ABSTRACT. This paper analyses the outcome of a reform of the academic career structure in Norway. From 1993 on, associate professors can apply for promotion to full professorships on the basis of individual research competence irrespective of vacant professorships. This has now become a more important way of attaining a full professorship than through competition with other applicants. Only 30% of new professors are appointed the traditional way. The reform has led to a substantial increase in the number of full professors in the university sector, from 37% of the tenured academic staff in 1991 to 47% in 2001.

INTRODUCTION

The design of academic career systems are generally regarded to be important instruments for the achievement of national science and education policy goals and for the personnel policy of higher education institutions, as well as for the motivation of academic staff. Career structures may thus be viewed from three different angles: (a) from the point of view of how career systems relates to the performance of a higher education system, (b) from the point of view of the individual institutions, and (c) from the point of view of academic staff members. To some extent these different stakeholders may hold similar expectations of how a career system should be designed, but they may also have opposing interests.

Seen from the point of view of the national policy level, the career system should (i) ensure that talented people will be attracted to an academic career in terms of career opportunities and salary, (ii) enhance productivity and quality in research, as well as quality of teaching and supervision of students, (iii) ensure equal chances for promotion between men and women, and (iv) stimulate to inter-institutional staff mobility.

Seen from the point of view of the higher education institution, the career system in addition to the first three points above should
(i) contribute to retain excellent staff, and (ii) encourage specialisation in subjects not well covered by the institution.

Seen from the point of view of individual staff members, the career system should (i) contribute to fair competition between potential candidates, and (ii) be motivating in terms of good career opportunities and possibilities for pay raise.

Academic career structures vary much between different national university systems and, to a varying degree, comply with the specific interests of state authorities, the institution, and the individual staff member. We may take for granted that the drive to become a full professor is very strong among lower ranked staff across different systems, but opportunities for achieving this status are very different. Today, we can distinguish between two main career models; the traditional *competition model* according to which persons aspiring to become a full professor have to apply for a limited number of vacant professorships in competition with other applicants, and a *competence model*, implying that all tenured academic staff who have attained the competence level of full professor in their discipline are entitled to be promoted to this rank. In general, the competition model has a stronger position among those who advocate the interests of the national system and the institutional level while the competence model has more supporters among academic staff aspiring for a professorial position.

In most countries, the competition model still prevails (see Enders & de Weert 2004). Two European countries, Norway and Sweden, have however introduced the competence model. Norway implemented the new career system in 1993 and Sweden in 1999. As opposed to the Norwegian model, which is managed at the national level and where nationally appointed committees assess the applicants, the Swedish system is locally managed; each institution is responsible for the evaluation of applications for promotion to full professor from their own staff (Fritzell 2004).

Also in American and British universities, faculty members have the possibility to apply for promotion to full professor on the basis of individual competence, but contrary to in Norway and Sweden, this opportunity is not an institutionalised arrangement initiated by the government. It is entirely up to each university to make decisions on the academic career system.

Ten years have now passed since the competence model was introduced in Norway, and the experiences of this reform have now accumulated to such a level that they should be shared with an