

Brief report about the activities of DUN and the situation in Danish higher-education teaching and learning

About (DUN – Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education)

The network has existed since 1994 and it has all 8 universities as members. In addition to the 8 universities 6 other institutions with relation to university teaching and learning have become members. The universities and other institutions are members in the sense that they sponsor the activities of DUN through an annual fee of approximately 75.000 Euro per year. Individual teachers employed at one of the 8 universities and the 6 other institutions can sign up for free as members. DUN at present has 1,278 individual members.

There is a board elected biannually at a general assembly in relation to the annual conference. The board at present consists of 7 members. 1 alternate member attends all meetings. The 8 members represent 7 of the 8 member universities. The network is supported and run by a permanent secretariat with 1 academic staff and administrative support.

Activities of DUN

The network runs four core activities.

- An annual national conference (usually in May) on university teaching and learning bringing together teachers and mainly academic developers and researchers from the member universities, but also from other institutions with interest in teaching and learning at higher education since DUN is the only institution addressing these themes. At the annual conference, experiences from teaching and development are presented along with research outcomes
- A journal (Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Tidsskrift (DUT)) with two issues published per year. The journal is peer reviewed with open access and presents research and scholarly discussions of teaching and learning experiences. The issue published in October 2016 presents several examples of development projects carried out by assistant professors as part of their participation in teacher development programmes. The issue thus documents the creativity present among university teachers. The articles are mainly, but not exclusively, in Danish.
- Special Interests Groups (SIGs). This has been a priority for the board over the past couple of years as a means of creating a space for the exchange and discussion of ideas and experiences between the conferences. The SIGs get some financial support from DUN to cover transport and sandwiches at the meeting. At present there are 10 SIGs covering a range of topics, including e-learning, assessment, PhD supervision, peer supervision and the international classroom. The SIGs are obliged to organise an event that reaches out to other members at DUN and to have a presentation at the annual conference.
- Newsletter and website. The secretariat sends out newsletters approximately every third week with information about conferences, meetings, reports, etc. The newsletter is sent to each individual member. For the past year, the board has had a short (200 words) introduction raising an issue of interest. The purpose is to increase the visibility of the newsletter in the stream of e-mails

floating into the inbox of the members. A new design of the website was launched during the past year. Recently, the board has also decided to ask the SIGs to contribute in turn to the newsletter with brief presentations of their activities. In addition to the newsletter the secretariat edits the DUN website. There have been some modest attempts to increase DUN's presence in the social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Apart from this, the network has occasionally organised or supported seminars or course activities, mainly for experienced PhD supervisors.

International relations

Next to DUN's involvement in ICED we have since 2011 been involved in the Nordic-Baltic Network in Higher Education Development

Particular focus areas of the past year

The Danish educational sector, including the universities, has experienced political turmoil during the past year. Substantial cuts in the funding for universities, reduced intake at selected university programmes that are considered not to prepare the students for the labour market, legislation to increase the pace and control of the students and threatening the university programmes with economic "punishment" if they do not succeed in making the students complete their degrees in short time has led to layoffs at some institutions (and more are expected to follow in the near future). It also has led to changes in the management of the studies and of the students that is likely to be detrimental to the quality of student learning. These developments are almost exclusively driven by an economic rationale and calculations which means that when politicians and the ministries seek advice of experts they turn to economists, but neglect the potential impact on teaching and learning.

The DUN board has sought to make itself visible to the political level in order to become the voice of the learning at universities; not of the students or the staff, but of the quality of teaching and learning. This will continue in this year.

Another focus area has been to showcase the Danish research in higher-education teaching and learning. This is done by increasing the visibility and availability at the DUN website of information about and links to research carried out at the Danish universities.

In the past year, DUN has sought to increase the exchange of knowledge and experiences between the centres for educational development at the universities through meetings and by launching a study of the teacher development programmes at the eight universities. The results of this study is expected in the spring of 2017.

Focus areas in educational development at Danish universities

Based on anecdotal knowledge, Danish universities appear to have a particular focus on educational development concerning

- The use of different kinds of E-based learning, such as blended learning, flipped classrooms or distance learning.

- Development of different formats for providing feedback to students, but also developing assessment and examination formats
- Teaching and learning during first year at university and how to facilitate the students' transition into university
- The universities in Aalborg and Roskilde that have problem-based learning and project work as defining characteristics are engaged in developing these formats.

Drivers for these developments are not only to increase student learning, but to find formats that can offer more teaching for less money. Sometimes the two interests (learning interests and cost reduction) can co-exist, but there is also a risk that the emphasis on lowering the costs can hamper the students' learning outcomes.

Two hot topics

1. How can we as networks and organisations of educational developers and researchers in higher-education teaching and learning involve ourselves and affect the political development of the sector if we see it move in direction that presumably will be detrimental to the quality of student learning? What are our possibilities and limitations with respect to the position we have at our institutions? What are our obligations as proponents of quality learning?
2. In a Danish context, educational management appears to be a key player in the development of quality teaching and learning and for encouraging staff to become involved in educational development. Who (teachers, researchers, administrative staff) occupy the positions in educational management? What are the experiences with targeting activities at this group? What are the barriers and possibilities for this group in order to act as change agents in educational development?