



# **Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills**

## **Full Country Report – Denmark**

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**Independent national experts network in the area  
of adult education/adult skills**

**Full country report - Denmark**

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## 1.0 COUNTRY OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Trends for the entire population

#### 1.1.1 Employment rate – entire population

**Table 1.1: Evolution of employment rate - national average (2010-2016) compared to EU data**

Geographical area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	67.9	68.6	68.6	68.4	68.4	69.2	70	71	75% of the 20-64 year-olds in employment	80
Denmark	77.9	78	75.8	75.7	75.4	75.6	75.9	76.5	77.4		

*Source: Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code lfsa\_ergaed, last updated 25 April 2017.*

*Explanatory note: This table compares the average employment rate of the population (ISCED all levels) aged 20 to 64 in a given Member State over the period 2000-2016 to EU targets and average, including the EU2020 target, national 2020 targets and the average EU employment rate for 2016.*

#### - Comparison to EU2020 target

The employment rate in Denmark is relatively high (77.4% in 2016) compared to an EU-28 rate of 71% in 2016. The EU2020 target has therefore already been exceeded. The national rate has been relatively high, and has stood above the EU-2020 target for several decades. The financial crisis of 2007-09 caused a significant fall in Danish employment, but during the last two years it has been catching up and as of 2016 is now approaching the earlier level seen in 2000.

#### - Comparison to National 2020 target

At 77.4% the employment rate sits below the 80% national 2020 target.

#### - Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016

The employment rate in Denmark was 77.4% in 2016, compared to an EU-28 rate of 71% in 2016.

#### - Evolution over time

The Danish employment rate has not been below the EU2020 target over recent decades, and is now significantly above it. However, the rate is still below the national 2020 target and it is difficult to say if the present rate of growth will continue. A new report from the Chairmanship of the Danish Economic Councils is optimistic and foresees continued growth

in employment, especially the next 3-4 years (Danish Economic Councils 2017). For the last decade employment in Denmark has been some 6-7 percentage points above the general EU level. Variations in this have been small and probably insignificant.

### 1.1.2 Participation rate – entire population

**Table 1.2: Evolution of participation rate in education and training - national average (2010-2016) compared to EU data**

Geographical area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	9.6	9.3	9.1	9.2	10.7	10.8	10.7	10.8		
Denmark	19.4	27.4	32.6	32.3	31.6	31.4	31.9	31.3	27.7	15% of adults in lifelong learning (LLL)	

*Source:* Participation rate in education and training by sex and age (%), Eurostat code trng\_lfse\_01, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 to EU data over the period 2000-2016.

#### - Comparison to EU2020 target

The participation rate stood at 27.7% in 2016. This is above the EU-2020 target of 15%. National participation rates have consistently stood above this EU-2020 target for the last several decades.

#### - Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016

The national rate was 27.7% in 2016, well over double the EU-28 average for this year (10.8%).

#### - Evolution over time

In Denmark the participation of adults in education and training is at a much higher level than the EU-28 average. This is a well-known phenomenon and reflects a strong historical tradition of adult education both in culture and in policy. During the decade following year 2000 participation rate rose from around 20 % to more than 30% and since then it has fluctuated around that level.

The data seems to indicate a fall of more than 4 percentage points from 2015 to 2016. Some fall in activity could be expected, since it is known that participation in labour market courses as well in the new vocational education scheme for adults has been below expectations (see also section 3). However, the fall is surprisingly big and it is possible that this figure is in fact incorrect.

National Danish educational statistics do not yet include 2016, because the information is not released until quality control has been carried out. So, interpretation should await confirmation of the 2016 figures. However, if the rate has in fact fallen significantly, a further contributing factor could be the rise in employment, which could lead to fewer adults participating in educational measures targeted at unemployed.

The Danish participation rate is much higher than the 15% demanded by the EU2020 target, in fact almost double the target rate. About four years ago the EU-28 average participation rate rose a little, but since then it has been stable at 10.7% or 10.8%. Progress towards the 15% target has been slow.

## 1.2 Trends for low qualified adults

### 1.2.1 Share of low qualified adults

**Table 1.3: Share of low-qualified adults (ISCED 0-2) – national data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016**

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	30.6	27.3	26.6	25.8	24.8	24.1	23.5	23
Denmark	21.5	19	24.4	23.1	22.1	21.7	20.4	19.6	19.3

*Source:* Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%), Eurostat edat\_lfse\_03, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* this table compares the percentage of the population with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) in 2016 to the EU-28 average for 2016 and the period 2000-2016.

#### - Comparison to EU-28 average

In general, the share of low qualified adults is considerably smaller in Denmark than the EU average. The share of low qualified adults stood at 19.3% in 2016, compared to 23% at the EU-28 level. In 2005 the difference seems to have been more than 10 percentage points, but since 2010 the difference has been smaller (about 3 percentage points) and relatively stable.

#### - Evolution over time:

The share of low-qualified adults increased from 21.5% in 2000 to 24.4% in 2010, following which there has been a steady decline in the share at national level. It is surprising that the share of low-qualified adults seems to have grown in the decade following year 2000. In general, the educational level of the Danish population has been growing as the younger cohorts are educated more and the older, less educated people become a smaller part of the population. It is an area for investigation as to whether the figures are in fact correct. Since 2010 the share of low qualified adults has been steadily falling. The same trend is seen in the EU-28 average.



### 1.2.2 Employment rate of low skilled adults

**Table 1.4: Employment rates of low skilled adults (ISCED 0-2) – national data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016**

Geographical area	Years									
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
EU-28 average	:	55.7	53.8	53.4	52.7	52	52.6	53.2	54.3	
Denmark	62.5	61.5	62.8	62.6	61.4	60.9	61.4	60.5	63.5	

*Source:* Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code *lfsa\_ergaed*, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the employment rates of those with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) to the EU average over the period 2010-2016.

#### - Comparison to EU-28 average

The employment rate for Danish low skilled adults is considerable above the EU-28 average. The level stood at 63.5% in Denmark in 2016, compared to 54.3% at the EU-28 level. The difference between the national rate and the EU-28 rate is generally around 9 percentage points (although in one year, 2015, it seems to have been smaller). A number of factors may contribute to this difference, for instance a generally well-educated workforce and active labour market policies.

#### - Evolution over time

For Denmark it is difficult to see a long-time trend in the employment of low skilled adults. The level has fluctuated between 2000 and 2016, with the lowest level seen in 2015 (60.5%) and the highest level seen in 2016 (63.5%).

For the EU-28 as a whole the employment rate has been slowly growing over the last three years, after being at its lowest level in 2013.

### 1.2.3 Participation rate of low skilled adults

**Table 1.5: Participation rate of low skilled adults – EU average in comparison to national average**

Geographical area	Years									
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
EU-28 average	:	3.7	3.9	4	3.9	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.2	
Denmark	11.6	16.5	23.6	23.4	22.4	22.1	23.2	21.7	19.4	

*Source:* Participation rate in education and training by sex and educational attainment (%), Eurostat code and *trng\_lfse\_03*, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 with low qualification levels (ISCED levels 0-2) to EU data and over the period 2000-2016.

*- Comparison to EU-28 average*

Danish low-skilled adults participate much more in education and training compared to adults in the EU-28 as a whole. For 2016, the national participation rate was 19.4%, compared to the EU-28 average of 4.2%.

For most of the time since year 2000 the Danish participation rate has been around five times as high as the average rate in EU. Again, this may be explained by the strong historical tradition of adult education, institutionalised in institutions and policy measures and also by the requirement for updated skills by companies and public organisations.

*- Evolution over time*

Following a significant rise in the decade after year 2000, the participation rate of Danish low-skilled adults has been around 22%-23%. In the last two years a slow fall seems to be occurring. Again, there may be reservations regarding the 2016 figure, but if the trend is real it could reflect falling activity in labour market training and adult vocational education as well as be the rise in employment (see comments to table 1.2. above).

