie Borgund (2022): Reforming higher education through national curriculum regulations: the case of Norwegian kindergarten teacher education, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, DOI: [10.1080/20020317.2022.2115214](https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2022.2115214)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2022.2115214>



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Published online: 28 Aug 2022.



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Reforming higher education through national curriculum regulations: the case of Norwegian kindergarten teacher education

Solveig Marie Borgund 

Department of Pedagogy, Religion and Social Studies, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACT

Reform in higher education is on the agenda worldwide, and there is increasing political interest in the content of study programmes. This article looks at the policy process leading to the new national curriculum regulation (NCR) for kindergarten teacher education (KTE) in Norway in 2012. The following questions derived from Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory (MST) will be posed to analyze the policy process: Who were the actors present in each of the different streams in the policy process leading to enacting a new NCR for KTE in 2012? What kind of opportunities for influence did the actors have in deciding to structure the KTE in interdisciplinary knowledge areas, and to what extent did these actors play roles as policy entrepreneurs? The data material consists of policy documents, consultation letters, and an online debate forum. The findings show that three policy windows, each representing different opportunities for impact for the participating actors, were opened during the process. Even if the process can be described as transparent and having a high degree of participation, the Ministry effectively structured it by setting rules and conditions. Nevertheless, one actor managed to take on a role as a policy entrepreneur early in the process.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 April 2021
Accepted 16 August 2022

KEYWORDS

Kindergarten teacher education; quality in higher education; higher education; professional programs; reform; policy analysis; curriculum; policy design

Introduction

In the discourse on the knowledge society, education is an essential tool for improving public service and facing diverse global challenges (Elken & Stensaker, 2011). Simultaneously, increased governance and the classification of kindergarten as part of the educational sector occur in many countries. This shift makes kindergartens responsible not only for taking care of the children, but also for teaching and preparing the children for school (Børhaug & Bøe, 2022; Liljestrand, 2021; OECD, 2001). At the same time, there seems to be a broad consensus that the quality of kindergartens depends on the well-educated and competent staff. As a result, kindergarten teacher education is of interest to policy-makers worldwide (Urban et al., 2012).

Over the last decades, a debate about the academization of professional higher education, such as teacher education, has taken place in, e.g. the Nordic countries and Britain (Larsson & Sjöberg, 2021; Messel & Smeby, 2017; Sitomaniemi-San, 2015). Professional education is characterized by its position between theoretical academic knowledge on the one hand and practical knowledge on the other (Hatlevik & Havnes, 2017). However, attention from policymakers to these educations

leads to new demands and reform activities such as an increased focus on admission requirements and requirements for a master's degree to teach in primary school in Norway (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017)

In 2012 a new kindergarten teacher education¹ (KTE) was launched in Norway. National curriculum regulations together with national guidelines were enacted, and the profession's name was changed from preschool teacher to kindergarten teacher. The changes resulted from several evaluations of the old education and policymakers' focus on *quality* in both kindergarten and higher education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009). Despite pressure to make the education more academic, the most significant change from old to new KTE was transitioning from traditional discipline subjects to interdisciplinary knowledge areas as the primary organizing principle. The core argument for interdisciplinary knowledge areas (KA) was to create coherence between the KTE's education and professional work-life.

The introduction of KAs was controversial during the process leading up to the new National Curriculum Regulation (NCR) in 2012. After introducing the new organizing principle, research and evaluation revealed that it remains controversial (Børhaug et al., 2018;

Følgegrupper, 2017). Despite giving insight into the controversy of the shift, research provides little knowledge of the process leading to the final decision-making. This article aims to take a closer look at the process leading up to the enactment of the new NCR, focusing on changing the structure of KTE from subjects to interdisciplinary KAs.

The theoretical framework guiding the analysis is Kingdon's multiple streams theory. The problem stream, policy stream, political stream, policy windows, and policy entrepreneurs are central for insight into the policy process (Kingdon, 2014). The following section will further elaborate on the theoretical framework and its concepts. The following research questions derived from Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory will be posed to analyse the reform process:

- (1) Who were the actors present in each of the different streams in the policy process leading to enacting a new NCR for kindergarten teacher education in 2012?
- (2) What kind of opportunities for influence did the actors have in deciding to structure the KTE in interdisciplinary knowledge areas, and to what extent did these actors play roles as policy entrepreneurs?

This article contributes to the research field on higher education policymaking and, more specifically, kindergarten teacher education. The case, reforming Norwegian kindergarten teacher education, could serve as an example of policymaking in higher education. Considering that changes in education policies are on the agenda in the Nordic countries (Krejsler, 2011; Larsson & Sjöberg, 2021; Liljestrand, 2021), this case could arguably be relevant outside the Norwegian context. Using Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory as an analytical tool could also provide new insights as this framework rarely has been used to analyse educational policy processes. MST gives the opportunity to look at more than just the participation in the policy process, but also to say something about what kind of participation and possibilities for impact.

The article starts with a section presenting the multiple streams theory, followed by previous research on KTE. Furthermore, the analysis consists of the main section and four subsections. Finally, a discussion and conclusion section wraps up the article.

Theoretical framework

Politics do not occur in isolation, which is a reason for looking at more than just implementation. According to Bobrow and Dryzek (1987), 'Policy designs, like any kind of designs, involves the pursuit of valued outcomes through activities sensitive to the context of time and place'. This article looks at one specific point in the policy design process: policy formulation.

