

Preparing Students and Lecturers for English Medium Instruction at the University of Copenhagen

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Abstract

In 2009, as part of the move towards increased internationalisation, the Department of Human Nutrition (IHE) at the Faculty of Natural and Life Sciences at the University of Copenhagen changed the language of instruction on its MSc programmes in Human Nutrition, Clinical Nutrition and Gastronomy & Health from Danish to English. This proved in many cases to be a struggle for students and teaching staff alike, apparently leading to considerable increases in exam failure rates and a decline in the number of students applying for the MSc programme.

These results prompted the IHE to consider how to tackle the language problems of their students. They decided to enlist the services of the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use (CIP) at the University of Copenhagen to pilot a workshop for students on how to successfully participate in English Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. In 2010, the workshop took place for the first time, and aimed to equip students with tools and strategies to help them meet the challenges of EMI. Consequently, the exam results seemed to improve almost to their pre-EMI levels and the number of students applying increased.

Encouraged by these results and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students, the IHE decided to run the student workshop again in 2011, this time funded by the project "Education at its Best" (DGU), an initiative taken by the University of Copenhagen which aims to promote new and creative ideas to supplement the educational foundation at the University and thereby seeks to boost the quality of its academic programmes even further. Besides the student workshop, an additional workshop day for teachers was added aimed at giving teachers similar tools and strategies to enable them to both help students and themselves cope more easily with the challenges of teaching through the medium of English.

Out of 66 DGU projects that were successfully run in 2011, ten particularly effective projects were selected to further develop and disseminate their ideas at KU, and together received a grant of all in all DKK 1.5 million. "Preparing LIFE students and lecturers for EMI at the University of Copenhagen" was one of them. Because of the apparent success and efficacy of the EMI workshops, the ambition for the future is not only to continue running this workshop, but also to "spread the word" to encourage other departments and faculties to adopt similar initiatives to help prepare their students and staff for academic learning through the medium of English.