Re-entry of Basic School Dropouts into the Education System

Summary

The State Audit Office (SAO) conducted the audit with the aim of giving an overview of the situation of persons without basic education, and analysing their re-entry into the education system. The audited period involved the years 2001 to 2003, and also some of the 2000 data were used. The audit covered persons mainly at the age range of 17 to 49, focusing on the 17 to 24-year-olds who had interrupted their studies without acquiring basic education.

According to the census of 2000, the number of persons aged 17 to 49 without basic education was 12,000. However, the responses by the local governments to the SAO's inquiries revealed that the number of persons without basic education among the 17 to 24-year-olds may reach up to 10,000, and among the 25 to 49 up to 11,000. Every year about a thousand young persons drop out of basic schools.

Both labour studies and the census data show that persons without basic education have poor prospects to find employment. In 2001, the unemployment rate for persons without basic education was 27.4 %, for persons with secondary and higher education, the respective figures were 13.6 % and 7.4 %. The problem is especially serious for persons without basic education at the age of 24, with half of them being unemployed. Also, the income of persons without basic education is three times lower than that of persons with higher education, and two times lower than the income of persons with vocational education. However, paid employment constitutes the lesser part of their income (one third for the 17 to 24-year-olds), indicating that citizens without basic education are a great burden to the national support system. In addition to having greater subsistence problems, persons without basic education are more frequently involved in committing offences. The SAO analysis revealed that 13 % of persons of 18 to 55 years of age without basic education are prisoners or probationers.

Proposals to the Minister of Education and Research and Opinions on the Minister's Response

To develop an activity plan on how to re-enter persons without basic education into the education system. First, information should be collected about the number and location of the persons without basic education in order to develop a system, which would enable to find the persons without basic education.

The SAO agrees to the Minister's opinion that this should take place in close cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Research and the local governments, employment offices, and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

To consider paying scholarships to adults acquiring basic education. The re-entry of unemployed persons into the labour market is supported by covering their training expenses and payment of scholarships, whereas there are no measures at the moment to increase the learning motivation of people without basic education.

The Minister of Education and Research claimed that it is the Ministry of Social Affairs that should deal with this issue. The SAO concedes that supporting students assumes close cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Social Affairs, however, the SAO believes that as the Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for creating access to basic education and preparing the draft Education Allowance Act which deals with supporting university students, it could also be the initiator in the issue of supporting persons who are acquiring basic education.

To develop the existing possibilities to facilitate continuation of interrupted basic education. Besides attending a basic school, there are two other options to acquire basic education – adult upper secondary schools and pre-vocational training, with the first providing basic education and vocational schools providing vocational education. Nevertheless, the use of these possibilities is limited.

1) The Ministry should ensure that adult upper secondary schools offer the possibility to study in each of the 9 years in each county.

Unfortunately, the Minister's answer does not say exactly what will be done about this issue.

2) The Ministry could support the adult upper secondary schools with the preparation of individual curricula by developing instructions for curriculum preparation and a financing system for individual curricula.

The Minister has promised to develop the instructions by the end of the year 2003, the in-service training in curriculum preparation has already started. Although the Minister admitted that the implementation of an individual curriculum requires a higher capitation fee, he answer did not state when the Ministry would start with additional financing of the implementation of individual curricula.

3) As pre-vocational training is available only in two counties at the moment, it should be more actively implemented.

The Minister replied that the possibilities have been created but not enough persons join the groups, and the vocational schools are not able to prepare the curricula. The SAO finds that the Ministry should not only wait for the initiative coming from the vocational schools and local governments, rather, the latter should be assisted in curriculum preparation and in planning student places, in order to ensure access to pre-vocational training for all students who need this form of study.

4) The organisation of pre-vocational training should be simplified, allowing vocational schools to provide also basic education for adults.

The Minister did not agree to the proposal, arguing that extensive provision of general education in vocational schools is not expedient. Focusing on the development of individual learning would facilitate acquiring of basic education to a greater extent. The SAO still retains the view that if a vocational school has qualified staff and there are interested persons aged over 17, basic education should be provided also in the vocational school. The present situation where studying takes place in two separate schools, both in adult upper secondary schools and vocational schools, hinders acquiring basic education at the time of pre-vocational training.

5) Employment offices should be notified of the pre-vocational training, so that they could consider whether to refer an unemployed person to employment training or pre-vocational training instead.

The Minister agreed to the proposal.

6) The number of graduated persons should be taken into account at least to some extent in financing vocational schools and adult upper secondary schools that provide pre-vocational training, in order to increase the schools' motivation to deal with the problematic students.

The Minister replied that focusing on the performance of vocational schools is one of the next year's objectives, and that the Ministry is applying for funds from the state budget to renew the vocational education financing system. Unfortunately the reply does not inform what the new financing system would involve, and how the performance of vocational schools would be taken into account in financing.

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