



# The Danish “Folkehøjskole

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Original text: Jørgen Carlsen and Ole Borgå.

Updated by Arne Andresén, Sigurd Kværndrup and Niels Glahn.

Editor: H. Roving Olsen / Translation: John Fallas.

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## Love is inexplicable!

*By: Jørgen Carlsen, Principal, Testrup Højskole*

So said the great Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. It is impossible, he believed, to convey through words what love actually is. Not that it matters very much though, he went on reassuringly, since a moment's thought shows that the problem more or less resolves itself. For on reflection, there are really only two kinds of people: those who have experienced love, and those who have not – or at least, not yet! And the first need no explanation because they already know what it is, while the others will never understand the phenomenon of love, no matter how often you try to explain. – So why waste time trying...?

It is exactly the same with the Danish folk high school. Basically it is impossible to explain what a folk high school is. I suppose a very brief, rough definition would be that it is a type of school for adults which place the emphasis on general, mind broadening education. But this fails to convey the true reality behind the words. To understand the Danish folk high school properly, explanation is not enough – it is something that has to be experienced.

Nevertheless, in writing this booklet, I am going to ignore Søren Kierkegaard's warning, and simply hope that the reader will not regard it as a complete waste of time. Indeed, I would argue there are several good reasons for making the attempt. The most important is that the folk high school is *the* single most original contribution Denmark has made to international thinking about popular education – original because of the comprehensive and profound meaning attached in Denmark to the concept of "*popular education*". For popular education means more than just spreading knowledge and technical skills more widely among the population at large. In principle it encompasses man's entire cultural environment, reminding us that we should be careful not to confuse the means and the end when it comes to human activities. Furthermore the Danish tradition of popular education rests on a solidly democratic outlook: no one can claim privileged access to the absolute truth – so everyone has a right to have his say! And there is a mistrust of pure "*reason*", gazing down on reality from so far on high that practically

everything turns out to be of minor significance. What is the use of giving “intellect” free rein, if there is no “heart”...?

I intend, then, to embark on the impossible task of explaining something inexplicable, something so unique to the Danish cultural tradition that not even the word itself can be translated without the risk of misunderstanding. That is why we have chosen to leave “folkehøjskole” (plural: “folkehøjskoler”) in Danish even though it may look rather odd, mysteriously Nordic even – with the strange letters “øj” in the middle (pronounced “oy” – so “follka-hoy-skoaler”). The direct English translation would be “Folk High School”, but the problem is that this may easily convey the wrong idea.

Perhaps it would help to look at the pictures first. Many of them show everyday scenes from a number of different schools. If you try to match them with the text as you read through, then you may gradually begin to gain a reasonably full picture of life in these unique schools. Because what matters, of course, is to understand not that curious word “folkehøjskole” itself, but the living reality behind it.





## Learning for life

There are about 70 folkehøjskoler spread right across the country, most of them in rural areas or smaller towns, and typically named after the local district. Some are quite old, others more recent. Some are large and can accommodate several hundred students, while others have room for only 30 or so. Some are quite wealthy, others less well-off. Some are architectural gems. Most are minor orgies of stylistic confusion. The most important thing about a folkehøjskole, though, is not its appearance but the atmosphere. The task of the academies, as one teacher once said, is to create "a climate where culture is a reality".

With one single exception, all the folkehøjskoler are residential. They become microcosmic societies, with students and staff living, eating, and sharing the same daily routines together for the duration of the course. Most schools run long courses of 4-8 months during the winter, and shorter courses of 1-2 weeks during the summer. The winter courses are chiefly intended for young people between 18 and 23, the shorter summer ones for students of all ages. Two folkehøjskoler are especially for young people between 16½ and 19, and three others cater exclusively for senior citizens. Over the past few years the average annual attendance has stood around 50,000. In other words, every year some 2% of Denmark's entire adult populations go to a folkehøjskole. Most of them attend courses lasting only a few weeks, but some 21% a year attend courses lasting several months.

