

POSITION PAPER: SUSTAINABLE PROMOTION OF MULTILINGUALISM – LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BREMEN

English translation of German version submitted to the Academic Senate on 10.10.2016

Mission Statement: Multilingualism¹ at the University of Bremen

The University of Bremen's policy on languages offers encouragement and support for all members of the University to acquire communication skills in foreign languages, i.e. multilingualism, as an element and resource of global education and cultural diversity. We actively encourage and promote both institutional multilingualism as well as individual multilingualism on the part of all teaching and administrative staff, researchers, and students. The University also offers support measures designed to foster multilingualism.

Not least through its internationalization and diversity strategies, the University of Bremen is explicitly committed to the guiding principle of a "Campus of Diversity". The University's *Guiding Principle for Teaching and Learning*² sees its future viability closely intertwined with the diversity of its members. Within this context, multilingualism is a crucial prerequisite to tap the potential of diversity, both in the context of our University as well as in society as a whole. We perceive multilingualism as a resource of global education and cultural diversity. The University of Bremen has therefore developed a language policy to foster multilingualism in the institutional frame as well as on the part of all its members. At the same time, we also identify the need to position ourselves on the German-speaking landscape as a University with strong international orientation. Against this background, it is necessary to break down the language barriers blocking access to the University, the labor market, and social life. As such goals are inextricably linked with its internationalization efforts, the University of Bremen naturally needs to promote a language culture that in addition to German and English embraces other languages as well. In its endeavors to promote multilingualism, the University therefore develops accordant measures of language training and support for its members. As a result, multilingualism is fast becoming a hallmark of our University.

Our language policy refers i.a. to the "Recommendation on Language Policy at German Universities" formulated by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), "to establish an increased awareness of language policy issues and thus the conscious use of different languages in everyday university life".³ This addresses the ongoing process of internationalization at German universities, which not only calls for increasingly stronger use of English as lingua franca and the language of academia⁴, but also requires a growing diversity of linguistic and cultural capacities on the part of university members. Such a development presents opportunities as well as challenges. As formulated in the Bologna Declaration, the European University Area can only be realized "while fully respecting [...] the diversity of European languages".⁵ The Lisbon Strategy expands this goal to the European Economic Area. A commitment to multilingualism is expected at all levels and in all sectors. It is thus a policy not solely addressing universities. These do, though, duly recognize their responsibility to help shape this opening-up process, and the German Rectors' Conference calls upon all universities to formulate language policies tailored to their specific situations. This is consistent with our internationalization strategy and our institution's view on multilingualism.

¹ Multilingualism can be defined on the one hand as the parallel existence of several different languages in a society or institution (institutional multilingualism) or, on the other hand, the ability of a person to speak different languages (individual multilingualism, also called plurilingualism).

² <http://www.uni-bremen.de/lehre-studium/leitbild-lehre.html>

³ Recommendation of 11th Annual General Meeting of German Rectors' Conference (HRK) on 22.11.2011: "Language Policy at German Universities": https://www.hrk.de/uploads/media/Empfehlung_Sprachenpolitik_MV_22112011.pdf

⁴ By "language of academia" we understand the language in which academics teach, research and publish; under "lingua franca", the working language generally spoken in academic contexts.

⁵ The European Higher Education Area, joint statement by the European Ministers of Education, 19.6.1999, Bologna: http://uniko.ac.at/modules/download.php?key=2708_DE_O&cs=2C55

Goals and Fields of Action

I Institutional fields of action

I.1 Research and the language of academia

English is the preferred language in many, though not all, areas of academic activity. The University of Bremen sees one of its prime tasks in promoting an active language policy which, besides English and German, also proactively encourages the use of other languages at an academic level relevant for our departmental structure.

Successful academics are already integrated in international networks and able to communicate and publish in English or another important language indispensable for international exchange. We are well aware that to focus exclusively on English would be counterproductive in respect of the diversity of languages strived for. Therefore, especially German universities must pursue an active language policy directed at promoting German as a language of academia and lingua franca as well. Every language is a manifestation of the culture of thinking and argumentation it gives rise to. A reductive language policy would negate this linguistic diversity and lose sight of the international complexity of academia. It is therefore important to retain German (or other languages as well) as a language of academia. This applies i.a. when regionally specific contents and languages are the thematic focus of research and exchange, or when (especially in application-oriented fields) a direct exchange of research results is necessary with actors external to the local academic scene. Furthermore, some subject fields are subject to their own specific requirements.

