

A word cloud of educational terms in various colors and orientations on a dark grey background. The words include: Learning (large orange), Education (large yellow), Democracy (large yellow), Gymnasium (blue), Upper Secondary Education (white), Study preparation (orange), Electives (white), Intellectual freedom (blue), Analytical and critical thinking (white), Problem Based Learning (white), Active participation (orange), Choice (blue), Language (orange), Equality (red), Learning process (white), hf (orange), stx (orange), Specialised study programme (orange), and Socially conscious (white).

## THE “GYMNASIUM” – A DANISH UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

A guide to the Danish education system with a focus on Upper Secondary Education, in particular the stx programme

Choice

age

icipation

Learning

programme

conscious

Educational

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## Education with a Global Perspective

Students, researchers, business leaders and employees increasingly travel abroad and work in collaboration with people from other countries. This places strong demands on our ability to interact effectively at an international level and on our understanding of other cultures. Education and training programmes must therefore furnish young people with strong academic and professional competences as well as a global outlook.

It is important for all education programmes to have a global perspective so that young people develop an understanding of other cultures and acquire the qualifications and competences to participate in a globalised world.

Danish education institutions - including upper secondary schools - and their students already today participate in numerous international activities. To facilitate our schools and help them to participate in further cooperation with foreign education institutions, the "Gymnasieskolernes Rektorforening" -The Danish Association of Upper Secondary Schools - has issued the publication "The Gymnasium - A Danish Upper Secondary Education". The Association organises the education institutions that offer the stx and hf qualifications.

The publication presents the entire Danish education system, with an emphasis on general upper secondary education, and provides insight into student life in Denmark.



## The Danish Education System – an outline

The Danish education system consists of “grundskole” (combining primary and lower secondary education), “ungdomsuddannelser” (youth education programmes, i.e. upper secondary education) and “videregående uddannelser” (higher education), as well as a system of adult education.

Education is compulsory between the age of six and sixteen. Compulsory education consists of ten years of primary and lower secondary education, including one pre-school year (grade 0) plus nine years (grades 1 - 9). Public school education also offers the pupils an optional year (grade 10).

**The Danish upper secondary education programmes, also referred to as youth education programmes, can be divided into:**

- Vocational upper secondary education and training programmes, which primarily prepare trainees for a career in a specific trade or industry
- General upper secondary education programmes, which prepare students for higher education

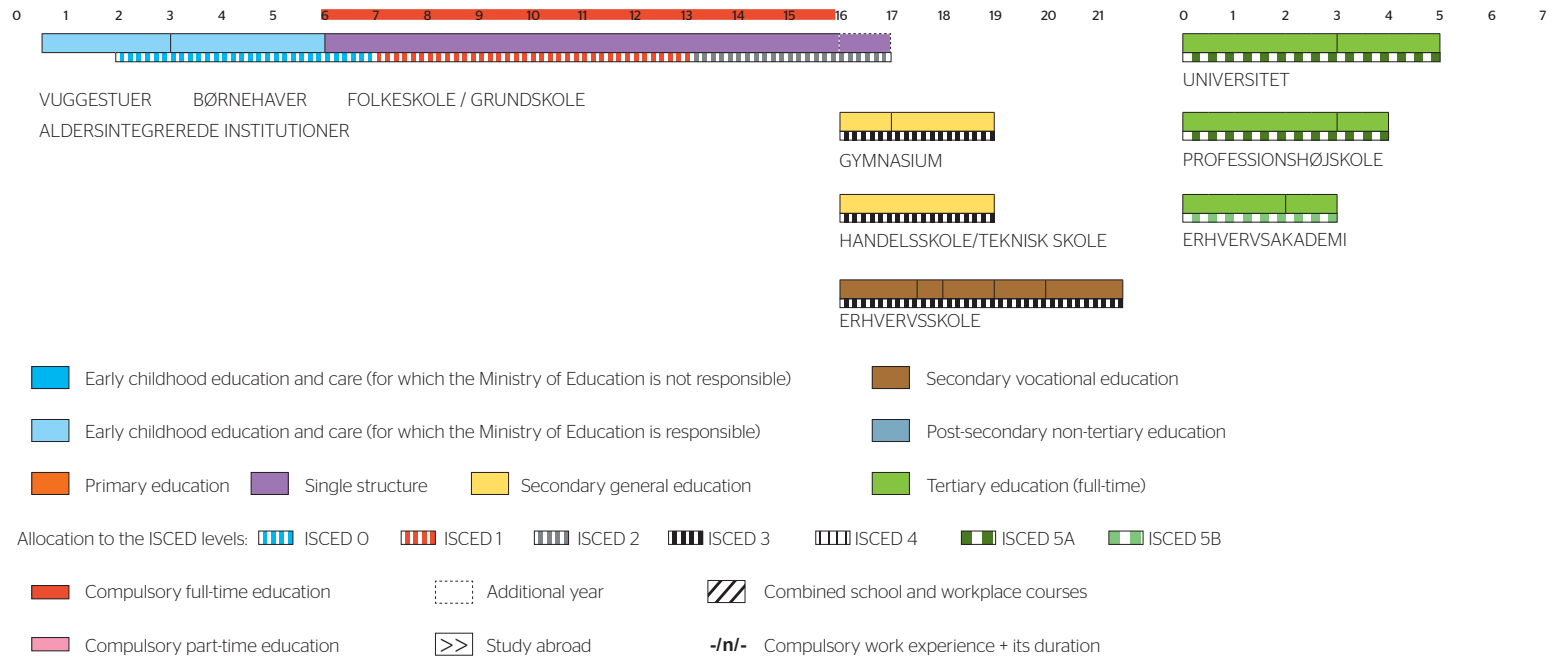
Higher education in Denmark is offered at three levels: short-cycle higher education, medium-cycle higher education and long-cycle higher education.

