

ÅRSRAPPORT FRA PROGRAMSENSOR 2024

University of Bergen
Department of Health Promotion and Development

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Annual report from the programme auditor

Name of auditor: Professor Lennart Nygren, Programme auditor at University of Bergen, Department of Health Promotion and Development (HEMIL) for the programmes Mastergrad in Barnevern (Child protection and welfare) and Mastergrad i Barnevernsarbeid (Child welfare work).

Period of appointment: 2024-2028.

Period to which the report applies: 2024.

The task for the programme auditor of 2024

The task for the auditor this year has been to have a closer look at the programmes' first subject – MABVA402, *Barnevernet sine beslutningsprosesser og rettslær*. The subject runs parallel within the master's in child protection and the master's in child welfare work. The programmes run in October to December 2024. The subject is designed to deal with decision-making processes and jurisprudence. It has been reported that both students and staff experience some challenges since the subject has an assessment with two parts; one that is a legal part-examination organized (nationally for all master's programmes in child welfare in Norway) by NOKUT, and the other is a home exam organized by the HEMIL Department which deals with decision-making processes. This audit will be focused on the interplay between these two different assessments. As I understand it the challenges for students (and staff) is that it has been difficult to achieve optimal learning conditions and that this besides time stress is reflected in the results of the students. Additionally, I have had a look into the literature of the course. I will give a comment to this at the end of this review.

All over Norway, 300 master's students in child welfare had a national part-examination in jurisprudence in child welfare December 6, 2023. On this occasion, 46 percent were failing the exam, which was assessed as pass or fail. The percentage that failed was high in several of the Norwegian masters' programmes even if there were exceptions where all students achieved a pass (e.g. HVL). The results of the 2024 national NOKUT exams are, when this audit report is published, not known (exam date was December 4 and censorship deadline is on January 7, 2025).

The course *Barnevernet sine beslutningsprosesser og rettslær* (15 credits) contains the social mandate of child welfare, decision processes, children's and families' rights, legal methods and legal sources. At University of Bergen some adaptations and modifications have been carried out the past year, after the 2023 exams, but according to both student and staff, the combination of a local home exam and the national NOKUT exam is still challenging. The course plan, time plan and other written resources and guidelines for the course that I as auditor have had access to indicate, together with oral information from at a short online meeting with students and staff November 11, 2024, several conflicts related to the organisation and implementation of the course. These are, in short:

- A. The high demands on the national one-day NOKUT exam (equal to five out of fifteen credits) requires preparations that appears to make it into a struggle for the students to allocate enough time to the two different course parts. The high proportion of students failing in the NOKUT exam in 2023 appears to coincide with a time pressure, leading to not being able to work hard enough with the home exam. So, students seem to be caught between the necessary preparations for the NOKUT exam (and quite a few students failed with this) and working on the home exam on decision processes. As I understand it, the students experienced it as stressful to write the home exam and immediately after submitting this, start the intensive preparations for the national NOKUT exam.
- B. A second aspect that might add to the stress is the different forms of grading where the home exam is graded with the scale A-F while the NOKUT exam is either pass or fail. The two different scales mean different thresholds in the grading scales regarding failure. This can lead to students regard it as necessary to prioritise the NOKUT exam before the home exam.
- C. The teaching form in this course consists of a mixture of lectures and seminars including working with case methodology. The idea is to alternate the legal content with the more decision theoretical and administrative (dealing) content in a way that connects the two types of content logically. This is obviously a well-motivated idea that supports student learning and preparing for professional judgment, but that also leads to that some of the content appears a rather long time before the exam. Anyway, it is not necessarily a problem, but it may require repetition a few weeks after the lectures and seminars.
- D. Thanks to the organisation of the course in this way (to alternate the two different contents) the course is built up thematically with relevant themes for both the cases in the seminars and for the tasks in the home exams. A question is if this thematization creates confusion in relation to the national NOKUT exam, that might be somewhat differently thematized. Whether this is a problem can be discussed.

