

# Skills and qualifications



**How 3F endeavours to ensure the upgrading of existing skills, training of new skills and general education**



## Introduction

The United Federation of Danish Workers, in Danish “Fagligt Fælles Forbund” - 3F for short - is the largest union in Denmark. It is the result of an amalgamation in 2005 of the Women Workers’ Union in Denmark and the General Workers’ Union in Denmark. In 2006 also The National Danish Restaurant Trade Union became part of 3F.

3F represents employees from many sectors of the labour market, and their training backgrounds vary considerably – some are skilled workers and even more are unskilled or semi-skilled workers. As many of our members have only had few years of formal training, both the upgrading of existing skills and training in new skills are high-profile issues of the union.

The overall objective of 3F as regards training and formal education is to strengthen the position of our members on the labour market. Through participation in short adult vocational training courses (AMU), general education or vocational training it is possible for our members to improve their qualifications and skills. Higher qualifications and more skills give them better opportunities for improving their wages and conditions. Thus education and training contribute to increasing job security.



### 3F's political objectives as regards training of new skills, upgrading of existing skills and general education

The formal training and education of the members of 3F – employed as well as unemployed members – are prominent political objectives of the union. 3F aims at making lifelong learning a reality for all our members, focusing the effort at three levels:

- The individual member,
- The schools, i.e. the education and training colleges (FE colleges)
- The training programmes, i.e. the formal education and vocational training programmes financed by the state.

At the local level it is the job of the branches to encourage the individual members to participate in on-going formal training and education.

At the national level it is the job of the representatives of 3F – in collaboration with the other social partners of the trade in question – to ensure that the existing formal training courses and vocational training meet the demands for qualifications expressed by the trade or sector.

When it comes to the effort of breaking down the barriers to training and education, which prevent our members from actually participating in the relevant training programmes, the activities are a joint venture between the local and the national level. Indeed, the success of the effort to encourage all members to participate in formal training and education will always depend upon a close dialogue and cooperation between the local and the national protagonists.

It is the aim of 3F that all our members:

- know their rights (and obligations) in relation to formal training and education as described in their collective agreements
- have sufficient knowledge of short formal courses addressing their particular trade or occupation as well as long-cycle training and education programmes and that they know the conditions for participating

- have sufficient knowledge of their opportunities for brushing up on general subjects, e.g. Danish, maths, ICT, science subjects and foreign languages – and that they know the conditions for participating
- have sufficient knowledge of their opportunities for participating on special literacy and numeracy courses as well as courses for dyslexics and that they know the conditions for participating
- understand the necessity of maintaining and developing their skills in order to retain their position on the labour market and to keep up to date with what is going on in society
- actually participate in relevant formal training and education programmes

The objectives in relation to trade union representatives and the officers responsible for formal training and education in the branches:

- That local trade union representatives and officers responsible for formal training and education have sufficient knowledge of the area of formal training and education. In addition to this they must be able to give qualified guidance to members about the formal training programmes, the conditions for participating, and why it is necessary to possess upgraded skills

The objectives in relation to the FE colleges:

- That 3F members sitting on college boards and local training and education committees endeavour to ensure that FE colleges provide the courses/education and formal training programmes that are required at local level as well as keeping an eye on the quality of the teaching and training itself

The objectives in relation to formal training programmes financed by the state:

- That 3F members sitting on national councils endeavour to ensure that there are up-to-date courses and training programmes required by the labour market and to ensure the best possible conditions for participation



## 3F's trade groups, collective agreements and formal training and education

The members of 3F are organized in six main areas or trade groups:

- Industrial & Manufacturing
- Transport
- Building & Construction
- Agriculture, Horticulture & Forestry (the Green Group)
- The Public-Sector Group and
- The Private-Sector Service Sector

Each group has the responsibility for a number of collective agreements. This division matches the way in which the employers are organized in conjunction with the collective agreements.

In the collective agreements there are - to varying degrees - provisions relating to formal training in new skills and upgrading of existing skills and the employees' rights to the corresponding formal training and education. Apart from this many of the collective agreements have provisions for a training fund, the resources of which can be used to strengthen a variety of education and formal training initiatives.

All the trade groups have as their objective to obtain the best possible provisions for education and training in the collective agreements.

