

The Danish Union of Teachers

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Mission

The Danish Union of Teachers (DLF) was founded in 1874 and is one of the oldest national trade unions in Denmark. Our members are primarily the teachers of the Folkeskole, that is, the public primary and lower secondary schools. Our mission is to improve the salary and working conditions of our members and to influence the substance of the teachers' work as well as the schools' educational development in general.

Vision

The Danish Union of Teachers firmly believes that the Danish Folkeskole must be characterised by high quality and adequate resources to ensure competent teaching. The school is responsible for providing education in the broadest possible sense of the word. It has to prepare the pupils for active citizenship in a democratic society and not just qualify them for entering the labour market. The free public school must be maintained and developed as a public asset, and all pupils must have equal opportunities. It is the pupils' right to be taught by qualified teachers. The teachers must be in control of the way they carry out their responsibilities as well as having freedom of choice in teaching methods. This professional autonomy is to be guaranteed by the school leader. The principles of school leadership should focus on delegating responsibilities and should be supportive of a good physical and psychological working environment.

The profession strategy

The Danish Union of Teachers regards teaching as a profession. Consequently the teachers' salary and working conditions and the essence of the work they perform should be viewed as a complete entity. We believe that our position is at its strongest when the teachers are looked upon according to their academic and professional qualifications. This includes our relationship with the Ministry of Education as well as the employers in the municipalities. Therefore, the DLF has adopted the profession strategy, which aims at making it obvious that the teachers' professional demands are an integral part of our efforts to support the work carried out in the Danish Folkeskole. Through the profession strategy we try to advance teachers' professional interests as well as the interests of the Danish Folkeskole in general.

An essential element of the profession strategy is to ensure that all teachers are committed to professional conduct. In 2002, the DLF adopted a professional ideal for teachers. The purpose of the professional ideal is to verbalise the essence of teaching in the Folkeskole and to create a common language to describe the teachers' work. It is also important to provide a foundation for a continuous discussion of the responsibilities and challenges of the teachers.

Tasks and activities

The main tasks and activities of the DLF are:

- Collective agreements: Collective bargaining with the employers, settling conflicts and providing interpretations of rules and regulations with respect to the collective agreements on pay and working conditions.
- Engaging in dialogue with the Ministry of Education, political parties and other stakeholders focused on the development of the Folkeskole.
- Preparing hearing statements to the Government related to the central planning and policy development in the education sector.
- Providing members with information on current salary and working conditions as well as political and educational trends within the field of education.
- Preparing and implementing public campaigns on education-related issues.
- Providing training and seminars to school representatives (shop stewards) and other union representatives.
- Organising meetings, courses and conferences on educational and organisational topics.
- Cooperating with other trade unions at national and international levels.

The DLF provides members with various services such as:

- Counselling and legal assistance in case of problems related to salary and working conditions as well as the psychological working environment.
- The weekly members' journal Folkeskolen and the monthly Undervisere (Educators).
- Collective liability insurance for work-related claims.
- Possibilities for advantageous insurances and loans as well as assistance to members in financial need.
- Membership of purchasing organisations.

Members

DLF has over 95,000 members, of whom the majority holds jobs in the Danish Folkeskole. However, the DLF is more than a traditional teacher trade union. It is also an organisation that works for the development of the Folkeskole. Therefore both teachers and school leaders are members, tied together by the teaching profession. Also 10,000 student teachers and 15,000 retired teachers are DLF members. With more than 70,000 active teachers among the members the DLF has a union density of 95 per cent. Other big member groups are teachers of children and adults with special needs, health and nutrition teachers, pre-school class teachers, school consultants and psychologists employed in the Folkeskole. In addition, the DLF negotiates collective agreements for teachers and other employees of a number of private schools.

Organisational structure

The School Representatives (shop stewards)

At every primary and lower secondary school in the country the members elect a school representative. There are some 1,900 DLF school representatives who serve as spokespersons for the teachers when dealing with the management of the individual school. The school representative provides the members with advice and information about the union's mission and goals, the political trends within the field of education and about existing rules and regulations of relevance for teachers. At the same time, the school representative acts as contact to the local DLF branch.

The Local Branches

The DLF has 80 local branches, including a branch for teachers employed at schools for the Danish minority south of the German border and a branch for the teachers in Greenland. The branches serve as links between the members and the DLF leadership and they protect the interests of members at local level. The branches adopt a local policy within the framework and principles adopted by the DLF Congress and National Executive Committee respectively. The branches are in charge of negotiations with the local authorities.