Kingdon (2014) argues that parts of the policy process can be looked at and analysed as a decision-making process. In Kingdon's Multiple streams theory (MST), a policy is shaped when different streams intertwine and open a policy window. The three streams, the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream, are more or less independent of each other, but the window opens when they meet. The streams will be shortly introduced in the following three paragraphs and illustrated in Figure 1.

The problem stream is concerned with capturing and identifying different problems and putting them on the political agenda (Kingdon, 2014). The problems are often actualized through events and occasionally through discontent with present policy. Zahariadis (2007) pinpointed that policymakers become aware of these problems through indicators, focusing events, and citizens' feedback due to routine monitoring indicators or special events. Different actors are present in the problem stream, such as politicians, bureaucrats, and various interest groups.

The policy stream is concerned with various actors striving to connect their solutions to the problems. In the policy stream, reports, statistics, and research provide a broad spectrum of ideas and choices politicians can use to support their political vision. Kingdon (2014) refers to this spectrum of solutions, ideas, reports, etc., as the *policy primaevial soup*. Experts, bureaucrats, and specialists often act in this stream. The ideas and solutions in the primaevial soup compete to win acceptance in policy networks and are presented in various forms, such as hearings, papers, and deliberation (Zahariadis, 2007).

Finally, the political stream is concerned with changing political leadership, public opinion changes, and election results. The political stream represents what Kingdon (2014) calls a national mood that involves developmental trends and societal change, forming public opinion. In this stream, politicians and interest groups are active. Herweg et al. (2015) found that interest groups seemingly substantially influence parliamentary systems' agenda-setting. Figure 1 illustrates the Multiple Streams Theory (MST) and how the streams come together, opening the policy windows with help from the policy entrepreneurs.

(Kingdon, 2014; Zahariadis, 2007)

According to Kingdon (2014), policy windows are moments when streams are coupled, offering actors possibilities to put solutions onto the political agenda. The policy stream is essential for placing issues on the state's decision agenda, and, as Vårheim (1997) argues, ending the process with a decision. However, it is sufficient that the policy stream meets one of the other streams. Coupling of the streams happens at what Zahariadis (2007) describes as critical moments. Kingdon (2014) points out that policy entrepreneurs play a big part in connecting the

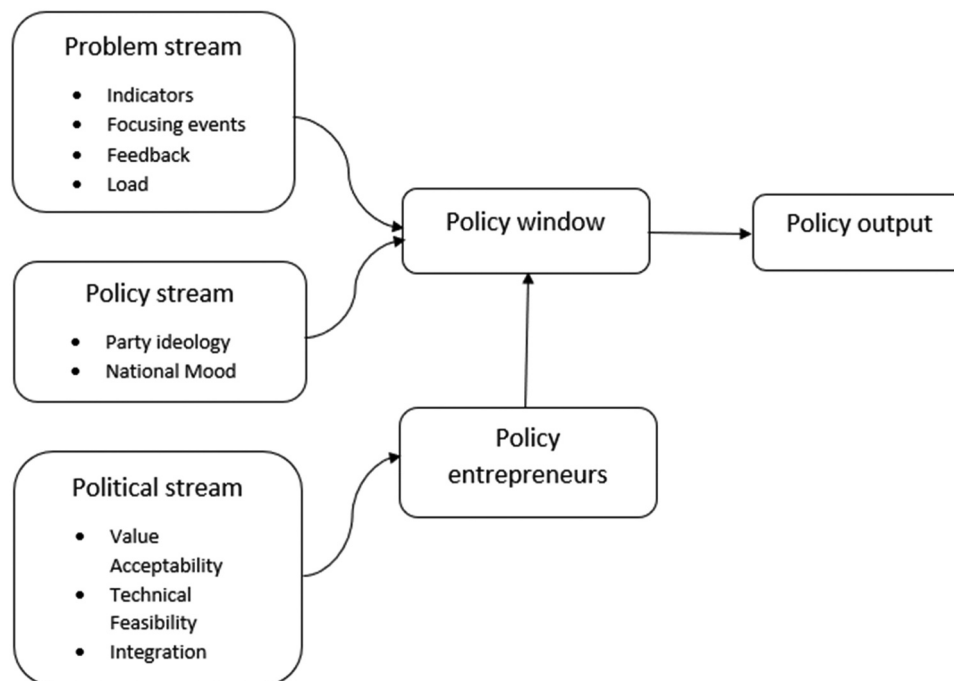


Figure 1. Multiple streams theory – illustrated.

streams and creating opportunities for the windows to open. Policy entrepreneurs are actors willing to invest resources to gain something in a political case. These entrepreneurs may be actors with commercial or ideal interests.

According to Kingdon (2014), the policy windows open at both predictable and more unpredictable special occasions. First, however, there has to be a policy entrepreneur opening it. Zahariadis (2007, p. 74) comments:

Policy entrepreneurs are individuals or corporate actors who attempt to couple the three streams. They are more than mere advocates of particular solutions; they are power brokers and manipulators of problematic preferences and unclear technology. When windows open, policy entrepreneurs must immediately seize the opportunity to initiate action. Otherwise, the opportunity is lost, and the policy entrepreneurs must wait for the next one to come along.

