

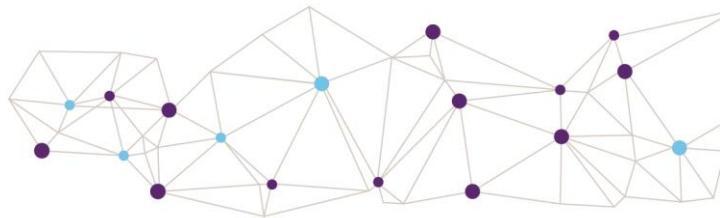
SHEFCE PEER LEARNING VISIT: DANUBE UNIVERSITY KREMS (15-16 JULY 2021)

Peer reflection by visiting team

1. Reflection on the concept of community engagement in the national context

- Based on the report and the discussions during the peer learning, the visiting team concludes that the element of national, local and institutional context is always crucial to take into account when discussing community engagement at different higher education institutions.
- An initial challenge faced by the visiting team in contextualising community engagement in the Austrian context is both a linguistic and system-level one. Firstly, the German/Austrian linguistic context there appears to be no direct, accepted equivalent to the term 'community engagement in higher education'. At the same time, in the area of higher education and research policy there is also no clear sense of where such a concept would belong. The closest terms were seen as being the following:
 - Third mission
 - Knowledge exchange /knowledge transfer
 - Societal impact
 - Social responsibility
 - Social dimension
- In the view of the visiting team, there is no doubt that the concept of community engagement (as defined in the TEFCE project) fits well into the strategic context of the Austrian system, and interrelates with each of the terms mentioned above, although primarily most with the goals of knowledge exchange and societal impact (understood as going beyond merely economic impacts), as well as in the context of third mission (understood as a notion of a third set of academic activities aimed at linking higher education institutions more closely with surrounding society). Future discussions about the framing of community engagement in higher education may result in translating/adapting the term in a way that is specific to the national context. The recommendation of the visiting team is that, in that process, it would be beneficial to keep the concept of 'engagement' in focus – i.e. about mutually beneficial, productive interactions. Otherwise, there is a risk that discussions may focus on 'societal relevance', which can be achieved without any interaction between the university and society, but can still happen with the university as an 'ivory tower'.



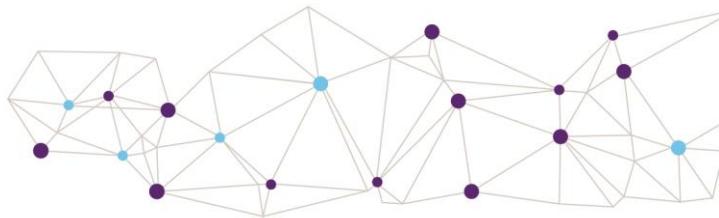


2. Reflection on the national and system-level context

- Other elements such as history, culture, institutional frameworks and other traditions have a major impact on how a concept such as community engagement can be framed and understood. For example, the visiting team realised that there are many top-down policies at the higher education system level (including performance agreements and nationwide practices and initiatives) that steer higher education institutions own policies and practices. For example:
 - nationwide practices such as children's universities and science nights
 - policies related to the social dimension of higher education (with measures for more inclusive universities)
 - widespread links between universities and companies and structures to make such connections.
- The interpretation of the visiting team based on the discussions with the DUK teams was that in Austria there is a well-functioning, trust-based relationship between national authorities in higher education and universities, resulting in the wide acceptance and implementation of national policies at the level of universities. In this sense, there was less a sense (as in some other countries), that universities carry out community engagement as primarily a proactive response to *local/regional* needs, often without any steering, guidance, or support from the national level; or, as it is the case with some countries, where academics and students carry out community engagement even without any institutional support.
- The question that remained for the visiting team was: to what extent does DUK carry out community engagement activities that go *above and beyond* schemes that are steered, supported and encouraged at the national level, e.g. based on university-led activities responding to local/regional/national needs?