The Congress

The Congress is DLF's supreme authority. There is an ordinary Congress once a year. Every four years the Congress elects the DLF president and vice president. The local branches elect delegates for the Congress every two years. The number of delegates from the individual branches depends on the number of members. Local branch chairmen are ex officio delegates. In addition to delegates from the local branches, pre-school class teachers, school leaders, retired teachers and student teachers also have Congress delegates. The Congress has a total of 309 delegates including the members of the National Executive Committee. The Congress is open to the public.

The National Executive Committee

The National Executive Committee is in charge of the union's day-to-day management. It has 25 members (including president and vice president). One represents the school leaders, one the retired teachers, one the student teachers and two members represent the teachers of Copenhagen. The other 18 members of the National Executive Committee are elected through a ballot among all members. The members of the National Executive Committee are elected for periods of four years. At present (2008 – 2012), 7 out of the 25 members are women. The National Executive Committee has at least ten annual meetings.

The Executive Board

The Executive Board has five members: The president, vice president and the chairpersons of the three standing committees established by the National Executive Committee: Committee for Working Environment and Organisational Matters, Committee for Collective Bargaining and Committee for Educational Policy. The Executive Board has a coordinating function vis-à-vis the National Executive Committee. The Executive Board handles matters

such as the union's financial affairs, administration, representation, international relations, training activities and contacts with other organisations.

The Secretariat

The general secretary is appointed, not elected, and is head of the secretariat. The secretariat assists the president in carrying out the daily tasks. Furthermore, the secretariat offers advisory and consultancy services to members and branches. The secretariat is located in the centre of Copenhagen and employs a staff of some 130. The secretariat is divided into a number of separate departments that take care of labour relations, educational affairs, working environment, training and conferences, information services, members' journals, research, international affairs, finance and accounts, information and communication technology and member administration. All staff members, including the general secretary, are employees of the DLF.

Training activities

The Danish Union of Teachers carries out extensive training activities. Each year some 5000 members participate in the training programmes. Training and course activities may be divided into the following categories:

- organisational basics (basic training programme for all newly elected officials)
- courses for elected officials who have completed the basic training programme
- courses for branch executive committee members
- courses for school leaders
- courses for members, including retired teachers
- courses for branch employees

The purpose of the basic training programme is to provide elected officials with greater knowledge and understanding of the union's political work and position in the general organisational picture – locally as well as nationally. Moreover, the training programmes are intended to provide elected officials with improved personal, social and professional skills. The courses for members serve the purpose of strengthening the feeling of solidarity among members and increasing commitment through information and dialogue about union issues of current interest.

Finally, training programmes and courses for officers are intended to provide the officers – politically elected as well as employees – with a high degree of professional, personal and social competence in relation to the tasks performed by a politically managed organisation. The basic training programme is managed by a permanent staff to maintain a cadre of trained school representatives at every school. Between 250 and 275 school representatives are trained every year.

The Danish Union of Teachers owns six training centres, each accommodating between 30 and 120 participants. The courses are predominantly held at these centres.

Finances

Membership fees

All members pay full membership fees irrespective of whether they work full time or part time. Membership fees are composed of a national union fee fixed by the congress and a local branch fee fixed by the local branches. In general, the aggregate fee amounts to approximately two per cent of a teacher's average salary. The Danish fiscal legislation ensures that fees associated with union membership are tax deductible, so in reality the fee amounts to one per cent of a teacher's salary. Retired teachers, student teachers and other special groups pay either reduced fees or may be granted free membership.

Remuneration of politically elected officials

All members of the Executive Board are paid by the Danish Union of Teachers. Members of the national Executive Committee are paid by the union for three working days per week. As part of the collective agreement approximately twenty per cent of the school representatives' normal working hours are set aside for union-related activities.

Information activities

Internal information

Through internal information activities all elected representatives have access to the information required to give members correct and qualified information. Internal information activities are based on electronic transmission of information to branches, school managements and school representatives. Many of the documents/publications can also be found at the union's webpage: www.dlf.org

The DLF handbook for school representatives is electronic and freely accessible to everyone.

The DLF also publishes the members' journals, "Folkeskolen" and "Undervisere." These journals deal with issues of contemporary interest to teachers, educational as well as professional.

