The Role of UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Northern Development.

At a Glance

- UiT The Arctic University of Norway was established to increase the educational attainment and availability of skilled workers in Northern Norway.

- Despite challenges with student recruitment, the cost of program delivery, and building links to local industry and communities, UiT has been highly successful in reaching its goals.

- Canada could address similar Northern skills and labour market challenges by establishing a Northern university with local community and employment links.
Executive Summary

Traditionally, economic development in Northern Norway has lagged behind the southern regions of the country. However, Norway has an equalization policy that aims to create comparable levels of services, infrastructure, and amenities across all regions. The creation of a post-secondary education (PSE) system in the North has been an important part of that equalization policy. UiT The Arctic University of Norway was founded in 1968 with the aim of being an engine for economic, cultural, and social development in the North.

Increasing access to PSE in the North was a major driver behind the founding of UiT. The university was established to increase the number of skilled workers for the region, particularly doctors, nurses, teachers, and other public sector workers. Courses and programs at UiT are shaped by the needs of Northern communities, and a number of programs are offered via decentralized or distance learning arrangements to ensure access for students in remote communities. The university has also sought to create research links with local industry in the North to support regional economic development.

UiT has had to address a number of challenges since it was founded. While enrolment at the university has steadily increased, many young people in Northern Norway continue to prefer to attend university in the South. In addition, UiT faces competition for students from other Northern PSE institutions. The high cost of delivering programs at smaller satellite campuses and via distance education is also a challenge. While UiT has a mandate to ensure collaboration between the university and local industry and communities, it has at times struggled to build such links. However, recent years have seen increasing engagement between researchers and local communities and businesses.
Since it was established, UiT has built a strong national and international profile. The university is symbolic of the economic, environmental, social, and cultural importance of the North, and has played a significant role in enhancing regional pride among Northern Norwegians. UiT, along with other PSE institutions in Northern Norway, has successfully raised education levels in the region and has helped to stem the brain drain from Northern Norway to the South. The increased number of PSE graduates in Northern Norway has resulted in more qualified people available in the North for employment in industry and public sector positions. It has also ensured that Northerners have access to local, high-quality public services.

In contrast to Norway, Canada is the only Arctic nation in the world without a university in its North. Canada could address its similar Northern skills and labour market challenges by establishing a Northern university with local community and employment links that would improve access to higher education for indigenous people and other Northern residents.

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**Introduction**

The post-secondary education (PSE) system has played an important role in fuelling development in Northern Norway. The region is sparsely populated and has a large indigenous Sámi population. Traditionally, Northern Norway has been dominated by resource-based industries and its level of economic development has lagged behind the rest of the country. After the Second World War, post-secondary institutions were established in Northern Norway to help facilitate regional development.
This briefing focuses on UiT The Arctic University of Norway, the northernmost university in the world, which was established in 1968 to fuel the economic, social, and cultural development of Northern Norway.¹

### Overview

Northern Norway covers an area of 113,000 square kilometres, which is approximately 35 per cent of mainland Norway. The region is sparsely populated with 470,000 inhabitants, or about 9.5 per cent of the total population of Norway. The North consists of three counties (Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark) and 88 municipalities. Most municipalities in the region are small—of the 88 municipalities, 56 have fewer than 3,000 people, while 11 have fewer than 1,000. The largest city in the North is Tromsø, with a population of 69,000.²

The North is home to the indigenous Sámi, who make up the majority of the population in the innermost parts of Finnmark county.³ Historically, the Sámi faced discrimination in Norway, particularly regarding their religion and language. Until the Second World War, the official policy in Norway was to assimilate the Sámi.⁴ However, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, the Sámi gained a series of rights to safeguard their way of life, including the right to educate their children in the Sámi language. In 1987, the Sámi Parliament was established with authority over some areas of governance, and in 1988 the Norwegian constitution was amended to recognize the responsibility of the state to safeguard the language and culture of the Sámi people.⁵

¹ UiT was originally founded as the University of Tromsø. In 2013, the university merged with the University College of Finnmark and officially changed its name to UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

² Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 29.

³ There is no overall registration of the Sámi population in Norway. In 2013, there were 55,700 people living in Sámi settlements in Norway north of the Saltfjellet mountain range, which lies on the Arctic Circle.

⁴ Jakobsen, “Education, Recognition and the Sámi People of Norway.”

