

Background and objectives of the REFORM-2000 of the Danish VET system.

1. Short description of the present Danish VET system

The Danish vocational education system - as it is today and as it will still be after the full implementation of the reform 2000 - is an apprenticeship system dated back to the middle ages. The system displays all the traditional features of the apprenticeship within the trades even these features have updated to improve the system with many legislative amendments. The system has been amended eight times since the first legislative proposal in 1857. Before a democratic constitution was adopted in Denmark in 1849 regulations of the guilds were generally based on royal acknowledgement of statutes laid down for every single guild. The statutes of a guild stated i.a. what were the conditions for fostering apprentices and for teaching the actual trade and for their later attainment of the status of Meister in that trade.

In reality the first legislative proposal in 1857 was not intended to regulate circumstances related to the apprenticeship system. In 1857 a law was passed that stated that everyone was allowed to set up business in any trade of his own choice. This was accomplished by prohibiting the existence of guilds in the future. However, this also meant that there no longer were rules and hence any framework for apprentice agreements for young people.

It is widely seen as a piece of great luck that the old tradition for apprentices in the trades was still alive in 1889, so that it was possible to pass a whole new law about apprenticeships. As the first prerequisite for an apprenticeship is a kind of authority within that specific trade and since the guilds had been prohibited the new law stated the existence of a board as a kind of substitute for the guild on educational matters. These boards of the different trades consists of equal numbers of employers' and employees' representatives (with unions in the meantime having come into existence). These boards of the trades (Trade committees" Were assigned important duties: Deciding the objectives for the learning process, laying down the conditions for the individual agreement (contract), checking the quality of the workshop-based part of the arrangement by i.a. assessing the firms taking part in

apprenticeship education, arranging the journeyman's tests and evaluate the apprentices' performance.

In 1889 teaching in schools for apprentices had already for years been arranged. From 1800 onwards there is an unbroken tradition for education in schools as a part of the ordinary apprenticeship. (Hence the terms: Dual system/alternating-/sandwich-based curriculum.) As early as the 18th century the trades related to house-building and to work on the interior of the house had become that technologically advanced, that the guilds saw the necessity to arrange teaching in drawing techniques.

Since 1889 the Danish VET-system has been reformed seven times - with intervals decreasing from 30 years in the beginning down to current 10 years intervals - and represents now a form of the medieval originated apprenticeship arrangement. That means that

- 1) it is possible to start as an apprentice either in college (which most youngsters do) or in a workplace. In order to stay in the course all apprentices must conclude a written agreement with an employer on workplace placement or, alternatively, have qualified himself to obtain an offer from the vocational college offering workplace substitution education.
- 2) different courses are offered in the different trades in a number now amounting to about 90 different trades and in the later part split in two to six different specialisations or branches.
- 3) the duration of the different courses varies from two to - mostly - four and up to five years. The courses consists of alternating college and workplace periods (college periods lasting normally from 20 to a few weeks). The accumulated college part is - in average - weighted by about 1/3 of the whole arrangement.
- 4) over time the college-based part of curriculum has increased in volume and importance, so that you now - in a simplified way - can say that it is the colleges' responsibility not only to teach the general subjects and the more theoretical parts of the vocational subjects, but also - in a workshop setting - to introduce and teach the foundations of the trade: Tools, materials and methods in the vocational part of the curriculum.
- 5) the apprentice has signed a contract with an assigned enterprise for the course period and is thereby engaged as an employee in that enterprise and receive a salary according to the tariffs agreed upon by the labour market. The apprentice is supposed to learn the trade by taking part in the daily working being undertaken in that enterprise.
- 6) the evaluating system is based partly on traditional college evaluation of the college- based part of the curriculum and partly on the results from the journeyman's test arranged by the trades' test-committees.
- 7) the flow of apprentices through the system is based on market principles (the employers' offering of workplace placements and the students demands) modified by the alternative option in college settings (i.e. college-based workplace placement).
- 8) the whole arrangement is supported and negotiated in a very complex tripartite system comprising the government and the social partners.

2. The political background for the Reform 2000

Governmental analyses and reports have indicated that - although the standard and performance of the educational system in Denmark as a whole is good and in general is of a high quality - some malfunctions are apparent. Furthermore, it is obvious that some generally accepted, politically stated high-level goals for the performance of the educational system cannot be fulfilled unless further measures are introduced.

