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# **Young Adults**

Data Collection in 2007



**HØGSKULEN I VOLDA**



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## Preface

This note is part of the reporting from the project *Young Adults*. The project, which is financed by Volda University College and Møre Research Foundation, is led by Rune Kvalsund and Jon Olav Myklebust.

The note provides an overview of longitudinal data that have been collected concerning youth with special needs in upper secondary school. Through three closely linked projects, the same individuals have been followed over a period of 11 years, in most cases from the age of 17 to 28. The three projects are titled as follows:

- *Reform 94–Specially Adapted Education* (Financed by the Dept. of Education and Research [KUF], 1995–2000).
- *Adult Life on Special Terms? The Way into Society for Pupils with Special Needs in Upper Secondary School* (Financed by the Research Council of Norway [NFR], 2000–2004).
- *Young Adults* (Financed by Volda University College and Møre Research Foundation, 2007–).

This research has been documented in a series of reports, book chapters and articles, all of which are listed in an appendix to this paper.

Volda, 25.09.07

Finn Ove Båtevik    Jon Olav Myklebust

<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Three projects: a longitudinal study.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Total data set, basic data set and interview data.....	6
The 2007 survey .....	7
<b>References.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Publications 1996–2007.....</b>	<b>15</b>

## Three projects: a longitudinal study

This note presents a longitudinal study in which we have followed youth with disabilities over a period of 11 years. The study is based on three different projects; the first of which, *Reform 94–Specially Adapted Education*, was part of the evaluation of the reform programme in upper secondary education that was conducted in the mid-1990s.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the main focus of the project was the terms of education in upper secondary school for the group known then as pupils with special educational needs, that is, pupils who are in a situation in which conditions in school and apprenticeship companies can represent obstacles to their education.<sup>2</sup> Even in this early project, huge amounts of longitudinal data were collected based on information from the professionals involved in the education process at the upper secondary level (Kvalsund and Myklebust 1998).<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 2002, this initial project was followed up by a study of the same youth, titled *Adult Life on Special Terms? The Way into Society for Pupils with Special Needs in Upper Secondary School*.<sup>4</sup> In general, the informants were the youth themselves, and the topic of the study was based on the strategies and adaptations that characterised their early adult lives. Key themes were education, work and leisure. A separate report (Båtevik 2002) presents the work involved in collecting the data for this project and also explains the reasons why parents or other close friends were interviewed rather than the individuals themselves in certain cases. In the spring of 2007, the same individuals were followed up yet again in the project titled, *Young Adults*.<sup>5</sup> Even though this latest project had the same focus as the project conducted in 2002, it was more limited than the initial one. By and large, the data collection in 2007 was carried out along the same lines as in the first project five years earlier (Båtevik 2002). This note offers a brief summary of the work involved in collecting the data in 2007 and a combined overview of the quantitative data on which the whole longitudinal study is based.

In this study, we have followed young individuals from the start of their upper secondary education in the mid-1990s to their adult lives in 2007. Even though the material also includes certain individuals who were adults when they started their upper secondary education, the vast majority are now in their late twenties in 2007. Special needs pupils from a total of six counties were involved in the first data collection. In the spring of 1996, schools in three of these counties (Møre og Romsdal, Nord-Trøndelag and Hedmark) provided data about youths who had commenced upper secondary school in individually adapted teaching programmes in 1994 and 1995. From the other three counties (Finnmark, Rogaland and Oslo), we received information concerning those who started in 1995. This information is what we refer to as the base material for the study, and it represents a total of 760 pupils, among whom we find those

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<sup>1</sup> Financed by the Ministry for Education, Research and Church Affairs..

<sup>2</sup> The term “pupils (students) with special educational needs” is recommended instead of “special needs pupils (students)”.

