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## Denmark as a further training Utopia ?

The interplay between firms,  
training providers and the state

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September 1999

*Paper prepared for The ILM Conference, Aberdeen, 11-12 October 1999*

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## 1. Introduction

During the last three centuries education and training have been legitimised in many different ways. Among these are salvation, civilisation, recreation, participation and vocation. Both in academia and in politics the vocational aspect of education and training has seemingly become the primary reason for the temporary interest increase in these fields.

There now exists a broad consensus in Denmark as well as in most other European countries, that education and training has become the necessary tolls in getting and/or maintaining jobs. Meaning that in the competitive world of today, it has become an issue of utmost importance in the task of securing future jobs. This goes for children, for the employed who wish to hold on to their job or advance into one more attractive, and for the unemployed in strengthening their chances in getting one. Moreover, education and training are also seen as a way of creating more equality and, as something new, as one of the most important aspects in creating a high-growth economy. Therefore, trade unions, employer organisations and government agree on the high significance of education and training.

In the 1990s, Denmark has often been mentioned as a forerunner in applying further training. Most of the collective agreements in Denmark grant the employees right to further training. In no other European country are the state expenses on further training so high per capita, nor are so many firms offering further training to their employees or so many employees making use of this right (Eurostat 1997). Moreover, further training of the unemployed is an important part of Danish labour market policy.

This paper will concentrate on adult and further education and training for the employed (in the following called adult and further education or further training). It will be argued that despite of this leading position in adult and further training numerous barriers exists in implementing the further training extensively in Denmark. Such barriers are imbedded in the positions of both employers, employees and providers of further training. These problems as well as the state response to these problems will be analysed and it will be discussed if the answers presented are sufficient.

## 2. The institutional set-up of further training in Denmark

The state expenses for operating the schools and educational centres for adult and further training are around 6 billion Danish crowns (0.55 billion £), including the running of the courses. Depending on the courses the state also pays compensation for lost salaries (*godtgørelser*) to participants. The compensations are not a 100-pct. wage-compensation, but are equal to the highest unemployment benefit, which is at the most 80 pct. of the income (for

the lowest income brackets) and lower for people with higher incomes. The state expenses on the compensation schemes run at approximately 6.5 million Danish crowns (0.73 billion £) a year - and that in a country with a labour force of only 2.8 million people. In conjunction with the government activation policy, 2/3 of the spending is allocated to the unemployed. The expenses have tripled in 10 years (Arbejdsministeriet et al. 1999: chapter 2). Relatively speaking the 12.5 billion, adult and further education budget equals that of the Danish defence which in turn equals half the public hospital expenditure.

Despite of this heavy financial engagement of the state, the private providers do have a fair share of the market for adult and further education, as can be seen in table 1. However, the shorter duration of the courses means that the public courses are far the most important in quantitative terms.

Table 1: Participation in Adult and Further Education

	Number of course participants	Number of participants full-year persons	Average duration of courses
Private courses	1 360 000	34,100	1 week
Public courses			
Adult education (VUC)	670 020	136 970	10
Open education	93 700	24 500	5
Labour market ed. (AMU)	187 300	21 400	2
Folk/Day high school	266 100	14 620	7
Other	78 900	13 200	7
	44 020	29 150	?
Total	2 030 020	136 970	

Source: (PLS Consult & Jensen 1996:119)

A second feature of the system for adult and further training is the separation of the responsibility on several ministries. The Ministry of Education is responsible for Adult Education (*VUC-kurser*). Adult Education offers a Leaving Examination (*Afgangseksamen*) at the first and secondary school (*Folkeskolen*) for those adults who never made it. Adult education also offers single-subject courses at the upper secondary (*Gymnasium*).

The Ministry of Education is also responsible for Open Education (*Åben Uddannelse*). Open Education offers adults the opportunity for completing degrees at the higher education level. The courses are equivalent to university- and business schools-degrees. These courses takes place at Centres for Adult (*Voksenuddannelsescentre (VUC)*)(Haahr et al. 1996: 118).

