VETprep
Empowering Europe's Youth through VET

VET policies enhancing youth participation in VET: Danish national report

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Glossary

AUB	**In DK: Arbejdsgivernes Uddannelsesbidrag** Employers' Reimbursement Fund. A Danish scheme that reimburses companies for part of the wage costs when apprentices attend school-based training. It is funded collectively by all employers and administered nationally to support the dual VET model.
ASD	**In DK: Autisme spektrum forstyrrelse** Autism spectrum disorder.
CPD	**Continuous professional development**
DM i Skills	**In DK: Danmarksmesterskaberne i Skills** Danish Skills Championship. National competition showcasing excellence in vocational skills.
EFG	**In DK: Erhvervsfaglig Grunduddannelse** Basic Vocational Education Programme that was introduced in 1977. EFG was Denmark's first unified vocational education model. It consisted of a two-year basic vocational course followed by specialisation and aimed to provide young people with broad practical skills and general education. The EFG system was phased out in the early 1990s and replaced by the current VET structure with basic and main programmes.
EPX	**In DK: Erhvervs- og Professionsrettet Eksamen.** EPX refers to Vocational and Professional Exam. It is a new upper secondary programme with a strong vocational and professional orientation, scheduled for nationwide implementation from 2030. EPX prepares students for both vocational education and professional bachelor programmes, but not for traditional university degrees.
EUX	**In DK: Erhvervsuddannelse med gymnasial eksamen.** EUX refers to Vocational Education and Training combined with General Upper Secondary Education. It is a hybrid programme that awards both a journeyman's certificate and a general upper secondary qualification, granting access to higher education.
FGU	**In DK: Forberedende Grunduddannelse** Preparatory Basic Education and Training. An educational offer for young people under 25 who are not ready for a youth education or a full-time job.
GF1	**In DK: Grundforløb 1** Basic Course 1. The first part of Denmark's vocational education and training (VET) programme. GF1 is a 20-week introductory course designed for students entering VET directly after compulsory schooling. It provides a broad introduction to vocational fields and basic practical skills before progression to GF2 (Basic Course 2) and the main programme, which combines school-based learning with workplace training.
GF2	**In DK: Grundforløb 2** Basic Course 2. The second part of Denmark's vocational education and training (VET) programme. GF2 is a 20-week specialised course that follows GF1. It provides more in-depth training within a chosen vocational field and prepares students for the main programme, which consists primarily of alternating periods of school-based learning and workplace training under an apprenticeship contract.
HF	**In DK: Højere Forberedelseseksamen** Higher Preparatory Examination. Two-year general upper secondary programme, often for adult learners.

HHX	**In DK: Højere Handelseksamen** Higher Commercial Examination. Upper secondary programme with a business and economics profile.
HTX	**In DK: Højere Teknisk Eksamen** Higher Technical Examination. Upper secondary programme with a technical and scientific profile.
LUU	**In DK: Lokale uddannelsesudvalg**
NEETs	**Students who are neither in education, employment, nor training.**
SOSU	**In DK: Social og sundhedsassistent** Social and health care assistant is a vocationally trained professional who provides personal care, basic nursing tasks, and practical support to elderly citizens, people with disabilities, and patients in hospitals or home care settings. The qualification is part of Denmark's VET system and typically prepares graduates for employment in municipal care services or healthcare institutions.
SPS	**In DK: Specialpædagogisk Støtte** Special Educational Support. Support scheme for students with disabilities in education.
STU	**In DK: Særligt tilrettelagt ungdomsuddannelse** Specialised Youth Education. A three-year education programme for young people with special needs who cannot complete another youth education.
STX	**In DK: Studentereksamen** General Upper Secondary Examination. Academic upper secondary programme preparing for university.
STUK	**In DK: Styrelsen for Undervisning og Kvalitet** STUK refers to the Danish Agency for Quality and Supervision under the Danish Ministry of Children and Education.
VET	**Vocational Education and Training**
VETflex	**In DK: Eudfleks** A flexible learning model introduced in 2025 that allows students with disabilities or special needs to extend the duration of their school-based training by up to 50% while maintaining financial support. It aims to improve accessibility and retention in vocational education.

1. General description of the Danish VET system

This section provides an overview of the Danish vocational education and training (VET) system, outlining its historical roots, structural features, and governance model. It explains how the dual system—combining school-based learning with workplace training—has evolved into a cornerstone of Denmark's approach to skills development and labour market integration. The description highlights key institutional arrangements, funding mechanisms, and the role of social partners, as well as recent reforms aimed at maintaining quality and responsiveness. Together, these elements offer the contextual foundation for understanding subsequent policy measures and initiatives designed to enhance participation and reduce dropout.

The report includes several abbreviations. Those are listed and explained in the section Glossary (p. 3).

1.1. Introduction to the Danish VET system

Denmark has long-standing traditions in both agriculture and a range of vocational crafts. Since the Middle Ages, Danish apprentices have earned the title of journeyman upon passing a formal test. With the introduction of the Apprenticeship Act in 1956, this vocational tradition was merged with the educational system, formalised as vocational education and training. Since then, practical training in approved companies or public institutions has been systematically combined with school-based learning. The model continues to emphasise the opportunity for apprentices and students to develop hands-on vocational skills while connecting them to technical frameworks, theoretical understanding and basic academic knowledge. Depending on the vocational field, programmes are completed with either a journeyman's test or a final project exam, maintaining the historical link between craftsmanship and formal qualification.

Today, Denmark's VET system encompasses around 107 specialisations, with at least half of the training taking place in approved companies or public institutions. The dual structure, combining school-based learning with workplace training, remains a hallmark of the Danish model, ensuring smooth transitions into employment and contributing to consistently low youth unemployment rates (Cort, 2025; Jørgensen & Smistrup, 2007).

VET constitutes one of the two main pathways within Denmark's upper secondary education system. The other consists of general upper secondary programmes, traditionally offered by Gymnasium schools since 1903 (Haue, 2004). While four out of five general programmes are academically oriented, one—Erhvervsuddannelse med gymnasial eksamen (EUX)—represents a hybrid model that combines vocational training with general education, leading to both a journeyman's certificate and a high school diploma.

From 2030, a new hybrid model—Erhvervs-og Professionsrettet Eksamen (EPX)—is scheduled to be introduced. EPX aims to further integrate vocational and general education, offering a flexible curriculum that prepares students for both employment and professional bachelor programmes, and marking a significant expansion of vocational orientation within Denmark's upper secondary landscape.

At the national level, the Danish Ministry of Children and Education is responsible for overall regulation, funding, and quality assurance of the VET system and schools. The state funding is provided through a taximeter subsidy, which is activity-dependent, in addition to which the schools receive a municipal subsidy. It is also common for schools to seek and receive external funding for innovation and development of workshops, vocational tools and materials, as well as digital and analogue networks and equipment. Social partners including trade unions and employer organisations play a central role in shaping the content and structure of vocational programmes. They are represented in Trade Committees[1], which define learning outcomes, curricula, and assessment standards, and advise on the relevance of programmes in relation to labour market demands.

Social partners play a crucial role in the governance of VET in Denmark through their participation in both national trade committees and local education committees[2]. The trade committees are national bodies composed of representatives from employer organisations and trade unions within the relevant occupational field. This composition ensures that both business and employee perspectives are reflected in development of programmes and VET specialisation. The committees are responsible for defining the content and structure of VET programmes, including competence goals, practical training objectives, and school-based subjects. They also establish rules for examinations and assessments, monitor labour market developments, and initiate new programmes or adjustments when needed. Each year, they prepare development reports for the Danish Ministry, documenting necessary changes in regulations and training frameworks. Acting as a key link between the labour market and the education system, the trade committees aim to ensure that vocational programmes remain aligned with industry needs and contribute to securing apprenticeship placements and maintaining quality in workplace training.

At the institutional level, local education committees operate at each VET school. These committees include local representatives of employers, employees, and the school itself. They advise the school on the local organisation of programmes, including the local education plan, and help ensure coherence between school-based learning and local business requirements. Local committees also serve as forums for dialogue on quality, apprenticeship opportunities, and the school's vocational profile. The collaboration between national trade committees and local education committees is essential to maintaining the Danish model, where VET is firmly anchored in labour market needs while offering flexibility across regions and sectors (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, n.d.).

At the national level, the overall responsibility for maintaining and developing the quality of VET lies with the Danish Agency for Quality and Supervision (STUK) under the Danish Ministry of Children and Education. STUK oversees compliance with legislation, monitors performance indicators, and ensures that VET programmes meet national standards for relevance and quality. The agency also coordinates evaluations, publishes guidelines, and provides data to support evidence-based policy decisions.

However, most quality development work takes place locally within the VET institutions. School leaders, local education committees, and VET teachers hold the primary responsibility for continuously improving programmes and adapting them to changing labour market needs while integrating the latest teaching technologies and methods. This involves revising curricula, introducing pedagogical innovations, and ensuring coherence between school-based learning and workplace training. Although these efforts are supported by dialogue with employers and national trade committees,

the day-to-day work of maintaining and enhancing quality is embedded in the professional practices of teachers and managers at each school. This approach—national oversight combined with local responsibility—reflects the Danish model of governance, which seeks to balance regulatory consistency with institutional autonomy and responsiveness to local contexts. The Danish labour market model is grounded in a long-standing tradition of cooperation between the state and the social partners, namely employers' organisations and trade unions. Rather than relying primarily on legislation, pay and working conditions are negotiated through collective agreements, enabling flexible, sector-specific solutions and ensuring broad legitimacy because agreements are reached by the parties themselves. This collaborative approach is reinforced by tripartite structures, where the state, employers, and unions jointly shape labour market policy in areas such as health and safety, job placement, and unemployment insurance. The system further depends on high organisation rates among both employers and employees, which underpin its effectiveness. The state generally refrains from intervening in wage-setting and working conditions as long as the social partners manage these responsibilities, a principle that fosters trust, flexibility, and adaptability in the Danish labour market (Danish Ministry of Employment, 2025).

The governance model of Danish vocational education and training is characterised by a shared responsibility between the state and the labour market for both the design of curricula and the organisation of practical training. The state finances VET provision through taximeter-based funding and additional grants for teaching, equipment, and facilities, while companies pay wages to apprentices and receive reimbursement during school periods via the Employers' Reimbursement Fund (AUB), a non-governmental scheme funded by all Danish employers. This tripartite structure differs fundamentally from fully market-driven systems, where companies alone define training content, and from fully state-controlled models, where programmes are school-based and politically determined. In Denmark, decisions on VET development are negotiated within the tripartite system, with significant influence from social partners (Reformkommissionen, 2022).