## **2.0 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ADULT LEARNING SYSTEM**

### **2.1 Main features and a concise summary of historic development**

Adult education and learning in Denmark has developed over a long historical period. The main events have been: the development of the folk high schools in the second half of the 19th century; the ensuring development of evening schools in towns and cities; the establishment of vocational training courses for unskilled workers in the years around 1960; the establishment of courses in general school subjects for adults in the same period; and, the development of part-time higher education programmes from around 1990 (Korsgaard 2000). These different types of adult education have continued and through legislation they have gradually become parts of system of adult education including four sectors of the general adult education, two types of adult vocational education and non-formal educational learning (Eurydice 2010). Alongside the public system there is a comprehensive offer from private providers including branch organisations, and suppliers of technology also often offer training in conjunction with the implementation of new technology (Ekspertgruppen for voksen-, efter og videreuddannelse.2017a)

General Adult Education (almen voksenuddannelse, AVU) is offered at adult education centres (in Danish voksenuddannelsescenter, VUC) and a few other institutions. The programmes aim to provide education that will enable both young and mature adults to improve or supplement their general knowledge and skills within general subjects, leading to a lower secondary certificate. The VUCs also offer courses at upper secondary level, the higher preparatory examination courses (HF) and supplementary examination courses (GS).

General adult education courses are funded through a combination of tuition fees paid by individual students and public funds (allocated to the institutions on the basis of the number of students enrolling and passing exams). The tuition generally covers a minor part of the costs of education.

Furthermore, the VUCs have primary responsibility for two other types of courses. Education for people covers reading and writing disabilities (e.g. dyslexia), and preparatory education for adults (FVU) aims to provide adults basic literacy and numeracy skills. These two types may also be run by other providers such as non-profit educational associations.

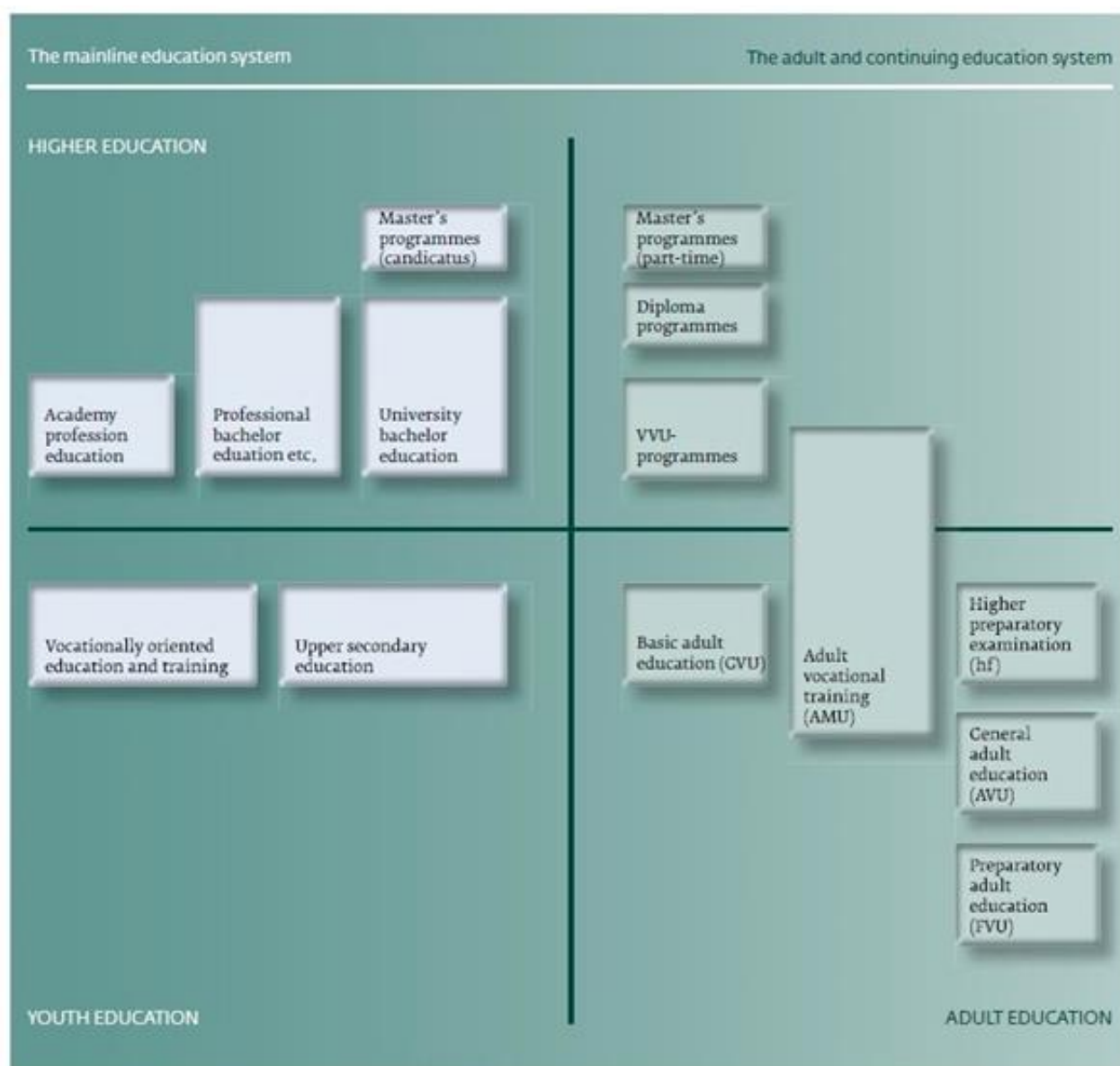
Adult vocational training includes labour market-related adult training courses (in Danish arbejdsmarkedssuddannelser, AMU) which are developed and run in collaboration between the state and the social partners. The short vocational training programs are mainly for semi-skilled and skilled workers with the aim at strengthening skills relevant to the labour market, and for providing the necessary qualifications. The funding of these courses involves a combination of the state, foundations (Kompetencefonde) based on contributions from employees and employers and tuition fees for the individual participants (often paid by their employers).

Another type of adult vocational education is the part-time higher education programmes. They are offered by higher education institutions and do not include the close collaboration with social partners which is a characteristic of the labour market training courses. The programmes constitute a 'parallel system of competence' with the same three levels as the adult education system, and in principle it is possible for students to move between the part-time and the full-time programmes at the different levels. The programmes are funded through a combination of tuition fees paid by individual students or their employers and public funds (allotted to the institutions on the basis of the number of students enrolling and passing exams).

Popular adult education, also called non-formal educational learning, consists of forms of teaching and education that are only to a limited degree part of the formal, public educational system. The main task of the popular adult education is to provide personal education for leisure time, facilitated in numerous educational associations, evening schools, "open" universities (in Danish folkeuniversitetet) and adult education centres (in Danish daghøjskoler). These non-formal learning activities are often based on initiatives by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They are funded through a combination of public funds (relatively limited, paid by municipalities) and individual tuition fees.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the general structure of the Danish adult education system, compared to the ordinary (full-time) system of secondary and tertiary education.

**Figure 2.1 The Danish Education System**



Source: Danish Ministry of Children, Education and Gender Equality, <http://eng.uvm.dk/>

The Danish adult education system is institutionalised in the form of education programmes, educational institutions and funding systems. The framework consists of legislation which is first prepared by the Government and the relevant ministry, then decided in the Parliament and administratively implemented by the ministry. The legislation determines the levels and frameworks, objectives, general curricula, examination and certification of education programmes, which institutions are allowed to run them and the systems of funding.

The different types of adult education provided are described more detailed below, in section 2.2. Table 2.1 details the level of participation in 2015.