The varied ranges of subjects they cover are much the same as would be found anywhere else in the Danish educational system:

**Literature, history, psychology, ecology, it, communication, education, music, drama, sport, outdoor pursuits, dance, art appreciation, photography, pottery, dressmaking, drawing, development studies, international politics and so on. Quite a number, though, have chosen to focus on just one or more particular subject areas. Eleven of the 74 or so schools, for instance, have elected to place the main emphasis on physical education – sport and gymnastics. There are some that concentrate mainly on music and the theatre. Others centre their attention on art or crafts. Others again focus on foreign aid work, or on ecology, nature conservation and environmental protection. One school has chosen to devote its courses to filmmaking and the cinema.**

But to understand what is so special about the folkehøjskoler we have to look further than just the subjects they teach. They are required by law to provide a *general broadening education* and are expressly forbidden to compete with traditional specialist educational establishments. They are not allowed to award marks or grades, or to provide specific vocational training. Their principal task is to educate their students for life – in other words to shed light on some of the basic questions surrounding life for people in Denmark today, both as individuals and as members of society.

The folkehøjskole is an educational institution, a school, and this must influence the daily life. But the difference from this type of school and schools within the school system is that the folkehøjskole has the freedom to select the subjects, methods of teaching, and types of classes. This each school can do according to its own philosophy and convictions. A folkehøjskole can offer longer class periods, non-traditional subjects, interdisciplinary subjects, correlation of theoretical and practical work, innovative methods of teaching, small study circles, lectures, workshops, student-managed classes, etc. But the difference is, first and foremost, reflected in the variance in content. Ideally, existence itself – one's life in connection with others – should be the core of all subjects; this cannot be judged by tests and examinations.

## Life at a folkehøjskole

The long courses at the folkehøjskole are characterized by the fact that life at the school becomes daily life. The students and teachers live together for such long periods of time that one is forced to become visible as a person; one cannot hide behind an assumed role. One has time to discover that a quick first-time appraisal is not always correct, that people from other social classes, different age groups, and often other geographic areas, are in possession of resources and values which one's preconceived ideas had not imagined possible. One also discovers that the "others" can be irritating, only thinking about having fun, terribly passive - or active, or unbearably serious. And one discovers one's own part in everything. One discovers that one's word and actions have meaning – for others and for oneself.

A stay at a folkehøjskole is the participation of teachers and students in common meetings where various activities are planned by discussing the scope and content of these activities. There are many schools where morning assemblies are held. Here, one can begin the day with a common starting point. There are community singing and sports activities, there is keeping up with current events, bike trips, there are friendships and romances that are built up – and break up, there are the midnight discussions, and there is the implementation and carrying out of school parties with entertainment and music. In short, a social activity place so broad and diverse that it cannot be matched with many other places. Many of the activities mentioned here will take place several times during a week – a week at a folkehøjskole is usually a very busy week. As one student has put it:

*"You never have time off, was the first thing that struck me, as I sat down thinking about my time at a folkehøjskole that had passed. This is certainly not meant negatively. It's just so, that when you stay at a folkehøjskole, and work and live together with the same people, then there is always something to do. And I had always committed myself to a whole lot of things, both concerning the subjects and the social life.*

*To stay at a folkehøjskole is often associated with something very social. And indeed it is, but it is so much more than that. I have learned a lot about people, about tolerance and about seeing people as who they are. To see people as who they are behind the mask, is probably the biggest strength of the folkehøjskole. The fact that you live and work together 24 hours a day makes*

*the masks fall, some day or other. You get to see what's inside and you get the chance to be who you are. Sometimes I felt totally naked and weak, but it was all right, because I felt safe. At other educations it is hard really to get to know one another besides the professional facets, because the uncertainty about what other people think makes you afraid of showing your true self. But after my stay at the folkehøjskole I find that I have become more aware of how I act on people. And aware of showing better who I am, in good and bad. Then you can just hope that others will keep up ..."*

By: Anne Gjesing Olesen, Den Europæiske Teaterhøjskole, Rødkilde, Autumn 1999/autumn 2000.

## Lifelong learning

"The mysteries make us all equal", as the head of one school put it. Before the mystery of existence we are all "equally wise, equally ignorant – whether old or young, unskilled or highly trained, teacher or pupil."

One of the basic ideas behind the Danish folkehøjskole, then, is that no one can claim to hold the key to the mystery of life. The only way in which we can come closer to the truth is through dialogue with one another, throwing light on the question through living encounters with others as we each pursue our own lives. So the crucial question asked of a student in the folkehøjskole. context is not "What can you do?" but "Who are you?". What is the cardinal element in human existence, the essential in human life? How can we live life more truly? What does it mean, in the everyday world we share, to say that "we humans hold part of each other's destiny in our hands", as the prominent Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup put it? All these questions play a large part in shaping the distinctive atmosphere found in a Danish folkehøjskole. But that does not mean that they are actually voiced explicitly in the daytoday course of school life. The idea is not to furnish ready answers, but to nurture a climate where they can emerge.