It is not yet known how the outcome of the NOKUT exams this year (2024) will be. In 2023 there was large variation between the different Norwegian masters' programmes in child welfare and child welfare work where some had over 50% of their students failing, while others had significantly less (as mentioned, HVL with 0%). The reasons for this variation can be many: from differences in the organisation of the programmes to variations in how much students work outside the university parallel to their studies. So, in a way it is a bit premature to suggest any changes before the current exams of 2024 are finished. But it is possible

to outline different strategies for the development of the programmes. Some alternative options are:

- i) A first option would be to modify the structure of the course so that preparations for exams start earlier and go parallel to lectures and seminars. There could be room for small adjustments of the time plan to find more time and/or to provide more support to the students in preparations for the NOKUT exam. A question is whether it would be possible to improve the preparation with inspirations from other masters' programmes in Norway where the rate of failures was low. Also, after January 2025 there will be new and more experiences available to learn from. This option is perhaps the best in the short run. It requires limited planning and administrative work from the Department, and the students will recognise the model of learning from previous semesters. Depending on how serious the experiences from the fall semester 2024 will be, it can be an attractive step-by-step way to go.
- ii) A second option would be to create a total separation of the decision-making content from the legal/jurisprudence (NOKUT-related) content. This would mean to begin with the first part and ending it after ca 2/3 of the course including writing the home exam, before introducing and teaching the legal content as a second part and ending this part with the national exam (1/3 of the course). This would need more planning and new ways to coordinate the two parts of the course. A risk would be that the integration that is achieved in today's time plan regarding lectures and seminars with case methods becomes more difficult and weaker.
- iii) A third option is to do nothing, and to accept and live with that one part of the course is more demanding and difficult than the other. Many education programs experience such differences. For example (which may be seen as a peripheral example) the courses in physical chemistry were for decades more demanding than other chemistry courses, but this was accepted by the students. They expected that half or so of the group would fail in the first attempt – it was just a more difficult content. To translate this into the child welfare and child welfare work masters' programmes would mean to maintain the pressure on students to prepare more for the NOKUT exam and simultaneously maintaining the high demands on the decision-making part. Lowering the demands on either part seems to be a questionable solution.

A general issue that has some relevance is the relationship between law and child welfare practice. This concern is shared with several other profession education programs, such as social work, nursing, police work, business economics etc. Over the years there has been different more or less integrated education programs, but it seems that the teaching of law has always been considered as crucial, even if the emphasis sometimes has been on broader approaches, other times delimited to more narrowly defined content¹.

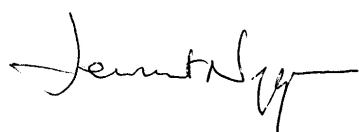
¹ An example with references to the Swedish debate is illustrated in Nygren, L. (2021) *Kontroversteman i kunskapsbildningen i socialt arbete i Sverige*. I Swärd, H. & Edebalk, PG (red.) *Socionomutbildningen – då, nu och i framtiden*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, sid. 341-378.

A second task for the auditor this year was to have a look at the literature and if possible, make some suggestions. I have investigated some international and Swedish course materials (see the attached list of literature that may be of interest). My main impression is that the literature that is used in the masters' programmes is adequate and advanced. The research environment of the HEMIL Department is engaged in producing high standard and relevant research, which guarantees that students will have access to the research frontier, and to teachers that have the overview and competence to teach in relation the themes of decision making and legal conditions for child welfare.

With today's rapid development of the utilisation of artificial intelligence as support to decision making in many areas, AI is increasingly being used in complex decisions such as child welfare. It might be a relevant idea to investigate the growing literature here, to see how students can, with a critical mind, think of utilising AI in child welfare decision making².

In general, an idea might be to add more literature about decision theory (see also attached list), since we in this field deal with discretionary decision making that requires knowledge on many levels: legal, organisational, theoretical, (inter-)professional and practical.