The economy in the North has traditionally been dominated by fishing and small-scale agriculture, as well as natural resources extraction in the form of mining and oil and gas production. While aquaculture and oil and gas remain important industries in Northern Norway, four out of five people in the region now work in the service industry.6

Northern Norway is home to two universities, UiT and the University of Nordland (UiN). Universities in Norway offer a wide range of programs, and must offer a minimum of five master’s programs and four PhD programs. UiT was established in 1968 and opened in 1972. Today, the university has seven faculties and a medical school. In 2014, the university had 11,812 students, including 554 exchange students, and awarded 101 PhD degrees. The university had 2,908 staff, including 1,640 academic staff.7 UiN was founded in 2011 (previously it was a university college) and has 6,100 students and 640 staff spread across three campuses.8 Northern Norway also has five university colleges, including Sámi University College. (See “Indigenous Education in Northern Norway.”) University colleges in Northern Norway are smaller institutions that offer primarily bachelor-level education in fields such as nursing, teaching, and business and management.

Indigenous Education in Northern Norway: Sámi University College

Sámi University College (SUC) was founded in 1989, and is located in Guovdageaidnu, in Finnmark County, Norway. SUC’s founding was spurred by a long campaign by the Sámi to access education in their native language. With laws passed in the 1960s and 1970s that gave the Sámi the right to educate their children in their own language, there arose a shortage of teachers qualified to teach in Sámi schools. SUC was founded to provide specialized

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6 Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 29.
7 University of Tromsø, UIT Figures and Facts.
8 University of Nordland, About UiN.
teacher training and assist in the preservation of the Sámi culture. SUC has approximately 150–200 students and almost 100 staff. The institution offers about half of its 40 courses annually.

SUC has national responsibility for Sámi higher education, including Sámi teacher education. Programming at SUC is developed in response to Sámi needs, and most classes are taught in the Sámi language. For example, the university college offers an award-winning degree program in reindeer herding, a traditional Sámi activity. SUC also offers master's degree programs in Sámi language studies, indigenous art, and indigenous journalism. While the university college does not offer PhD studies, about 20 PhD projects are linked to SUC. PhD students spend the majority of their time at SUC while enrolled in a PhD program at another university.

To meet the needs of learners in remote communities, some programs are offered via distance education, including teacher training. As many indigenous people in Norway do not meet the academic requirements needed to enter a university program, SUC offers pre-university or bridging courses for indigenous peoples. The university college has also developed language courses for indigenous Sámi who do not speak the Sámi language—these courses often incorporate traditional Sámi skills such as handicrafts.

Another important role of SUC has been ensuring that research relevant to the Sámi people is conducted by Sámi scholars. Scholars at SUC conduct research on topics such as traditional handicrafts, the Sámi language, reindeer husbandry, and cultural anthropology.

9 Abele and Graham, “The Literature on Building Post-Secondary Success,” 5; interview findings.
10 Sámi University College, Sámi University College.
11 Ibid.
12 Interview findings; Sámi University College, Sámi University College.
13 Sámi University College, PhD Projects at Sámi University College.
14 Interview findings; Sámi University College, Sámi University College.
15 Interview findings; Sámi University College, Sámi University College.
The establishment of SUC has helped to increase the self-reliance of the Sámi population and strengthened Northern identity. It has contributed to the continued use of the Sámi language and a better understanding of Northern practices and culture. The institution has encouraged young Sámi people to stay and study in the North rather than relocate to the South to pursue their studies.16

Objectives and Processes: The Establishment and Development of UiT

Traditionally, the development of Northern Norway has lagged that of the South. However, Norway has an equalization policy that aims to create comparable levels of services, infrastructure, and amenities across all regions.17 Following the Second World War, the Norwegian government funnelled considerable resources into developing Northern Norway, which at the time was less developed than the rest of the country. The founding of UiT was an important component of this regional development effort. UiT was to be an engine for economic, cultural, and social development in Northern Norway. It was founded as the fourth university in Norway, with the ambitious goal of being a first-rate national university, rather than a second-rate regional university. At the same time, programs at UiT were intended to be regionally relevant, interdisciplinary, and problem-oriented.18

A major impetus for establishing UiT was to increase access to advanced higher education in the North. The institution was intended to provide skilled workers for the welfare state in the region, such as doctors and teachers, as well as meet the needs of local industry.19 Indeed, a strong argument for establishing UiT and its medical school was the lack of doctors and other medical personnel in the North.20

