

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

The STSM applicant submits this report for approval to the STSM coordinator

Action number: COST Action 15221 – We ReLate -- Advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development

STSM title: Writing Centre Exchange Project

STSM start and end date: 16/04/2018 to 20/04/2018

Grantee name: Dr. Katrin Girgensohn, Dr Ide O Sullivan, Dr Gina Henry

PURPOSE OF THE STSM

One of the goals of the COST Action We ReLaTe is to start and foster a global conversation around new models for the centralised support of teaching, learning, research and writing, for both staff and students. Those conversations should be based on shared reported findings on what leads to effectiveness, success and productivity of such centralised support units. Therefore, the aim of this STSM was to structure this conversation between participating European institutions in order to uncover what leads to the effectiveness and success of such centralised supports.

This STSM provided an organised platform to structure the conversation between three European institutions about their centralised support models, in particular, for writing. The University of Gothenburg in Sweden, the University of Limerick in Ireland and the European University Viadrina in Germany all offer support for writing, teaching, learning and research within their writing centres. This visit was the first of three conversations between the three participating institutions. During this first visit, Íde O’Sullivan of the University of Limerick, and Katrin Girgensohn and Gina Henry of the European University Viadrina visited ASK, the writing centre at the University of Gothenburg under the direction of Ann-Marie Eriksson.

Through three mutual visits and a collaborative, exploratory research approach, we strive to find out what leads to effectiveness, success and productivity of the centres. Furthermore, we endeavour to find out which challenges the centres face and how they deal with them. The goals of the research collaboration are to get outside perspectives on the work of each centre, to learn from each other, and to develop more knowledge on the institutional work of central support units. Equally, it is intended to share the outcomes of this research with interested parties within the European higher education context.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

Background

Based on a model of institutional work of writing centre directors (Girgensohn 2017), this collaboration examines how writing centre teams in Sweden (Gothenburg University), Ireland (University of Limerick) and Germany (European University Viadrina) conduct institutional work in their writing centres. Institutional work is defined as “purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006, 215). According to Girgensohn’s research, institutional work in writing centres includes specific strategic action fields and uses collaborative learning as a tool to interact with stakeholders.

Research questions

The research collaboration asks how the local actors interact in their writing centres, with whom they interact and in which strategic action fields, related to teaching, learning, research and writing.

Methods

Actors of all three universities visit each other’s centres to learn more about them and gain insights about strategic action fields and the ways of interacting with stakeholders. One method of data gathering and analysing is a kind of “fishbowl” as a special form of focus group (cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_\(conversation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_(conversation))). The overall approach is explorative, oriented towards grounded theory methodology in the way that the first findings will influence the data gathering of the next visits.

Visit to Gothenburg University

On Day 1 of the visit, the research objectives were reviewed, clarified and refined:

- Do we find the same strategic action fields in Gothenburg University as found in Girgensohn’s (2017) research on strategic action fields? Are there may be more/different ones?
- Girgensohn identified a stance of collaborative learning as a tool for institutional work in her research. Is this also true in Gothenburg, or do we identify other tools?

- The two general directions of institutional work are stabilization (of the center) and legitimization (of the center's work towards the outside). Those directions might help us to categorize what we observe.

Equally, the schedule for the visit was finalised and the questions for each of the interviews with stakeholders were agreed. See Appendix I for an overview of the schedule.

During the five-day visit, the participants from the University of Limerick and the European University met with key stakeholder in the institutions. Interview were conducted with the following key stakeholders

1. Director of the Teaching and learning unit, Maria Sunnerstam (PIL: Pedagogic Development and Interactive Learning)
2. University library: Thomas Palmqvist
3. Dean, Faculty of Education: Åke Ingman
4. Faculty representatives on the Advisory Board
5. Chair of the Advisory Board
6. Student and library representative on the Advisory Board
7. Unit for Special Pedagogical Support
8. Director of ASK
9. Representative from the national context and another writing centre in Sweden: Ingrid Lennartson-Hokkanen, University of Stockholm, Sweden

The following was established during the interviews:

- What is ASK's mission?
- What is ASK doing well?
- Why does it work well?
- How do they work (with you)?
- What challenges do you see?

Equally, the participants met with the co-workers in the unit to establish the following:

- What is ASK's mission?
- What is functioning well?
- Why are things functioning well?
- How is it to work in such a new unit? Challenges?
- Where do you see ASK in ten years? And how did you get there when you look back in ten years? What needs to happen?

Equally, the ASK team presented multiple presentation on many aspects of their work. See Appendix II.

Each evening, Íde, Katrin and Gina transcribed the interviews with the stakeholders and the co-workers in the unit. The interview were then analysed in an initial thematic analysis to establish the main themes emerging in relation to the questions posed. These notes were then used to establish the primary themes for discussion during the fishbowl activity. The fishbowl was recorded and will be used to further input into the data from the interviews that will be closely analysed following the visit.

