



The Wulkow
Group

MEMORANDUM

How European Language
Centres in Higher Education
act as a driver for
mobility, employability and
inter-cultural communication

WELCOME



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Dr Thomas Vogel is the Director of the Foreign Language Centre at the Viadrina European University Frankfurt (Oder), and the founder of the Wulkow Group. He is also the founding board member of ECAM, the European Centre for Applied Multilingualism, a think-tank based at Viadrina European University for projects in the area of multilingualism in higher education and society.



NICK BYRNE

Nick Byrne is the Director of the Language Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has edited the separate memoranda of the previous Wulkow Group meetings into this one combined memorandum.



INTRODUCTION

In January 2009 over 30 language centre directors from a variety of European institutes of higher education came together in Wulkow in Brandenburg, Germany to discuss the key issues and challenges facing them, their centres and their parent institutions.

This initiative was started by Dr Thomas Vogel, Director of the Language Centre at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder.

Each meeting had a specific theme and looked at a range of topics including:

- **STRUCTURE AND MISSION**
- **FINANCE AND FUNDING**
- **MANAGEMENT**
- **HUMAN RESOURCES**
- **QUALITY ASSURANCE.**

The conclusions from each meeting were compiled in a memorandum which offered guidance and direction. These separate memoranda from the meetings of 2009-13 have now been brought together here in one unified document.

The Wulkow Group Memorandum reflects the views of a wide range of institutions and countries. It shows how European Language Centres in Higher Education can achieve far more than just successful language teaching, they can also act as a driver for mobility, employability and inter-cultural communication.

In a decade where economic mobility is a given, and where students and academics have a pan-European and global dimension to their studies and careers, languages and consequently language centres have a crucial role to play in this process.

SITUATION

Allocation of responsibility
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is a tool for staff
recognition

- Evaluation has to be embedded in an overall mechanism of motivation and compensation.

- Student success that is recognised in the community is a highly motivating factor for staff performance.

STRUCTURE AND MISSION

Language Centres at Institutes of Higher Education are active participants in organisations which base their reputation on an implicit recognition of the importance of quality in all activities.

Institutes of Higher Education emphasise their individual character alongside their collaborative cross-European activities which are underpinned by the Bologna process.

Language Centres play an important role in delivering many of the key aims of the Bologna process in terms of fostering and developing skills that go beyond the purely linguistic. These transferable skills include:

- **INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**
- **EMPLOYABILITY**
- **MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**
- **MULTI-LINGUALISM**
- **MOBILITY**
- **KEY COMPETENCES.**

Our commitment to and support for effective quality assurance procedures are embedded in our aim to deliver the best in teaching and learning which not only enhances the reputation and marketability of our parent institutions but also ensures that our customers leave with the best possible experience.

Our aim is to maximise the potential of all of our customer-base which can go far beyond the confines of the campus but reach out to the whole community:

- **STUDENTS**
- **UNDERGRADUATE**
- **POSTGRADUATE**
- **COLLEAGUES**
- **EXTERNAL CLIENTS**
- **BUSINESS LANGUAGE LEARNERS**
- **LEISURE ACTIVITY LEARNERS**
- **SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS.**



FINANCE AND FUNDING

The findings of the group showed diversity and flexibility in funding methodology across Europe, but we were able to draw conclusions and make recommendations with the aim to maximising the potential of each Language Centre to operate within acceptable norms and this to the benefit of all stakeholders.

The Wulkow group noted the following:

- Whereas there is no one model for funding language centres in higher education across Europe, successful funding strategies are based on reliability, transparency and flexibility.
- Funding for infrastructure and core teaching should be properly embedded into the funding system of the host university, the majority of which receive funding from government sources.
- Such funding is best top-sliced and transferred directly to the language centre, and is preferable to a system of billing individual departments.
- In many cases supplementary funding from extra teaching grants, through European projects and includes from exploiting the institution's internal market can provide an enhancement of basic funding.
- Some language centres are funded solely from income generation activities through both internal and external clients.
- Other language centres use entrepreneurial activities to either boost their own income or contribute to the income generating activities of the parent institution.