16 Interview findings.
18 Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 29.
19 Ibid.
20 Musial, “University and Regional Development,” 357.
Another aim was to stem the migration of people from the northern part of the country to the southern, as many young people who went south to study did not return.\(^2^1\)

However, when UiT was first opened, regional stakeholders viewed the university as an ivory tower that was “relatively oblivious to the challenges and problems facing the region.”\(^2^2\) This started to change in the late 1990s when the university enacted a strategy to ensure relevance to the region, including the establishment of centres for Sámi and Arctic issues and a central office dedicated to continuing education and regional outreach.\(^2^3\) Today, UiT engages in basic and applied research relevant to the needs and challenges of Northern Norway. Areas of research specialization include climate change, fisheries, astrophysics, biomedicine and biotechnology, health and telemedicine, and indigenous studies.\(^2^4\)

In recent years, UiT merged with the local university college at Tromsø (2009), University College of Finnemark (2013), Narvik University College (2016), and Harstad University College (2016). These mergers have given rise to six UiT campuses across Northern Norway, strengthening its research across the region and expanding its number of programs.\(^2^5\)

**Innovations**

Many of UiT’s courses and programs are shaped by the cultural, social, and economic needs of the North. For example, the university offers a bachelor’s degree in pilot education, the first of its type to be awarded by a public PSE institution in Norway. The program trains pilots to handle the challenging navigational conditions of the Arctic—a direct response to local needs. Another example is a master's program focused on

\(^{21}\) Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 29.

\(^{22}\) Pinheiro, “Regional Policy and Higher Education,” 59.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Interview findings; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *OECD Territorial Reviews*, 68.

\(^{25}\) Pinheiro, “Regional Policy and Higher Education,” 59.
security issues and crisis management in the North, which was created in response to the importance of the oil industry in the region. Many of the courses offered at UiT focus on areas of specific interest to the North—for example, institutional dimensions of global change in the Arctic, Sámi history/culture, marine bioprospecting, Arctic biology, land use and agriculture in Arctic areas, health issues from an indigenous perspective (Sámi focus), and telemedicine and e-health.26

The university offers a number of flexible and decentralized courses for learners in remote communities. In these types of learning arrangements, students may meet periodically, but the bulk of their coursework is taken online. Decentralized courses are partly a response to local labour market needs, as it is often difficult to recruit workers to move to remote areas of Northern Norway. As such, it is easier to educate local populations to meet local labour needs.

Often, decentralized courses are delivered by municipal study centres that deliver programming locally as needed (e.g., nursing, teaching, engineering, business administration, language skills).27 For example, UiT offers decentralized nursing education (DNE) as part of its bachelor program in nursing. The DNE program is a four-year part-time program. The curriculum is delivered by university lecturers through local study centres, online activities, and the occasional condensed, week-long course delivered at one of the university campuses. Clinical placements are generally offered in a student’s local area. Students admitted into the DNE program must document their connection to one of the participating rural municipalities, as well as meet general university entrance requirements. Since it began in 1990, the DNE program has played an important role in sustaining medical services in rural regions of the North. A survey of DNE graduates from 1990 to 2011 found that the majority continued to work in rural areas.28

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26 Pinheiro, “Knowledge and the ‘Europe of the Regions.’”
27 Interview findings.
28 Norbye and Skaalvik, “Decentralized Nursing Education in Northern Norway.”
UiT has sought to create research links with local industry in the North. This is partly due to a shift in the 1980s that saw PSE policy in Norway move away from an emphasis on strengthening education and public services to a greater emphasis on innovation, business creation, and technology transfer.\(^\text{29}\) In the 1980s, this led to the creation of FORUT, an applied contract research institute, and the Tromsø Science Park, which was rebranded as Norinnova in 2003.\(^\text{30}\) In 1992, UiT founded the Norut Group with the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs, which promotes R&D with other firms and educational research institutions.\(^\text{31}\) UiT also has technology transfer offices and investment funds for business start-ups.\(^\text{32}\)

**Challenges and Solutions**

**Student Recruitment**

UiT struggled to attract students during its early years, but enrolment at the university has steadily grown since. Growth in student numbers has been fuelled by a combination of demographic and cultural changes in the region, as well as the economic crisis in Norway in the late 1980s. When unemployment rose in Norway in the late 1980s and early 1990s, UiT maintained its open-door policy of admitting all students who fulfilled entrance criteria, unlike many other PSE institutions in the country.\(^\text{33}\) As noted above, the university has also reached out to students in remote communities through distance education offerings. Many students from

\(^{29}\) Interview findings; Musial, “University and Regional Development,” 358.

