

# Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 34

## **De-internationalising Danish Higher Education: Re-framing the Discussion**

By Susan Wright & Matej Zitnansky

**Working Papers on University Reform**  
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This working papers series is published by the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF) at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. The series brings together work in progress in Denmark and among an international network of scholars involved in research on universities and higher education.

The current paper arises from two seminars held by the HEPP (Higher Education Policy and Practice) section of DUN (Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Netværk) in December 2020 and March 2021. The aim was to bring together stakeholders in Danish higher education, hear their various perspectives on cuts to English-medium higher education and see if we could find any common ground. HEPP acted as facilitator of a free exchange of views in a politically neutral space. This paper is not an official statement of HEPP (or DUN). It aims to be a reflection of the common ground found among panellists and participants. It was written by the meeting convenors and revised in response to comments from stakeholders and participants.

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- ‘Practicing Integrity’, funded by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science.
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- ‘University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation’ (URGE), an EU-funded Marie Skłodowska-Curie IRSES knowledge-exchange project.
- ‘New Management, New Identities, Danish University Reform in an International Perspective’, funded by the Danish Research Council.
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Re-framing the Discussion**

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# 1 Introduction

The Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science issued a press release on 3 November 2020 announcing that ‘interventions are necessary to limit spending on SU (Danish student grant) for EU students’. According to the Danish Rectors’ Conference (DU), the government is considering making cuts across the sector (universities, university colleges and business academies) amounting to 20% to 25% of study programmes with English as a language of instruction.

In 2018, the first round removed 1200 places on English-medium programmes. The aim of the cuts was to reduce the number of EU students who would be eligible for the Danish student grants. However, the initiative restricted access for all kinds of international students. It is unclear whether this method of making cuts achieved its objective as there seem to be no figures to show whether the first round actually reduced the number of EU students receiving SU.

The HEPP (Higher Education Policy and Practice) section of DUN (Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Netværk) has held two seminars to consider this issue. These brought together the different stakeholders in Danish higher education:

- Danish Rectors’ Conference (DU Danske Universiteter),
- Danish Chamber of Commerce (DE Dansk Erhverv),
- National Union of Students in Denmark (DSF Danske Studerendes Fællesråd),
- Confederation of Danish Industries (DI Dansk Industri),
- Copenhagen Capacity,

as well as international officers, academics and students. The aim was to hear their various perspectives on the issue and see if we could find common ground. HEPP acted as facilitator of a free exchange of views in a politically neutral space.

While the stakeholders each had their own specific proposals, there was a general agreement among them and the other participants of the seminars that the debate about Danish international education needed re-framing as the cuts have damaged Denmark’s higher education, industry, economy and reputation.

## 2 Background to the issue

In 2006, the Danish government published its Globalisation Strategy, 'Progress, Innovation and Cohesion: A Strategy for Denmark in the Global Economy'.<sup>1</sup> This acknowledged an important role for education. In particular, university research and higher education were to produce the knowledge and highly skilled labour needed to drive Denmark's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy and maintain Denmark's position as 'one of the richest countries in the world'. The Ministry of Higher Education and Science together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the universities have enacted that strategy through very successful collaborative efforts to internationalise research and education and attract highly qualified foreign researchers and students to Denmark.

The Danish student grant (SU: Statens Uddannelsesstøtte) is a type of direct financial support that Danish government offers to students. It is a non-returnable grant and was introduced in the 1970s. Its objective was that 'no good students should opt out of studying due to lack of financial opportunities', and it should not be necessary for anyone to work alongside their studies to such an extent that it harms their studies.<sup>2</sup> The idea behind this direct support for students is to provide equal educational opportunities and enable the social mobility of students whose parents could not support them while studying.

