

## Danish summary national report (WP6)

1. The purpose of the study and the EU context (to be provided by editor)
2. The national policy context and brief outline of care and education systems

### *Education in Denmark*

Expenditure on education in Denmark is slightly over the OECD average as a percentage of public expenditure. The elevated expenses to higher education in Denmark may in part be ascribed to the relatively high expenses to financial grants to the students (Undervisningsministeriet 2010).

In Denmark, there are nine years of compulsory education.<sup>1</sup> Children are expected to enter grade one in the calendar year of their seventh birthday. In addition, after completing the nine years of compulsory school there is an optional grade 10. The Danish primary and lower secondary school is comprehensive with no streaming through from the preschool class to the end of grade 10 (Cirius 2006). After compulsory school the young people can continue to short-cycle education programmes that usually take two years or to vocational education and training that usually takes between 2-4 years or they can continue to upper secondary school or vocational oriented secondary school. The latter two programmes are academically oriented and give access to higher education. They give access to medium-cycle higher education programmes like nursing, pedagogy etc. that can be studied at university colleges. Old subjects like law, finance, history etc. can only be studied at university where you can get a bachelor or a masters degree.

We know that approximately 15% – 20% of all young people never obtain a youth education (Jensen and Jensen 2005) and The Danish government has made a strong commitment to increase participation rates in education. The goal is that by 2015, 95% of a youth cohort should have completed a youth education.

### *Children in care and their education*

In Denmark, approximately 15,000 children and young people are placed in care which means that 1.3% of the population of children and young people are placed in care. This figure has been constant over the last 100 years (Bryderup 2005, Andersen (red.) 2010). The great majority of children in Denmark are placed on a voluntary basis. More men than women are placed in care. The lowest number of children placed in care concerns the 0-3 year olds that accounts for 6% of all children and young people placed in care. The biggest group of children and young people placed in care concerns the 15-17 year olds. They account for 41% of all placements of children and young people. There is an inclination towards placing small children in foster care and older children at residential care centres and the majority of the 15-17 year olds are placed at residential care centres.

In Denmark, the Parliament lays down the overall guidelines and aims for the placement of children and youngsters into care. It is up to the local authorities to provide the required number of places and to approve of the institutions involved. The local authorities also fund and manage actual

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that it is the education in itself that is compulsory, not attendance at school. Parents, thus, may choose to teach their children at home. In reality, however, this opportunity is rarely used.

placements.<sup>2</sup> Local authorities have different placement options when a child or a youngster is to be placed outside their homes: foster care, residential care centres, private residential care centres, boarding schools, own accommodation and ship project. The young people can stay in care until the age of 18 and further receive leaving care support until the age of 23.

A fundamental principle of Danish educational policy is that everyone should have the same access to education and training. The focus is on the individual and all students are entitled to instruction that is adapted to their situation, potential and which takes into account any special needs.

Since 1998, residential care centres, private residential care centres and day-care centres have been authorised to establish schools for children and young people. Approximately half the children and young people of compulsory education age placed in care at these centres are educated at on-site schools (Bryderup et al. 2001). The type of instruction offered in these centres is defined as special educational provision and as such it is subject to the rules of the 'Folkeskole Act'.

### 3. What did we know at the start of the study and what questions did we need to ask?

The first stage of the research was to carry out a comprehensive literature review to find out what was already known (Höher et al, 2008). In Denmark research regarding young people in care and care leaver's schooling is very limited. Several researchers have hence concluded that research is needed regarding young people in care's schooling and in particular research focusing on their future pathways in the educational system (Christoffersen 1993, Bryderup 2004, Egelund & Hestbæk 2004, Cowi 2005, Bryderup & Andsager 2006).

