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Time for SUs to write a new chapter on community on campus?

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WONKHE
SUs



Why?

- We know that for many students, “getting in” is only the start of it
- In England, OfS’ B3 and TEF metrics are a major topic of discussion right now – and ministers are keen especially that students aren’t accepted in only to fall at the three big hurdles of getting to Y2, completing and getting a graduate job
- The continuation metric is important to students – some “drop out” for good reasons but many don’t
- Belonging is crucial – see also Wonkhe and pearson research
- Q21 links to outcomes and mental health





WONKHE

So what if...


If the following video told us more than something about comms, framing and nomenclature, what could those things be?

- What intrigues you?
- What differences strike you?
- What do you want to know more about?

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It's mostly nervousness, I would say.

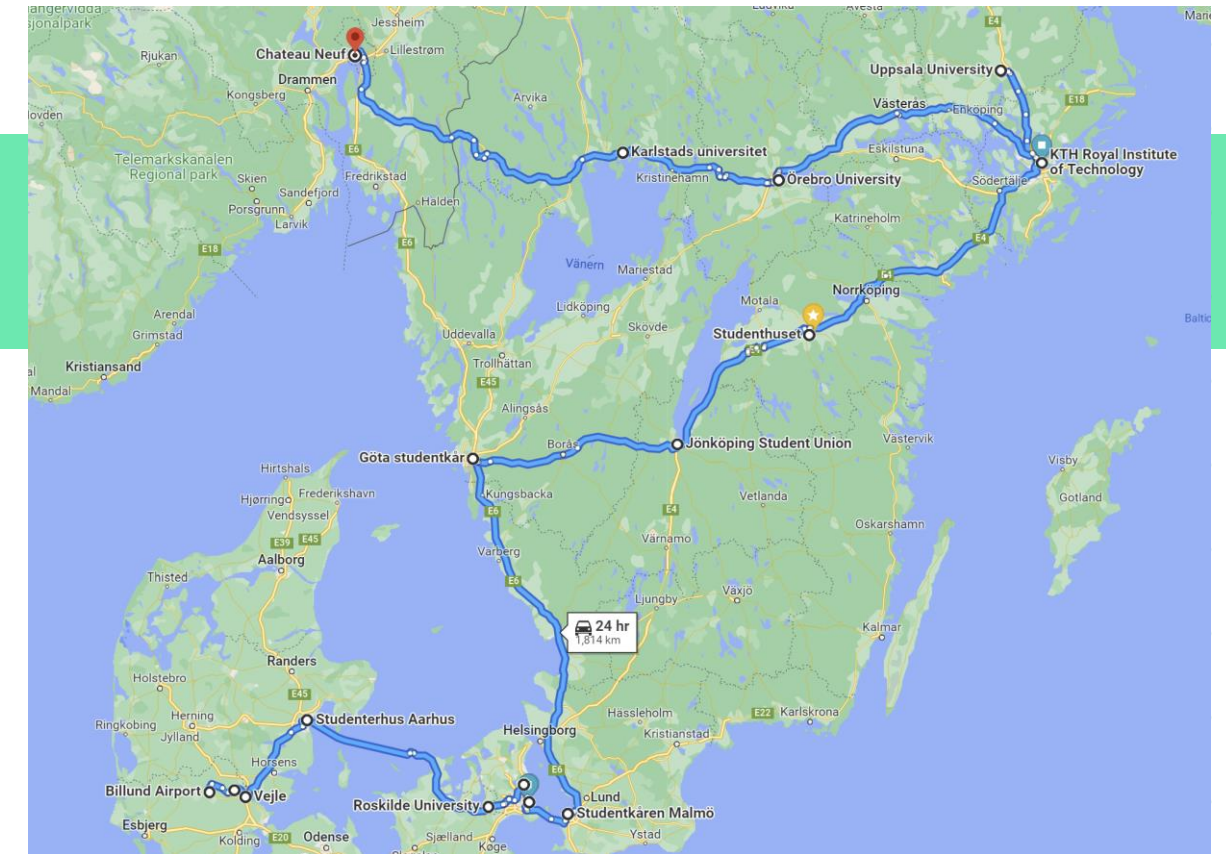
So what if...