- Some language centres however now fully integrate their income generating activities into their core funding out of necessity and due to reductions in core funding.
- The question of charging fees to students varies and the issues are complex.
- Generally if language tuition forms an assessable part of a degree, then a tuition fee is not charged to the student.
- If the institution does charge a tuition fee, the language centre should receive an appropriate and proportionate amount of that tuition fee.



MANAGEMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES

This is a summary of views and ideas on the principles and conditions needed to facilitate professional staff recruitment, development and management in Language Centres in Institutions of Higher Education in Europe. It offers a basis for negotiation and further planning with stakeholders.

In essence, the Wulkow group's approach towards professional human resources management entails:

- Following a context-sensitive human resources management strategy that is embedded in the institution's overall quality management program and consists of measures that are fit for purpose.
- Applying systematic and endorsed recruitment, management and development procedures that lead to positive experiences and results for all stakeholders and maximize the benefit for both the institution and the individual employee.
- Implementing effective diversity and change management procedures that support team building and ensure continuity in quality assurance initiatives and in the services provided.
- Utilizing the potential of well-functioning national and European networks of language centres who share the aspiration to enhance the quality of language teaching and testing in higher education in Europe.

PROMOTING A CONTEXT-SENSITIVE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The central aim of Language Centres in Higher Education in Europe is to deliver a high quality service that effectively addresses the language learning needs and expectations of the specific university and the larger community in which they are embedded.

Human resources management procedures essentially serve to support this aim within the institution and country-specific structural, financial and legal constraints.

Under the guidance and leadership of their directors, Language Centres therefore:

- Implement clearly defined, systematic and transparent recruitment, management and professional development measures that are revised continually to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and effective in addressing changing needs.
- Follow an HR strategy that is embedded within the larger institution's human resources policy and practices, while making provision for the unique needs and conditions pertaining to staffing issues in the language centre.
- Play an active and pro-active role in all HR planning and allocation processes concerning the language centre and provide accurate job descriptions and person specifications relevant to the needs of both the language centre and the parent institution.
- Acknowledge the importance of close and constructive cooperation with their institutions' HR divisions.
- Use their experience and expertise in managing multilingual and multicultural teams to contribute to the development and implementation of their parent institutions' diversity management policies and practices.

APPLYING SYSTEMATIC AND ENDORSED MEASURES THAT MAXIMIZE THE BENEFIT FOR ALL INVOLVED

As is the case for all service-oriented organisations, the quality of the work done by a language centre depends heavily on the levels of competence, expertise and experience of its individual members of staff, as well as on their willingness to apply these in contributing to the language centre's aims.

Staff is a language centre's most important asset, and investing in quality means investing in its employees. This requires the implementation of human resources management procedures that lead to positive and constructive experiences and results for all stakeholders.

Language Centres therefore develop and implement a clearly defined HR policy that:

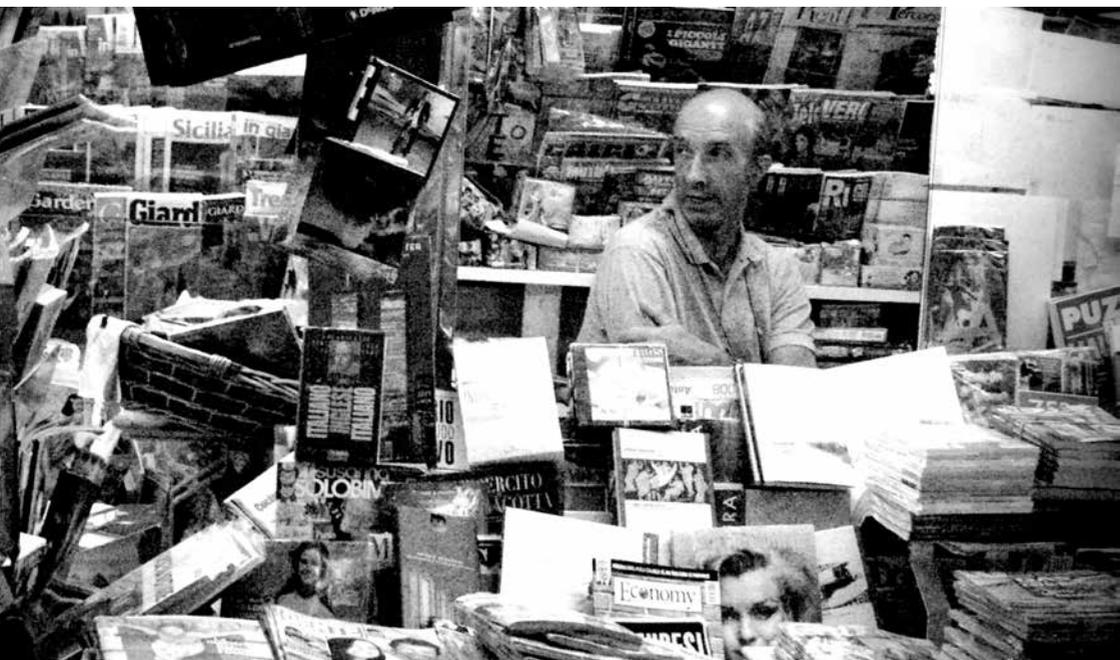
- Cultivates an organisational culture that fosters professionalism, confidence, trust and a spirit of collaboration.
- Addresses the needs of staff, the centre and the university, and facilitates fast and effective reactions to changes.
- Makes provision for the application of widely acknowledged and endorsed measures for staff recruitment, management and development.

In terms of recruitment procedures, language centres should:

- Follow structured, valid, respectful and fair procedures and clearly defined, transparent and relevant selection criteria. This means that all stages and elements of the recruitment process accurately reflect the tasks, qualities and competencies required by a specific post and that these are communicated clearly both internally and externally.

In terms of staff management and development, language centres should:

- Identify, acknowledge and develop the strengths and competences of each member of staff with the aim of maximizing the value of their unique contributions to the team's overall endeavours.
- Promote a culture of open, clear and respectful communication between staff members on all levels of the organisation that facilitates fair and professional exchanges about expectations and performance.
- Set clear and reachable goals that employ the strengths and competences of the individual members of staff.
- Use structured, objective and acknowledged staff performance assessment procedures and clear and ethical record keeping systems.
- Offer staff a wide range of internal and external further training as a means of developing available potential and equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to react to changing demands.
- Apply fair and transparent remuneration systems that reflect a concern for quality assurance.
- Follow measures that maximize job satisfaction, motivate staff and enhance their identification with the institution and its aims by acknowledging and rewarding their contributions.



EFFECTIVE DIVERSITY AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Although there are differences in staff structures of individual language centres across Europe, most consist of diverse multilingual and multicultural teams. These include teaching and administrative members of staff, part-time and full-time employees, as well as permanent appointees, employees on fixed-term contracts and freelancers.

A relatively high degree of staff turnover, especially in centres where there is a high number of freelancers and employees on fixed-term contracts, calls for special measures that promote continuity in quality assurance initiatives and in the services provided.

In order to manage diversity and change effectively, language centres in higher education in Europe should develop and implement an HR strategy that:

- Recognises the contributions of all members of staff and promotes identification with the institution and its aims.
- Fosters a collaborative organisational culture and supports team building measures, while it also harnesses the potential offered by diversity.
- Promotes an on-going and lively exchange and recording of experiences and expertise in order to ensure continuity in quality assurance initiatives and the services provided.
- Ensures a healthy balance between permanent and temporary members of staff.
- Utilizes the potential of well-functioning national and European networks of language centres

In addition to CercleS (the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education) and the various networks on national levels, the work of the Wulkow Group reflects language centres' joint aspiration to maintain and improve the quality of their work.

