

## The University of Oldenburg's language policy

The University of Oldenburg is a young and ambitious university that positions itself both nationally and internationally. It attracts students from the surrounding region and the border region with the Netherlands as well as from all over Germany, Europe and the rest of the world.

Researchers from across the globe come to our university to carry out their research and to teach, bringing their own native languages and cultures to Oldenburg in addition to their scientific expertise. The University of Oldenburg is an international community.

This language policy reflects the international character of the university and its location. It values languages and cultures as well as people and emphasises the opportunities afforded by a diverse community.

It takes into account all areas of the university and identifies key areas in which action should be taken. It also lays down university-wide standards, which are regularly reviewed and amended.

### Goals and key areas for action

In 2008, the European Commission declared multilingualism to be "an asset for Europe and a shared commitment" (COM (2008) 0566). Three years later, the German Rector's Conference (HRK) published its "Recommendations on Language Policy at German Universities". Both documents pursue the objectives of preserving and protecting regional languages, recognise English as a universal language and promote individual multilingualism. The European Commission recommends that European citizens learn at least two other languages in addition to their native language. The HRK also warns against a loss of linguistic diversity if English is used exclusively as the language of academia.

Following on from the above-mentioned declarations on languages in Europe in general and language policies at universities in particular, this language policy focuses on two main areas: the formulation of goals regarding the use of German and English as academic languages and the promotion of multilingualism among all members of the university. It identifies key areas in which action concerning languages is required, from studying and teaching to research and administration. These goals and action areas serve as a basis for developing appropriate measures. The measures should be

reviewed and amended regularly; they are the primary instrument for implementing and putting into practice this language policy at the university.

## **Goals**

### Preserving and strengthening the status of German as an academic language

The majority of degree programmes at the University of Oldenburg are taught entirely in German. German continues to enjoy a strong position as an academic language, particularly in the humanities and social sciences and also in the publication of academic articles in the German-speaking world. Although in some fields English is the *lingua franca* of academic publications, in many cases German nevertheless continues to be the language of communication. However, German plays – and will continue to play – a leading role as an academic language in the field of teacher training. Not only are excellent German language skills a prerequisite for the successful completion of German-taught (or bilingual) degree programmes, they are also indispensable for finding a job in the German labour market after graduation. For this reason, the university attaches great importance to ensuring that students master the German language and that they have the opportunity to improve their language skills up to C1 level (CEFR) by the end of their Master's degree at the latest. To achieve this level of proficiency, the university offers courses in German as a foreign language for its international students. For its German-speaking students, the university offers courses (Learning Workshops) which focus on developing and mastering their use of German as an academic language.

### Strengthening and consolidating the status of English as an academic language

The University of Oldenburg offers an increasing number of Master's degree programmes which are taught entirely in English; these attract not only international students but also a significant number of German students. The bilingual German-English degree programmes also attract large numbers of German-speaking students as well as international students. International students taking part in exchange programmes and following full degree programmes are drawn to Oldenburg by the English-taught programmes.

English as an academic language is ubiquitous at universities, and the University of Oldenburg trains its students to become successful international professionals and researchers. The university offers all its members the opportunity to develop and master their English language skills through personnel development courses, courses offered by the Language Centre and training courses for researchers. Furthermore, the university strongly supports the expansion of English-taught degree programmes. English is the primary foreign language in the field of international research and the University of Oldenburg sees it as its duty to facilitate access to this international

market for its members.

### Recognising and promoting individual multilingualism

Heritage languages, the languages spoken at home alongside German, enrich not only the speakers themselves but also their surroundings. Russian, Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish are currently the most widely spoken heritage languages in Oldenburg. The university encourages its students and researchers to learn languages that will help them to study and conduct research abroad (mobility languages). The university gives its members the opportunity to take courses in various languages (via the Language Centre) and encourages students to learn languages by awarding credit points. As recommended by the European Commission, the Language Centre offers courses in neighbouring languages as well as in the major European languages, up to at least level B1.

Speakers of heritage languages should be given the opportunity to improve their proficiency in these languages at the university so that they can be used in an academic context.

### **Key areas for action**

The above-mentioned goals are reflected in the key areas for action. The goals are translated into measures in the relevant areas in consultation with the members and organisations concerned. Some areas for action are particularly relevant for specific degree programmes or schools; others are relevant for the university as a whole. The measures (see Appendix) are reviewed regularly and the implementation thereof is monitored and evaluated.

### Languages in degree programmes and teaching activities

German and English are the most commonly used languages in degree programmes and teaching activities at the University of Oldenburg. The School of Linguistics and Cultural Studies offers degree programmes in English/American Studies, German Studies, Dutch Studies and Slavic Studies. Students following these programmes can study and communicate in the corresponding languages.

For example, they have the opportunity to learn Low German (as a regional language) and Dutch (as a neighbouring language); students following the Slavic Studies programme have the chance to learn several Slavic languages; and students studying English/American Studies can develop their proficiency in English as the global *lingua franca*.

