DENMARK

Education and training in figures

Further information


Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

% of all students in upper secondary education, 2012

Tertiary education by type

% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2013

Lifelong learning

% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2013

Early leavers from education and training

% of early leavers from education and training, 2013
Vocational education and training (VET) plays a key role in Danish strategy for lifelong learning and meeting the challenges of globalisation and technological change. An inclusive and flexible initial VET system helps ensure that all young people have an opportunity to obtain relevant competences for smooth transition to the labour market. Adult education and continuing training respond to structural and technological changes in the labour market and provide the workforce with the knowledge and new and updated skills.

The Danish education and training system comprises a mainstream system providing qualifications at all levels, from compulsory schooling to doctoral degrees, and a parallel adult education and continuing training (CVT) system. The adult education and CVT system is designed to meet needs of adult learners, for example by offering part-time courses. The two systems offer equivalent courses at various levels, enabling horizontal and vertical progression. VET is under the Ministry of Education’s jurisdiction, which maintains close dialogue with the social partners to respond to labour market needs. Initial VET is organised into 12 broad entry routes and includes technical, agricultural, commercial, social and other programmes. Programmes are organised according to the dual principle, alternating between periods of college-based learning and workplace learning (apprenticeship training) in enterprises. A typical VET programme (ELD) lasts three-and-a-half years with a 2:1 split between workplace and college-based training, although there is considerable variation between programmes. Individual study plans are compiled for all students, with VET colleges and the social partners sharing the responsibility for developing curricula to ensure responsiveness to local labour market needs. Qualifications at tertiary level, for example, are equivalent to academic foundation (KVU) programmes or professional bachelor programmes at tertiary level.

Alternative routes to VET qualifications include:
- combined vocational and general upper secondary education (EUD programme (new academic preparation programme)) – a relatively new pathway, which lasts around four years, attended by highly motivated students aiming at obtaining access to higher education along with a vocational qualification;
- new apprenticeship (Ny Meisterlære) programmes, which combine on-the-job training at a company instead of partly at a VET college;
- AMU programmes are attended by students with a practical approach to learning;
- individual VET programmes, attended by very few students, consist of single subject courses and elements from EUD programmes;
- basic vocational education and training (EUVU), attended by lower secondary graduates with a practical approach to learning. The programme caters for young unemployed, and lasts for three to four years, with work-based learning (WBL) lasting at least 75%.

Basic adult education (grunduddannelse for voksne, GUVU) provides qualifications equivalent to VET. GUVU is aimed at adults (minimum 25 years old) with at least two years relevant work experience, but without formal qualifications. Individual study plans, which recognise prior learning, are used. GUVU study plans can comprise elements from other adult education programmes.

Adult vocational training (adultualesundskoleuddannelse, AMU) provides participants with skills and competences relevant to the labour market and is primarily directed towards specific sectors and jobs. Programmes may either deepen a participant’s knowledge in a particular field or extend it to related fields. AMU programme levels can provide equivalent qualifications to tertiary level. The programmes last one to three years, and are created, adapted or discontinued in response to labour market needs. At tertiary level, further VET and adult education programmes lead to EQF level 5 qualifications.

The Danish VET system is characterised by a highly motivated and committed labour force with low levels of long-term unemployment, and particularly long-term unemployment among young people with little or no work experience to face challenges for adult education and continuing training. Substantial upheavals in the labour market are necessary to adapt enterprises to VET, contribute a fixed amount per employee to a central fund. Enterprises are then subsequently reimbursed for providing training placements and for employee participation in continuing training.


Distinctive features of VET

The Danish VET system is characterised by a high level of participation and low levels of unemployment. Apprenticeships and further training of employees are subsidised according to a solidarity principle – coordinated in the AUB system (Arbejdsgiveren Uddanningsbidrag, employers educational contribution) where all enterprises are required to pay a contribution to VET, contribute a fixed amount per employee to a central fund. Enterprises are then subsequently reimbursed for providing training placements and for employee participation in continuing training.

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Challenges and policy responses

Education and training are considered a key to tackling unemployment and stimulating economic growth. As a result, VET is expected to accommodate an increasingly heterogeneous student population. Two reforms will have significant influence on development of VET in Denmark. The VET system reform (2014) establishes VET teachers’ minimum qualification requirements and VET students’ minimum attendance requirements, thus increasing quality in VET. A new social assistance reform (2014) makes it mandatory for unemployed people under 30 receiving social benefits to participate in education and training. Thus, numbers of weaker learners entering VET will increase. It is a challenge to maintain high participation rates in VET. The government has set a target that by 2016, 80% of each youth cohort will complete an upper secondary education programme. It is a huge challenge to keep a focus on both weaker and stronger learners, increased quality in VET, VET teachers’ professional development and the new structure of provision results from the ongoing VET reform.