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Scandi

- Each year Wonkhe SUs organises a study tour to Europe
- It's partly about identifying innovative practice that we can bring back to UK HE
- For obvious reasons, this year a lot of us were keen to identify the way in which Scandinavian HE builds belonging in students
- We've identified five ways in which they do this
- Caveat – student finance and wider assumptions about community!



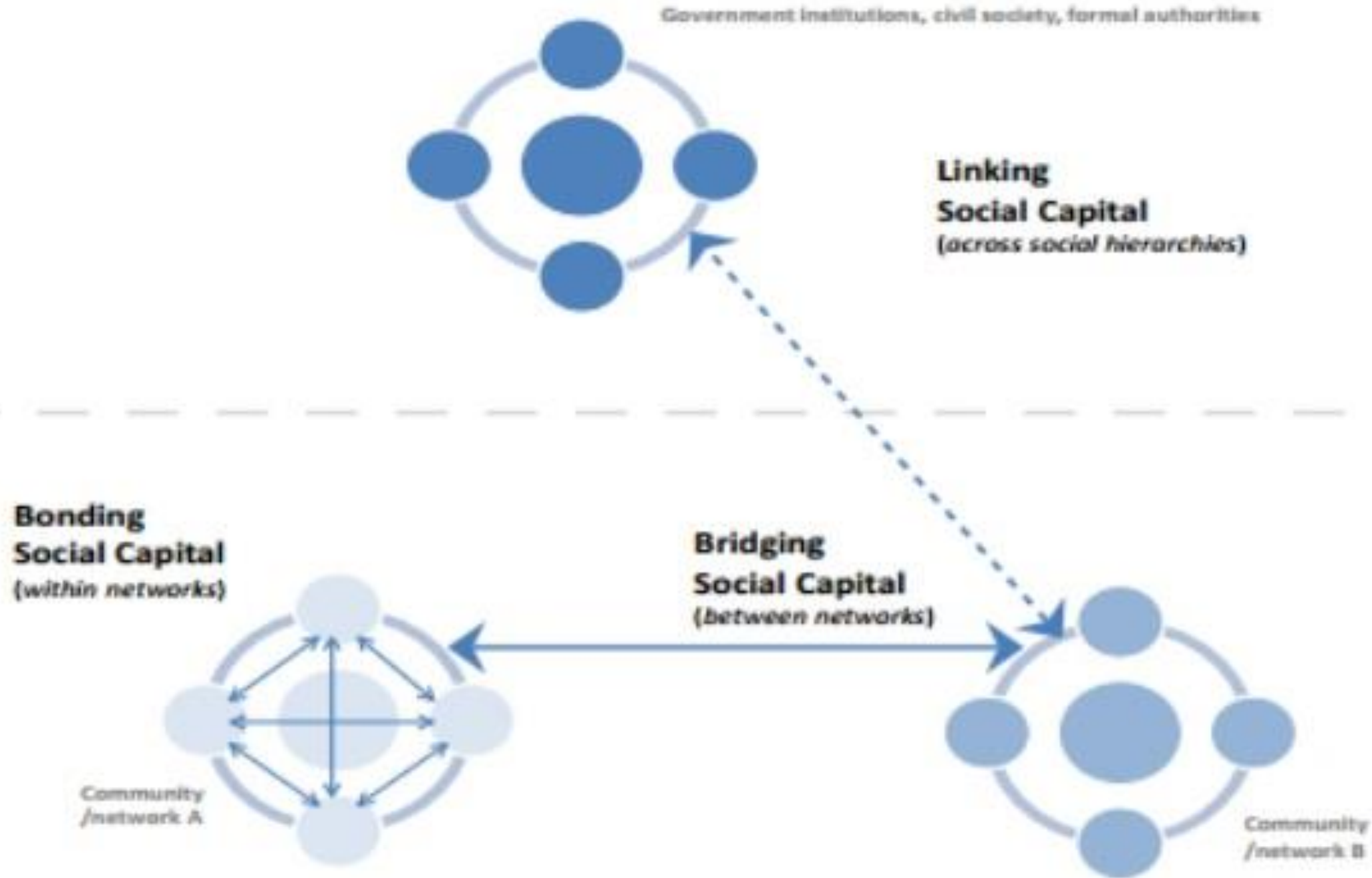


Characteristics

Hobbies (Class)

Student living

Subject and
academic



*Aldrich 2012; Wilson 2012; Magis 2010; Elliott et al. 2010

Figure Source: Reproduced with permission from Aldrich (2012, p. 34) in Frankenberger, T., Mueller M., Spangler T., and Alexander S. October 2013. Community Resilience: Conceptual Framework and Measurement Feed the Future Learning Agenda. Rockville, MD: Westat.

