Position Paper for National Union of Students in Denmark

The National Union of Students in Denmark (DSF) is a national interest organization for students in Denmark. We are a community based on principles and actions, which works at the public level, towards politicians and other stakeholders to ensure the best conditions for students in Denmark. We work strategically and goal-oriented for all students interests and for better educations. We are the students’ national voice, and contribute to build up activity and critical participation in our studies. This Position Paper forms the background for a progressive movement that creates concrete improvements for students.

In the following, DSF presents its fundamental positions, visions and values as well as substantial policy areas.

WE CREATE MOVEMENT

The role of DSF is to create a student movement, which assures and strengthens the prioritization of education. We have a lot in common with researchers, teachers and administrative staff, however, we are aware, as students, that we have interests that are conflicting with theirs.

To build national alliances, through which we have collaborators who share our ambition to prioritize education, is of great political and strategic value. Essential alliance partners for DSF is the network of the Pupil and Student Movement as well as likeminded and similar organizations.

We can and should collaborate with our international partners to resolve many of the challenges we face as students in Denmark. The Danish education system is constantly affected by international trends, and the work of DSF thus goes beyond borders. Therefore, DSF works internationally with the European and worldwide student movement, in order to create the best possible conditions for students.

EDUCATION FOR LIFE

There are many good reasons for taking an education in Denmark. Knowledge and education are important preconditions to navigate in a more complex and composed world. That is why education has value for the individual and for the society. We need a large range of competences to be able to participate actively,
critically and constructive in solving the society’s problems. There is a need for 
education so we can continue to develop the society.

Educations and the universities have a new role in Denmark. To study is no longer 
reserved to the elite and great proportions of a generation gets either an academic 
profession, a bachelor or a master’s degree. Many get an education 
to get work-related skills, and the studies are no longer solely directed towards 
educating researchers.

We want everyone, no matter background, to be assured the best opportunities and 
conditions to apply for and complete a higher education. There must be a 
qualified guidance throughout the education system that makes it easy to make 
the right choice of education. To assure a diverse admission it must be 
possible for differentiated admissions, which considers other aspects 
than grades.

We work to break down negative social inheritance and to assure free and equal 
access to education. This requires that no one should pay to study and 
indirect expenses, related to the life as a student, are limited as much as possible. 
Consequently, DSF is against tuition fees.

Education is positive for society, the economy and the individual. Studies show 
that the longer education you have and the more interested you are in your 
education, the better life quality you have. By then people will live longer and 
actively participate to the society. Therefore, education must never become a 
solution to resolving small tasks or short-termed fulfillment of needs. It is a 
quality that we withhold freely and critical to our own subjects and that critical 
reflection is not limited to or obstructed by the pressure to get students faster 
through the education system.

**QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

Students should always demand that our educations are of the highest quality 
possible. We want to be a part of and contribute to active academic environments 
at the education institutions. No education must solely be based on 
self-studying. Therefore, DSF works for all students to receive a sufficient amount 
of teaching and direct interaction with their teachers. This means that academic 
educations must be research-based and professional 
bachelor’s programs must be vocational-based. This also means
that our educations are driven by teachers with relevant experiences and the necessary pedagogic and didactic competences.

Students are different and have different interests, goals and learning methods, and encounter themselves in different life situations. This should be reflected in variated teaching methods. Furthermore, exam methods should be shaped to fit the specific teaching method. We work for students to have the possibility to be a part of shaping our courses, and we consider it a value, that it is possible to get an education no matter your region of living in Denmark.

In addition to benefit all students, these demands contribute to create a higher degree of social mobility, by facilitating the possibility for a variety of settings to break down negative social inheritances.

It ought to be an independent purpose in education that we have time, space and settings to immerse into our academic areas. DSF works for flexibility in education, so there is space for students with different types of needs for e.g. a semester abroad, leave of absence, maternity leave or internships. To realize these initiatives it is necessary with an increase in funding in education.

EDUCATION IS A COMMON GOOD – NOT A COMMODITY

The purpose of education is various. Education creates and communicates knowledge. Education give humans competences and capabilities to improve their own lives and the society they are a part of. Education contributes to democratization, as well as require that individuals take a critical and constructive standpoint to society. Our education institutions requires insight, curiosity, new thinking and competences, which engage people in democracy, in their working lives and in society in general. Unfortunately, the institutions have been subject to the logic competition, where the educations are seen as an explicit economic investment and not as a mean to develop, democratize and ensure cohesion in the society. In DSF, we believe that the economic gain of education is important, but the pursuit of this economic gain may never overshadow the education institutions wider goals in the society.

Political micro-management and the rhetoric in the public debate distorts the societal goals of education. It reduces education institutes aims to solely be producers of labor and reduces students to be customers in this system instead of being a part of creating new knowledge and research.
Our institutions and educations are driven by a production logic, because of political steering, and are being measured on efficiency as to how fast and inexpensive graduates can be “produced”. Measures such as the study progress reform¹, the SU-reform and the central reduction of study places are a direct consequence of an increased commodification of education. It is problematic, that shifting governments and political actors consider education a commodity, which should exclusively ensure qualified labor for the short-termed needs of the job market.