At the institutional level, VET schools are self-governing institutions with boards that include representatives from local employers, employees, and municipalities. These boards oversee strategic development, approve budgets, and appoint school directors. The strong involvement of social partners in both national and local governance structures ensures that VET remains a labour market-driven system. However, this structure can also make the system resistant to change, particularly when reforms challenge established practices or redistribute influence.

Apprenticeships in Denmark are based on a formal contract or training agreement between the apprentice and the company. All training companies must be approved by the social partners through the relevant trade committee and meet specific requirements, such as having adequate technology and the capacity to offer a variety of tasks within the occupation. Many companies hold approval to provide apprenticeships in more than one field. Once granted, approval does not need to be renewed unless the company has been inactive for five years or more. Apprentices receive a salary during their time in the company, as stipulated in collective agreements (CEDEFOP, 2025b). These agreements set wage levels for each occupational field rather than applying a single national rate. Salaries typically increase as apprentices gain experience. In general, starting wages for apprentices in vocational programmes range from approximately DKK 9,500 to DKK 12,500 per month before tax, though actual amounts vary significantly by sector and specialisation.

1.2. Tracking after the compulsory basic education

Denmark has a unified school system – *grundskole* – comprising ten years of compulsory primary and lower secondary education, from grade 0 to grade 9. Students may opt for a 10th grade, which serves as a transitional year for those seeking further academic preparation or clarification regarding their educational pathways[3]. Students typically complete *grundskole* at the age of sixteen. At this point, they may choose to continue in general academic oriented upper secondary educations at a gymnasium or enter vocational education and training, depending on their interests, academic performance, and career aspirations. After completing nine years of compulsory basic education, students make their first significant choice at the age of 16.

Initial VET programmes are offered at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. To be eligible for admission to a VET programme, applicants must typically have passed the final examination of the *grundskole*, achieved a minimum grade point average of 2.0 in both Danish and mathematics in either the final exams or the 10th-grade exams, and obtained at least a 2.0 average in their continuous assessment grades in Danish and mathematics from 9th or 10th grade[4]. Unconditional access is granted to applicants who hold a signed training agreement (apprenticeship contract) with an approved company/organisation. Those who do not meet the formal grade requirements may still be admitted through an entrance interview which in some cases is supplemented by a test. Alternatively, the student may be referred to a preparatory basic education programme – the FGU. This programme was designed in 2017 (Danish Government, 2017), to strengthen challenged students' academic competencies and support future admission to a VET programme. In 2024, approximately 11.8% of students completing compulsory schooling did not achieve the minimum passing grade of 02 in both Danish and mathematics, which is the highest share recorded in more than a decade. This underlines the persistent challenge of ensuring basic academic competencies among all students before entering upper secondary education (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd [AE], 2024).

Denmark is marked by a relatively low degree of early tracking to VET. In 2025, 20% of the cohort completing *grundskole* applied for admission to a vocational education programme. While students in the gymnasium school typically are between 16 and 19 years old, reflecting a direct and continuous transition from the compulsory primary and lower secondary school, VET students span a much wider age range.

The Danish VET-system is divided into four main areas: 1) Care, health and pedagogy; 2) Office, trade and business services; 3) Food, agriculture and experience; and 4) Technology, construction and transport. All vocational programmes follow a three-part structure. Students who enter directly from compulsory school begin with Basic Course 1 (GF1), a 20-week introductory programme. This is followed by Basic Course 2 (GF2), also 20 weeks, which provides more specialised training. After completing these courses, students progress to the Main Programme, where most learning takes place in an approved company through alternating periods of school-based instruction and workplace training (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025a). The 107 specialisations are delivered by 68 independent VET schools across the country. Admission volumes are generally determined by the individual schools, giving them autonomy to decide how many students to enrol in each programme. However, a few programmes—such as Clothing Technician, Boat Mechanic, Animal Keeper, and Photographer—are subject to centrally defined enrolment quotas set annually by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education.

In 2025, the largest share of VET-applicants chose programmes within technology, construction, and transport (60%), followed by Care, Health, and Pedagogy (14%), Office, trade, and business services (13.5%) and Food, agriculture, and experience (10.5%). This distribution has been steady over the last five years (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025a).

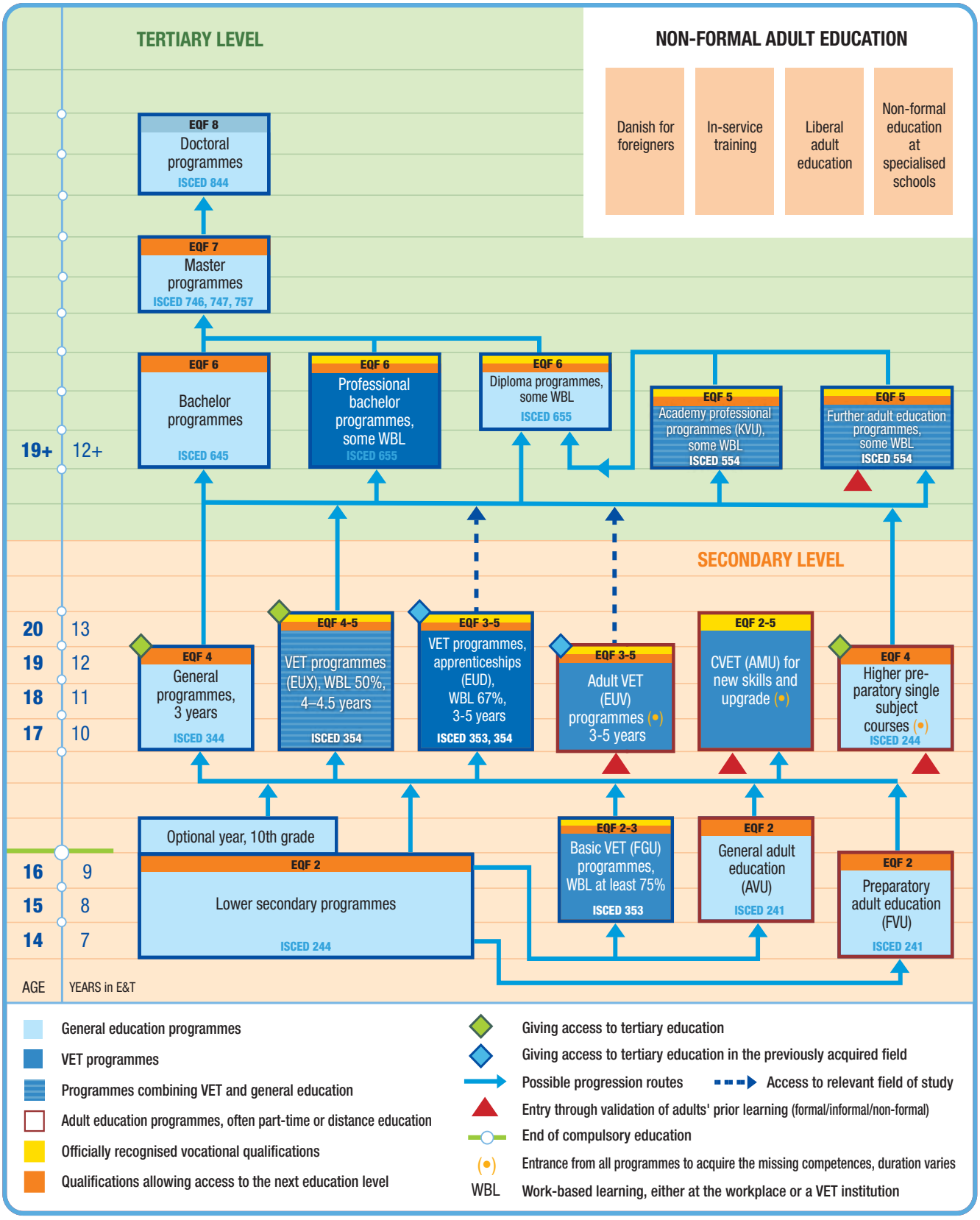


Figure 1: VET in the Danish education and training system (Cedefop, & University College Copenhagen (UCC) (2023))

Across all VET programmes, the average age of students at the start of Basic Course 2 is 25 years. This reflects the dual function of vocational education in Denmark: it serves both as an initial education pathway for young people and as a re-entry route for adults seeking new qualifications or career changes. The broader age profile is particularly evident in the vocation specific main programme, where adult learners are well represented.

The duration of VET programmes ranges from 1.5 to 5 years, but most programmes typically last between 3.5 and 4 years[5]. Vocational qualifications are awarded at different levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ranging from level 2 to level 5.

In addition to the standard VET programmes, Denmark also offers maritime vocational education, which consists of specialised training programmes tailored to the needs of the maritime sector.

1.3. Access for vulnerable groups

Although social inclusion for disadvantaged youth in VET was heavily promoted in the 2000 reform, efforts to make the system more inclusive have had unintended consequences. Notably, they have contributed to a decline in the perceived parity of esteem between vocational and academic education (Cort, 2025). Despite this, a range of targeted policy measures and educational programmes continue to support equitable access to VET, ensuring that all young people—regardless of background, ability, or prior schooling—have meaningful opportunities for participation.

Two general pathways open to vulnerable groups are:

- The Specially Organised Youth Education (STU)
- The Preparatory Basic Education (FGU)

Both STU and FGU are flexible tracks to support vulnerable groups. While STU is for young people with severe disabilities who cannot complete a regular youth education focussing on personal development and life skills, FGU supports young people under the age of 25 who are not yet in education or employment. and who lack the qualifications or readiness to begin youth education. The the aim is to prepare them for transition to VET, general upper secondary education, or unskilled employment. FGU is designed to meet the diverse needs of this target group through flexible entry and exit points, individual learning plans, and inclusive learning environments. The programme combines academic, personal, and social development and incorporates bridging modules, workplace training, and competence-based progression tools. It is organised into three distinct tracks, and each FGU student follows one of three tracks:

1. *General basic education*, focusing on academic subjects in a practice-oriented format
2. *Production-based education*, centred around workshop-based learning and real production
3. *Vocational basic education*, based on company internships with formal agreements.

The FGU was introduced in the 2017 reform (Danish Government, 2017), which also included a national Danish strategy for the support of dyslexic students. As part of the strategy, all students suspected of dyslexia are to be offered screening and, if dyslexia is confirmed, entitled to free access to compensatory tools, alternative assessment formats, and support from teachers trained in the use of assistive technologies. The support is designed to follow the student across transitions—e.g. from compulsory school through VET.