The Ministry of Education is moreover responsible for the courses at the Day High Schools (*Daghøjskolerne*). These schools offer courses for people with little or no previous formal education and have mostly been used in activating unemployed people in their 20s (PLS Consult & Jensen 1996:120).

The Ministry of Labour is responsible for the Labour Market Courses (*AMU-kurser*). These are (mostly) short-term courses aimed at upgrading the qualifications of semi-skilled and skilled labour, mostly in the manufacturing sector. It has become increasingly common to combine these courses, especially when used in activating the unemployed, which make the average length of the courses longer than the standard duration (two weeks). Participation in the courses often enables semi-skilled workers to receive certification of national coverage or in obtaining a status as skilled labour (*ibid.*). Until a few years ago these courses only took place at Labour Market Course Centres (*AMU-centre*) but now other institutions like the Technical Schools (*tekniske skoler*) and the Trade Schools (*handelsskolerne*) are acting as suppliers such courses as well (Arbejdsministeiret 1997:4).

Lastly, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for courses offered at the Folk High School (*Folkehøjskoler*), a true specialty of the Danish further training system. These schools date back to the 19th century enlightenment circles, and have been linked to the widespread co-operative movement among the farmers (*Andelsbevægelsen*) (PLS Consult & Jensen 1996:119). The schools operate on the idea, that education should be an ongoing process that enriches the life of the individual and prepares citizens for democracy - (in some way Lifelong Learning, but without the vocational dimension). The students are normally in their twenties who live on the school premises for a period of 3-8 months.

A third feature of the Danish system of further training is a strong influence of the labour market parties on all levels. At central level, the tripartite Educational Council (*Uddannelsesrådet*) holds strong influence as to what the content of the further training programs and courses are. The Educational Council advises the Minister of Labour on matters concerning vocational training programs, including the dimensioning of training activities (Arbejdsministeriet 1997:6). The 50 Further Training Councils (*Efteruddannelsesudvalgene*) which are developing the Labour Market Courses are also tripartite constructs.

Adult and further education pertaining to the Ministry of Education have a similar structure, but there are several councils which advise the Minister of Education, one for each area (Vocational Education Council (*Erhvervsuddannelsesrådet*) for technical and trade educational, Agricultural Education Council (*Landbrugsuddannelsesrådet*), Social- and Health Education Council (*Rådet for Social- og sundhedsuddannelserne*) etc. The councils are

not al tripartite by legislation, but most of them are in reality. The councils under the Ministry of Education also deal with ordinary education. The only cross-ministerial council is the Adult- and Further Education council (*Voksen- og Efteruddannelsesrådet*) however they do not hold any formal competencies, but act as advisor to both the minister of Labour, the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Education (Arbejdsministeriet et al. 1999, chapter 5).

The labour market parties also hold influence in the local and regional tripartite boards which were established and have functioned from the 1960s onwards. Their task has been to support the workings of the schools and educational centre responsible for vocational training. From the late 1980s into the 1990s, the local and regional tripartite boards have been accorded greater responsibility. In the case of the schools and educational centres related to further training, a number of legislative reforms have decentralised competencies to local and regional tripartite boards connected to each school and centre and have in addition set up new tripartite committees. However, most of contents of the courses are negotiated at the central level. What are being decentralised are the economical responsibility and the responsibility for each school or centre to decide which courses should be supplied. The decentralisation of some of the decision making power has been followed by market-simulating forms of regulation (New Public Management), which have given the local and regional demand more influence on the supply and opened up for selling of firm-specific courses.

A fourth feature of further training in Denmark is the large number of suppliers compared to the number of people engaged in further training. On the public site alone there are 644 schools and educational centres offering adult and further education (Arbejdsministeriet et al. 1999, chapter 3). The number has more than tripled during the last 15 years (Mandag Morgen 1999a).

A fifth feature of further training in Denmark is the very small users. More than 75% of the firms have less than 10 employees and only half of the work force work in firms with more than 100 employees (Due et al. 1997).