Commoditization of education imposes an enormous pressure on the individual student. The increased focus on completion time and the amount of full-time students being produced, enhances an appearance of students as a unit that must be pressured through the system to create economic growth. Therefore, the students must live up to efficiency-based initiatives, without deeper understanding, gaining of skills, involvement in the society, health of the student and interests are taken into account.

Simultaneously, education institutions are subjected to the demands of the market to survive. Commoditization of education leads to an unnecessary dispute and competition between the education institutes because of economic self-interests. Furthermore the competition for economic resources between education institutes can be directly harmful for the quality and research of the educations, since it represses academic cooperation between academic communities, which otherwise can improve the quality and the characteristics of the educations. DSF believes that efficiency initiatives in education, economies of scale and the constant focus on study progress leads to a reduction in quality.

One of the problems with commodification is that it shifts the responsibility for the structural problems away from the society and onto the individual student. The consequence is that societal challenges are internalized instead of being used critically and constructively to develop the society and solve its problems.

DSF is against the commoditization of our educations, where they through an undemocratic market management are conformed to commercial interests. Education is above all a common good and not a commodity. Education should ensure development for the individual and for future generations, and raise society in general, so that all of us gets a better life and better opportunities.

THE COSTS OF QUALITY

¹ In Danish: Fremdriftsreformen
Denmark shall in the future be nurtured by research, knowledge and educated labor, and therefore it is necessary that education institutions are funded in a way that enhances quality. When society educates and the individual study, it is an investment of time and money, which highly pays back.

Funding for all studies must be sufficient. We will not accept that some studies are under-funded and cannot offer the sufficient amount of teaching, which is a precondition for quality, because of economic troubles.

DSF works for a financing model that ensures all studies and institutions sufficient funding. As students we disagree when education institutions spend a disproportionate number of resources on advertising and competition to attract students or when funds are unnecessary saved. Instead, a strong collaboration should be established between the institutions, which enhances development and new thinking in education.

DSF promotes solidarity in financing the educations and the education institutions and thus we cannot accept any educations being under-funded. As to both taximeter subsidy\(^2\) and basis funds, DSF supports and works for a financing model that does not allow under-funding of some educations.

DSF works to make sure that under-funded educations get a higher priority in the allocation of funds, for the economic settings to enhance our subjects and quality. DSF works for a financing model that does not solely allocate funding based on historic circumstances.

We are working to make sure that funding enhances quality while we study and that it is not used as a tool for getting us faster through the education system.

**INFLUENCE AND AUTONOMY**

As students, we are active participants in and partly responsible for our education. We are a central part of the education institutions and we wish to play an active part in our education. Not only regarding influence in the teaching situation, but also in establishing the settings and structures, that our educations are subjected to. Together with staff members at our education institutions, we are the best at knowing and explaining the functioning of our educations and how they should evolve. This counts especially for the local academic environments, which are essential to the work of the institutions. Therefore, decisions should be made decentralized in the

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\(^2\) taximeter subsidy (taxametertilskud): amount of money given to institutions every time a student completes 60 ECTS (the equivalent of a full-time study year)
academic environments whenever possible and appropriate. Besides, education institutions should contribute to student participation in the Danish democracy, through critical and democratic education.

As students, we have a responsibility to expand our real influence and to make our formal influence effective. DSF tries to ensure that all students have knowledge about and interest for the possibilities of influence in all our education institutions.

Our education institutions are subject to a long list of laws, regulations and instruments of control, which greatly allows the Ministry of Higher Education and Science to micromanage the institutions. In DSF, we are critical towards managing our education institutes in detail as it limits our real local influence. Detail managing from the Ministry of Higher Education and Science undermines the local opportunities for negotiation and makes the collegial bodies do administrative tasks rather than developing local environments. Therefore, DSF works towards a legal basis that ensures more freedom and autonomy for our institutions and actually provides the framework for real student influence on all institutional levels.

The decisions made in the institutions, should be democratic. Therefore, it should not be up to the leaders of the institution to decide whether they will involve the students. To assure local autonomy and student influence in our institutions, DSF must protect the right to have two student representatives in the institution boards, which is currently given by the law. At the same time, DSF wishes it to be the institutions’ students and staff members who draw up the respective institutions statutes, which ensures local democracy and the institutions' relations to the surrounding world, e.g. in the process of drawing up the statutes, relevant parties can be included. The statutes must ensure the students and staff members’ right to determine the composition of the institution board themselves.

A SU WE CAN LIVE WITH

The SU is unique to Denmark because it ensures everyone an economic situation, which enables one to study. We students are depending on an income to cover our most basic needs. Unfortunately, many students do not have an economic situation where they are able to cover their fixed and necessary expenses.

Having stable living conditions, including economic conditions, is a prerequisite for us to be able to focus on studying. Therefore, the SU should not be changed or regulated randomly or out of the blue and it must not be replaced by discount- or loaning arrangements. The SU is one of several prerequisites for free and equal access
to education. Therefore, DSF works to ensure that it is possible to live out of our SU. We have the right to stable economic conditions, where we as equal citizens have reasonable terms to live with, without having to put ourselves in debt or delay our study unnecessarily due to paid employment.

AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL STUDENTS

A good and stable housing situation is a prerequisite for focusing on studying and improving ones skills during the studies. DSF works to make sure that the student housing market provides the best possible settings for students across Denmark. We are working to make sure there are build enough dormitories and student accommodation, accessible to all students and affordable within an SU-budget. DSF will work to make sure that the responsible politicians, locally as well as nationally, provide the settings for this.

It is necessary that the volume of student housing increases along with the increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education institutes, so there is capacity for all students to have affordable housing within a reasonable distance from the education institution. Together with both public and private actors, DSF will take the lead in assuring the availability of good student housing.

We work both practically and concrete with the development of new types of student housing. We are working for a new Planning Act\(^3\), which can give the municipalities the best possibilities to build affordable housing, as the volume of students increase. In relation to good housing conditions, it is important to ensure transportation facilities and infrastructure between housing and education, so our everyday lives as students can correlate. Therefore, DSF works to make it better and cheaper for students to use the public transportation and in the long run to make public transportation free for students.

DSF will fight to ensure that the cities with higher education institutions establish housing guarantees, which guarantee new students housing before starting their studies. In addition, we work with a lease- and housing regulation act, which will guarantee the legal rights of the students in the housing market and ensure that affordable housing keeps being affordable.

STUDY ENVIRONMENT

It is necessary that both the physical, mental and aesthetical settings in our educations are good and support learning. We need proper premises to get the optimal outcome of our educations. We cannot and will not accept too many students in classrooms, to be sitting on the floors or by the windows, while trying to follow the lectures.

\(^3\) In Danish: planlov
A prerequisite for good learning and education is that institutions do not admit more students than they have physical capacity for, and that there are good physical conditions to study. Therefore, DSF works to strengthen the legislation regarding teaching environments, so that education institutes are obligated to provide satisfactory settings for the students learning and working environments.

An important part of any education is the social environment. We should never underestimate the significance of finding fellow students and teachers in social environments, where it is possible to talk about our education, the last lecture or just to feel well. We need a lively study environment, which we take part and initiative to create. This is the best way to ensure ties to our studies and get us well through our educations. Besides, it is a value of its own to feel good while studying.

Denmark and the education institutions have a strong volunteering culture, where mainly students sets requirement of participation and influence the frames for education. This ensures good prerequisites for us students to volunteer in our study environments. DSF works to make sure that the education institutions will be better at providing settings for this and, on the other hand, we offer to get as many students as possible to volunteer. DSF will therefore work on assuring access to sufficient student-managed rooms, group rooms, study spaces etc. for all students.

**WORK AFTER STUDIES**

The majority of students in Denmark are studying with the purpose of gaining skills to get a job later on. Unfortunately, for a number of years, Denmark has had major problems with unemployment for graduates.

It is undesirable to not be able to use ones education and it has as well consequences for our private economic situations and the national economy. Job creation is primarily a public matter that should be taken care of by politicians, locally as well as nationally. For our sake and for society’s sake, politicians should work together with the job market to ensure the best conditions for us to get a job as quickly as possible, after graduating.

It is essential that the responsibility for developing employment policy is not put on the education institutes. However, these are responsible for strengthening the students’ orientation within the job market and their understanding of the job market.

The short-term needs of the job market should not influence the offering of educations, this should be based on a comprehensive analysis of the skills and
knowledge that are needed in the society. This analysis must be rooted in the academic environments, existing today.

**EQUALITY**

DSF advocates for equal opportunities for all students and thereby does not accept any form of personal discrimination. Equality is within DSF understood, as any student having the same opportunities and rights in higher education and in the access to this. This involves equal opportunities to get influence and power as well as equal opportunities for education, work and to create a career. Students are different and thereby they have different prerequisites for studying. Equality is to acknowledge this and to give different groups of students what they need to become successful in their life as students and in their professional life afterwards.

For the entirety of students enrolled in a higher education, the purpose of equality is to provide the fundaments of our community. DSF works to ensure that equality among students can gather us in communities across groups and individual differences. That equality assures the community is essential for our mutual understanding of each other and makes critical and free debate possible in a scientific and/or artistic perspective.

**INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATIONS**

Educations in Denmark and Europe are increasingly being internationalized. This means, among other things, that Denmark receives a large number of international students and that a large number of Danish students go abroad. We are working to provide the best possible settings for international students in Denmark and for Danish students studying abroad.

International students, whether they are in Denmark or abroad, should have the best possible conditions, and the education institutions should adapt to the diverse student population. Internationalization does not mean a translated study program – it means education and knowledge across borders and our educations should reflect that.

Internationalization does not mean a translated study program; it is a process that affects all levels of an education. For this process to succeed, international students must be informed and have equal access to the democratic processes on the education institutions and to the advising and governing bodies.

**FROM POSITION TO ACTION**
DSF has, through this Position Paper, made it clear what our organization believes is the most important political priorities in the process of assuring the best possible conditions for students in Denmark, as well as international. This will be the foundation for our student political work, where active and progressive action is a prerequisite for success.