Besides the two general pathways, a supplementary programme called Glad-Flex has been piloted since 2018. The scheme was introduced by the private foundation Glad Fonden[6]. Glad-Flex targets young people with cognitive disabilities who cannot access ordinary VET programmes but are expected to enter the labour market. The two-year programme combines practice-based learning in companies with integrated theory lessons in small groups, supported by vocational teachers and pedagogical mentors. Its aim is to prepare students for employment in flex jobs, and early evaluations show promising results: low dropout rates and strong transition to work. The model is aligned with VET competence frameworks and has been recommended for national implementation under the Ministry of Children and Education (Folketinget, 2020).

Further, two national agreements adopted in 2021 expanded access for specific groups. The agreement on young people with disabilities introduced measures to increase flexibility in VET, including the option to extend the second part of the basic course by up to 50% for students with functional impairments, and to establish dedicated classes. It also funded advisory initiatives and continued support for Glad-Flex as part of a broader strategy to improve transitions and completion rates (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2021b). The agreement on elite athletes made permanent a scheme allowing students engaged in high-level sports to complete VET under special conditions. This includes the possibility to extend both the basic and main programmes by up to 50% and access school-based training during intensive competition periods, ensuring that elite athletes can combine vocational education with their sporting careers (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2021a).

Ensuring equitable access for young people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) remains a key challenge in the Danish VET system (EVA, 2019). Despite growing awareness, no tailored educational pathways currently exist to support this group in completing a vocational qualification. A recent report recommends structural and pedagogical adjustments, such as longer, coherent school and internship periods, flexible schedules, clear teaching structures, continuous mentorship, adapted physical environments, and closely coordinated internships. Vocational fields like IT, graphic design, bookkeeping, and logistics—characterised by structured tasks and limited customer interaction—are highlighted as particularly suitable for students with ASD. However, no concrete initiatives have yet been implemented.

1.4. Transition from VET to higher education

The Danish VET system offers limited progression routes to general and higher education. The EUX programme formally qualifies students for higher education on par with academic upper secondary programmes. However, its dual structure—combining practical training with school-based learning—restricts access to certain university programmes due to limitations in subject breadth and academic level. Only around 6% of VET graduates continue to tertiary education, whereas approximately 60% of a full youth cohort in Denmark enrol in higher education programmes after completing upper secondary education (EVA, 2021; Statistics Denmark, 2024). This reflects the persistent divide between vocational and academic tracks.

VET programmes of at least three years' duration grant access to short-cycle Academy Profession programmes aligned with vocational fields, such as laboratory technician or marketing economist. Admission to specialised areas like police, defence, or the arts is also possible via alternative entry

requirements. Access to longer higher education programmes, including university and most university college bachelor's degrees, generally requires an academic upper secondary qualification. In some cases, VET graduates may be admitted to professional bachelor programmes if their vocational background is relevant and supplemented with basic academic courses.

1.5. Backgrounds and qualification requirements for VET teachers in Denmark

Denmark has national legislation governing the professional development of VET teachers, but implementation follows a decentralised model for organising continuous professional development (CPD) (CEDEFOP, 2022). Danish regulations stipulate that VET teachers must meet specific qualification standards upon employment, ensuring they possess the professional expertise required for the subjects and vocation they teach (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2023). These standards combine formal education with substantial industry experience, reflecting the dual nature of VET as an integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Key challenges identified by CEDEFOP (2022) include an ageing teaching workforce, difficulties in attracting younger teachers, and the low perceived attractiveness of VET teaching careers. Limited job stability and relatively low remuneration further undermine recruitment efforts. Green skills have not yet been systematically integrated into CPD (CEDEFOP, 2022).

Under §12 of the Executive Order on Vocational Education and Training, teachers must hold a relevant vocational or professional qualification in one or more pertinent fields, supplemented as needed by continuing or advanced education. They are also required to have relevant and current professional experience—typically at least five years for teachers of directly vocational subjects and at least two years for other teachers. Exceptions may be granted when qualified candidates are unavailable; in such cases, schools must implement structured programmes to ensure teachers acquire sufficient insight into relevant vocational domains. These requirements aim to guarantee that VET teachers bring both subject-matter expertise and practical experience, thereby supporting the pedagogical principle of alternating training and the close linkage between school-based and workplace learning.

Beyond initial qualifications, newly employed teachers encounter additional professional demands, including adapting to institutional cultures, meeting performance expectations, and engaging in continuous professional development. These obligations often involve demonstrating pedagogical competence, fostering student engagement, and contributing to collaborative practices within departments—factors that can intensify the transition into teaching roles.

To strengthen pedagogical capacity, Denmark mandates a formal VET teacher education programme: Diploma in Vocational Pedagogy. The programme is offered by university colleges across the country and delivered part-time over a period of up to three years and comprises 60-ECTS divided into three compulsory modules (25 ECTS), two elective modules (20 ECTS), and a final project (15 ECTS). The programme aims to equip novice VET teachers to design, deliver, and evaluate teaching and learning processes while enabling them to act as facilitators and advisors. Its curriculum is aimed at developing core competencies in teaching and learning, curriculum planning, didactics, and philosophy of science. Teachers gain expertise in practice-oriented instruction, differentiated learning pathways, and digital

learning, alongside an understanding of alternating training principles and the interplay between general and subject-specific didactics.

However, these formal criteria intersect with the highly diverse educational backgrounds and professional biographies of teachers entering the VET sector. Newly appointed teachers are required to begin the diploma programme within their first two years of employment. As a result, VET schools often employ a significant proportion of short-term staff who may leave before completing any formal pedagogical qualification. Research shows that this diversity shapes learning trajectories and influences engagement with the mandatory diploma programme, which itself occupies a complex position: it is simultaneously a vocationally oriented continuing education programme, a higher education qualification, and an adult learning pathway (Duch, Egendal, Marcussen, Højlund, & Nistrup, 2018). This structural configuration creates persistent challenges in aligning qualification requirements with practice, particularly as policy agendas increasingly prioritise competencies in innovation, entrepreneurship, and digitalisation. Consequently, qualification frameworks must not only ensure compliance with formal standards but also accommodate heterogeneous teacher profiles and provide sustained professional development responsive to labour market dynamics and institutional needs.

1.6. Danish VET: a source to ensure employability and future training

Denmark's VET system remains a cornerstone of national employability and workforce development. According to the 2025 agreement on strengthening VET, only three percent of newly qualified skilled workers are unemployed, underscoring the system's strong labour market outcomes and its capacity to deliver job-ready graduates (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c).

Yet, as Green (2024 in Cort, 2025) points out, the transition to a green economy and the rapid advancement of digital technologies—particularly artificial intelligence—are expected to reshape skill demands across sectors. Forecasts predict a shortage of skilled workers in Denmark by 2030 (Damm, Nielsen & Jensen, 2021; European Commission, 2024 in Cort, 2025), a challenge that can only be addressed by attracting more learners into vocational pathways and ensuring that VET programmes remain responsive to evolving labour market needs.

CEDEFOP's 2025 Skills Forecast reinforces this urgency, projecting sustained labour market tightness throughout the forecast period. Replacement demand is expected to be the dominant driver of job openings, particularly in sectors such as ICT, health, engineering, and business services—many of which align closely with VET specialisations. While overall employment growth is expected to remain modest, Denmark faces acute shortages in medium-skilled occupations, especially among skilled agricultural, craft, and elementary workers (CEDEFOP, 2025). These gaps are driven by demographic shifts, high replacement needs, and insufficient supply of qualified candidates.

To address these imbalances, recent reforms have introduced more flexible entry routes for adults with relevant work experience, strengthened real competence assessment, and promoted international mobility. The introduction of the VETflex[7] model and targeted support for learners with disabilities further expand access to vocational qualifications and improve retention. These measures are designed not only to ensure employability but also to support lifelong learning and progression into higher education or specialised professions.

With a growing share of the labour force holding high-level qualifications and increasing participation across age groups, Danish VET is well-positioned to secure both immediate employment and long-term adaptability. Its dual structure, strong ties to industry, and commitment to inclusive and future-oriented education make it a key instrument in preparing the workforce for the demands of a green, digital, and increasingly specialised economy.

The strong labour market outcomes of Danish VET underscore its role as a key driver of employability and lifelong learning. Yet, maintaining this position requires continuous adaptation to demographic shifts, technological change, and evolving skill demands. The following section traces the policy movements that have shaped VET over time, highlighting how successive reforms have sought to balance tradition with innovation and respond to persistent challenges such as enrolment, retention, and parity of esteem.

2. Danish VET policy movements

This section reviews the historical and contemporary policy developments that have shaped vocational education and training in Denmark. It traces major legislative reforms and strategic initiatives, highlighting how VET has evolved in response to changing societal expectations, labour market needs, and international agendas. By examining these movements, the section provides insight into the underlying policy rationales, recurring challenges, and the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation that continues to define Danish VET.

The development of the Danish VET system has been shaped by a series of legislative reforms such as:

- The Apprenticeship Act of 1956 introduced a formal structure for vocational training, establishing standards for both practical and theoretical instruction.
- The EFG Act of 1977 created a two-year basic vocational education followed by specialisation.
- The VET Act of 1991 unified vocational education under a single legal framework, introducing new structures and admission requirements.

In 1999, the Danish VET system was awarded the Bertelsmann Prize as one of the world's best vocational systems. One of the reasons for this recognition was the collaborative governance model, in which "the state intervenes as little as possible in vocational education and training" (Stiftung, 1999, as cited in Cort, 2025). Paradoxically, this prize was awarded during a period of major reform, where Danish VET was increasingly framed as a solution to social inclusion challenges—an agenda strongly promoted by international organisations such as the OECD (OECD, 1996; Cort, 2025).

The 2000 VET reform introduced the current structure of basic and main programmes, along with a modular system that allows students to tailor their education to individual needs. Students became responsible for developing personal education plans, effectively acting as their own study planners. The reform also strengthened the dual model by improving coordination between schools and training companies and introduced mentoring schemes to support the integration of theoretical and practical learning.

In 2012, Denmark launched the Broad Internship Agreement to address persistent challenges in

securing training placements for VET students. As part of the initiative, internship centres were established to support students in finding placements, and financial incentives were introduced to encourage companies to offer training opportunities. Despite these efforts, access to internships remains uneven across sectors, with some vocational fields continuing to face shortages of available placements.

In line with a lifelong learning perspective, the overall Danish VET system—including vocational upper secondary education and adult and continuing training—is being streamlined to ensure coherence and transferability across educational levels and pathways. Improving transitions and bridging the gap between vocational and general education is a central goal, with a particular focus on avoiding dead ends and enabling learners to move between tracks and progress toward further education or employment (Rolls, 2012).