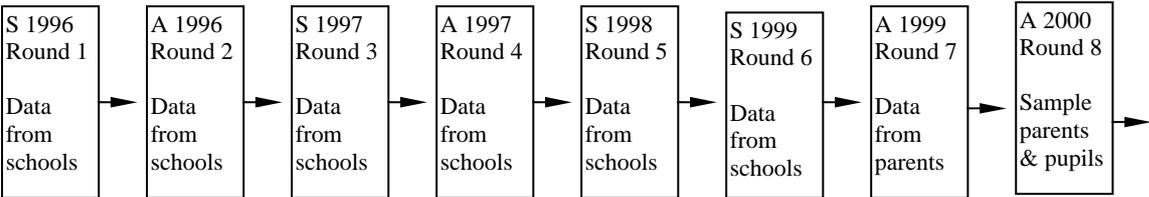
<sup>3</sup> Many interviews were conducted with pupils in upper secondary school during the project *Reform 94–Specially Adapted Education*. These youths were not the same ones who participated in the longitudinal part of the study because of the terms of the licence issued by the Data Inspectorate in Norway.

<sup>4</sup> Financed by the Welfare Programme of the Research Council of Norway.

<sup>5</sup> Financed by Volda University College and Møre Research Foundation Volda.

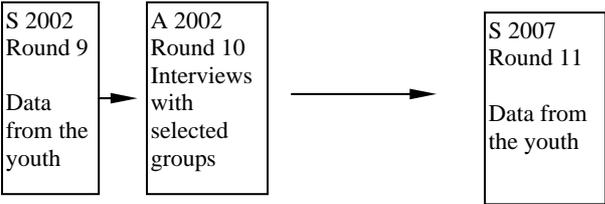
who have been followed up continuously until the year 2007. During the early years, the schools supplied data once or twice a year (cf. Kvalsund and Myklebust 1998). Later, in the spring of 2002 and in the spring of 2007, the youths themselves were interviewed by telephone. All in all, data have been collected in 11 stages, of which those collected at the upper secondary school level were the most comprehensive. During their upper secondary education, new information about the youths was gathered more or less every six months. The majority of the data collected in this longitudinal study is quantitative. Figure 1 illustrates the various steps in this process.

**Reform 94 – Specially Adapted Education**



**Adult Life on Special Terms**

**Young Adults**



S = spring      A = autumn

Figure 1. Schematic overview of collection of longitudinal data in the three projects.

**Total data set, basic data set and interview data**

At the commencement of their upper school education in 1994 and 1995, 2.025 students with special educational needs were registered for school in the six counties involved in the project. These pupils were first registered for this study in the spring of 1996; by which time, 172 pupils had dropped out of school. Certain key variables were recorded for the 1.853 pupils with special educational needs from the two cohorts who were still engaged in education on a full-time basis. The information gleaned from these two cohorts comprises what we later in this note refer to as the **total data set**. Of these 1.853 students with special educational needs, a total of 760 youths participated in the project, and about whom we collected the most comprehensive information in the spring of 1996. This information comprises the **basic data set** for the longitudinal study. An overview of the total data set and the basic data set is presented in Table 1. While conducting this study, we were able to follow the progress of the 760 youths through the education system until they fully or partially completed their upper secondary education.

*Table 1. Overview of the total data set (pupils with special educational needs from six Norwegian counties who commenced their upper secondary education in 1994 and 1995) and the basic data set (pupils with special needs from the same cohorts who were involved in the longitudinal study).*

		Number of pupils
Total data set	Commencement of upper secondary in 1994 and in 1995	2.025
	In school on a full-time basis, spring 1996	1.853
Basic data set	Basis for the longitudinal study of secondary education	760

As long as the pupils were engaged in upper secondary education on a full-time basis, the schools were in possession of the lists of names of the pupils and apprentices, and were responsible for keeping track of the information they had about pupils (e.g., reporting transfers between schools) and for establishing routines for following up this information. To facilitate the implementation of the follow-up project, *Adult Life on Special Terms*, the name lists from the schools were handed over to those responsible for the research project. During this process, it proved impossible for the schools to identify 118 of the youths who had participated in the project from the outset, among other things, because some of the schools had not kept their lists on file. This situation is discussed in greater detail in a study conducted by Båtevik (2002: 9–10). As a result, we were left with the names of 642 individuals whom we could contact for the surveys carried out in 2002 and 2007. These numbers were further reduced because of the death of two of these youths by 2002; an additional seven individuals were registered as deceased by 2007. In 2002, a total of 494 youths were interviewed, which represents a response rate of 77.2% if we take into account those who had died by this time.<sup>6</sup> In 2007, a total of 373 young adults were interviewed, representing a response rate of 58.9%. A summary of the interview data for the 2002 and 2007 surveys is presented in Table 2.