And what
about
academic
capital?

WONKHE

Five belonging practices

- They build **communities** out of courses and subjects
- They build **bridging** social capital early on
- They build **linking** social capital through activities
- They build **academic confidence** through student-led activity
- They build **employment** capital through student-led activity



1. Communities

- We tend to assume that students can only benefit from and participate from “community” if they are an on-campus, away from home student
- We also tend towards addressing student needs through individualised services, approaches and initiatives
- But both loneliness and belonging research suggests that feeling part of a community is beneficial re outcomes regardless of student characteristics
- Students more likely to find friends on their course – so it hits harder if they don't



Community

- Across the three countries, almost all students belong to a “chapter”, “division” or “section” – like a mini students’ union shaped around their subject area
- These are coherent academic and social communities – which run a programme of activity from welcome to graduation
- Think “academic society” + “course reps in that subject” + “student led-careers work for those students”
- Students run these communities and consider how they can ensure everyone feels connected



Three things help

- Spaces are socially sticky as well as study sticky – they are often cosy and look designed for people to spend time together in them
- Eating and drinking is a huge aspect – there were countless student organised breakfasts, coffee mornings, community meals – social activity that is course based and “back to basics”
- Most SUs and their universities have volunteering strategies that are focussed as much on students serving each other as they are on the community



Some examples

- At Copenhagen Business School, students earn “Student Citizenship points” for active participation in a student organisation that serves others.
- At KTH in Stockholm, a chapter for every subject area runs its own welcome period with scavenger hunts, meet and greets and speed networking for new students
- At Malmo the SU runs a roadshow of student breakfasts where students meet each other and discuss how their programme is going



Chapterisation



Arkitektursektionen (A)

Arkitektursektionen (A), is created by architectural students at KTH. Th...



Bergssektionen (B)

Bergssektionen (B), was founded in 1819 in Falun. In 1866, the education...



Datassektionen (D)

Datassektionen, or the Computer Science Chapter is a non-profit



Doktorandsektionen (Dr)

Doctoral students' network The PhD Chapter is a network of engaged PhD s...



Elektrosektionen (E)

Konglig Elektrosektionen (or The Electrical Engineering Chapter) is a un...



Flygsektionen (T)

Kongliga Flygsektionen, The Flight Chapter, is a nonprofit organization ...



Fria sektionen (Fria)

All students who do not belong to a specific program.



Fysiksektionen (F)

