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### **Social partner's role in managing the future challenges**

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#### **V INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

**“VOCATIONAL TRAINING, FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY FOR THE CHANGES IN THE  
LABOUR MARKET”**

**18th 19th and 20th June 2007**

### **Introduction**

In Denmark, there is great political attention on vocational education and training (VET) as a key to achieving major political goals.

95% of the Danish youth is to have an upper secondary education by 2015. Today the number is approximately 81%. In addition the Danish government has started a process where the education system takes a central role in meeting the challenges of globalisation. In short the ambition is to take the education system to a higher level – and creating world class education at all levels.

We therefore have massive challenges in adjusting the education system to deal with these ambitious goals. The social partners take a crucial role in adjusting and developing the VET system as well as the higher education system to meet the future challenges.

This paper will focus on the active participation of the social partners in terms of the VET system. The value of this participation and involvement of the social partners is that it guarantees that the content of the individual VET programmes meets the demands of the labour market, and that the qualifications are recognised by business and industry.

## **Education on national agenda**

During the past 5-7 years Denmark has experienced a massive shift in the business structure as a result of the globalisation. A vast amount of industries have moved production to Asia producing massive challenges to the Danish society to maintain its wealth, living-standard and competitive position. In short there has been a shift from an industrialised industry to knowledge-based industry.

As a result the Danish government established in April 2005 a Globalisation Council which over a year had the task to formulate proposals to deal proactively with the Globalisation process.

### **Facts about the Globalisation Council**

The Council had 26 members: 21 high level representatives and 5 key ministers, including the Prime Minister (chairman) and the Minister of Economic and Business Affairs (deputy chairman).

On the Council, the Government has sat together with important groups in society across traditional divides: Employers together with trade unions, and representatives of the major educational and research areas and companies alongside each other.

In a total of 14 meetings, the Council has heard contributions from 48 international and Danish speakers and held discussions with 111 representatives of organisations and other individuals specially invited to the meetings.

In April 2006 the Council put forward its proposals in the publication: "*Progress, Innovation and Cohesion Strategy for Denmark in the Global Economy*"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> More information as well as relevant publications regarding the Globalisation Council can be found on this website: [www.globalisering.dk/](http://www.globalisering.dk/). Choose the English website provided for foreigners

The strategy contains 350 specific initiatives, which especially entail extensive reforms of education and research programmes as well as substantial improvements in the framework conditions for growth and innovation in all areas of society, including entrepreneurship and innovation policy.

As stated in the introduction a main conclusion for the Government is that education and research will take a crucial role in meeting the challenges of globalisation.

In Denmark and the other OECD countries the demand for a highly educated workforce will be increasing as a result of globalisation-process, while the demand for some low skilled will be decreasing. Therefore, a major challenge is to ensure a higher level of education and make everyone able to keep pace with new demands.

Therefore, the Government has put forward a benchmark that - by 2015 - 95% of all young people should have an upper-secondary education and 50% should have a higher education. In addition research and development (R&D) should be strengthened with the objective that public and private companies and institutions should spend a total of at least 3 % of GDP on R&D by 2010. Finally entrepreneurship, innovation and not least internationalisation should be a central theme on all education programmes.