*Table 2. Overview of interview data from the surveys in 2002 and 2007.*

	Number of youth
Those from basic data who could be identified in 2002	642
Deceased prior to interviews in 2002	2
Interviews completed in 2002	494
Response rate, %, of the 2002 survey (494 of 640)	77.2
Deceased between 2002 and 2007	7
Interviews completed in 2007	373
Response rate, %, of the 2007 survey (373 of 633)	58.9

Of the 373 individuals who responded to the 2007 survey, 298 also participated in the 2002 survey, which means that 75 new individuals from the basic data set were included in this most recent round of interviews.

### **The 2007 survey**

The 2007 survey was conducted as a combined postal and telephone survey, whereas the whole data collection process for the 2002 survey was based solely on telephone interviews. Both surveys were based on a structured questionnaire; the vast majority of cases involved stipulated response alternatives. The questionnaire from 2007 was shorter and simpler than

<sup>6</sup> The report from 2002 (Båtevik 2002) stated that 497 interviews were conducted. This number is correct, but later control of the data file revealed that the wrong person had been interviewed in three cases; these data were then discarded.

the form used in 2002, thus making it more suited to a postal survey. Moreover, an effort was made to draw up a questionnaire that provided the best possible basis for comparison of data over a period of time, which is essential in a longitudinal study.

The first step in the process of gathering data consisted of updating the earlier address lists with the help of the extensive Directory Enquiries database belonging to Telenor, Norway's largest telecommunications operator. In February 2007, all those individuals with sufficient postal information were sent a questionnaire and detailed information on the project itself. When questionnaires were returned because of "address unknown" or because of inadequate postal address details, a search was performed in the National Registry to find updated information. A first reminder was sent in March. All those who did not reply by post were contacted by telephone during the period between 27 March and 4 July. An additional reminder was sent by post in June 2007.

A number of measures were taken to obtain responses from as many participants as possible. In general, they followed the same pattern as in the earlier interview survey in 2002 (Båtevik 2002: 15–19) and can be summarised briefly as follows:

- A simple questionnaire with concrete questions that are easy to understand and quick to answer was used.
- A telephone interview was conducted to contact those who, for a variety of reasons, did not wish to fill out the questionnaire themselves.
- Close relatives or friends were allowed to provide assistance to those individuals who were not able to answer on their own. The vast majority, however, answered the questions without the help of such persons.
- A course of instruction was provided to those carrying out the telephone interviews.
- The collection of data was conducted over a fairly long period of time (February–July) to ensure that as many individuals as possible were contacted.
- Using various sources (e.g., the Telenor database, the National Registry, the Internet, etc.), an active effort was made to locate the correct person and to find the correct address. In addition to making a collective search (e.g., in the National Registry), each interviewer carried out individual searches during the process and phoned at various times of the day and week to offer the best possible chance of finding people at home. The interviewers kept a detailed logbook of their own phone calls.
- Those who responded were offered an extra incentive in the form of a prize draw, with gifts awarded to 25 of those who participated.

*Table 3. Status after completion of the 2007 interview survey.*

	No. young adults
Completed interviews	373
Refusals	113
Not identified or wrong person	22
No contact established	125
Potential candidates for interview 2007	633
Deceased	7
Basis for interview survey	640

As revealed in Table 3, there are several reasons why fewer interviews were carried out in 2007 than in 2002. One reason is that more people refused to participate in the most recent round of interviews than in 2002. A total of 17.9% of those who were potential candidates for interviews in the spring of 2007 did not wish to be interviewed. However, the largest drop in response rate occurred among those with whom we, for a variety of reasons, did not manage to establish contact. If we combine the numbers of those that we have not managed to identify, those for whom the earlier information we had has not led us to the right person and those with whom we, for various reasons, have not managed to establish contact, they together represent 23.2% of all those who were potential candidates for interview.