Umeå 15 december 2024



Lennart Nygren, programsensor
Professor emeritus i socialt arbete, Umeå universitet

Appendix - A list of literature that may be of interest. Several of the titles here are probably already known to the staff of the masters' programmes.

- Alexius, K. (2022). Vad är barnets bästa när rättsprinciper kolliderar? En studie av principkollisioner i bedömningar av tvångsvårdade barns relation till ursprungsföräldrar. *Retfærd. Nordisk Juridisk Tidsskrift*, 174(4), 25-42.
- Bosk, E. A. (2020). What counts? Quantification, worker judgment, and divergence in child welfare decision making. In *Human Service Organizations and the Question of Impact* (pp. 93-112). Routledge.
- Christiansen, Ø., Havnen, K. J. S., Iversen, A. C., Fylkesnes, M. K., Lauritzen, C., Nygård, R. H., & Vis, S. A. (2019). Når barnevernet undersøker-Barnevernets undersøkelsesarbeid-delrapport 4.
- Forkby, T., & Höjer, S. (2011). Navigations between regulations and gut instinct: The unveiling of collective memory in decision-making processes where teenagers are placed in residential care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 16(2), 159-168.

² See for example Kawakami, A., et al. (2022). Improving human-AI partnerships in child welfare: understanding worker practices, challenges, and desires for algorithmic decision support (see attached reference list).

- Gillingham, P., & Whittaker, A. (2023). How Can Research and Theory Enhance Understanding of Professional Decision-Making in Reviews of Cases of Child Death and Serious Injury? *The British journal of social work*, 53(1), pp. 5–22
- Hardenstedt, H., Linde, S., & Ponnert, L. (2024). Aiming for participation of foster children within organizationally specialized social services: a bureaucratic or a relational act?. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 1-15.
- Hestbæk, A. D., Höjer, I., Pösö, T., & Skivenes, M. (2020). Child welfare removal of infants: Exploring policies and principles for decision-making in Nordic countries. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, 104572.
- Kawakami, A., Sivaraman, V., Cheng, H. F., Stapleton, L., Cheng, Y., Qing, D., ... & Holstein, K. (2022). Improving human-AI partnerships in child welfare: understanding worker practices, challenges, and desires for algorithmic decision support. In *Proceedings of the 2022 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1-18).
- Keddell, E. (2014). Current debates on variability in child welfare decision-making: A selected literature review. *Social Sciences*, 3(4), 916-940.
- Kraus, M., Burghardt, J., & Koska, C. (2024). AI-assisted reflection in child welfare. *Edition Moderne Postmoderne*, 63.
- Mattsson, T. (2016). Juridik och socialt arbete. I Meeuwisse, A., Swärd, H., Sunesson, S. & Knutagård, M. (red.) *Socialt arbete. En grundbok*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur. 3:e omarbetade upplagan, 198-215.
- Munro, E. (2019). Decision-making under uncertainty in child protection: Creating a just and learning culture. *Child & Family Social Work*, 24(1), 123-130.
- Przeperski, J., & Taylor, B. (2022). Cooperation in child welfare decision making: Qualitative vignette study. *Child Care in practice*, 28(2), 137-152.
- Ponnert, Lina (2024). *Utredningsarbete i den sociala barnvården*. Malmö: Gleerups. 191 s.
- Ponnert, L. (2023). Mellan rättslig reglering och professionell logik:—att hantera orosanmälningar om våld i barnvården. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 30(1), 415-434.
- Sletten, M. S. (2024). Proceduralisation of decision-making processes: a case study of child welfare practice. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 14(1), 149-161.
- Starcke, K., & Brand, M. (2012). Decision making under stress: a selective review. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 36(4), 1228-1248.
- Taylor, B. J. (2021). Risk-managing decision-making: A psycho-social rationality model. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 51(7), 2819-2838.
- Toros, K. (2021). Children's participation in decision making from child welfare workers' perspectives: A systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 31(4), 367-374.