3. Reflection on the local and institutional context

- The territorial element of where the university is located – e.g. whether it's a small location a big location, socioeconomically developed or not developed, again that influences what kind of engagement can take place or is likely to take place. It was clear from the peer-learning visit that DUK makes connections with local stakeholders in a range of initiatives and projects. One main challenge, however, was identified: how to maintain a place-based focus in a context of having most staff and students not living in the city of Krems?
- But the institutional context that is most important in the case of DUK is that the university has a specific profile that makes it markedly different from other universities in Austria: it is the only public university for continuing education, and its students are virtually all mature students (average age of 39), working professionals, and not living near the university. This in itself shifts the debate about what kind of community engagement activities are likely to take place in such a context. Not having most of the (academic) staff and students in both 'constructs' that shape the essence of

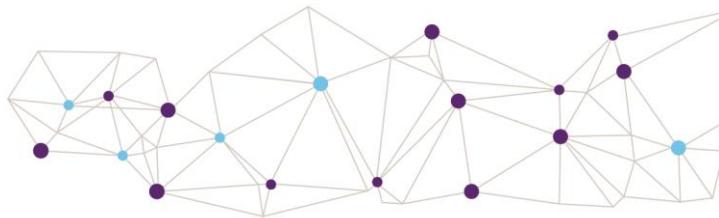


community engagement - on university campus and in the community (city/region) - is clearly a very context-specific reality that needs to be taken into account when considering the future possibilities and challenges for community engagement.

- Despite its specific institutional profile, what was clear to the visiting team was that the university's mission, strategy and priorities were closely aligned with many core principles related to the third mission of higher education generally, and community engagement specifically. The university refers to its goals of 'addressing societal challenges', 'having a societal impact' and 'carry out knowledge transfer'. The issue of the SDGs also seems highly prominent at the university, and the visiting team got the impression that the university is quick to respond to addressing societal challenges in both its study programmes and its research.

4. Reflection on the level of community engagement and on good practices

- Some of the examples of community engagement that most struck the visiting team are highlighted below – noting that these are only for illustrative purposes, rather than as an assessment of being the 'best practices' od DUK.
 - **Teaching & learning; students:** DUK links its programmes to societal challenges and many students appear to have the opportunity to apply their learning to solve challenges for external partners. For example, business study students meet with local NGOs and develop PR campaigns for them; architecture students contributed to reconstruction of buildings after an earthquake in Italy; education studies students developed a handbook for linking schools and museums, and for a awarness campaign for mental health. Overall, since most students work, they are encouraged to apply their newly acquired knolwedge to address needs of their organisations.
 - **Research; Service and Knowledge Exchange:** DUK engages with a range of external institutions in joint initiatives, including with schools, museums and prisons, and has facilities that are available to the community. A notable example is collaboration developed with the regional network of music teachers and music schools' leaders, who frequently participate in various tailored-made professional trainings in education leadership, while using the university facilities and all the IT on the campus for free. Another example is collaboration with museums in the region where DUK stepped as a creator of various apps for both the museum and citizens themselves. The university also engages in science communication through a magazine that is co-created between academics and professionals.
- Many of the practices described during the meeting were not featured in the report, so the visiting team would recommend to include all those practices in the report (even as short descriptions of each practice, not necessarily as longer case studies). Generally, the report would benefit from a



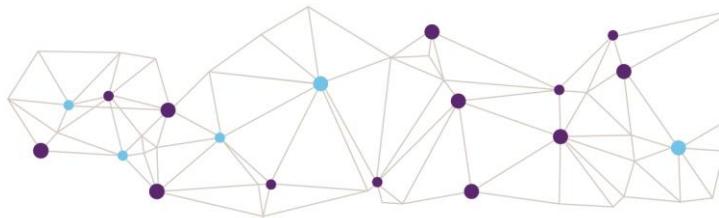
more narrative form, rather than a bullet-point form, in order to describe the types of practices that illustrate each sub-dimension.

- While DUK's commitment to addressing societal challenges and societal impact is clear, the key question that remained open at the end of the meeting was to what extent do the practices at the university cooperation *with* society in addressing those societal needs, or developing solutions *for* society. The latter is of course highly important, but according to the TEFCE framework, the higher levels of engagement correspond to closer forms of cooperation, co-determination and co-creation. The visiting team recommends that the DUK team re-examines some of its assessment scores in this light, in particular the sub-dimensions assessed as Level 5, to check whether this criterion is met based on the mapped practices, or whether there may still be space for improvement.
 - E.g. The inclusion of external lecturers is featured as evidence of a high level of community engagement. To confirm that assessment, it would be important to reflect on whether those external lecturers are really from *external* communities (e.g. business, public institutions, NGOs, etc) or whether they are still primarily from the *academic* community.