There are many reasons why it has not been possible to make contact with some of the individuals whose names were on the original list that formed the basis for the interview survey. Because these individuals are young and are in the midst of trying to establish a foothold in life as adults, their situation sometimes makes it difficult to contact them. For instance, some change their names, and many move once or even several times. In some cases, it may be helpful that many of these people have mobile phones, assuming that they, for example, still have the same phone number after they have moved. However, it is not unusual for individuals to change their phone number, thus making it difficult to contact potential interview candidates. We also cannot ignore the possibility that lack of contact is a form of hidden refusal. When conducting the 2002 survey, we noticed that some individuals whom we had contacted by phone to set up a subsequent interview time neglected to answer their phone at the mutually agreed upon time. With the adoption of telephone services such as calling number identification, individuals are now aware of who is calling and can choose whether or not they wish to answer the phone. By not answering the phone, individuals are refusing to participate and can do so without having to communicate their response directly.

### ***Representativity***

With each new round of data collection, the number of respondents has decreased. A declining response rate poses a problem because it can mean that the net sample, which comprises those who do reply, becomes systematically dissimilar to the gross sample, which comprises those individuals whom we interviewed at the beginning of the project. However, in longitudinal studies, we have the advantage of being able to compare data at different times along a series of variables, which allows us to identify biases in the data. The tables below provide such an insight. It is the total data set (1.853 pupils) that is the basis for the comparisons in the first five tables.<sup>7</sup>

*Table 4. Gender distribution. Percentages.*

	Total data set in education spring 1996	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Girls, %	37.6	38.7	38.5	37.5
Boys, %	62.4	61.3	61.5	62.5
Total, %	100	100	100	100
N	1.844	760	494	373

<sup>7</sup> However, because we lack information about certain variables, this number varies somewhat in the tables below.

As shown in Table 4, a slight bias exists in the gender distribution. The girls are slightly overrepresented in the basic data set in 1996 and in the interview sample from 2002, but the gender distribution is almost identical in the sample from 2007 and in the total data set.

Table 5 shows the percentage of pupils in each type of class in the spring of 1996. Here, we distinguish between those who attended mainstream classes (full- or part-time) and those who had no such link but were placed in different types of special classes.

*Table 5. Type of class, spring 1996. Percentages.*

	Total data set in school spring 1996	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Mainstream class, %	60.6	51.3	51.8	52.8
Non-mainstream class, %	39.4	48.7	48.2	47.2
Total, %	100	100	100	100
N	1.844	760	494	373

As shown in Table 5, the pupils from mainstream classes are underrepresented in both the basic data set from 1996 and the interview samples from 2002 and 2007. The reason for this bias would appear to be that during the data collection process in 1996, the form teachers in the special classes were more conscientious in providing data than their counterparts in the mainstream classes.

*Table 6. Branch of studies, spring 1996. Percentages.*

	Total data set in education spring 1996	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Academic specialisation, %	13.7	12.1	9.7	8.8
Vocational programmes, %	78.9	76.1	78.1	78.3
Unspecified, %	7.4	11.8	12.1	12.9
Total, %	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0
N	1.828	760	494	373

Table 6 provides information about what branch of studies the pupils attended in the spring of 1996. The vast majority (almost 4 of 5) at that time attended vocational education programmes. In comparison, less than one-seventh attended academic specialisation programmes. The rest attended unspecified study branches. Most of them have relatively severe functional difficulties.

As indicated in Table 6, pupils from academic specialisation programmes are underrepresented in both the basic data set and the interview samples to an increasing degree, whereas pupils with unspecified programmes are correspondingly overrepresented. The bias is small in the case of pupils with special needs who attended vocational education programmes in the spring of 1996.

As mentioned previously, the pupils participating in this longitudinal study represent six Norwegian counties. Table 7 illustrates the changes that occur over a period of time in the makeup of the sample with regard to the geographical background of the respondents; a fact

that can be accounted for by the tendency for the number of answers to vary from one interview round to the next.

*Table 7. Home county, spring 1996. Percentages.*

	Total data set in education spring 1996	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Rogaland, %	25.6	33.0	36.8	30.3
Hedmark, %	19.4	9.6	9.3	10.2
Oslo, %	8.2	12.2	9.3	11.3
Møre og Romsdal, %	21.1	22.0	23.7	26.8
Nord-Trøndelag, %	16.9	15.5	13.4	14.5
Finnmark, %	8.8	7.6	7.5	7.0
Total, %	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9
N	1.853	760	494	373

The general pattern is as follows: In comparison to the total data set, Rogaland in particular is strongly overrepresented, and Hedmark strongly underrepresented, in the basic data set 1996. A similar pattern is also revealed when we compare the sample from 2002 with the total data set. When we compare the interview sample 2007 with the total data set, we find that Rogaland is underrepresented to a lesser degree, Møre og Romsdal is now clearly overrepresented and Hedmark remains underrepresented. In the case of the other three counties, the bias is not particularly large, neither for the basic data set 1996 nor for the interview samples in 2002 and 2007.