**Table 2.1 Number of participants in formal education and training by level of education and age (2015)**

	Age 20-24	Age 25+	Total
Level of education (i.e. basic, vocational, higher)			
Primary	40	0	40
Lower secondary	221	9	230
Upper secondary	71,873	57,292	129,165
Post-secondary non-tertiary education		0	
Short-cycle tertiary education		17,320	
Bachelor's or equivalent level		81,078	
Master's or equivalent level		55,918	
Doctoral or equivalent level		9,768	

Source: Eurostat, Eurostat database table "Pupils and students enrolled by education level, sex and age (educ\_uoe\_enra02)", accessed 2017.08.21

The numbers given in table 2.1 for primary and lower secondary participants seem very low compared with the number given for upper secondary participants. In fact, they may be incorrect. Data available at the Danish Ministry of Education home page has the following numbers for 2015/16:

- Primary Level (FVU): Aged 20-24 10,807; Aged 25+ 41,439
- Lower Secondary Level (AVU): Aged 20-24 52,275; Aged 25+ 63,251<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 Provision

### 2.2.1 Helps adults improve their Basic Skills

Preparatory adult education (in Danish Forbedredende Voksenundervisning, FVU) is education targeting adults who need basic literacy and numeracy skills. There are three types of courses: FVU-start, aimed at immigrants with Danish as second language; FVU-reading (Danish language), which is taught at four levels; and, FVU-mathematics, which is taught at two levels. Courses are free. Classes are small and teaching topics are linked

<sup>1</sup> Source: Danish Ministry of Education statistics, accessed 2017.09.28;  
<http://statweb.uni-c.dk/databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=VEU-kursister-vuc>

to everyday life of adults. Adult Education Centres (VUC) are the main providers of these courses, but they may also be offered by other educational institutions.

Courses are offered to adults suffering from dyslexia. These courses are free and teaching is done in small groups (2-6 persons). Adult Education Centres (VUC) are the main providers of these courses, but they may also be offered by other educational institutions.

Danish language tuition is provided for adult foreigners living or working in Denmark. These courses are offered by language centres or language schools. In most cases they are free. There are two types: labour market language tuition (ADU) designed for foreigners coming to Denmark to work; and, ordinary language tuition (DU) designed for refugees or other persons with a residence permit. There are three different types of DU courses for students with different skills. For instance, DI1 is for participants who do not read or write in their own language, or who do not master a European script.

### *2.2.2 Helps adults achieve a Recognised Qualification*

General Vocational Adult Education (AVU) is education at lower secondary level for adults. It is offered mainly in the ordinary range school subjects in the national Danish curriculum, and leads to exams and degrees equivalent with those that young people take in schools. Subjects may be taken at different levels. AVU is organised as single subject teaching, but it is possible to study more several subjects simultaneously. There are two types of AVU subjects, with core subjects like Danish, mathematics, history, English, and smaller choice subjects like art, sports, psychology and philosophy.

AVU education is provided by the Adult Education Centres (VUC). Costs are mainly covered by state grants, but students have to pay a tuition fee. For the core subject fees are low (less than €20 per subject), for choice subjects the fee is higher. Classes are available both in daytime and in evenings.

AVU subjects may also be offered as flexible teaching, organised for instance as distance education or linked to workplaces.

Higher Preparatory Education (HF) is education at upper secondary level partly for adults. It is given mainly in the ordinary range of school subjects for general upper secondary education and it leads to exams and degrees that give access to higher education. HF exists in two types, as a 2-year coordinated programme, and as single subject teaching. The 2-year programme is open to all who have completed lower secondary education, like the main form of general/academic upper secondary education, the Gymnasium or STX. The single subject HF is aimed at adults. It is possible to study several subjects at a time. A recent reform has adjusted the profile of HF in order to distinguish it more clearly from the STX. The HF is now more focused on preparing students for short or medium cycle higher education, while still allowing for access to university education,

The single subject HF is provided by the Adult Education Centres (VUC). Costs are mainly covered by state grants, but students have to pay a tuition fee. Classes are available both in daytime and in evenings.

*2.2.3 Helps adults develop other knowledge and skills, not for vocational purposes*

Folk High Schools are adult education institutions that offer courses in many different subjects such as sports, culture, literature, societal and political issues, and music. There are no special requirements for access, and in most cases courses do not lead to exams in the recognised degree system. Courses may be shorter or longer and are most often residential. Folk High Schools receive state support, especially for the longer courses, but students have to pay tuition fees amounting to about one third of the costs (including residence and food). Some folk high schools offer preparatory courses for types of vocational education, for example police education.

In Denmark there is public recognition of and support for popular enlightenment (folkeoplysning). This may take different forms, for instance through voluntary associations. A widespread type of popular enlightenment are the evening schools, which provide teaching on many different topics, both general and practical, such as sports, music, dance, painting, culture, societal and political issues. The general aim is for citizens to improve their ability and motivation to handle own lives and participate in society. In order to be recognised, popular enlightenment teaching must be organised in voluntary associations with democratically elected boards. Municipalities give economic support to recognized associations. Participants have to pay tuition fees.

*2.2.4 Facilitates Transition to the Labour Market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (ALMPs)*

While there are educational opportunities for unemployed people Denmark has no special educational provision for employees at risk of unemployment. This may be due to the organisation of the labour market (institutions, rules, benefits) which facilitates flexibility and circulation. Unemployed people fall into two categories: those entitled to unemployment benefits (an insurance scheme where individual savings are supplemented with state funding); and, those only entitled to social benefits.

People on unemployment benefit who have little previous education are entitled to participating in 6 weeks of vocationally relevant education. This may be a part of an existing education programme, for instance a vocational programme or a labour market training course. The specific education or courses must be chosen from a list of recognized options maintained by the public labour market authorities. There are also regional funds supporting courses for this group of unemployed, as well as a special programme for educating unskilled adults over the age of 30 to a required skilled level.

For persons on social benefit there is a wide variety of shorter courses, often focusing on job-seeking skills like writing CVs and handling job interviews. Younger adults (below 30 years) who do not have a vocational degree may also apply for education funding. If this is approved by the authorities (municipal job centres) the unemployed persons are obliged to commence an education programme as soon as it is available.



The main principle guiding education for unemployed people is not to concentrate them in special programmes but to guide (and to some degree force) them into recognised types of education that will improve their qualifications.

### *2.2.5 Opens up Higher Education to adults*

Danish higher education contains programmes at three levels: business academy level (2 years duration); bachelor level (3-4 years duration); and, master level (5 years duration). The master level is also sometimes called the candidatus level. There is also a part-time system for adults with programmes corresponding to (but not identical with) the three levels. Access to these programmes requires both relevant exams from upper secondary education and job experience (most often for at least 2 years) relevant to the programme applied for. The amount of teaching in the part-time programmes is less than in the corresponding full-time programmes, because the job experience contributes to knowledge and skills. In some programmes part of the teaching is done online.

The part-time programmes at the three levels are called Academy programmes (provided by business academies), Diploma programmes (provided by university colleges) and Master programmes (provided by universities). At all three levels a wide variety of programmes are available, covering for instance business administration, public administration, social work, education and teaching, media and communication, health, IT and regional planning. The programmes at master level are typically more focused on the practical application of skills and knowledge than the ordinary university programmes.

Part-time higher education is supported by state grants, but students also have to pay tuition fees. This is in contrast to ordinary higher education which is free to students. The amount of tuition fees varies with the type of programme. Tuition is often but not always paid by the employers of students.

### *2.2.6 Enables adult employees to develop their work-related skills*

Denmark has an extensive system of labour market training courses (AMU). These are aimed at unskilled and skilled employees in industry, commerce and public service. Courses are relatively short, and are focused on specific types of skill such as welding, driving, preparing food, caring for patients or for children.

AMU courses receive general funding through a combination of state support and general/collective contributions from employers. But the individual employers whose employees attend courses also have to pay tuition fees. The courses are provided by labour market training centres or by vocational schools or colleges. AMU courses can be categorized in four types: (1) certificate courses, training for publicly authorized certificates needed for certain jobs; (2) other courses in a certain trade; (3) transversal courses across trades, such as management and collaboration skills; (4) basic skills courses.

Unskilled adult employees also have the opportunity to study for an upper secondary vocational degree (EUV). They must be at least 25 years of age. The content and the

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examinations follow the regulations for full-time vocational programmes, but the programmes for adults are individualised and start with an assessment of prior learning and competence. The result of this assessment decides how long the programme needs to be and how much workplace training it needs to include. There are no tuition fees.