Statistics comparing the educational attainment of children in care with the general population is not published in Denmark. Only few studies have focused at children in care and their schooling experiences and when it comes to research regarding young people's pathways after compulsory school it is even more limited. However, the research that has been carried out documents that young people in care/from a public care background suffer from a range of disadvantages and are also more likely than their peers to experience educational difficulties (Christoffersen 1993, Mortensøn and Neerbek 2008, Ottosen and Christensen 2008, Melbye & Husted 2009, Andersen (red.) 2010).

Three studies examining post-compulsory pathways drawing on statistics from Statistics Denmark have all revealed that young people from a public care background that children from a public care background are under achieving compared to their peers. Only a minority of the young people from a public care background obtains qualifications beyond compulsory school compared to all young people (Christoffersen 1993, Melbye & Husted 2009, Andersen (red.) 2010).

Previous research has stated that young people in care are underachieving compared to their peers. But there has only been little or no interest in the minority who were educationally successful and no research addressing the central question for the YiPPEE study, how well does the care system recognise and promote educational potential among children in care? To what extent are the young people enabled to, or prevented from accessing universal educational provision beyond the age of compulsory schooling? Are the young people influenced by others in choosing to study or not choosing to study? What facilitates their learning and what restrains can be identified for maintaining the young people in the educational system?

### 4. How the research was carried out

We gained insight into the educational identities held by young people, the structural and individual processes and pathways leading from the end of compulsory schooling and towards continued participation in formal education by analysing the empirical data consisting of 1) Literature review,

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<sup>2</sup> By 1 January 2007 the administrative system in Denmark has been changed. The number of municipalities has been reduced from 275 to 98

2) Secondary analysis of national statistics on children in care and their educational attainment, 3) A case study consisting of 5 interviews with group leaders, 75 telephone interviews with young people, 35 in-depth face-to-face interviews with young people, 29 follow up interviews with young people, 14 interviews with nominated adults.

All research regarding young people in care and education as well as research regarding vulnerable young people was included in the literature review. Following the state of the art literature review, the next stage consisted of secondary analysis of national statistics on children in care and their educational attainment. Five local authorities were chosen for closer study and agreed to participate. They were selected to represent different socio-economic characteristics with varying numbers of children in care and care leavers. They differed greatly in size, with the largest area having a total population of 90,000 and the smallest only 30,000.

Managers of leaving care services and education support services were interviewed in each area. They were asked for information on their services, on educational opportunities available in their locality and for their views on what made it easier or harder for young people in care to access further and higher education.

They were also asked for more detailed statistical information and contact details for all young people aged 19-21 in their area who met the criteria for showing educational promise<sup>3</sup> and were willing to become involved. Telephone screening interviews were then carried out with 75 nominated young people<sup>4</sup>, from which the intensive sample of 35 young people was drawn based on the young people showing “educational promise”.

Thirty five individuals were interviewed in depth in the five study areas, and 28 of them were interviewed again approximately one year later. The young people were asked to nominate an adult who had been supportive of their education and 16 young people did so<sup>5</sup>. These nominated adults were also interviewed by telephone. All telephone interviews were analysed using SPSS and all face-to-face interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis package.

The research team moved towards a more grounded theory approach and by continuously returning to read the transcribed interviews when discussing themes and findings. Reading through the interviews several times ensured that the themes derived from the study were grounded in the empirical data. By doing so we gained insight into patterns that would not have been possible to identify otherwise. This method of returning to the interviews on an ongoing basis also facilitated the identification of five ideal types of young people, which will be described in the following section.

The first interview with the young people took a life story approach following the interviewees’ lead but with a list of areas to be covered. The follow up interviews that were carried out approximately a year after the first interview were more structured although still using open-ended questions as far as possible. The first interview included a ‘lifeline’ which helped the researchers to map the young person’s care and educational career.

We asked the young people to nominate a person that had played a significant role in particular relation to their education. 16 out of 35 young people did so and we carried out semi-structured interviews with them.

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<sup>3</sup> The inclusion criteria were that the young person was in care at the age of 16, had been looked after for at least a year and had shown some sign of educational promise in the form of having completed compulsory school and having started on an education programme or were just about to.