A distinct feature of the four tables above is that the greatest bias occurs during the collection of data in 1996. It appears that the efforts of the form teachers influenced, to varying degrees, the composition of what we here refer to as the basic data set 1996. Differences between the basic data set and the two interview samples in 2002 and 2007 exist because of a slightly different response rate among the various categories of pupils with special educational needs; however, these differences have not created a particularly large bias. The subsequent tables consist only of basic data from 1996 and the interview samples from 2002 and 2007. The total data set did not include the types of data that are shown here.

*Table 8. Language background. Percentages.*

	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Foreign language speakers, %	5.4	3.4	3.2
Norwegian speakers, %	94.6	96.6	96.8
Total, %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	760	494	373

As shown in Table 8, the percentage of pupils with special educational with a foreign language background in the basic data set was low. This percentage has decreased still further in the two samples after the interview rounds in 2002 and 2007.

During the collection of data in 1996, the pupils' possible functional difficulties were registered. As revealed in Table 9, the basic data set from 1996 and the two samples from 2002 and 2007 in general are very similar in terms of functional difficulties and functional levels.

*Table 9. Functional status, spring 1996. Percentages.*

	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Normal eyesight, %	97.0	96.6	96.0
Normal hearing, %	96.4	95.5	96.2
Normal freedom of movement, %	94.5	94.5	93.3
No motor difficulties, %	86.3	85.2	84.5
No language or communication problems, %	77.9	78.5	79.9
Normal speech & articulation, %	86.6	86.8	87.7
Normal reading & writing skills, %	41.6	40.1	39.9
Normal numeracy skills, %	53.2	54.3	54.4
Normal intellectual ability, %	52.0	55.1	53.4
No psycho-social problems, %	66.4	69.0	66.8
Normal concentration ability, %	62.2	62.3	62.2
No medical problems, %	82.5	80.8	83.1
No psycho-social stress, %	80.4	81.4	79.4
Average functional level*	4.5	4.5	4.5
N	760	494	373

\*Arithmetic average of 13 indicators

In the spring of 1996, we were given a good overview of what type of specially adapted teaching the pupils were offered in school. Table 10 shows the percentage of pupils who received all their individually adapted teaching within the framework of the mainstream class and the percentage of those who were offered at least one remedial measure.

*Table 10. Individual adaptation, spring 1996. Percentages.*

	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Percentage exclusively in mainstream class, spring 1996	43.3	43.3	44.5
Percentage with at least one intensive remedial measure, spring 1996	57.6	57.3	60.3
N	760	494	373

Fairly tiny differences exist among the basic data set and the two interview samples in terms of the percentage of pupils who are offered all their remedial measures in the mainstream class. However, the interview sample from 2007 has a somewhat higher percentage of pupils with more than one remedial measure than do the basic data set and the interview sample from 2002.

Finally, we compare the progression levels of pupils (i.e., whether they are in step with the vast majority of pupils on ordinary terms) in the basic data set and the two interview samples. As shown in Table 11, slightly higher percentages of pupils with normal progression exist in the two interview samples than in the basic data set.

*Table 11. Progression. Intake cohorts, 1994 and 1995. Percentages.*

	Basic data set 1996	Interview sample 2002	Interview sample 2007
Percentage on schedule, autumn 1996	34.3	38.1	38.9
Percentage on schedule, spring 1997	31.2	35.6	35.1
Percentage qualified for admission to higher education or vocation, spring 1999	13.9	16.4	15.3
N	760	494	373

Table 11 also reveals that slightly higher percentages of pupils in the two interview samples (especially in the interview sample from 2002) had succeeded in gaining vocational qualifications or had qualified for admission to colleges and universities by the spring of 1999 than in the basic data set.

Overall, based on those variables that we were able to investigate in this study, there appear to be only small biases in the interview samples from 2002 and 2007 compared with the basic data set.

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