In 2013, the European Court of Justice decided that EU and EEA students who work part time in Denmark are eligible for the same student grant as Danish students. The political parties reluctantly complied and most of them entered into an agreement about

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<sup>1</sup> 'Fremgang, Fornyelse og Tryghed - Strategi for Danmark i den globale økonomi' [https://www.ftf.dk/fileadmin/multimedia/fagligt\\_arbejde\\_fremtidens\\_velfaerdssamfund/pixi.pdf](https://www.ftf.dk/fileadmin/multimedia/fagligt_arbejde_fremtidens_velfaerdssamfund/pixi.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> 'Historien om SU' Uddannelses- og Forskningsstyrelsen. <https://www.su.dk/om-su/historien-om-su/>

a ceiling for net spending of SU on EU/EEA students,<sup>3</sup> which was later represented as a gross ceiling of 442 million DKK (2020 prices).<sup>4</sup>

In 2018, the ceiling had been exceeded. At very short notice, six universities were asked to cut 1,200 places on courses taught in English. The negative effects of the cuts included:

- It undermined the educational development of ‘internationalisation at home’ for Danish students, whose international experience is often constrained by domestic commitments.
- The cuts to English-medium education affected fee-paying international students, not just European students.
- It involved closing engineering, health sciences and other STEM courses whose graduates were urgently needed by Danish industry, whereas government policy was to increase the number of students in these fields.
- It hit courses in humanities and social sciences especially hard, whose graduates maintain Denmark’s high reputation in international policy-making, humanitarian and peace agencies, as well as contributing to Danish industrial and business organisation.

In 2019, the new Social Democrat government’s political statement, ‘Retfærdig retning for Danmark’ included a promise to take the limit off the numbers of international students due to the lack of highly educated foreign labour:

More skilled foreign labour. [The government] must ensure that companies or welfare institutions that have a shortage of labour, can quickly and unbureaucratically attract qualified foreign labour. ... The social partners must

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Partierne konstaterer, at dommen medfører merudgifter til SU, og tager til efterretning, at regeringen vil indarbejde det nuværende skøn på 200 mio. kr. efter skat og tilbageløb på de kommende finanslove.’ Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2013 ‘Reform af SU-systemet og rammerne for studie gennemførelse’ 18.04.2013: Forligspartier: Socialdemokraterne, Radikale Venstre, Socialistisk Folkeparti, Venstre, Det Konservative Folkeparti, Dansk Folkeparti og Liberal Alliance. <https://ufm.dk/lovstof/politiske-aftaler/reform-af-su-systemet-og-rammerne-for-studiegennemforelse>

<sup>4</sup> ‘Status for udviklingen i antallet af EU/EØS arbejdstagere som modtager SU – 2019’, p. 5 § 2.2

work together to propose a concrete model, which will form the basis for political discussions. After one year, it will be evaluated whether the scheme works as intended. More European labour can be attracted by setting up new Danish job centres in other European countries, and through a new collaboration with the business community, where there are openings for more English-speaking students from the rest of Europe in the areas where companies lack employees. The new government will seek to retain international students who have taken their education in Denmark and remove the ceiling on English-language education.<sup>5</sup>

In 2020, although the rise in numbers of EU/EEA recipients of SU had flattened out, the Ministry predicted that expenditure would rise to 630 million DKK by 2023 and would breach the ceiling again. The Social Democrat Minister's press release now praised the previous government's handling of the first round of cuts and stated that a further intervention was required.<sup>6</sup> The Ministry is still discussing several models for intervening to make these savings but they all focus on reducing the number of courses offered in English. It seems a saving of 83 million DKK on limiting SU for EU students has already been transferred to police services.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether, in the meantime,

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<sup>5</sup> Authors' translation from the Danish: 'Mere kvalificeret udenlandsk arbejdskraft. Det skal sikre, at virksomheder eller velfærdsinstitutioner, der har en konkret mangel på arbejdskraft, på minimum faglært niveau, hurtigt og ubureaukratisk kan tiltrække kvalificeret udenlandsk arbejdskraft. (...) Arbejdsmarkedets parter skal i samarbejde komme med indstilling til en konkret model, som skal danne grundlag for politiske drøftelser. Efter et år evalueres det, om ordningen fungerer efter hensigten. Ved at oprette nye danske jobcentre i andre lande i Europa, og gennem et nyt samarbejde med erhvervslivet, hvor der åbnes for flere engelsksprogede studerende fra resten af Europa på de områder, hvor virksomhederne mangler medarbejdere, kan der tiltrækkes mere europæisk arbejdskraft. En ny regering vil søge at fastholde internationale studerende, som har taget deres uddannelse i Danmark og fjerne loftet over engelsksprogede uddannelser'. 'Retfærdig retning for Danmark. Politisk forståelse mellem Socialdemokratiet, Radikale Venstre, SF og Enhedslisten' 25 June 2019. p.13. [https://www.altinget.dk/misc/Retf%C3%A6rdig%20retning%20for%20Danmark\\_2019-06-25\\_ENDELIG.pdf](https://www.altinget.dk/misc/Retf%C3%A6rdig%20retning%20for%20Danmark_2019-06-25_ENDELIG.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> 'Jeg vil gerne rose den tidligere regering for at have vist rettidig omhu, da man reducerede de engelsksprogede uddannelser'. Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2020 'Regeringen efter ny SU-prognose: Indgreb nødvendigt for at begrænse SU-udgifter til EU-studerende' 3 November. <https://ufm.dk/aktuelt/pressemeddelelser/2020/regeringen-efter-ny-su-prognose-indgreb-nodvendigt-for-at-begraense-su-udgifter-til-eu-studerende>