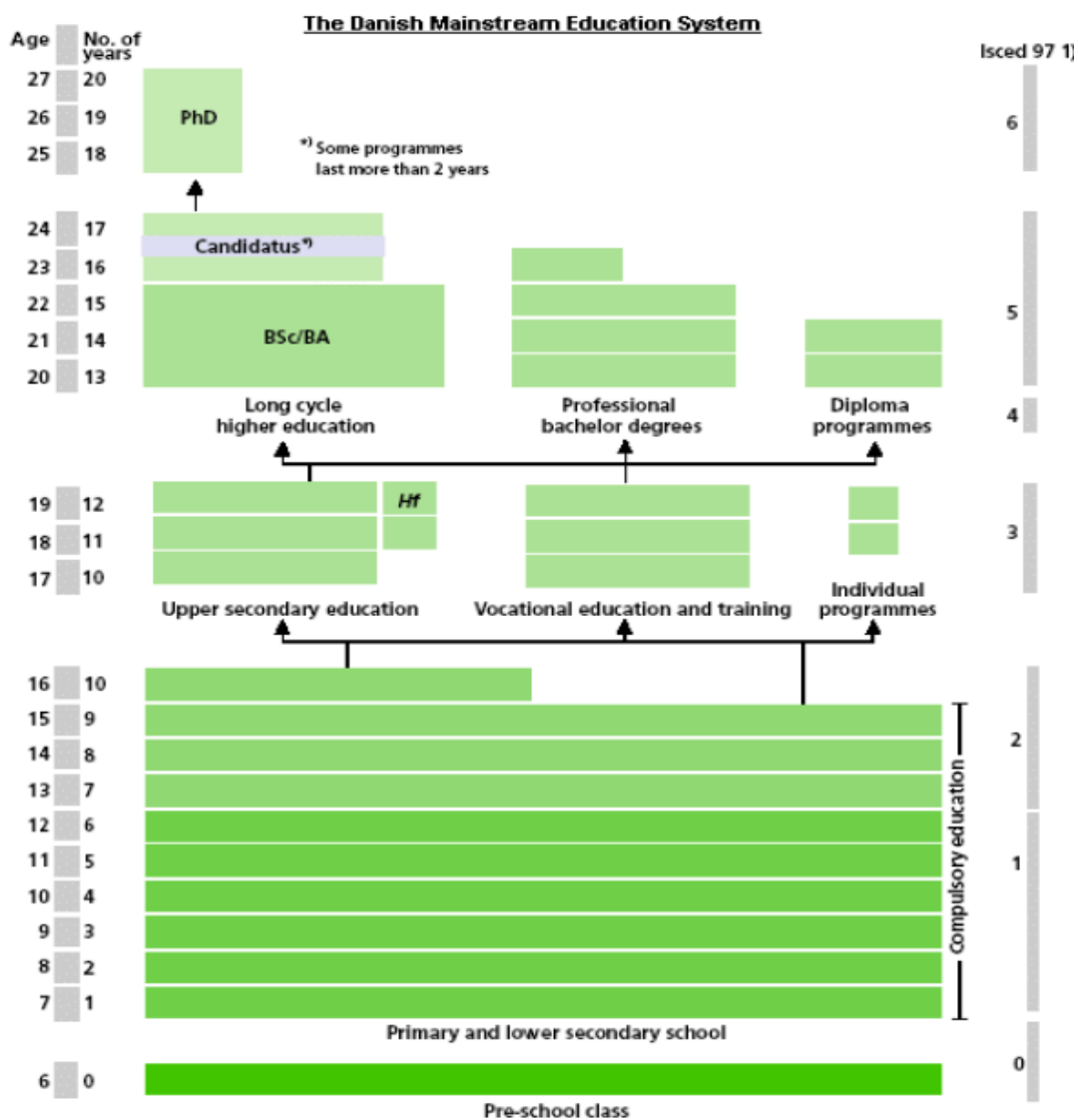
In order to change the framework and institutional settings for achieving these benchmarks the Government has initiated a wide range of reforms within the education system.

Especially within the VET programmes and CET programmes (Continuing Education and Training) and to some degree within the framework of higher education the social partners take a crucial role. This influence and dialogue take place both in terms of implementing the scheduled reforms as above mentioned and in the daily progress of managing the VET and CET programmes.

## Short introduction to the Danish education system

Below the Danish mainstream education system is shown. In short it has four levels:

- Primary and lower secondary education
- Upper secondary education
- Higher education
- Phd programmes



*Primary and lower secondary education* is compulsory for nine years in Denmark. The majority of children begin their formal education in the nine-year public school system.

*Upper secondary education* is specified in general programmes and vocational education and training (VET).

General upper secondary education programmes provide students with an all-round education and prepare them for higher education. They usually have duration of 3 years. There are 3 lines: general, mercantile and technical. In addition there is a Higher Preparatory Examination Course (HF), which exists in two forms – a two-year option intended for young people and a single-subject option intended for adult learners.

The Danish vocational education and training system – VET - is based on dual training, whereby training alternates between education and training in a vocational college, and in-company training. School periods (1/3 of the entire training programme) will alternate with periods of in-company training (2/3). The VET programmes include a basic course, which is broad in its scope, and a main course, in which the trainee specialises within a craft or a trade. Most VET programmes have duration of four years, but the system encompasses programmes from 18 months to 5½ years.

*The higher education programmes* provide occupational competences and build on upper secondary programmes. They are theory-based programmes, some of which include a practical element, which is especially true of the profession-oriented bachelor programmes and to a limited extent the vocational academy programmes.

