



EUROPEAN  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION  
OF ADULTS

# **Country Report on Adult Education in DENMARK**

Helsinki, 2011



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## Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Denmark. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Denmark as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info[at]eaea.org).



## Overview

The policy and practice of the Danish **adult education system (AE)** can primarily be divided into two aspects, **‘formal’ and ‘non-formal’**. The non-formal has been developed with the principles of **self-governing institutions, life-long learning** without the need for formal examinations, and a drive towards the **recognition of prior learning (RPL)** and validating this prior learning.

In previous decades there was also a **move towards the full inclusion of adult education in to the general education system**, and AE was taking a key role in educational policy in Denmark. This included a long term strategy, aimed to upgrade and strengthen lifelong learning in all sectors of education, as well as the labour market and the society as a whole. This largely focused on quality and capacity, and in **embedding AE** throughout all of the national, regional and local stakeholders, and within Danish society. [1]

However, at the present time (2010) it can be said that the Danish AE system is in a **phase of transition**, and faces many challenges ahead. There has been increasing **pressure on the financial backing** of AE over the past years from both the private and public sector. Taking into account forthcoming proposals and budgets this is potentially set to increase in the coming years, which could cause some real changes in the structure and delivery of AE.

## Politics and Law

There are several ministries responsible for education at different levels. Firstly, the **Ministry of Social Affairs** is responsible for nurseries and **kindergartens**; then the **Ministry of Education** is responsible for **primary, lower secondary and upper secondary** education, **vocational** education and training, **further education** apart from universities, **adult vocational training and AE**. The **Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation** holds the **universities and research** programmes; and the **Ministry of Culture** the **degree courses** at the **Royal Academy of Fine Arts**, **music** academies, schools of **librarianship**, and the schools of **architecture**. Finally the **Ministry of Defence** is responsible for military education. [2]

The political policy for institutional guidance is that educational organisations are seen as **self-governing institutions**, with the aim to ensure broad educational environments with a range of options for students in all regions and all ages. Due to this, it is also policy that the institutions should be able to have **independent and decentralised responsibility** for educational opportunities and development, as well as their **own pedagogical development**. The official primary aim is therefore to ensure a **high level of educational quality** and



broad geographical coverage throughout the country; however that has not always been translated effectively into action on the ground. [3]

Educational and vocational **guidance** is given **high priority** in Denmark, both generally and politically. The overall structure and national targets in the field of guidance are defined in the 'Act on Guidance in Relation to Choice of Education, Training and Career', which was adopted by the Danish parliament in April 2003 and which has subsequently been revised (2006 and 2007). Within this Act the **Ministry of Education** is responsible for **continuous supervision and development of guidance services** in the educational sector. Although the Act on guidance is primarily targeted at young people (up to the age of 25 years), it does also concern services for adults wishing to enter a higher education programme. [4]

As previously mentioned, over the past decade there have been a number of **reforms** which have affected the Danish educational system, including that of adult education and lifelong learning. In 1990 the Act on Open Education opened up vocationally and professionally oriented part-time courses and single-subject studies for adults at vocational colleges and higher education institutions. This was developed in May 2000 with a major reform of the **vocational education and continuing training system**, when the Danish parliament adopted a number of acts which would bring together the continuing training and further education programmes with the aim of creating a more **coherent and transparent** adult education system. The reform comprised a new system of adult education and continuing training, a new form of educational support for adults as well as new grant allocation schemes for institutions offering adult education and continuing training. In the new adult education and continuing training system, the courses are structured in such a way that they **can be compared to levels in the ordinary system**.

This **adult vocational reform** had three main objectives:

1. Providing relevant adult education and continuing training offers to all adults at all levels, from low skilled to university graduates,
2. Improving opportunities for those with the lowest levels of education,
3. Better utilisation of resources,

Reforms also came into force within 2007, which aimed to ensure more coherent youth education by giving the responsibility of the upper secondary schools and higher preparatory examinations to the state. With a view to creating **improved correlation between education for adults**, the state also took over the responsibility for the adult education centres (VUC), preparatory adult education



(FVU) and general adult education (AVU), including education of dyslexics which has been separated from the special education for adults. [5]

## Future trends/key concerns/directions

As outlined in the previous section, the future of Danish AE is currently uncertain. **Financial pressures** and changes in political backing have the potential to cause real changes in both the structure of AE and the delivery of programmes as seen 'on the ground'. This combined with waves of **mergers and changes in legislation** to create a now rather new system and structure which is **still in the process of establishing itself**. As of 2010 it is difficult to predict how the consequences of these changes might manifest, but it is perhaps fair to say that the picture of AE in Denmark may change in various ways over the coming years. General trends however, common with many countries in the ever globalised world, do include issues of **integration and multiculturalism** which is gaining in importance in the society as a whole as well as in political arenas. Also potentially important is the debate over the **validation of non-formal education**, and how to best recognise non-formal learning.