<sup>7</sup> Borelli, B 2020 'Uddannelser slipper for at betale for nyt politiforlig' *DM Akademikerbladet* 16 December. <https://www.akademikerbladet.dk/aktuelt/2020/december/uddannelser-slipper-for-at-betale-for-nyt-politiforlig>

the 2020-21 Covid-19 pandemic pandemic has reduced the number of applicants for SU, and whether this has been taken into account.

In the next sections, we will reframe the discussion by setting out three main benefits of international study programmes for Denmark:

1. **Benefit to Danish economy.** Whereas the political debate has focused on how much money is spent on SU for European students, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science's own cost-benefit analysis showed that on average all international students make a positive contribution to the Danish economy. There are indications that a more comprehensive cost-benefit analysis would reveal that international students bring even greater positive economic benefits to Denmark.
2. **Educational benefits.** Seminar participants gave examples of how international students play a crucial role in sustaining a high quality of education. These benefits are not just for international students themselves. Importantly, Danish students benefit from participation in an international classroom. Educational considerations have been utterly neglected in political and media discussions.
3. **Benefits to Danish society.** To help the government achieve its aim of making Denmark 'an open land' viewed positively by the rest of the world,<sup>8</sup> and to drive Danish global competitiveness, universities should seek to attract the contribution of international students. The country already has a lot of assets (good education, good work-life balance) on which to build these benefits to Danish society and welfare. This mission is undermined by cuts to international education, along with other difficulties that foreign students face when wishing to settle and work in Denmark and contribute to the economy and society.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Retfærdig retning for Danmark. Politisk forståelse mellem Socialdemokratiet, Radikale Venstre, SF og Enhedslisten' 2019: 1.

## 3 Benefits to Danish Economy

### 3.1 Calculation of SU

The political debate focuses on the expenditure of SU on European students who work while they study and this amounted to a mere 4% (see Figure 1)<sup>9</sup> of the total 15.8 billion DKK that was spent on SU for higher education in 2018.<sup>10</sup> The debate treats this as an inappropriate use of taxpayers' money, whereas it can be considered a small investment for huge benefits.

The Ministry's figures are for the gross amount of SU paid out to EU/EEA students, whereas the net amount is significantly lower because

1. Students pay taxes on SU. This figure for 2018 was not included in the Ministry's report.
2. Students have to work 10-12 hours/week to be eligible for SU and they pay tax on their salary. This figure for 2018 was not included in the Ministry's cost-benefit analysis.
3. The Ministry recalls SU payments for any week when a student did not work 10-12 hours. In 2018, 2,301 repayments totalled 45 million DKK.<sup>11</sup>

Paying SU to EU students does not mean sending the money abroad: students spend their SU in Denmark and often bring additional money with them to pay for their rent and living expenses. Therefore SU is recycled within the Danish economy.