It is in this light that the schools' teaching of the various subjects has to be seen: as an indirect doorway to personal maturity and self-knowledge, so that people do not simply become experts in one narrow field and illiterate in every other area of human life. The intention is to help students to grow wiser – both about themselves and about the world.

Only when individuals become their true selves can they fully enter into a living democratic human community.

### Lifelong learning in the EU

Lifelong learning has become a central idea in the policy on education in the European Union. The visions and objectives agree with the politics of the Danish folkehøjskoler, making emphasize on the wide and reflective concept of competence. In a EU-memorandum on lifelong learning from 2000 the six key messages are:

- 1) New basic skills for all
- 2) More investment in human resources
- 3) Innovation in teaching and learning
- 4) Valuing learning
- 5) Rethinking guidance and counselling
- 6) Bringing learning closer home





## N.F.S. Grundtvig

The fact that popular education is so intimately linked in the Danish tradition with the concept of learning for life is mainly the work of Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), a clergyman and writer. Grundtvig was a contemporary of two other eminent Danes – Hans Christian Andersen and Soeren Kierkegaard – both far better known in the world at large than he is. Yet from a Danish viewpoint there is little doubt that it was Grundtvig who left the most indelible mark on Danish culture.

Of course, no one can tell what the course of history might have been if Grundtvig had not lived, but I would venture to claim that life in Denmark – our whole cultural environment, Church life, educational system, political culture, atmosphere and mentality – would not have been quite the same – and probably a little less festive and cheerful than it is.

In many ways Grundtvig was a living paradox, a man full of contradictions. At times he suffered from extreme depression and would probably have been diagnosed as a manic depressive today. But the undisputed fact is that he had a remarkable ability to transpose his personal experiences into poetry and prose of immense visionary power. Once in the grip of inspiration, he could work at a frenzied pace for long periods, hardly sleeping at all. Indeed, he is reckoned to have been the most prolific writer in Danish history, though paradoxically enough, one of the themes to which he constantly returned was the inferiority of the written word compared with the spoken or “living” word, as he called it. In the course of his long life he set forth his views in speech and writing on practically every topic that touched on human existence – from the burning political issues of the day to the question of eternity.

As a young man, Grundtvig was not much different from most others of his calling in Denmark. He believed that human life on earth was something transient, insignificant – a sort of temporary exile – and that the essential task for man was to turn his attention towards “the eternal life” beyond death. But in his late forties, between 1829 and 1831, he undertook three study trips to England, and these marked a major turning point in his life in several respects. One of the changes they brought about was a completely new outlook on human life and the world. At

the same time he also began to develop the basic educational ideas that were to inspire the creation of the Danish peoples college.

The actual purpose of his trips to England was to study a number of Old Norse manuscripts, including some kept in the University libraries at Oxford and Cambridge. While in Cambridge he stayed for some time at Trinity College, where he felt extremely at ease. In particular he was struck by the collegial atmosphere between the teaching staff and their students. They lived as a community even outside classes and lectures, dining together, meeting on the playing fields and debating with one another over afternoon tea. Students had a natural respect for the tutors and their knowledge and scholarship – which was not so very unusual, of course. What did surprise Grundtvig, however, was the similar respect clearly shown by the teaching staff for their students. Here was an environment that contrasted sharply with Grundtvig's own experience of the Danish educational system.

It was during Grundtvig's second visit to England in 1830 that an incident occurred that was to be of crucial significance. Seen from outside it might appear quite trivial. But spiritually and intellectually what happened was something in the way of an inner revolution, and it had a decisive impact on Danish culture! The date was 24th June 1830. At a dinner party that evening Grundtvig met Clara Bolton, the charming young wife of a doctor. And the revolutionary incident was simply the conversation that passed between the two of them. That entire evening Grundtvig and Clara Bolton sat engrossed in discussion about human existence, continuing long after the rest of the company had left for the bridge tables in the neighbouring rooms. When it was past midnight their host, somewhat concerned, came in to ask what kept them so long; to which Clara Bolton, looking up at him with her pretty brown eyes, replied, "There is nothing in the world that Mr Grundtvig and I could not talk about!" As far as we know, they never met again. But Grundtvig's intense discussion with this intelligent and charming young woman left an indelible impression. He fell under a spell! Fourteen years later he still returned in his writing to that exhilarating meeting with "the lady of Greece", as he called her.