2.1. Main recent reforms in VET (2014–2024)

Over the past decade, the Danish vocational education and training system has undergone a series of ambitious reforms designed to enhance its attractiveness, flexibility, inclusiveness, and labour market relevance. These reforms have primarily targeted the school-based component of VET, with less direct regulation of the workplace-based elements (Danish Government, 2014, 2017, 2018, Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018, 2020a, 2020b; Retsinformation, 2019: Danish Ministry of Employment, 2020, 2022). The reform agenda has been driven by persistent challenges, including declining enrolment, the need to support both high-achieving and vulnerable students, and the imperative to ensure that VET keeps pace with evolving labour market demands and technological change.

The 2014 reform (Danish Government, 2014) marked a significant turning point, simplifying the structure of VET by consolidating twelve entry pathways into four main fields: care, health and pedagogy; office, trade and business services; food, agriculture and experience; and technology, construction and transport. Simultaneously, the introduction of a two-tiered basic course structure (GF1 and GF2) aimed to create greater coherence and flexibility between lower and upper secondary education and the VET system, making it easier for students to switch between programmes.

In 2017, the "Better Ways to Education and Employment" reform introduced the Preparatory Basic Education (FGU) as a cornerstone of the national inclusion strategy (Danish Government, 2017). This initiative targeted young people under 25 who were neither in education, employment, nor training (NEETs), with the ambition that 90 percent of each youth cohort should complete an upper secondary education by age 25. FGU builds on the workshop-based pedagogy of the former Danish Production schools[8], combined with individual education plans to support young people academically, personally, and socially in completing an upper secondary education or entering the labour market.

Building on this, the 2018 agreement "From School to Skilled Worker – VET for the Future" (Danish Government, 2018) further strengthened the link between compulsory schooling and VET. The reform introduced the concept of practical expertise as a central pedagogical and political focus, making it mandatory for all students in grades 7–9 to follow a practical-musical elective with a final examination. Vocational schools were also permitted to offer elective subjects to primary school students, although this opportunity has only been utilised to a limited extent.

Technological development has been another central reform track. In 2018, a national action plan for technology in teaching (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018) clarified the responsibility of schools to prepare students for a digitalised society. The goal was to strengthen technological understanding and digital competences at all educational levels. In VET, specific projects were launched to embed digital pedagogy and didactics throughout the school organisation, with a particular focus on teacher development.

In 2020, the Danish Educational Guidance System was revised to ensure that students in general upper secondary education also have access to information about VET pathways (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2020a). That same year, continued funding was secured for the seven national knowledge centres for VET, established in 2014 (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2020b). These centres are planned to serve as professional beacons, by supporting technological upgrading, developing and disseminating teaching materials, and fostering networks among VET teachers. As a follow-up to the 2014 reform's requirements for teacher competence development, a national survey in 2022 (EVA, 2022) revealed that while most teachers who completed the required diploma programme reported positive effects on teaching quality, 20 percent had not yet begun the training.

The issue of apprenticeship placement has long been a source of concern in Danish VET policy. Over the years, many young people have expressed uncertainty about their ability to secure a training contract with a company—a concern that was further accentuated after the 2014 reform, which placed significant responsibility on students to find placements themselves. This burden discouraged some from enrolling in VET, fearing they might not be able to complete the practical component of their education. In response, a tripartite agreement was reached in 2020 (Danish Ministry of Employment, 2020) to ensure a more reliable and sufficient supply of apprenticeship placements. The agreement redistributed responsibility, placing greater accountability on schools and companies, and strengthened the role of trade committees in securing and overseeing apprenticeship opportunities.

Recent reforms have also placed increased emphasis on the well-being and protection of VET students, particularly during workplace training. Recognising their vulnerability, an executive order in 2019 (Retsinformation, 2019) mandated systematic monitoring of student and apprentice well-being in VET, extending a practice established in compulsory schooling since 2014. In 2022, a tripartite agreement further strengthened student protection by addressing sexual harassment in companies (Danish Ministry of Employment, 2022), granting apprentices the legal right to terminate their training contract in cases of serious violations. These measures represent significant steps towards safeguarding students' rights and ensuring safe and supportive learning environments.

Taken together, the reforms implemented between 2014 and 2024 have sought to create a more flexible, inclusive, and labour market-oriented VET system. The intended outcomes include higher enrolment, improved retention, enhanced professional quality, and smoother transitions to further education and employment. However, these ambitions have not yet been fully realised. As Cort (2025) notes, Danish VET policy continues to grapple with the persistent and complex challenge—often described as a "wicked problem"—of making VET genuinely attractive to young people.

2.2. Current reforms (2024–2025)

In 2025, the wave of reforms continued to sweep across Denmark's vocational schools. A so-called "2025 handshake" marked a renewed commitment to enhancing the quality and relevance of VET, bringing together three major policy tracks: the green transition, securing the future workforce in healthcare and elderly care, and a general strengthening of VET provision (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025b). The agreement was forged between the Danish government, social partners, and vocational institutions.

The first component of the agreement, focused on the green transition, seeks to integrate sustainability and advanced technologies into vocational education and training. It entails a nationwide upgrade of equipment across vocational institutions, mandatory professional development for teachers to build green competencies, and the introduction of environmentally oriented journeyman's tests. In addition, the agreement promotes international mobility through study trips and exchange programmes and ensures permanent funding for national VET knowledge centres to foster innovation and disseminate green pedagogical practices (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024a).

The second component of the agreement addresses workforce shortages in the welfare sector by strengthening social and health care (SOSU) programmes. It introduces permanent funding increases, paid training for students over the age of 25, and expanded access for applicants with relevant work experience. To improve retention, the agreement includes harmonised course fees, enhanced language support, simulation-based learning, and better coordination between schools and training sites. Early recruitment initiatives such as the Sprouting Programme[9] and Young in Welfare[10] aim to improve the public perception of SOSU careers and engage young people through hands-on experiences and peer-led outreach (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024b). Collectively, these measures seek to make SOSU education more accessible, attractive, and resilient, ensuring a future workforce capable of meeting the growing care needs of Denmark's ageing population.

The third component of the agreement, signed in May 2025, responds to long-standing challenges in the VET sector, including declining enrolment and high dropout rates—currently affecting four out of ten students. While the system continues to deliver strong labour market outcomes, the agreement recognises the need for a substantial quality upgrade to ensure that VET remains a viable and attractive pathway for future generations. Key measures include a permanent increase in funding through the taximeter system, enabling schools to invest in pedagogical development, student well-being, and local quality initiatives. A temporary youth environment subsidy supports the creation of stronger social and academic communities, including improved physical learning spaces and collaboration with 10th grade programmes.

VET teacher development is prioritised through continuing education in inclusive pedagogy and the prevention of discrimination and harassment. Schools are also encouraged to bring in guest teachers from industry to ensure students are exposed to current, practice-based knowledge. Access to VET is broadened through new pathways for applicants with relevant work experience, including direct entry to the second part of the basic course. Flexible learning routes for adults and students with disabilities are supported through the introduction of VETflex.

Dropout prevention is addressed through improved access to student accommodation, smoother transitions between school-based and workplace-based training, and increased use of simulation-based learning. Schools are required to visit students at risk of dropping out during their workplace training and to coordinate support with employers. The agreement also strengthens the legal and institutional framework for student protection by mandating anti-discrimination strategies and improving access to special educational support (SPS), while simplifying administrative procedures for students with disabilities.

Further, the agreement introduces a new national model for programme provision and dimensioning, aiming to consolidate VET offerings in areas with low student numbers while maintaining geographical accessibility. It also promotes international mobility, with the ambition to increase fivefold the number of students completing part of their training abroad by 2035 (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c).

This reform was particularly noteworthy as it followed shortly after the EPX agreement, which introduced a paradigm shift in Denmark's upper secondary education. EPX was launched in February 2025, through a broad political agreement. Together, the two reforms reflect a pronounced and intensified policy focus on vocational education and training.

Most recently, a partial agreement concluded in June 2025 introduced a structural reorganisation of the Danish educational landscape. Vocational colleges will be consolidated into regional area schools to ensure broad geographical coverage and institutional sustainability. In addition, these institutions will assume responsibility for general adult education, creating integrated educational entities governed by a unified legal and funding framework. The reform aims to strengthen local leadership and promote coherence between youth and adult education, thereby supporting a more resilient and accessible VET system across Denmark (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025e).

3. Main statistics about Danish VET

Number of VET students in Denmark

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Students in VET (all VET programmes)	120,347	112,672	106,989	104,032	108,434	112,152	112,884	110,599	107,107	106,185	105,745

4. Attractiveness and image of VET

This section examines the perceived status and public image of vocational education and training in Denmark. Despite strong labour market outcomes, VET continues to struggle with issues of prestige and recruitment, often positioned as a second-choice pathway compared to academic tracks. The analysis explores cultural perceptions, structural factors, and recent policy initiatives aimed at improving attractiveness—such as promotional campaigns, competitions, and reforms designed to strengthen

vocational identity. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing enrolment challenges and ensuring that VET remains an appealing and respected option for young people.

Despite sustained political ambition and substantial public investment, vocational education and training in Denmark continues to face persistent challenges related to prestige, recruitment, and retention. In a recent publication, Cort (2025) explores the issue of esteem through a longitudinal case study of Danish VET policy over the past 25 years. She argues that the prestige problem is deeply entangled with broader political expectations, where VET is repeatedly positioned as the solution to a wide range of societal challenges—from youth unemployment and social inclusion to green transition and demographic shifts.

Each reform introduces new demands and responsibilities, often resulting in further complexity and a cycle of continuous restructuring (Jørgensen et al., 2016). The actual impact of these reforms on the attractiveness and public image of VET remains uncertain. Nevertheless, VET in Denmark is deeply embedded in the fabric of labour market needs, societal ideals, and educational ambitions. It is this entanglement—between policy, practice, and perception—that continues to shape both the opportunities and the dilemmas facing the Danish VET system.

Although vocational programmes and the crafts they lead to have historically been associated with professional pride and strong communities, these values appear increasingly difficult to access for many students. Fragmented learning environments and weak social cohesion contribute to a lack of belonging (Andersen, 2023).

Strong professional communities and a clear sense of purpose are essential to fostering vocational engagement, yet dropout rates remain high—particularly during transitions between school-based and workplace-based learning (VIVE, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to enhance coherence, relevance, and recognition across the VET system and Danish society more broadly. This includes improving structural integration, strengthening the role of trade unions, ensuring fair wage conditions, and cultivating a wider societal appreciation of skilled craft and vocational excellence.