### 3. Barriers related to the firms and their employees

Some of the barriers for a more extensive use of adult and further education in Denmark are general, i.e. they are barriers that every country must face, while others are due to the structure of the Danish adult and further educational system.

Scepticism from both employers and employees pertaining to training has to be faced. The central problem for the employers is that they cannot be sure that their investment in their employees' qualifications will pay off. Speculations of employees leaving the firm and the subsequent investment with them hence benefiting somebody else, perhaps even a competitor, adds to the

uncertainty of entering further educational schemes. The high mobility, geographical as well as functional, of the Danish labour adds to this problem (Smith 1998:114). The problem is minimised if enough employees receive further training and the employers are able to think of them selves as part of a local labour market and think of further training as a common good. In this way, a self-perpetuating process can be established leading to more training (Kristensen & Høpner Petersen 1994:6). However, the problem will not be totally eliminated in this way, because firms investment in qualifications are sometimes very task specific.

This is not the only problem related to the employers. Since small companies most often are not involved in further training as much as larger firms (EIROnline 1999), the strong representation of small firms and “micro firms” with less than 10 employees in the Danish economy are a barrier to further training. There is also a qualitative dimension to this problem. It seems that smaller firms do not so often have a personnel function (Navrbjerg 1999:318; Arbejdsministeriet 1996:69). In the absence of a personnel function, training will often be used add hoc, for instance in conjunction with downturns in the production. The core task of a personnel manager is thus to develop individual training plans. In 1996, more than 70% of firms with more than 100 employees had developed individual training plans for their employees, whereas the numbers were 50% for firms with 20-100 employees and less than 25% for firms with less than 20 employees (IFKA 1996).

Size, however, is not the only problem. Firms using lots of computer-aided production-technology are in general investing more in further training than other firms, because new technology continually requires new operational skills. This is partly because due to new technology being expensive which leads to a heightened utilisation rate concern. Firms with a continuous flow in production are in general also over the average investors in training. This is because a continual production flow makes planning, for instance personnel management, much easier (Navrbjerg 1999: 318). However, Danish manufacturing is characterised by a relatively large share of low-tech firms and many sub-contracting firms.

Even if a firm has got a personnel function, it is not sure that all employees have an individual training plan and receive training. Segmentation between functional flexible core-workers, shifting between several tasks, and numerical flexible peripheral group of employees, doing routine task (Atkinson 1987) are also seen in Denmark. Sometimes only the core workers are offered the opportunity for further training, while the peripheral workers are not (Navrbjerg 1999:318; Mandag Morgen 1997).

Since 1993 further training have had to face yet another problem. The up-turn in the Danish economy have made the firms to busy to use the further

training system. This pertains in particular to firms without a personnel function.

The upturn is also part of the reason for the lack of qualified labour, which is starting to appear in some branches. Theoretically, this lack of skilled labour should give firms an incentive to invest more in training. Instead, some low-tech industries are aiming for less qualified youngsters, partly because of this development (Sommer & Sørensen 1998). In these industries, there are a real danger that demographic development and the economic up-turn will trap part of Danish manufacturing into competitive strategies that come to rely on low-cost/high-volume/low-value-added production, simply because the firms lack the skills to produce higher quality goods and move up-market. This has been the situation in British manufacturing for many years (Keep 1993:95). If too many firms use this strategy, it will be very difficult to start the self-perpetuating process leading to more training.

Another barrier is that employers have the impression that on-the-job training is enough and therefore the need for further training is not present (Sommer & Sørensen 1998). If an employer does not have an actual need for up-skilling, he needs a long term strategy for the firm to invest in training anyway - and many, especially small, firms do not have such a strategy.

Not all barriers are employer related. Other barriers are located in the employee realm. A number of young people in EU-countries never receive formal vocational qualifications. In Denmark, it is no less than 35 % - only Holland is worse off. A great share of the 35% did start a vocational education but have since dropped out. Some of them have had bad experiences with the educational system, and therefore they are not motivated in entering further training schemes. Adult and further education have to face the problems of the earlier experience of these "dropouts" - and that is not an easy task.