For Clara Bolton's ideal was most definitely not the ascetic saint with his eyes set firmly on eternal salvation, but rather the ancient Greeks, proudly shouldering their destiny and openly accepting life with all the joys and pain it entails. Clara Bolton's forceful personality and philoso-

phy of life wrought a dramatic change in Grundtvig's view of human existence and Christianity. From now on he saw the purpose of Christianity in a completely different light. Its task is not to free man *from* this world – quite the reverse. It is to liberate mankind *for* life here on earth. Its object is not to release people from the trials and tribulations of earthly existence, but to set them free and enable them to embrace life, with the good and the bad, to the full. He realized that human life – the very real life we live with our selves and each other – is a meaningful and precious gift granted us for our own use.



## The first folkehøjskole

During the 1830s Grundtvig sketched out numerous plans for setting up some kind of high school based on his experience in England. His idea was for the King to set up a higher civil service school. Here the country's future administrators would sit side by side in the classroom with the sons and daughters (!) of peasant farmers, fishermen, workmen, tradesmen, housemaids – in short, the people at large – so that the future officers of the kingdom would get to know the wants and needs of ordinary folk and so be better able to serve the Danish people. For various reasons all these plans came to naught. But to offset that, Grundtvig's ideas came to play a major role for the Danish peasant farmers, as the folkehøjskoler helped them to gain the authority and selfconfidence to take full advantage of the democratic rights granted them under the Danish Constitution of 1849.

The first school had opened its doors a few years earlier, on 7 November 1844, when eighteen farm labourers gathered at a farmhouse in the small town of Rødding in South Jutland to become the world's first folkehøjskole students. In the years that followed several schools were established around the country and gradually the classic folkehøjskole pattern began to emerge.

After Denmark's defeat by Germany in 1864, with the loss of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein (some 40% of the country's territory), there was a sudden upsurge in the folkehøjskole movement. In less than ten years some 50 new folkehøjskoler were established throughout the remaining territory of the country. One of the schools' main concerns was to lay a basis for the nation to come to terms with the new situation. Practically all the folkehøjskoler in the last century were distinguished by a strong spirit of romantic nationalism. There was an intense interest in Danish history, culture, language, countryside, and above all in the present and future prospects for the country and the Danish nation.

Paradoxically, defeat by Germany marked the beginning of a unique period of progress – a flowering of prosperity due not least to the new cultural self-assurance of the farmers. Alongside the expansion of the folkehøjskoler – and closely linked to it – they also developed a special form of organization: the cooperative movement. Together they established cooperative dairies, slaughterhouses, purchasing associations

(consumer associations), insurance companies, savings banks and so on. These cooperative societies rested on the principles of solidarity and community, with each member having equal influence when it came to decision-making. Voting rights in the cooperative did not depend on how much property you owned, but went on the principle “one man, one vote”. The close parallel with popular education and the folkehøjskoler, where each individual is regarded as unique and incomparable, is unmistakable.



## The “golden age” of the folkehøjskoler

The last third of the 19th century was the golden age of the folkehøjskole. During this period they acted as a powerful cultural dynamo, helping to lay the foundation for the modern welfare state. In the present century a number of schools were founded by the labour movement with the similar aim of giving the urban working population a sense of cultural worth too. And as the century has progressed the pattern has grown ever more varied and diverse. At the same time the role of the folkehøjskole in society can be seen to have changed. Typical of very many schools nowadays is their emphasis on creative subjects such as music, theatre and art. Some critics have seen this trend as a form of escapism. Supporters reply by pointing out that the schools’ task is to offer a response to the present – not to mirror it exactly. To be able to motivate and inspire, the folkehøjskole must offer an alternative – something different from the dull utilitarian attitudes that abound in society around us. The folkehøjskole is meant to be an experimental laboratory for reflection, enthusiasm and the joy of life.

