Developing institutional language policies in higher education

HRK German Rectors´ Conference

LANGUAGE POLICY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
From Guidelines to Practice: towards Functional Multilingualism
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From Guidelines to Practice:
towards Functional Multilingualism
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Background & expertise
- International Human Resources Management
- Internationalisation Strategy, Processes and Implementation
- Change Facilitation and Change Management
- Coaching and Training
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI in a nutshell

Established 1640
Subjects 300
Staff 7300
Degree students 32000
Ranking <100
INTERNATIONAL CLOSE-UP

ACADEMIC STAFF: 25 % international

DOCTORAL STUDENTS: 33 % international

MASTER DEGREE STUDENTS: 9,5 % international

NON-ACADEMIC STAFF: 5 % international
University of Helsinki
Language Policy: the Framework

- As an educational institution, University safeguards the national languages → Finnish, Swedish

As a research institution, University bears responsibility for internationalisation → English
Languages in the University’s everyday operations and services

- Parallel use of Finnish, Swedish, or English
- Guidelines for official contexts and when decisions are made in meetings or workgroups
- Examples of best practices
1. LANGUAGE SKILLS OF THE STAFF

- language and communication skills related to job duties
- the required skill level determined on a job-specific basis when recruiting new staff
- developing language skills considered in work hour planning
2. COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- The names of the faculties, units, and independent institutes in Finnish, Swedish, and English
- The strategic and other key documents published in Finnish, Swedish and English
- Signs in Finnish, Swedish and English
3. MONITORING

- Implementation of the language policy is part of the University’s operations management process; monitoring of
  - languages of publications
  - the number of credits in different languages
  - staff participation in language training
BUT DOES IT WORK?
POLICY CHALLENGES

1. ** Debate within the University**: the role of national languages in the academia vs. the role of English as lingua franca in the academia

2. ** Debate outside the University**: members of the nationalist party seeking to put an end to laws making the learning of Swedish in public schools obligatory.
OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

1. Everyday communication: delays in English (and Swedish) versions

2. CASE Research Services: using English only raised protests among national disciplines

3. CASE Christmas Party: inclusion - exclusion in social events
SOLUTIONS

Language Buddy Programme

CASE HR: Templates, mini-dictionaries

Internal communication vs. external communication
BUT IS IT WORTH IT?
"It is a nice thought, of course - but there really are more important money holes in the university administration than investing time and money in the implementation of the language policy."
PERSONAL ENERGY PIE
Tekoja maailman parhaaksi
Insatser för världens bästa
Actions for the best for the world
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