



Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur

European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education

Europäischer Verband der Hochschulsprachenzentren

## **Position Statement on Language Policy in Higher Education in Europe**

In 2009, CercleS established a number of Focus Groups, including one on Language Policy which met for the third time in Luminy, Marseille, France from 19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> May 2011. The following position statement is based on analysis and discussions which took place during the three meetings. It is presented in the form of guidelines for Institutions in Higher Education.

### **0. *Institutions in Higher Education should have a Language Policy***

Why? Language practices within an institution should be determined exclusively by the stakeholders in that institution and provide continuity over time in a constantly evolving context.

How? By following these guidelines.

### **1. *A Language Policy of an Institution in Higher Education should address issues for native and foreign languages***

Why? Fostering plurilingualism is a fundamental element of European Higher Education policy.

How? By:

- taking into account local specificities and the language needs of all parties.
- actively promoting plurilingualism and institutional multilingualism.
- guaranteeing access to language learning facilities based in Language Centres.
- encouraging native speakers of other languages to use their own mother tongue.
- enhancing linguistic and cultural diversity and awareness.
- facilitating student and staff mobility.
- fostering lifelong language learning.

*The exclusive use of English as a Lingua Franca threatens the quality of cultural and academic exchange.*

**2. A Language Policy of an Institution in Higher Education should address issues at all levels of the organisation (university, faculty, programmes, courses etc.) and be co-owned by all stakeholders and the whole university community (governing bodies, teaching, research, administrative staff and students)**

Why? The success of any policy depends on the commitment of all parties concerned.

The practical implementation can only be as strong as its weakest link.

How? Through debate and approval by the governing bodies after wide-ranging consultation of all stakeholders prior to implementation.

By widespread publication and accessibility (institutional website, official documentation, marketing strategy).

*It is important that stakeholders differentiate clearly between needs and wants.*

**3. A Language Policy of an Institution in Higher Education should be coherent with external (European, national, regional and local) and internal strategic goals**

Why? Its efficiency depends on its coherence and its capacity to address the wide range of settings in which Higher Education Institutions play an important role.

How? Through widespread permanent consultation.

*Language Policy should never become a political battle-field.*

**4. A Language Policy of an Institution in Higher Education should define responsibilities within the organisation**

Why? Language Policy must be shared across the board to reflect the commitment of all parties.

How? By taking into account the specific skills of all parties, including Language Centres, in the process of decision making.

*Language Policy should not be delegated to Language Centres only.*

*Parties should not be held responsible beyond their actual expertise and abilities.*

*Cooperation and mutual understanding between Language Centres and International Offices should be encouraged.*

## **5. Language Policies in Institutions of Higher Education should provide guiding principles to address the following issues:**

### **5.1 Language appropriation**

Why? A Language Policy should accommodate changing linguistic circumstances and the social and political climate to foster mobility and employability in accordance with the Bologna Reform.

How? By treating the following questions:

- Which target languages should students acquire, to which level and why?
- What are the entry language level requirements?

By defining support infrastructure and services (e.g. Language Centres, training, coaching, language counselling, etc.) for students and staff.

*A Language Policy should define compulsory levels of language competence for students and lecturers, with finalising exit levels according to the requirements of the job market.*

*A Language Policy should reflect existing and future exchange programmes and agreements, and should include provision of necessary language tuition to incoming foreign students.*

*A Language Policy should define the minimum level of language competence of the host country's language for mobility and international students.*

### **5.2 Language of tuition**

Why? Research has demonstrated that the languages of instruction have an impact on the quality of the learning outcome.

The languages of instruction contribute to the students' cognitive and cultural development.

How? By defining which language(s) of instruction is (are) appropriate in a given programme and its global context.

By defining support infrastructure and services (e.g. Language Centres, training, coaching, language counselling, etc.) for students and teaching staff.

*A Language Policy should guarantee programme coherence and cohesion while respecting the inherent historical characteristics of the subject.*

### **5.3 Research**

Why? Future researchers have to be prepared for multilingual professional situations.

How? By defining which languages are used for which research activities.

By defining support infrastructure and services (e.g. Language Centres, training, coaching, language counselling, etc.) for students and research staff.

*A Language Policy should reflect existing and future research cooperation agreements and networks.*

*Linguistic skills should be taken into account in recruitment procedures and promotion of researchers.*

#### **5.4 Administration**

Why? The growing degree of internationalisation creates a need for plurilingual competence of administrative staff.

How? By defining support infrastructure and services (e.g. Language Centres, training, coaching, language counselling, etc.) for administrative staff.

*Linguistic skills should be taken into account in recruitment procedures and promotion of administrative staff.*

#### **5.5 (Internal and External) Communication**

Why? Corporate identity is also determined by language use within the Institution.

Foreign students and staff have a right to accessible information.

How? By identifying the need for services such as translation, proof-reading and editing, and defining appropriate measures.

*High level language services, including but not limited to Language Centres, are a means to guaranteeing the quality of the University's national and international image.*

### **6. Language Policy design should be seen as a process.**

Why? Any Language Policy is the result of the context in which it is developed, and this context is subject to change at all times.

A constant review process is necessary to maintain a high level of quality.

How? Through a permanent process of debate and approval by the governing bodies.

*In a constantly changing environment, only a qualitative multi-disciplinary review process can guarantee that a Language Policy will remain appropriate, applicable and acceptable for all parties.*

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