**The folkehøjskole and community singing have gone hand in hand ever since Denmark’s (and the worlds) first folkehøjskole saw the light of day in 1844. For the first 50 years different schools used different songbooks. But at the end of the last century they all joined forces for the publication of a common songbook, which has gone through a number of new editions since then. The latest edition – the eighteenth – appeared in 2006, with a total of 572 songs covering a wide range of different aspects of the life we all share: Morning Songs, Psalms, Mother Tongue and Spirit, Denmark, The Nordic Countries, The Seasons, History, Bible History, Folklore and Evening Songs.**



## Free schools

A major driving force behind the rise of højskole education was *Christen Kold* (1816-1870), whose enthusiastic teaching largely shaped the pattern of the folkehøjskole approach ever since. It was Kold's idea that students should be "stimulated" before they could be "educated"; in other words, the ground was not ready for fruitful learning until they were gripped by enthusiasm for the subject. Once, when asked what he hoped to achieve through his højskole work, Kold took out a pocket watch, began to wind it up and said, "I want to wind up my students so that they never run down!" The art of teaching, according to Kold, was to awaken the vital potential already inside the students and help it to grow and develop. Rather than learning by rote and ploughing through textbooks, the key was the teacher's ability to bring a subject to life for his pupils through narrative.

As we saw earlier, the oral tradition was already an important factor for Grundtvig, "the living word", and it has remained one of the cornerstones in the folkehøjskole tradition down to this very day. Often one can even sense a distinct resistance to the written word. In those early days, for instance, it was not unusual at some schools for students to be forbidden to take notes while the teacher spoke, because it was thought this would distract their attention. After all, the teacher's narrative was meant to make the topic more immediate and relevant for students – not to subject it to distanced, neutral scientific analysis.

Characteristically Grundtvig never set out a detailed description of what his folkehøjskole should look like in practice. His ideas and plans were always couched in very general terms – not for want of imagination or interest, but because of his fundamental belief that a folkehøjskole should not simply come straight off an educationalist's drawing board. The essential element is life at the school itself. A folkehøjskole becomes what it is through the individuals of which it is made up. The folkehøjskoler are what is known as "free schools". This means that they can determine their subject profile and lessons themselves, as long as they abide by the general educational requirement laid down by law.

Strictly speaking it is incorrect to talk of *the Danish folkehøjskole*. For in a sense no single school is truly representative. There are enormous differences between schools and they all set great store by their own

individuality. Broadly speaking, most regard themselves as followers in Grundtvig's tradition. But even here we can find substantial differences – because, of course, Grundtvig too can be interpreted in different ways. And then there are schools with links to the labour movement and to particular religious denominations or ideologies.





## Freedom is there to be used

The schools' educational freedom does not just rest on an *idée fixe*. The entire structure rests on a very special view of human beings and a very special view of the relationship between the individual and the state. Any educational approach is based on a certain view of mankind. And that view cannot be dictated by the state. In Grundtvig's words, man is a "divine experiment", and no one can take out a patent – neither state, nor Church, nor any other institution.

This fundamental view of freedom and humanity is characteristic not just for the folkehøjskole but also for Danish educational legislation as a whole. There is no legal obligation to attend school in Denmark, only an obligation to have some form of education. If a group of parents wish to set up a special school for their children because they have their own particular view of man and the world, they are entitled to state support for running it. Parents also have a right to educate their children at home themselves, so long as they can show that it is actually done. There is broad agreement both among the population at large and in Parliament that it cannot be left to a monopoly of public authority to lay down rules on the true way of life. The background of this view of freedom lays in 19th century Danish history, when various popular forces demonstrated a self-assured rejection of central authority. And ever since then it has been an unquestioned principle in Danish political life that this sense of freedom should remain inviolate and, indeed, must be defended.

One of Grundtvig's fundamental educational ideas was that love generates understanding and insight. However, the important thing is not that the idea was his, but that he found a way to remind us with brilliant simplicity of something we all know – something that every human being will be able to accept if only he lets his heart speak. We began on the subject of love – and we end on the subject of love. Love is inexplicable, and so too is the folk high school. But perhaps it is not so very vital to have it explained. Perhaps the most important thing is that we are here and that life is lived with all that it entails – the good and the bad. Ultimately it is the elemental thrill at the teeming variety of human life that lies at the heart of the Danish folkehøjskole.

## A history of the folkehøjskoler

**1836.** Grundtvig publishes the first of a series of publications in which he advocates the establishment of a Danish folkehøjskole.

**1844.** On 7 November the first folkehøjskole, Rødding folkehøjskole in the Duchy of SlesvigHolsten, is to be inaugurated.