<sup>4</sup> 235 letters were sent to nominated young people but only 75 agreed to participate.

<sup>5</sup> We managed to interview 14 out of the 16 nominated adults.

All these data sources have provided a very comprehensive and rich data set that made it possible to investigate young people's educational pathways and lives in care from many different perspectives.

### 5. Findings from literature review

The Danish literature review of policies, procedures and literature since 1990 included a discussion of policy and interaction with family and individual level and it documented that the research on children and young people in care is very limited and at that time there was only one study that had focused on young people from a public care background pathways after compulsory school (Christoffersen 1993).

### 6. Analysis of statistical data

Instead of asking the care managers for statistical data as some other partner countries have done; we have analysed statistical data from Statistics Denmark. Our statistical research focused on three groups in the Danish population from 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006:

- Children aged 0 to 17 years placed who were still in care at the time of the research as well as young people aged 18 to 22 years who received leaving care support per 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006 and all children and young people of that age;
- Young people aged 17-20 (born between 1986 to 1989) who had been in care for their whole 16<sup>th</sup> year compared to all young people aged 17-20 years;
- Young people aged 27-30 (born between 1976 to 1979) that had received care during their whole 16<sup>th</sup> year compared to all young people aged 27-30 years.

The analysis of the statistical data showed that young people in care/from a public background lag far behind the attainment levels of their peers in the overall population. They do not finish compulsory school at the same speed as all young people and only a minority obtains qualifications beyond compulsory school compared to all young people. In all three population groups there is a big difference between the level obtained by young people in care/from a public care background and all young people. 12% of young people aged 27-30 years old had not completed compulsory school compared to 1% of all young people. 40% of the young people from a public care background aged 27-30 years had obtained qualifications beyond compulsory school compared to more than 80% of that group of all young people that same age. Although the gap between the young people from a public care background and their peers is decreasing when it comes to the third group; the difference of the educational level between young people in care/from a public care background and all young people is still significant and altogether women perform better than men.

### 7. Analysis of interviews with care managers

The group leaders shared the view that when a placement in care became a reality the social workers were primarily concerned with finding the right type of placement; matching the child or young person with a place seen as best suited them. Education was considered to be a second priority and it was often not considered until the child or young person had settled in his/her new surroundings. According to the group leaders, this reality explained why many of the young people had periods in their life when they had not attended compulsory school.

The care managers interviewed expressed a strong commitment to improving the educational attainment of young people in contact with their service and encouraging them to continue in some form of post-compulsory education or training. With some exceptions, expectations and aspirations for the young people concerned were rather modest and they tended to be steered towards vocational qualifications rather than academic courses.

The following figure shows facilitating factors and obstacles identified by the care managers that helped or stood in the way of the young people's educational participation.

Facilitating factors	Obstacles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people motivated to take responsibility for his/her own life</li> <li>• Good self-esteem and high expectations</li> <li>• Feet on the ground/realistic awareness of their situation</li> <li>• Support from family, carers and professionals</li> <li>• Respect for education/school in the family</li> <li>• More focus at schooling/education before placement</li> <li>• Mentors</li> <li>• Measures to prevent/discourage dropping out</li> <li>• Continuity in education</li> <li>• Being at the same level as their peers</li> <li>• Continuous personal support/advice throughout placement</li> <li>• Placement stability</li> <li>• Staying in placement after 18</li> <li>• Services focused specifically on this group of young people</li> <li>• On-going support after leaving care</li> <li>• Keeping young people who require further support after 18 in the same department</li> <li>• More focus at schooling and education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The young people lack self-esteem and motivation</li> <li>• Low-achieving compared to their peers</li> <li>• Poorly functioning family that provides no stimulation</li> <li>• No role models to copy or learn from</li> <li>• No support from their social network</li> <li>• Too many young people in the classes</li> <li>• Lacking the opportunity to be like their peers, e.g. having a computer, being dressed according to the fashion</li> <li>• Lacking friends</li> <li>• Schooling/education is under-prioritised</li> <li>• More focus on placement than schooling/education</li> <li>• Different approaches to support from different municipalities</li> <li>• Lacking personal support throughout placement</li> <li>• Two different laws and two different ministries responsible for care and schooling</li> <li>• Need for a holistic approach</li> </ul>