The system of part-time higher education described above (1.2.5) is also generally used by employees (and their employers) to improve skills and support career changes, for instance readying employees for management or consultancy positions in the organisation.

### **3.0 ADULT LEARNING POLICIES**

#### **3.1 Context**

##### *3.1.1 Distribution of responsibilities regarding adult learning*

Three ministries have responsibilities for adult education and learning. The Ministry of Children, Education and Gender Equality is responsible for general adult education and for labour market training. The Ministry of Higher Education and Science is responsible for part-time higher education and the Ministry of Culture is responsible for popular adult education. The first two ministries directly control the educational programmes and institutions, while the Ministry of Culture has delegated this to municipalities.

The complexity of the field, involving at least three ministries, can sometimes make this question difficult to consider whether Denmark have an overall strategy for lifelong learning, but in fact the answer must be yes. Strategic policy documents for this field do exist, but more important is the fact that governments have continued to develop and coordinate the different parts of the adult education system and has given adult education an important role in providing skills, knowledge and well-being for Danish citizens. Furthermore, the social partners have over time increasingly committed themselves to the adult education effort. The preparation of the year 2000 Act on part time upper secondary and higher education, involving comprehensive mapping of the field, was no doubt a milestone for strategic thinking about lifelong learning in Denmark.

The adult education institutions are generally independent institutions funded by the state and headed by boards composed of representatives reflecting the different types of programs. For institutions of vocational education and training representatives from trade unions and employer associations constitute the majority of board members, while for institutions of general adult education as well as higher education a broader group of stakeholders from society and education are represented. The main responsibility of the boards is to hire the director of the institution and to approve the yearly plans and budgets. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the director.

The governance structure for adult education is mainly vertical, with hierarchical lines of decision-making within each type of adult education. However, in regional and local contexts the division of labour is not always clear-cut, and this calls for coordination between the different institutions. At present this is handled by 13 VEU-centres, established in 2010 and covering all regions in Denmark. These are organisational structures intended to increase collaboration between the different adult education institutions and thus provide a more coherent provision. The VEU-centres include institutions in vocational training and general adult education, but not institutions for part-time higher education. Recent evaluations indicate that regional collaboration is still insufficient, and steps may be taken to restructure the VEU-centres (Ekspergruppen for voksen-, efter- og videreuddannelse 2017b).

*3.1.2 Major national socio-economic strategies governing the provision of Adult Learning*

Danish public policy has traditionally had a strong emphasis on welfare policies, especially in the form of universal provision of benefits and services. This is a social-democratic type of welfare state regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990). During the 20th century coalition government was the rule rather than the exception, and in the post-war period most governments were formed by the Social Democratic party in combination with different liberal partners. The last three decades have seen an increased polarisation between right-wing populist forces (especially the Danish People's Party) and social and socialist left liberals. The biggest liberal party has headed most government coalitions, with the support of the right. That is also the situation at present.

Both the previous and the present government have proposed ambitious long-term socio-economic plans, but since governments have not had an absolute majority in Parliament the plans have not been decided as such, rather different elements of them are negotiated and sometimes decided. For this reason, it is difficult to identify clear socio-economic strategies governing the provision of Adult Learning. One possibility, however, is to look at the political platform of the present Government and see which elements relate to adult learning.

The present platform (Regeringen, 2016) dates from November 2016 and describes the policy of a government led by the liberal party (Venstre) with the participation of the Conservatives and a smaller liberal party (Liberal Alliance). The title of the platform is 'For a Richer, Freer and More Secure Denmark'. One element with consequences for adult learning and the whole education sector is the dedication of government to reduce public spending and taxes. New initiatives should not increase public spending, so like the rest of the public sector educational institutions and programmes have to reduce their budgets by 2% per year (platform, chapter 2). Another element concerns the changes in the character and organisation of work through digitalisation and robotics and the consequences for the labour market (chapter 3).

To assess these changes and their policy implications, the Government has established a Disruption Council, with members from many parts of society. This links to concerns about the flexibility and efficiency of the labour market (chapter 10). One of the priorities here is to have sufficient opportunities for lifelong learning in order for qualifications and competencies to follow the changes in work and employment, and the Government will establish an expert group and hold negotiations with the social partners (tripartite negotiations) about this. In the field of higher education (chapter 21) government intends to reduce the level of economic support for living provided to students (which is fairly generous). This has indirect consequences for adult learning because government proposes to place the money saved on student support in a competence fund aimed at improved the competencies of Danes through lifelong learning. In the field of culture and media (chapter 24) government emphasises the importance of voluntary associations and institutions such as folk high schools and intends to increase economic support for such activities.

The government platform demonstrates that the present national socio-economic strategy does concern itself with issues of adult learning, but in a limited way. Adult learning is seen as necessary in order to meet the challenges of new technologies and labour market changes, and thus to ensure national competitiveness. But there is little attention to broader functions of adult education such as citizenship and well-being.

## **3.2 Adult learning policy framework**

### *3.2.1 A summary of major developments/ changes since 2010*

Recent policy changes in Danish adult education have focused on improving conditions for and boosting activity in the field of adult vocational training, especially for the skilled and semi-skilled.

A general reform of vocational education and training was passed in the Danish Parliament in June 2014 and was implemented from August 2015. The reform also introduced a new VET-scheme for adults beyond 25 years of age in order to promote that more low-skilled adults qualify as skilled workers. The new VET-scheme for adults is intended to provide more transparent and targeted learning pathways for adults and to building on the education and work experience that the adults already have. Adults with at least two years of relevant work experience will receive a standardised education without the basic programme and the internship that younger VET-students have. The educational programmes will be individualised and based on an evaluation of the actual prior learning. Teaching can be conducted differently according to the character and degree of work experience that the adults have. The reform has encountered considerable difficulties, not least because it has emphasised making the duration of study as short as possible for the individual student. The result has been a fall in the number of enrolments (EVA 2016).

In the spring of 2014, the then government developed a comprehensive 'growth plan' for the Danish economy in dialogue with the social partners. The plan was passed in Parliament. It included a grant of one billion DKK (€135 million) to be used to increase adult education and training activity over the following six years. It was estimated that 180,000 more adults would participate in courses as result of the plan (Regeringen, Landsorganisationen i Danmark & Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening (2014). The social partners collaborated in developing the plan, and it presupposed that the public investment should be matched by funding accumulated in the labour market education funds.

In the guidelines for use of the grant some trends could be identified. One was that the teaching of general skills for adults was to be linked more closely to the teaching of vocational skills, and that the labour market training centres were to take care of this. Another was that schemes and economic support for up-skilling to higher level of qualification should be improved, so that more adults could be educated to skilled workers. Also, a number of fees paid by users of vocational training courses (either individuals or companies) were to be reduced in order to increase activity. This must be seen on the background of previous rounds of cutting public expenses, where government had increased the participation fees for all types of adult education. However, the growth plan's

reduction of fees only applied to the vocational training courses, not to general adult education.

The growth plan was followed up by legislation. In November 2014 a bill on vocationally oriented adult education and training was introduced. One of the aims of the bill was to make it easier for skilled workers to enter further education at higher educational levels, for instance by individual assessment of prior learning. Another bill passed in November 2014 introduced by the Minister of Employment mentioned activities intended to reduce unemployment and allocated approximately 152 million DKK (€20 million) to unemployed unskilled workers (or skilled with an old education) aged 30 years or more, to enter VET already in the beginning of their unemployment (Regeringen, 2014).

In line with the priorities of the growth plan, finances were allocated in the 2015 national budget to lower tuition fees at 'selected educations' at academy level (vocationally orientated education programmes at ISCED-level 5). In relation to education at university level, the minister was authorised to set the rules in relation to tuition fees, but there was no money allocated in the budget (Regeringen, 2015).

In February 2016, the new Minister for Higher Education and Research (after a government change in June 2015) introduced a bill that changed the rules for the adult education grant. The bill reduced the support available for adults taking higher education, while allowing a higher level of support for people taking a lower or upper secondary degree in order to qualify higher education. The act came into force July 1st 2016.