In the following, initiatives on public campaigns and events as well as the EPX-reform, will be introduced as measures to improve image and raise public awareness on VET.

4.1. Selected policy measure: Danish Skills Championship and EuroSkills 2025

Policy context and rationale

The Danish Skills Championship[11] is a nationwide competition showcasing excellence across vocational disciplines. Introduced in 2009, it has evolved into a flagship initiative for promoting VET in Denmark. Organised under the EU-supported Skills framework, the event aims to raise awareness of vocational pathways, foster pride in skilled professions, and strengthen the public image of VET as an attractive and future-oriented educational choice.

Over time, The Danish Skills Championship has become a cornerstone of Denmark's strategy to improve the visibility and prestige of VET, attracting widespread media coverage and strong engagement from schools, employers, and trade unions. Its purpose is threefold:

- Promotion: Present VET in a positive light by showcasing the most skilled students through competitive demonstrations.
- Talent Development: Offer opportunities for high-performing students to excel nationally and internationally.
- International Dimension: Enable Danish participants to compete in EuroSkills and WorldSkills, fostering global networks and exposure to innovative practices (SkillsDenmark, 2024).

The measure reflects Denmark's broader policy ambition to counter declining VET enrolment and address cultural perceptions of vocational education by positioning skilled trades as prestigious and future-oriented careers.

Design and implementation

The Danish Skills Championship is coordinated by SkillsDenmark, a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting VET. The event is financed through public funding from the Danish Ministry of Children and Education and supplemented by contributions from employer organisations, trade committees, vocational colleges, and private companies. In-kind support—such as equipment, materials, and expertise—further strengthens the collaborative funding model, reflecting shared responsibility between government, industry, and education.

In 2025, Denmark intensified its focus on VET by designating the year as the Year of Vocational Education. As part of this initiative, Denmark hosted EuroSkills 2025, attracting over 102,000 visitors and featuring 597 competitors, including 43 Danish participants. The scale and visibility of EuroSkills underscored Denmark's commitment to positioning VET as a central pillar of its educational and economic development strategy.

Strengths and challenges

The Danish Skills Championship demonstrates significant strengths, particularly in its ability to generate national visibility and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, employers, and trade unions. The event has proven effective in fostering vocational pride and strengthening professional identity among young people. Its international dimension further enhances Denmark's reputation and provides students with valuable global learning opportunities.

However, challenges remain. While the initiative successfully raises awareness of vocational education, there is limited evidence that this increased visibility translates into higher enrolment or improved retention rates. Prestige issues continue to be deeply rooted in cultural perceptions of vocational education, making it difficult to achieve lasting changes in educational choices. Overall, the measure's impact lies in its capacity to attract attention and build strong partnerships but addressing structural and cultural barriers remains essential for long-term success.

Transferability

The Danish Skills Championship is expected to remain a key promotional instrument for VET, complemented by international events such as EuroSkills and WorldSkills. Its model offers quick-win potential for other countries seeking to raise the profile of vocational education through national competitions and EU-level collaboration. While long-term impact on enrolment is uncertain, the

initiative demonstrates how visibility, partnerships, and international engagement can strengthen the attractiveness of VET.

4.2. EPX-reform

A major structural reform in Denmark's upper secondary education system is the planned introduction of EPX—a new general upper secondary programme with a distinct vocational and professional orientation (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025d). Agreed upon through broad political consensus in 2025, EPX is designed to combine academic subjects with practice-based learning, thereby strengthening the link between general education and vocational pathways. EPX replaces several current programmes such as the two-year HF, EUX, 10th grade and the initial part of vocational education (GF1). It is to offer a flexible curriculum that combines general education with practice-oriented learning, preparing students for both employment and professional bachelor programmes. The ambition is to implement EPX nationwide in close collaboration with employers and public institutions to start from 2030 (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025d).

The reform is driven by the ambition to ensure that all young people—regardless of geographic location—have access to high-quality upper secondary education with a strong youth environment and clear progression routes to further education. As stated in the official agreement:

> *"With this reform, the parties aim to secure three overarching principles for future upper secondary education: (1) all young people should have access to a nearby upper secondary school after completing compulsory education, (2) with a strong youth environment, and (3) which opens doors to further education. The reform establishes a new upper secondary programme called EPX, designed to prepare students for either vocational education or higher education. Thus, the purpose of upper secondary education is expanded to include preparation for vocational pathways." (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025d)*

While the stated objectives echo those used to justify the introduction of the Higher Technical Examination (HTX) in the 1980s, the political ambition behind EPX is notably more pronounced. HTX began as a pilot in 1982, building on one-year vocational foundation programmes (EFG), and was formalised in 1988 with the addition of general study competence. By 1990, it became part of a unified legal framework for vocationally oriented upper secondary programmes (HTX and HHX), and since 2016, HTX has been fully integrated into the general upper secondary education law alongside STX, HHX, HF, and EUX.

Although HTX was originally designed to meet the needs of technically inclined students—particularly those aiming for engineering programmes—and developed a distinct pedagogical profile based on project- and problem-oriented learning, its political positioning differs significantly from that of EPX. EPX is introduced with the explicit objective of becoming the largest upper secondary programme in Denmark. This ambition is to be realised by raising the grade point average required for admission to STX, thereby redirecting a larger share of students toward EPX. This marks a notable shift in the political steering of educational pathways and student distribution across tracks.

EPX represents a paradigm shift by integrating general academic subjects with vocationally oriented learning. It is designed to bridge the divide between vocational and academic routes, offering a flexible

curriculum that prepares students for both employment and professional bachelor programmes—though not for traditional university degrees. However, the programme's precise structure remains under development. Key questions persist regarding the balance between academic content and vocational skill-building, and whether EPX should be classified as a vocational qualification or as a general upper secondary programme with vocational elements.

A new requirement for EPX institutions is to establish close partnerships with private enterprises and public organisations. While such collaborations are not uncommon in general upper secondary education, they are a defining feature of VET institutions, whose mission is closely aligned with labour market needs. It is therefore expected that EPX programmes will draw heavily on the institutional expertise and pedagogical practices of VET schools.

At the same time, EPX is envisioned as a continuation of the general education ideals that have traditionally characterised Danish upper secondary education. Students are to be educated in accordance with democratic values, freedom of thought, and equality. While the final curriculum is still under development, it is confirmed that all EPX students will complete Danish (L1), mathematics, and English at C-level[12]. In addition, students will be able to select subject packages aligned with their interests—potentially drawing on existing subjects from both vocational and academic programmes.

A defining feature of EPX is its pedagogical orientation, with a strong emphasis on practice-based knowledge and learning[13]. The reform is expected to foster new teaching methods that reshape the traditional relationship between theory and practice in upper secondary education. Notably, EPX places significant focus on the learning environment, drawing inspiration not from VET institutions but from general upper secondary schools. For example, the reform mandates a common entry point for all students and assigns them to a fixed class group with extensive shared teaching hours—explicitly designed to support "committed classroom communities and strong relationships" (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025d).

These developments reflect broader tensions in Danish education policy—particularly regarding the integration of educational tracks, the parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes, and the evolving institutional identity of upper secondary education.

The EPX-reform casts new light on the evolving role of vocational education within Denmark's upper secondary system. Unlike the current hybrid programme EUX, EPX is designed to provide only the latter—a combined vocational and general education certificate qualifying for entry into professional bachelor programmes. EPX is not designed to lead directly to a skilled trade qualification, but rather to serve as a strategic entry point into vocational education. This reflects a broader political ambition to position EPX as a key pathway into VET, thereby strengthening the integration between general and vocational tracks and expanding the reach of vocational education within Denmark's upper secondary landscape. EPX is presented as a new type of upper secondary education programme, while simultaneously replacing several existing pathways—including municipal provision of 10th grade, the two-year HF, EUX, and the first basic course of vocational education—as standalone options. Whether the HTX-programme will continue to be offered alongside EPX, and under what conditions, remains unclear at this stage.

At the same time, the introduction of EPX raises a fundamental question about the future role of vocational education in Denmark's educational architecture: Will VET continue to constitute one of

the two pillars of upper secondary youth education, or is it gradually shifting toward becoming part of the higher education system? This tension highlights the increasingly fluid boundaries between educational levels and underscores the need for coherent policy frameworks that support both vertical progression and institutional clarity.

The EPX-reform marks a significant restructuring of Denmark's upper secondary landscape, aiming to bridge vocational and academic pathways and strengthen progression opportunities. While its implementation is still in development, EPX reflects a broader ambition to modernise educational routes and enhance flexibility. The next section shifts focus to the transition from compulsory schooling to VET, exploring how guidance initiatives and early orientation programmes seek to address persistent challenges in recruitment and ensure smoother entry into vocational education.

5. Transition to VET

This section explores the critical transition from compulsory schooling to VET in Denmark. It examines the structural and cultural factors influencing students' choices, including academic bias, access requirements, and perceptions of vocational pathways. The analysis highlights recent policy initiatives aimed at strengthening early vocational orientation, improving career guidance, and creating flexible entry routes. Understanding these measures is essential for addressing persistent recruitment challenges and ensuring that VET remains an attractive and accessible option for all learners.

Public perceptions of VET remain marked by low status (Andersen, 2023). An opinion poll conducted by the National Association of Municipalities in 2015 revealed that only six percent of Danish adults would prefer a vocational pathway for their child when choosing upper secondary education (Egedal, 2015). There is little evidence to suggest that this perception has improved since. Denmark has recently introduced new initiatives aimed at strengthening early vocational orientation among lower secondary students. These initiatives reflect Denmark's ongoing efforts to modernise and diversify its VET system, making it more inclusive, adaptable, and aligned with the needs of a changing labour market.

The recent initiatives are aimed at improving flexibility, accessibility, and early engagement in the transition from compulsory schooling to vocational pathways. Key examples include:

- **Career guidance and educational awareness** – mandatory guidance initiatives in both lower and upper secondary education to ensure informed educational choices and visibility of VET options.
- **Early VET orientation initiatives**
  - **Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship** – a practice-based programme for lower secondary students, combining school subjects with workplace learning.
  - **The Sprouting Programme** – offering part-time employment in elderly care for youth aged 14–17, providing early exposure to health and social care professions.
  - **Young in Welfare** – a national student ambassador corps promoting SOSU programmes through peer-led outreach and recruitment.
  - **MiniSkills** – hands-on workshops for grade 7 pupils, introducing vocational tasks under the guidance of skilled professionals and apprentices.