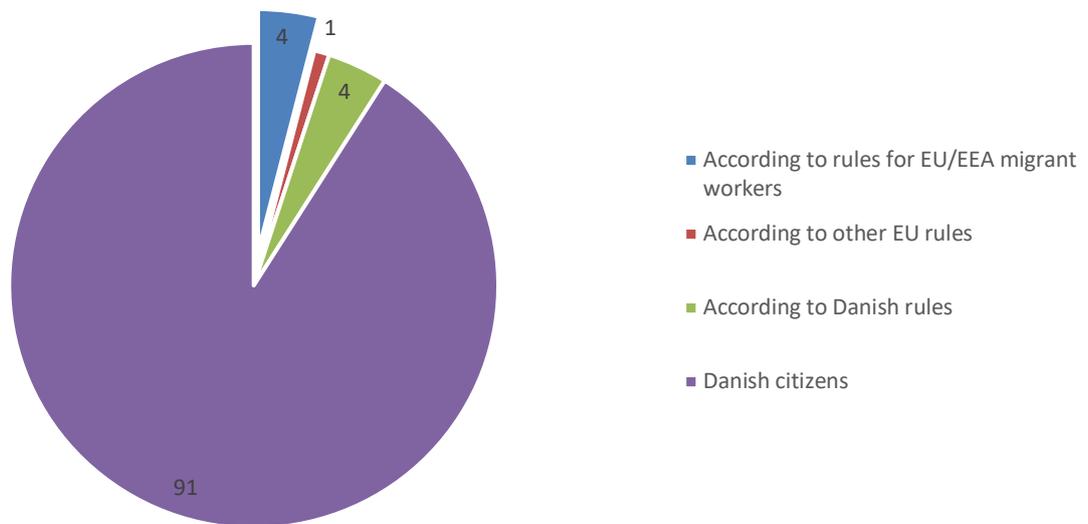
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<sup>9</sup> Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2020 'Status for udviklingen i antallet af EU/EØS arbejdstagere som modtager SU – 2019' 3 september, p. 4. <https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/statistik-og-analyser/eu-borgere-med-su/status-for-udviklingen-i-antallet-af-eu-eos-arbejdstagere-som-modtager-su.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2020 'Oplysninger om tildeling af SU for 2019' 10 september, p. 17

<sup>11</sup> Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2020 'Status for udviklingen i antallet af EU/EØS arbejdstagere som modtager SU – 2019' 3 september, p. 8.

Figure 1: Receptients of SU in higher education (technical colleges, university colleges and universities) in 2018, percentage



Source: based on Figure 1 in Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2020 'Status for udviklingen i antallet af EU/EØS arbejdstagere som modtager SU – 2019', p. 4.

### **3.2 Positive contribution to Danish economy**

The Ministry's cost-benefit-analysis showed that 34% of international master's students who graduated in 2014 were employed in Denmark in 2016 and made a positive contribution to Danish finances. All international students, even including those who left Denmark immediately after graduating, each contributed on average 100,000–350,000 DKK to the public finances over a 50-year life course. The Ministry concluded that this was a 'good business' for Denmark.

The Ministry speculated that the economic benefits would be even greater if the number of international students who left Denmark fell by a quarter, and if they settled in the country instead. Then the average net contribution for all international students

(including those who leave on graduation) could be between 330,000 and 660,000 DKK over the course of their lives.<sup>12</sup>

The cost-benefit-analysis would be even more positive if it took into account that each international student brings with them 13-17 years of primary, secondary and undergraduate education. This is a gift to Denmark, which has been paid for by their home country and/or parents.

The panellist from DI also pointed out that because students work at least 10-12 hours per week, they contribute positively to the Danish economy during their studies:

They are therefore contributing their knowledge and labour to the Danish economy even before they graduate. As graduate employees, they are net contributors to companies and quickly pay back their education in tax ... DI calculates that international graduates contributed 156.5 million in tax income between 1996 and 2008 (Nibras Aziz).

In sum, even the Ministry's limited cost-benefit analysis provided no economic basis for the first round of cuts of 1,200 places, let alone further cuts. Instead, it concluded that international students were beneficial for Denmark. If the prior education and students' work were included, that would make the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis even more positive. This would reinforce the ministry's argument not for cuts but for better retention of international students and their integration in Danish society and economy.

