Language Policy for the Faculty of Engineering LTH at Lund University 2009-2011

Lund University will contribute to future knowledge-based society through research-based training, through participation in the international university community and through education related to global and critical issues for the future of humanity. All activities should maintain a competitive international standard.

This Language policy seeks to clarify the principles that should apply to the use of languages at LTH, and an action plan for 2009-2011, which allocates responsibility for actions within the organization.

The Language Policy connects to the current Strategic Plans for Lund (Dnr A9 4470/2006) and for LTH (LTH Dnr 2007/549), as well as the current plans for internationalization for Lund University (RA Dnr 2007/357) and for LTH (LTH Dnr 2007/861).

The plan comprises three parts. The first part is an introduction describing the background to the policy and the key words that the policy built around. The second part includes a number of policy positions. The third part, which is not translated into English, includes an action plan that connects to the policy. The action plan addresses the actions to be prioritized in the period 2009-2011 and clarifies where the responsibility for implementation falls within LTH. The action plan will be monitored annually.

1. Introduction

Higher education is today one of the most internationalized sectors of society. In all activities and functions of LTH the daily communication between students, staff and the outside world is largely conducted in languages other than Swedish. That applies not least in education, where 10% of the students are exchange students and international master students. The use of English is also expanding in the common administration and at the departments, where many researchers and teachers are of foreign origin.

In research, English is now a “Lingua Franca”, that is a language systematically used to communicate between persons not sharing a mother tongue. Most doctoral students and researchers use English daily.

LTH takes on a responsibility to protect the Swedish language and to promote the
maintenance and development of Swedish nomenclature. At the same time, it should be used efficiently, fairly and unambiguously, and be understandable even for people with a limited knowledge of the language. The use of other languages, especially the Nordic ones, is positive, but may possibly end up in opposition to the Swedish language.

In April 2008 the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, HSV, published a follow-up report (Report 2008:15 R) of the 2004 evaluation of the internationalization of the university sector. In the evaluation report HSV recommends that all higher education institutions develop their own language policy, modelled to fit the universities’ own needs. It emphasizes the importance of managing linguistic dilemmas.

LTH’s language policy is based on four key areas: Authority and legal security, internationalization, integration, and quality of education.

1.1 Authority and legal security

The Faculty of Engineering LTH is part of a Swedish authority, Lund University. Laws and regulations in Swedish govern LTH’s activities, and all local decisions are formulated in Swedish. English versions of legally binding documents such as syllabi, curricula, records, etc. should only be seen as translations having no legal effect. In some cases Lund University is required to use an interpreter in order to reach the requirements of legal security.

Employment processes are a particularly difficult area. While LTH in many cases seeks international recruitment and use of international experts, all applicants are free to write their applications in Swedish, Norwegian or Danish. LTH is working to ensure that the rule of law in the recruitment process should be maintained, regardless of the applicant and the expert’s linguistic background.

According to the Higher Education Ordinance §9 “students at the university have the right to be represented in all decision-making and deliberating bodies within the university whose activities are relevant to education and the students’ situation.” Among other things, for that reason LTH takes the policy position that meetings of decision-making and deliberating bodies except the Academic Appointment Board, are to be held in Swedish.

1.2 Internationalization

LTH has a very strong internationalization of education and research. The internationalization of education is in itself a benefit, and contributes to students’ personal development and employability. LTH offers many courses in English which are well documented. Within these courses, Swedish students learn valuable English terminology. The large number of courses offered in English also allows LTH to receive many incoming students. This creates multicultural student groups, which contributes to the “internationalization at home”, defined as internationalization at the home campus of a University that happens both within teaching activities and elsewhere, when national and international cultures meet.
Furthermore, the incoming students make it economically feasible to pursue a wide range of advanced courses with strong links to research.

Although the main teaching language is Swedish, teaching and literature in English is a particularly valuable complement at all levels of education.

Research and doctoral education is highly internationalized, and English is a natural working language. This is established and causes no specific measures in the policy.

1.3 Integration

The increasing diversity at the departments of LTH is positive from a social, cultural and academic viewpoint. At the same time, however, language causes restrictions on the integration between Swedish and international employees. Many international doctoral students, post-docs and visiting scientists feel that they operate in a “bubble”, with poor social relations at work beyond their closest co-workers. LTH’s policy is to counteract this, including by reducing the barriers that are set by language.

Integration is also about integration in Swedish society and in the Swedish labour market. LTH’s strategic plan states: “LTH’s objectives for training at doctorate level is to contribute to competence at Lund University, to the university sector within and outside Sweden and above all to the surrounding community with a focus on the business community.” Regarding interaction with the surrounding community, “LTH’s goal is to deliver a skilled workforce.” Therefore, LTH will facilitate for international masters’ students, doctoral students, teachers and researchers the acquisition of the linguistic proficiency needed to establish themselves permanently in Sweden. This also means that economic resources need to be allocated to the teaching of English language for employees. But most importantly, the ambition of staff members regarding reception and integration of foreign students and staff must be high.

1.4 Quality of education

Lund University’s strategic plan states that “The overall goal is to attain the highest quality in both education and research”. As far as language use is concerned, LTH’s policy on education is that high quality is obtained when students reach the learning objectives of each course, and for their education as a whole, and are sought after in the labour market. LTH presumes that the learning objectives will be achieved best if the students adopt a deep approach to their learning, which is supported by a good language communication between students and between students and teachers.

There are scientific studies showing that the quality of learning, at least for children, may suffer if teaching is conducted in a language other than the mother tongue (see e.g. Collier, 1987: Age and rate of acquisition of second language for academic purposes. TESOL Quarterly 21:4, p. 617-641). There is also evidence that the disadvantages of teaching for engineering students in foreign languages can be reduced significantly within a time frame of about half a year (Klaassen, 2001: The international university curriculum: Challenges in English-medium engineering education. Department of communication and education, Delft
University of Technology). The conclusion is that selecting teaching language to obtain “highest quality” may include trade-offs between learning and the usability on a global labour market and an international research world. It is the responsibility of the Study Programme Boards and the Program Directors to ensure that students are receiving sufficient language skills related to their field of study and their profession, without compromising education quality in general.

2. Policy positions

Authority and legal security:

High competence in Swedish, English and other foreign languages is a vital resource in the administration and management in all parts of the activities.

English translations/versions of the rules and instructions should always be linked to the Swedish original.

Meetings in decision-making and deliberating bodies except the Academic Appointment Board, should be held in Swedish.

All students should be allowed to have influence over their education.

Internationalization:

All graduates should be given the best condition possible to compete in an international labour market.

The strong position of the English language should to be used to create ‘internationalization at home’ and promote exchange studies.

Internationally oriented information should be presented in good, comprehensible and coherent English (British or American).

The campus environment should be adapted to international students.

Integration:

Students in internationally oriented Master’s programs should be given the opportunity to prepare linguistically for employment in Sweden.

LTH will facilitate for all employees to integrate into their work environment, regardless of linguistic background.

Students, staff and alumni should continuously get current information in Swedish and English on important decisions and events at LTH.

Quality in Education:

For quality reasons, the main teaching language is Swedish. Multilingualism of graduates and employees is a benefit. Examiners and the supervisors should have basic skills in the Swedish language.