



FOLKETINGET
STATSREVISORERNE



FOLKETINGET
RIGSREVISIONEN

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submitted to the Public Accounts Committee

Student absence in vocational education and training (VET) schools

1. Introduction and conclusion

1.1. Purpose and conclusion

1. This report concerns student absence in Danish vocational education and training (VET) schools. The schools have the highest drop-out rate compared with other qualifying post-secondary educational institutions. Students with a high rate of absence are at risk of dropping out. Close to half of all students at the VET schools drop out, and efforts made since 2011 to significantly reduce the drop-out rate have not been successful. Attendance at the VET schools is compulsory, and class participation is a requirement for passing the programmes. These facts put together make it relevant to focus on absence in this particular field of education.

2. The study includes the Ministry of Children and Education and 78 schools that offered VET programmes in the period from 2015 to 2020. The schools are independent institutions, and each school is led by a school board with overall responsibility for the activities and running of the school. Independent institutions are legally separated from the state, and the minister of children and education has no powers of direction over the VET schools. However, the Ministry of Children and Education is responsible for the supervision of the schools.

3. In 2022, the VET schools received funding (under the taximeter system) of approx. DKK 5 billion. Funding allocated to the VET schools is primarily activity-based and based on the number of students enrolled and can serve as an economic incentive for the individual school to retain the students. Students enrolled in VET programmes are entitled to receive SU (government grants and loans scheme) during the basic course. Students enrolled in the main programmes, who have an internship contract with a company, are paid an internship salary by the company. If the work-based learning takes place in an internship centre, the students are paid a salary by their school.

For several years, the Ministry of Children and Education has focused on retaining students at risk of dropping out. Retention was also addressed in the reform to improve vocational education and training that took effect in August 2015. Rigsrevisionen notes that the ministry's focus on retention, combined with the economic incentive for the schools to ensure that the students stay enrolled, entails a risk that too much effort is put into retaining students who have a high rate of absence and do not complete their education. This approach would increase the government's expenditure under the taximeter system unduly.

Qualifying post-secondary education

Qualifying post-secondary educational programmes include vocational education and training (VET), short-cycle education, professional bachelor programmes and long-cycle education programmes.

4. The Ministry of Children and Education's supervision and the schools' administration should have focus on efficient management of funding allocated for the VET system under the taximeter system.

The purpose of the study is to assess whether the Ministry of Children and Education has ensured that student absence in the VET schools is managed efficiently. The report answers the following questions:

- Have the VET schools managed student absence efficiently?
- Has the Ministry of Children and Education monitored student absence in the VET schools appropriately?
- Have three selected schools (*Technical Education College, South Jutland's Global School for People and Businesses and Zealand Business College*) followed up on student absence appropriately?

5. Rigsrevisionen's understanding of the terms under which the schools work with student absence differs significantly from the ministry's understanding. Thus, the ministry submitted several comments on the report of a general nature along with comments on the method applied by Rigsrevisionen. The ministry has, among other things, stated that the legislators' focus was on retention. Rigsrevisionen agrees that retention is important and, as it appears from the legislative history of the act concerning VET schools, the students should be retained to complete their education. Some of the comments made by the ministry are incorporated into the report, and an excerpt from a memorandum from the ministry on the commitment of the political level to student retention is included as Appendix 2.

6. Rigsrevisionen initiated the study in January 2022.



Main conclusion

The Ministry of Children and Education has not ensured that student absence in the VET schools is managed efficiently. Much of the funding allocated to the schools is therefore spent on students who have a high rate of illegal absence and do not complete their education.

Funding provided to vocational education and training institutions has not been managed efficiently in relation to student absence

The study shows that from 2015 to 2020, 53% of the students completed their education. Rigsrevisionen estimates that these students released approx. DKK 17 billion under the taximeter system, whereas the 47% who dropped out released approx. DKK 13 billion under the taximeter system. The study found that the group of students with high illegal absence rates was the cause of unnecessary government expenses for the taximeter system because most of the students dropped out. The study indicates that high absence rates increase the risk of students dropping out. Only 9% of all students with an illegal absence rate of 10% and beyond complete their education. Lastly, the study shows that if the government had not released taximeter funding for students who, after having reached an illegal absence rate of 10% the first time, in the end, did not complete their education, expenses for the taximeter system could potentially have been reduced by well over DKK 1.7 billion in the years from 2015 to 2022.

The Ministry of Children and Education has not appropriately monitored absence in VET schools

In April 2022, the Ministry of Children and Education obtained valid data on rates of absence in the schools. As the ministry has not previously operated with a complete set of data on absence in the schools, the ministry has neither monitored the rate of absence nor appropriately examined the connection between absence and drop-out rates. Thus, the ministry was unaware of the financial implications of the connection between the two. The ministry has informed Rigsrevisionen that its monitoring activities in 2022/2023 will include absence as a key performance indicator.

Technical Education College, South Jutland's Global School for People and Businesses and Zealand Business College have not followed up on student absence appropriately

The study shows that Technical Education College, South Jutland's Global School for People and Businesses and Zealand Business College have rules and business processes to handle compulsory attendance, registration of absence and sanctions. However, the focus of the schools has predominantly been on retaining the highest possible number of students, and none of the schools have considered setting targets for attendance that ensure that the students will have a realistic chance of completing their education. Nor is systematic monitoring of absence rates for individual programmes part of the management information systems in the schools.

Illegal absence

The individual school defines which type of absence it regards as absence without a valid reason. Illegal absence is typically absence without prior agreement or absence that the student has failed to report to the school.

The schools have informed Rigsrevisionen that decisions to expel students due to absence are always preceded by an overall pedagogical evaluation, including an evaluation of the students' potential to complete their education. However, the study shows that this evaluation is rarely reflected in the schools' decisions to expel students. Rigsrevisionen has therefore not been able to assess the extent to which the schools' decisions are fully or partly based on the student's absence.

Going through the documents concerning the expulsion of students, Rigsrevisionen noted that compliance with the Danish Public Administration Act is not immediately apparent from the decisions made by the schools. Based on this finding, Rigsrevisionen assesses that at least one of the requirements prescribed by the act concerning, respectively, the reason for expulsion, reference to relevant acts, consultation and the right to file a complaint was absent in largely all the decisions reviewed by Rigsrevisionen. The Ministry of Children and Education has informed Rigsrevisionen that in cases concerning the expulsion of students due to excessive absence, all VET schools are required to adhere to the concept of procedural fairness as stated in the Public Administration Act. The ministry's processing of complaints made it clear to the ministry that there was a need to follow up on the schools' compliance with the administrative regulations when students are expelled, for instance.