The short-cycle and medium-cycle programmes are the academy profession programmes offered at the Academies of Professional Higher Education (Erhvervsakademier) and the professional bachelor programmes offered at the University Colleges (Professionshøjskoler).



The long-cycle programmes such as the bachelor, master and PhD programmes are offered at the universities.

The model below shows a complete outline of the Danish education system.



Source: Eurydice

## Primary Education

Education is compulsory in Denmark for everyone between the ages of 6-7 and 16. Prior to this, most children attend some kind of day nursery from the age of 1-2, however this is not mandatory.

Whether the education is received in a public school, private school or through homeschooling is a matter of individual choice, as long as accepted standards are met. It is education itself that is compulsory - not school - however most children attend public school.

The accepted standards are centrally defined standards stipulated by the Ministry of Education. National legislation covers the aims and framework of education, funding and in some cases curricula, examinations and staffing. The Ministry of Education is responsible for setting up the framework for curricula at primary and secondary level. However, the content of the courses is finalised by the teachers themselves, with their pupils. The Ministry of Education oversees the public schools in collaboration with the municipal councils.

The Danish public school - "Folkeskole" - is a comprehensive school covering both primary and lower secondary education, i.e. first (grades 1 to 6) and second (grades 7-9/10) stage basic education. In other words, it caters for the 6/7 to 16/17 year olds. The "Folkeskole" consists of one year of pre-school class, nine years of primary and lower secondary education and a one-year 10th grade, which is optional.

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not school**

## Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education and training in Denmark (VET) includes a vast range of programmes. The duration of these programmes varies from between 1 ½ to 5 ½ years, the most typical length being 3 ½ to 4 years. VET programmes are sandwich-type programmes in which theoretical and practical education at a vocational college alternates with practical training in an approved company or organisation. The dual training principle ensures that the trainees acquire the theoretical, practical, general and personal skills which are in demand on the labour market.

The VET programmes qualify primarily for access to the labour market.



## General Upper Secondary Education

There are four academically oriented general upper secondary programmes:

- The 3-year Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination (stx)
- The 3-year Higher Commercial Examination (hhx)
- The 3-year Higher Technical Examination (htx)
- The 2-year Higher Preparatory Examination (hf)

All four programmes prepare pupils for further studies and develop their personal and general academic competences. The programmes aim to enhance the students' independent analytical skills as well as prepare them to become democratic and socially conscious citizens with a global outlook. Each of the education programmes has its own specific range of common compulsory subjects for all students.

