

## Site visit report

### SHE – Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Education

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This feedback is based on the site visit to SHE – Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Education on 24.-25- November 2021.

The centre and UiO was represented by Kristin M. Heggen (Director SHE), Eivind Engebretsen (excecutive chairman), Bjørn Stensaker (Vice-rector UiO), Erlend T. Aasheim (teacher on elective course), Mathilde Røed Jørgensen, Ritika Sharma, and Siri Hundstad Quamme (students).

The feedback was written by Tina Bering Keiding on behalf of Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and skills (HK-dir). The goal of the site visit was to:

- Provide advice to the centre about further development and priorities.
- Provide insight and reflections on centre development in the context of the centre plan and, where applicable, the feedback from the mid-term evaluation.

The discussions of the site visit were structured around the questions:

- How do the SDGs challenge our understanding of health and health decisions?
- How can we prepare future health professionals to act in accordance with the sustainability goals and to make health decisions that are sustainable in a social, economic, and ecological perspective?
- How can we translate the 17 SDGs and sub-objectives into operational pedagogical principles for health education and into content that is relevant in the education of health science students?

## **How has the Centre worked to realize its vision, and how will the priorities help the centre reach its aims?**

Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Education (SHE) is hosted by the Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo. The aim of the centre is to develop, implement and disseminate innovative education strategies providing students and healthcare workers with knowledge and skills needed to incorporate sustainability values and principles into comprehensive medical decisions.

The centre opened in June 2020, in the midst of the first Covid 19 lock down. Despite difficult conditions and the need to adjust plans, the centre has reached some significant results during the first one and a half year:

### **A management structure based on a**

- A Centre Management Board, which beside the director Professor Kristin Heggen, the executive chairman Professor Eivind Engebretsen and the administrative coordinator, Trine Kleven, includes members from the three departments and the rectorate. The composition of the management board has the potential to ensure close links between the centre, the executive strategies of the university and the core activities of the departments. However, it seems that the link between the centre activities and the academic programs at the departments is quite weak. The board should be encouraged to clarify the links between centre activities and the academic programs.
- An International Advisory Board chaired by the former rector of UiO, Ole Petter Ottersen. The board also includes Professor Trisha Greenhalgh, Oxford University, Helen Clark, former prime minister of New Zealand and Professor Jonathan Grant, King's college. The advisory board can be an important contribution to the international obligations and ambitions of the centre.

### **Student-involvement has high priority in SHE.**

- During the first period, the collaboration with the students has been formalised by establishing a student management - a group of four students, who will lead WP4, Digital Solution Development. The group represent students at the faculty and have their background in different educational programs (nutrition, medicine, health economics and management). Delegating the management of WP4 to the students has

the potential to benefit from the students' engagement in the SDG-agenda and to transform the vision of "students as change agents" into concrete and transformative actions.

- During the Covid 19 lock down, international students were facing a hard time both socially and economically. SHE decided to combine student engagement and a wish to support international students by offering a number of scholarships, engaging the students in storytelling, ideas and concerns of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the essays form the basis of the podcasts "Folkefeber" and "Pediatri smertepodden". In a short-term perspective, the initiative contributes to the dissemination and public awareness of the activities of the centre. Whether the initiative has more permanent value remains to be seen.

### **Research based education**

A strong, but sometimes a bit implicit or overlooked, value of the educational activities in SHE is to raise the students' awareness about how concepts related to the SDG's gain form and might serve many and sometimes conflicting agendas as they find their way from the political to the professional and practical levels of the healthcare system. Such agendas and transformations can be difficult to identify and substantiate, but new digital methods open new opportunities to reveal underlying structures in SDG-related communication. This is convincingly described in one of the centre's research papers.

During the first period, an intensive work has been done to adopt and adapt the Genealogies of Knowledge research network (GoK) software interface, where students get the opportunity to explore how SDG-terms are used and linked to different discourses. The next step will be to develop so-called "datatons", where the students in collaboration identify and explore inherent norms and dilemmas in discourses on sustainability in the healthcare system. Mirroring the initiative in experiences from similar initiatives in other disciplines, the centre's work with the medical corpus has a generic and formative profile that could be useful for other study programs and professions.

In addition to these efforts, the centre has worked on developing the elective course *MED3066 Klimaendringer og helse: Din innsats teller*.

## **What are the strengths that the centre draws on in achieving its aims and vision?**

The centre has several strengths that might serve as strong drivers in the accomplishment of its aims:

- A management board with direct link to the rectorate and the three healthcare departments
- An international advisory board which might be an important partner for international attention and collaboration of research and education
- A dedicated group of students representing different programs
- A well-established research group (KNOWIT)
- International collaborations on both research and education. An important element is the collaboration around the open access resource Genealogies of Knowledge<sup>1</sup> providing a digital corpus that can be used for exploring sustainability discourses in relation to healthcare

## **What challenges does the centre face in realizing its aims?**

The visit also revealed some challenges for the centre in its current form. Some of the challenges are not simple problems that can be solved, but rather conditions that the centre must deal with on an almost daily basis

### ***Broad involvement***

A reoccurring topic – raised from both management team and students – is an apparently modest interest and engagement from both academic staff and students in SHE's agenda and activities. As the site visit did not include sessions with representatives from the department, it is not possible to validate and gain further insight in this experience. The introduction of the elective course *MED3066 Klimaendringer og helse: Din innsats teller* could have been a window for such discussions but was hindered by a technological breakdown.

