Silkeborg Gymnasium

Silkeborg Gymnasium is situated in Silkeborg in the middle of Jutland, about 40 km from Denmark’s second biggest town, Aarhus.

Silkeborg Gymnasium is Denmark’s biggest sixth-form college; we have approximately 1200 pupils and nearly 150 employees, 135 of whom are teachers.

The pupils start in the first year, when they are 16 years old, and they are about 19 years old by the time they finish. Our 1200 pupils are placed in 45 different classes.

The school leadership includes the headmaster and five educational managers. The School also has five careers/study advisors and two reading supervisors.

Further information on teaching in further education in Denmark can be found via the following link to the Danish Ministry of Education. The regulations for teaching can be found in English here:

About the Danish Further Education Exam

Over and above the teaching, the school also provides the pupils with a number of extra-curricular activities where the pupils are mixed across classes; our homework café, the school choir, sports activities; such as handball, football, art classes and voluntary work on the school newspaper are just some examples of the activities offered here. Each year we hold a Christmas and spring concert where the pupils and teachers work together on the production of the
school play. Each year the school stages a musical performance of some kind; this is often in the form of cabaret, a musical or something similar.

In order to ensure that our pupils take an active part in the running of the school, pupils are represented on the school board and naturally also on the school’s pupil representative committee; each class has one member in the representative committee; this is to ensure that pupils take an active part in some of the decisions made by the school.

The school places an emphasis in having international contacts. Our pupils and teachers regularly take part in school exchanges and this helps support the international aspect in the life of our school. Furthermore, the school receives 7 to 10 exchange pupils each year; these pupils usually stay with us for the whole of the school year.

In the school years 2010 and 2011 we have set up several international classes. Our pupils traditionally take part in a week long study trip abroad during their time here and they often go on school trips as part of their teaching.

We also have a special sports class for those pupils who are especially gifted or interested in sports.

The following passage will include information on the town of Silkeborg and its history; it is a major industrial-town, educational town and cultural meeting point. After this there will be a more detailed presentation of the Gymnasium itself – including a description of the ‘study paths’ our pupils can choose between, our school identity and profile as well as a discussion of the values we place an emphasis on.

If you would prefer to read this information now, please follow this link: More on Silkeborg Gymnasium

**Silkeborg and Silkeborg Gymnasium**

The town of Silkeborg has approximately 42,000 inhabitants. The town is, amongst other things, known in Denmark for its rich industrial past; its unique natural surroundings; for its museums; its rich cultural life; its tourism and for its many centres of education; one of which is Silkeborg Gymnasium, Denmark’s biggest Sixth form College. Trade in the town is characterized by companies that specialize in IT and environmental technology.

Silkeborg is a relatively young town; it was founded in the middle of the Eighteenth Century next to Denmark’s largest river, The Gudenå, in one of the most picturesque areas in Denmark.

Silkeborg lies in Denmark’s ‘lake-district’ and is surrounded by lakes and forests. The Gudenå River runs through the town and even today it creates a natural waterway, both for locals who sail down the river in their boats and for the many tourists who visit the town.
The world’s oldest steam ship the ‘Hjejlen’, still sails down and around the Gudenå River and around in the lakes. This is probably the best known river cruise boat in town.

"Hjejlen"

A Bit of Local History
The area around Gudenå River, the Danish Lake District, has been inhabited since prehistoric times. In 1950, a sensational find was made in the area around Tollund. During peat bog explorations a body was unearthed; a body which to this day is believed to be the world’s oldest and best preserved example of Bronze-age man.

The body was so well preserved that the find was initially reported to the local police station as the people who found the body believed it was the consequence of a recent crime.

The body is male, he is reckoned to be about 30 years of age. He was hung and still has the noose tied around his neck. He lived in the period of about 400-300 years before Christ, which is just after the transition from the Bronze Age to the (Celtic) Iron Age.

The ‘Tollund Man’ is now on exhibition in the Silkeborg Museum.

The Tollund Man
The History of the Town
In connection with the growth of industry in Denmark in about the 1800’s, entrepreneurs in industry and business became aware of the potential of water power from the Gudenå for the purposes of manufacture. It was the Drewsen family who established the first factory in the area, known as the ‘Silkeborg Paper factory’ and the town soon started to grow around the factory.