## 8. Analysis of the interviews with 35 young people

A holistic approach was taken to the research questions, locating the young people's educational experience within the overall context of their lives, in and out of care. The areas covered were young people's lives at the time of first and second interviews, their current concerns, educational engagement and attainments, social relationships and informal learning and leisure time activities. Exploration of their past experiences covered life in their birth families and ongoing relations with relatives, childhood events, care careers and educational lives during the compulsory school years. It was also discussed how much support for education was provided by birth relatives, teachers, social workers, foster parents, residential carers and others. Topics also covered young person's own hopes and dreams. Most of the young people were interested in the study and very positive about contributing to it.

The study showed that we could identify five ideal types of young people *based on their educational pathways*. This is a device we adopted as a means of representing, analysing and interpreting data. It was our belief that the ideal types were selective in relation to points of comparison and contrast between the young people in each ideal type. Each ideal type addresses a

range of issues via patterns of similarity in relation to the young people's educational pathways. The five ideal types and their educational pathways are as follows:

- *Young people with “promising” educational pathways in college or university*  
Pathway: compulsory school  $\rightleftarrows$  upper secondary school  $\rightleftarrows$  college or university
- *Young people with “promising” educational pathways in vocational education and training*  
Pathway: compulsory school  $\rightleftarrows$  basic vocational education and training / vocational education and training  $\rightleftarrows$  employment/unemployment
- *Young people with “yo-yo” pathways in education*  
Pathways: compulsory school  $\rightleftarrows$  start of education  $\rightleftarrows$  drop-out  $\rightleftarrows$  start of education  $\rightleftarrows$  drop-out  $\rightleftarrows$  unemployment/un-skilled job  $\rightleftarrows$  un-skilled job/unemployment
- *Young people with “delayed” educational pathways*  
Pathway: compulsory school  $\rightleftarrows$  unskilled job/unemployment  $\rightleftarrows$  in education / unemployed
- *Young people with health problems that dominate their educational pathways*  
Pathway: compulsory school  $\rightleftarrows$  start of education  $\rightleftarrows$  drop-out  $\rightleftarrows$  start of education

This structure of using ideal types enabled more nuanced descriptions of consistent themes and allowed for more patterns to emerge and moreover facilitators and barriers also became very clear.

#### *Present lives*

The pathways listed above reflect the young people's educational lives. The young people with “promising” educational pathways in college or university were all but two studying at the first time of interview. The majority lived on their own and had leisure time interests.

The majority of the young people with “promising” educational pathways in vocational education and training were enrolled in vocational education and training programmes, and some was in employment or unemployed. Half of them lived with a partner. Few had leisure time interest.

The young people with “yo-yo” pathways in education were either in education, in employment or unemployed or off sick or on maternity leave. The majority lived with a partner. Few had leisure time interest.

The young people with “delayed” educational pathways were mainly in education. Half of the young people in this group lived on their own. Few young people in this group had any leisure time interest.

The young people with “health problems” dominating their educational pathways were divided by being on sick leave, on at training course, in education, in employment and unemployment and on maternity leave. Two were still placed in care and two were living in own apartment. Only one was living with a partner.

#### *Family and care lives*

All the young people who participated in the study had been placed in care at a stage in their life, some very early but most at a later age.<sup>6</sup> Their placement history differed considerably: some had been placed in a foster family; some at residential care centres; some in both types of placement; and, a few in their own apartment. Some had experienced a number of breakdowns in their placement and others had a more stable placement with the same foster family throughout.