International research activities at the University of Oldenburg are often conducted in English. Students at the university should therefore aim to achieve level C1 (CEFR) in English by the end of their Master's degree in order to complete their studies

successfully and to be able to compete in the national and international labour market after graduation.

### *Admission requirements*

To be admitted to degree programmes offered by the university, candidates must meet the language requirements if fundamental components of the programme are taught in a language other than German. In addition to the language of instruction, fundamental components of the degree programme include the learning of languages which are necessary for reading specialist literature and which are essential for studying abroad. Examples of admission requirements include the required language level for admission to the degree programme, the certificates to be submitted as proof and the period of validity of these certificates.

### *Languages of instruction and learning*

The languages of instruction and learning used in the degree programmes are specified in the admission regulations of the respective degree programmes and on the university's InfoPortal, so that students can find out which language skills they will need in order to complete their studies successfully. Students must also be informed of the language in which courses are taught and the level of proficiency required in order to participate. Lecturers and students are entitled to use the services of the Language Centre and the Learning Workshops to help them develop and master their study-related language skills.

### *Languages in teacher training*

The University of Oldenburg trains aspiring teachers for all types of schools in Germany. Budding teachers must have mastered the German language (C2 level) in order to be able to teach their subject in schools. In light of social developments, language-sensitive learning and teaching is one of the university's themes for teaching and research.

### *Language learning opportunities for students*

The university gives students the opportunity to learn languages through the Language Centre. In many cases, students can obtain credit points for completed language courses to count towards their specialisation modules. All language courses offered by the Language Centre start at beginner level. For English, German and French, courses are offered up to C1 level. Specialist and competence-specific courses are also available in these languages.

### *Languages of mobility, heritage, integration and cooperation*

The Language Centre offers courses in the following languages: <sup>1</sup> Danish, English,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mobility languages are particularly relevant for students and researchers interested in taking part in an exchange programme.

French, Italian, Japanese, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish (languages of mobility); Arabic, Croatian/Serbian/Bosnian, Polish, Russian and Turkish (heritage languages); and Arabic, German Sign Language and Kurdish (integration languages). Language courses in Chinese, French, Dutch and English are also available for degree programmes offered in collaboration with a partner university.

### Languages in research

Language is one of the university's most important research areas – both as part of the aforementioned linguistic disciplines as well as in cross-faculty teacher training in the context of 'language-sensitive teaching and learning'.

Research is international. The standard language of publication is English, and research groups all over the world work together in English – including at the University of Oldenburg. The level of language used in research and scientific debate is higher than the level of language used in everyday life. This means that researchers must be able to communicate their specialist expertise at the highest level in both their mother tongue and in a foreign language, in writing in publications and verbally in conversation with international researchers in Oldenburg.

Furthermore, German continues to play a role in international research collaborations, since German is part and parcel of life at the University of Oldenburg's locations. Through the courses offered by the Language Centre, the Graduate Academy and the Professional development/organisational development department (PE/OE), the university is committed to helping all those involved in research to improve their academic English and all international researchers to improve their German during their stay in Oldenburg.

### *Research groups*

International research groups at the University of Oldenburg work successfully in English and produce international publications in English. The University expects its researchers, and in particular its junior researchers, to develop and improve their English language skills in a constructive way. To this end, the university's Graduate Academy offers the *english+* programme.

### *Guest researchers*

International guest researchers, like all members of the university, are entitled to participate in the courses offered by the Language Centre. The University is committed to supporting English-speaking research collaborations based in Oldenburg. However, it also hopes that international guest researchers will be keen to learn German during their time in Oldenburg, depending on the length of their stay, so that they can not only fully participate in research collaborations with German colleagues, but also enjoy their stay and life on campus and in the city of Oldenburg

without obstacles. Host researchers are also expected to interact with non-native speakers of German and to embody the welcoming culture of the university through language.

### Languages in administration

The University of Oldenburg also employs people from many different countries who speak many different languages in its administration departments. For all administrative processes and activities, German is the legal official language and language of communication. In order to simplify administrative matters for international members of the university, many documents and services are also available in English.

#### *Service and advice*

The central contact point for all students at the university is the Student Service Centre (SSC). Employees in all service areas and departments provide advice and support to all international students in both German and English.

The International Office (IO) provides a similar service to international researchers and employees; IO employees are on hand to provide them with advice and information in German and English.

In collaboration with the Language Centre, PE/OU offers (subject-specific) English programmes from A2 level to C1 level for all university employees, including intensive training for providing advice and information.

#### *Public image*

The public image of the university reflects the diversity of its community. In order to facilitate access to the university, the most important information is available on the university website in both German and English.

#### *Languages spoken on campus*

The University of Oldenburg is proud of its linguistic and cultural diversity. Everyone – students, employees and visitors – must be able to understand the languages used on campus. As such, the main campus languages are German and English. In certain areas, however, the languages spoken by individuals should also be represented alongside these two languages. The university supports the expression of its members' and institutions' individual multilingualism.