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Minutes of the meeting in Employer Panel Meeting part 2 (SSD) on June 6, 2023

Participants: Amalia De Götzen, Runa Sabroe, Nis Ovesen

Other participants: Anne Christoffersen (minute taker)

Item 5. Discussion about the Curriculum revision

Nis Ovesen (NO) introduced to the meeting and the agenda and introduced the meeting participants.

Runa Sabroe (RS) asked about a brief introduction of the Service System Design programme – such as numbers of admission and unemployment, including where the graduates end up in jobs.

Amalia De Götzen (ADG) briefly introduced the Service System Design program:

Student intake for admission September 2023, 167 applications have been received for 30 places. The programme has previously been limited to 40 places with a further downgrading to 30 by the department itself.

Unemployment rate: There are unemployment challenges among the programme's graduates. This is seen, among other things, due to corona.

NO supplemented Amalia with data on unemployment. There is high unemployment rate among the programme's graduates – 15% (2020, 7th quarter). There may be a language barrier in relation to the fact that there have been many foreign students on the programme, and they may find it difficult to enter the Danish job market.

RS inquired whether this is also due to the political stance on educating fewer foreign students.

NO believed that this attitude has changed again, but since there is no natural bachelor intake for SSD, it is more challenging to get the right applicants in and into jobs afterwards.

RS further asked if compared to KADK and Kolding Design School the same challenges are seen. ADG was able to confirm that it is and was just discussed at the initial meeting with the full panel. Design programmes are particularly challenged on unemployment. ADG added that more students from Kolding Design School take SSD as an extension to their bachelor. There is a comparable education at ITU, but they have more IT etc. – their unemployment is better; however, it says that they close specialization due to lack of teachers.

It was also discussed whether there was a risk that SSD could be forced to become a 1-year education rather than a two-year one.

NO's immediate assessment was that SSD is a more technical education, and 1-year master's programs will be focused on other programmes first. But educations with design in the title is a challenge.

ADG introduced to the curriculum with effect September 2023 and overview of the revision (the presentation is attached):

1. semester

It has been discussed along the years at the employer panel meetings and with students that a course was missing on visualizing and prototyping for service designers and that programming is not a competence employers look for in a designer. Therefore, the course "Programming for Services" (5 ECTS) has been replaced by the course "Visualizing and Prototyping for Service Design" (5 ECTS). The other two courses in the 1. semester is kept as they are.

2. semester

The course "Technological and Organizational Trends in SD" (5 ECTS) will mainly just change name to "Perspectives in Service Design" (5 ECTS). The course will also have a couple of lectures in design in the public administration, but will keep a focus on technology trends and ethics etc.

The course "Design Futures" (5 ECTS) is a new course and will replace the course "Services Representation and Prototyping" (5 ECTS). The prototyping element in the "old" course is now moved to the first semester's course and the representation and speculative design element (video sketching workshop) is kept in the new course. The new elements in the new course "Design Futures" is foresight and experiential futures, which is a hot topic among companies.

3. semester

There are no changes at this semester. It's the internship semester, where students have different options. They can go work in a company, go abroad for the semester, or do internship in the SSD lab.

4. semester

There are no changes at this semester. The students are doing their Master Thesis at this semester.

Several Career Development Workshops have also been implemented on the programme:

- SSD7: Build your LinkedIn profile workshop (with companies).
- SSD8: Career development sprint at the beginning of the semester.
- SSD9: Write an effective resume workshop.
- SSD10: Strategies to look for a job workshop.

RS asked about the "Career development sprint" and how many companies will show up to an event like that. ADG explained that only 3-4 guests (from industry/former students) are invited to give input on how to build a portfolio. The students are not presenting it to the companies.

The discussion turned to internship, and how many students made use of that opportunity. ADG could state that most students took internships but added that it is a challenge that the internship is not paid. The students must work beside the study and therefore, more and more stay at the university instead of doing internship as they need to keep their side job. NO added that it comes into play that international students must work to get SU.



RS gave the important input that internships are the way into the labor market. The students in internships often get student employment in the company while they complete their thesis, and they will often be looked at in relation to future employments. As an employer, you look at whether the applicant has some kind of experience even before they have completed their studies. And here internship gives a kind of experience. It is also relatively easy to get in and get a place as an intern, mentioned RS, as they do not get many applicants for internships for one reason or another. Probably also because it is not remunerated.

Another recommendation from RS was to keep alumni and companies close. CBS is very good at this, among others, because they have a set up with an advisory board that works differently than at AAU. The advisory board collaborates on cases, but the students are also given the opportunity to introduce themselves to the advisory board. It is much closer to the industry and at a very high level.