These networks reflect a culture of mutual support and cooperation and facilitate the fast and effective exchange of ideas. In terms of HR management issues, these networks enable language centres to:

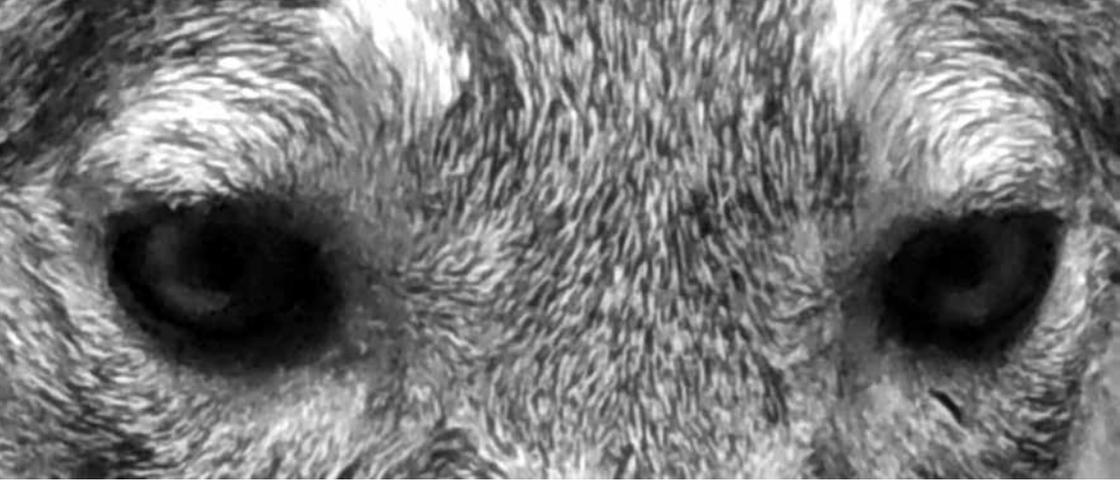
- Share expertise in and experience with different staff recruitment, management and development procedures both in the context of formal meetings and conferences, as well as by means of informal exchanges and various internet-based forums.
- Maximize their access to the pool of professional talent available.



QUALITY ASSURANCE

Language Centres at Institutes of Higher Education are committed to the effective implementation of quality assurance procedures. They support their parent institutions' existing quality assurance procedures but also aim to develop additional measures that relate to their specific operational needs.

- They strive to deliver the highest standards of service to their customers. This is done by creating courses that are fit for purpose, and where both curriculum and assessment procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure continuing relevance.
- They make full use of those quality assurance mechanisms which focus on customer satisfaction. This is done by using not only in-house procedures – student questionnaires, student panels, internal reviews, but also by making use of external procedures – reviews, cross-European benchmarking frameworks such as the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference), membership of professional organisations such as CercleS (European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education) and national associations.
- They stress the importance of recruitment procedures which ensure that candidates have the correct qualifications and experience.
- They emphasise the importance of recognising the worth of their employees by awarding them salary levels and contracts which reflect the professional nature of their workforce.
- They recognise and underline the importance of funding for continuous professional development to ensure that their staff maintain and improve their skills.



- They recognise that effective feedback is part of this professional development and value the importance of feedback from all stakeholders – learners, colleagues and external review panels.
- They use applied research activities to develop and increase the quality of all their activities. This research-informed approach to quality assurance is one of the strengths and advantages of being based and involved in the Higher Education sector.
- They value the importance of funded meetings held on a regular basis between colleagues at both national and international level to arrive at a common understanding and agreement on European wide quality assurance procedures and mechanisms. Continued funding from both institutional and European funds is essential.
- They emphasise the importance of the quality of the learning and teaching environment and the necessity, availability and effective utilisation of technology and learning platforms.

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CONCLUSION

Language Centres in higher education institutions across Europe can demonstrate a wide variety of offer and emphasis, but at the same time maintain a consistency of approach to delivering quality in those areas which make an enterprise successful.

They provide an energising mix of complementary activities which encompass the following remits: academic, service, support, applied research, income generation and outreach. Language Centres contribute to the broader academic agenda as well as enhancing employability and other transferable work and life-skills. Furthermore the people working in Language Centres represent a positive diversity and multi-national and multi-lingual mind-set which contribute greatly to the goal of internationalisation and an institution's global relevance. The aims of mobility and intercultural awareness are built into the DNA of all language centres and their staff, creating a laboratory which is designed to maximise the potential of the 21st century student in a globalised marketplace.



The Wulkow Group

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Our website will be available from February 2014:
www.sz.europa-uni.de/wulkow