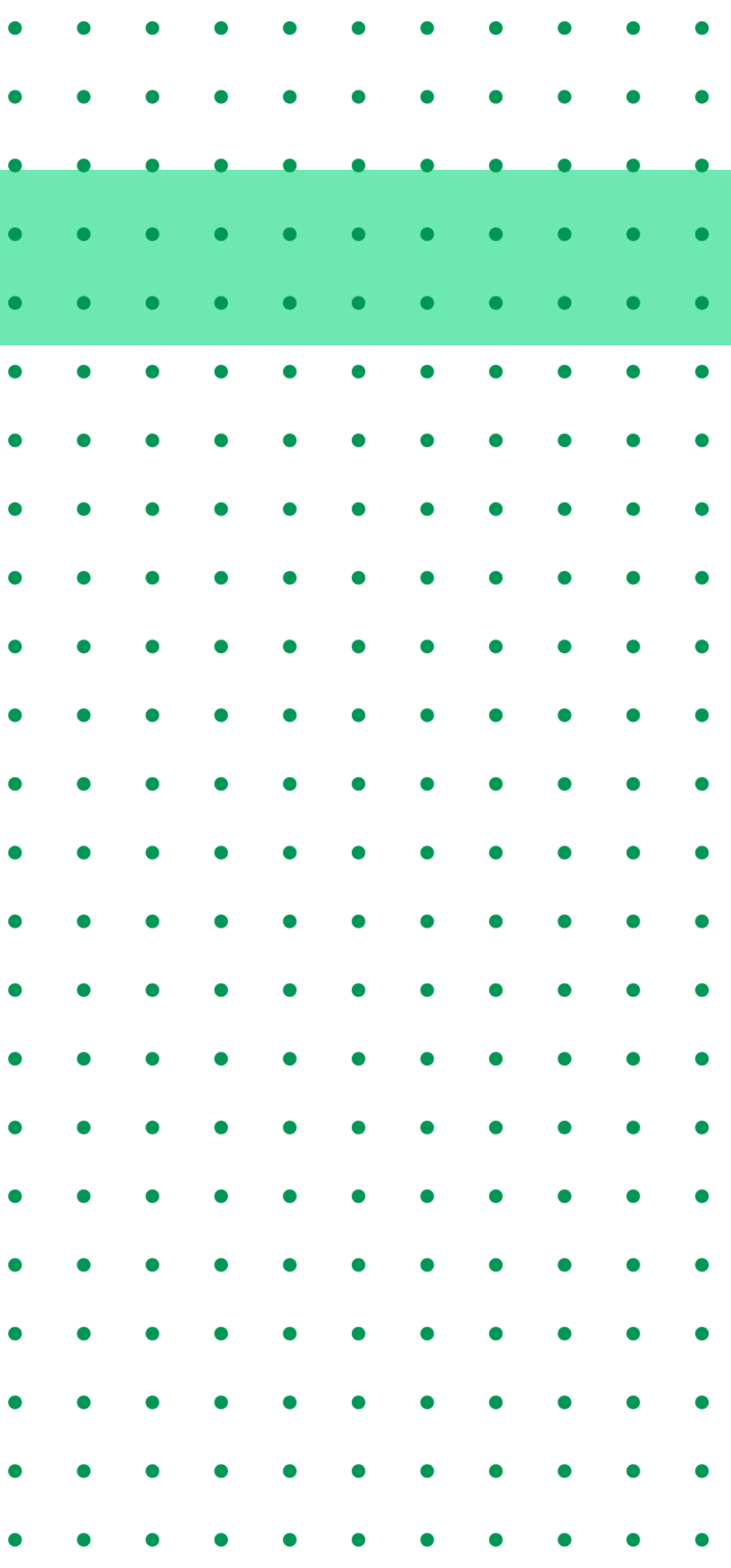

The Physics Chapter (F) is part of the THS and brings together all stude...



Chapter time

- Each chapter organises a scheme where a student will look after a group of new students and show them around the campus, the city and the diversity of the student body.
- They each have a welcome programme of informal activity that segues neatly with the main SU events.
- Every chapter has their own chapter hall, where students study together, meet friends or heat up food during their lunch break.
- Each chapter hosts a weekly “pub” during the week where the emphasis is on social networking rather than getting off their face.

- 
- 
- Some organise tournaments, or careers events.
 - Some get involved in curriculum development projects and international exchange. Some go big on causing international students to integrate with home students.
 - All of them organise the student representation in their academic area – flexing the structures and meetings and processes around the students they have.

- 
- 
- The Architecture chapter at KTH goes big on sustainability work – a big issue in that academic field.
 - The chapter for students enrolled in the Vehicle Engineering program at KTH organises careers networking evenings.
 - Some of the chapters put on student led study skills sessions for others.
 - Some put on amazing weeks of subject based learning for other students – attracting incredible guest speakers who are more likely to come for free is it's students asking.
 - Some run their own harassment initiatives, or take the lead on tackling problem conduct that has cropped up in their chapter.
 - Many run their own campaigns – linking with other chapters on student hardship, hidden course costs or student safety

- Most command significant support from faculty, school or department based staff – many of whom have budget to spare and alumni keen to donate time, expertise and cash.
- All have high levels of student involvement in their democracy.
- And most SUs support a chapter for PhD students too – as well as supplying student representation from PhD students into the university and promoting the rights of PhD students, at KTH next week the PhD chapter will welcome Resolution Games, a world leading video games firm, to run an afternoon of interesting presentations and discussions, some VR gaming, and an after-work mingle with Resolution employees.