Together, these initiatives form part of a broader national strategy to strengthen the vocational orientation of the education system. By combining practical experience, targeted guidance, and public engagement, they aim to foster pride in skilled trades, enhance the visibility and status of VET, and position vocational education as a respected and future-oriented pathway for young learners.

5.1. Career guidance and educational awareness

When it comes to career guidance and educational awareness, Denmark has introduced several new initiatives. To ensure that all students receive a comprehensive and differentiated overview of their educational options, new guidance formats have been implemented in lower secondary education (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018). These formats aim to support informed decision-making by presenting both academic and vocational pathways at an earlier stage.

Since 2020, students enrolled in general upper secondary education have also received mandatory guidance on vocational education and training opportunities (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2020a). This measure seeks to counteract the prevailing academic bias in upper secondary schools and to position VET not only as an alternative route to higher education but as a credible and attractive pathway leading directly to employment and the labour market.

5.2. Early VET orientation

Early vocational orientation has been a key focus in recent policy developments. Both the 2018 reform (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018) and the 2024 reform of the Danish primary and lower secondary school – folkeskolen (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024c) – introduced several initiatives designed to strengthen the connection between compulsory schooling and vocational education and training, thereby expanding pupils' opportunities for early engagement with vocational pathways. Some measures promoted collaboration between lower secondary schools and vocational colleges, for instance by enabling vocational schools to design and offer vocationally oriented electives for pupils in the final years of compulsory schooling. Others were implemented within the primary school itself, aiming to stimulate pupils' interest in practical and vocationally oriented work. This section highlights five such initiatives: the new mandatory practical-musical elective subject, the Sprouting Programme, the Young in Welfare initiative, MiniSkills, and the Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship scheme (the latter presented as a selected policy measure).

One example of an initiative introduced through the 2018 folkeskole reform to foster pupils' interest in vocationally oriented and practical work was the introduction of a compulsory practical-musical elective subject with a final examination (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018). The measure aimed to strengthen students' practical skills and provide early exposure to vocational learning environments. However, an earlier evaluation indicated that introducing final examinations in practical-musical subjects—music, visual arts, and crafts and design—had only a limited impact on students' academic competencies. While the examinations contributed positively to the perceived status of these subjects among teachers and students, they were primarily regarded as symbolic recognition, enhancing legitimacy rather than improving learning outcomes (VIVE, 2011). Implementation challenges were also noted, with teachers requesting clearer frameworks and additional resources to ensure quality in both teaching and assessment. To date, there is no empirical evidence that this initiative has increased pupils' motivation or competence to pursue vocational education after completing compulsory schooling.

Another initiative designed to strengthen early vocational orientation is the Sprouting Programme. Targeting young people aged 14–17, the programme offers paid part-time employment in elderly care settings, providing authentic exposure to vocational work in the health and social care sector and aiming to increase awareness and interest in SOSU programmes (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024b). Participants—known as "sprouts"—receive an hourly wage for a limited number of weekly hours and are supported by a dedicated mentor to ensure safety and quality. Their tasks focus exclusively on social and activity-based engagement, such as conversation, games, and shared activities, rather than personal care. An internal evaluation of the programme in Horsens Municipality demonstrates that such early vocational initiatives can generate substantial social and educational benefits (Horsens Kommune, 2019). By employing young people in nursing homes, the scheme created a more vibrant and engaging environment for residents while fostering personal development and vocational awareness among participants. Many of the young sprouts reported increased respect for care work and expressed interest in pursuing social and health care education, indicating the potential of these initiatives to influence career choices. However, the evaluation also identified structural challenges, including unclear task frameworks, limited onboarding, and resource constraints for mentors. These findings underscore the need for clear guidelines, adequate training, and sustainable funding to ensure quality and scalability. Overall, the Sprouting Programme illustrates how targeted, practice-based experiences can strengthen the link between compulsory schooling and vocational pathways, while highlighting the importance of robust implementation strategies to maximise long-term impact.

Complementing this, the Young in Welfare initiative has established a nationwide corps of student ambassadors from SOSU programmes to promote vocational careers in welfare professions. Implemented between 2021 and 2023 across 11 Danish social and health schools, the initiative trained 150 ambassadors aged 16–25 to engage with lower secondary pupils through school visits, career fairs, and social media campaigns. The evaluation of Young in Welfare highlights the effectiveness of peer-led outreach in promoting social and health care education (Tietgenfonden, 2023). It concludes that ambassador programmes significantly increase awareness of SOSU pathways among young people and help counter persistent academic bias in educational choices. Ambassadors reported strengthened professional identity and pride, while schools and municipalities viewed the initiative as a valuable recruitment tool. However, the report notes challenges related to coordination across institutions and sustaining engagement beyond the project period. Overall, Young in Welfare demonstrates that structured, youth-to-youth communication can play a critical role in improving the visibility and attractiveness of vocational careers in welfare professions.

Both initiatives reflect a broader policy ambition to introduce vocational learning at an earlier stage in the educational trajectory. By combining practical experience with structured guidance and peer-led outreach, these programmes seek to strengthen the link between compulsory schooling and vocational education and to support informed educational choices among young learners.

In parallel with DM i Skills, the MiniSkills programme was introduced to engage younger students through hands-on workshops led by skilled professionals and apprentices. Targeting pupils from grade 7, the initiative offered authentic, guided experiences in vocational fields such as masonry, carpentry, cooking, and social care. Its primary aim was to spark early interest in vocational careers by providing meaningful, practice-based learning opportunities in real-world settings. While the programme has

attracted attention as an innovative approach to early orientation, it has not yet been systematically evaluated, leaving its long-term impact on recruitment and career choices uncertain.

5.3. Selected policy measure: Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship

Policy context and rationale

The Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship scheme[14] was introduced nationwide in August 2025 as part of Denmark's broader strategy to strengthen vocational pathways and improve transitions from compulsory schooling to vocational education and training. Under this scheme, pupils in grades 8 and 9 can, by agreement with their school and teachers, complete the final years of compulsory education through a combined academic and practice-based programme. Typically, students spend one to two days per week in a workplace or at a VET school, an FGU institution, or a municipal youth school. The remaining days are spent in lower secondary school, where they follow a reduced academic curriculum.

The measure reflects a growing policy emphasis on early vocational orientation, responding to concerns about declining VET enrolment and high dropout rates among young people. It was launched under the Folkeskolens Kvalitetsprogram – Frihed og Fordybelse agreement (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2024c), which prioritised practical learning and closer links between general education and vocational tracks.

The scheme targets pupils in grades 8 and 9 who benefit from hands-on learning environments and aims to foster motivation, engagement, and career awareness. By integrating practice-based learning into compulsory schooling, the initiative seeks to bridge the gap between general education and vocational training and to provide pupils with authentic exposure to vocational work environments.

Design and implementation

Under the Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship scheme, pupils complete part of their compulsory schooling through practical training either in a workplace setting with an approved company or at a VET school. Participation is voluntary and requires agreement between the pupil, parents, and the school. The programme is organised in collaboration between municipalities, lower secondary schools, and VET schools, with companies playing a central role in offering workplace-based learning opportunities. VET schools provide practical instruction and ensure alignment with national curricula and safety standards.

Governance of the scheme rests with local authorities and VET schools under the strategic oversight of the Danish Ministry of Children and Education. Municipalities are responsible for identifying eligible pupils and coordinating agreements, while VET schools manage the practical training component and liaise with companies. The scheme is supported by national funding for coordination and pedagogical development, supplemented by in-kind contributions from participating companies.

Since August 2025, all municipalities are required to offer Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship as part of compulsory schooling. While the scheme is statutory and nationally funded, implementation varies significantly across municipalities, and systematic monitoring of participation and outcomes is still being developed.

Evidence base and lessons from previous pilots

The design of the Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship scheme draws on lessons from the EUD 8/9 framework experiment, a pilot implemented during the school years 2020/2021–2022/2023 but already evaluated in 2022 (EVA, 2022b). This earlier experiment targeted pupils at risk of not completing compulsory schooling or progressing to upper secondary education. It combined a reduced academic subject range with practice-oriented electives delivered at VET schools.

Evaluation findings indicated that participation improved pupils' motivation and sense of purpose compared to traditional schooling. Students reported that hands-on learning and exposure to vocational environments made school more meaningful and strengthened their confidence in pursuing a VET pathway. Teachers and project leaders highlighted the importance of strong collaboration between municipalities and VET schools, as well as clear frameworks for planning and assessment.

However, the evaluation also identified significant implementation challenges, including coordination difficulties between schools and companies, resource constraints, and the need for better pedagogical support to ensure quality in both academic and practical subjects.

Evidence of long-term impact on transition rates to VET remains limited, as the initiative is still in an early phase.

Strengths, challenges, and future outlook

The Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship scheme holds high potential as a model for early vocational orientation. Its strengths lie in its ability to engage practically oriented pupils, strengthen motivation, and provide authentic vocational experiences during compulsory schooling. By fostering early awareness of vocational careers, the scheme is expected to support more informed educational choices and reduce dropout risks in upper secondary education.

Nevertheless, successful implementation depends on addressing several challenges, including ensuring robust coordination between schools, municipalities, and companies; securing sustainable funding; and providing adequate pedagogical support for teachers and trainers. Systematic monitoring and evaluation will be essential to assess the scheme's effectiveness and inform future adjustments.

Looking ahead, Junior Craftsman Apprenticeship is positioned as a key component of Denmark's strategy to make vocational education more attractive and accessible. If effectively implemented and supported by strong evidence, it could serve as a model for other countries seeking to strengthen early vocational orientation and improve transitions from compulsory schooling to VET.

5.4. Improving access to VET across all regions of Denmark

Despite Denmark's relatively small size, ensuring equitable access to VET across its diverse geographical landscape remains a key policy priority. In sparsely populated areas, maintaining a broad range of educational offerings and attracting young people to local vocational schools presents a particular challenge.

To address this, the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (2018) has promoted the establishment of residential facilities[15] at vocational colleges. These boarding arrangements are designed to foster a

strong youth environment and enhance students' sense of belonging. Schools with residential facilities report that students' increased attachment to the school contributes to a positive social climate and a greater sense of safety and well-being in the educational setting.

The overarching ambition is to make it more attractive for young people to relocate to vocational schools situated in rural or remote areas. By improving access to accommodation and strengthening the social and educational environment, the policy aims to support regional mobility and ensure the sustainability of VET provision across Denmark's less densely populated regions.

