

Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF)

Centre Description

AMBITION

The Centre for Higher Education Futures aims to:

- Research the internationally transforming mandates and organization of universities and higher education
- Provide students, faculty, university administrators, university leaders and the higher education policy community with an internationally linked and research-informed space for meta-analysis and reflexive thinking about higher education.
- Be a site for national and international research and experiments on new models for higher education and its institutional forms.

ROLES and ACTIVITIES

The Centre will fulfil this ambition through four roles and associated activities:

1. International networking

- a. **International collegiality** CHEF members' extensive international networks will be maintained and extended through collaboration on projects, exchanging draft papers for comment and co-authorship of publications.
- b. **Future collaborations** wherever possible, new projects will include 2-3 international experts who are fully integrated into all phases of the research.
- c. **Sister Centres** CHEF will establish links, share information and organise scholarly exchanges with 'sister centres' on critical studies of higher education around the world.

2. Facilitator of projects and collaborations

- a. **Inspiring research** In seminars, workshops and conferences, CHEF will establish a platform for integrating research on its three themes (below) and inspire high quality, locally relevant and internationally recognised research on current and future developments in higher education.
- b. **Research support** CHEF will organize 'low key' activities to support members in developing their ideas for new projects and to discuss work in progress, as well as organizing 'high key' national conferences and sessions at relevant international conferences.
- c. **Experimental designs** For research on higher education that engages with the agendas driving its transformation. CHEF will facilitate an explosion of methodological energy to combine criticality with outreach, involves stakeholders in research design and creates new publics around projects.

3. Project hotel

- a. **Linked projects** Core Members link a number of existing projects (*31 projects Dec 2016*) into the CHEF agenda and numerous new project ideas have been formulated at the initial CHEF meetings and will be developed. Linked projects contribute to CHEF's activities, gain from CHEF's networks and collaboration, and disseminate through the CHEF platform.

- b. **Future research** Projects will range from nationally and internationally funded research, research-based development projects, and commissioned research. CHEF may also carry out research on Aarhus University's own activities and inspire or support its organization and education.
- 4. Critical and constructive proponent of public debate**
- a. **Dialogue with policy makers** To address the current gap between critical higher education research and policy processes nationally and internationally, CHEF's projects and faculty will connect with policy processes and actors of all hues. By maintaining a critical research base and meta-perspective yet be capable of 'rapid response', the Centre aims to engage stakeholders in discussion of emerging issues and be a natural and felt presence in the higher education policy community.
 - b. **Public dissemination** The Centre will engage the wider public through an active presence in Danish and international media, as well as maintaining an open door to its activities through its website, newsletters, a working paper series, and being active on social media platforms.
 - c. **Teaching and graduate research opportunities.** The Centre will contribute to DPU/ARTS' master degree programmes and graduate school and by proactive modelling of government's 'elite' initiative it will develop new formats for structured graduate research opportunities and integrated research and teaching.
 - d. **Summer school.** An annual summer school (funding permitting) will bring together current and former researchers and our network of international experts and stakeholders to explore how universities' new mandates are unfolding and create a critical and constructive dialogue with all concerned. The aim is to make this summer school a highly anticipated annual event on the international calendar.

THEMES

The Centre brings research activities together around three inter-related themes:

1. The role and positioning of universities and higher education in the world

The first theme explores the positioning of universities in a new context where they engage with and respond to a plethora of external stakeholders, including industrial and commercial companies, publishing firms with new business models, student recruitment agencies, corporate universities, private institutes providing supplementary or 'shadow' education, consultancies and international organisations with policy prescriptions, rankings firms, municipalities, and governments using universities in their economic and foreign policies, as well as national and international associations of rectors, academics and students. In this situation, universities are working to renew their societal mandate as a progressive force in society. The boundaries around the higher 'sector' are no longer clear; they are constantly being renegotiated, and relations span from exchange, trust and gift to contracts and new forms of financialisation.