![Silkeborg Paper Factory. Painting by G. E. Libert, 1850 (Silkeborg Museum).](image)

The area was ideal for the production of paper; the Gudenå River provided energy in the form of water power, while also providing a natural means of transport; at the same time it provided the water needed for the production of paper. Within a few years Silkeborg Paper Factory developed into Denmark’s leading producer of paper. In 1871, the railway network reached the town. The Silkeborg Paper Factory produced paper of such high quality that the company was responsible for the production of national bank notes for many years.

![10-kroner note from 1952 – front and back](image)  ![50-kroner note from 1957 – front and back](image)
Silkeborg’s industry soon attracted large numbers of working men. Naturally this lead to the development of industries that accompany population growth; business and trade came to town and a local bank and newspaper were established at the end of the 1800’s. In 1900, Silkeborg gained the position of a royal borough and the town gained its own town arms.

Silkeborg Town Arms

In the town arms you can see the River Gudenå, a castle and a bishop’s mitre. This provides the key to understanding the origin of the name of the town of Silkeborg. Local legend has it that the bishop of the borough, Mr. Peder, wanted to build a manor house in the area but could not decide where exactly the buildings should be situated. He sailed down the Gudenå to explore the area, as he sailed he took off his silken mitre (the bishop’s hat) and let it flow down the river, proclaiming that he would build his manor in the place where the mitre flowed onto land. In this fashion, he found the area where he would build his manor house and called it ‘Silkeborg’, which can be roughly translated as the ‘Silken Castle’.

Silkeborg and Hans Christian Andersen

Because of his friendship with the paper manufacturer Drewsen, the poet and fairytale writer, H.C. Andersen, visited Silkeborg on several occasions.

Four of his fairy tales are believed to be inspired by these visits to Silkeborg. ‘Ida and the Little Christine’ portrays the boatmen on the Gudenå River which winds through Silkeborg.

In addition, H.C. Andersen got his inspiration for the story ‘The Rags’ and ‘The Shirt-Collar’ when he visited Silkeborg’s paper manufacturing factory and saw how rags were transformed into paper. According to local legend, it is also thought that H.C. Andersen got the idea for his most famous fairy tale ‘The Tinder Box’ when he saw a hollow oak tree on his visit.

This tree can still, to this day, be seen on the side of a road leading into Silkeborg.

Link to the Fairy story

English translations to the four previously-mentioned fairy tales can be found on the following websites:

“Ib and Little Christine”  “The Rags”  “The Tinder Box”  “The Shirt-Collar”
From a public to a private school system

The growing population in the later part of the 18th century in Silkeborg brought about a large population of children and a great need for school teachers. Not all parents were satisfied with the public schools, however, and several citizens established a private school where their girls could receive an education and be taught manners. It the meantime it proved difficult to find women teachers. When two teachers broke down because of disciplinary problems, two of the city’s prominent businessmen travelled to Copenhagen to find a more stable and permanent solution to their problems. They found Theodora Lang who had recently graduated from Zahles’ Teaching Seminary. She went to Jutland and in her lifetime created an impressive educational system which comprised different branches of education, a teaching seminary, primary and secondary schools as well as a sixth-form college in Silkeborg. Theodora Lang is one of the people who has had the most importance in regard to the development of Silkeborg as an important center of education and culture throughout the 20th century and which it continues to be today.

Theodora Lang started teaching on November 23rd, 1882. Alongside with her female pupils, she sang the Danish psalm “Everything is in God our Father’s Hands” – a psalm which represents the values which Theodora Lang built her schools on as well as her own teaching.

Theodora was a visionary in her field and was also a courageous woman and pedagogue. She played a part in a commission created by the government which in 1903 presented a new school law, where the whole school system from 1st to 12th grade was altered. A ‘new language’ major was created which introduced the ‘modern’ languages to the syllabus. Latin was reduced and the modern sciences, e.g. physics, also gained influence. “We must find a form
which can reduce rote learning and place emphasis on proficiency” was a comment from the new school law.

Theodora Lang (on the left)

Silkeborg’s sixth-form college opened in 1907 and in 1909 the town’s first and only graduate was driven around the town in a carriage with Theodora Lang.

In 1918 Theodora Lang donated her ‘school empire’ to a privately owned institution which was run by a private board until 1977.

