

The future of DHT

This is a short note in response to the evaluation report by Robert Winter on Roskilde University's strategic research initiative (SRI), Designing Human Technologies (DHT), addressing the request from the rector's office to: "Briefly reflect upon his observations in terms of how you see the future of your strategic research initiative: What actions (at the level of your SRI, at the level of department and at the RUC-level) are needed to maintain the strength and momentum of the SRI? (up to 1 page)."

The evaluation report by Professor Robert Winter has been discussed by DHT's reference group, and our appraisal is that it aligns well with our views of DHT. The report recognizes that "50% of the DHT researchers joined the new 'People and Technology' department" (DPT), and it further recommends that we analyze "[h]ow DHT should adapt its positioning in order to even better match the 'People and Technology' positioning" (p. 5).

Roskilde University's new departmental structure strengthens the overall teaching responsibility in the four main subject areas, with the DPT being responsible for the bachelor's program in humanities and technology ('HumTek'). However, it is practically impossible to devise a structure that binds the bachelor's program with a particular group of subjects in a way that is professionally consistent with the content of the subjects of these programs. This is reflected in the fact that 50% of the DHT faculty members are *not* within the DPT but reside within the Department of Communication and Arts (including the bachelor's degree subjects in performance design and communication) and the Department of Social Science and Business (including the bachelor's degree subject in business studies). DHT members from these two departments have voiced the concern – and risk – that the ownership of a future DHT initiative resides within the DPT and that, in terms of teaching, they might be marginalized as part of the HumTek programs. This will not be in the interest of Roskilde University nor in the interest of a highly interdisciplinary research effort such as DHT. Most projects within DHT have been staffed with faculty across the DPT and the departments of Communication and Arts and Social Science and Business; this is the case with all the four ongoing DHT projects highlighted in the Robert Winters report.

We see the following future possibilities for DHT:

1. DHT is completely discontinued. Here, we quote from Robert Winters report: "While the ongoing DHT projects will secure a decentral 'survival' of some DHT ideas, such external project funds cannot be used (formally and in terms of volume) to support internal integration objectives like continuing with the Ph.D. community, continued methodological integration (further books) and funding new DHT projects that complement the portfolio. There are even threads that basic decentral activities like journal publications on DHT core topics cannot be continued if, e.g., travel funds for conference participation are drastically reduced as planned" (p. 6).
2. DHT is closely linked to the DPT. While this might seem appropriate from a teaching responsibility perspective, it is limiting from an interdisciplinary research perspective, as described above. It is also unclear to which extent – if at all – the DPT will be able to support DHT research as a prioritized research area among the other research areas within the DPT.
3. DHT continues as a university strategic research initiative. This would be the most optimal situation from the perspective of DHT faculty members who are now positioned in the departments of Communication and Arts and Social Science and Business.

We acknowledge that Roskilde University is currently in a very difficult financial situation. *We thus recommend that DHT continues as a university strategic research initiative on a modest scale:*

- We request an initial modest support to continue with a third book project, as suggested in the DHT self-evaluation report. This book project is planned specifically to support Robert Winters request to analyze "[h]ow an evolution of HumTek teaching and in particular an evolution of teaching at the Master level could lead to a better fit of teaching and research structures" (p. 6). The project will examine how we teach and work with design, participation and involvement in order to contribute to rethinking how we didactically develop our university teaching.
- We also request approval that DHT continues as a university strategic research initiative to be supported with dedicated funding from Roskilde University when the economic situation hopefully improves in the coming years.

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