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RIGSREVISIONEN

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Extract from Rigsrevisionen's report
submitted to the Public Accounts Committee

The transfer of students from upper secondary school to higher education

1. Introduction and conclusion

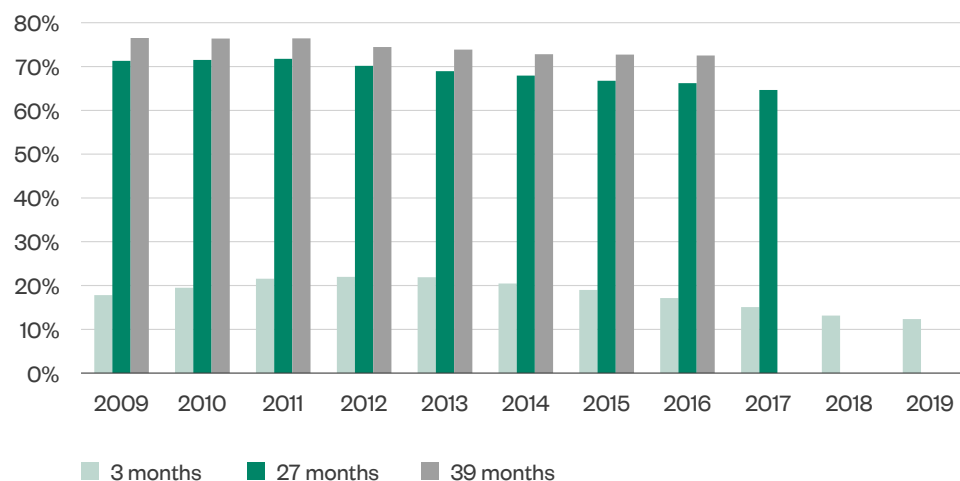
1.1. Purpose and conclusion

1. The report concerns the extent to which upper secondary schools succeed in transferring the greatest possible number of students from upper secondary school to higher education. According to section 1 of the Danish Upper Secondary School Act (act no. 1375 of 24 June 2021 on general upper secondary education), the purpose of upper secondary schools is primarily *"to prepare students for higher education and to ensure that they acquire general education competences, knowledge and skills through a combination of width and depth of learning and interaction between the subjects taught"*. In addition, it appears from the agreement on the reform of upper secondary schools from 2016 that *"it should be clear that upper secondary education is primarily aimed at young people who wish to continue their studies and intended to prepare the students for higher education"*.

For the past ten years, however, the number of students that have transferred to higher education after upper secondary school has declined. This applies to direct transfer (three months after the students have completed upper secondary school) and the more long-term transfer (27 and 39 months, respectively, after completion of upper secondary school). Figure 1 shows the number of students who – in the period from 2009 to 2019 – transferred to higher education, respectively 3, 27 and 39 months after having completed upper secondary school.

Figure 1

The number of students who - in the period from 2009 to 2019 - transferred to higher education, respectively 3, 27 and 39 months after completion of upper secondary school



Note: Please note that the y-axis only goes to 80%. Transfer data on education statistics are available after 3 months for the period from 2009 to 2019. After 27 months for the period from 2009 to 2017 and after 39 months for the period from 2009 to 2016.

Source: Rigsrevisionen based on data provided by the Ministry of Children and Education.

Transfer frequency

The transfer frequency from upper secondary to higher education is calculated as the number of students enrolled at a higher education institution at the time of count (for instance, 27 months after completion of upper secondary school).

Cost efficiency

In this study, cost efficiency is measured by the government expenditure for education of students that transfer to higher education after completion of upper secondary school.

It appears from figure 1 that in the period from 2011 to 2019, student transfer to higher education declined every year both after 3, 27 and 39 months. If you look at transfer *immediately* after completion of upper secondary school (i.e. within 3 months), only 12 per cent of the students from class of 2019 were enrolled at an institution of higher education in October of that year. This is the lowest number for decades, cf. a report published by the Statistics Bureau of Denmark in 2019 with the title; '*Rekord få studenter læser videre med det samme*' (Record low number of students transferring to higher education).