\(^{30}\) Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 30; Musial, “University and Regional Development,” 358–59; interview findings.


\(^{32}\) Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 30; Musial, “University and Regional Development,” 358–59; interview findings.

\(^{33}\) Musial, “University and Regional Development,” 361.
Northern Norway choose to attend UiT to avoid relocating to the South for their studies.\textsuperscript{34} Today, approximately two-thirds of students at UiT come from the North.\textsuperscript{35}

However, while enrolment at UiT has increased, Northern Norway continues to see steady migration from rural areas to urban areas, as well as to the South—a process that began following the Second World War. Many young people in Norway continue to prefer to attend PSE in Oslo or other major cities. More young people from the North leave the region to study elsewhere than Northern PSE institutions are able to attract from outside the region. Furthermore, many students at UiT seek to transfer to an institution in the South partway through their studies.\textsuperscript{36}

In the future, continuing population decline in the North will likely make it more challenging for PSE institutions to fill available spaces, train workers for local labour markets, and build stronger regional institutions as part of national regional development policies.\textsuperscript{37}

UiT also faces increased competition for students from other PSE institutions in the North. In particular, in 2011 Bodø University College, located in Bodø, the second-largest urban area of Northern Norway, became the University of Nordland (UiN), creating greater competition for students. Youth from Bodø and its surrounding local regions tended to prefer to enrol in UiN rather than attend UiT.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Clark and others, \textit{OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education}, 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Interview findings.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} It is relatively easy for students to transfer between PSE institutions in Norway due to few barriers to the recognition of credits and programs between institutions.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 34; Clark and others, \textit{OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education}, 11.
\end{itemize}
As a result of these recruitment challenges, UiT is increasingly recruiting students from other parts of Norway and internationally. Some suggest that this broadening of recruitment has led to a shift in institutional focus from regional and domestic to become more international in scope.

**Cost of Program Delivery**

Cost of program delivery is an ongoing challenge for UiT. While programs are offered on a cost-recovery basis, the large number of remote classes and programs offered are costly to deliver due to factors such as smaller class sizes and higher operational and program delivery expenses. This is particularly problematic as the Norwegian government funds PSE according to a per-person funding formula that does not vary by region. The mergers between UiT and university colleges were prompted by spending constraints, as institutions sought to achieve economies of scale. However, the mergers have also created new challenges for UiT due to the need to run more campuses that are spread out over a region where transportation is expensive.

**Building Links to Local Industry and Community**

Since 1995, universities in Norway have had a legislated responsibility to respond to the needs of society and the economy through activities such as knowledge dissemination. Universities and faculty feel obligated to ensure their research and teaching benefit the local community. Also, there is more cooperation between local governments and universities than is typically seen in Canada.

38 While UiT is increasingly focused on recruiting students from outside the North and internationally, some programs with strategic regional importance, such as dentistry and medicine, continue to prioritize applicants from the North through a quota system. Pinheiro, “Knowledge and the ‘Europe of the Regions.’”

39 Pinheiro, “Knowledge and the ‘Europe of the Regions.’”

40 Interview findings.

41 Interview findings; Lindqvist, Olsen, and Baltzopoulos, *Strategies for Interaction*, 23.

42 Interview findings.
However, while links between UiT and local industry have improved in recent years, they have been slow to develop. The slow development of industry–university links are due to a number of factors, including the anti-capitalist orientation of the university when it was first founded; the nature of local industry, which is often small and focused on the primary sector (many businesses are family-owned and employ less than 10 people); and a lack of major industrial, knowledge-based clusters in the region. Furthermore, some argue that links have been further hindered because the university has emphasized programs to meet the needs of public sector employers (e.g., medical school, nursing, dentistry, teaching, and public policy), while enrolment in business programs has remained low. While Norut and the Tromsø Science Park have helped to fuel research and innovation within the North, their existence at arms’ length from the university has meant that the university itself is largely insulated from these types of collaborations.

Another challenge is that rules and regulations at UiT do not explicitly encourage strong engagement with regional actors outside the university. UiT has no dedicated organization for regional collaboration, and there are no special incentives for researchers to take part in regional collaborations. For example, academic hiring and promotion structures focus on traditional measures, such as research productivity, without incentives to interact with the local community. Despite these challenges, recent years have seen increasing research engagement with local communities on issues of interest to the North. Industry is also sponsoring more research in the North.