One reason for the modest involvement might be the uncertainty of the concept "sustainable healthcare education" and what it might mean to the topics and competences acquired in the programs.

Almost all academic programs experience an external pressure for integrating what the programs might see as "additional topics" (e.g. sustainability,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.med.uio.no/she/english/research/groups/genealogies-of-knowledge.html>

employability, digital competences and generic competences, expressed in for instance 21<sup>st</sup> century skill). If sustainability is understood as a new generic topic or perspective that must be taught or included in almost every module, i.e, sustainability as a driver for curriculum transformation, the academic staff might rightfully be concerned about both how to teach this topic and the consequences for in many cases an already overloaded curriculum. If sustainability rather is understood as an elective topic, i.e. as an academic aim/topic, that some students might choose, the experience of modest engagement might be a simple side effect of the "division of labor" well-known – although not necessarily fruitful – from other electives in an academic program.

The need to create a broad understanding of the aim and relevance of the centre seems urgent. Possible initiatives could be:

- 1) A go-home seminar arranged by the students: Why is sustainability also something that healthcare education must deal with – and what does it mean?
- 2) A small reference group with academic staff that can give academic staff "a voice" in the center. This might create an opportunity to clarify if/how sustainability competence can be integrated as a perspective in the current curriculum and if/when the sustainability agenda requires new subjects and how these subjects should be integrated in the curriculum, as mandatory elements and/or electives or offered as extra-curricular courses.

Regarding students' engagement a development from "talking about" to "working with" activities might be an important driver. The "datatons" might be one important initiative here. Another approach to support students' involvement might be a formal recognition of involvement based on micro-credentials.

The challenge regarding broad involvement also raises the question about how the centre gains the most impact of its efforts. A strong focus on international collaboration around electives and extra-curricular initiatives might be a very efficient approach. The current international network and the fact that UiO is part of the European university alliance Circle-U offers a strong platform for realizing international ambitions.

A possible negative backwash of this approach is that the collaboration between the centre and the HE-departments are neglected. This might be handled through partnerships, where academic staff from the departments are involved in specific and strategic element of the international activities.

### ***Balancing academic and activist agendas***

The site visit revealed two agendas that must be dealt with and continuously negotiated:

- The academic and analytical agenda striving to enable students to make professional decisions in complex situations where different – and sometimes conflicting – considerations must be taken into account. An important aspect of this agenda is to teach students to reflect critically on how concepts, e.g. sustainability, carries different and potentially conflicting meanings in different domains and discourses.
- The activist and normative agenda insisting that sustainability is and must be a part of the future healthcare system and hence a part of the healthcare educations. A fundamental task for SHE is to provide suggestions to what this mean and how it can be done, i.e. a didactic track. Another task is to ensure the capacity to reflect critically on the normative agenda.

### ***Master program, honors, or micro-credentials***

In the application the centre has committed to developing a master program in sustainable healthcare. During the visit the question, whether this is the right solution, turned up. The question was not whether a master program is relevant or feasible, but if the impact of the centre would be higher focusing on a portfolio of micro-credentials that can be taken individually or build together to an honor-degree. The micro-credentials also have the potential to open for life-long learning activities for professionals in the healthcare system on what the sustainability agenda means to the healthcare profession.

### ***The work-packages***

The annual report describes 8 work-packages that form the basis for the deliveries of the centre. Each work-package has a WP-leader. However, the link between the work-packages is somewhat unclear. There seems to be quite many and strong interdependencies between the work-packages. For instance, it is unclear how WP3: Educational Material Development in ESD and WP4: Digital Solution Development in ESD meaningfully can be seen as two work-packages and if that's the case: how mutual interdependencies are identified and handled.

This raises the question whether the deliveries and activities should be reduced to a few but bigger work-packages including the current work-packages as sub-deliveries. Furthermore, the conclusion on the question on how the centre gain most impact might generate a need for an in-depth reflection and adjustment of the work packages.

## **Summary and advice going forward.**

During the first year the centre has focused on

- Creating a clear management structure
- Formalized and binding student involvement
- Educational activities: development of an existing elective and designing the so-call “datatons” where students are invited to explore how sustainability emerges in various discourses

The centre faces some genuine and yet unsolved challenges in relation to broader involvement of academic staff and students.

Regarding the modest involvement of academic staff, this might be a consequence of an organizational structure based on the management level. A fundamental task for SHE is to provide suggestions to what this mean and how it can be done, i.e. a didactic track. Another task is to ensure the capacity to reflect critically on the normative agenda. Possible initiatives to bridge the gap and start reciprocal conversation could be a go-home session arranged by the students and a reference group with academic staff.

At student level, the sustainability agenda is only one among many other agendas competing for the students often limited resources. A driver for enhanced and binding student involvement could be the development of a portfolio of micro-credentials.

During the visit the question arise, whether the impact of the centre would be higher focusing on a portfolio of micro-credentials rather than striving for a full master program. Besides gradually building a platform for integrating sustainability as an integrated perspective in health-care education, the micro-credentials have the potential to open up for life-long learning activities for professionals in the healthcare system.