Finally, on the last morning, the initial findings were used to address the primary research questions in order to establish the strategic action field apparent in the working of the ASK unit in Gothenburg university. Again, this will be analysed more rigorously following the visit.

The last meeting consisted of presenting the initial findings to another colleague in another Swedish university, who was able to contextualise the findings in the national context.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The main results will derive from all three visits and the research activities in between (data analysis using qualitative content analysis). They will be described in a scientific article that we will submit for publication after presenting and discussing the collected results at the EATAW conference 2019. As preliminary first findings, that were discussed during the fishbowl activity, we explored three categories that subsumed the impressions that were most interesting from our outsiders' perspective: 1) The center's mission, 2) the growth of the center and 3) the center's team.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

This STSM consisted of the first of three visits amongst the participating institutions. The next visit is to take place at the European University Viadrina in December 2018.

The third visit is to take place at the University of Limerick in April 2019.

This STSM contributes to the COST Action by generating results that directly contribute to the action's goals, giving greater insight into the centralised supports for teaching, learning research and writing in three European institutions of higher education. Once all three visits have been completed, dissemination will be in the form of a presentation at the EATAW 2019 conference. Another practical outcome will be a collaborative article that publishes the main findings of the

collaborative research project. The article will be written in a “book sprint”. Other publications are planned as follows:

Paper 1: EATAW comparative paper (Journal of Academic Writing in 2019; EATA symposium in 2019)

Paper 2: Methodological paper (Journal yet to be decided on in 2019)

Paper 3: Extended article of findings and case study (Journal: Studies in Higher Education in 2020)

Paper 4, 5 and 6: Articles of research project and results (Local distribution in 2019)

Appendix I

Working schedule for visit to Gothenburg University (April 2017)

Monday 16th April to Friday 20th April, 2018

Monday: Establish research context and aim of the STSM

Morning: Arrival and getting to know each other.

Afternoon:

- Revisit planned schedule (Gothenburg project group: visitors + Lina, Emma, Ann-Marie)
- Introduction to the University of Gothenburg Unit for academic language (Anne Marie)
- Develop research design
 - Design questions for interviews with staff members and Unit Council
 - Identify key stakeholders/actors

Tuesday: Establishing institutional contexts

10.30 to 14.30: Meeting with the Gothenburg unit

- Íde and Katrin to present their writing centres (10 to 15 minutes) to staff at the Gtb unit
- Short thematic presentation (colleagues at the University of Gothenburg, approx. 10 minutes each; Lina, Emma and Ann-Marie are preparing a schedule)
 - Identify obvious differences and commonalities between centres
 - Invite contribution from colleagues in Gothenburg

15.00 Review research design (Gothenburg project group)

Wednesday:

- Observations and reading documents:
 - Observing as many different activities as possible (meeting, observing and interviewing colleagues) (Schedule prepared by Lina, Emma, Ann-Marie)
 - Getting an understanding of how the writing centre fits in its local context
 - Stabilisation: tutoring manual
 - Legitimation: action/strategic plans
- Visit local unit council (faculty representatives, student representatives, staff representatives):
- Presentation by Íde/Katrin to Unit Council (People with strategic focus)
 - Focus on how centres are organised institutionally
 - Core activities
 - Mission of the centre

- Questions and discussion, interviewing council members.

Thursday: Exploratory Research

- Visitors analyse and discuss what they have learned from interviews, presentations, etc.
- Elaborate research design: developing research questions for fishbowl activity (Gothenburg project group)

1pm – 3pm Fishbowl with writing centre team (Katrin)

- Meetings with key stakeholders (some onsite or follow up following the meeting)

Friday

- Discussion with all research collaborators about findings
- Situating the findings within the national context, interviewing Dr Ingrid Lennartsson-Hokkanen, University of Stockholm
- Planning ahead for two other site visits (Viadrina and Limerick)

Appendix II

ASK unit meeting 17 April 2018, 10:30 – 14:30

Location: A2 136

Presentations from guests:

European University Viadrina 10 min

University of Limerick 10 min

Discussion and questions 10 min

11.10: Presentations from ASK

Development of digitally available resources via the university LMS (GUL och Canvas): Greg, Sarah

Academic language support for students: individual tuition and drop-in: Anki

Cooperative and integrated ASK interventions (utbildningsspecifika samarbeten), an example from Psychology: Jennifer

Academic language support for staff: Jenny, Joel

12.00: Lunch

NB: Change of location for lunch: A1 136

13.00: Continued presentations from ASK

Writing and Reading retreats: Emma Karin, Jenny

The ASK booking system: developmental work and current status: Anne

Development project: the example "Inclusive internationalization": Britt, Ann-Marie

Developing an advisor handbook – "Advisors in Action": Anne, Emma Karin

Swedish for international staff: Swedish Language and Culture: Emma

Competence development for teaching staff: a few examples and cooperation with PIL: Ann-Marie

Kl. 14.00: Questions and summarizing discussion