RS commented on the adjustments in the curriculum and considered them to be good adjustments, which are based on the discussion the employer panel has had in recent years.

RS emphasized, among other things, UX, visualizing and prototyping as being good skills which can be brought into play in industry.

RS also commented that foresight is also important. Foresight is also used in Wonderful Copenhagen. However, RS would not put a recent graduate to do foresight, as you will not be able to do it as a completely new graduate. This is often also done in collaboration with other functions, including highly qualified finance employees and other highly qualified people who are trained and experienced in foresight.

NO acknowledged the good points that RS gave and asked about her thoughts on removing the programming course. And in general, on hiring students which are more generalist than specialists, where programming is more of a specialist skill.

RS informed that they have had a programmer from ITU – e.g., for UX and for building a site to show analysis to collaborators, so that person was not used for hardcore programming.

RS expressed that it is generally difficult as an employer to understand exactly what the students can do after graduation, it is the case with SSD, but also other new educations. For recruitment purposes, we will look for someone with hardcore skills that you can understand and with experience, such as relevant student jobs and interns. As a recent graduate, you will, at most workplaces, not have the opportunity to work with strategy and high-end advisory. There, it's more a matter of getting something done and playing into what you can help the company with. So, you must have acquired specific competencies that you can offer for e.g., a job interview.

Item 6. Student collaboration with industry

NO brought the discussion on to point 6, where the internship discussion was taken up again in relation to, among other things, whether it could also be relevant to have internships in the spring semester and exchange progression for internship and thesis writing.



RS could state that they normally have three interns in the autumn. They do not receive any applicants in the spring, probably also because the universities have the same annual cycle. When interns are there at the same time, they network and often end up writing a thesis in collaboration. It also requires something from the company to have interns – so it is good that it is centered in the autumn.

Regarding progression, an internship before thesis writing is best, RS assessed. Then they can use the internship period to think about what they want to write about. You will not see the dilemmas and possible problems that they see in a company if the thesis writing was earlier.

The meeting participants generally discussed the educational landscape and the many educational programmes/fields of study, where it can be difficult to see what the graduates must/will be able to do after graduation. NO specifically noted regarding Service System Design that there is a very strong research environment behind the education, so an education within this field should be located with this group.

RS also recognized the strong research environment and the good skills that the students acquire in terms of being able to communicate and create an interview guide and understand and analyze the user group, visualize the early stage, and put it back into practice and context.

ADG gave an example of where to go for students if you want different skills (all within an SSD context):

KADK – creativity and artistic

ITU – focus on IT backend service

AAU – user research, understanding the system, being able to visualize it and navigate in it.

NO commented that we should make a clearer narrative about this. And thereby sharpen our profile as KADK and ITU is the main competitors, and they have other profiles.

It must be very clear what you come with, and what you can, RS stressed. And it's not all you can contribute with as a recent graduate, i.e., as a facilitator or project manager, as this also requires knowledge and familiarity with business partners.

NO understands from RS's input that we must clearly show what basic skills are for a service system designer. An RS emphasized the importance of that also to the industry in general, as she is not entirely representative of the industry, as she e.g. has been with the Danish Design Center for many years and knows the area.

The meeting participants also again touched on the international students, who often talk about going back home already while they are writing their thesis. RS noted that the department must find truly international companies to introduce these students to. Even at companies with an international focus, much is done in Danish, especially if they work with Danish authorities. This is also the case for Wonderful Copenhagen, even though they work with international tourism, RS could inform. But she also experienced, that foreign employees quickly became good at Danish, and they also carry out targeted recruitment of foreign employees but only if they specific need to know something about the market, e.g., the Chinese market.

ADG noted that there is a real challenge in recruiting Danish students for the programme. If you are a Danish student – you will likely not choose SSD. There is a larger educational landscape in CPH, and the choice is not given AAU here. But if you're an international student you look at all universities - all are in the same boat.

Finally, NO would like to know if RS has experience of working with students in their thesis.



RS stated that they do this sometimes, but since there are many students reaching out, it is limited. And then it will be in a specified program with industry and educational collaboration. It must also be narrowly defined and close to something they would do anyway. And not least, there must be the resources for that as the students must learn something.

RS mentioned:

- Bicycling around the city
- Access to the harbor
- Big crowds in the old part of the city

These are themes that are worked on together with the industry in Wonderful Copenhagen.

Item 7. Completion and evaluation in subgroup

NO thanked for a good meeting and a fruitful dialogue with good inputs.