

LANGUAGE STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A KEY CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

DRAFT DECLARATION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF THE BERLIN EUROPEAN YEAR OF LANGUAGES CONFERENCE (28-30 JUNE 2001)

We call upon the authorities, institutions, and organisations of Europe to co-operate in developing the multilingual and intercultural knowledge and skills that are fundamental to a Europe of linguistic and cultural diversity.

In particular, we call upon those carrying forward the Bologna Process to co-operate in developing multilingual and intercultural knowledge and skills as a precondition for the creation of a European area of higher education.

The European Year of Languages 2001 comes at a decisive point in time. The European Union, which is being constructed as a multilingual society, is preparing for expansion, as a result of which the number of Community languages will increase further. There is growing trans-European co-operation and interaction between individuals, institutions, organisations and states across language and cultural barriers in all spheres of activity. Europe and Europeans are beginning to see themselves in a global context. Universities across Europe are seeking to redefine their role as institutions belonging to a European higher education area. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 stresses the mobility of staff and students, the need for universities to be able to compete effectively on the international stage, and to develop the knowledge and skills that are essential for productive employment in the knowledge society. Increasing social and economic integration, EU expansion, and the need to address the consequences of globalisation all have linguistic implications, which present a major challenge for higher education. In particular, universities and authorities in charge of higher education need to recognise that the establishment of a European area of higher education can only be achieved if students are encouraged and enabled to develop multilingual and intercultural knowledge and skills. More generally, universities need to recognise their specific responsibilities to promote societal and individual multilingualism.

1. The key qualifications of multilingual and intercultural competence

Multilingual competence, high levels of communicative competence in a number of languages, and language learning ability are becoming essential aspects of a European graduate's employability, citizenship and personal development. Universities must provide students, regardless of their field of specialisation, with opportunities for improving their knowledge in languages, for learning new languages, and for becoming more independent in their language learning. To this end, universities should

- offer all students in undergraduate education the opportunity to take a number of credits in languages;
- create environments for independent language learning, exploiting the opportunities offered by information and communication technology and e-learning;
- encourage co-operative language learning involving speakers of different languages;
- offer as many languages as possible – including less widely used and/or less taught languages;
- offer degree programmes or portions of programmes in other languages.

Periods spent on study or placement abroad are important for improving linguistic and intercultural competence. Universities should provide the necessary linguistic and intercultural preparation and support for mobility. They have a particular responsibility in promoting their own languages and in enabling incoming students to learn these languages to as high a level as possible. Language competence acquired through mobility should be assessed and certified.

Language learning and teaching at university should be aimed at the development of a multilingual profile. Students need to be made aware of the importance of multilingual skills. The DIALANG system and the European Language Portfolio are instruments designed to develop this awareness and should be introduced in universities across Europe. We welcome the initiative of the CEL/ELC and CERCLES to develop a European Language Portfolio for the higher education sector.

2. The need for quality enhancement

Language teaching and learning in higher education need to have clearly defined objectives related to language use. Objectives should be based on the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. All language courses and modules should include assessment and have a credit value. This is to ensure transparency and comparability between institutions and languages and to facilitate credit transfer. It will enhance learner motivation and provide meaningful information for non-academic bodies such as potential employers.

There is an urgent need for highly qualified university language teachers and learning advisors. Postgraduate programmes and continuing education modules designed to meet this need must be developed and implemented as a matter of priority.

3. Relevance of specialist language and language-related programmes

Specialist language degree programmes ought to lead to qualifications relevant to the labour market and, where appropriate, should be geared to professional needs. In addition, universities need to plan and implement continuing education provision for specific language-related professions, and for life long learning.

Modern language programmes

Graduates of modern language programmes and other language-oriented programmes need to achieve a high level of communication skills in the language or languages studied. To this end, teaching on these programmes should be in the target language. Graduates need to have acquired skills enabling them to adapt and further develop their linguistic repertoire in response to changing needs. In the case of ab-initio languages, universities are recommended to introduce intensive foundation courses preceding the degree programme proper.

Modern language degree programmes need to have a wider international dimension. Language majors should be encouraged to study another European language alongside their major language.

Teacher education

Programmes should include preparation for early language teaching, bilingual/multilingual education, the use of information and communication technologies, and the teaching of learning skills.

Students in language teacher education should be required to study another language alongside their major language.

Teachers of subjects other than languages should be encouraged to study a language alongside their area or areas of specialisation.

Universities should encourage the introduction of less widely used and less taught languages in school curricula.

Translation and interpreting

Translators and interpreters now work in many different contexts. Bachelor programmes can lead to new qualifications as professional communicators or language mediators, while masters degrees should lead to qualifications as professional translators and interpreters. Proper attention needs to be given to the Union's less widely used and less taught languages and to the languages of the candidate countries.

Departments charged with the education of translators and interpreters should consider ways in which they can contribute to modern language programmes and other language-related programmes.

4. Language policy

The goals set out in this declaration will only be achieved if language policies are developed and implemented at national, regional, and institutional level.

Universities are urged to develop and implement their own specific and coherent language policies, covering the fields of education, research, and development. These need to reflect the European dimension, the specific needs of the non-academic environments, and institutional priorities and strengths. Universities should give proper weight to the added value to be gained from co-operation both within the individual institution and with other partners, nationally and internationally. In addition to inter-university co-operation at regional, national and European level, universities should pursue opportunities offered by co-operation with other sectors of education, cultural institutes, and other partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

European co-operation in policy, curriculum, and materials development and in research is a key to innovations and improvements in the area of languages in higher education and beyond. We call upon the CEL/ELC and the Thematic Network to continue to seek to identify and disseminate examples of innovative practice and to identify areas in higher education language studies and in the professional environments that require a European development or research effort. In doing so, they should continue to co-operate with pertinent European associations and organisations and to seek synergies with other European associations and co-operation projects.

Berlin, 30 June 2001