**Guidance** has also previously taken an important role in policy and initiative in Danish AE, as there was a concern that low skilled citizens were not being given the access to the education centres and resources which could best help them. This resulted in **Adult Guidance Networks** being established in 2008 to attempt to bridge this gap between those in need and the resources available. [6]

Between 2004 and 2006 a Government commission aimed to analyse and evaluate the adult education and continuing training sector and anticipate future needs and directions. Although now becoming slightly outdated this is somewhat still influencing the way that the Danish system is aiming, and might highlight some future concerns. Firstly there was a **concern for vulnerable sectors of the labour market**, for instance adults with poor or inadequate reading and writing skills. It also focused on the need for **better motivation** within the field of adult learning, especially related to the numbers of participants. [7] Connected to this is the idea of recognising prior learning, including "**real competencies**" (or non-formal learning skills and life based learning), and flexibility. In 2007 the Ministry of Education then introduced a system of **systematic evaluation and measurement** of the effects of AE-programmes. [8]



## Structure overview

In short, the system of adult education providers and programmes in Denmark can be divided into **Formal and Non-formal** AE. Formal AE comprises of examined education, and vocational training from which students can gain formal qualifications. Non-formal AE is characterised currently by the lack of examinations, and a focus on prior knowledge and skills, however, non-formal learning can also be concerned with the labour market and personal development.

### The formal system includes:

**General Adult Education (AVU)** which aims to provide **competence based** education for adults to improve knowledge and skills at **secondary education level**. The standard syllabus and examinations are adapted to incorporate and recognise the experiences and interests of adults; however the **qualification level is still the same as standard secondary education**. All adults of 18 years and over **have the right to access** AVU, which then also requires the state to ensure the provision of this education in accordance with the law. The programme is partly financed by the state, and partly financed by tuition fees from participants, although they may receive a grant from the government. [9]

**Preparatory Adult Education (FVU)**, which aims to improve **basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics** for adults. This is based on an underlying philosophy that increasing globalisation is also increasing the demands within the labour market, which many are struggling to meet with their basic skill levels. Implementation of FVU was a consequence of the 2001 Adult Education Reform, and the aim is to provide all adults (18 years or over) the possibility to improve and supplement their literacy and numeracy skills so that they will be **better equipped within the labour market**, but also as **citizens in a democratic society**. It also aims to **provide a stepping stone** to further education and training within the framework of the adult education system. Teaching of FVU is designed to interact with the daily life and existing skills of the participants, which means that many of the activities take place within the workplace rather than in educational institutions. [10]

**Immigrant learners:** Non-Danish citizens over 18 years of age with a residence permit and a civil registry number are entitled to a programme for non-native speakers, providing the **Danish language skills** needed to find and maintain a job, complete an education, and to function as citizens in Denmark. Danish for immigrant learners is specifically aimed at adults of non-Danish origin as it does not require any prior knowledge of Danish, and **is compulsory** for those wishing to apply **for permanent residency**. The programme also aims to educate about **Danish culture** and society, which is seen as an equally important aspect for students. [11]



## Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

### ‘Non-Formal’ Learning

#### - Folkehøjskole

Usually translated in English as ‘**Folk high schools**’ and based on the ideas of Grundtvig (as common in many of the Nordic/Scandinavian countries), the Folkehøjskole form an important part of the **non-formal** learning system. They offer **residential courses**, characterised by **mutual learning** taking into consideration prior experiences, and a lack of formal examinations. Although course lengths differ the average stay is 4 or 5 months. **Subjects vary greatly**, covering politics, arts, music, and subjects aimed at personal development such as team building or nutrition. ‘Folkehøjskolernes Forening i Danmark’ (Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark) - or FFD for short - is the national organising body of the Danish Folk High Schools, however each is an independent, non-governmental institution from between 50-200 adult students. [12]

#### - Evening Schools and Study Associations:

Voluntary (non institutional) AE largely comprises teaching, **study circles**, lectures, and **flexibly organised activities**, where fees are charged for participation. The teaching is usually offered at **evening schools** which are free independently to create a framework for their choice of subjects and activities offered. [13] The objective of this kind of ‘**voluntary learning**’ in associations is to strengthen non-formal adult learning, particularly related to **active citizenship** and becoming actively responsible for your own life and part in society. The subjects can be quite varied, including, for instance from sport to politics, and also religious or philosophical socially engaging programmes. [14]