Lack of suitable training placements in enterprises is frequently cited as a primary reason for student dropout. Several policy initiatives aim to alleviate the problem, but the current global financial crisis has further weakened the system between supply and demand of training places.

Implementation of 50 practical training centres (2013) and the planned 1000 new placements in “Vækstplan 2014” (growth plan, 2014) are expected to alleviate this problem.

Unemployment, and particularly long-term unemployment, among young people with little or no work experience to face challenges for adult education and continuing training. Substantial upheavals in the labour market are necessary to adapt enterprises to VET, contribute a fixed amount per employee to a central fund. Enterprises are then subsequently reimbursed for providing training placements and for employee participation in continuing training.

The 2014 growth plan includes funding for the unemployed to become skilled workers through targeted adult VET programmes.
Vocational education and training (VET) plays a key role in Danish strategy for lifelong learning and meeting the challenges of globalisation and technological change. An inclusive and flexible initial VET system helps ensure that all young people have an opportunity to obtain relevant competences for smooth transition to the labour market. Adult education and continuing training respond to structural and technological change in the labour market and provide the workforce with the necessary knowledge and updated skills.

The Danish education and training system comprises a mainstream system providing qualifications at all levels, from compulsory schooling to doctoral degrees, and a parallel adult education and continuing training (CVT) system. The adult education and CVT system is designed to meet the needs of adult learners, for example by offering part-time courses. The two systems offer education and training at various levels, enabling horizontal and vertical progression. VET is under the Ministry of Education’s jurisdiction, which maintains close dialogue with the social partners to respond to labour market needs. Initial VET is organised into 12 broad entry routes and includes technical, agricultural, commercial, social and pre-vocational programmes. Programme content is based on the dual principle, alternating between periods of college-based learning and work-based learning (apprenticeship training) in enterprises. A typical programme lasts three to four years, attended by highly-motivated learners, and lasts for three or four years, with work-based learning (WBL) lasting at least 75%.

Basic adult education (grundskærelse for voksne, GVU) provides qualifications equivalent to VET. GVU is aimed at adults (minimum 25 years old) with at least two years relevant work experience, but without formal qualifications. Individual study plans, which recognise prior learning, can comprise elements from other adult education programmes.

Adult vocational training (arbejdsmarkedstræning, AMU) provides participants with updated and new and updated skills. AMU programmes are attended by students with a practical approach to learning. Individual VET programmes, attended by very few students, consist of single subject courses and elements from EUD programmes; basic vocational education and training (EUD), attended by lower secondary graduates with a practical approach to learning. The programme caters for young unemployed, and lasts for three to four years, with work-based learning (WBL) lasting at least 75%.

The Danish VET system is characterised by a high degree of structural labour market flexibility. Social partners, vocational colleges, teachers and students play a key role in advising the Ministry of Education on overall VET policy and determining the structure and general framework for training programmes within their field, by cooperating in national trade committees. At local level, stakeholders cooperate in developing local curricula to respond to local labour market needs.

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In Denmark, the participation in VET is considered a key factor in addressing labour market challenges and unemployment. As a result, VET is expected to accommodate the rising demand for human capital, particularly in areas such as engineering and IT. The Danish government has prioritised the expansion of VET programmes, especially those that focus on emerging industries such as green technology and digital transformation. The aim is to increase the number of enrolments and improve the quality of VET offerings. Education and training are considered a key factor for the country’s competitiveness, and the government has set ambitious targets to increase participation in VET programmes. The government has also introduced measures to improve the quality and relevance of VET programmes, such as the implementation of competency-based curricula and the establishment of partnerships between VET providers and employers.

A key challenge for the Danish VET system is to ensure that all citizens have access to quality education and training opportunities. The government has implemented policies to address this issue, such as the introduction of a national qualifications framework and the development of partnerships between VET providers and employers. These initiatives seek to alleviate the problem, but the current global financial crisis has further widened the gap between supply and demand of training places. Implementation of 50 training centres (2013) and the planned 1000 new placements in five-year plans (2014) have been expected to alleviate this problem. Unemployment, and particularly long-term unemployment, among young people with little or no work experience is a major challenge for the VET system. As a result, IVET is expected to contribute a fixed amount per employee to a central fund. Enterprises are then reimbursed for training placements and for employee participation in continuing training.

Public financing is central to the VET system. VET colleges receive performance-based block grants. Apprenticeships and further training of employees are subsidised according to a solidarity principle – coordinated in the AUB system (Aktion for Udvikling af Beskattet, employers educational contributor) where all enterprises contribute to the cost of VET. As a result, IVET, contribute a fixed amount per employee to a central fund. Enterprises are then reimbursed for training placements and for employee participation in continuing training.

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This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Denmark.

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Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.
Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.
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