The young people came from divorced families experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their relationship with their biological family was described as “demanding”.

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<sup>6</sup> If a child is placed in care when he/she is 10 years old or older we regard it as being placed in care at a late age because there have been substantive problems in the family for a long time before a placement becomes a reality.

The group of young people with “promising” pathways in college or university typically had divorced parents. Half of them were placed in care before the age of six years and had thus experienced early intervention. Their parents were better educated and more supportive than the parents in the other groups and half of the young people talked of having a close relationship with their parents.

Those with “promising” pathways in vocational education and training also had divorced parents. Half were placed at residential care centres. Few of their parents had qualifications beyond compulsory school and only a few said that their parents wanted them to become educated. They had irregular contact with their parents.

The group of young people with “yo-yo” pathways in education also had divorced parents. Moreover some of their parents had been violent and they retained irregular contact with them. Four out of nine young people in this group had experienced more than three placements. The majority were placed in foster families.

The group of young people with “delayed” pathways typically had parents who were divorced, violent, mentally ill or ill. Two of the parents were on early retirement and few held any qualifications. Only one parent was described as supportive of the young person’s education. The majority were placed in foster care.

The group of young people with “health” problems had parents who were divorced, drug abusers, violent, who had committed a crime and a few young people had also been victims of incest. Only one parent held a qualification beyond compulsory school. They had irregular contact with their parents and their parents were not regarded as supportive.

#### *Educational lives*

The young people with “promising” educational pathways in college or university were studying for a BA. They had a stable time in compulsory school with no periods of non-attendance and had not dropped out of further education.

Young people with “promising” educational pathways in vocational education and training had all completed a vocational education and training programme. They, too, had experienced a stable time in compulsory school. Only one young person in this group had been absent for more than three months and none had dropped out of further education.

The group of young people with “yo-yo” pathways in education either held un-skilled jobs or were unemployed. They had experienced an unstable time in compulsory school and two young people in this group had a leaving certificate from compulsory school with fewer subjects than required. Five out of nine of these young people had been absent for more than three months in school. Some had also dropped out of further education.

Those with “delayed” pathways in education were either in education or were unemployed. They, too, had experienced an unstable time in compulsory school and two young people stated that they had missed more than three months in school. Nevertheless, none had dropped out of education.

The majority of the young people with health problems dominating their educational pathways were in education. They had experienced an unstable time in compulsory school and one young person in this group had a leaving certificate from compulsory school with fewer subjects than required. Five out of these six young people had missed more than three months in school. Some had dropped out of education.

In general, the young people regarded an education as a tool to live a better life and to “get a good job”. The study showed that the notion of becoming an educated person was a driving force for the young people. They were striving to be part of the norm and in this respect the norm meant holding a good job and contributing to society. In their view, their parents did not commit such a norm since they rarely held a job.

### *Informal learning and leisure*

None of the young people participating in the Danish study explicitly articulated that their social and leisure activities were part of, or added to, their learning identity. In their opinion, leisure time activities were seen as free time from school or the job that they enjoyed doing.

Many young people had no leisure time interests mainly due to lack of time, no traditions of leisure time activities and financial problems.

Most young people who had leisure time interests had “promising” educational pathways in education in college or university. Mainly those who had leisure time interests engaged in individually based sports activities like running and going to a fitness centre. Leisure time activities were almost non-existent before a placement but when placed in care, the young people were encouraged to take up activities by foster parents and through being placed at a residential care centre. They were also sometimes influenced by a friend or a parent.

### *Looking ahead: hopes and dreams for the future*

Short term plans were dependent upon where the young people were in their lives.

Those with educational promise in college or university wanted to continue their studies.

Likewise, those with educational promise in vocational education and training did not hope for many changes in the near future. Those in jobs wanted to retain their jobs or to find a permanent position and those unemployed were hoping to find skilled jobs.