Other barriers are related to age. Age has become an increasingly important issue for two reasons. Firstly, today the time-span of major cultural changes and thereby of knowledge is considerably shorter than that of a human life span, and accordingly education and training must prepare individuals to face a novelty of conditions throughout life. It is therefore no longer functional to define education as a process of transmitting what is known; it must be defined as a lifelong process (Knowles 1996: 82-83). Therefore, people have to be prepared to learn at every stage of their lives. Secondly, the population is getting older in Denmark like in many other European countries. Older people are in general not so committed to learning as the young (Arbejdsministeriet 1996:16). Moreover, half the population over 49 years have not received more than seven years of education - and that was a very long time ago. That is one reason for the fact, that the readiness for going back to school is not as

extensive as it could be. Another reason is that both the capacity and the incentives to learn drops during a lifetime. These relations are reflected in the actual use of the further training system, which in the case of Labour Market Education courses drops from 10% for the employees aged 25-34 to 6% for 45-54 years old down to 3% for employees aged 55-66 (ibid.:6). Because of the ageing of the population, the lack of investment in the qualification of the older employee is problematic, not only for the employees.

However, the very limited use of the further training system by older employees are not only to be explained by a lack of readiness and motivation on the side of the employees. Reluctance of the side of the employers is also part of the explanation.

Another dimension of motivation is the economic incentives of employees to partake in further training. A lot of unskilled and semi-skilled workers do not have any ambitions about making carriers or in developing their skills to any great extent. They sell their time, not their soul, to the employers in order to get a wage to raise a family and to make their dreams come through in the spare time (Højrup 1984). Because of the relatively high wages for unskilled and semiskilled workers in Denmark and because of the strong presence of performance-related wage systems, these workers are able to earn a higher wage than many salaried white-collar workers, even without working more than the normal 37 hours a week. These workers are not particularly interested in further training - especially if it means that their wages drop (Sommer & Sørensen 1998).

A third barrier is teamwork related. Implementing different varieties of teamwork can be a way to raise productivity in the firms. However, a side effect of team building and team spirit can be that it is ill taken if somebody suddenly leaves the team. Even if the purpose is for training. A leave which the team could benefit from in the long run therefore holds a risk of achieving the just the opposite (ibid.)

#### 4. Barriers Related to the Training Providers

The large number of different providers of further training, public as well as private, are in some way an advantage of the Danish system of further training, because it gives opportunity for choice. However, the many providers supply so many training programs and courses that most firms are getting confused. Some of the courses are very similar, which complicate decision making further. According to one analysis, as many as 60% of the firms in the public sector, 53% of the municipalities and 33% in the private sector report according to their own experience a lack of overview when it come to the supply of further training (SFI & Konsulentfirmaet Paula Helth 1999). Obviously, this points to the existence of an information problem, which means that the transparency of



the market for further training is low. The reason for the low transparency has among other things to do with the separation of the responsibility and a lack of co-ordination between ministries.

Another problem is that those firms which do have an overview of the further training system do not consider the programs and courses offered by the public as part of the further training system useful for their firms (Mandag Morgen 1997). This is the case even though representatives from the trade unions and employers organisations have a strong influence on the content of the courses at the central level and the mix of the supply at the local level.

Adding to the problem of training supplies is the institutional set-up for regulating the system, which try to promote co-operation as well as competition. It is illustrated by the governments attempt to overcome the negative effects of New Public Management (NPM) instruments. When NPM devices spur competition in attracting students among schools and educational centres the consequence seems to be an oversupply of courses resulting in low market transparency, low quality of the courses and cancellations of courses. Another negative effect is the subjective advice of individuals and firms seeking information on training given by each school or centre. The government has tried to force schools and educational centres to co-ordinate course supply through legislation, but such attempts have been futile so far. These attempts have not been able to overcome the Prisoners Dilemma of the individual school or educational centre: The temptations to competition are in most cases greater than the incentive to co-operate (Mailand, forthcoming). Adding to the co-ordination problem is the large number further training suppliers.