The most recent reform initiative is ongoing at the time of writing. In 2016, the Danish Government set up an expert group to come up with suggestions for a reform of the adult education system. The mission of the group was stated as to "analyse and present possible solutions for adjusting and improving, focusing especially on companies' and adults' needs for competence and on quality and efficiency in provision" (Ekspertgruppen for Voksen, Efter og Videreuddannelse, 2017, p 10, own translation). The group presented its report and recommendations in June 2017. In general, the recommendations follow earlier policy, with a focus on coherence and partnership in the system, more recognition of prior learning, and flexible and efficient institutional management. One new recommendation is the establishment of a voucher system, involving individual education accounts where employees can accumulate resources (obtained through individual negotiation with employers) for funding continuing education (see also section 3.5).

After the publication of the report the tripartite discussions (involving the Government and the organisations of employers and employees) have been initiated on the topic of general and vocational adult and continuing education. The agenda for the discussions (Regeringen, 2017) focuses on two themes: a stronger, more coherent and flexible system of adult and continuing education; and, a more balanced funding of work-related adult education. An important issue will be how to handle the money accumulated in the labour market competence funds that were established in 2007 following collective negotiations. These funds are based on general fees paid by employers and they are used to pay for trainee wages and adult participation in vocational education. However, activity has not kept pace with payments and excess funds seem to be accumulating. The tripartite discussions are ongoing.

### 3.2.2 *Main legislative act(s) governing the provision of adult learning*

Below is a list of the laws currently regulating adult education and learning, including acts on the structure and content of programmes and acts on institutions and funding. Since legislation is frequently updated the year of the most recent version of each act is mentioned.

General adult education:

- Act on general adult education and the recognition of prior learning in relation to the subject in general adult education, the higher preparatory training and education to secondary school (AVU Act; most recent version 2013);
- Act on higher preparatory examination courses (HF; most recent version 2015);
- Law on Institutions of general secondary education and general adult education etc. (most recent version 2016);
- Act on Preparatory Adult and dyslexia education for adults (most recent version 2016).

Adult vocational education:

- Act on labour market training, etc. (most recent version 2014);
- Act on vocational training and higher education (further education) for adults (most recent version 2017);
- Act on vocational education (including provision for adult vocational education – most recent version 2017);
- Act on open education (vocational adult education) etc. (most recent version 2017);
- Act on institutions for vocational education (most recent version 2016).

Popular adult education:

- Act on popular adult education, educational voluntary associations, adult education centers and, 'open' universities ('Folkeoplysning' act, most recent version 2011).

Transversal:

- Act on Special Education for Adults (most recent version 2015);
- Act on Danish courses for adult foreigners (most recent version 2015).

All Danish legislation is available online through the website <https://www.retsinformation.dk>. However, none of the laws listed above are available in English translation.

The more specific curricula of programmes are prescribed in government orders. These are generally developed in ministerial task forces with representation from the educational institutions. For labour market training courses, they are developed in trade committees, with representation from the state, employer associations and trade unions.

### 3.2.3 *Main strategy(-ies)*

The most important strategic document is 'Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning' which was in 2007 (Danish Ministry of Education, 2007). The document was not a result of focused strategy development, but was a report to the European Commission summarising Danish education policy. It drew on the work of the Danish Globalisation Council, a high-level task force established by the Prime Minister and including also other ministers, chairmen of the key employer and employee organisations, other stakeholders and experts. The Globalisation Council focused on education and research, seeing a high level of educational attainment and good educational opportunities as some of the most important preconditions for strong national competitiveness and welfare.

The lifelong learning strategy uses a broad concept of lifelong learning, including all types of education that people may engage in through the life course. For adult education and learning the report describes a shared responsibility with a division of labour between the different actors in the field and lays out some key goals to be promoted.

The shared responsibility envisaged is that individuals are responsible for continuously developing their competences: enterprises are responsible for developing the development of the competences of employees in line with the needs of work and the labour market; the social partners should contribute to the development of competences and to learning at work; and, authorities should 'provide a good framework, relevant education programmes of high quality and the necessary incentives to ensure that everyone in the labour market has good opportunities to participate in adult education and continuing training' (Danish Ministry of Education, 2007, p 21).

The goals defined are:

- Everyone shall engage in lifelong learning;
- Adult education and continuing training efforts must be effective and flexible. They shall support good job opportunities for individuals, good competitiveness in enterprises and high employment and prosperity in society;
- Adult education and continuing training must provide everyone with opportunities to improve competences – not least those with the lowest level of formal education;
- Adult education and continuing training must reflect changes in the qualification requirements and needs of the labour market (Danish Ministry of Education, 2007, p 22).

Since the publication lifelong learning strategy, no comprehensive strategic platforms for adult learning have been presented by Danish governments. A reason for this could be that education policy during this period has increasingly focused on other sectors of education, in particular basic school education (primary and lower secondary) and higher education. Another reason could be that the system of adult learning and education in Denmark is well developed (and participation is high) so that needs for change mainly manifest themselves in the sub-sectors of adult learning. It may be concluded that the shared responsibility and the general goals defined in the 2007 report are still a valid characterisation of Danish adult learning strategy.



### 3.2.4 *Main implementing act(s)*

The types of provision, policy initiatives and legislative acts described above all contribute to the implementation of national adult learning policy. Targets with short-term end dates have generally not been defined.

### **3.3 National quantitative policy targets**

In some areas general quantitative targets have been set for Danish education policy. The most prominent example is the objective that 95% of the youth cohort should complete an upper secondary education. This target was set in 1993 by a Social Democratic government and although it has proven to be extremely difficult to realise it has been confirmed by different governments. Recently the current government has announced its intention to revise the target; the new formulation is to be that 90% of people 25 years of age should have completed an upper secondary education (Regeringen 2017a, p.27) There are also quantitative targets for higher education. The most recent version, proposed by the current Government, is that at by 2025 least 50% of people 30 years of age should have completed a higher education, and that at least 60% of new higher education graduates find employment in the private sector (Regeringen, 2017b, p. 111).

Since the target groups include adults of a maximum of 25 and 30 years of age, adult learning programmes in general, vocational and higher education will to some extent contribute to meeting these targets. However, no quantitative targets have been defined for the sector of adult learning and education as such.

### **3.4 Quality assurance**

Institutions for adult education and training are obliged to control and document the quality of their work. For institutions of general adult education (VUC) and institutions of labour market training (AMU) this mostly is done by the institutions themselves following ministerial guidelines. For instance, AMU-centres are obliged to use the web-based system 'Vis kvalitet' [Show quality] where participant's evaluation of courses are summarised. An element of external quality control is also present; the independent governmental institute 'Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut' (EVA) can be called by ministries, institutions and others to evaluate educational institutions or programmes in the field covered by the Ministry of Children, Teaching and Gender Equality.

For instance, EVA is evaluating the new vocational education scheme for adults (described in section 2.2.6). For higher vocational education the system is different. All higher education institutions, including those offering adult education, have to be accredited at regular intervals by the Danish Accreditation Council. Accreditation decisions are based on comprehensive documentation and a set of recommendations form an administrative accreditation unit, ACE Denmark.

### 3.5 Future policy developments

The contribution of recent reforms and initiatives to the priorities of the European agenda for adult learning 2015-2020 focus mainly on supply and take up. The funding provided through the growth plan is expected to significantly improve enrolment in adult vocational training through schemes for up-skilling to upper secondary and lower tertiary skills levels, and through the lowering of participation fees in vocational training.

As mentioned in section 3.2.1, the most recent policy suggestions adult learning was presented by an expert group in the summer of 2017 (Ekspertgruppen for Voksen, Efter og Videreuddannelse, 2017). The report presents eight recommendations for improving the coherence of Danish adult and continuing education. They are:

- One coordinated 'entrance' to the many types of education available for adults. Both for individuals and for companies it is important to be able to quickly get an overview, apply for participation and receive reimbursement;
- Increased use of assessment of prior learning so that adult learning can be based on persons' actual skills, regardless of where and how they have been acquired;
- Employees should be able to have personal education 'accounts' to increase the real opportunity to participate in adult education, continuing education;
- Establishment of a national system for analysis and monitoring of the needs for adult learning so that changes in the labour market and the character of work can be quickly converted into continuing education;
- Strengthening of local and decentralised cooperation through partnerships between actors in adult and continuing education, business development and employment regulation;
- Experiments with competence clusters in order to improvement the adaption of education efforts to the needs of the labour market. This should help cover specialised competence needs and create close dialogue between companies and educational institutions;
- An organised effort to improve basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) in the workforce. This is seen a prerequisite for ensuring a good benefit from employee competence development;
- Increased flexibility in organization and implementation of adult and continuing education.

