Guidelines for Defining a Language Policy for Institutions in Higher Education

In September 2013 the CercleS Focus Group on Language Policy, established in 2009, met at the Language Centre of the Freie Universität Berlin. The group drew on the Position Statement that was produced during their meeting in 2011 in Marseille (cf. CercleS Bulletin n. 29, 2012: 8, http://www.cercles.org/shared/bulletin29.pdf).

With the following document the Focus Group is aiming at supporting directors of Language Centres of Institutions in Higher Education in the process of initiating, defining and implementing a language policy (LP).

A language policy document is an important strategic instrument in the general context of internationalisation, growing competition and other future challenges in Higher Education. Therefore it is crucial that Language Centres adopt a key role in initiating and formulating language policies.

1. Leading questions

A. Current situation

1. Why should the institution want a language policy (e.g. benchmarking, quality assurance)?
2. What is the current situation in the university and in the language centre (e.g. SWOT analysis, a "Frascati checklist" of Quality Assessment Criteria for Language Centres, a Self-assessment checklist, created in Frascati, 2010, http://casajc.ff.cuni.cz/Documents/Pdf/SelfAssessment_Checklist.pdf)?
3. What are the institution's overall goals and strategies?
4. What are relevant documents on a European, national, regional/local and institutional level?

B. The making of a language policy

1. Who should be involved in the process of defining the LP?
2. What are the appropriate working methods (e.g. regular meetings, roundtable discussions)?
3. How can you get the official mandate to start the process?
4. Who is able to support you in the process?

C. The implementation of the Language Policy

1. Where/how is the LP disseminated? What are the appropriate channels?
2. Who will monitor and review the process of implementing the LP?

2. Scaffolding a language policy

The structure of the document could be as follows:

a. Introduction/Vision statement
b. Context and conditions
c. Languages of tuition and ICLHE (Integration of Content and Language in Higher Education)
d. Languages taught and language acquisition
e. Use of languages in research
f. Use of languages in Public Relations
g. Use of languages in everyday life on campus
h. Implementation strategies

Ad 2a) Introduction/Vision statement

- What is the objective of the LP?
- Who is the target audience of the LP?
- What are the overall institutional goals?
  o Internationalisation
  o Research performance (the impact of their research) in an international context
  o Facilitating student mobility
  o Student employability
  o Promoting individual plurilingualism and institutional multilingualism
  o Fostering life-long learning
  o Other(s)

Ad 2b) Context and conditions

- What is the local context (e.g. linguistic, social and ethnic specificities)?
- What is the role of the different languages at the institution (e.g. official/local/working language(s), English, migrant languages)?
- What kind of international cooperation exists or is planned (e.g. joint degree programs, exchange programs, research cooperation)?
- What type of cooperation is in place with other institutions (e.g. primary and secondary schools, companies, foundations, embassies, testing boards, cultural institutions)

Ad 2c) Languages of tuition and ICLHE

- Which languages of tuition are appropriate in which programme?
- What is the role of English?
- How does the institution foster ICLHE?

Ad 2d) Languages taught and language acquisition

- What are the target languages?
- What are the entry and exit language level requirements?

- What minimum level of the host country's language should incoming and outgoing ERASMUS students have? What minimum level of the host

university's language(s) of tuition should incoming and outgoing ERASMUS students have?
- How are the levels tested and who is in charge?

Ad 2e) Use of languages in research
- Which languages are used for which research activities?

Ad 2f) Use of languages in Public Relations
- In which languages does the university present itself?

Ad 2g) Use of languages in everyday life on campus
- Which languages are used in communication (e.g. with international students, guest researchers)?
- Which languages are used for documents (e.g. forms, decrees, minutes, tenders, applications, diploma supplements/transcript of records)?
- Which languages are used for signposting on the campus?

Ad 2h) Implementation strategies
- What is the impact of language skills in recruitment procedures and staff development?
- What kind of support, infrastructure and services (e.g. language courses and counselling, translations, proofreading, terminology databases …) is offered to the following target groups:
  - students
  - academic staff
  - administrative staff
- How are language issues addressed and included into the quality assurance strategies of the institution (e.g. linguistic quality of research and other publications)?

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