The problems on the political agenda in Denmark related to the VET system are:

- { the quality of students performance needed to be further increased
- { the number of students completing a full youth-education (which means competence as either an upper-secondary academic student or as a journeyman) should be increased and should in very few years amount to at least 95 % of the age group. This point is really a repetition of a political Education-for-All-(youngsters goal, announced in 1994. (*only 71% young completed an education in 1982, 76% in 1991 and 83% in 1999*).
- { the number of students completing youth education and passing on to and completing also higher education (in a shorter - i.e. two-years course - *or* a middle, *or* a longer - i.e.. masters-course) should be increased to 50 % of the whole cohort.
- { the long term tendencies related to the proportions of the mainstreams in the youth-education part of the system should be modified so that more youngsters in the future should attend the different types of vocational courses.
- { the efficiency of the system should be enhanced in order to avoid unnecessary spending caused by slow student progress, waste due to unqualified choices, lack of accountability of elements in related courses and similar inflexible arrangements causing too low productivity.
- { The drop out rate (also) in the vocational training system is too high and shall decrease with 50%

3. The design of the Reform-2000

SLIZE 1

3.1 Main items for a new VET-legislation

The problems and goals became part of the Danish government's educational reform programme early in 1998. And the task for the Minister of Education according to this was to invent proposals and actions supposed to be appropriate means to cope with problems in an goal-oriented direction.

In spring and summer 1998, general agreement with the vast majority of the Parliament and with the social partner's was reached. First on some principles for a VET-reforming plan and later, in the

early autumn of 1998, on a draft of a new legislative framework for the future VET-system in Denmark.

The answer to the problems and principles of the reformed VET-system are:

- { The VET-system must become more attractive and attain higher status in order to enhance the competitiveness and the quality of the system.
- { The system should be simplified, so that students do not necessarily have to make a binding choice between 90 different trades/programmes from the very start. The final choice can be taken immediately or be postponed some time. This means that at the same time students, who have made the final choice, can start according to the specific choice in a course lasting no longer than before, while other students can take their time to find out what they would like to choose.
- { The system shall have a more trustworthy form in the sense that the true capacity of both access to vocational college and offer of work placement places should match with students' needs much better.
- { Flexibility in the system should be significantly enhanced both to give students and enterprises increasingly diversified possibilities and to reduce the amount of wasted time (and thus resources) i.e. related to wrong choices of courses and to making alternative choices when students have already followed a programme for some time.
- { A modernised system should encompass more options for academic supplements to vocationally-oriented programmes offering students the opportunity to be examined in a part of or in a full package of higher education entry requirements.
- { More focus on further and lifelong education perspectives should be visible in a new structure in arrangements and means and in the curriculum.
- { Better opportunities for weak performers should contribute to the realisation of the overall goal of education-for-all-youngsters.

According to this, the main inventions in the Reform are:

SLIZE 2

- { An entirely new „entrance“-construction for all programmes, dividing 90 - until now - different programmes into seven new „entrances“ or „gateways“, each of them leading through a very flexible scheme (the basic-course) to - on average - 13 different main-(principal-)routes to the different trades (these in principle being the same as before the reform).
- { The individual route concept, which means that the route in the entrance (the basic-course) - lasting from 20 to 60 weeks in college - according to an individual plan can vary very much in its content i.e. breath, depth and duration. The following main-course of the full programme can also - but to a much lesser degree - have an individual form.

- { The personal programme (route-plan) and the individual logbook are introduced as means to facilitate the individual route concept in combination with the idea of widening the curriculum and support the personal development and the acquisition of personal or "soft" competencies.
- { The changing the teacher-role and -attitude by introduction and support to tutoring and team-organising.
- { The "academic-addition-option", which means that apprentices must be given the opportunity - along their individual path - and as an ordinary part of it - to follow supplementary academic programmes in order to pass entry-examinations for higher education. It should also be possible - as an option - eventually to supplement these examinations to obtain a full upper secondary certificate incorporating both vocational and academic qualification.
- { The "part-qualification-option" offering a new possibility to low-achievers - as an alternative to a dropping out - to follow a planned individual route giving the student a certificate of specific vocational skills, but on a level lower than that of the journeyman.
- { A quite new statutory arrangement combining the colleges' offer of specialised courses for the specific part of the stated programme, with the labour market authorities offer of further education training courses in the like topics. This possibility will enhance the flexibility in both kind of systems.

3.2 A short description in practice of the *new* Danish VET-system

SLIZE 3

Students who wants to follow a VET-programme must follow a track or path, which in principle is individual and which therefore has to be planned, argued and agreed upon, and so must be written down in the so-called personal education plan. The path starts with a basic-course and is followed by a main-(principal-)course.

