Vocational education and training in Denmark

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Objective and target groups
The publication of this description of the vocational education and training system in Denmark is a further step towards updating and extending the series of descriptions of the (then 12) Member States published by Cedefop between 1993 and 1996. It now includes Austria, Finland and Sweden and countries covered by the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement. The objective is to present an overview of vocational education and training activities in Denmark so that it is easily understood by interested ‘foreigners’. The target group includes those who may be responsible for, and concerned with, VET policy issues, researchers in this field, directors of vocational training departments or institutions, and trainers and teachers, whether they work at EU or Member State level, or for a governmental or social partner organisation. Some may be using the text at their desks as a reference document. Others may be visiting the country concerned either on a study visit or to plan or execute a bi- or multilateral project, and are more likely to wish to read the document from beginning to end.

Content and structure
The volumes in this series set out to describe initial and continuing vocational education and training (VET). As far as initial VET is concerned this means including provision which is in some cases the responsibility of ministries for education and in others of ministries of employment or social affairs. As far as continuing VET is concerned, it requires coverage of provision for both the employed and unemployed, usually by a wide range of governmental bodies and ministries and by private and social partner organisations.

The structure of the report (see ‘Contents’) has been laid down in some detail by Cedefop, which also placed limits on how long it should be. The structure is, in general terms, similar to that adopted for the reports on the Member States commissioned in 1992, but there have been some changes such as the addition of a chapter on what we have called ‘qualitative aspects’, including information on certification, training of trainers and guidance. We required the authors of all monographs including those updating the existing ones, to follow this amended structure, so as to facilitate readers who wish to try to make comparisons between the systems.

Choice of author and consultation procedures
For this series Cedefop has tried to achieve a product which in some ways is impossible. We wished to have a report written by an insider of the system concerned, but easily comprehensible to the outsider. It followed that the person/institution chosen, as an author is an insider, located in the country being described and, unless they choose not to do so, writing in their mother tongue. A further corollary of this was that Cedefop has tried to play the role of ‘outsider’ in discussions on the draft text, in order to draw authors’ attention to places where the report was likely not to be easily understood by the public for which it is intended.

Cedefop has also stipulated that the authors must carry out a consultation on the draft with the main parties involved in VET in their country. This has meant their sending the draft not only to the various public bodies responsible for organising the system and providing VET, but also to the principal representative bodies of the social partners. The assistance of the members of the Cedefop’s Management Board in the country concerned has in particular been requested in this connection.
Publishing and updating
It is Cedefop’s intention, as long as the necessary resources are available, to publish these monographs in paper form in their original language and in English, French and German. In occasional and exceptional circumstances it may publish some monographs in additional languages. Experience has, however, shown that the timescale involved in translating and publishing in hard-copy form, and the rate of change in the systems described, means that the reports can almost never be entirely up-to-date (*). Cedefop intends therefore also to use electronic means of publishing, including making summaries and updates of the texts available on Cedefop’s Internet site (www.trainingvillage.gr).

Comments and feedback
As indicated above, Cedefop is conscious that in preparing this series it has had to make choices. We would very much appreciate having readers’ views as to whether we have made the right ones concerning the scope, content and structure of the report. We would be pleased to have your comments by letter, fax or e-mail.

Vocational education and training in Denmark
Denmark invests heavily in education and training. It has a high-wage economy, with low unemployment. The range of opportunities available through the education and training systems, particularly for those threatened with exclusion, has been extended, but so has the pressure to participate in them. Unlike systems in other Nordic countries, the Danish one is highly differentiated in the upper secondary period. Apprenticeship, having experienced difficulties due to the lack of training places in companies in the late 1980s, has grown in recent years as employers have become increasingly aware of the need to invest in training. For adults also there has been a broadening and deepening of the education and training opportunities on offer. Although relatively small and homogeneous, the delivery of VET in Denmark is decentralised with a high level of operational and financial independence for each education and training institution. Particularly in the field of continuing training, competition between training providers is encouraged. Interest in the internationalisation of education and training is strong, with a unique piece of legislation encouraging apprentices to seek placements abroad. The role of the social partners is omnipresent, both on the formal and informal level.

Cedefop is very grateful to Søren Nielsen and Pia Cort of the Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers who prepared this monograph. They responded very positively to the comments and proposals for changes, which Cedefop made. We hope that together we have provided the reader with a useful tool.

Stavros Stavrou  J. Michael Adams  Reinhard Nöbauer
Deputy Director  Project coordinators

Thessaloniki, April 1999

(*) In this connection, attention is drawn to Annex 5 of the present publication.
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Annex 5: Recent initiatives
This monograph in the Cedefop series on vocational training in the EU Member States was originally planned as an updated version of that published in the spring of 1995. However, structural changes which have taken place in vocational education and training in Denmark in the period since 1995 are so extensive that, in many areas, it has been necessary to rewrite the monograph completely.

While the text was being written, which took at least half a year, reform activity was further stepped up. Thus, a substantial restructuring of the Education Ministry took place with effect from 1 September 1998. The new organisational model is described as well as possible in Chapter 4. At the same time, a process of reform has been initiated in the field of technical vocational education and training. The main elements in this reform are described as well as can be achieved at this stage in Chapter 6.

The monograph is based on many sources. The publications of the Ministry of Education Undervisningsministeriets Nyhedsbrev (Newsletter of the Ministry of Education), the magazine Uddannelse (Education) and the statistical data issued by the Ministry provided a wealth of sound source material for an overview of a period in the history of Danish vocational education which has been marked by wide-ranging reforms in virtually all areas. The annual reports and statistical surveys of the National Labour Market Authority (Arbejdsmarkedsstyrelsen) were also very helpful.

This edition builds on the monograph of 1995, which gave a comprehensive description of vocational training provision in Denmark after the reforms. Although the many changes of substance in the various systems posed a number of difficulties in the work, it proved to be an interesting, albeit time-consuming task.

The monograph has been considerably improved by the comments and suggestions for changes presented during the discussion of the first draft. A number of constructive suggestions were incorporated into the text. Comments were received from the Ministry of Education, the Danish Employers’ Confederation (DA), the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Danish unit of the Eurydice (education information network in the European Community), and selected experts in the field of vocational training who were able to comment on the monograph. I am also grateful to colleagues in the Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers (DEL) for their valuable critical comments and encouragement throughout the process.

It should be emphasised that responsibility for the final text rests with the authors. As we have already indicated, it amounts to an attempt to cover all the changes which have taken place in the Danish vocational education system in recent years at a single stroke. This monograph does not constitute an account authorised by either the Ministry of Labour or the Ministry of Education.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners at Cedefop for the fruitful cooperation we have enjoyed in the course of the work on the monograph.

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Pia Cort

Copenhagen, December 1998