In many ways, reforming Norwegian KTE may be regarded both as a predictable policy window and a special event. After *quality* was placed on the agenda preceding the evaluation of KTE in 2010, one might say the window was expected. Nevertheless, it was not evident that the evaluation should cause a complete upheaval of KTE.

Using MST for analysis, emphasize the actors and whether they act as policy entrepreneurs when policy window/s open and for whom they open. The strength of using MST for analysis is the possibility to uncover rationality rather than assume it (Zahariadis, 2007). However, one must be aware that using MST also can cause events to seem more random than they were. The aim here is to explain

why the national curriculum regulations (NCR) turned out the way they did by using MST to analyse and identify actors and events in the policy process.

Methodology and data

This article examines the policy process leading up to the new KTE in Norway. It involves analysing the decision process according to Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory. This, in turn, means mapping out the actors involved in each stream, setting up a timeline to map all events, and finally performing a qualitative content analysis of the documents. The data consists of publicly available documents subjected to systematic qualitative content analysis. Table 1 presents an overview of the documents included in the study.

The listed documents have different statuses, ranging from formal regulations to an informal online forum, which is important to consider in the analysis.

Table 1. Data material.

Report from a working group to the NRLU ²
Minutes from the eight meetings of the Rammeflu ³ committee
Rammeflu's online debate forum
Rammeflu's proposal for a new NCR for kindergarten teacher education
The Ministry of Education and Research's letter of invitation to the consultation process regarding the new NCR for kindergarten teacher education
List of consultation bodies
The Ministry of Education and Research's proposal for a new NCR for kindergarten teacher education presented for the consultation process
Consultation statements from bodies entitled to comment National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education

The material has been analysed through the following step-by-step process:

- (1) Set up the timeline for the policy process
- (2) Map out all actors involved in the process
- (3) Map out events and actors present in each stream
- (4) Identify policy entrepreneurs and policy windows

'In a broad sense, content analysis refers to any analysis that systematically summarizes textual content' (Bratberg, 2017). Content analysis can, in other words, be both quantitative and qualitative. In this article, the analysis of the data material is qualitative. The aim has been to give a concentrated rendering of the material's content. Additionally, the objective is to link the document's content to the authors' attitudes, values, and ideas (Bratberg, 2017).

The content analysis of the documents was further performed in three separate steps. The first step involved close and systematic readings of the three different versions of the NCR, searching for themes, areas, sentences, or words that have changed from one version to the next. The second step involved reading all the statements sent in during the consultation process, coding them according to themes. Finally, the third step concerned reading reports and minutes to identify how the input has been treated.

This way, it has been possible to identify which areas have been paid attention to by the actors attending. After mapping out occurrences, the next step relates to the comments' content and the links between these comments, and the changes made to the NCR.

The transition from subjects to interdisciplinary knowledge areas – a controversial shift?

The primary purpose of this section is to present research on the new KTE and its KA. Securing quality in kindergartens and KTE was the main argument for reforming KTE (Følgegrupper, 2014). The Ministry of Education funded a research project [Følgegrupper] to follow the implementation and report back. Følgegrupper (2014) pointed out that the controversies in the debate connected to structuring the KTE in KA still existed during the first years of implementing the new KTE. Several informants referred to the discussions and debates initiated in the policy process. Further, they found that implementing a new NCR could have conserved old structures within the new framework because the staff identified themselves more with the old subject than the new KA (Følgegrupper,

2014). In the last report Følgegrupper (2017) found that even if the staff at the institutions have nothing against the idea of working interdisciplinary, most were critical to the model's rigidity with settled KA.

Jernes et al. (2020) stated that one of the original purposes of the reform was to strengthen pedagogy and make it more central in the KTE. However, as a subject, they found pedagogy weakened, unclear, and less defined within the new KTE. In addition, educators report they experience professional competition between pedagogy and other subjects, despite the ideal of interdisciplinarity. Also, Foss et al. (2019) concluded in their study that pedagogy has changed from being the carrying beam in the old KTE to being a satellite in the new KTE.

Dybvig and Jæger (2018) found that Norwegian as a language subject has lost substantial perspectives due to artificial linkage between two disciplines, Norwegian and Mathematics, with significantly different knowledge traditions. Further, they stated that the intention behind the KA 'Language, text, and mathematics', to create a holistic and coherent KTE was good. However, it seems like the organizing of KA works against the intent and at the expense of important academic perspectives.

The new KA 'Art, Culture, and Creativity' involves teachers from the three disciplines Music, Arts & Crafts, and Drama. Eide et al. (2017) found that teachers in their study expressed frustration because they thought that the changes have happened without the ideological visions of a more integrated education. This is in line with several other studies of the new KTE. Typical findings are that KA's as organizing principle is challenging and creates tension between the academic disciplines (Dybvig & Jæger, 2018; Eide et al., 2017; Følgegrupper, 2017; Lyngtun, 2017; Sataøen & Fossøy, 2019). Hauge and Heggen (2019) also claimed that KA does not respond to specific societal challenges or problem areas in the kindergarten as they were supposed to. Sataøen and Trippestad (2015) stated that the reform seems to have become an organizational reform, more than a content and culture reform.