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43 Pinheiro, “Knowledge and the ‘Europe of the Regions.’”
44 Personal e-mail communication.
45 Arbo, “University of Tromsø,” 29.
46 Ibid.
47 Pinheiro, “Knowledge and the ‘Europe of the Regions.’”
Benefits and Impacts

While UiT’s establishment was controversial, the university has shown it is able to recruit qualified staff and students both from Norway and internationally, and build a national profile. UiT has enhanced regional pride among Northern Norwegians. Students feel considerable pride in having studied at the university, even if they choose to finish their studies in the South.48 The university is a symbol of the government’s responsibility to ensure equitable services and development in the region, as well as recognition of the importance of the North.49 Indeed, UiT has raised the profile of the North and Northern issues among all Norwegians. The university has helped to enhance the social composition and culture of the city of Tromsø and the North as a whole, and provided links to networks and knowledge centres outside the region.50

UiT, along with other PSE institutions in Northern Norway, has successfully raised education levels in the region, although in some instances they continue to lag behind the South.51 In 2013, 30.4 per cent of Norwegians had tertiary education. In the Northern counties, tertiary education attainment ranged from a low of 23.5 per cent in Nordland, to 24.8 per cent in Finnmark, to a high of 29.0 per cent in Troms.52 Notably, tertiary education attainment in 2014 in the municipality of Tromsø was 38.9 per cent.53

UiT has helped to stem the brain drain from Northern Norway to the South. Of students attending UiT who are originally from the North, about two-thirds remain there after graduation. Of students attending UiT who are originally from other regions of Norway, about one-quarter stay in the

48 Personal e-mail communication.
49 Interview findings.
51 Interview findings.
52 Statistics Norway, Universities and Colleges.
53 Statistics Norway, Population’s Level of Education.
North after graduation. The number of graduates who stay in the region has meant there are more qualified people available in the North to work in industry and public sector positions. It has also contributed to a much higher quality of public services in the North.

Applicability to Canada

Canada is the only Arctic nation in the world without a physical university in its North. However, there is increasing interest in establishing a Northern university. For example, the Government of Nunavut has expressed interest in creating a university. The classes and research at a new Northern university would be oriented to meet regional needs, with a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of the Inuit population.

The PSE system in Northern Norway, particularly UiT, illustrates the significant role a university can play in regional development in the North. Like the Canadian North, Northern Norway was a sparsely populated region where educational attainment lagged behind the South; attracting educated professionals, such as teachers, doctors, and nurses, was a challenge. The establishment of UiT has helped to stem population migration to the South and addressed local labour market needs. This has greatly improved the quality of life in Northern Norway. Canada’s North faces similar labour market challenges that could be addressed by improving access to higher education. Establishing a university in the North is one avenue to reach this goal.

However, the experience of UiT points to several challenges that a university established in Canada’s North would likely face. Such an institution would be relatively expensive to run, particularly if it offered a wide range of distance education classes or encompassed multiple campuses. Initially, attracting students and staff from outside the local

54 Interview findings.
55 Interview findings; Arbo and Eskelinen, “The Role of Small, Comprehensive Universities,” 36–37.
area would likely be challenging. Once established though, the need to rely on non-Northern faculty and staff would diminish as more local individuals completed a university education and became available to take on these roles. Employing local faculty with stronger ties to the community would reduce recruitment and turnover costs for the institution.

The success of PSE institutions in Northern Norway has been part of a broader regional development strategy to provide equivalent levels of services and infrastructure throughout all regions of the country. This has ensured considerable investment in infrastructure and social services in the North, thereby increasing the attractiveness of living in the region. Despite being located over 300 km north of the Arctic circle, the city of Tromsø has a relatively temperate climate, with average lows in January and February of −6.5°C. In comparison, Canada has no such regional development policy when it comes to the North and a much harsher Northern climate.

Actions for Canada, then, as part of an investment in a long-term strategy for improving access to PSE in the North, could be to:

- establish a Northern university to improve access to PSE for local populations;
- limit the number of physical campuses of a Northern university to one or two to offset operational costs;
- offer flexible and decentralized courses, with some reliance on distance education, in conjunction with a broad regional development plan that includes increased broadband access;
- partner with a university in the South to promote the brand and quality of the Northern university;
- ensure a Northern university prioritizes research and employment links with local industry to support regional economic development.
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APPENDIX A

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