Based on these recommendations the expert group also presented some more specific suggestions for the system of labour market training courses (AMU), aimed at making this type of provision more focused and stable through allowing more national competition between schools and perhaps 'slimming' the offer of courses with public funding.

## 4.0 INVESTMENT IN ADULT LEARNING SYSTEMS

### 4.1 Total investment in adult learning and change over time

Information about the total investment in Danish adult education and learning is not readily available. This must be seen as result of the fact that there are many types of provision and that different ministries and public agencies have the responsibility for them. A detailed study of the yearly state budget could perhaps give a picture of those public investments that come directly from the state (not those coming from municipalities), but that would be a significant task.

Summary information about the current situation is given in the recent report from the expert group on adult and continuing education. This information is presented in table 4.1:

**Table 4.1 Investment in Danish adult education and learning 2014/2015**

	Public funding of education	Public support for adult students	Student and employer funding
General adult education (2014)	2500 million DKK	1700 million DKK	(not available)
Labour market training (2015)	735 million DKK		552 million DKK
Continuing and higher adult education (2015)	320 million DKK	83 million DKK	(746 million DKK)

Source: Ekspertgruppen for Voksen, Efter og Videreuddannelse, 2017, p. 33. 1 million DKK equals 134.379 EUR

The figure on student and employer funding is not directly stated in the report, but is calculated from the information that student and employer funding of education costs in these programmes constitutes 70% of the total funding.

Some types of adult education are probably not included in these figures, for instance upper secondary vocational education for adults. It should also be noted that the expert group was not able to obtain any detailed information about the collective competence funds (see section 3.2.1).

### 4.2 Public national investment

As noted, it is difficult to get an overview over the investments in adult education and training. Analyses of the investments are sometimes made, most often not by the state but by different stakeholders. This report will draw mainly on a comprehensive analysis done a few years ago by the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) and supplemented with other sources.

Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills  
Full country report - Denmark

The DA analysis includes both public and private adult education and training. Privately provided courses are typically shorter than courses in the public system, so the volume of public adult education is higher than suggested by the table. The figures only cover people in employment, not the unemployed, who often participate in publicly funded adult education in order to improve employability.

Expenses for publicly provided adult education and training fall in two groups:

- Expenses for educational institutions. This is covered partly by the state, partly by contribution from labour market training foundations and partly by fees for individual participants, paid either by themselves or their employers. Most comes from the state except for higher adult education, where participant fees cover around two thirds of the cost;
- Compensation for employees participating during normal working hours. This is provided partly by the state, which gives economic support for adult students under two schemes, one for general and one for vocational adult education. The rates are defined in relation to the unemployment benefit. Employers then often supplement the compensation to bring it up to normal wage level.

Based mainly on the yearly public budgets, the DA analysis calculates the public investments in adult education and training over a 5-year period up to 2012 (DA 2012, p.34).

**Table 4.2 Public investments in adult education and training, in million DKK (2012 level)**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
General	1400	1800	2400	2100	2600
Vocational	3200	3900	3200	2200	2400
Higher	1500	1800	1900	1900	1700
Total	6100	7500	7500	6300	6600

*The figures do not include popular adult education under the Ministry of Culture*

*1 million DKK equals 134.379 EUR*

The reduction of public investment is mainly due to the fact that rates for state compensation to employees were reduced during the period. According to the DA analysis the share of compensation covered by the state fell from 51% in 2011 to 34% in 2012 (DA 2012 p.36). This was partly an outcome of discussions about how much the state should fund courses designed to meet the specific needs of companies.

The figures in table 4.2 are not directly comparable to those in table 4.1, but it could still seem that investments in vocational and higher adult education seem to be considerably lower in 2014 and 2015 than in 2012. This fits with the fact that activity in labour market training (AMU) has been falling and also that an analysis from the Danish Evaluation Institute has shown falling activity in higher adult education (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut 2017). Furthermore, revision of the criteria for public support to adult students has meant that much less support is being given to such students in higher education programmes.

As noted above a recent reform initiative has been the 2014 comprehensive 'growth plan' including a dedicated grant of one billion DKK (€135 million) for increasing adult education and training activity over a six-year period, estimated to result in 180,000 more adults participating in courses. The grant focuses on vocational adult education and on semi-skilled workers to skilled level and well as skilled workers to short-cycle higher education.

### **4.3 EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF)**

#### *4.3.1 Structural fund support planned as part of 2014-2020 financial framework*

As a member of the EU Denmark has over the years received considerable economic support for adult education and learning from EU structural funds. Especially support from the European Social Fund (ESF) has contributed significantly to the development of human resources in the peripheral regions (Cowi 2009). ESF support allocated to Denmark in the years 2014 – 2020 amounts to €206.6 million. According to the data on financial support to the Member States between 2014 and 2020, available in July, 2016 for the European Commission from Operational Programmes for the ESF, the planned financial support from the European Union for the investment priority most directly targeting adult learning, i.e. Investment priority 10.3 – Enhancing access to lifelong learning, is €38.8 million.

#### *4.3.2 EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF) provided as part of 2007-2013 financial framework*

According to the data on financial support to the Member States between 2007 and 2013, ESF support allocated to Denmark in the years 2007-2013 amounted to €254.8 million. This was considerably higher than the amount in the later 2014-2020 budget. Information about ESF support to Denmark for more specific purposes is not readily available.

### **4.4 Effectiveness of investment**

The effects on adults are often debated, and some research has also been undertaken, including register-based econometric analyses as well as surveys and qualitative studies. The research generally confirms that there is a positive correlation between adult education and employment (Kristensen & Skipper 2009a; Kristensen & Skipper 2009b; AE-rådet 2013; DEA 2014; Bolvig et al, 2017).

As regards effects of the support from EU structural funds a recent evaluation (Erhvervsstyrelsen & Danske Regioner, 2016) shows that education measures have considerable impact. The analysis covers 150 initiatives started in 2012, and co-funded by structural funds. The analysis reports the estimated employment and turnover effects in targeted private companies, by comparing with non-targeted companies. On this basis it is estimated that some 4,200 new full-time jobs have been created, and some 1,750 of these are due to initiatives in education and competence development.

## **5.0 ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING POLICY**

In general, the Danish system of adult education and training offers versatile possibilities for participation. There are relevant types of education available for different purposes and for different groups of users (Illeris 2004). Two strengths of the system can be highlighted. One is the balance between general adult education, provided by the adult education centres (VUC) and vocational adult education and training, provided by the labour market training centres (AMU). Both types of education have in recent years established better links to the ordinary education system, for instance by the AMU being moved from the Ministry of Employment to the Ministry of Education, and the VUC's also offering full-time upper secondary degrees (the HF degrees).

The other strength is the introduction of the system of adult higher education from the year 2000, providing opportunities for adults with skilled or professional degrees to educate themselves to a higher level within the institutions of the ordinary higher education system. This system formalised the recognition and validation of prior learning, with relevant work experience being introduced as a criterion for enrolment and part of the education programme.

The following sub-sections assess the existing policy through the lens of the six key success factors for effective adult learning policy that have been identified in a recent study.<sup>2</sup>

### **5.1 Develop learners' interest in learning**

As documented by participation rates, Danish learners generally have strong dispositions towards learning. This is a result of long-time developments starting in the 19th century, as described briefly above. The different social groups – first the small farmers, then the industrial workers, then the professionals – have developed dispositions for learning in interaction with both social movements and public educational institutions, and the manifested needs for learning have led to expansion and institutionalisation of public adult education (cf. Salling Olesen and Rasmussen 1996). Especially in adult vocational training the social partners have been and still are strongly involved in developing curricula as well as in governing the educational institutions.