Multilingualism also has a firm place in the area of academic teaching. Moreover, conferences and the like cannot and are not supposed to be held only in German but also in other languages wherever possible. From this point of view, highly desirable, though not always feasible in practice, is an offer of translations, editorial assistance and the services of interpreters as described in central papers of the (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)⁶.

I.2 Teaching and learning

Our curriculum has an international orientation. The University actively encourages and supports courses and lectures delivered in English. All graduates of the University of Bremen have sufficient⁷ language competence in at least German and English. At the same time we draw students' attention to the importance of multilingualism and support this aim via various programs and other measures.

The internationalization of the curriculum is one of the University's major objectives. Although undergraduate programs are usually delivered in German, they can be complemented with compulsory electives taught in other languages (above all in English but also in other subject-relevant languages). Whole master's programs can also be offered in English. Besides this, most study programs have sufficient courses in English (or in another language relevant for the subject). Visiting and exchange students are thus able to actively participate without facing fundamental language barriers.

We moreover strive to train graduates' language competences to levels that facilitate orientation to and integration in the German and international labor market. We thus ensure that all graduates of the University of Bremen possess an adequate knowledge of German and English. As a general rule, the University focuses on German as its first language and English (or another language if the subject requires) as its second language, both of which must be mastered to a

⁶ HRK 2011, 4. 4, as well as DAAD: "Memorandum on the Promotion of German as a language of academia", [o.J.], S. 3 (https://www.daad.de/de/download/broschuere_netzwerk_deutsch/Memorandum_veroeffentlicht.pdf)

⁷ Study programs taught in German: Competence in German at level C1 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and English at level B2; programs taught in English: English at level C1 and (as a minimum requirement) everyday competence in German. Exceptions may be made for students on cooperation programs.

level that enables academic work. The order of importance may change according to subject requirements. Thus, in the main teaching language, students must have language competence on level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CFER). Besides this, the University promotes the learning of a third language.

Possibilities for language learning are increasingly being integrated into the curricula, thereby raising awareness of multilingualism and appreciation of multilingual skills. Multilingualism is gaining more and more space in teaching and learning activities as well as places to meet and mingle on the campus.⁸

The extraordinarily wide spectrum of possibilities for language learning offered by the Foreign Languages Center (FZHB) – which drew special praise during the audit “Internationalization of Universities” in the HRK recommendation report for the University of Bremen – is likewise a manifestation of the growing appreciation of multilingualism at the University of Bremen. The FZHB offers courses in more than 20 languages, evidence of an awareness reaching far beyond the concentration on German and English.

- The University of Bremen is committed to improving the German language skills of its international students and thereby their capacity to participate in social life in the German-speaking world. Accordant measures (e.g. extracurricular courses, incentive systems, elective and compulsory elective courses) vary, depending on the subject studied. German classes for international students are to be integrated in the subject curricula and offered free of charge. Such possibilities are also to be made available to participants of graduate schools and research training groups working in English. When planning new study programs to be delivered in English, it is essential to include German classes in the area of electives and compulsory electives of the curricula. Exceptions to this rule must be adequately substantiated and approved by a body at authorization level. The acquisition of language competences must be recorded as a separate qualification in the Diploma Supplement.

I.3 Administration and service providers

The internationalization process results in an increased proportion of non-German speakers among the University’s members. This necessitates that important services are delivered in English.

In order to successfully recruit more international academics and students in future, the University of Bremen has to be prepared to meet a growing demand for important services to be offered in English. This demand applies across all areas of University administration and services. It requires that all information materials, forms and applications as well as contractual agreements (and accordant notes) have to be available in English-language versions.⁹

The long-term objective is for all service areas to be able to communicate the services they offer in English. The University leadership supports and promotes such efforts to their conclusion.

Furthermore, the University appreciates the knowledge of other languages of its administrative staff so they can also offer initial assistance to non-English speakers. By making such offers visible throughout the university and showing how much we value and support the learning of languages, we share in the special appreciation for migration-related multilingualism as propagated in the integration concept for educational institutions in the federal state of Bremen.¹⁰

⁸ Among these are the provision of information on events in different languages, the *kompas forum international*, *Café International*, or multilingual conference formats.