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<sup>12</sup>'Internationale studerende skønnes i gennemsnit at være en god forretning for Danmark' (p. 6). 'Samlet set skønnes de internationale studerende at bidrage med mellem 100.000 og 350.000 kr. pr. studerende til de offentlige finanser set over et livsforløb' (p. 8) 'Der er dermed et stort potentiale forbundet med internationale studerende, som fastholdes og eventuelt vælger at slå sig ned og stifte familie i Danmark på længere sigt. Hvis udrejsetilbøjeligheden eksempelvis faldt med en fjerdedel ville det skønnede nettobidrag vokse fra 100.000-350.000 kr. til 330.000-660.000 kr. pr. studerende over et livsforløb' (p. 9) Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2018 *Justering af engelsksprogede uddannelser*. August. <https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2018/justering-af-engelsksprogede-uddannelser>

### 3.3 Labour-market

In 2018/19, former Minister of Higher Education and Science, Tommy Ahlers, shifted the argument from a focus on reducing the number of students, to increasing the number of international students who find employment in Denmark after graduation.

In keeping with the Social Democrats 2019 political programme (quoted above) social partners, universities and other stakeholders have developed concrete models to retain international graduates and integrate them in Danish employment and society:

- 1) In 2019, DI, DU, DSF along with the Danish Chamber of Commerce (DE) and the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (*Akademikerne*) formed a 'Partnership for retaining international students in Denmark'. Their goal is to increase the percentage of international students who are working in Denmark two years after graduating from 34% to 40% or more by 2025. Progress takes time, as they recognise this is a major task. They have made 29 recommendations, directed at universities, business, unions and politicians.<sup>13</sup>
- 2) Copenhagen Capacity, an organisation that 'supports foreign companies, investors and talents in making a successful start in Greater Copenhagen' heads a project, 'Talent for Denmark', with 28 partners (universities, university colleges, unions, employers and business organisations). The 52.8 million DKK project 'aims to support companies in all parts of Denmark in attracting and retaining highly qualified foreign employees'.<sup>14</sup> This project is Denmark-wide, and the ability to attract and integrate international students in the economy and society of towns such as Esbjerg and Sønderborg is crucial for the sustainability of universities outside Copenhagen and Aarhus and is needed for achieving the government's policy of rebalancing the economies of Denmark's regions.
- 3) DI is also working with its member companies on recruitment and retention, especially of engineers, as international graduates are valuable employees

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<sup>13</sup> Myklebust, Jan Petter 2019 'Joint push to increase retention of international students' [University World News](#) 3 October.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.copcap.com/news/talent-attraction-gets-massive-support>

who strengthen innovation. DI's representative pointed out that it is much easier for companies to hire international workers who have studied in Denmark as they are used to living here and have an established social network, rather than recruiting people who have to move themselves and their families to Denmark for the first time. However, DI acknowledges that the companies need to be better at attracting and hiring international students who graduate in Denmark.

Large companies' recruitment is focused on a limited number of institutions and disciplines, whereas a participant at the seminar pointed out that many of their employment needs can be met by a wider range of graduates from the humanities, and educational and social sciences. For example, Ørsted, Lego and Mærsk are part of a global push for companies to diversify their workforce and they need graduates specialised in diversity and inclusion. Ørsted, for example, has targets for international citizens at all levels of the company – but is there political awareness of these labour market needs for international students in a wide range of disciplines?

***To sum up, the economic argument needs reframing. Whereas the political debate focuses on the gross amount spent on SU for EU students, Danish companies and other stakeholders see international students as an enormous benefit to the Danish economy. Instead of cutting English-medium courses, as these cuts affect not only EU, but all international students, the government should collaborate with the universities and stakeholders in their serious efforts to raise the number of international students who stay in Denmark, integrate in society, meet the country's dire needs for skilled and international labour, and thus enhance the Danish economy.***

## 4 Educational Benefits

English-medium courses support the quality and success of Danish higher education in several ways.

### ***4.1 Raising the Quality of Danish Institutions***

The success of Danish universities in responding to the government's call to raise their international status and attract high quality students and academics to Denmark, is based on the internationalisation of both education and research. As DTU's international officer explained:

If you wish to be a globally elite university, and that is what DTU claims to be, there is no discussion that you need to have a strong presence of international students, and also staff. I challenge you to name one world-class, international university that does not have a strong presence of international students! (Morten Overgaard).