The different sectors of adult education have tended earlier to be too 'inward looking', but the system of guidance that has been developed in recent years (Zhang 2016) provides better transversal overviews for adults wanting to educate themselves. In recent years there has been falling activity, both in labour market training (AMU) and in higher part-time education. In both cases the fall can be seen as result of changes in the schemes and

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<sup>2</sup> Key success factors, indicating the strength of evidence (available in all EU languages): <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/policy-tool/key-success-factors>; Study "An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe" by EC (2015): <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/final-report-20150817-en.pdf>

opportunities for funding of adult learning that influences the interest in learning. While overall participation is still high, these are warning signs for Danish policymakers.

## **5.2 Increase employers' investment in learning**

The vocational adult education run by the AMU centres is based on a principle of sharing costs between the employers, the employees and the state. The employers and the employees contribute both individually (through participation fees) and collectively through training foundations established through collective negotiations on the labour market. According to the DA analysis cited earlier, the companies pay about half the cost of vocational training, but this includes the topping up of wages for employees participating during normal work hours. The funding principles for vocational adult education have been revised several times, but the state continues to make a major contribution to the funding of upskilling.

Although a significant part of adult vocational education is privately provided and generally without external quality control, the systems of AMU and part-time higher education mean that most of the education activity takes place within the publicly regulated system, with generally recognised curricula, certificates and degrees and with external quality control. AMU courses are work-based in the sense that they often consist of short periods of teaching and learning at the AMU centre interspaced with being at the workplace, and that they relate directly to participants' work experience and specific needs for skills. Part-time higher education is less work-based, although students often draw on and elaborate their professional experience. There is no doubt that the introduction of part-time higher education from around year 2000 has motivated employers in the public sector to invest more in educating employees. For both AMU and higher education, forms of work-based learning could and should be developed further.

The complexity of the adult education system is often pointed out as a barrier to employer investment in learning. Especially, small and medium-sized companies find it hard to obtain an overview of opportunities and conditions for educating their adult employees, and this may mean that they refrain from using the public system with the result that employees do not get the systematic training necessary to confront present-day conditions (Ekspertgruppen for Voksen-, Efter- og Videreuddannelse, 2017, p 36 f.).

## **5.3 Improve equity of access for all**

The description in this report shows that The Danish system of adult education provides good opportunities for adults in work and for adults seeking to improve their general qualifications to a higher level, for instance in order to commence a higher education. Adult education (especially vocational) is also available to unemployed persons, but how much and under what conditions depends on labour market legislation and the rules for receiving benefits. These rules have often changed, but the general trend in recent years

is to move unemployed persons quickly into either temporary employment (with public economic support) or vocational courses.

The recent policy of targeting adult student support at lower levels of adult education shows the dilemma involved: on one hand it probably improves equity of access, on the other hand it probably contributes to limiting adult learning educational activity at higher educational levels.

The vocational parts of Danish adult education are strongly connected to a traditionally organised labour market, where many conditions are regulated in collaboration between employer and employee organisations. But social changes including globalised business and platform economy are increasingly changing this picture, and to many people in part-time or temporary jobs the labour market-based vocational education and training is not available.

There are other groups where opportunities are restricted. One is persons with some kind of disability. Legislation makes sure that education is in principle available for these, but funding is not always sufficient, both because this is a very diverse group with many different needs, and because funding is most often to be provided by the municipalities, whose tax basis is limited. The other is immigrants and refugees, a group that has become much larger in recent years. Most difficult to provide is education for refugees without asylum or other kinds of permit. This is a new problem, surrounded by political controversy, so it is difficult to get an overview. The problem is limited by the dominant Danish policy of returning refugees to their places of origin as much and as quickly as possible.

#### **5.4 Deliver learning that is relevant**

The Danish system is strong on this aspect. As described above there are relevant types of education available for different purposes and for different groups of users; the involvement of the social partner especially in the AMU system means that the needs are well reflected in the curricula, and a reasonable level of public funding means that participation is possible for most people. As supplement to the involvement of the social partners, different types of skills forecasting are also undertaken, although not on a regular basis.

The system of part-time education for 'parallel competencies' described earlier, defines the different levels of competence and the possible pathways through the system. One weakness of this institutionalised and relatively stable system is that it is segmented according to levels of education and qualification. While modern work is increasingly organised as collaboration between employees with different types and levels of education and competence, the adult education system seldom allows for instance skilled workers and university college graduates to participate in the same courses. Another weakness is that innovations may be difficult, because it needs to be recognised from many sides before being implemented.



### **5.5 Deliver learning that is of high quality**

As mentioned above most of the education activity takes place within the publicly regulated system with external quality control. Most adult education institutions are formally independent organisations, but funded and controlled by the state through procedures of reporting and accreditation. There are demands on teacher qualifications in the different parts of the system. Teachers in general vocational education are to have the same qualifications as those teaching at equivalent levels in the ordinary system – lower secondary or upper secondary school. Teachers in vocational adult education often have training and work experience as skilled workers in the relevant trades, but have to undergo in-service courses in teaching and learning in order to work as teachers. Opportunities for continued professional development are limited compared to the opportunities in the ordinary system, which tends to be more visible to political decision-makers than adult education.

### **5.6 Ensure coherent policy**

This is maybe the weakest aspect in Danish adult education. Adult education policy has generally been well coordinated with other policy areas, including labour market policy and cultural policy. Currently, however, relatively little attention seems to be given to adult education, while there is much focus on reforms of the unified primary and lower secondary school ('Folkeskole') and upper secondary vocational education. One example is the almost complete silence which Denmark greeted the results of the PIAAC survey (Cort and Larson 2015). Very few funds for research in adult education and learning are available, and most often they are not provided by the state but by stakeholder and/or think tanks. The recent report of an expert committee on adult learning emphasises the need for more systematic knowledge as well as for a simpler and more coherent 'entrance' to the system of adult education (Ekspertgruppen for Voksen-, Efter- og Videreuddannelse, 2017)..

Coordination at the regional and local level is also a problem; the division of labour between the different institutions of adult education is in principle clear, but because funding systems encourage schools to compete for students and development projects the lines between general and vocational adult education sometimes become blurred (Rasmussen and Staugaard 2016). The establishment of regional VEU centres mentioned above was as a response to this; but there are indications that more is needed. The coordination maintained by VEU-centres is horizontal; it connects educational institutions at the same level. However, some degree of vertical coordination, involving institutions of higher education, is also needed. Better coordination is also needed with other regional actors, such as those administering the regional implementation of EU structural funds.

The qualities of the Danish system of adult education and learning are the result of long-term developments and gradual institutionalisation. The last important structural reform was the introduction of part-time vocational and higher education in year 2000. The most recent reforms are either minor structural or institutional adjustments or changes in funding – often forming a cycle of cuts and restorations of funding levels.

## **6.0 STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Strengths and weaknesses must be seen on the background of employment and participation in adult education and learning. The Danish employment rate thus meets the Europe 2020 target of 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed, but it will still be a challenge to reach the national 2020 target on 80%. The employment rate for low-qualified adults has been fluctuating around 61%, but was 63.5% in 2016, the highest level since 2005. Danish adults' participation in adult education and learning has traditionally been high and continues to be so. The 2016 participation rate of 27.7% is almost double the ET 2020 benchmark of 15% and even the low-skilled adults comfortably exceed the benchmark with a participation rate of 19.4%. However, the 2016 Danish participation rates show a distinct fall from the year before, when the rate was 31.3 % for the 25-64 population and 21.7% for low-skilled adults.

