Key features of the Education System

Central topics within the Danish education system

- **Education for all**: The Danish education system aims to ensure that all young people acquire knowledge and competencies which will qualify them to take active part in the Danish knowledge society and contribute to its further development. Education is open to all and generally free of charge.
- **Compulsory education**: Education is compulsory between the age of six and 16. Compulsory education consists of ten years of primary and lower secondary education, including one preschool year (grade 0) and nine school years (grade 1-9). It is possible to prolong the compulsory education with a tenth grade, but that remains optional.
- **Lifelong learning**: In Denmark, there is a tradition of taking part in education through all phases of life as a highly qualified and well-educated workforce plays a decisive role in the global knowledge economy and is the key to Denmark’s development as a leading knowledge society. More information about lifelong learning can be found in [chapter 2.2](#) and in the [fact sheet on lifelong learning](#).
- **Self-governance**: The primary aim of the self-governing educational institutions is to ensure a high level of educational quality, a range of educational options for young people and adults and broad geographic coverage throughout the country. The institutions have the independent responsibility for educational opportunities and development as well as the pedagogical development.

In particular, institutions of higher education in Denmark have a long tradition of academic freedom and autonomy. The ministries lay down the overall regulations for all institutions of higher education. These include regulations concerning the admission of students, the structure of studies, programmes offered, awarding of degrees and appointment of teachers and academic staff. The individual institutions are then responsible for drawing up and updating their study programmes, indicating the aims, scope and duration, form and contents of the courses as well as a description of the syllabus.

**Governance and organisation of the Danish education system**

National legislation covers the aims and framework of education, funding and in some cases curricula, examinations and staffing.

The Danish education system is centrally managed by the following ministries:

- **The Ministry of Education**
  - Responsible for early childhood and care as well as primary and lower secondary education
- **The Ministry of Higher Education and Science**
Responsible for higher education and formal adult education
- The Ministry of Culture
  - Responsible for the non-formal adult education and training
- The Ministry of Defense
  - Responsible for specialised education programmes within the Danish defence.

Education is, however, largely the responsibility of the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for setting up the framework for curricula at primary and secondary level. The contents of the courses are then finalised by the teachers themselves with their pupils. The Ministry of Education oversees the municipal primary and lower secondary school (the Folkeskole) in collaboration with the municipal councils.

In the field of vocational education and training, sectoral committees with equal representation of the labour market organisations concerned play an important role in defining and developing vocational qualifications and stipulating the training conditions. Technical colleges and business colleges are independent institutions under the overall authority of the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Science is largely responsible for higher education. As mentioned, some of the higher education programmes within the arts fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, e.g. the schools of visual arts and the academies of music. Specialised education programmes within the Danish Defence are managed by the Ministry of Defence.

For information about financing and ownership, please consult the fact sheet on general organization and administration of the Danish education system [3].

**Stages of the Education System**

In Denmark, primary education consists of integrated primary and lower secondary education. The educational institutions at which primary and lower secondary education takes place is called primary and lower secondary schools (in Danish: Folkeskole). Primary education is compulsory between the age of six and 16 and consists of one pre-school year (grade 0) and nine school years (grades 1-9). It is possible to prolong the compulsory education with a tenth grade, but that remains optional.

Following the primary and lower secondary education, students are free to choose the educational path they wish. In brief, the choice is between academia-oriented general upper secondary education programmes and secondary vocational education programmes.

General upper secondary education programmes take place at several institutions whereas some institutions offer various types of programmes:

- The three-year upper secondary school leaving examination (STX) takes place at upper secondary schools (in Danish: gymnasium)
- The three-year higher commercial examination (HHX) takes place at commercial upper secondary schools, also known as business colleges (in Danish: handelsgymnasium)
- The three year higher technical examination (HTX) takes place at technical upper secondary schools, also known as technical colleges (in Danish: teknisk gymnasium)
- The two-year higher preparatory examination (HF) usually takes place at upper secondary schools (in Danish: gymnasium), but the programme is also offered at adult education centres (VUC Centres).
The duration of the three first-mentioned programmes is three years. Students usually start at the age of 16 and graduate at the age of 19. However, this depends on several factors, including whether the student in question has taken the tenth grade. The duration of the last-mentioned, HF, is two years, and the age of the students vary greatly.

Secondary vocational education programmes vary in duration depending on the programme in question. More specifically, the duration varies from 1½ to 5½ years, the most typical being 3½ to 4 years. The programmes are offered at vocational/technical schools (in Danish: erhvervsskole). The age of students when starting and graduating varies greatly.

Following the general upper secondary education programmes and secondary vocational education programmes, there is a great variety in the students’ educational opportunities. In general, general upper secondary education qualifies for further studies at the level of higher education, while secondary vocational education qualifies for the labour market.

Higher education takes place at different educational institutions:

- Short-cycle programmes are offered at business academies (in Danish: erhvervsakademi)
- Medium-cycle programmes are offered at university colleges (in Danish: professionshøjskole)
- Long-cycle programmes are offered at universities (in Danish: universitet)

**Structure of the Danish Education System**

The Danish education system consists of both an ordinary education system and a parallel education system for adult and continuing education.

The ordinary education system is comprised of the integrated primary and lower secondary education (in Danish: Folkeskolen), general upper secondary and vocational upper secondary education as well as higher education.

The education system for adult and continuing education is targeted adults at the age of 18 years and above and makes it possible for people to engage in continuous education and acquire new skills. The level of the educational programmes in this parallel educational system corresponds to the level in the ordinary education system. Examples of educational programmes are general adult education (AVU), adult vocational training (AMU) and diploma programmes.
Useful links

- Further information can be found at the website of [the Ministry of Higher Education and Science](https://www.mhe.dk). The Ministry provides overview and links to further information about all levels of the Danish education system.
- Further information can also be found at the website of [the Ministry of Education](https://www.mda.dk). The Ministry provides fact sheets and online descriptions of the parts of the education system under its auspices (ISCED 1, 3 and 3).
- For a thorough and comprehensive description of the different programmes in the Danish education system in Danish, please see the [Education Guide](https://www.mhe.dk/).

Common European Reference Tools Provided by the Eurydice Network

- [National Student Fee and Support Systems](https://www.eurydice.org/en/policy/fees/
- [Organisation of the Academic Year in Higher Education](https://www.eurydice.org/en/policy/year/)
- [Organisation of School Time in Europe](https://www.eurydice.org/en/policy/time/
- [Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe](https://www.eurydice.org/en/policy/time/)
  (Presented by grades/stages for full time compulsory education as well as by subject and country.)
- [Teachers and School Heads Salaries and Allowances in Europe](https://www.eurydice.org/en/policy/salaries/)
  (Salaries and allowances of teachers and school heads at pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education levels.)