

1 Position Paper for National Union of Students in Denmark

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

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

12 **WE CREATE MOVEMENT**

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

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

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

27 **EDUCATION FOR LIFE**

28 There are many good reasons for taking an education in Denmark. Knowledge and
29 education are important preconditions to navigate in a more complex and
30 composed world. That is why education has value for the individual and for
31 the society. We need a large range of competences to be able to participate actively,

32 critically and constructive in solving the society's problems. There is a need for
33 education so we can continue to develop the society.

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

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

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

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

57 **QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

58 Students should always demand that our educations are of the highest quality
59 possible. We want to be a part of and contribute to active academic environments
60 at the education institutions. No education must solely be based on
61 self-studying. Therefore, DSF works for all students to receive a sufficient amount
62 of teaching and direct interaction with their teachers. This means that academic
63 educations must be research-based and professional
64 bachelor's programs must be vocational-based. This also means

65 that our educations are driven by teachers with relevant experiences and the
66 necessary pedagogic and didactic competences.

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

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

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

81 **EDUCATION IS A COMMON GOOD – NOT A COMMODITY**

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

95 Political micro-management and the rhetoric in the public debate distorts the
96 societal goals of education. It reduces education institutes aims to
97 solely be producers of labor and reduces students to be customers
98 in this system instead of being a part of creating new knowledge and research.

99 Our institutions and educations are driven by a production logic, because of political
100 steering, and are being measured on efficiency as to how fast and inexpensive graduates
101 can be “produced”. Measures such as the study progress reform¹, the SU-reform and the
102 central reduction of study places are a direct consequence of an increased
103 commodification of education. It is problematic, that shifting governments and political
104 actors consider education a commodity, which should exclusively ensure qualified labor
105 for the short-termed needs of the job market.

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

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

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

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

131 **THE COSTS OF QUALITY**

¹ In Danish: Fremdriftsreformen

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

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

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

146 DSF promotes solidarity in financing the educations and the education
147 institutions and thus we cannot accept any educations being under-funded.
148 As to both taximeter subsidy² and basis funds, DSF supports and works for a
149 financing model that does not allow under-funding of some educations.
150 DSF works to make sure that under-funded educations get a higher priority in the allocation
151 of funds, for the economic settings to enhance our subjects and quality. DSF works for a
152 financing model that does not solely allocate funding based on historic circumstances.

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

155 **INFLUENCE AND AUTONOMY**

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

² taxamiter subsidy (taxametertilskud): amount of money given to institutions every time a student completes 60 ECTS (the equivalent of a full-time study year)

164 academic environments whenever possible and appropriate. Besides, education
165 institutions should contribute to student participation in the Danish democracy,
166 through critical and democratic education.

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

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

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

190 **A SU WE CAN LIVE WITH**

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

196 Having stable living conditions, including economic conditions, is a prerequisite
197 for us to be able to focus on studying. Therefore, the SU should not be changed or
198 regulated randomly or out of the blue and it must not be replaced by discount- or
199 loaning arrangements. The SU is one of several prerequisites for free and equal access

200 to education. Therefore, DSF works to ensure that it is possible to live out of our SU. We have
201 the right to stable economic conditions, where we as equal citizens have reasonable terms
202 to live with, without having to put ourselves in debt or delay our study
203 unnecessarily due to paid employment.

204 **AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL STUDENTS**

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

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

216 We work both practically and concrete with the development of new types of student
217 housing. We are working for a new Planning Act³, which can give the municipalities the
218 best possibilities to build affordable housing, as the volume of students increase.
219 In relation to good housing conditions, it is important to ensure
220 transportation facilities and infrastructure between housing and education, so our
221 everyday lives as students can correlate. Therefore, DSF works to make it
222 better and cheaper for students to use the public transportation and in the long
223 run to make public transportation free for students.

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

229 **STUDY ENVIRONMENT**

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

³ In Danish: planlov

235 A prerequisite for good learning and education is that institutions do not
236 admit more students than they have physical capacity for, and that there are good physical
237 conditions to study. Therefore, DSF works to strengthen the legislation regarding
238 teaching environments, so that education institutes are obligated to provide satisfactory
239 settings for the students learning and working environments.

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

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

255 **WORK AFTER STUDIES**

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

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

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

268 The short-term needs of the job market should not influence the offering of
269 educations, this should be based on a comprehensive analysis of the skills and

270 knowledge that are needed in the society. This analysis must be rooted in the
271 academic environments, existing today.

272 **EQUALITY**

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

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

288 **INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATIONS**

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

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

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

304 **FROM POSITION TO ACTION**



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