5. Reflection on identified challenges and potential opportunities

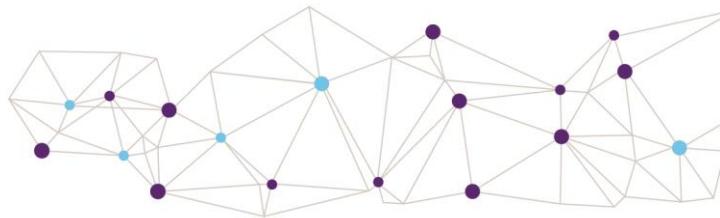
In addition to the challenges and areas for improvement defined in the DUK report, the peer reflection team would like to add the following points for consideration:

- **Unique opportunity to map impact of learning on students' host organisations:** Teaching and learning at the DUK is designed as a knowledge-exchange, and DUK primarily focus is on the improvement of their students' professional selves. Knowing that most of DUK students live around the globe, it would be really interesting (not to mention even important at some point) for the DUK to try to map what is going on in all those communities where they students live and work and actually transfer the knowledge gained at the DUK. Due to such a particular context-specific institutional setting, the DUK might be in a relation with lots of different (external) communities, not necessarily them being local nor regional. In the context of building its institutional profile, it could be interesting for the DUK to actually reflect upon its possible impact in all those various and distant communities.
- **Reimagine opportunities for community engagement among the student body:** The nature of DUK's students (mature part-time students who are geographically dispersed working professionals) provides both unique challenges and opportunities in terms of building a community engaged student body. We recognise that without a co-located centralised student body, the university's student engagement with its community/region is restricted. Nevertheless, we see distinct value in the student demographic profile and suggest mobilising their wealth of prior knowledge, experience and networks in partnership with the community to generate mutual benefit. Reimagining the scope of community engaged practice (including online volunteering, fundraising, awareness raising, advocacy) may help to mobilise this broadly dispersed student group. In keeping with the co-creative and co-participative nature of student learning in DUK, there is great opportunity to afford students



the agency to choose and develop the types and forms of community engaged practices that they find inspiring (as well as professionally relevant) and form teams centred on developing these practices, which, in turn, could trigger student driven initiatives. Further, the introduction of bachelor programmes (both professional and continuing education) over the next two years may alter the demographic profile of students and present opportunities for greater community engagement.

- **Collaborate with co-located higher education institutions on community engagement** – DUK's co-location with other HEI partners (i.e. IMC University of Applied Sciences and Karl Landsteiner University) offers an important opportunity to combine efforts at forging strong links with region and community. Although such partnerships may be hampered by academic competitiveness, there are opportunities for fruitful synergies, for instance the possibility of a joint community engagement strategy (mentioned by Attila), shared student community engagement initiatives, as well as jointly organised citizen science/outreach events. This thriving academic community at Campus Krems is uniquely positioned by its "glocal" perspective to respond to the societal needs of the region.
- **Develop institutional support for community engagement:** As noted by the DUK team, there is little institutionalisation at management level for community engagement (apart from the university council). There are thus many opportunities to improve this situation. Firstly, a dedicated, fully resourced office or unit for "community engagement" (or a similar term that fits with the national context without compromising what is meant by community engagement) could be considered. Secondly, a centralised database of community engaged academics and practices across the institution could be developed as a means of record/impact and of referral for community-based organisations looking to collaborate on societal issues with the university. Thirdly, a community engagement strategy could be developed by DUK alone or co-created with neighbouring HEIs, as mentioned above.
- **Other notes of visiting team:**
 - One of the area of potential for development in the mapping report, defined by the DUK piloting team, is - "Stimulate Community Engagement through internal competition"; following some of the core TEFCE principles, and dedicated to the idea of the TEFCE Toolbox not becoming (another) mean for competition in the academia, the visiting team highly recommends to the DUK piloting team to reconsider if this particular recommendation can be re-visited and re-framed outside the competition 'field'.
 - One of the challenges identified was the balance the DUK regional embeddedness and responsibility (Danube region) with the global market and actions that, due to a very strong international focus of the DUK, takes its academic pillars outside of their intermediate external communities and region). balancing social responsibility and marketisation.
 - Knowing about the prison being located quite close to the campus, and the existing practices of cooperation, the visiting teams recommends to the DUK piloting team to reconsider the idea of extending those existing practices to offering professional trainings to inmates (of course, if the normative environment allows for such a collaboration).