## 5. The response of the state to the barriers

In addition to the day-to-day steering of public further training system, the state have tried to address some of the problems listed above. Here, the focus will be turned to the recent attempts of government to solve these problems.

In 1996, the government established a fund for personnel planning, targeted SMEs. During the period 1996-98 barriers having to do with personnel planning in SMEs and labour supply were addressed. Both individual and networks of firms have been able to apply for SME funding. The idea being, that small firms by pooling their resources would be able to establish a personnel function. However, the fund was limited to 40 million Danish Crowns (3.6 million £) (Arbejdsministeriet 1996:71).

The labour supply barrier due to the demographic development was addressed in this period as well. The government has addressed this barrier by making the early leave schemes less lucrative. Other adjustments have likewise contributed to overcoming demographic barriers. It becomes more attractive to stay in the labour market for people over 60. Moreover, the labour market

parties as well as the government have been trying to promote seniority policy at the workplace to make firms think of the older employees as a resource equally important of the young. However, it is doubtful whether this will be enough. The shorter turnover time undermines the value of experience, and therefore the status of older people. This structural change cannot be overcome only by appealing to employers and employees in campaigns, conferences and adjustments of the leave schemes.

Even though 1999 should have been a year of a major adult and further education reform a government white paper dealing with this reform have been postponed several times. Their proposals long overdue were only recently published (August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999). It has therefore not been possible to say what the actual content of the new reform will be, although the government white paper gives some idea of what steps will need to be taken.

The report addresses several of the problems mentioned above. The aims of adult and further education are according to the report not only to secure a more extensive use of the further training system, but also to secure a high quality of the supplies and an opportunity for all groups to be able to use the supplies. Highest priority is given to problems of public spending and labour market segmentation. The report recommend that public spending to a much larger extent than previously should be targeted employees with no or few formal qualifications. This has been recommend because there exists a political ambition to cut spending, while counteracting segmentation in the labour market, and because employers (or employers and employees if the funding of training become a collective bargaining issue or training funds will be set up) most likely are willing to finance qualifications for more educated employees (core-workers). Hence, firms or the labour market parties should carry a greater share of the financial burden of further training, as is the case in neighboring countries. This argument of the committee implies that the existing system include a dead weight burden.

Moreover, the committee recommends that only adult and further education leading to formal qualifications should be publicly financed. Today, a great share of the courses are not leading to formal qualifications even though a large share of the workforce do not have any such. These changes would as a side effect have, that the firms to a larger extent are forced to use personnel planning, by making it less attractive to send the employees to a Labour Market Education course just because of the low costs.

The committee gives lower priority to the transparency problem, the lack of corporation between the suppliers, and to personnel planning. The committee nevertheless shows documentation for the transparency problem and suggest that only one compensational scheme should be available instead of three and that the central tripartite bodies should be amalgamated or co-ordinated to a

larger extent. Furthermore, the report suggests compounding adult and further education into one ministry. There are however no signs that this will happen in the near future - the resistance of the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Education and their civil servants by far outweigh the will to change.

Also addressed in the report is the lack of cooperation between suppliers. This lack is mentioned as a contribution to the transparency problem. The committee has accordingly proposed that co-operation between course suppliers should be rewarded financially. That is if they succeed in establishing joint advisory committees catering firms and individuals. However, as the committee mentions, there are some barriers to this process, because present legislation prohibits that suppliers create new independent units, even though co-operation is obligatory (Arbejdsministeriet et al. 1999: chapter 2). Moreover, it is questionable - as long as the *raison d'être* of each school is to be run without a deficit - whether these attempts to balance out co-operation and competition will prove successful. The committee report admits that there exists ministerial confusion concerning the choice of governance, but it also fails to suggest a credible solution to this problem.