6. Participation in VET and prevention of dropout

Ensuring sustained participation in VET and reducing dropout rates remain central objectives in Danish VET policy. Recent evaluations and reforms have increasingly emphasised the importance of student well-being—both academically and socially—as a key factor in retention. This section outlines the challenges and policy responses related to student well-being, with particular attention to mental health, quality of learning environments, and protection against discrimination and harassment.

6.1. Student well-being and protection

Mental health is a significant predictor of educational completion. A longitudinal study by the Danish Health Authority (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2022) found that young people with low levels of mental well-being—regardless of gender—are significantly more likely to drop out of upper secondary education compared to their peers with higher mental well-being. Similarly, academic engagement and a sense of belonging are closely linked to retention in VET programmes (Nielsen, 2016).

High-quality workplace training plays a crucial role in fostering student motivation and well-being. According to EVA (2023), authentic and meaningful tasks—characterised by variation, progression, and structured guidance—enhance students' daily engagement and strengthen their commitment to completing their education. Learning environments that offer side-by-side instruction and continuous feedback are particularly effective in supporting vocational identity and persistence.

The importance of a meaningful everyday experience is also reflected in the 2018 reform, which emphasised the need for students to feel that their presence—both at school and in the workplace—is valued. Schools are required to monitor absenteeism actively and follow up with students at risk. Transparency around attendance is mandated, and data must be shared with training companies via the national apprenticeship platform, praktikpladsen.dk (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018).

Recent data (Uddannelsesstatistik, 2025) highlight persistent disparities: students enrolled in the basic course consistently report lower levels of well-being compared to those in the main programme, and younger learners appear particularly susceptible to feelings of isolation. Gender differences are also evident, with female students generally reporting slightly lower well-being scores. The lowest well-being levels are associated with the "physical environment," which has a national average score

of 3.7, whereas the highest levels are observed for the indicator "well-being," with an average score of 4.3[16]. Overall, student well-being at vocational schools and upper secondary schools is comparable and has remained stable over recent years.

While most students express satisfaction with teacher support, transitions between school and workplace learning continue to pose risks for well-being and retention. These findings underline the need for integrated strategies that combine pedagogical quality, strong peer communities, and structured support during practical training to reduce dropout and enhance motivation.

Policy measures aimed at supporting student well-being are often framed as dropout prevention strategies. EVA's evaluation report Knowledge on Dropout and Well-being (2023) identifies dropout as a multifaceted issue, shaped by age, gender, and the dual structure of VET. Many students report poor learning environments during workplace training, where they are treated as cheap labour rather than learners. Companies may prioritise productivity over pedagogy, resulting in limited task variation and inadequate skill development (Epinion, 2020; Louw & Hansen, 2018; Muehlemann, 2019).

Dropout risks also vary by age and gender. Younger students are more likely to disengage early, while female students face higher dropout rates in VET compared to their male peers in general upper secondary education (Statistics Denmark, 2022). Gender minorities within vocational programmes—such as women in male-dominated fields or men in female-dominated ones—are particularly vulnerable. These students may encounter sexist language, social isolation, or difficulties securing apprenticeships, all of which contribute to increased dropout risk (Institute for Human Rights, 2019; EVA, 2023).

To address these challenges, legal protections have been strengthened. A tripartite agreement introduced in 2022 redefined sexual harassment as a serious breach of contract, granting students the right to terminate their training agreements without notice in cases of harassment or bullying (Danish Ministry of Employment, 2022). The agreement also established a fast-track procedure for handling complaints and ensured that affected students could continue their education through school-based training.

Since 2019, VET institutions have been required to conduct systematic student well-being surveys, further institutionalising the focus on students' experiences and needs (Retsinformation, 2019). These measures reflect a growing recognition that safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments are essential to improving retention and ensuring that vocational education remains a viable and attractive pathway for all learners.

6.2. Flexible learning pathways and new programme models

The New Apprenticeship Model[17] places increased emphasis on workplace-based learning, thereby reinforcing the dual structure of Danish VET and strengthening the connection between education and industry. A distinctive feature of this model is that the student begins their vocational education directly in a company, bypassing the conventional school-based introductory course (GF1). This approach offers a more immersive and practice-oriented entry into vocational training, particularly suited to learners who thrive in real-world environments. Despite its name, the model is not entirely new. Historically, apprenticeship in Denmark traditionally began in the workplace, and the current initiative can be seen as a revival of this original format. By reintroducing a company-first structure,

the model seeks to enhance motivation, improve retention, and foster stronger ties between learners and employers from the outset of their education.

While the New Apprenticeship Model revives a traditional company-first approach to strengthen workplace learning, other initiatives aim to address inclusion and retention through structural flexibility. Among these, VETflex stands out as a targeted measure designed to support learners with significant challenges by offering extended time for school-based training without financial disadvantage. The following section explores the policy rationale, design, and implications of VETflex as a cornerstone of Denmark's strategy for equitable access to vocational education.

6.3. Selected policy measure: VETflex

Policy context and rationale

The VETflex scheme was introduced in 2025 as part of a comprehensive agreement to strengthen vocational education and training (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c). The initiative responds to persistent challenges of high dropout rates and limited accessibility for students with functional impairments or severe learning difficulties. Under VETflex, learners are granted the right to extend the school-based part of their VET programme without losing financial support or apprentice wages. This flexibility aims to accommodate individual learning needs while maintaining the overall curriculum and qualification standards. The measure reflects a broader policy ambition to ensure equity and inclusion in VET, recognising that some students require additional time and tailored support to complete their education and transition successfully into employment. By institutionalising flexible pathways, VETflex seeks to reduce structural barriers, improve retention, and uphold Denmark's commitment to inclusive education and labour market participation (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c).

Design and implementation

VETflex is designed as a flexible learning pathway for students and apprentices with documented functional impairments or severe learning difficulties. The scheme allows these learners to extend the school-based part of their vocational education by up to 50%, while maintaining the same total curriculum and qualification standards. This extension does not affect the overall content or learning objectives but provides additional time to complete the programme.

Implementation is based on an individual assessment by the school following documentation of the student's support needs. Students can indicate their need for VETflex when applying through the national admission platform, enabling schools to initiate early dialogue and plan appropriate support measures, including special educational assistance (SPS). Schools are required to review the student's progress continuously and may adjust the support arrangement if necessary.

To ensure financial viability, the scheme includes a dedicated funding framework that preserves the taximeter level throughout the extended period, despite reduced weekly hours. A state-funded wage supplement for apprenticeships is introduced to guarantee full apprentice pay during the extended training, administered through the Employers' Reimbursement Fund (AUB). The initiative also mandates systematic monitoring of VETflex participants, including data on dropout, completion rates, and transitions to workplace training, to inform future policy decisions (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c).

Strengths and challenges

VETflex represents a significant step toward inclusive vocational education. By institutionalising the right to extend school-based training without financial penalties, the scheme removes structural barriers that have historically hindered students with functional impairments. The model promotes equity by ensuring that learners receive sufficient time to meet qualification standards while maintaining access to full apprentice wages. Its design supports early identification of needs through the national admission platform and integrates continuous assessment, which strengthens retention and reduces dropout risks. Furthermore, dedicated funding and monitoring mechanisms provide a robust framework for implementation and evidence-based policy development.

Despite its potential, VETflex faces several implementation challenges. The scheme depends on access to specialised pedagogical expertise and adequately trained teachers and support staff. In addition, strong coordination between schools, employers, and support services is essential to ensure that extended learning pathways maintain coherence and do not compromise progression or workplace integration. Maintaining quality and coherence across prolonged programmes demands additional pedagogical resources and specialised staff, which may strain institutional capacity. Financial sustainability is another concern: the model depends on fixed budget allocations, and any increase in uptake could trigger automatic taximeter adjustments, potentially limiting flexibility. Finally, systematic evaluation will be essential to determine whether VETflex achieves its intended outcomes in reducing dropout and improving labour market transitions, as evidence from similar initiatives remains limited.

Transferability

While VETflex appears promising as a model for inclusive vocational education, its transferability to other national contexts is highly uncertain. The scheme is fundamentally anchored in Denmark's welfare-state framework, where state-funded educational support and guaranteed apprentice wages form the financial backbone of the initiative. Such comprehensive public financing is rare internationally, making replication challenging without significant structural adjustments. Beyond funding, the model presupposes strong institutional capacity, specialised pedagogical expertise, and close coordination between schools, employers, and support services—conditions that may not exist in many systems. Countries considering similar measures would need to establish sustainable financing mechanisms and robust monitoring structures to maintain quality and evaluate impact. In short, VETflex reflects a distinctly Danish approach shaped by welfare-state principles, and its success may be difficult to reproduce in contexts with different economic and policy foundations.

6.4. Internationalisation and mobility

Internationalisation has become an increasingly important dimension of Danish VET policy, reflecting broader ambitions to position vocational education as globally relevant and future-oriented. Recent reforms have introduced new opportunities for mobility, aiming to enhance the attractiveness of VET and support the development of intercultural competencies, language skills, and professional adaptability.

As part of the 2025 reform package, vocational students are now offered expanded access to international study trips, exchange programmes, and cross-border training placements (Danish

Ministry of Children and Education, 2024a; 2025c). These initiatives are designed to expose learners to diverse work cultures and practices, strengthen their employability in an international labour market, and foster a sense of global citizenship.

The reform sets an ambitious target: by 2035, the number of VET students completing part of their training abroad is to increase fivefold. To support this goal, permanent funding has been allocated to national VET knowledge centres, which play a key role in coordinating mobility programmes, developing partnerships, and disseminating best practices.

International mobility is also framed as a strategy to improve retention and motivation. By offering students the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning experiences abroad, the policy seeks to strengthen vocational identity and provide new perspectives on career development. These experiences are particularly valuable for students in sectors undergoing rapid technological and environmental transformation, such as green energy, digital services, and health care.

While implementation is still in its early stages, the internationalisation agenda reflects a clear shift in Danish VET policy—from a primarily national labour market orientation toward a more outward-looking and globally integrated model. This development aligns with EU priorities on mobility and lifelong learning and positions Denmark as a proactive contributor to the European VET landscape.

6.5. Strengthening vocational pedagogical competencies among teachers and training companies

Pedagogical competence among vocational teachers and trainers is a cornerstone of student retention, well-being, and educational quality in Danish VET. Recent policy initiatives have prioritised the development of inclusive, practice-oriented learning environments that support both academic progression and vocational identity formation.