For most students the basic-course lasts from 20 to 60 weeks. For most students a minimum of 20 weeks is mandatory. More time is optional. The reasons for using more time can be of manyfold: More time needed by slow learners, acquisition of academic abilities, undefined or unclear career plans, a change in career plans etc.

The basic-courses are organised by the vocational colleges **in 7 so-called „entrances“**.

SLIZE 4

Each of them comprised by 10 to 20 different programmes according to trades. The personal education plan must as a minimum indicate those elements mandatory for acquiring access to (as a minimum) one main-course leading to a specific journeyman's test.

The student can start his programme either on a VET-college attending a basic-course or in an enterprise if an apprenticeship-contract is signed. In the latter case the apprentice must also pass the basic-course some time before.

The basic-course is a VET-college arrangement offering the students elements (modules) of learning possibilities from which paths or routes can be constructed on an individual basis according to the specific needs of the student in relation to his learning abilities and his future plans.

Having passed assignment/examinations related to the preferred main-course (programme) and the barrier posed by the fact, that it is an indispensable condition for continuing in the programme that you have been able to either sign an apprenticeship contract or you have been offered and have accepted the conditions for a college-based workplace-substitution.

In order to continue in the programme, the apprentice needs to follow a main-(principal-)course organised in an alternating scheme, part-time in the enterprise (if not in the college-based alternative) and part time in college settings. An important part of college-based part is courses in the most specialised subjects related to the trade and branch in question. It is intended, that apprentices and enterprises should have a wider framework to select their preferred mix from the available range of shorter courses arranged for that purpose and for further education purposes together.

It is also intended that more flexibility should be part of the main-course construction not only in the above mentioned framework (related to specialised courses) but also e.g. by offers of general/academic courses for added competence.

The programme is finally in its ordinary form completed by the passing of the journeyman's test. A new option will be the possibility of supplementing the - eventual - general/academic competence to a complete certificate giving access to university studies or to obtain part of that.

An essential part of the Reform-2000 is the possibility for a student to follow a programme quite individual in form and content and completing it by the assigning of a part of an ordinary VET-competence. This possibility should be offered to low-achievers not able (eventually in their first attempt to complete a full programme).

4. Conclusions and summarizing

I shall finish my presentation by summarizing the most important backbones in the new Danish vocational training system.

SLIZE 5

The Reform-2000 can be summarized as follows:

{ **Opportunities:** Reform-2000 introduces a number of new opportunities at the same time as all the opportunities in system - as it is right now - will still be existing

Among the most important new ones are

- v A much wider range for combinations and supplementary units will exist.
- v Combinations between the vocational and the general programmes (up to double competence) will be possible.
- v Weak performers will be given quite new options.
- v The diffuse starters having not yet decided their preferred programme can be taken hand of within the ordinary arrangement.

{ **Incentives:** The wide range for the individual designing of the course-plan is meant also to give more incentives to the students.

Also it is a new feature of the vocational system, that choosing that alternative no longer means, that you are writing off the general/academic possibilities.

If a balance between supply and demand of workplace placements succeed, the then much higher odds for being able to fulfil the preferred programme can be supposed to increase the incentive to choose the vocational alternative.

{ **Costs:** There is nothing new in this field. As it is, admission is free. Students having an apprenticeship contract will receive a salary (also when in college); being in the college- based alternative you will receive a substitute for the salary. Students not having the contract and not being in the alternative arrangement will have state grants.

{ **Constraints:** In the Reform-2000 many of the past constraints will be taken away. The most important "open up" is supposed to be the effect of changing the admission-structure from being based on about 90 different programmes to 7 new, much broader composed "entrances". In the past form it was necessary for the student to decide among 90 options before starting and so that the first 20 weeks spent in the system are confined to education only related to that specific programme. Today students who are sure of their selection of programme and carrier route can still pick up the necessary specific courses, and at the same time other students can "surf" across the opportunities in order to clarify their preferences.

It follows from what has already been said, that Reform-2000 aims at increasing in a substantial amount

- v the transition from lower secondary school to the youth education sector (third level) and to some extent increase the proportion of the cohort that attends the VET-sector.

- v the transmission in the VET-system so that all (at least 95 % of the cohort) students graduate either with a journeyman's certificate or the like or with a grammar school-diploma/general upper secondary certificate (or a combination).
- v the transition from youth education to higher education, so that 50 % of the cohort will enter higher education.

At last it shall be shortly mentioned, that "the pathway"-concept seems to be supportive also to a handicap-policy based on the inclusion principle.

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