

Reference Document for a European university language policy: A challenge for the "Task Force on European Language Policy" [Table of contents](#) [en français](#)

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In January 2000, the Executive Committee of the CEL/ELC set up a task force entitled the "Task Force on European Language Policy" (TFP), with the mission of outlining the framework of a European university language policy. The statutes of the CEL/ELC are still very general in this area, with regard to both the objectives and methods.

In particular, the statutes refer to the quantitative and qualitative improvement of language skills, the development of the multilingual and multicultural character of Europe, the promotion of other languages and cultures, the creation and launching of European projects, the evaluation of teaching and research units in these areas, and the need for universities to co-operate in these activities involving education, research and assessment. These are objectives that the TFP must adopt, define, develop and realise, in the form of a CEL/ELC reference document, which will aim to define the specific role of universities in the creation of the European plurilingual and pluricultural citizen.

This document must form a conceptual framework for recommendations and actions which will enable universities to respond to new demands in several domains, professional, political, socio-cultural and economic, both through their educational structures and their research structures. Their response will be formulated in terms of adaptation, control and anticipation.

A reference document developed through co-operation

A considerable amount of work was necessary to draft this document, to decide on the objectives, the content, the structure and the language. It is important to retrace the principal stages of this work process here, insofar as they give meaning to the final product.

The first meeting of the TFP took place at the University of Lausanne on 25 March 2000. It was basically a "brainstorming" session on the creation of the document and resulted in a list of proposals both rich and diverse, focusing on the objectives, content, structure, and form of the document.

A first attempt to classify the proposals was discussed at the second meeting on 6 April 2000 in Brussels, where the different categories of issues were defined, remodelled and modified. Based on this new categorisation, a first draft was made. This text, of around 30 pages, set out explicitly and in detail the different concepts, recommendations or actions proposed. This text constituted the first "internal" version, from which a short and simplified version, made up of the essential elements, would be drawn up for a first "external" discussion. The selection of these essential elements and the rewriting was undertaken during the third meeting, which took place at the University of Lausanne on the 28 October 2000.

This brief version was presented and discussed at the Workshop organised at the Freie Universität Berlin on the 15 and 16 December. This workshop brought together representatives of a great number of European institutions, notably the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the French Ministry of Education, associations such as CERCLES, EAQUALS, ACA and UNICA as well as members of the Board of the CEL/ELC.

The workshop focused on the principal issues developed in the text. The members of the Task Force presented these issues, while the representatives of the different European institutions were invited to

contribute their reactions before the general debate. From both these reactions and the ensuing discussions, a considerable number of ideas, additional information, points and appraisals emerged, which will be integrated into the final version of the text. This version will serve as the basis for discussion in the workshop on "Universities and Linguistic Policy in Europe", which will take place at the Conference on "Multilingualism and New Learning Environments", at the Freie Universität Berlin, from 28 to 30 June 2001.

The reference document: a conceptual framework for recommendations and actions

The document is organised around four principal themes, each introduced by a general description of its context. These four themes are:

- What does university language policy entail?
- A global concept for the consideration of languages in universities
- The methods to be applied to develop a global concept
- The implementation of a language policy

General description

The motivation behind such a document lies in the aim to enable universities to respond to the major challenge that growing European integration represents, in particular the need to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe and to favour interaction between its languages and cultures, while at the same time taking into account the current demands of globalisation and the need to control its effects. The creation of the plurilingual and pluricultural European citizen, open to the world, constitutes a major challenge for the totality of education systems and notably for universities. Universities must reflect on their specific contribution in their dual role as providers of education and research. In other words, they must respond to new linguistic and cultural needs through their educational structures while at the same time anticipating future needs through their research structures.

However, in order to develop and to make educational and academic choices relating to language, universities must develop a language policy, which will direct their choices.

What does university language policy entail?

The first thing which is required is a general description of the context of the language policy. This context is made up of the new linguistic realities in Europe resulting from political, economic, and social developments, the new role of languages in today's society and their importance in the creation of the European citizen.

The next step will take the form of a definition of the responsibilities and duties of universities in the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe, in the development of the plurilingual and pluricultural competence of the European citizen, in the realisation of the "1+2" principle and of the principle of the equality of European languages and cultures, in the defence of regional and minority languages, in the promotion of immigrant languages, and in the promotion of languages as a means of cognitive and social mediation.

A global concept for the consideration of languages in universities

Universities must become actors in language policy and be recognised as such in the political, economic and professional worlds. To do this, they must first see themselves as capable of taking decisions concerning language policy, as institutions conscious of their role in influencing the situation of languages. A new perspective has yet to be discovered, which will consider languages in universities in a global context, and which will bring together in a single concept, perceptions that already exist, that are not recognised and that are yet to be invented. A global concept that calls on universities to consider languages as resources which they can classify, promote and develop.

The methods to be applied for a global concept

The development of a global concept of languages in universities implies that the opening up of nations and cultures is accompanied by a decompartmentalization of disciplines and languages. It is necessary to introduce a form of plurilingual education at university (leading to the joint development of linguistic and disciplinary knowledge), or to consider restructuring existing disciplines, or even to imagine new areas of teaching, concentrating in particular on language policy, while at the same time attempting to promote new forms of research linked to new linguistic objectives.

Furthermore, these new forms of teaching and research must be developed in the context of a pedagogy based on student mobility - physical or virtual mobility.

However, the integration of languages and disciplines in the university curriculum also demands new forms of assessment and recognition (following the example of the European Portfolio applied in the university context), so that this integration can be of real added value for universities and their different elements.

The implementation of a language policy

If the implementation of a language policy has a cost, it is important to underline the investment that this cost can represent for the European universities of the future. Language competencies must be allowed to develop their full potential, particularly those left uncultivated because of a lack of opportunity to use them. While it is clear that those responsible for financing Universities are limited in the extra resources that they can provide, they may nevertheless be interested in innovative projects and in particular projects that bring a number of partners together. Partners such as governments, local authorities (regions or towns), international institutions and business. As a first incentive, universities must be persuaded to play a pilot role and to co-operate in international networks so as to compare and evaluate their experiences, to act on them and to share the new competence which they have acquired.

In conclusion, this reference document, product of a rich "co-development" process, must remain a text which is open to adaptation and improvement reacting to external and internal developments in universities, both to new demands in the socio-cultural, political and economic contexts and to new challenges in the educational and academic contexts.