To achieve this mission of attracting highly qualified international students, universities have developed English-medium courses especially at master's level. In 2019, whereas 26% of all higher education courses and 34% of all university courses in Denmark were offered in English, at master's level, half of all master's courses were in English.<sup>15</sup> At DTU, for example, all 33 masters' courses are taught in English, along with 25 joint masters programmes with international partners. As a research-intensive university, DTU has many PhD positions, and 'the international MSc students contribute to having a strong pool of talents for these positions'. Without their combined internationalisation of education and research, DTU would not be able to provide companies with the talent and knowledge they need:

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<sup>15</sup> Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet 2020 'Status for udviklingen i antallet af EU/EØS arbejdstagere som modtager SU – 2019' 3 september, p. 10 <https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/statistik-og-analyser/eu-borgere-med-su/status-for-udviklingen-i-antallet-af-eu-eos-arbejdstagere-som-modtager-su.pdf>

We consider this part of our societal responsibility. It's in the mission of DTU to work for the benefit society. We think the best way we can benefit Danish society is by providing the best engineers, including very talented international graduates (Morten Overgaard).

DM highlighted the connection between attracting top-level international researchers and raising the quality of Danish higher education.

When a person enrolls in an English-medium MA programme, they get in touch with some of the best teachers and researchers. English is necessary for the transfer of knowledge especially at a Master's level (Mads Flyvholm).

Given the success of Danish research environments in attracting highly-qualified academics, it is important to make the most of their capacities by transferring their knowledge in teaching. This raises the quality of Danish institutions and Danish students reap the benefits.

## **4.2 Benefits to Danish Students**

Internationalization is crucial for the quality of education for Danish students. Morten Overgaard explained that international students not only contribute to the learning environment but

Just by being there, and contributing at campus in all kinds of ways, they are a huge asset and something that our national Danish students really appreciate, not doubt about that.

'International education' does not just mean changing the language of instruction: as Danish research has shown,<sup>16</sup> it is a carefully considered education approach that treats all students, including Danes, as 'international'. The curriculum, pedagogy and classroom interactions of such courses are designed to engage all the students in creating an international environment. There is no doubt that Danish needs to be continually developed as a scientific language, but that is not incompatible with running courses in

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<sup>16</sup> See for example: Adriansen, 2020; Adriansen & Nissen, 2019; Holmen, 2020; Holmen & Risager, 2018 and Tange, 2021.

Danish and English within a discipline that cross-fertilise each other. Danish universities are extremely good at this kind of ‘international education’, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

At the seminar, Hanne Tange (AAU) explained the enormous benefits for Danish students. They gain first-hand experience of knowledge sharing. They gain inspiration from working with people from different educational and cultural backgrounds, who think in a diversity of languages and with different mind-sets. Students’ perspectives are re-orientated when

You throw an international topic on the table and then the students discuss it from different perspectives. You are not only reading about different understandings of, for example, the European Union. It is there with you in the classroom (Hanne Tange).

In sum, internationalisation of higher education means far more than simply changing the language of instruction to English and it is not just to benefit foreign students. It means treating all students on a programme, including Danes, as ‘international’ and designing the curriculum, pedagogy and classroom interactions so as to engage all the students in creating an international environment ‘at home’. The role of international students in raising the quality of education for Danish students has been utterly neglected in political and media discussions.

### ***4.3 Expanding Danish Students’ Employability***

Danish students learn the competences needed to work for Danish companies that have a global reach and international markets, as well as for agencies concerned with development, peace and diplomacy. For example, Aalborg University’s English BA programme Language and International Studies recruited 30% international students and was chosen by Danes seeking to work in intercultural communication, diplomacy and peace initiatives. Aarhus University’s Anthropology of Education and Globalisation MA programme recruited 30-50% international students and was chosen by Danish students seeking to work, e.g. in the HR of global companies, in diversity programmes of local authorities and in international agencies such as UNESCO. Both programmes were de-internationalised in the 2018-19 round of cuts and now require

students to have Danish language at A-level, so that international and global studies are now taught in Danish-only environments. These cuts affect Denmark's ability to continue to 'punch above its weight' on the world stage.