### **6.1 Strengths**

The Danish adult education system has many strengths. In summary they are:

- Adult education in Denmark is well institutionalised in a system of different but coordinated programmes, institutions, and funding systems. Funding is based on combinations of state grants, individual participation fees and (for vocational education) collectively organised contributions from the social partners. The level of participation fees is for the most part not prohibitive. There is good quality control. Especially for part-time higher education there are strong links to ordinary (full-time) education. Especially for vocational education (AMU) there are strong links to the social partners;
- The adult education and learning system is versatile. The four different types of adult education (general adult education, vocational adult education, popular/non-formal adult education and part-time higher education) offer relevant types of education and learning for different purposes and different groups. The different types have developed in interaction with social groups and movements through the long history of adult education in Denmark. This has contributed to a high level of motivation for learning as an adult;
- These factors together contribute to the high level of participation in adult education. This gives basis for some optimism that adult education can help meeting some urgent current challenges. Global reorganisation of work continually reduces the demand for unskilled labour in Denmark, and these people need to be up-skilled. Also, the growing group of immigrants, arriving in Denmark as adults, need both general and vocational adult education.

### **6.2 Weaknesses**

However, some weaknesses in the system can also be identified:

- Regional and local coordination between the different types of adult education is too weak. The availability of different types in regional and local contexts increases

the possibility of matching demand and supply, but funding systems encouraging schools to compete as market actors reduce the clarity of divisions of labour in the system. This may also have contributed to the lack of innovation currently characterising Danish adult education. In order to create conditions for innovation in such a system, new ideas should be encouraged from 'above', and funds for experimenting with them should be made available. This is not the situation at present;

- While the adult learning system is versatile, it is also complex, and this can imply participation barriers both for individuals and for companies and other collective actors. For individuals, education and career guidance makes the system more permeable, but research indicates that companies – especially small and medium-sized companies – need a more clearly structured system to navigate;
- The vocational part of the adult education system faces challenges in responding to modern conditions in work and the labour market. It tends to be segmented according to levels of education, but modern work is increasingly organised as collaboration across types and levels of education and competence. Also, the types of work and employment emerging from globalised business and platform economy do not fit well into the established conditions for participation in and funding of vocational adult learning;
- There is a long-term trend to give higher priority to vocational and higher adult education than to general and popular adult education. This is understandable, given the need to keep the competences of employees up to date and to up-skill many in the labour market, and also given the growing interest among professionals in part-time education. But some balance must be kept; popular adult education gives vital contributions to well-being and citizenship, and general adult education is necessary to give many adults access to higher education, for instance professional bachelor degrees in welfare work. Cuts in funding and increases in participation fees should not be allowed to undermine this;
- Adult opportunities for some groups are too limited. One group is adults with special needs caused by some kind of disability. For them there is legislation based on sound principles, but provision (mainly from municipalities) is often not up to standard. Another group is immigrants and refugees.

## **7.0 FURTHER POLICY REFORMS AND ORIENTATIONS NEEDED**

In spite of the many strengths of the Danish adult education system there are some areas where weaknesses show and a change of policy is needed. These are (as argued above):

- Better regional and local coordination between the different types of adult education and their institutions should be established. Coordination should be both horizontal and vertical. One possible initiative could be to dedicate a share of funding to cross-sector educational activities, only to be released when institutions documented collaboration on these initiatives;
- Better and more coordinated knowledge and information about adult learning should be provided. Paradoxically the versatility of Danish adult education systems means that the knowledge available is fragmented because it depends on documentation through different ministries and agencies. For instance, yearly summaries of the overall investment in adult education should be provided;
- The access to adult learning for companies – especially small and medium-sized companies – should be improved. This calls for a combination of measures including clearer structure of the adult education system, simpler procedures for releasing available funding, better coordinated (and less marketing-styled) information and guidance;
- Funding for general adult education and popular/non-formal education should be improved in order to avoid undermining these parts of the adult education system. The state could raise the level of activity-based grants for general adult education and it could oblige municipalities to a certain level of funding for popular/non-formal adult education;
- Educational provision for adults with disability and special needs should be improved. Relevant educational institutions exist, but municipalities should be obliged to a more systematic and fair funding practice;
- More relevant education opportunities for adult migrants and refugees should be developed, This should also be done for persons without work permits or seeking asylum. This calls for cross-sector coordination and collaboration as well as for innovations in teaching and learning.

In order to achieve these improvements, a further policy initiative is needed:

- Innovation in adult education policy and practice should be encouraged and given better conditions and funding. In connection with this, more adult education research should be initiated and funded. This could be done through comprehensive innovation programmes. Several such programmes have been run successfully in the ordinary education system.

## 8.0 SUMMARY

At 77.4% in 2015, the Danish employment rate for 20-64 year-olds meets the Europe 2020 target of 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed. But given the trend of recent years, where the rate has been relatively stable between 75% and 76% only to rise a little in 2015, it will probably be difficult to reach the national 2020 target of 80%.

The employment rate for low-qualified adults has been falling for some years, but in 2016 rose to 63.6%. The participation in adult education and learning is high in Denmark. The 2015 participation rate of 27.7% is almost double the ET 2020 benchmark of 15% and even the low-skilled adults comfortably exceed the benchmark with a participation rate of 19.4%.

However, participation rates are currently falling, and this should be carefully considered by policy actors. Participation rises with the level of education; among adults with a vocational degree (the middle-qualified group) it is generally 5 or 6 percentage points above the level of the low-skilled adults. There is a distinct gender difference in participation in lifelong learning; the rate among Danish women (37.3% in 2015) is much higher than among Danish men (25.3% in 2015).

In general, the Danish system of adult education and training must be characterised as well developed, offering versatile opportunities in a publicly regulated system of different but coordinated programmes, institutions, and funding schemes. There are still notable weaknesses and challenges, however, and some of them have become more marked in recent years. The system is segmented in different types and levels of education, and the vocations parts are embedded in a traditional organisation of the labour market. This makes it difficult to respond to the demands of new technologies, more integrated work organisation and more individualised employment relations.

Another weakness is that vocational and higher adult education has steadily been given higher policy priority, argued from the need for skills and competences in the labour market under the conditions of globalisation. There is a risk that this will undermine the conditions and quality of general and popular adult education, which also serve important functions in society.

No general structural reform of Danish adult education training is needed, but some improvements are possible:

- Re-establishing the balance in policy focus and funding between vocational and general/popular adult education;
- Better access to the adult education system for companies;
- Providing better and more coordinated knowledge and information about activity and investment in adult learning;
- Encouraging and giving better conditions for innovation in adult education policy and practice;
- Establishing better regional and local coordination, both horizontal and vertical, between the different types of adult education and their institutions;

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- Improving educational provision for adults with disability and special needs as well as for migrants and refugees.

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ANNEXES

**Annex 1: List of adopted legal acts, strategies, laws**

Name	Date of adoption	Short description of content
Act on labour market training etc	26 March 2010	Change of the act; new chapter introduces VEU-centres for collaboration between general and vocational adult education
Law on Folk High Schools, continuation schools etc.	20 December 2013	Change of the law; the folk high schools are moved from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Education
Law on vocational education etc.	16 June 2014	Change of the law following agreement on reform of vocational education; introduces new system of vocational education for adults
Act on state support for adult students	31 May 2016	Change of the act, targeting support at education at primary and secondary level. Students at this level get an amount corresponding to 80 pct. of the unemployment, students at higher level get 60 pct.

**Annex 2: Inventory of policy interventions**

Name of intervention	Source (with hyperlink)	Budget	Outputs	Which of the 6 building blocks for successful adult learning policies does it target? (tick all relevant)						Further details/description (purpose, duration, responsible entity etc.)
				Fosters learners' interest in learning	Employers' investment in learning	Improve equity of access for all	Learning that is relevant	High quality learning	Coherent policy	
Act on labour market training etc,, adopted 26 March 2010			Establishment of VEU-centres for collaboration between general and vocational adult education		X		X		X	
Law on Folk High Schools, continuation schools etc,			Folk high schools are moved from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Education						X	

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adopted 20 December 2013										
National 'Groth plan' includes major grant for learning (mainly vocational)		1 billion DKK (135 million Euros)		X			X			To be implemented over 6 years
Law on vocational education etc, adopted 16 June 2014			General reform of vocational education including new system for adult vocational education	X	X	X	X		X	
Act on state support for adult students, adopted 31 May 2016			Targets state support at adult students at primary and secondary level	X		X				

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