⁹ It is to be noted that especially in the case of contractual agreements the status of German as the official language must be upheld. As a consequence, solely the German-language versions of contractual agreements are legally binding.

¹⁰ Cf. “*Entwicklungsplan Partizipation und Integration*” (2012-2015) der Freien Hansestadt Bremen (2012): http://www.rathaus.bremen.de/sixcms/media.php/13/Entwicklungsplan_Ansicht_Broschuere.46027.pdf

I.4 External presentation

The University's external presentation is bilingual

The public image of the University of Bremen is shaped not least by a consistently bilingual internet presence (German/English). Wherever appropriate, information materials, press releases etc. are also to be in German and English. The signposts around the campus indicating the direction of central buildings are in German and English (functional representation of multilingualism), contributing further to our international image. It is planned that these signs will be supplemented with a further language (symbolic representation of multilingualism). These measures further illustrate our commitment to linguistic diversity on the campus.

II Individuals' fields of action

II.1 Researchers and teaching faculty

Researchers and teaching faculty are able to take advantage of customized support measures designed to improve their capacity to teach, communicate, and publish in German and English. Such measures are also intended to promote active participation in the self-administration of the University and the everyday life of academics who come to our University from abroad.

In principle, all of the University's researchers and teaching faculty should be able to teach, communicate and publish in German and in English. The University supports them with targeted measures such as language training and individual coaching.

The University of Bremen has set itself the goal to increase the number of its members who come from abroad. Co-workers from other countries make a significant contribution to the linguistic diversity on our campus. Part of our welcoming culture is to support newly appointed and newly employed co-workers who speak only little or even no German to acquire competence in the language. It is up to the faculties to make the acquisition of language skills part of the agenda of appointment negotiations.

Academics with migrant backgrounds and/or first languages other than German or English are encouraged to contribute their cultural potential and multilingualism to campus life and develop suitable ways to integrate such cultural aspects in their teaching.

II.2 Students

Students can attend language courses in German and English or other languages relevant for their studies. International students on masters' programs delivered in English are led to levels of competence in German that at a minimum enable everyday communication.

The University is committed to supporting German as well as international students in the acquisition of language competences at a level required on German as well as international labor markets. We also foster the development of career perspectives in academia. In this respect, all of our students are offered possibilities

- to improve their competence in academic English by attending language courses as well as participating in classes delivered in English
- to develop or build on competences in academic German (including courses on academic writing);
- to acquire or improve knowledge of a further language relevant for their studies and

- to open up access to a third language. This can be either via developing competences in their first language to academic language level or by learning a further foreign language.

We encourage students with migrant backgrounds and/or other first languages to use their multilingualism to good effect by supporting cross-cultural understanding on the campus and thus their own personal development. Via a program established at the University of Bremen in 2011 called “Academic multilingualism”¹¹, students are able to open up additional career perspectives based on language competences either in their second language or in their original language. Besides English with special subject profiles, the University offers courses on German as a second language as well as on the most-spoken first languages in the federal state of Bremen, i.e. Turkish, Russian, and Polish.

A special focus is placed on study programs delivered in English – especially master programs – as a targeted instrument to promote the internationalization of studies. These study programs make a significant contribution towards attracting qualified students from all over the world to the University of Bremen. Moreover, the ensuing interchange in English reflects the current status of the (mostly English) academic discussion. Notwithstanding, knowledge of German is indispensable with regard to facilitating active participation in student and social life. The University therefore expects international students to acquire at least basic knowledge in German as lingua franca. With the language courses it offers, often with a subject-specific orientation, it also encourages international students to acquire more advanced and career-relevant German language skills.

II.3 Administrative staff

The University offers a wide range of further training and coaching to develop multilingualism on the part of its administrative staff.

Members of the administrative staff are to be able to communicate in English with non-German speaking members of the University. The University is expanding its existing program of further training and coaching, initially to ensure that there is at least one person in every administrative unit who is capable of communicating in English: In the longer term, all co-workers in the administration must be able to do so. Furthermore, we encourage knowledge or acquisition of further foreign languages so that administrative staff can offer targeted support to people seeking assistance or advice at our University. In consultation with co-workers who already speak the language, suitable ways must be found to make such information available in English – another manifestation of how we breathe life into multilingualism on our “campus of diversity”.

¹¹ Cf. <https://www.fremdsprachenzentrum-bremen.de/2366.0.html>