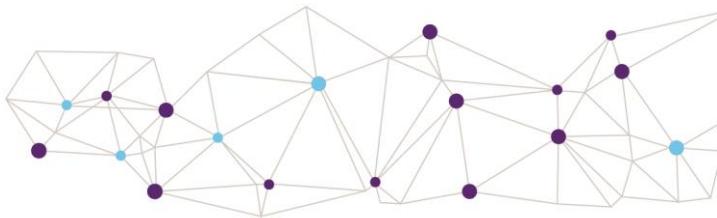


6. Reflection on value of the TEFCE Toolbox

- The feedback of the DUK team indicates that the TEFCE Toolbox process was seen as positive experience for DUK, with the particular benefits being having an interdisciplinary core team involved. The main process challenge for DUK was related to time (DUK team members have many other obligations and projects) and to motivating staff members to take part and provide their practices. A conclusion was that having a vice-rector involved from the beginning could have added more weight and momentum to the process.
- The outcome of the TEFCE Toolbox was seen as positive: it has allowed DUK to frame its activities in a new way and to gain a better understanding of the range of ways in which it engages with its external communities. The resulting report was also identified as a valuable result that can further inform the university, strategically.
- The DUK team did note, however, that the unique profile of DUK means that they also had challenges in how to adapt or apply some of the Toolbox sub-dimensions to DUK. The DUK team felt that some of the elements of the Toolbox were better fit for more ‘traditional’ universities than for DUK’s unconventional institutional profile. The visiting team concluded the following:
 - The TEFCE Toolbox is intended to be a flexible framework that can be applied in a broad range of institutional and socioeconomic contexts. In that sense, the SHEFCE project should consider how to further strengthen the context-specific nature of the framework to ensure that institutions do not feel constrained by the Toolbox. One idea could be making the scoring of certain sub-dimensions optional (instead replacing them by narrative reflections)
 - Overall, the visiting team felt that the TEFCE Toolbox ultimately does ‘work’ even in the context of DUK, since it opened an interesting discussion about the university’s framing of its interaction with society, provided an insight into good practices and helped identify open questions and potential for improvement.

7. Reflection on value of the peer-learning visit

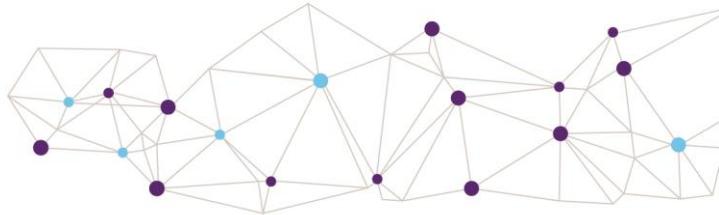
- The visiting team gained an invaluable insight into how community engagement takes place at DUK as a result of the peer-learning visit. This insight would be incomplete if it were limited to a review of an institutional report. The particular value of the visit, especially its focus group discussions, provided another one is that it allowed the visiting team to gain new knowledge on the extent to which community engagement activities are diverse, especially in different national, local and institutional contexts. Structuring the discussions according to 4-5 thematic blocks (with the help of the Mural tool) further helped in providing a clear framework for discussion.
- The hosting DUK team also confirmed the value and mutual benefits of the peer-learning visit: the process of discussing the report and receiving peer reflections provided the hosts with a better understanding of the context-specific ways in which community engagement can take place, and



with a better understanding of the process of assessing an institution's level of community engagement and its potential for improvement.

Members of peer-reflection team

1	Betts	Alícia	University of Girona	International Strategic Projects
2	Brophy	Martina	Technological University Dublin	Research Assistant, College of Business
3	Cayetano i Giralt	Marta	Association of Catalan Public Universities	Communications Officer
4	Cooney	Tom	Technological University Dublin	Professor of Entrepreneurship, College of Business
5	Culum Ilic	Bojana	University of Rijeka	Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
6	Dusi	Davide	Ghent University	Postdoctoral Researcher, Centre for Higher Education Governance Ghent
7	Farnell	Thomas	Institute for the Development of Education	Higher Education Policy Expert
8	Feliu	Jaume	University of Girona	Delegate of the rector for Territory and Sustainability
9	Iglesias Vidal	Edgar	University of Girona	Assistant Professor, Department of Pedagogy
10	Planas	Anna	University of Girona	Associate Professor, Department of Pedagogy
11	Skledar Matijević	Ana	Institute for the Development of Education	Higher Education Project Manager



Members of DUK hosting team

1	Campbell	David	Danube University Krems	
2	Doppler	Elisabeth	Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research	
3	Fellner	Magdalena	Danube University Krems	Research assistant, Department for Higher Education Research
4	Hahn	Brigitte	Danube University Krems	
5	Keplinger	Maria	Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research	
6	Krych	David	Danube University Krems	
7	Lessky	Franziska	Danube University Krems	
8	Pausits	Attila	Danube University Krems	Professor, Department for Higher Education Research
9	Reisky	Florian	Danube University Krems	
10	Roszman	Sascha	TU Graz	
12	Schwarz	Barbara	Gesellschaft für Forschungsförderung NÖ	
13	Tronner	Roman	Danube University Krems	
14	Vacek	Alexander	Danube University Krems	