In general, available research on KTE focuses on implementing the new curricula in different ways and stages and the results and effects of the new reform. The work in this article explores the policy process, hence trying to add to former research on KTE in a new way. At the same time, research on the policy process and its actors could also contribute to a more extensive discussion on democratic and professional qualities in policy development in the educational sector.

The policy process: timeline and actors

The following table (Table 2) illustrates the policy process timeline, from the National Organ for Quality in Education's (NOKUT) evaluation of KTE published in 2010, to the point when a new NCR was ready to be implemented. NOKUT's evaluation and its role in the policy process are discussed further under 'The Problem Stream'.

Twenty months passed from the publication of the NOKUT-evaluation to the point of the Ministry's final legislation. Two months later, the first institutions started implementing the new NCR, and the rest of the institutions followed in 2013.

It is necessary to explain who some of the actors in Table 2 are to describe the structure of the policy process. First, the expert committee called Rammeflu, appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, intended to represent different forms of expertise from the kindergarten and higher education sectors. The members in Rammeflu were as follows (number of representatives in brackets):

- different universities/university colleges (9)
- privately owned kindergartens (2)
- county governors (1)
- the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) (1)
- the parent organization (FUB) (1)

- the Sami Parliament (1)
- union organization for kindergarten teachers (1)
- student representative (1)

In addition to these appointed members, the Ministry of Education and Research granted itself an observer role (Rammeflu, 2011).

Rammeflu chose to communicate with multiple actors by opening an internet forum open to everyone in the public sphere. However, it appealed especially to the sector, such as educators, kindergarten owners, unions, and professionals. Rammeflu used the forum to announce which themes they would discuss in advance of its meetings, opening for comment and input. In total, Rammeflu initiated three themes: 1) the organization of the subjects and structure of KTE, 2) learning outcome descriptions, and 3) the title/name of the profession (Rammeflu, 2011). This forum offered a channel for deliberation, albeit informal and with no clearly defined status in the process.

In addition to the forum, Rammeflu established six different expert groups to cooperate with closely. Rammeflu established the groups after deciding to organize KTE by KA instead of by traditional subjects. The expert groups consisted of five to nine individuals and got named after each KA. The individuals in the groups were mainly from educational institutions. All groups had one student

Table 2. Timeline.

Period	Event	Actors	Policy Window
September 2010	NOKUT presents an evaluation of kindergarten teacher education (NOKUT evaluation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOKUT • Ministry 	
29.10.2010	The Norwegian Council for Teacher Education (NRLU) appoints a working committee with a mandate to develop input for an upcoming revision of kindergarten teacher education based on the NOKUT evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRLU 	
November 2010 – January 2011	The working group develops its report and recommendations for the NRLU, including a meeting with two representatives from Rammeflu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The working group (NRLU) • Rammeflu 	
February 2011	The NRLU provides input to Rammeflu by sending a letter and the report from the working group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRLU • Rammeflu 	Window 1
2.2.2011	The Ministry of Education and Research appoints an expert committee (Rammeflu) with a mandate to develop a proposal for a new NCR and national guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry • Rammeflu 	
02.2011–10.2011	Rammeflu works on a proposal for a new NCR and national guidelines while communicating with several actors online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rammeflu • Different actors in the public sphere • Professional groups 	Window 2
15.10.2011	Rammeflu delivers a proposal for a new NCR to the Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rammeflu • Ministry 	
15.10.2011–31.01.2012	The Ministry of Education and Research revises Rammeflu's proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry 	
01.02.2012	The Ministry of Education and Research sends out its proposal for a new NCR and invites actors to a consultation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry 	Window 3
01.02.2012–13.04.2012	65 actors submit their comments to the Ministry in a consultation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting parties 	Window 3
13.04.2012–06.2012	The Ministry of Education and Research revises the proposal again in line with comments from the consultation process and develops a final version of the NCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry 	
06.06.2012	The Ministry of Education and Research adopts the final legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry 	
Autumn 2012 – Autumn 2013	The implementation of NCR starts in the educational institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational institutions 	

representative, and some had representatives from various kindergartens and municipalities. The primary role of these groups was to advise Rammeflu on the development of the national guidelines.

The policy process's second point involving several actors was the consultation process. The Ministry of Education and Research invited 165 actors to submit their comments, and nine actors opted to offer comments without being formally invited. However, only 56 of the invited actors responded with comments and input. In addition, nine actors responded with 'nothing to remark' or 'we do not wish to take a position in the hearing'. Thus, a broad range of actors is on the invited and participating actors list. Table 3 gives an overview, categorizing the actors and indicating whether and how they responded. The actor categories align with the Norwegian Centre of Research's data categories for governmental and private organizations (NSD, 2020b).

Table 3 shows that some actors are 'organized in' while others are 'organized out' of the process. Out of 165 invited parties, only 65 responded, and 9 did not comment. Thus, 60% of the actors invited chose not to participate. These include several large organizations linked to higher education, unions, kindergartens owners, and actors presumably interested in teacher education and the profession. However, several actors were 'organized out' of the process simply by not being invited. Notably, only three counties/municipalities were invited out of 19 counties and 435 municipalities. The municipalities in Norway own approximately 50% of all the kindergartens in Norway, making them a significant employer of kindergarten teachers. Rather than invite all of them to participate, the Ministry of Education and Research expected the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) to represent them. In 2012, there were over 3,000 privately owned⁴ kindergartens in Norway (Utdanningsdirektoratet [Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training], 2021). However, only six kindergarten owners received an invitation.