*In summary, the focus on cutting English-language education as a way of limiting SU expenditure on EU students is detrimental to the political ambition and universities' own mission to raise their international status and provide the best possible education and research for Danish society. The two policies contradict each other and it is hard to see how Denmark can have ambitious international strategies and de-internationalise their higher education at the same time. There is need for a national strategy for the internationalisation of higher education, similar, for example, to that developed in Sweden.*

## **5 Benefits to Danish society**

### **5.1 Denmark's Capacity to Succeed in the International Competition**

Denmark has a number of assets that enable it to succeed in the global competition for attracting international talent. These were enumerated by the DSF's International officer:

- Denmark's free education is a major attraction for EU/EEA students and reinforces Denmark's reputation as a country of equal opportunities.
- The inquiry-based approach to education and studying in Denmark is highly valued.
- The possibility for European students to combine work with study enables them to afford the high living costs in Denmark.
- Combining employment and study allows students to develop social and work-based networks, so as to integrate in society, and develop a sense of belonging in Denmark.

- Good work-life balance, relaxed and informal work culture, comprehensive welfare system and high income levels are incentives to find work and settle in Denmark (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013).

A student panellist also explained that it was Danish culture, with its widespread social interest in ideas and education, that motivated him to study in Denmark:

When I first came to Denmark, everyone seemed not only educated, but also caring about education. First, I thought this was true only for people who attended an international educational conference. But when I hitchhiked across the country, every Dane who gave me a lift was curious about my ideas about education -- about how students could influence their curriculum and harvest their inner motivation. The drivers understood and added their perspectives. I was fascinated-- is everyone in this country educated? (Matej Zitnansky).

Denmark attracts international students for a range of reasons, not primarily SU.

Students move, not because of the SU. Of course they take it when it is there, you cannot blame them for that. But it's not the key motive for moving (Hanne Tange)

DSF's international officer confirmed that the Ministry of Higher Education and Science's data shows there is no evidence that international students are primarily attracted by SU:

Numbers of international students had already started rising between 2004 and 2013 – as a sign of the success of Denmark's internationalisation strategy – and the curve of the graph remained the same after they could access SU (Sandi Rizvic).

It is clear that Denmark's international reputation and the quality of life give Denmark the capacity to succeed in the international competition for talent.

## **5.2 Hurdles to Retention**

Many international students are attracted to Denmark because of its cultural openness and social investment in education and they want to stay and contribute to the Danish economy and society. However, they encounter hurdles that impede this ambition.

Nibras Aziz from DI stressed that the best way for students to enter the labour market and integrate into Danish society was for them to get student jobs within a field relevant to their future employment. However, students at a CHEF seminar in 2019 revealed how the low-key yet widespread negative attitudes towards foreigners in Denmark limit their possibilities of getting a student job at all, let alone in a field relevant to their career aspirations.<sup>17</sup> The students said that even though they wanted to stay, work and live in Denmark, political and social attitudes meant they were reluctantly having to move to another country to gain employment.

A survey of graduates who wanted to stay after completing their education also found they experienced negative attitudes and complicated administrative hurdles when they tried to contribute to the labour market. The ‘Partnership for retaining international students in Denmark’ (mentioned above) received this feedback from international graduates from a range of disciplines who were trying to settle in Denmark:

I would have loved to stay in Denmark. But it is incredibly hard to find a job in Denmark, not being Danish and having a limited network outside of the university (agricultural development student).

The rules regarding foreigners are changing every year; it makes it difficult to plan my life and start a family in Denmark (PhD graduate in electrical engineering).

In my experience, most of the international students are leaving Denmark because they cannot find a job. Otherwise, they would really prefer to stay and work here (Food science graduate).<sup>18</sup>

***In sum, Denmark clearly has very important assets that enable it to compete for internationally mobile talent. Yet, to support the best efforts of universities and other stakeholders, there is clearly work to be done in overcoming the organisational***

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<sup>17</sup> ‘How do Danish universities “internationalise” in the current policy context’ CHEF seminar, 6 May 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA23jESDR1M&t=1527s>

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Myklebust, Jan Petter 2019 ‘Joint push to increase retention of international students’ *University World News*, 3 October 2019 <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20191003152707792>

*and cultural impediments that hinder graduates' attempts to work and settle in Denmark.*

## **6 Conclusion: towards reframing the 'SU for the EU' debate**

SU for EU/EEA students is a tiny amount of national expenditure with great implications for Denmark's position in the world.

