

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGES IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

An ELC memorandum developed in
consultation with EUA, EURASHE,
ENQA, and ESU



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... proficiency in English is de facto part of any internationalisation strategy for learners, teachers and institutions (...)

(...) multilingualism is a significant European asset: it is highly valued by international students and should be encouraged in teaching and research throughout the higher education curriculum.

European Commission (2013)



IN EUROPE TODAY ... / IN A GLOBAL WORLD ...

- All HE graduates need to be proficient in more languages in order for them to study and work professionally in multilingual settings.
- This also applies to those whose L1 is English.
- There are roughly two groups of students/ graduates:
 - The language experts to be.
 - **The non-language students and graduates.**



AIMS

- To identify key linguistic and intercultural skills and competences that would be considered essential for the European graduates and their employability;
- To recommend actions to be taken in order to ensure that students at European HEIs are given the opportunity to develop these skills and competences in the course of their studies.



KEY COMPETENCES AND SKILLS

- Three headings:
 - The role of English in Higher Education.
 - Learning and teaching through another language than one's first language, that is, through a second (L2) or third (L3) language.
 - Linguistic and cultural competences and skills essential for European graduates and their employability.



THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- English is the medium of instruction in a rising number of study programmes – 7,000+ programmes spread unevenly across Europe (outside the UK and Ireland).
- For the vast majority of lecturers and students teaching and learning through English, T/L is through their L2/L3.



LEARNING AND TEACHING THROUGH L2/L3

- Without special measures, students do not necessarily improve their L2/L3 while studying through their L2/L3.
- What about the lecturers who also teach through their L2/L3?
- How can the teaching and learning processes be scaffolded to the benefit of students as well as their lecturers?



MULTILINGUALISM : LEARNING LANGUAGES

- The provision of language learning opportunities varies considerably across Europe.
- The provision is (partly) determined by the language proficiency levels expected / required when students enter higher education.
- Lack of consistent language and culture policies, tradition, financial constraints, etc. also play a key role.



LINGUISTIC AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCES & SKILLS

- The employability of graduates depends on a number of factors, among which adequate language and intercultural communication skills are only a part.
- The importance of these skills and competences are closely linked to the context and content of a given job function.
- Language learning AND learning to learn.



EHEA – YEREVAN COMMUNIQUE 2015

- Enhancing the quality and relevance of teaching and learning.
- Fostering employability of graduates throughout their working lives.
- Making our systems more inclusive.
- Implementing agreed structural reforms.



FOSTERING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES

- [We need to ensure that ...] graduates possess competences suitable for entry into the labour market
- We will promote international mobility for study and placement as a powerful means to expand the range of competences and the work options for students.

Yerevan Communiqué 2015

2015 Ministerial Conference and 4th Bologna Policy Forum



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QUALITY IN MOBILITY

- Mobility as a means for the acquisition of competences such as foreign language knowledge, intercultural awareness, and other soft skills must be integrated in all programmes.

Report of the 2012-2015 BFUG Working Group on Mobility and Internationalisation, p. 6.



3 PROJECTS LAUNCHED FROM WITHIN THE ELC

- The **IntlUni Project** 2012-2015 – Principles for quality teaching and learning in the multilingual and multicultural learning space.
- IntlUni Recommendations – targeted at institutional, national/regional and European levels.



3 PROJECTS LAUNCHED FROM WITHIN THE ELC

- The **MAGICC Project** 2011-2014 – a conceptual framework for multilingual and multicultural communication skills and competences based on, and providing an extension to, the CEFR.



3 PROJECTS LAUNCHED FROM WITHIN THE ELC

- The **CELAN Project** 2011-2013 – launched from within the EC's Business Platform for Multilingualism. Vademecum:
- The relevance of multilingualism to competitiveness and employability has become a major issue in EU Policy.
- Business activities : language and intercultural communication skills and competences.



CONCLUSIONS 1

- With globalisation and migration within and into Europe, attention to issues of language and intercultural skills and competences are more important than ever.
- Languages and intercultural skills and competences are needed, but typically not directly addressed in policy or quality assurance documents.



CONCLUSIONS 2

- The project outcomes mentioned and the memorandum may inform future research and development. Both are needed.
- Higher education institutions have a crucial role to play: Should take stock of the situation and make provisions as needed for their students and staff.





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