Even if the timeline in Table 2 may cause an impression of a linear policy process, this is not necessarily the case. The timeline only provides an overview of the events and actors in the order they occurred. However, as further analysis will show, not all events were planned or initiated from the start. Also, some actors chose to play a more significant role earning themselves roles as policy entrepreneurs creating events. Following is a closer look at each stream.

The problem stream

The problem stream is concerned with seeking out events that raised KTE onto the political agenda. For example, the Ministry of Education and Research stated in 2011 a need for a modernized KTE based on the kindergarten sector's rapid evolution after 2005 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011b). Before 2011, several changes and developments in higher education and the kindergarten sectors contributed to this. In that way, the problem stream started to flow even before the timeline presented in Table 2. In the following, the analysis will focus on these events.

Norway's higher education (HE) has undergone several changes in recent decades. Reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) and post-New Public Management (post-NPM) have affected the sector. These reforms typically seek to streamline public sector through goals and performance management (Christensen et al., 2010; Christensen & Lægveid, 2011). Øgård (2005) states that NPM reforms are characterized by more indirect control than direct authority. Christensen and Lægveid (2001) say that NPM, in many ways, contains contradictions in the form of more control on one side and more autonomy on the other. In the Norwegian context, NPM has had more to do with internal reform in the public sector than with public service privatization, which has been the case elsewhere.

Bleiklie and Michelsen (2020) point out that reforming HE aims to improve the efficiency and

Table 3. Consultation process.

	Invited	Response with 'Nothing to remark' or 'do not wish to take a position'.	Response with provided comments/ input	Response in total
Ministries	18	7	3	10
Central administrative bodies, directorates, county governors	26	1	2	3
Other administrative bodies, wholly-owned public companies, administrative bodies with special authorities	23	0	10	10
Universities and university colleges	25	0	22	22
Regional health authorities	4	1	0	1
Municipalities and counties	3	0	2	2
Unions	24	1	6	7
Employer organizations	5	0	3	3
NGOs	26	0	13	13
Kindergartens and owners of private kindergartens	6	0	2	2
Others	5	0	2	1

quality of educated candidates and research outcomes. The quality of HE has been on the political agenda for many years (Beerkens, 2018; Elken & Stensaker, 2011; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018), but changes in the concept have occurred. Traditionally, quality has referred to input or process, whereas nowadays, it refers to result or output (Stensaker & Prøitz, 2015). Frølich et al. (2015) indicate that HE has evolved towards increased use of national guidelines and standardization when organizing study programmes in Norway. Also, today it is customary to use common standards for degrees, grades, publishing, accreditation/quality assurance, research finance, evaluation, and the measurement of results. Since the year 2000, according to Bleiklie (2006), the tendency has been, on the one hand, to grant institutions greater autonomy when it comes to internal organization, and on the other, to rely on NOKUT to perform control and supervision. Simultaneously, incentive tools were introduced in the form of funds⁵ tied to the production of new graduates (Bleiklie (2006)).

KTE is no exception to this trend of change and reform. Traditionally, KTE in Norway has been at the intersection of education and welfare. The Ministry of Social Affairs was responsible for this type of education until 1955, when the Ministry of Church and Education took over. In 1975, the Teacher Education Act was passed, encompassing KTE. In 1980, KTE became a three-year higher education programme with admission requirements. In 1994, following the Norwegian University College Reform, KTE became subject to the same laws as all HE in Norway. This reform resulted in fewer and larger HE-institutions, the goal of making university colleges more economically efficient. Since then, KTE and other welfare education have been under pressure to become more academic (Barnehagepionerene, 2020; Terum & Smeby, 2014).

However, these KTE changes also relate to national kindergarten policy and political changes. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research assumed responsibility for kindergartens from the Ministry of Children and Families (Utdanningsforbundet, 2017). This represented a shift from seeing kindergarten as an institution centred on caring for and rearing children to kindergarten as part of the Norwegian education system. In the same period, a massive development took place in the sector. An agreement between several political parties made it a right for every one-year-old to six-year-old to go to kindergarten, resulting in a need for a large-scale building period (Utdanningsdirektoratet [Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training], 2008). The owners consists of both public municipalities and private companies. The political agreement also resulted in a national standard for maximum

pricing and an understanding that private and public owners should be treated alike when financed (Ministry of Children and Families, 2003).

Consequently, the demand for high-quality content in kindergarten also found its way onto the political agenda. In 2009, the White Paper *Quality in the Kindergarten* was launched (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009). This White Paper addresses the need for a greater focus on qualified personnel and content quality.