2. Bridging social capital

- If “bonding” social capital is developed by spending time with people just like you, “bridging” social capital is developed by spending time with people not like you
- Bridging one of the things HE is supposed to deliver for students but the bigger and more stratified HE gets (both between and within universities) the harder it is to develop
- We’ve all seen formal and informal groups form of students who share characteristics – and good work in recent years has focussed on helping students find those like them



2. Bridging social capital

- Everywhere we went we saw a focus on bridging social capital from day one
- In Aarhus one project involves pairing new commuter students with “away from home” students to explore the city together – putting the commuters in charge!
- In Copenhagen the “studenterhuset” runs a programme that groups international students with home students to exchange perspectives
- In Linköping student volunteers look after groups of 15 new students that are deliberately diverse – the volunteers deliver social norming messages and host discussions about the richness of each background



3. Linking social capital

- This is the aspect of social capital about involvement in the structures that govern your experience in the university and the community
- In the UK we tend to deliver this at election time, through sporadic projects or for a select group of representatives
- Across Scandinavia we saw a number of approaches to making sure that all students are immersed early on
- The “Fadders” at Jonkoping are careful to explain how the university and city works to new students and how they can actively influence their education and study environment



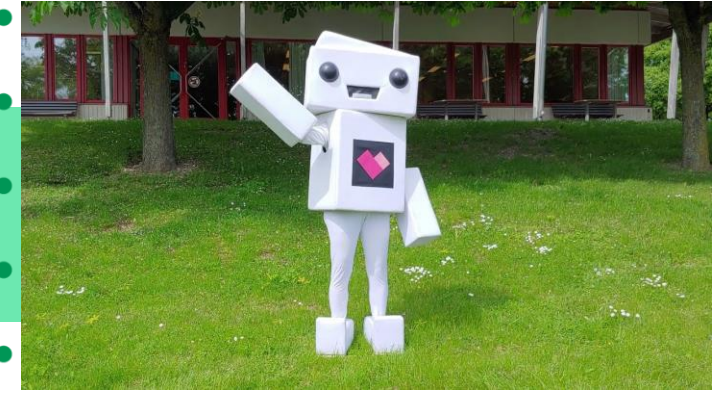
4. Academic confidence

- Once belonging is achieved, the student led chapters, divisions and sections are often instrumental in building academic confidence
- Everywhere we went we saw student-led (not just student *delivered*) projects focussed on study skills and immersion in the subject
- In Norway student associations were supported to stage week long academic conferences aimed at students outside of the subject
- In Denmark teaching awards were usually reciprocal – with staff awarding students as well as the other way around, and lots of information about how and why they won awards
- In Sweden we saw a number of recent alumni based schemes that help students with their final year
- And we saw countless example of subject associations being supported to stage study skills interventions, reducing imposter syndrome and building confidence



5. Employment

- Finally, we saw lots of examples of student led careers and business facing activity, often highly creative
- For example at Aarhus new international PhD students are paired with couples employed by local and regional businesses as people to spend time with
- “Case competitions” where students take part in designing solutions for businesses exist across the three countries
- Even fairs and networking events were student led, with high participation as a result (students go to things organised by other students)



Why are you like this?

- No tradition of mutuals
- Obsession with positions
- Obsession with electing everything
- Two separate staff support professions (+careers)
- Mistaken belief that students need everything done for them and to them (charities rather than mutuals)

Five big belonging questions

- Do we, with our SU, do all we can to help students build diverse and supportive communities out of our academic subjects?
- What activity deliberately helps students to spend time and build networks with those not like them?
- Do we help all students to interact with the structures that can influence their experience?
- Do we cause students to create, design and run initiatives that build each others' confidence?
- How much of our careers and employment activity is about students helping each other?



Next week

- Next week, with that Domino's pizza code and that bit of budget you have left, you could take one academic area where you know you have issues.
- Get as many course reps as you can find in that room.
- Add in the fledgling academic societies that are knocking about that area.
- Top up with the enthusiastic student staff that you know from there, and see if any friendly academics or professional services staff will join in.

Next week

- Tell them they've got a few hours to design their own automatic membership mini SU for that academic area. No rules. No pre-existing structures.
- What would welcome look like? How would they do student representation? How would they address careers and employability? Are there campaigns they'd go for, or events they would stage, or lectures they'd put on?
- What would they do about the current access and participation stats? How would they involve students in curriculum change? What positions would they need?
- And how could a central support service like you get out of the way and into a role that gave them power?
- And then try to do all you can to pilot that approach over the next year.

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