The Danish higher education system is divided into three levels, according to duration:

- Vocational academy programmes (short-cycle higher education programmes), in technical colleges or vocational academies. Duration of 2 years
- Profession-oriented bachelor programmes. Duration of 3½ years
- University programmes (long-cycle higher education programmes). Duration of 3 years (Bsc) and additional 2 years (Msc).

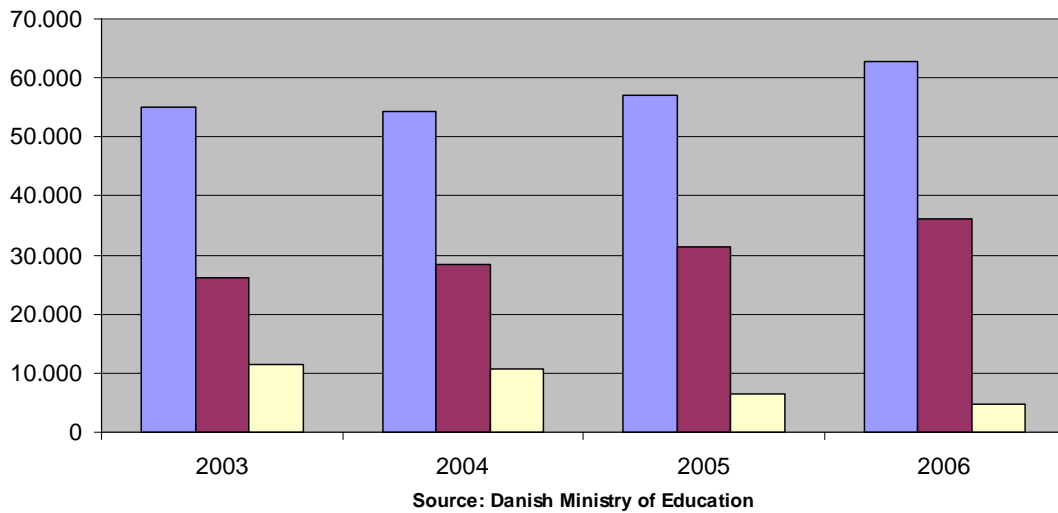
### **Key figures**

- 87.5% of the children begin their formal education in the nine-year public school system. The rest starts in the privately based school system.
- 81% of the population have completed at least upper secondary education (OECD: 68.7 %). 11% will take both a general and a vocational programme.
- 31% of the population has completed a higher education (OECD: 24 %). They are divided into:
  - 16% of students in higher education in technical colleges or vocational academies (Short cycle higher education)
  - 44% of students in Profession-oriented bachelor programmes.
  - 40% in long-cycle higher education programmes (Bsc & Msc)

One of the major focus points of the Danish Government is the employers' ability to provide enough training sites for VET programmes. Obviously, this is crucial if the Government's objective is to be met in terms of 95% of all young people should have an upper secondary education. Thus, there has been a huge pressure on the employers' organisations to provide enough training sites to meet this challenge.

The diagram below shows the recent development in the companies' ability to sign VET contracts, which is the way the activity is measured. For the past four years there has been a positive development and the numbers from 2007 indicate that this development continues.

Development in VET contracts



■ Ongoing VET contracts ■ Number of VET contracts signed pr. year □ Number of students looking for training site

## The role of the social partners in the education system

As stated before VET has been put forward as a central part of meeting the Government's objective that at least 95% of the youth by 2015 should complete an upper secondary education.

At the same time there is an ambition to develop a world-class education system. This is also the case for VET programmes. The challenge is thus to produce attractive education programmes for young people who lack theoretical skills, as well as produce attractive educations for the ambitious and talented student. This is a major task, but it is of utmost importance so that in future VET programmes are not considered a class-B education opportunity.

The Government and the Ministry of Education have taken initiative to launch a major reform of the VET system. It has the following headlines and purposes:

- Reduce drop-outs from VET programmes. On some programmes the drop-out rate is above 50%.
- Implementation of flexible and practice-oriented approach to VET in terms of both managing the system and planning the VET programmes
- Focus on better quality in VET programmes in terms of school periods

- Dividing education and training programmes into levels to meet the different qualifications and ambitions of the students
- Pressure on employers to provide more practical training placements