Demand for quality in kindergarten and placing them as a part of the education system had a ripple effect. Although people of different educational backgrounds have traditionally staffed kindergarten in Norway, kindergarten teachers have had a monopoly regarding management positions (Børhaug et al., 2018; Greve et al., 2014). In 2008, NOKUT evaluated KTE on behalf of the Ministry. Overall, the results presented in the report were discouraging. NOKUT found that the intake quality was low, educational institutions' competence was sparse, and graduate quality was highly varied. Further, NOKUT concluded that KTE was not of the quality one would expect in 2010, and therefore recommended that KTE should be strengthened (NOKUT, 2010). A White Paper the same year, also recommended strengthening the KTE, and in addition considering prolonging the education from three to four years (NOU 2010:8, 2010). Universities Norway (UHR), the cooperative body for accredited universities and university colleges in Norway, started getting the case onto the political agenda immediately after the NOKUT evaluation (Olsen et al., 2011). The research and evaluation played a significant role in lifting the KTE onto the political agenda.

The policy stream

In the policy stream, the focus lies on actors connecting their solutions to the problem, especially looking at the so-called *primaevial soup* – the spectrum of ideas and solutions that the actors uses to support their proposals. The new KTE was launched in 2012, and by 2013 it had been implemented at all relevant institutions (Sataøen & Trippestad, 2015). However, there was little or no financial incentive following this reform. In fact, KTE was in the second-lowest category (E), and after the reform, it remained in this category (NSD, 2020a).

The Ministry of Education and Research's solution to the critique of the old education was to redesign KTE by putting together an expert committee, Rammeflu, with the mandate to 'make an integrated, profession-oriented and research-based education that is attractive, innovative and demanding, and of high quality' (Rammeflu, 2011). Further, the mandate stated that Rammeflu's efforts should be trifold:

- (1) develop a proposal for a new NCR for KTE
- (2) organize and manage a process for developing a set of national guidelines for KTE
- (3) develop a set of characteristics and indicators for KTE.

The mandate also stated that the new NCR should not be as detailed nor govern as the old one. Instead, national guidelines and their characteristics and indicators are intended to make it possible to evaluate and measure institutions' fulfilment of new educational goals (Rammeflu, 2011). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education and Research provided NOK 6.65 million to Rammeflu, the expert groups involved, and the secretariat. However, the Ministry did not promise to fund the implementation of the new NCR. On the contrary, the institutions got the message that they should finance it through ordinary budgets (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011a).

The work carried out by Rammeflu and its associated organizations represents the policy stream. As previously mentioned, Rammeflu consisted of a broad range of people with a common interest in kindergarten and KTE. These group members align with what Kingdon would refer to as experts and specialists. Nevertheless, by setting a clear mandate as described for Rammeflu, the Ministry structured and laid down the premises for what the actors could do in the policy stream. Also, Rammeflu involved both the higher education sector and the kindergarten sector by opening the internet debate forum. As the policy windows analysis will show, several active actors in this forum tried to connect their solutions to the 'problems'.

The political stream

Political support and timing are crucial in the political stream, and national mood is of great importance. The events in this stream are also decisive regarding the case resulting in a decision. It is possible to interpret all the controversies presented earlier to be a part of the national mood. However, regarding the reform of KTE, there was political support from the left to the right in parliament. The timing of the NOKUT evaluation coincided with a need for more qualified personnel in the many newly established kindergartens and a new political interest in the quality of kindergartens. Therefore, when NOKUT presented its evaluation, there was broad support for change. The controversies seemed to be about content and structure.

Further along in the process, the Ministry of Education and Research was present as an actor at all stages, keeping the political stream active and closely linked to the policy stream. The Ministry was present throughout Rammeflu's work, having one or more representatives at all meetings. The

representatives' role was first and foremost to observe, but they could also assist if needed to answer questions of principle (Rammeflu, 2011). Thus, Rammeflu's conclusions did not come as a surprise to the Ministry. On the contrary, the Ministry was ready to take the next step in the policy process right after Rammeflu delivered its proposal. The Ministry revised Rammeflu's proposal before the consultation process started. This revision resulted in minor changes, primarily linguistic changes, and harmonizing it with other legislation in the field.

After the consultation process, on the 4th of June 2012, the Ministry laid down the new NCR (Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning, 2012).

The policy windows: windows of opportunity?

During the process, three policy windows opened. The first policy window opened before the official policy process started, the second was informal but planned, and the third window was both a predicted and formal one. This section will be about the three windows and what kind of opportunities each of them represented.

The first window opened at a stage in the policy process when most actors had not started working. However, one actor began to work immediately after the published NOKUT evaluation. The fact that NRLU began to work, could be seen as an attempt to control the future of KTE. After all, the NRLU consists of representatives from educational institutions offering teacher education. The evaluation report also gave a harsh critique of several factors connected to the institutions themselves. The NRLU anticipated a complete reformation. By appointing a working group that developed concrete and comprehensive advice on accomplishing a reformation, it played a significant role as a policy entrepreneur in the policy process. The advice from NRLU ended up setting the premises for the rest of the policy process and the work of Rammeflu. Rammeflu's minutes show that input from NRLU came up as soon as at its first meeting in February. What is interesting about this input, is that NRLU suggests structuring KTE by KA, which is the first time the concept KA appears.

The NRLU suggested in its input to Rammeflu that it should move forwards with the idea of organizing KTE by KA instead of by traditional subjects. Not only did NRLU recommend this, but they also presented a concrete proposal on how to do it. This proposal is close to the model in the final legislation. The argument for KA was that they responded well to the critique of the old KTE. The old KTE consisted of ten small subjects; the new model with knowledge areas would allow the students to gain more in-

depth knowledge and better education. Simultaneously, knowledge areas were argued to better fit kindergartens' purpose and take a step away from 'schoolification'. Organizing by KA was meant to better qualify students for the interdisciplinary work in kindergartens. The working group's view is that this should be enhanced (Olsen et al., 2011). This proposal created debate and controversy throughout the whole process.