Annual report from the programme auditor

Name of auditor: Professor Lennart Nygren

Programme auditor at University of Bergen, Faculty of Psychology,
Mastergrad in Barnevern (Child protection and welfare) og Mastergrad i Barnevernssarbeid.
Period of appointment: 2019-2023.
Period to which the report applies: 2023.

The task for the programme auditor of 2023

My task this year has been to contribute to the revision of the third semester in the two master programmes. The course MABARN 331: Kunnskapsbasert barnevernfaglig praksis på individ- og systemnivå (30 stp) will disappear and replaced by the two 15-stp-courses MABARN 431 and MABARN 435 within the programme Master i barnevern, and the two 15-stp-courses MABVA 431 and MABVA 432 in the programme Master i barnevernssarbeid.

The new courses are:

MABARN 431: Endringsarbeid, tiltak of prosjektplanlegging (15 stp)

MABARN 435: Kunnskapbasert barnevernfagleg praksis på individ- og systemnivå (15 stp)

MABVA 431: Innovasjon, tiltak of prosjektplanlegging (15 stp)

MABVA 432: Praktisk barnvernssarbeid på system- og individnivå (15 stp)

More specifically, my task has been to give an outsider's view on which parts of the MABARN 331 that are particularly important to transfer to the new courses. The two programmes Barnvern and Barnevernssarbeid can be organised with common subparts, but it is important to strive for the development of their unique profiles. However, since the courses in the third semester only correspond to one fourth of the programme, this profiling is also a task for the first two semesters of the programmes, and the fourth semester with the 30-stp-thesis can also reflect unique profiles.

- A. Parts of the MABARN 331 that seem to be particularly important to bring into the new courses MABARN 431 and 435.

The current 30 stp course has a relatively broad content. It is named "Kunnskapsbasert

barnevernfaglig praksis på individ- og systemnivå”. The expected learning outcomes cover knowledge about communication with children and families to leadership, interprofessional cooperation and application of knowledge in different aspects of practice. There are nine skills and four general competencies mentioned in the MABARN 331 programme syllabus. The translation of these intended learning outcomes is visible in the timetable and in the list of literature. As I see it, there are no obvious parts of the 331 that can be left out, given the multitude of intended learning outcomes of the new courses. When comparing 331 with the new courses I wondered where the learning outcome of 331, “Emnet skal gi studentene nødvendige ferdigheter i arbeid med samiske- og minoritetsfamilier”, has gone in the new courses?

The new courses in the master of barnevern are MABARN 431 Endringsarbeid, tiltak of prosjektplanlegging, and 435 Kunnskapbasert barnevernfagleg praksis på individ- og systemnivå. To start with **MABARN 431**, 15 stp. Since the following 15 stp MABARN435 has an emphasis on practice and project work, the more theoretical content of the old 30 stp course 331 needs to be concentrated to the 15 stp of MABARN 431. So, which parts of MABARN 331 seem to be most important to keep (and develop) as parts of MABARN 431? At a first glance it seems like all the content of MABARN 331 is important but nevertheless needs to be reduced to fit into the smaller frames (15 stp instead of 30 stp).

The focus on change/endringsarbeid is obviously important, and it will be important to keep this theme closely connected to the professional context. Looking into the timetable of the “old” course 331 there seems to be over twenty subthemes. Perhaps these could be organized in fewer but more integrated subthemes? Such as:

a. an overview of endringsarbied/tiltak and evaluation, prevention, etc. i.e. that has more to do with construction and organization of tiltak and principles for identifying target groups, defining targets and evaluating results of interventions, than with the actual practical work. Relevant theories and research.

b. The professional: power issues, professional ethics, professional roles, interprofessional work, supervision, etc., with focus on action and interaction, participation, Relevant theories and research.

c. Communication and collaboration with actors on different levels (children, families, other professions, other parts of system, cultures etc.). Focus on communication and cooperation skills. Relevant theories and research.