With regards to the stx, hhx and htx programmes, every school also offers a number of different specialised study programmes and elective subjects for students to choose from. The specialised study programme is of a longer duration than the basic programme.

With regards to the hf programme, students choose from among the elective subjects offered by the school. The curricula of the hhx and htx differ from those of stx and the hf in the sense that the hhx, in addition to a number of general upper secondary subjects, includes financial and business subjects, and the htx includes technical subjects.

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The stx and hf programmes consist of a broad range of subjects in the fields of humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. The hhx programme focuses on socio-economic disciplines in combination with foreign languages and other general subjects. The htx programme has its focus on technological and scientific subjects in combination with general subjects.

The stx and hf programmes are offered by general upper secondary schools. This type of school is called a “gymnasium”. Business and technical colleges offer the hhx and htx programmes respectively. Some schools are mixed institutions and offer various types of programmes.





Electives  
Freedom  
Analytical and critical thinking  
Upper Sec  
stx  
hf  
P  
Democracy  
Success

## Gymnasium (stx)

Even though all four of the upper secondary education programmes come under the category “gymnasium”, it is primarily the stx qualification that is strictly speaking a “gymnasium” qualification. What sometimes causes confusion is that the gymnasium is both the institution and the education. This means that a student typically goes to a certain gymnasium in the country, however also attends the gymnasium - meaning the stx education programme.

Of all four upper secondary school programmes, student intake into general upper secondary education is the highest for the stx programme. In 2013, 48 per cent of the pupils leaving grade 9 and 10 applied to the stx programme. And the programme is a success. The completion rate is high and the programme is the primary provider of academically proficient students to the higher education programmes.

The focus in the stx is on general education and general preparation for higher education. The academic standard is closely linked to aspects of the academic subjects, and the aim is for the students to achieve general education and study competences in the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences with a view to completion of higher education. Students should, in the course of their academic progression, develop insight and study skills. They must become familiar with the application of various approaches and working methods and acquire the ability to function in a school environment that demands independence, cooperation and a keen sense of seeking out knowledge.



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## Specialised study programmes at gymnasiums

Since the reform of the gymnasium in 2005, the stx-programme has provided a wide variety of options allowing applicants to decide what direction to choose. This means that the education is tailored to the interests and wishes of the individual student. Each student goes through a basic programme (1/2 year) with a number of compulsory subjects and levels.

### Compulsory subjects and levels

- Danish A
- English B
- 2nd foreign language B or A
- History A
- Classical studies C
- Physics C
- Physical education (PE) C
- An artistic subject C
- Mathematics C
- Religion C
- Social science C



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The focus in the stx is on general education and general preparation for higher education.

As a minimum, the student must choose 4 A level subjects, 3 B level subjects and 7 C level subjects. The student always has the option of choosing more A and B level subjects, but may not choose fewer subjects.

In addition, at least two of the following subjects must be chosen: biology, chemistry and geography at C level. Most students must also complete mathematics biology, physics, chemistry or geography at A and B level. The compulsory artistic subject is chosen from visual arts, drama, media studies or music.

The most popular choice of 2nd foreign language is: French continued level B and A, German continued level B and A, French beginner language A, Italian A, Russian A, Spanish A or German beginner language A, Chinese A, with possibilities for other languages in some schools.

Some of the instruction is in the form of multi-subject courses within the framework of general study preparation, general language understanding and a natural science basic programme.

Following this, the student must choose a specialisation or direction, which combines two or three subjects within natural sciences, social sciences or humanities and includes artistic subjects.



**This broad variety of directions in the stx programme gives students the opportunity to adjust their upper secondary education to their envisaged future study course or job.**

This broad variety of directions in the stx programme gives students the opportunity to adjust their upper secondary education to their envisaged future study course or job. This choice of a specialised study programme and electives takes place in parallel with the compulsory subjects, and each student writes a specialised study project in the third year within two or three subjects of their choice and selects a number of elective subjects. The number varies according to the study field subjects taken by the student.

