

Network report for DUN, Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education Annual conference

The 2018 conference of DUN was held on May 17-18. It had 166 participants with 37 presentations of research and development activities. The conference theme was "From data to decisions". It was inspired by the growing focus on the use of data, including big data, in decisions concerning educational planning. Hence, the plenary sessions addressed issues related to initiatives at a national or institutional level where the generation of data was used for decision making. It further included papers about how various types of data could be used by teachers when planning, carrying out and evaluating their teaching.

The general assembly of DUN was held on the first day of the conference.

SIGs

The special-interest groups (SIGs) form the spine of DUN's activities during the year. There are at present 11 active SIGs that meet typically 2-4 times a year to discuss and exchange experiences related to the theme of the SIG. The members come from the various member organisations. There are SIGs focusing on, inter alia, doctoral supervision, use of digital learning technologies, exams and assessment and collegial supervision.

The board decided to increase the budgets of the SIGs and allow them to pay invited speakers with the funding. This was done to support and increase SIG activities.

Meetings for the heads of the units and departments of educational development

DUN facilitates meetings between the heads of the units and departments engaged with educational development. The group met twice and will continue to meet every six months.

The journal and the newsletter

DUN publishes a journal, Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Tidsskrift (DUT). This journal publishes two issues each year containing peer-reviewed research papers as well as non-peer reviewed papers, mainly in Danish. The quality of the papers is high and there is a reasonable number of submissions.

Furthermore, a newsletter is sent via e-mail to all members, approximately every three weeks. In addition to information concerning conferences, seminars, vacant positions, etc., each letter includes a short comment from a member of the board, addressing a topic that the board member finds relevant to reflect on.

Particular activities from May 2017 to May 2018

DUN has launched a part of its website containing information about Danish research on higher-education teaching and learning (<http://dun-net.dk/dansk-forskning/>). It provides an overview of Danish research published within the past five years in English or in a Scandinavian language. This has been a wish for several years and has now been accomplished.

Members of the board had two meetings with government officials from the Ministry of Higher Education and Science in relation to a committee working with enhancing the quality of higher education. The purpose was to contribute with a research-based view on the issues the committee was discussing. The dialogue was open and the government officials were interested. In the final report, launched earlier this year, DUN's role as a network in the exchange of knowledge and experiences was explicitly mentioned.

The political landscape

There is in Denmark a pronounced focus on what is labelled 'the quality of higher education'. In the political discourse, this has mainly been linked to study pace (how long time do students take completing their degree?), completion rates and to employment rates (what is the unemployment rate of graduates from a study programme compared to the overall unemployment rate of at the Danish labour market).

In November 2017, a reform of the funding system was passed in parliament where quality should be one of the parameters used for allocating funding. However, there are also attempts of including teaching quality in the system. The ministry is presently working on setting up the system. At the same time, more money is allocated for research on higher education – compared to previous research funding for this area it is a substantial increase in focus.

These changes offers opportunities for the development of higher education as well as risks of too narrow focus on performance on particular scales

Hot topics

The quality discussion is one hot topic. How should quality be perceived and defined? How can it be assessed? What are the relevant parameters?

Another topic is the focus on the introduction of digital learning resources in various forms and with various labels. How can this be achieved in a way that maintains the digital resources as means to an end rather than being the goals in themselves?

Lars Ulriksen

Chairman of DUN, May 25, 2018