Based on the development in transfer from upper secondary school to higher education (in the following referred to as the transfer frequency) for all four upper secondary education programmes, this study looks at the cost efficiency of upper secondary schools, i.e. how much does the government spent per student that transfers from upper secondary school to higher education. We use data on the transfer from upper secondary school to higher education 27 months after the students have completed upper secondary school, as this is identical with the time of measurement used by the Ministry of Children and Education in its supervision of the upper secondary schools. Yet, we have carried out complementing analyses of, among other things, transfer after 39 months. These are described in appendix 1.

2. The Ministry of Children and Education has responsibility for upper secondary schools and the implementation of reforms in this area. Section 70 of the Upper Secondary School Act stipulates that the minister of children and education has overall responsibility for and supervise education, tests and exams at the upper secondary schools. This means that the minister is also responsible for ensuring that upper secondary schools fulfil their primary statutory objective which is to prepare the students for higher education.

Despite the fact that upper secondary schools are government funded, independent institutions of education, the minister is responsible for ensuring that government funds are used economically, efficiently and effectively. Thus, it is up to the ministry – in cooperation with the upper secondary schools and through its supervision – to attain the highest possible transfer frequency.

As mentioned earlier, this study is based on data about transfer from upper secondary school to higher education 27 months after students have completed upper secondary school. This means that students from classes of 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 are included in the study. This study does not include data on transfer 27 months after the students in class of 2018 completed upper secondary school. The reason is that these data are not available and ready for use before the end of 2021, which is after completion of the study.

3. The purpose of the study is to assess whether the Ministry of Children and Education has ensured that upper secondary schools have attained the highest possible transfer frequency for the public funding provided through the so-called taximeter system. The report answers the following questions:

- Have upper secondary schools managed to transfer the greatest possible number of students to higher education?
- Has the Ministry of Children and Education's supervision of the transfer frequency of upper secondary schools been satisfactory?

Rigsrevisionen initiated the study in March 2021.



Main conclusion

The Ministry of Children and Education has not ensured that upper secondary schools have achieved the highest possible transfer frequency for the public funding provided through the taximeter system. The consequence is that the upper secondary schools have failed to fulfill their purpose, which is to prepare the students for higher education.

Upper secondary schools have not managed to transfer the greatest possible number of students from the classes of 2014 to 2017 to higher education. With the same taximeter funding, the upper secondary schools might have transferred a minimum of 6,300 additional students from the classes of 2014-2017 to a higher education. Rigsrevisionen's comparison of upper secondary schools with much the same characteristics shows an untapped potential of just under 6 per cent for increasing the number of students that transfer to higher education based on the taximeter funding provided to the schools. The upper secondary schools with the greatest potential for improvement, when the total number of students is taken into consideration, are small and medium-sized schools, schools offering higher preparatory examination programmes, schools located in peripheral regions and schools whose students have a lower socioeconomic status.

The study also found that the taximeter rate paid by the government per student that transfers from upper secondary school to higher education has increased by 12 per cent in the period from 2014 to 2017 after adjustment for the change in the socioeconomic status of students attending upper secondary school. In the same period, cost efficiency has declined in more than one in every three upper secondary schools (37 per cent). Thus, it has become more expensive for the government to transfer a student from these schools to higher education. At the same time, the rate paid by the government per transferred student differs significantly from school to school.

The Ministry of Children and Education's supervision of the transfer frequency of upper secondary schools for the classes of 2014 to 2017 has not been satisfactory Firstly, the ministry's supervision does not cover all the upper secondary schools that are experiencing permanent transfer frequency issues. At the same time, the upper secondary schools that are selected for supervision are the same year after year, which seems to indicate that the supervision does not have the intended effect.

Secondly, the Ministry of Children and Education has not supervised the transfer frequency of all upper secondary education programmes every year in the period from 2017 to 2020, in spite of the fact that this is a requirement of the upper secondary school reform.

The study also shows that by using data with a shorter time perspective as a basis, the process laid down for the supervision can be shortened. The reason is that the majority of the schools that offer higher general and higher preparatory examination programmes and have a low transfer frequency after 27 months, also have a low transfer frequency after 3, 6, 9 and 15 months. These programmes account for the majority of the students that attend upper secondary school every year.