This first policy window was created by what Kingdon refers to as a policy entrepreneur, namely the NRLU. By seeking out an opportunity to get ahead of the process, NRLU managed to get its view and its proposed solution into the policy stream at a stage when the other actors waited for the process to start.

The second window opened a couple of months into Rammeflu's working period. The minutes from Rammeflu's meetings show debate and uncertainty over how and if it should move forwards with KA. Consequently, Rammeflu decided to launch KA for the public early in March 2011 in the online debate forum. The debate forum was open for discussion for approximately a month, and there were 82 comments in the forum on this subject. The response was divided, and the temperature in the forum was high.

The knowledge areas should, in other words, cover more or less the same competence as traditional subjects, but the knowledge should be organized in new ways. At DMMH, we have experience with this way of organizing education, and we wish to warn of some unfortunate consequences of this kind of organizing. (...) We would warn not to end up with one division of knowledge that only people in kindergarten teacher education understand, while the rest of the world uses the traditional division. It is commendable to emphasize that kindergarten's everyday life should be different from everyday school life. However, it should be achieved in ways other than by introducing completely new subject areas.

This comment in the online debate forum represents comments that signaled scepticism of or opposition to the proposal of a transition from subjects to KA. Nevertheless, there were positive voices in the debate forum as well. For example, this post from a person working at an institution that already organized its educational offering after a theme-based/interdisciplinary model:

It is a form of education closely to everyday life in the kindergarten. I think this is a big advantage of this model. Kindergarten life is mainly interdisciplinary, and the students seem to appreciate this way of organizing education.

Four days after closing this debate forum section, Rammeflu had its third meeting, failing to decide. Instead, it concluded that more investigation was needed and postponed its decision for another

month, assigning further investigation and preparing a proposal to the committee's management. Again, the committee's management presented a proposal to organize KTE according to six knowledge areas at the May meeting. This time the decision was taken in a vote where eleven were in favour, and four were against the proposal.

After this, the knowledge areas were presented as the only choice for the participants further in the process. Between May and October 2011, Rammeflu continued to develop a proposal for the new NCR. Interaction with the public and the six expert groups continued. However, the theme of KA was not brought up again, and Rammeflu stated on its website that KA was the chosen model.

The third window is a so-called foreseen window, the consultation, which the Ministry of Education and Research announced in February 2012 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). It was a formal consultation common to most policy processes in Norway; this is the part of the policy process where all actors involved and affected should have an opportunity to provide input. However, it did not turn out like the window of opportunity for the case of KA. When sending out its invitation, the Ministry instructed the participants on which areas of the proposed NCR it wanted input. This included the aim for KTE as formulated in §1 and learning outcomes formulated in §2. However, §3, which concerned the KAs, was not included. By doing this, the Ministry attempted to set rules for what kind of response the consultative bodies should provide. Several actors in the consultation process reacted to this, and some expressed it in their answers as well:

OMEF Norway is critical of the fact that the Ministry of Education and Research encourages the consultation bodies to "especially consider" the change of name and §1 and §2 of the regulation. This kind of encouragement signals that it is not important to comment on §3 of the regulation. However, the content of §3, on organizing the educational format, sets the premises for realizing the aim (§2) and the learning outcome descriptions (§3). For this reason, this section is emphasized in our consultation response.

This comment from OMEF Norway (World Organization for Early Childhood Education), is one example of an actor who explicitly stated that it disagreed with the Ministry concerning the purpose and opportunities of the consultation process. Other actors did not necessarily comment on the issue explicitly. Nevertheless, they commented on §3, which the Ministry had excluded in the invitation. Table 4 provides an overview of the themes most commented on in the consultation process.

Excepting the first category, the themes in Table 4 all relates to §3 in the NCR, i.e. the paragraph the

Table 4. Categories of comments in the consultation process.

Theme	Number of comments
The change of name to kindergarten teacher	42
The role of the subject of pedagogy in KTE	15
Determination of credits for subjects	12
The role of arts and aesthetical subjects	12
Organizing the KTE by knowledge areas instead of by classical subjects	22
Management as an educational theme	10
The youngest children as an educational theme	8

Ministry initially excluded from the consultation. Most of the bodies chose to overlook the Ministry's instruction when it came to this, signaling that they did not accept the presented result. Even if some actors were optimistic about KA, these actors also asked for changes and adjustments to the NCR. For example, in its statement, Queen Maud University College (DMMH) said:

DMMH would strongly encourage the subjects to be clearly stated both in structure and content in the new kindergarten teacher education. This is best done by attaching credits to subjects to secure them a place in the new curricula.

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) went even further in its statement:

KS wants to maintain a subject structure in kindergarten teacher education and does not support the proposal for knowledge areas. KS believes that the proposal to organize by knowledge areas could lead to a weakening of support for research subjects and arts and crafts development work, and the subject of pedagogy. In the long run, this would weaken [this type of] education as a whole. (...) Suppose it is still decided to organize by knowledge areas. In that case, KS thinks the content of these [knowledge areas] must be managed nationally and more precisely by giving credits for subjects that should be included in the areas.