External information

The DLF engages in the public debate through participation in interviews, press releases and contributions to the ongoing debate. When needed, the DLF undertakes campaigns and advocacy activities aimed at specific target groups, such as information aimed at school boards, school administration or politicians.

Social dialogue

The DLF has the important role as representative of the civil society within the field of education in Denmark, both in terms of designing the educational policy at government level and negotiating members' conditions of employment.

The Danish Union of Teachers is a member of the FTF (Confederation of Professionals in Denmark) which represents the majority of employee organisations in the public sector. The FTF is represented in key committees and boards at government level, where they represent the DLF on general matters. The DLF contributes to the shaping of educational policy through a social partnership with the Ministry of Education. This partnership shows its strength in the sense that the DLF is normally asked to supply comments on any amendments of legislation concerning the activities and management of the schools, including subject curricula syllabus in the schools as well as training of teaching staff.

In general, the Danish labour market is characterised by a system under which salary and conditions of employment are regulated through collective agreements between sector-specific employers and employee organisations and not by law. Thus, as regards all questions of general salary and working conditions for its members, the DLF negotiates with the relevant employers' organisation. The majority of members are employed by the municipalities. The central employers' organisation is the association Local Government Denmark (KL). The DLF primarily negotiates the working conditions and a framework agreement for salary and working hours. The local branches negotiate the rest of the working hours agreement and a small part of the salary.

For members teaching at some schools for children with special needs as well as certain private schools, the relevant employers may be either the regional authorities or the government, and in such cases the DLF negotiates the working conditions of these members with either the Association of Danish Regions or the State Employer's Authority.

The collective agreement negotiated by the DLF and the Local Government Denmark, the State Employers' Authority and the Danish Regions is sent out for a ballot among the members. The DLF has consultation status in the event of discharge of members.

Danish Teacher Trade Unions (DLI)

In Denmark there are nine teacher organisations. However, there is no competition among them since it is clearly defined who can be a member of which organisation. The teacher organisations work together within the framework of the Danish Teachers' Council (DUS) by seeking to achieve consensus on questions of educational policy of common interest.

International cooperation

At the international level the Danish Union of Teachers is a member of the following international organisations:

- § The Nordic Teacher Council (NLS), an association of teacher organisations in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands. www.n-l-s.org

- § European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), the European umbrella organisation for teachers in the EU and the EFTA region. www.csee-etuice.org
- § Education International (EI), the world organisation of teacher trade unions. www.ei-ie.org

The DLF operates a joint office in Brussels, Belgium, with the other Danish teacher organisations. The office is responsible for monitoring all EU initiatives within the field of education as well as the EU policy on labour market conditions. The office is in continuous contact with members of the European Parliament, employees at the European Commission as well as the representations of Danish and international labour organisations and employers' organisations in Brussels.

Solidarity work

The DLF adheres to the long-established Danish tradition of solidarity between employees across country borders. Since 1982 the DLF has been engaged in development projects in cooperation with teacher unions all over the world. This work is carried out in close coordination and cooperation with the teachers' world organisation, Education International. The union is mainly involved in projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of these development projects is to assist sister unions in building up well-functioning democratic and independent organisations, mainly by assisting in developing leadership training

of union representatives at all levels. The DLF also advises project partners on social dialogue processes, union policy development, membership services, professional issues, financial accountability, gender issues and human rights etc. depending on the needs identified with the partners involved. The development assistance projects are to a wide extent financed by the Danish government through Danida, the Danish International Development Agency, and thus by the Danish taxpayers. Moreover, the DLF sets aside 0.7 % of the membership fees for international development cooperation. This equals about 140,000 € annually.

The Danish educational system

The Danish educational system is divided into:

- Primary and lower secondary education
- Upper secondary education
- Short-cycle higher education
- Medium-cycle higher education
- Long-cycle higher education

Primary and lower secondary school

Denmark has nine years of compulsory basic education. Approximately 87 per cent of all children attend the public Danish Folkeskole, which was established in 1817. Today we have over 1600 public schools in Denmark offering basic education. Almost 98 per cent of all Danish children attend one year of pre-school before they begin school at the age of seven. The children normally continue in the same group from pre-school class up to and including the 9th grade. A tenth year at the Folkeskole is optional. The average class size is 20 pupils, and the average teacher/pupil ratio is 1:11. By law the Folkeskole is required to provide children with academic qualifications and to prepare them for active citizenship in a democratic society. The school works closely together with the parents and teaching is based on the individual pupil's abilities. Some 13 per cent of a year group attend one of the country's approximately 500 private, albeit state-subsidised, schools, where parents contribute to the funding. Elsewhere tuition is free in the Danish school system – that is to say: tax funded. Very few choose to home school their children.