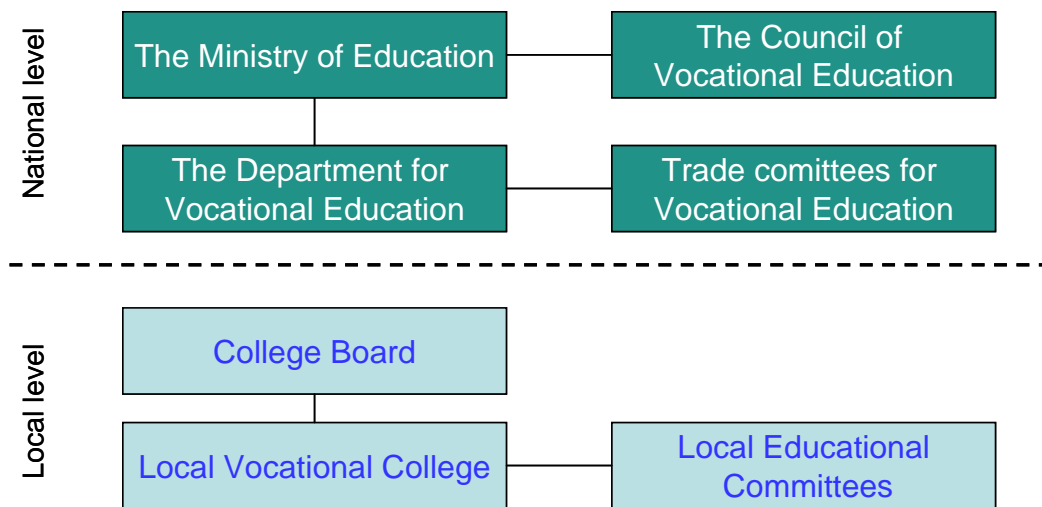
### ***Managing the VET system***

Basically, the VET system's advantage and purpose is based on its flexibility and ability to change in accordance with development within the trade and business development. Therefore, the training programmes are developed in close co-operation with the social partners representing both employers' organisations and trade unions. The obvious advantages of this construction are the following:

- Wishes for new types of qualifications are instantly registered and incorporated in the political bodies and the VET programmes
- High degree of adaptation and flexibility gives students an education that meets the demands of the trades and companies
- Coherence between the market and educational system in terms of qualifications and quality of the VET programmes
- To contribute to a general lift in the qualifications on the labour market in the longer perspective.

In terms of managing the VET system there are 3 levels of regulations where the social partners are equally represented: The Council for Vocational Education, The Trade Committees and Local Educational Committees (LEC). Below the cohesion between the governmental/institutional bodies and the bodies of the social partners are shown.

The task of the Council of Vocational Education is, first and foremost, to consider and discuss general issues common to all vocational education and training programmes (e.g. the goals and structure of the courses, admission conditions, required teacher qualifications, transitional schemes or approval and certification and new vocational colleges).



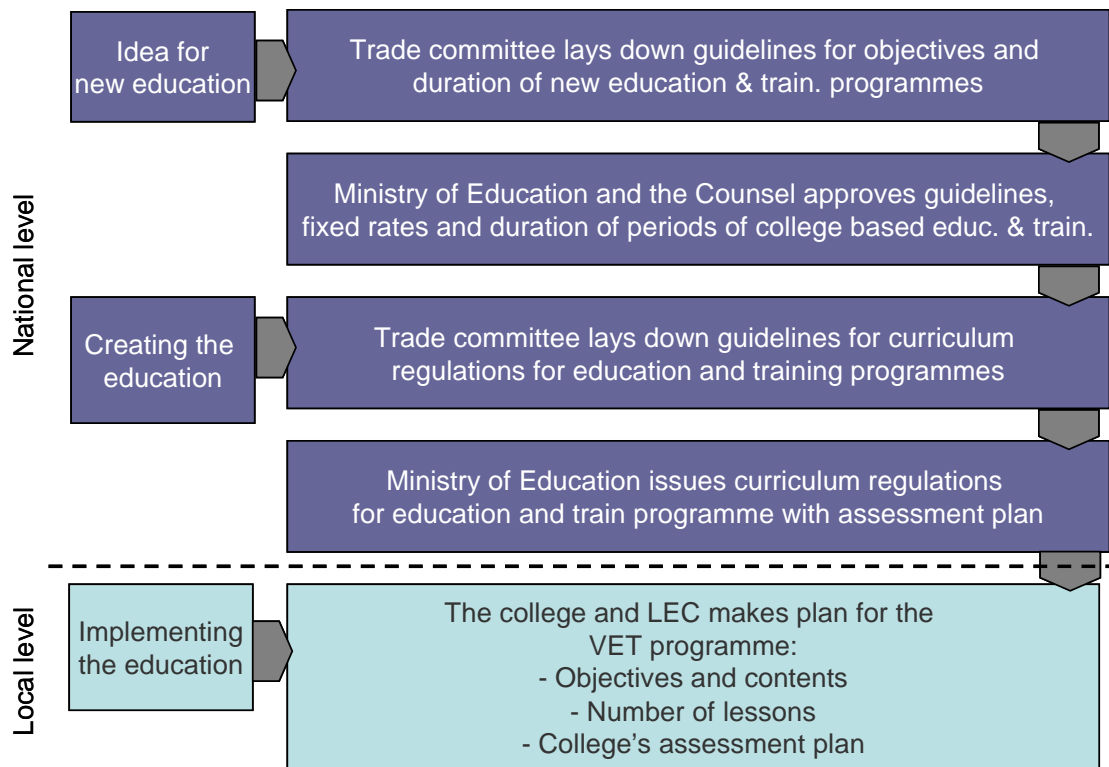
For each individual vocational programme a special Trade Committee is set up, which equally represents the national organizations of employers as well as of employees of the trade in question. Especially the Trade Committees are important for understanding the flexibility and adaptation of the Danish VET system.