While the SME lack incentive to invest in personnel management, the incentive structures of the employees with little or no formal competence and the other problems mentioned above are touched upon in the report, no ways of solving these problems are proposed.

It is interesting that the Danish tripartite governance tradition is not seriously questioned in the report. In recent years, some civil servants have unofficially been questioning the strong influence of the labour market parties, because they have seen the labour market parties as conservative reform counterparts. The labour market parties have been accused of being defenders of yesterday's industrial society and hence an obstacle to implementation of new and modern education schemes (Mandag Morgen 1997; 1999b). Nevertheless, the report states that the influence of the labour market parties are necessary, because they represent the users, and therefore know what the new qualification demands are. Because the blueprint of labour market parties help firms and participants in mutually recognising the content of the courses, they are also deemed necessary partners. But, the division of labour between the labour market parties and the public authorities are said to be "not appropriate in all cases" (Arbejdsministeriet et al. 1999, chapter 2). It is, strangely, not said in which cases and how the division of labour is not appropriate. The reason can be, that it would be too controversial to say so.

One can ask, if the state responses so far and the proposals in the government white paper are sufficient and appropriate. The proposed targeting of resources to the lesser-educated workforce is sympathetic and necessary if the cost of adult and further education have to be curbed. However, there is a

real danger that a cutback in public expenditure will lead to a decline in the overall amount of further training. That is especially so if the willingness of employers or the labour market parties to finance further training for their core employees does not turn out to be as widespread as the committee presumes and if the problems of quality, co-ordination and co-operation related to the further training supply are not solved. As of now, it is very doubtful that this will happen.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, it has been argued that despite the leading position of Denmark in adult and further training there exist a number of barriers for a more extensive use of the further training system in this country. Some of the barriers for a more extensive use of adult and further education in Denmark are general, i.e. barriers that every country has to face, while other barriers are due to the structure of the Danish adult and further education system.

On the employers side the most important problems are: Employers cannot be sure that their investments in employees qualifications will pay off; lots of manufacturing firms in Denmark are either small, low-tech or subcontractors (these types of firms are for miscellaneous reasons not among the heavy investors in employees qualifications - typically they do not have any personnel function, which is a necessity in gaining a strategic use of qualifications); in some firms only core-workers receive further training; shortage of qualified labour make some firms follow a low-skill path.

On the employees side the most important barriers are: The large amount of dropouts who no longer have the motivation needed for re-entering education; the workforce is getting older, and older people are in general less motivated for further training than younger people; unskilled and semi-skilled workers do not always have career ambitions, especially not if it means that their wages drop; some types of team work are a barrier to further training, because leaving the team can cause irreparable damage to the functioning of the team.

Yet, other problems are related to the suppliers of training. These are: Low transparency of courses offered due to the large number of suppliers on the market and the lack of co-ordination between suppliers; an entourage of useless courses (seen in the eyes of firms and individuals); an over-supply of courses and subjective advice of firms and individuals, because of hard competition between suppliers.

The state have responded to these problems by establishing funds for personnel planning in SMEs and by trying to extend the labour supply by making the early leave schemes less attractive. A recently published government white paper will be the starting point for negotiations on a new

reform of adult and further education. It suggest, that the firms and/or the labour market parties should carry a greater share of the financial burden of further training, as is the case in neighboring countries. The report recommends that future public spending is targeted the lesser-educated part of the workforce and that focus is more firmly aimed at courses leading to formal qualifications. Moreover, the report recommends that the course differences should be highlighted and that some of the central tripartite bodies should be amalgamated in order to overcome the lack of supply transparency. In addition, training suppliers should have economic incentive in co-operating. Common bodies should be set up to secure closer co-operation and an objectively sounder course in advising individuals and firms taken. However, it seems doubtful that the government response and the suggestions in the white paper will strengthen the quality and demand of labour market courses adequately. Moreover, there is a real danger that the overall demand of adult and further education will decrease, if the wishes of the civil servants committee come through.

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