In 2025, a permanent increase in funding through the national taximeter system was introduced to strengthen professional development among VET teachers (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c). This funding supports continuing education in inclusive pedagogy, prevention of discrimination and harassment, and the onboarding of guest teachers from industry. Guest teachers bring specialised, up-to-date knowledge into the classroom, and schools are encouraged to provide pedagogical training to ensure effective integration into teaching teams.

As part of the June 2025 agreement on the green transition, approximately DKK 90 million was allocated to strengthen teacher competencies in sustainability and technological innovation (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c). These investments aim to ensure that students encounter educators with relevant, future-oriented expertise and that vocational programmes remain aligned with emerging labour market demands.

Training companies play a critical role in shaping students' vocational identity and well-being. Research by the Danish Centre for Youth Research (CEFU, 2021) highlights a frequent mismatch in expectations: companies often focus on students' immediate job performance, while students seek broader professional development. EVA (2023) notes that this misalignment can lead to misunderstandings and dropout. To address this, companies are encouraged to adopt a shared value

framework for apprenticeships, including eight concrete principles centred on expectation alignment and continuous dialogue.

Workplace-based learning environments must support both social and professional integration. Rambøll (2018) emphasises the importance of apprentices becoming part of both the social and practice-based communities at the workplace. Fuller (2019) and Louw & Hansen (2018) similarly argue that apprenticeships should foster vocational identity, not merely task execution. EVA (2023) recommends that companies actively support students' development by offering meaningful tasks, structured feedback, and inclusive work cultures.

VET schools are advised to strengthen student well-being through four key areas: teaching methods and learning formats, academic and social communities, support and resources, and transitions between educational phases (EVA, 2023). Social activities—such as communal meals, excursions, and informal events—are particularly important for younger students. Teachers play a central role in facilitating these communities, and their ability to create inclusive and engaging environments is essential to retention (Hansen & Nielsen, 2021 in EVA, 2023).

Together, these measures reflect a comprehensive approach to strengthening vocational pedagogy. By investing in teacher development, enhancing collaboration with industry, and promoting inclusive practices, Danish VET policy seeks to ensure that all students encounter high-quality, supportive, and professionally relevant learning environments.

6.6. Selected policy measure: guest teachers and inclusive pedagogy in VET

Policy context and rationale

The initiative to strengthen inclusive pedagogy and bring guest teachers from industry into VET was introduced as part of the 2025 agreement on improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational education (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c). The measure responds to two persistent challenges: the need to enhance teaching relevance through closer links to industry and the imperative to create inclusive learning environments that prevent discrimination and harassment. By combining permanent funding for teacher development with structured collaboration between schools and companies, the initiative aims to ensure that students encounter both high-quality pedagogy and up-to-date, practice-based knowledge. This dual focus reflects a broader policy ambition to improve retention and engagement by making VET more inclusive, future-oriented, and aligned with labour market needs.

Design and implementation

The measure consists of two main components. First, permanent funding is allocated through the national taximeter system to support continuing education for VET teachers in inclusive pedagogy, sustainability, and harassment prevention. This includes courses on differentiated teaching methods and strategies for creating safe and supportive learning environments. Second, schools are encouraged to recruit guest teachers from industry to deliver specialised, practice-based instruction. To ensure quality, schools are responsible for onboarding guest teachers and providing basic pedagogical

training. Implementation is decentralised, allowing institutions to tailor activities to local needs while adhering to national guidelines. The initiative also promotes collaboration between schools and companies to strengthen the link between education and workplace practices.

Strengths and challenges

The measure bridges the gap between education and the labour market by integrating current industry expertise into teaching. It enhances student engagement and retention by making learning more relevant and inclusive. Permanent funding provides stability for teacher development, supporting long-term improvements in pedagogical quality.

Implementation varies across institutions, and the success of guest teaching depends on effective onboarding and pedagogical training. Schools may face resource constraints in coordinating industry partnerships and ensuring quality standards. Sustaining inclusive practices requires continuous investment and monitoring, particularly in areas such as harassment prevention and diversity awareness.

Transferability

The initiative offers quick-win potential for systems seeking stronger industry-education links and inclusive teaching practices. Its core elements—guest teaching and targeted professional development—are adaptable to different contexts, provided that funding and institutional capacity are in place. However, successful transfer requires mechanisms for quality assurance and structured onboarding of guest teachers, as well as sustained investment in teacher training. Countries with less developed collaboration between schools and industry may need to establish formal frameworks to support partnerships and ensure pedagogical coherence.

7. General description

This concluding section synthesises the key findings and insights presented throughout the Danish national report for the VETprep project. It provides an integrated overview of the main policy directions, structural features, and targeted measures aimed at enhancing participation and reducing dropout in vocational education and training. By summarising strengths, weaknesses, and emerging trends, the section offers a final perspective on Denmark's approach to VET reform and its implications for future development—both nationally and in an international context.

Participation and retention in VET remain persistent challenges in the Danish context. Despite strong labour market outcomes and a historically well-regarded dual model, dropout rates continue to affect approximately 40% of students, particularly during transitions between school-based and workplace-based learning. These challenges are compounded by structural factors such as fragmented learning environments, uneven access to apprenticeships, and limited social cohesion among students.

Recent policy developments have reframed dropout not merely as an individual issue, but as a systemic concern linked to student well-being, pedagogical quality, and institutional support. Measures introduced since 2018 have focused on strengthening inclusive learning environments, improving

transitions, and enhancing the professional competencies of teachers and training companies. The overarching ambition is to ensure that all students—regardless of background, ability, or geography—encounter meaningful, motivating, and coherent educational pathways.

7.1. Selected policies and measures to support participation in VET and prevent dropout

A range of targeted policy measures have been implemented to support participation and reduce dropout in Danish VET:

- **Student Well-being and Protection:** Legal frameworks have been strengthened to protect students from harassment and discrimination during workplace training. Systematic well-being surveys have been introduced, and schools are required to monitor absenteeism and follow up with at-risk students.
- **Flexible Learning Pathways and New Programme Models:** The New Apprenticeship Model allows students to begin their education directly in companies, while the VETflex scheme offers extended training periods for students with disabilities, ensuring equitable access and financial support.
- **Strengthening Vocational Pedagogical Competencies:** Permanent funding increases have enabled schools to invest in teacher development, inclusive pedagogy, and guest teaching from industry. Training companies are encouraged to adopt shared value frameworks to align expectations and support vocational identity formation.
- **Improved Access in All Regions:** Boarding facilities have been promoted to strengthen youth environments and support mobility in sparsely populated areas, ensuring that regional VET provision remains viable and attractive.

These measures reflect a multi-dimensional strategy that combines structural reform, pedagogical innovation, and student-centred development.

7.2. Strengths and weaknesses of the Danish approach to support students' participation in VET and prevent dropout

Strengths of the Danish approach include:

- A strong legal and institutional framework for student protection and well-being.
- Flexible programme models that accommodate diverse learner needs.
- Sustained investment in teacher development and pedagogical quality.
- Integration of workplace and school-based learning through the dual model.
- Political commitment to inclusive education and regional accessibility.

Weaknesses include:

- Continued high dropout rates, particularly among younger students and gender minorities.
- Uneven quality of workplace training environments and limited employer engagement in pedagogy.
- Fragmented transitions between educational phases and institutions.

- Experimental status of key initiatives (e.g. ASD classes, VETflex), with uncertain long-term funding.
- Limited evidence of impact from some measures due to lack of systematic evaluation.

Overall, Denmark's approach demonstrates a comprehensive and evolving strategy to support participation in VET. However, successful implementation depends on sustained funding, coherent coordination across stakeholders, and continuous monitoring of outcomes. The Danish experience offers several transferable elements—such as flexible pathways, inclusive pedagogy, and employer collaboration—that may serve as quick wins in other national contexts, provided they are adapted to local conditions.

8. Summary

Danish VET policy has adopted a multi-dimensional approach to supporting student participation and preventing dropout. Central to this strategy is the recognition that well-being, flexibility, and pedagogical quality are decisive factors in retention. Measures such as systematic well-being surveys, strengthened legal protections against harassment, and targeted support for gender minorities reflect a growing awareness of the social and emotional dimensions of vocational education.

The introduction of flexible programme models—such as The New Apprenticeship Model and VETflex—demonstrates a commitment to differentiated learning pathways that accommodate diverse learner needs, including adults and students with disabilities. These initiatives are complemented by investments in teacher development and workplace-based learning environments, aiming to foster inclusive and motivating educational communities.

Internationalisation efforts further enhance the appeal of VET by offering students global perspectives and intercultural competencies, while partnerships with industry ensure that vocational programmes remain relevant and future-oriented.

Despite these strengths, challenges persist. Dropout rates remain high, particularly among younger students and gender minorities. The dual structure of VET continues to produce uneven learning experiences, especially during workplace training. Moreover, the sustainability of experimental models such as ASD-classes and extended training schemes depends on long-term political and financial commitment.

Overall, Denmark's approach combines structural reform, pedagogical innovation, and inclusive policy design. While implementation gaps remain, the framework offers several transferable elements—such as flexible entry routes, targeted well-being initiatives, and strengthened teacher competencies—that could be adapted in other national contexts as quick-win solutions to improve participation and retention in VET.

Notes

1 In DK: Faglige udvalg

2 In DK: Lokale uddannelsesudvalg abbreviated as LUU

3 This option is expected to be phased out from 2030.

4 Danish Grading System: Denmark uses a 7-point grading scale from -3 to 12, aligned with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The grades and their ECTS equivalents are: 12 = A (Excellent), 10 = B (Very good), 7 = C (Good), 4 = D (Fair), 02 = E (Sufficient), 00 = Fx (Fail), -3 = F (Fail).

5 Including the two basic courses

6 The Happy Foundation *https://www.gladuddannelse.dk*

7 In DK: Eudfleks

8 Production schools were practice-oriented institutions in Denmark that offered young people under 25, who were not in education or employment, an alternative learning environment focused on hands-on production tasks combined with personal and social development. They were phased out in 2019 and replaced by the Preparatory Basic Education programme (FGU).

9 In DK: Spireordningen

10 In DK: Ung i Velfærd

11 In DK: DM i Skills

12 In Denmark, subjects such as Danish, mathematics, and English at "C-level" refer to the lowest level of the three-tier grading structure in upper secondary education (A, B, C). C-level corresponds to a basic level of academic competence, typically equivalent to the minimum requirement for general study competence and aligned with the European Qualifications Framework at level 3–4.

13 In DK: Praksisfaglighed

14 In DK: Juniormesterlære

15 In DK: Skolehjem

16 Well-being is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where five indicates the highest level of well-being.

17 In DK: Ny Mesterlære

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