#### - Day folk high schools

Day **folk high schools** offer adult education, especially programmes which have a ‘**learning for enjoyment**’ aim behind them. Courses tend to run from anything between 4 and 18 weeks, and usually the teaching is full time. Many day folk high schools also offer **Preparatory Adult Education** (FVU) (see above for details on FVU). Local authorities can decide to give a financial grant to non-formal adult education or employment-creating programmes within a day high school when the school is an independent, self-governing institution. The local authority decides the form that the municipal support will take, and further conditions and supervision may be required for the grant to be given. [15]





## - University Extramural Departments

Also within the non-formal system are **University Extramural Departments**, which is a **nationwide system with a regional structure** consisting of 4 divisions in the university cities of Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg. There are, in addition, more than 100 university extramural committees working outside of the university cities. The objective of the University Extramural Department is to **disseminate knowledge of the methods and outcomes of research through non-formal adult education teaching and lectures**. Each branch can design its own programme, and also offers courses relevant to their region. The state gives grants for costs involved in providing this service (e.g. payroll for lecturers and teachers, travel allowances and administration), and the Council for the University Extramural Department distributes the grants. [16]

## Formal Learning

Among the most important institutions of formal AE are:

- Language centres,
- Adult Education Centers, (VUC) (see below)
- Labour Market Training Centers (AMU)
- Technical, schools, business schools, agricultural schools and basic social & health service schools. Centres for Higher Education (CVU) and universities are all primarily for young people, but also offer AE. Most are also self-governing state institutions.[17]
- Adult education centres: (Voksenuddannelsescenter, Danish abbreviation: VUC)

Adult education centres (VUC) are the main providers of general adult education (AVU) (see above), and have been independent institutions since 2007 (originally they were governed by region). As well as the main VUC there are also a number of associated satellite departments spread throughout the country. Alongside the AVU programmes these centres also offer education and courses for those with difficulty reading and writing, as well as specific courses for those with dyslexia, and workshop programmes for independent study. These workshop areas are open to all students and are designed specifically for this purpose, providing special equipment, such as computers or video equipment, as required for the subject. [18]



## Non-Governmental Organisations

- Danish Adult Education Association - DAEA

DAEA is an organisation which aims to promote non-formal adult education through **collaboration, information and development**. DAEA represents member organisations within the field, and also aims to raise the profile of, and to document how non-formal adult education can provide citizens with solutions to the challenges which they are facing within today's society. It works with its members to try and ensure they are in the best position to meet challenges and be able to implement their non-formal education values; and to **promote the importance of non-formal adult education in society**. It also acts as an **umbrella organisation** to create the framework within which the non-formal adult education sector can co-operate. [19]

## Vocational Institutions and career-related training

Vocational Training, or more often known in Denmark as either Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) or Vocational Education and Training (VET), is an important part of Danish adult education. There is a long standing tradition of involving social partners and organisations, who have been given a significant influence also more officially in the legal and political guidelines for vocational training which focussed on a sustained and shared responsibility. [20]

- VET -Vocational Education and Training.

The adult vocational training programmes (in Danish arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser or AMU) aim to serve a number of purposes. Firstly, they aim to contribute to maintaining and improving the vocational skills and competences of participants in accordance with the needs of the labour market and to further their competence development. Secondly, they also aim to contribute to solving labour market restructuring and adaptation problems in accordance with the needs on the labour market in a short and a long term perspective. And finally they also work to give adults the possibility of upgrading competences by obtaining formal qualifications in vocational education and training.

Adult vocational training programmes are primarily developed for low skilled and skilled workers, but everybody may participate irrespective of educational background; the only formal entrance requirement is being resident or holding a job in Denmark. The programmes are mainly aimed to be short term training, varying in duration from half a day to six weeks, and these programmes can be combined with education in the same field at higher levels to create a learning 'package'.



The training is delivered in classes or as open workshops where participants may follow different programmes at different levels in the same room with the same teacher, or within the workplace. Normally the training activities take place during working hours, however activities may also take place outside working hours e.g. during weekends or via distance learning. [21]

## e-learning

It can be said that Danish education is quite firmly rooted in a long-standing tradition for learning through 'the living word', or face-to-face learning. Therefore the focus of e-learning has been directed towards online education that emphasises face-to-face seminars and collaborative learning. It has been suggested that this could make the process less flexible, however it also demonstrates the Danish approach to education and a collaborative and interactive process, rather than an individual consumption of knowledge. One institution identified as a large provider of online courses is Dansk Netskole, who provide Web-edu and CISAER supported projects. (CISAER - Courses on the Internet: Survey, Analysis. Evaluation, Recommendation, as part of the Europe wide Leonardo da Vinci programme, see [http://nettskolen.nki.no/in\\_english/cisaer/index.html](http://nettskolen.nki.no/in_english/cisaer/index.html)) [22]

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