These are tentative ideas; the main point is to create fewer and larger themes so that the 15 stp are structured in for example four parts: except for the above (three) a fourth theme is: d. project planning. This theme that can run as a parallel to the rest, maybe by a session per week in which the students successively develop their plans for the masteroppgave.

Continuing with **MABARN 435**, a course that builds upon MABARN 431 but emphasizes the students' experiences with practical work related to children and families in socially exposed life situations. The idea is, in relation to institutions and organizations in the field of practice, give opportunities for the students to apply previous course content into practice, and that this application is to be achieved within the frames of a project work.

It appears as if this course needs to allocate most time to the project work including numerous contacts with the field of practice. At the same time the project needs to integrate the intended learning outcomes of the course, and these are quite many. This is challenging, if I have understood the course concept correctly, since there needs to be distinct activities related to the project that makes it possible to evaluate the students' achievements in relation to the learning outcomes. I will not

repeat all the skills that are mentioned in the syllabus but just give a few examples to emphasise the need for enough resources:

- ... nytte kunnskapar og ferdigheitar om eigen og andre profesjonars kompetanse og ansvarsområde til å samhandle både tverrfagleg og tverretattlig for å skape heilskapleg tilbod
- ... gode ferdigheiter i å utøve familie- og miljøterapi
- ... avanserte ferdigheiter med å samarbeide og kommunisere med barn og familiar i utsette livssituasjonar, og fremje konstruktive medverknadsprosesser, på individ- og systemnivå.
- ... utvise høy grad av sjølvstende, samarbeidskompetanse og skjønn i individretta og systemretta arbeid med utsette barn og deira familiar

A question that came to my mind (but it could also be a misunderstanding) is whether there is any connection between planning of the master thesis and the project that is the main content in MABARN 435? It could be a good idea to let the plan for the masteroppgave that is done within MABARN 431 evolve further during the project work. The project might produce insights and ideas that can be very important for the master thesis.

Additionally, there are several more learning outcomes that need to be addressed in a distinct way. I think it requires some work to find a method to help the students to carry out a project with this multi-faceted content containing both knowledge growth and giving the students experiences from practice. Some of the theoretical content can perhaps be lifted out from the project and provided in the form of lectures, but it still needs some thoughts to avoid too much stress and fragmentation for the students during the 15 stp (a half semester).

B. Parts of the MABARN 331 that seem to be particularly important to bring into the new courses MBVA 431 and 432.

The second programme, **Master in barnvernsarbeid**, is expected to have a different profile. The main difference in the first course, MABVA 431, of the third semester is in the concept “innovation” instead of “endringsarbeid” in the MABARN 431. Looking into the learning outcomes, there are many similarities, and possibilities to let the two programmes have the same content in parts. Another difference between the programmes is that the “project” in MABARN 431 is named as “praksisarbeid”, in MBVA432 but in terms of learning outcomes/skills the two courses are identical, so my comments above regarding MABARN 435 are relevant. As with the MABARN courses, also here most of the content in the old 331 is reflected in the learning outcomes of the MBVA-courses. But it seems plausible to put a little less emphasis on the individualized therapeutic interventions (some of the communications skills for example, and to focus more on organization development, evaluation and innovation), so the focus on innovation is obviously important to create a distinct profile different from MABARN and should be reflected in large parts of the course content.

Since the following 15 stp MABVA432 has an emphasis on field practice, the more theoretical content needs to be concentrated to the 15 stp of MABVA431. We can also notice that the text in the syllabus about the aims for “*praksisarbeidet*” in MBVA 432 is identical to the text about “*prosjektarbeidet*” in MABARN 435 in terms of the experiences the student is expected to get. This means (?) that the profiles MABARN vs MBVA must be visible in the choice of setting and subject for the MABARN project and the choice of setting for the practice for the MBVA students.