Young people with “yo-yo” pathways in education said that they wanted to start an education, stay in education or retain a job. 18 of the young people had fulfilled their initial plans in relation to education and employment. Eight young people had not followed their initial plans mainly due to health problems.

Those with “delayed” pathways in education expressed wishes to stay in education or start on an educational programme.

Finally, those with health problems dominating their educational pathways wanted to stay in education or to start an educational programme.

Long-term future plans were the same at both the first and second round of interviews and included getting an education, getting a good job and establishing a family.

## 9. Analysis of interviews with nominated adults

The nominated adults raised many of the same points as the group leaders. They highlighted that the transition to adulthood was very important for the young people and they wanted to ensure the young people received continuous support after turning 18 years old. They also argued that there should be increased attention on education in the everyday practice of social workers. They all agreed that education was the tool for the young people to combat their problematic background and suggested that young people in care need support in school.

## 10. Conclusions and implications for policy and practice

The Danish study showed that although all the interviewed young people showed educational promise, which was a criterion for selecting them, they had not all obtained qualifications beyond compulsory school, nor had they obtained the same level of education. The study showed that differences between the ideal types shed light on barriers and facilitators in general and further explained why some young people managed better than others. Facilitators were mainly evident in the two “promising” groups (those with educational pathways in college or university or in vocational education and training). Barriers were mainly seen in the other three groups of young people (those with “yo-yo” pathways, “delayed” pathways or with health problems dominating their educational pathways). Facilitators included early intervention, stable schooling, no bullying, few if any changes in placements, a safe community with adults with whom the young people could confide and trust, friends, leisure time interests, support from carers/adults, resilience, a driving force in the form of not ending like their parents and being hard-working.

Based on the findings from this study some recommendations were given. These recommendations concern four main issues including: a) upbringing; b) schooling and further education; c) placements; d) social lives; and leisure time activities. A final set of recommendations focuses in particular on actions that should be taken by local authorities.

### *Upbringing*

- Providing disadvantaged families with early intervention and comprehensive support;
- Optimising the potential for the municipality to raise parental knowledge of the importance of education so that parents could motivate and support their children to pursue further education

### *Schooling and further education*

- Acknowledging and recognising that young people in care do not have the same family background/support and living conditions as their peers and therefore they need intensive support in order to be retained in the educational system;
- Providing young people in school with extra support (due to a lack of motivation, problems concentrating as a result of problems at home) and tailored teaching to their individual needs;
- Ensuring that schools provide support to children in care through social communities and support them in their learning;
- Ensuring that the new school focuses in particular on the student adapting to their new surroundings after a change of school.

### *Placements*

- Considering changes in types of placement carefully so that the children do not experience too many changes. Continuity is key;
- Ensuring that the approval process for foster parents includes checks regarding: their capability of helping young people with homework; their knowledge of the educational system; and, their ability to guide and support young people;
- Giving higher priority to education at crucial stages including: when a placement starts; during a placement; and, when a placement ends. Such priority should be given by both foster and residential carers (social pedagogues) and social workers;
- That carers should provide a safe community and opportunities for developing the social competency of young people.
- Carers supporting young people in taking up leisure time interests;

### *Social lives and leisure time activities*

- Local authorities establishing a network where young people can share experiences and discuss future educational possibilities through the development of peer groups of young people in care and/or care leavers;
- Schools ensuring that young people in care are part of social communities at school.

### *Local authorities*

- Reconsidering the consequences of the division between schooling and care and increasing the collaboration and communication between the two departments;
- Keeping young people with a care background in the same department in a municipality after turning 18 years old;
- Sharing information about school progress and attendance in school between departments;
- Ensuring that education is always discussed at meetings with young people in order to motivate them to continue studying and to raise their expectations;
- Providing more leaving care support and enhancing current provision through introducing special programmes for children and young people in care such as budgeting and cooking.

In conclusion, future opportunities should be taken into consideration in every step of the child protection and care processes both in terms of education but also in terms of the lives of children in care.

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