The Trade Committees lay down provisions on the contents, structure, duration and evaluation requirements of the individual programme or course. The provisions are recorded in curriculum regulations which must be approved by the Ministry of Education. In addition, the Trade Committees must approve the practical training enterprises and are responsible for the evaluation and assessment of final examinations and the issuing of certificates of education.

At the individual college at local level, the local educational committee (LEC) participates in the planning of the education and training programmes and securing the quality of the education carried out by the local college. LEC is set up by the individual vocational college on the recommendation of local labour market organizations and trade committees. The committee has an advisory and supervisory authority regarding the educational programmes of the individual college.

## Policy making

From an overall perspective policy making in terms of creating new VET education is done according to the diagram below stated. New education and training programmes are created by the Ministry of Education, the social partners and the individual college in co-ordination.



The Ministry of Education lays down the objectives and frameworks of the education and training programmes (Law). This takes place in co-operation with The Council of Vocational Education and the Trade committees.

Then the general guidelines are laid down for the programme. This means that the objectives, scope, duration etc. of the education and training programme are defined. This takes place in at the Trade Committees, where the knowledge of the trade in question is located. The guidelines have to be approved by the Ministry of Education.

In terms of implementing the education, the guidelines are then converted into concrete plans for the education and training. This part of the process takes place in a local, decentralized forum in close co-operation between the local college and the LEC.

It is important to be aware of the fact that policy making is especially facilitated at the Trade Committees. It is from this forum that initiatives regarding new educations and adjusting existing ones are taken for the trades in question. This gives the social partners huge influence, but also responsibility to provide attractive educations and enough training sites.

### **Concluding comments**

There is no doubt that the Danish education system faces huge challenges. The Government has initiated numerous reforms with the objective to prepare both the qualifications of future citizens and the labour market framework to the challenges of globalisation.

One of the major tasks concerning the VET programmes is to reduce drop-outs at one hand and at the other hand to develop attractive educations at different levels. In addition, it is no secret that the Government has focused on the employers' ability to provide enough training sites. After a period of trouble in terms of providing enough training sites, all trades are showing substantial growth rates in establishing training sites.

Another challenge is to create better cohesion between the educational levels and to give young people the opportunity to start a higher education. At this point there is still a long way to go, but initiatives have been taken to improve the situation.

Finally, evidence has shown that co-operation with the social partners in terms of developing education programmes that are in balance with labour market requirements are more likely to provide jobs for the students. It is from this point

of view that the social partners take pro-active part in forming the future education whether it is VET programmes or higher education.

**Useful links:**

- Facts and publications regarding the Globalisation Council:  
<http://www.globalisering.dk/>
- Website for the Danish Ministry of Education (in English):  
<http://eng.uvm.dk/>
- Website for English online publications regarding the Danish education system: <http://eng.uvm.dk/publications/engonline.htm>
- The Confederation of Danish Employers (DA): <http://www.da.dk/>
- The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO):  
[http://www.lo.dk/smcms/English\\_version/Index.htm?ID=2923](http://www.lo.dk/smcms/English_version/Index.htm?ID=2923)