The Danish VET system is characterised by a high level of stakeholder involvement with the social partners, vocational colleges, teachers and students all involved in developing VET based on the principles of consensus and shared responsibility:
• at national level, stakeholders play a key role in advising the Ministry of Children and 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 curricula to respond to local labour market needs.
An integrated lifelong learning strategy was introduced in 2007 and supported by implementation of a national qualifications framework. It improved horizontal and vertical permeability within the education and training system; it also improved guidance services and provided better opportunities for recognition of non-formal qualifications through standardised procedures for the validation of prior learning.
Denmark has the highest levels of participation in adult education and continuing training in the EU. High participation rates reflect: the national strategy to focus on knowledge-intensive specialist sectors and lifelong learning; the large public sector; and a tradition of strong links between educational institutions and the social partners.
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 whereby all enterprises, regardless of their involvement in VET, contribute a fixed amount per employee to a centralised fund. Enterprises are then partially reimbursed for provision of training placements and for employee participation in continuing training.

Characteristics

Transition and modernisation
VET plays a key role in the Danish strategy for lifelong learning and meeting the challenges of globalisation and technological change. An inclusive and flexible 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 responds to structural and technological change in the labour market and provides the workforce with new and updated skills.
VET is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Children and Education, which maintains close dialogue with the social partners to respond to labour market needs. Recent VET reforms have concentrated on:
• making the VET system more inclusive by introducing partial qualifications and alternative pathways aimed at weaker learners and additional qualifications for stronger learners;
• supporting flexibility through individualised learning pathways, decentralisation of VET curricula and continuing training programmes tailored to the needs of enterprises;
• increasing effectiveness by streamlining entry routes and creating fewer, larger institutional providers offering a wider range of VET programmes;
• improving transparency by incorporating all VET qualifications within a national qualifications framework;
• reducing drop-out rates by consolidating guidance services and guaranteeing sufficient apprenticeship places for trainees;
• improving responsiveness through partnerships between VET providers and local enterprises, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms, as well as research, analysis and forecasting activities.

Structure
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 system. The adult education and continuing training system is designed to meet the needs of adult learners, for example by offering part-time courses. The two systems offer equivalent qualifications at the various levels, enabling horizontal permeability.

Vocational upper secondary education and training, or IVET, includes technical, agricultural, commercial, and social and healthcare programmes. Organised into 12 broad entry routes, they provide access to 109 more specialised main programmes and 301 different vocational qualifications. Programmes are organised according to the dual principle, alternating between periods of college-based learning and practical apprenticeship training in enterprises. A typical IVET programme 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 responsibility for developing curricula to ensure responsiveness to local labour market needs. Qualifications at this level can provide access to relevant academic profession or professional bachelor tertiary programmes.

Basic adult education (grunduddannelse for voksne, or GVU) provides qualifications equivalent to IVET, and is aimed at adults (minimum 25 years old) with at least two years relevant work experience, but without formal qualifications. An individual study plan is designed, which considers and credits prior learning.

Mainstream education and training

Mainstream education and training

Adult education and continuing training

Spotlight on VET

The main challenge for IVET is improving completion rates. The government has a stated objective that, by 2015, 95 % of a youth cohort should complete an upper secondary education programme. Education and training are considered key as demand for unskilled labour continues to fall. As a result, IVET are the key to accommodating an increasingly heterogeneous student body. The latest projections indicate that 81 % of those commencing one of the main programmes of IVET in 2010 are expected to complete the programme. Improving this figure by ensuring IVET is an attractive and viable option for both stronger and weaker learners is a political priority.

An associated issue is provision of a sufficient number of training placements in enterprises. Lack of suitable training placements is frequently cited as a primary reason for student dropout. A multitude of policy initiatives seek to alleviate the problem, but the current global financial crisis has further widened the gap between supply and demand.

Improving vertical permeability from VET to higher education is currently a political priority because it is seen as an effective strategy to increase participation in higher education. Basic adult education (grunduddannelse for voksne, or GVU) provides qualifications equivalent to IVET, and is aimed at adults (minimum 25 years old) with at least two years relevant work experience, but without formal qualifications. An individual study plan is designed, which considers and credits prior learning.

Adult vocational training programmes (VVU) provide qualifications at the lower, basic and higher levels, combining vocational and general upper secondary qualifications and may provide a solution. This programme will allow unrestricted access to tertiary education, including university programmes, while also providing a full vocational qualification.

Rising unemployment levels, and particularly long-term unemployment among young people with little or no work experience, poses a major challenge for adult education and continuing training. The global financial crisis has also led to a faster decline in demand for unskilled labour. Substantial upskilling and retraining will be necessary to avoid a considerable part of the workforce becoming permanently excluded from the labour market.