Upper secondary education

Upper secondary education is free. Usually, upper secondary education takes three years, and great importance is attached to developing both the pupils' academic and personal qualifications.

Higher education

After completing upper secondary school it is possible to continue the studies at one of the universities or the other institutions of higher education. It may be at one of the teacher training colleges, where future teachers normally study for a period of four years, including six months of practical training. Well over 80 per cent of those employed as teachers at primary and lower secondary school level have been trained at one of the teacher training colleges. Higher education, at universities or other institutions, is free of charge with the exception of certain graduate and master programmes. The students only pay for their own learning materials.

The Folkeskole and the teachers

- The DLF organises the teachers of the Folkeskole, that is, public primary and lower secondary school for children from 6 to 16 years of age
- The Folkeskole has some 600,000 pupils and 51,000 teachers, of whom 95 per cent have chosen to be DLF members
- There are 1600 Folkeskoles. The average school has 372 pupils
- The average class size is 20 and the pupil/teacher ratio is 11:1
- 70% of the teachers are female
- The teachers' employers are the 99 municipalities
- The full-time teacher works some 1680 hours on an annual basis. Approximately 720 hours are classroom teaching. The rest is used for preparation, meetings, professional development etc.
- The gross starting salary of a Danish teacher is 360,000 DKK (48,000 €) annually. The maximum salary of 418,000 DKK (55,730 €) is usually reached after 12 years of experience. A teacher's salary is higher than the national average salary
- The teachers' pay and working conditions are negotiated every three years at national level between the DLF and Local Government Denmark, the association of local authorities

Private schools

- Denmark has some 500 private schools with 90,000 pupils and 7,500 teachers
- The average school size is 183 pupils and the average class size is 17
- 85% of the private schools' costs are covered by the state

The members' journals

Folkeskolen and Undervisere both have a circulation of 87,000, and they have 221,000 readers. The journals are distributed to the members 44 times a year. The journals have their own editorial staff and are edited according to principles of editorial freedom. This means that the journals do not always express the official DLF policy. The journals carry regular columns by the political leadership of the DLF. The journals as well as their web pages are the centre of an open lively debate among readers. In addition to these journals, each local branch publishes a members' journal of varying scope, content and regularity.

The aim of the journals is to:

- inform about the DLF's policy, decisions and views both towards members, the public and the authorities
- promote debate and support the union's democratic processes through an open editorial policy
- clarify and discuss the teachers' educational, financial and professional interests
- offer members the best possible basis for opinion formation on educational issues

The negotiation-based labour market model – “The Danish Model”

The Danish labour market is regulated through collective agreements and not through legislation. Approximately every three years the partners concerned, i.e. representatives of the trade unions and the employers' organisations, meet to negotiate collective agreements on salaries and working conditions for the different groups of employees.

This system is generally referred to as the Danish model (or the Nordic Model). The system was introduced in 1899 after a widespread industrial unrest. The negotiation of collective agreements is one of the trade unions' core services to the members. The collective agreements cover almost 80 per cent of all employees in both the public and the private sector in Denmark, and they contribute to ensuring a relatively stable and peaceful labour market.

Economic conditions for students

In 2006, Denmark spent approximately DKK 126.6 billion (€ 16.8 billion) on education, which corresponds to about 7.7 per cent of the GDP. Denmark spends above the OECD average on basic education, only topped by New Zealand, Norway and Korea. Denmark is also above OECD average when it comes to expenses for higher education. Out of these expenses, a considerable amount is spent on student support. Tuition at Danish public and most private educational institutions is free for Danish students and for all EU/EEA students. However, the Danish society gives students a helping hand in covering the living costs for a great variety of courses and studies. Students are entitled to public support for 5 years and 10 months of higher education study. One month of student support corresponds to approximately DKK 5000 (€ 665). In 2006, Denmark spent approximately DKK 10.6 billion on student support. This corresponds to about 0.7 per cent of the GDP.

To learn more:

www.dlf.org
www.dlint.org
www.ftf.dk
www.uvm.dk
www.denmark.dk

The Danish Union of Teachers
The Danish Teacher Trade Unions
The Confederation of Professionals in Denmark
The Danish Ministry of Education
General information about Denmark