In 1977 the school moved from to the outskirts of Silkeborg into completely new and modern buildings.

In 2011 Silkeborg Gymnasium is expected to take over its current public buildings and thus become a privately run institution.

Silkeborg Gymnasium – About the school and what the school offers
Study Paths
Students at Silkeborg Gymnasium can choose between fifty paths of study which are divided into four major faculties: science, language science, social science and music (science).

Students have moreover the opportunity to choose an optional subject so that they have an influence on their education with their individual interests

Identity and Profile
Because of its very large size and the fact that it is the only sixth-form college in the area, the goal is to give the pupils as many choices as possible in regard to their study path in regard to which majors and minors they pick.

It is our philosophy that the choices available at our sixth-form college should be taken advantages of as much as possible. Silkeborg Sixth Form has in this regard an extremely wide range of choices of optional and mandatory subjects and activities for the students. We do our utmost to make the most of the variety we can offer. It is important that our sixth form college has a strong profile in all the important areas of study, as, for example, the sciences, music, languages, while at the same time making room for more special activities to engage in.

Our goal is to excel at taking care of the large and diverse amount of students, keeping our focus on both the most scholastically strong students, as well as students who have special needs.

The College Values
Silkeborg Sixth-Form is an old institution and academic excellence has always been the college’s trademark. Our modern sixth-form college is characterised by its study paths, and this focus is reflected in the width and depth of the collaboration between subjects.

As a modern school in modern times, we at Silkeborg Sixth Form College strive to find a balance between, on the one side, tradition, history and scholastic excellence, and on the other hand, new areas of study, the ability to change and focus on the challenges the future brings.

We strive to find a balance between the more well-tried and well-known methods of teaching and the new techniques made possible by, among others things, modern technology. The teaching, as well as the daily life of the school, is based on the following values:

* A sense of community and personal involvement
* Respect and responsibility
* Dialogue and openness.
The Role of the Danish Sixth Form College

Silkeborg Gymnasium’s primary role is to give young people living in the area a high scholastic level of education which can give them access to a higher education (for example, business colleges, seminaries, and universities). The school’s target group is students who thrive on scholastic challenges which often attach themselves to concrete, as well as abstract, problems which students are expected to relate to in the subjects they study. They do so through the use of theory, and more importantly, put them into perspective with their understanding of the world.

Sixth-form colleges work to give students a good basis for their further education. It means that students must achieve theoretical as well as social competency in their chosen subjects and make sure they feel secure on their path to a lifelong education. In this way, they learn how to study efficiently and can thus function well in a school environment where a large degree of independence as well as collaboration are in high demand.

Sixth-form college must both support and further students’ development in order to become competent world citizens. This means that students must learn to reflect as well as feel responsible in relation to the environment they find themselves in – both locally as well as globally. Furthermore, the sixth-form college must help to develop students’ creative and innovative talents as well as teach them to think critically.

Sixth-form college must furthermore make sure that students acquire the necessary requirements in order to become active citizens in the democratic society which the school and students are a product of. This means that what is taught daily at the college must be built on the same values which society represents: intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.
Students must learn that by actively taking part in their surroundings, they can individually and collectively contribute to change their society as thus ensure its development.

**Collaboration with others:**
Among the different areas which Silkeborg Gymnasium collaborates with, can be named:

- The school has an active group of parents who organize a ‘parent club’ which has worked together with the school in many different ways to help solve many practical problems, responsibilities, giving lectures,

- Silkeborg Gymnasium opens its doors to parents and to others who are interested in the local environment in connection with holding concerts, musicals, plays, art shows and more.

- Representatives from the many languages taught at the school, especially German, and the sciences, have different projects where they collaborate with the different primary schools in the area.

- We have also entered into diverse ad hoc projects where students collaborate with local businesses in connection with concrete projects that are a part of the students’ syllabus.

- The town’s museums and other cultural institutions are a well-known choice of collaboration when the students work with artistic or creative projects and lessons.

- Silkeborg Gymnasium works with many universities and other schools that provide a high level of education in regard to its teachers to ensure their level of experience in their chosen fields of study.
This picturesque scene portrays an image of working life at the Silkeborg Paper Factory as it was shown in the National Paper 'Illustreret Tidende' on the 25th of June 1865. (Wooden print (xylografi) of the drawing by Ludvig Ipsen).