2. Universities' organisation and inner Life

The second theme explores the implications of universities' location in this new ecology for its internal life, based especially in the global drivers of performance management, massification, digitalization, and quality

assurance. In many countries (including Denmark), governance and management have been reformed to make universities 'world class' and 'drive' competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Academics and students are faced with changing expectations about their work and identity, often embedded in new performance criteria and human resource management. Increased demands from industry for collaborative research and knowledge exchange provide opportunities for different disciplines to develop new research methodologies and relationships with stakeholders. Education at all levels has been expanding and adapted to new international and output oriented standards, controlling the pace and learning outcome of the students. Many of these reforms are carried out with the assumption that candidates will gain the skills and inclination to develop careers as 'knowledge workers' outside academia, revealing a 'torn curriculum' within globalised higher education programmes. The boundaries between institution, work-life, the private life sphere and extra-curricular professional networks have also become permeable. Meanwhile, the merging of societal and academic arenas give rise to a renewed discussion about how to promote and educate for academic citizenship and revitalize discourses about virtues and pedagogical formation in university life. Formal and informal support systems can now be seen as part of the higher education curriculum, and learning environments outside the campus maybe should be included in higher education pedagogy and didactics. The power and potential of media ecologies surrounding formalised higher education programmes should not be overlooked in the analysis of student motivation, learning, and engagement.

3. Higher Education Futures

The third theme is to develop new insights into the practical implications of our critical research on the ecology and internal transformation of universities for building alternative futures for higher education. The Centre will draw on international links to experimental projects (e.g. Auckland's 'Liveable University', 'Cooperative Universities' in Australia, U.S.A., UK and Mondragon, Spain). While not translatable to other contexts in their entirety, how do these examples of 'thinking otherwise' help bring a critical and reflexive perspective to discussion about issues 'at home' and possible ways of developing the university in future?

Also, the *idea* of the future university will be explored. The notion of 'future,' 'future education 'and 'new educational futures' will be of key interest. These themes link to idea of 'future making' and draws on the philosophy of higher education, design thinking, educational philosophy and the history of ideas. The conceptualization of the future university challenges several of the present state forms of higher education systems and management by raising the questions whether higher education is dependent on physical university buildings, offered only to registered students, and using a set course curriculum. At the same time this theme explores what can be said to make manifest an idea and practice of the university today, which is not eroded by the changing political and social landscapes but gives cohesion and authority to the university as an institution in the knowledge economy and in the societies yet to come.

Organisation

The centre is led by Professor Susan Wright from DPU and Associate Professor Søren Smedegaard Bengtsen from CUDiM is the vice leader.

The three themes (above) are coordinated by:

1. Universities' and higher education's role and positioning in the world
Jakob Williams Ørberg (DPU) and Sarah Robinson (CUDiM)
2. University organization and inner life
Søren Smedegaard Bengtsen (CUDiM) and Laura Louise Sarauw (DPU)
3. Future universities and higher education
Susan Wright (DPU) and Rikke Toft Nørgård (CUDiM)

The role of the coordinators is to network the people together who are doing projects or are interested in their theme and generate ideas for activities and future projects.

These leaders and coordinators will meet twice per semester to share ideas and plan CHEF's calendar of activities, preferably face to face, but otherwise digitally. These meetings are open to any members of CHEF and notes of the meetings will be available on the website.

Membership

CHEF is based in the Department of Education (DPU), Emdrup Campus, Aarhus University, and is formed in conjunction with the Department of Education, Trøjborg Campus and CUDiM (the Centre for Teaching Development and Digital Media), Aarhus University. Membership is open to anyone from these institutions, other faculties and universities in Denmark and international colleagues. CHEF will also establish links with 'sister centres' around the world.

Our initial invitation generated 16 core members and 21 associated members from DPU and 6 core members and 6 associated members from CUDiM. Membership is still open.

The members come from different disciplinary backgrounds including computer science, digital design, educational anthropology, educational sociology, history of ideas, educational sciences, cultural studies, design thinking, philosophy, media studies, information studies, pedagogy and didactics, and language studies.