While some actors chose to continue the struggle for change in the form of reversing the decision to introduce KA, others chose to express disappointment in it while still moving forwards;

Hedmark University College has received the change from subjects to knowledge areas with mixed feelings. (...) Based on strong signals from the Ministry, we have chosen not to continue this argumentation in either direction, but only to confirm that this is how it will be.

Discussion and conclusion

The primary purpose of this article has been to look closer into the policy process leading to the enactment of a new National Curriculum Regulation for the Norwegian kindergarten teacher education in 2012. By letting Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory

guide the analysis, the focus has been on identifying actors and their possibilities for impact on the policy process. Thus, the goal has been to contribute to a research field on higher education policy and more specific knowledge about policy formulation processes for professional education, such as kindergarten teacher education. As mentioned in the introduction, the authorities have stated that transparency and participation by involved actors should characterize policymaking in the higher education field. Hence, using MST as an analytical frame has been fruitful in uncovering possibilities for more than symbolic participation in the form of policy windows opened by policy entrepreneurs. In this last section, I will briefly discuss each policy window and what kind of participation they represent.

The first policy window was opened thanks to a policy entrepreneur's work, NRLU, and sat premises for the rest of the policy process. Through their representation in NRLU, this can be seen as higher education institutions trying to control the response to the critique that emerged from the NOKUT evaluation. Moreover, it shows the will and capacity to respond to the critique without the Ministry's instruction.

The second window was opened, structured, and closed by Rammeflu. The second window created a high level of engagement and debate. Still, it does not seem to have significantly impacted the outcome in hindsight. After all, Rammeflu chose to move forward with the idea of KA despite the protests and controversy in the debate forum.

The third policy window was opened, structured, and closed by the Ministry. However, this third window was not a window of great opportunity considering the KAs. Although most of the actors chose to overlook the Ministry's attempt to omit the KA from the consultation, they did not change the proposal significantly.

In sum, the policy process for reforming KTE showed signs of both transparency and participation. The policy process did have elements of network governance with a great deal of dialogue. However, the Ministry did not intend to have a free flow of ideas and solutions. The process had clear goals, and the Ministry chose to structure the process through rules for participation. The three identified policy windows were not all windows of opportunity. The first window, and NRLU acting like a policy entrepreneur, played a big part in how the final policy ended. The two other windows represented participation in an internet forum and a formal consultation, but these did not influence the policy process to the same extent.

The most significant change from old to new KTE was transitioning from traditional subjects to KA. This change was controversial and still is. In

2017, The Ministry appointed an expert committee to investigate the role of the kindergarten teacher from a professional perspective. In the final report, Børhaug et al. (2018) say that knowledge areas should be critically evaluated as an organizing principle for KTE. Further, they state that this type of organizing has great challenges, especially when it comes to the subjects as academic disciplines and when it comes to possibilities to have a research-based education. Havnes (2021) describes⁶ NRLU's part in the policy process as an intermezzo or interlude, managing to play a significant part in the process. Havnes concludes that the KA model was not a good way to realize an integrated and profession-oriented education and calls it an impossible model.

The controversies, the research, and critique have led The Ministry to consider changes in the KTE again. In September of 2020, seven years after implementing the education reform nationally, the Ministry appointed an expert committee with a mandate to propose changes to the NCR and, especially, to look closely at the role of pedagogy as a subject (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020).

Further, this article's findings align with what Vukasovic et al. (2021) describe as a process of asymmetric dialogue in their policy brief about another, more extensive reformation in Norwegian higher education, the structural⁷ reform. Koritzinsky (2000) also pointed this out when looking at the reform activity of the 1990s. He states that questions were raised about these processes' democratic and professional qualities in his work. Common for this research is that it deals with major reforms that cover most of the higher education sector in Norway. However, this article's findings confirm that this is also the case when looking at a single professional programme's reformation.

Notes

1. Kindergarten teacher education (KTE) refers to the Norwegian higher education for working in the kindergarten/pre-schools/ECEC. The reason for using the term kindergarten teacher is that this refers to the direct translation of the Norwegian name of the profession, 'Barnehagelærer'. To become a kindergarten teacher, one must have a bachelor's degree from university/university-college.
2. The NRLU is the strategic unit for teacher education in Universities Norway (UHR), the cooperative body for accredited universities and university colleges in Norway
3. Rammeflu is the name of the committee appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research. It was given the mandate to develop a new kindergarten teacher education. A more detailed description of the committee follows in the paragraph headed 'The Policy Process: Timeline and Actors'

4. The exact number of privately owned kindergartens was 3,353. There are no statistics showing how many owners these are divided among. Owners range from small companies with one kindergarten to large corporations (SSB, 2021)
5. The funding system is categorized from A to F, where A equates to the highest level of funding and F the lowest (NSD, 2020a).
6. The article published by Havnes (2021) was published in August 2021, in the review-phase of this article.
7. The Norwegian Structural Reform of 2015 was a large reform re-shaping the landscape of higher education in Norway. It resulted in mergers of several higher education institutions. The ministry's goal was 'fewer but stronger institutions' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015)

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Geolocation information

Norway

ORCID

Solveig Marie Borgund  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2881-1908>

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