The **MABVA431** can have a slightly different, and broader profile than MBARN431, but I think that the need to reduce the number of subthemes is as important here. Again, this is only tentative, and there are many alternative ways to do this reduction and concentration of themes. Here, *inventions* could be a key word for the profile.

a. Organizational and contextual conditions: Themes such as organizational development, leadership,

prevention, the role of the local community, knowledge-based practice. This includes relevant theories and research.

b. The professional: communication skills, power issues, professional ethics, professional roles, inter-professional work, supervision, etc., with focus on knowledge-based practice and cooperation. Relevant theories and research.

c. Innovation and evaluation: Focus on evaluation of innovations and of social programmes/tiltak. Relevant theories and research.

In the same way as in MABARN 431) a fourth theme could be: d. project planning. This theme that can run as a parallel to the rest, maybe by a session per week in which the students successively continue to develop their plans for the masteroppgave.

The fourth course, **MABVA 432** is, since it is nearly identical to MABARN 435 in terms of intended learning outcomes, it also needs to allocate time to a well-structured "praksisarbeid" including various contacts with the field of practice. This praksisarbeid needs to integrate the large amount of learning outcomes of the course. As a parallel to MABARN 435 also here it will be relevant with distinct activities related to the practical parts of the course, that makes it possible to evaluate the students' achievements in relation to the learning outcomes. As I wrote in relation to MABARN 435 a specific theme can run as a parallel to the rest, maybe by a session per week in which the students successively develop the plans for the masteroppgave, that they produced in the previous course (MABVA 431). As in the case with the project of MABARN 435, praksisarbeid might produce insights and ideas that can be very important for the master thesis.

Comments and suggestions

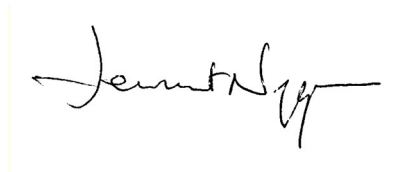
The content of the two programmes is overall advanced and ambitious. In relation to the labour market these master programmes can be expected to produce advanced and highly competent professionals. The big tasks are to become more specific when it comes to implementing the two programmes. An idea to reduce the number of themes follows from the structure of four courses instead of one large: one course per programme with more theoretical and knowledge-based content, and one course per programme that are more skills-oriented (project and practice). This means that most of the core content of the older 331 needs to be concentrated to fit into the different and smaller stp-frames of MABARN 431 and MBVA 431. So, I suggest identifying 4-5 themes out of which some can be identical for the two different programmes. For the MABARN 435 and MBVA 432 there appears to be important to identify control stations that helps the process of learning skills and getting experiences from practice and at the same time developing the "project" and the "praksisarbeid". I assume that this also can contain a further development of the plan for the master thesis that follows in the next semester.

A comment on professional identity: There are parallels in other professional educations that can serve as references. In Sweden we have for example both pedagogics and pedagogical work that have different aims and that both have their unique phd programme definitions. In social work there is a history of more theoretical profiles vs "social" or "administrative" (from the 1964 regulations). Maybe the most relevant comparison is with profiles that were introduced in Sweden around 2000 when the regions' (landstingen by then) educations in social care (social omsorg) and social pedagogy (socialpedagogik) were integrated into the socionom education. Indeed, those who studied the specialisation in social omsorg were not always welcomed to apply for all types of social work positions since their direction towards elderly care and care of the disabled was considered to contain too little of core knowledge required for social workers in the

health care system. Anyway, this is history, and today it appears as social workers with different profiles in their education can apply for any positions that require a social work/socionom degree (except for some areas where a master or equivalent degree is required)

I was also asked to suggest literature which is a bit difficult since I do not have the full overview of the literature that is used in the programmes at UiB. As an attachment to this report, I send a couple of reading lists from Stockholm and Göteborg universities, both universities that deliver master's level courses in the field of child welfare. There is some international literature (and a lot of Swedish) that can be interesting to investigate.

Umeå 12 december 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lennart Nygren', enclosed within a thin yellow rectangular border.

Lennart Nygren, programsensor
Professor emeritus i socialt arbete, Umeå universitet