### **6.1 Denmark's economic success**

At the moment, economically the policy is going in two contrary directions:

#### **1) Internationalisation for national economic benefit.**

Danish companies already lack highly-educated labour and need to attract people from abroad. The benefit of attracting them as students is that they not only acquire the necessary skills but develop networks and relationships and adapt socially and culturally to the Danish society (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). This increases the possibility that they will stay, find employment and contribute to the Danish economy and society. This is the strategy for Denmark to retain its status as one of the richest countries in the world.

#### **2) De-internationalisation to save money.**

The policy to de-internationalize Danish higher education stops all categories of international students from taking those programmes, including fee-paying students from outside Europe and many EU students who do not seek SU. It is not even clear whether the policy is saving expenditure on SU for EU/EEA students.

Given that European economies need to attract international high-value labour, but face considerable difficulties in the face of the greater opportunities offered by places like the USA, higher education, especially postgraduate education, is a very important route

for attracting such talent. One seminar participant summed up how a clear policy for internationalising higher education was important for Denmark's economic success:

Denmark has a very small 'national economy'. Almost all of the Danish economy is globalised. Make Denmark a hostile environment for global 'talent' and it will mean that capital will move. Politicians are making a big mistake thinking that nationalising higher education in this way will benefit the Danish economy (Simon Warren).

## **6.2 High quality education**

International education is not simply changing the language of instruction to English. It involves creating an international classroom. This gives Danish students the experience of participating in complex international contexts by engaging with people from different and educational and cultural backgrounds. International students learn Danish habits and values and even if they move to other countries, they carry these with them.

The status of world-class universities depends on the presence of international students. It takes many years to develop a prestigious international study programme, yet it can be destroyed overnight. This attempt to save money undoes the successful internationalization that has been achieved by universities over the last 15 years.

## **6.3 Denmark's Global Impact**

International education not only engages international students in contributing to Danish society, it also promotes Denmark and its democratic and humanitarian values in the world.

Danish citizens who engage in international courses at Danish universities in humanities and social sciences as well as STEM subjects, are equipped to uphold Denmark's strong reputation for playing significant roles in shaping the world. Denmark has traditionally had people highly placed in UNESCO, NATO, EU, the Bologna Process, humanitarian and peace-keeping agencies. The next generation needs to have the abilities to keep Denmark's high international profile. International education programmes are an important way to achieve that.

Many political parties, including the Social Democrats, and their supporters agreed that they want Denmark to be 'an open country, where we live off our outlook to the rest of the world'.<sup>19</sup> The Liberal party's leader also is clear that 'our openness to the world' is 'completely crucial for our success' but Denmark 'risks wasting its chance ... and gradually closing in on itself'.<sup>20</sup> An important way to achieve this openness is by fulfilling the government's promise to lift the ceiling on SU for EU/EEA students and placing the emphasis instead on developing a successful model for enabling talented international students to stay and contribute to the Danish economy and society.<sup>21</sup> By reframing the issue as proposed in this paper, and seeing the connections between the economic, educational and social benefits of international education, then supporting rather than closing international education becomes a small investment for huge benefits.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Retfærdig retning for Danmark. Politisk forståelse mellem Socialdemokratiet, Radikale Venstre, SF og Enhedslisten' 25 June 2019. p.1.

<sup>20</sup> 'Når jeg ser på Danmark, så ser jeg et fantastisk land. Men også et land, der risikerer at spille sin chance. Et land som....gradvist lukker sig om sig selv'.... 'Noget andet som vi ser som helt afgørende for Danmarks succes. Det er vores åbenhed overfor verden. Den skal vi holde fast i. Danmark er en lille, åben økonomi, der befinder sig midt i en verden i opbrud.' Jakob Ellemann-Jensens Tale ved det Ekstraordinære Landsmøde i 2021, 24 January 2021. [ventstre.dk/politik/jakob-ellemann-jensens-tale-ved-det-ekstraordinaire-lansmøde-i-2021](http://ventstre.dk/politik/jakob-ellemann-jensens-tale-ved-det-ekstraordinaire-lansmøde-i-2021)

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