## Structure of the programme

Specialised study programme 2 ½ years					
Compulsory subjects		Two of the following subjects , depending on the school	Specialised study subjects	2nd foreign language	Electives
Danish A History A Religion C English B Physical education C Classics C	Mathematics C Physics C Social science C Natural science B	Biology C Chemistry C Natural science C	Normally three subjects constituting the specialised study programme	Continued level B or Beginner languageA	Two or three electives

Basic Programme ½ year								
In addition, there is multi-subject coursework, for example in a language and a natural science subject.								
History	Social science	A natural science subject	Mathematics	Danish	English	Physical education	Artistic subject	2 nd foreign language

Each individual education institution that offers stx has a broad variety of directions, and therefore the choices and education profiles offers by each gymnasium varies from school to school.

### Examples of choice of specialised study subjects and electives

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4
<b>Specialised study subjects:</b> Mathematics A Physics B Chemistry B  <b>Electives:</b> English A Astronomy C	<b>Specialised study subjects:</b> English A German A Psychology B  <b>Electives:</b> Natural science subject B Social science B	<b>Specialised study subjects:</b> Social Science A Mathematics A Business economics C  <b>Electives:</b> Natural science subject	<b>Specialised study subjects:</b> Music A Mathematics B Psychology C  <b>Electives:</b> Natural science subject B English A

## Teaching Style in Denmark

Provision of high quality education at all levels is essential to ensure competitiveness in today's global society. Thus Danish education aims to ensure that all young people acquire the knowledge and competences which will qualify them to play an active part in the knowledge society and contribute to its further development. Danish secondary education is characterised by innovative teaching methods and an informal learning environment designed to promote creativity, self-expression, analytical and critical thinking.

At all levels of the education system, pupils and students attend classes; however, they also carry out project work, either on an individual basis or in small groups. Treating pupils and students as independent individuals with a right to form their own opinion and a duty to participate actively in discussions is a matter of course in Danish education.

Pupils and students in Denmark are expected to play an active role in their own learning process. Apart from attending traditional lectures, they engage in project work and are encouraged to participate in open discussions with their teachers and fellow students.

The education and school culture as a whole is designed to prepare pupils and students for active participation, joint responsibility, rights and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. Teaching and the entire school day thus build on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy, allowing pupils and students to acquire the fundamentals for active participation in a democratic society and an understanding of the possibilities for individually and collectively contributing to development and change, and the understanding of the national, European and global perspective.

Problem Based Learning (PBL) is a key feature of education in Denmark. PBL promotes the student's innovative abilities through problem-based group projects with the teacher as a consultant, and sometimes in collaboration with a company to work on real-world problems.



## The Grading System

The grading system in Denmark applies to all education institutions. The seven-point scale allows you to easily convert Danish grades into ECTS credits according to the EU European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. The ongoing evaluation of the student's progress is in the form of oral and written exams. The quality of Danish education is assured in many ways. It is mainly regulated and financed by the state under the Ministry of Education, and all public education institutions, grading systems etc. are approved and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

### Overview of the Danish seven-point scale

Grade	Description	ECTS
12	For an excellent performance displaying a high level of command of all aspects of the relevant material, with no or only a few minor weaknesses	A
10	For a very good performance displaying a high level of command of most aspects of the relevant material, with only minor weaknesses	B
7	For a good performance displaying good command of the relevant material but also some weaknesses	C
4	For a fair performance displaying some command of the relevant material but also some weakness	D
02	For a performance meeting only the minimum requirements for acceptance	E
00	For a performance which does not meet the minimum requirements for acceptance	Fx
-3	For a performance which is unacceptable in all respects.	F

In some cases, a simple pass or fail can be given instead of grades. Performance is assessed according to academic targets set for the specific subject or course.

## Facts about gymnasium

- There are a total of 168 education institutions offering the stx and hf qualifications. Of these, 19 institutions are private and 148 of them are members of The Danish Association of Upper Secondary Schools
- 139 of these institutions provide the three year upper secondary education programme, stx, with some of them also providing the two year hf programme and the three year IB programme
- About 48 per cent of the pupils leaving grade 9 or 10 in 2013 applied for the stx programme
- In 2012, the completion rate of the stx programme was 87 per cent
- These education institutions are scattered all over Denmark, guaranteeing every young person in the country the opportunity to participate in upper secondary education
- About 49 per cent of the stx students choose to take a university bachelor degree course and at least 23 per cent a professional bachelor course. Furthermore, 5 per cent choose to study further at an Academy of Professional Higher Education

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