**1849.** Uldum folkehøjskole in the Kingdom of Denmark is established.

**1851.** Christen Kold starts a folkehøjskole at Ryslinge on Funen. The Danish state makes its first grant to the folkehøjskoler.

**1856.** On 3 November Grundtvig inaugurates Marielyst folkehøjskole north of Copenhagen, built with the money he received on his 70th birthday three years before.

**1864.** Herman Anker and Olaus Arvesen open the first Norwegian folkehøjskole, Sagatun at Hamar.

**1865.** The folkehøjskole movement gains momentum. Ludvig Schrøder founds a folkehøjskole at Askov while Ernst Trier opens Vallekilde folkehøjskole.

**1866.** Testrup folkehøjskole is founded by Jens Nørregaard.

**1868.** The first three Swedish folkehøjskoler are established, Herrestad in Öster Götland, Önnestad in Kristiansstad county, and Hvilan in Scania.

**1876.** On 7 April the first number of *Højskolebladet* (The folkehøjskole Review) carrying the subtitle *Tidende for folkelig Oplysning* (Journal of Popular Education) is issued. It has appeared on a weekly basis ever since.

**1878.** Askov folkehøjskole launches *extended teaching programme*, meaning chiefly that the natural sciences are now also included in the curriculum. The first Danish folkehøjskole in America is founded at Elk Horn, Iowa.

**1883.** The first major Nordic folkehøjskole conference takes place at Testrup Folk High School. These Nordic conferences are still being held at fouryear intervals, alternating between Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland.

**1887.** The Home Mission opens its first folkehøjskole at Nørre Nissum.

**1889.** The first two folkehøjskoler in Finland are established, one for Finnish-speakers at Kangasala, and one for Swedishspeakers at Borgå.

**1891.** On 2 September *Foreningen of folkehøjskoler og Landbrugsskoler* (Association of folkehøjskoler and Agricultural Schools) is founded. Johan Borup establishes a nonresidential folkehøjskole in Copenhagen.

**1894.** Appearance of the first edition of *Sangbog for den danske folkehøjskole* (Songbook for the Danish folkehøjskole). Since then 17 editions have been published under the title of *Højskolesangbogen* (The folkehøjskole Songbook). It has become the most widely used book of its kind, in Denmark.

**1900.** The Faroese folkehøjskole is established at Tórshavn.

**1905.** Købmandshvile folkehøjskole, mainly intended for young tradesmen, is started at Hørsholm in north Zealand. The school closed down in 1976.

**1908.** A fishermen's folkehøjskole opens at Kerteminde on Funen. The school moves to Snoghøj in east Jutland, but has to close down in 1925.

**1910.** The first workers' folkehøjskole is established at Esbjerg.

**1920.** The first physical education folkehøjskole is founded by Niels Bukh at Ollerup on Funen.

**1921.** Peter Manniche starts the International People's College at Elsinore, the only exclusively Englishlanguage folkehøjskole in Denmark. The periodical *Dansk Udsyn* (Danish Perspective), edited by teachers from Askov folkehøjskole, begins publication.

**1946.** Krogerup folkehøjskole at Humlebæk is founded with Hal Koch as principal. The school grew out of the cooperation across political party lines between a number of youth organisations during and after the Second World War.

**1949.** *Scandinavian Seminar* is founded by Aage Rosendal. Since then this organisation has helped students from America to get a folkehøjskole education in the Nordic countries.

**1950.** Jaruplund, the Danish folkehøjskole in Schleswig, is inaugurated. *Højskolernes Sekretariat* (folkehøjskole Secretariat), a joint information office for folkehøjskoler, opens in Copenhagen.

**1962.** The first folkehøjskole in Greenland, Knud Rasmussen's folkehøjskole at Holsteinsborg, is established.

**1965.** A former continuation school near Ribe in southwest Jutland is approved as the nation's first folkehøjskole for young people aged 17 to 19.

**1970.** The Travelling folkehøjskole is founded with headquarters in Tvind near Ulfborg in west Jutland. Since then these "Tvind" Schools have branched out into several folkehøjskoler and a number of continuation schools in Denmark and abroad.

**1971.** The first folkehøjskoler for senior citizens are approved at Nørre Nissum, at Kolt, and at Marielyst. The longstanding association between folkehøjskoler and agricultural schools is ended. The folkehøjskoler join together in *Foreningen for folkehøjskoler i Danmark* (Association of folkehøjskoler in Denmark).

