

Network for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in research-intensive universities (NETL)

Mission

Research universities both carry out ground-breaking research that helps solve local and global issues, and provide high quality education that will help students develop the competencies that enable them to make a substantial contribution to society.

The members of NETL represent research universities with a strong commitment to both research and education, which are equally important for realizing the mission of the participants. Sustaining and enhancing the quality of education requires systematic and evidence informed policies on faculty development and educational development. By sharing experiences and discussing ideas, perspectives and challenges concerning the development and implementation of such policies, the members aim to contribute to sustaining and improving the quality of education at their universities and in higher education in general.

Strategy

The annual network meetings provide an opportunity for senior policy makers representing research-intensive universities with an excellent reputation in both research and education, to meet jointly with the directors of their institutions' academic development units, spend time together in informal conversations, and share ideas, perspectives, and challenges with their colleagues from other research-intensive universities across the world.

As formulated in the foreword to the book which was recently published by the members of the Network¹, "the value in these conversations is that they allow us to step outside our own frames of reference. This, in turn, helps us see that the ways things are done in our own institutions – norms, practices, and values – are often a result of historical accidents or unexamined beliefs. And that means they can be improved upon, so that we may strengthen the enterprise of undergraduate education that we are committed to."

Practical set-up

The network consists of research universities with active centres for teaching and learning. The network is loosely coupled: besides the annual meeting, contacts are non-

¹ Foreword of 'Strengthening teaching and learning in research universities. Strategies and Initiatives for Institutional Change'. Edited by B Stensaker, GT Bilbow, L Breslow, R van der Vaart (2017). Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.

structured and depend on the individual contacts between universities or their representatives.

New universities are invited to join the network if all current members (that is, those present at the annual meeting) agree. The meetings are the most visible activity of the network:

- Universities take turns in hosting a yearly two-day meeting, and act as coordinator of the Network for that year.
- Universities participate with two representatives: a senior policy maker (typically the Vice-Chancellor, Vice-Rector, or Dean) and an expert in teaching and learning (typically the director of the Teaching and Learning centre or unit).
- Each university pays for the travel and housing expenses for its representatives. The host university assumes the other meeting costs.
- Topics for the annual meeting may vary widely, as they depend on interests of participants and current developments, challenges and opportunities in the field. For instance, they may include:
 - o strategic positioning of the centers for advancement for teaching and learning;
 - o quality assurance mechanisms;
 - o the relationship between organisational infrastructure, and norms and practices related to teaching and learning;
 - o faculty training and development;
 - o teaching careers;
 - o how to help students to develop as learners;

History

(Source: Foreword of 'Strengthening teaching and learning in research universities. Strategies and Initiatives for Institutional Change. Edit. B Stensaker, GT Bilbow, L Breslow, R van der Vaart)

The formation of the network was initiated by Professor Graham Gibbs, an international leader in the movement to improve teaching and learning at the university level. Gibbs, renowned for his publications on the topics of student learning, training of university teachers, and development of teaching and learning strategies at the institutional level, was the director of what currently is the Oxford Learning Institute at Oxford University, when he conceived of NETL in 2004, resulting in the organising of the first meeting in 2005. The network started with universities from the UK, continental Europe, North America, and Australia. In the ensuing years, the network has expanded to include universities from Asia, and meetings have been held on members' campuses on four continents.

List of participating universities, dd June 2017

(between brackets year(s) the institute acted as coordinator and organised the annual meeting)

University of Oxford, United Kingdom (2005, 2007)
Utrecht University, the Netherlands (2006, 2017)
University of Helsinki, Finland (2008, 2018)
MIT, Cambridge, MA, USA (2009)
University of Sydney, Australia (2010)
University of Oslo, Norway (2011)
KU Leuven, Belgium (2012)
University of Edinburgh, Scotland (2013)
National University of Singapore, Singapore (2014)
University of Copenhagen, Denmark (together with Lund in 2015)
Lund University, Sweden (together with Copenhagen in 2015)
The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong (2016)
Cape Town University, South Afrika