## Formal training and education programmes

As adaptability and lifelong learning have become the provisos on the labour market it is important for 3F that there are flexible and focused paths to formal training and education for all our members. Therefore 3F is an active partner in the development of formal general education, adult vocational training courses (AMU) and vocational training courses (EUD).

General education for adults

- It is important for 3F that our members have the opportunity to brush up on general subjects, e.g. Danish, maths, ICT, science subjects and foreign languages. Apart from this some of our members have the need to participate on special literacy and numeracy courses as well as on courses for dyslexics. These can take place at Adult Education and Training Centres (VUC). The courses are financed by the state, and the trade union organisations - including 3F - have a close co-operation with the centres. Adults participating in these courses are entitled to financial support from the state corresponding to the rates for unemployment benefit.

Job oriented formal training for adults: Adult Vocational Training Courses (AMU):

- The rapid development of the labour market and the skills in demand emphasise the need for an upgrading of the skills, irrespective of whether the 3F member has a vocational training qualification (EUD) or not. Therefore it is very important for 3F that our members participate in formal training courses to upgrade existing skills related to their trade or occupation or to acquire new skills. The lesser skills, the greater the need for formal training, and as mentioned before many of 3F's members have only limited formal training. AMU provides formal short-cycle job oriented courses in all the trades and occupations. They are financed by the state and are provided by vocational training colleges all over the country. Adults participating on these courses are entitled to financial support from the state corresponding to the rates for unemployment benefit.



Vocational training – basically developed for young people, but also accessible for adults:

- 3F takes a keen interest in having excellent, up-to-date vocational training programmes for all our members regardless of trade or sector. Vocational training is aimed basically at young people, who need to learn the skills of a trade and become skilled workers. Special shorter adult versions of vocational training have been developed, the so-called “accredited vocational training”. They recognize and give credit to the actual experiences and informal skills of adult workers acquired through years of work experience. Whilst undergoing training financial support for the trainee takes the form of either the wage rate for an apprentice or the rate for an adult apprentice.

## The social partners’ influence on formal vocational training

Denmark has a long-standing tradition for the social partners exerting influence on vocational training. Their position in the labour market ensures them a profound knowledge of the skills and qualifications in demand at any point of time. This is why they have a direct influence on job oriented formal education and training at the national level as well as locally in the FE colleges. Through this position and effort the social partners have also gained an extensive knowledge of formal vocational training and education.

3F has set up our own secretariat for formal training and education policies which contributes to the on-going development of the Danish education and training system. The education and training officers employed by the secretariat have specific expertise in the field of vocational training within the different sectors and industries.

The internal division of work in 3F is such that an education and training officer along with a negotiating officer from the group in question, who is an expert in collective agreements, normally sit on the committees

responsible for all aspects of collective bargaining as well as on the vocational training committees.

The social partners and the adult vocational training courses (AMU):

In each sector and industry there is a national training committee with equal representation of both parties which undertakes the audit and development of adult vocational training courses (AMU) in each sector. The adult vocational training programme (AMU) is a labour market policy-making tool for training and education which is at all times able to provide precisely those courses which the sector or industry requires. On the basis of their knowledge of the sector or industry, the social partners are active contributors to the course development of this training programme.

The social partners and vocational training:

Denmark has approximately 100 vocational training programmes, which between them cover the requirements that the vast majority of sectors and industries have for formal skills and general qualifications. Vocational training gives young people the basic skills to qualify them for their working life. But of course they will also need access to further training to upgrade these skills, as time goes by.

Every vocational training programme is monitored and managed by a vocational training committee with equal representation of both parties. 3F has a keen interest in vocational training as it is the union’s long-term goal to ensure that all young people start their working life with - as a minimum - a vocational training.

3F’s influence at local level:

3F is also represented at local level on the education and training committees which have been set up in all FE colleges to provide adult vocational training courses and vocational training courses.



These committees are responsible for:

- monitoring the quality of vocational training courses
- ensuring that FE colleges provide those courses which are required locally
- undertaking the task of finding work placements and
- making sure there is close collaboration between the FE colleges and the local enterprises

In recent years still more responsibility and actual influence has been transferred from the national committees to the local vocational training committees in FE colleges. As a consequence 3F has strengthened its effort to develop and strengthen its local representation.