**1972.** The Icelandic folkehøjskole is established at Skálholt.

**1977.** The first independent trade union in the folkehøjskole sector is founded, *Danske folkehøjskoler Lærerforening* (Association of Danish folkehøjskole Teachers).

**1979.** *Foreningen for Folkehøjskoler i Danmark* (FFD) establishes a permanent secretariat on 3 October.

**1983.** Numerous folkehøjskoler observe the bicentennial of N.F.S. Grundtvig's birth. Both that anniversary and the centennial of the first Nordic folkehøjskole conference are celebrated at a Nordic seminar at Testrup folkehøjskole and afterwards at a large conference at Askov folkehøjskole.

**1993.** The world's largest folkehøjskole is founded in Nigeria.

**1999.** The members organisation (FFD) and the association of the schools (HS) join together, now called "Folkehøjskolernes Forening i Danmark" (FFD).

# The folkehøjskole and the state

## The state requires:

- School buildings must be approved for folkehøjskole use by the Ministry of Education and other public authorities.
- Schools must be residential. Only up to 15% must be day-students.
- Schools must offer at least 32 weeks of approved courses annually and the longer courses must have duration of 20 weeks of at least 4 weeks. At least one of the courses must have duration of 12 weeks or more.
- Schools' regulations and statutes must be approved by the Ministry of Culture.
- Students must be at least 17½ years old at the beginning of the course.
- Schools must have had an average number of at least 24 *oneyear* students (1 *oneyear* student equals 1 student for 40 weeks) during the three previous fiscal years preceding.
- Education may not be so specialised in one particular direction that it cannot fairly be termed generally broadening.
- No examinations may be held.
- The schools are obligated to offer guidance and counselling.
- The courses must be open to all interested, but it's a requirement that at least 50% of the students in each course are Danish citizens.

## The state provides:

- In 2015 government funding for folkehøjskoler totalled over Dkr 550 million. The state subsidy covers only about half of the average school's total budget (taxes, building maintenance, heating, wages of teaching and other staff, provision of meals etc.). The rest comes from student fees and the schools' own revenue from hiring out their facilities.
- The price of the courses longer than 12 weeks is around 1,450 Dkr per week (195 Euros) Courses from 2 to 11 weeks cost around 1.700 Dkr per week. The short courses cost around 4.500 Dkr for one-week courses and around 6.500 for two-week courses. The prices cover

the education, board and lodging. The folkehøjskoler receive grants from the state for each student at the courses that last one week or more, such that the largest contributions are made for courses of 12 weeks.

The government also has established special financial incentives in order to support young people without formal education and with special needs can follow courses at folkehøjskoler.

- The schools receive the same amount in subsidies for international students or people with immigrant or refugee status as they do for a Danish citizen.
- International students are eligible for financial support to courses of no less than 8 weeks duration. Each school has a limited sum of money available to international students as a scholarship to help cover the tuition. It is up to each school individually to decide which students they give the scholarships and what criteria they base their decisions on.

## The people in the background

Behind each folkehøjskole is a group of people who form the school's democratic base. They elect the school's board, its supreme governing body. The board is responsible for the general policy of the school; it determines the basic philosophical outlook and educational principles, and takes major financial decisions (for example, on new buildings). To handle the daytoday management and administration the board appoints a principal, who, together with the staff, is responsible for organizing classes and the ordinary running of the school as a whole.

The public authorities have no power to set up or close down a folkehøjskole. That can only be done by the school itself – or, more correctly, by the board, since it is the board that bears responsibility for the school's affairs on behalf of the members. But in order to remain in existence a folkehøjskole must be economically viable. True, it receives a subsidy from the state, but the size of that subsidy depends on its success in attracting students. If a school's financial situation no longer allows it to continue operating, it may have to close down. The price of farreaching educational freedom is that individual schools must constantly prove their worth.



# HØJSKOLERNE

The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark

Højskolernes Hus - Nytorv 7

DK-1450 Copenhagen K

Tel. +45 33 36 40 40

Mail: [kontor@ffd.dk](mailto:kontor@ffd.dk)

[www.danishfolkhighschools.com](http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com)

[www.facebook.com/danishfolkhighschools](https://www.facebook.com/danishfolkhighschools)