



The Wulkow  
Group

# Memorandum

**WULKOW MEMORANDUM ON THE IDENTITY  
AND PROFILE OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN  
LANGUAGE CENTRES IN HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS**

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# Introduction

In January 2019 Language Centre directors from thirteen countries came together to mark the 11th annual workshop of the Wulkow Group.

The Wulkow Group, an informal professional network, was founded in January 2008 by Dr. Thomas Vogel, the director of the language centre at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany. The purpose of the group is to gather directors of language centres from all over Europe to exchange ideas and best practices, but above all to promote quality in teaching and management across Europe and beyond.

# Key Points of the 11<sup>th</sup> Wulkow Meeting

Over the past decade, teachers in higher education language centres have experienced substantial changes in learner biographies, needs and expectations. No longer can we rely on the fact that the majority of learners have grown up monolingually and have acquired their second and third languages in secondary education. Indeed, the internationalization of European universities has brought new target groups, who sometimes present didactic and intercultural challenges at a time when the definition of teacher roles and expectations regarding methodologies clash. With the integration of languages into the overall curriculum of universities, the need to survey and analyze these changes has become of utmost importance for teachers, curriculum designers, material developers and not the least for directors of language centres.

Such societal, technological and educational shifts necessitate responsive developments in key aspects of teacher recruitment and staff development. Newly qualified teachers will come with new skill-sets much sought after by recruiters. For more experienced teachers these new or revised skill-sets will be key in setting the agenda for language centre teachers' development programs. Both the increasing integration of technology and social media into pedagogy, and the need for creative approaches to develop flexible modes of delivery increase pressure on teachers to respond effectively to the needs of students and future employers. This will in turn have an impact on the resources, which parent institutions must provide to help ensure the quality of content delivery while increasing student satisfaction as well as success. This calls for a properly accredited professional development.

The process of broadening and extending the core skills of the language centre teacher is something which will continue throughout the next decade. These developmental needs are driven, influenced and controlled by a diverse and potent mix of technology,

financial constraints, perceived employers' needs and students' expectations. All the subsequent scenarios will be played out under the proscenium arch of the universities, many of which are by necessity adapting and re-writing their roles in society by balancing academia with workplace, research with teaching, and idealism with pragmatism. All stakeholders benefit from targeted investment in relevant skills, helping to ensure the quality of subject delivery within a framework of aspirational excellence. There are key skill-sets which the 2020+ language centre teacher needs to demonstrate:

**1. PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE** - demonstrating subject knowledge and delivering effective knowledge transfer using sound pedagogy based on applied research, varied experience and reflected practice

**2. OPENNESS TO CHANGE** - demonstrating active thinking, innovation and imagination to increase effective communication of subject, positive collaboration amongst colleagues and stakeholders to extend field of reference

3. **DIGITAL COMPETENCE** - demonstrating its full potential by using social media and technology's own user-friendliness, flexibility and adaptability to maximize the effectiveness of learning and teaching

4. **MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE** - demonstrating the ability to understand the managerial aspects of their own role, and the organizational and financial workings of their language centre outside of the immediate world of the classroom

5. **TEAM SKILLS** - demonstrating the ability to play a variety of pedagogical roles and to utilize multiple teaching styles which best serve both subject and student as well as enhancing the teacher's own skills.

If the above skill-sets are to be exploited to the full, the following issues need to be addressed by all four stakeholders:

1. **EMPLOYER:** Senior Management should ensure that language centre directors are fully supported, and should also recognize the potential of the language centre to contribute to agendas outside of language teaching per se. They need to recognize the work language centres already do in the areas of quality assurance, effective teaching, employability, social cohesion, internationalization and aspirational excellence. Language centre directors need to devise and implement robust training programs for professional development. University heads and Human Resources should be made aware of the expanded skill-set of language centre teachers. This would result in more effective recruitment procedures, recognition and later appropriate reward for professional development.
2. **STUDENTS:** Students need to assume responsibility for their own learning; they should be open to new formats, e.g. by developing a flexible approach to

language learning. This process, facilitated by their teachers, helps to ensure that students are able to increase and hone their own skills in order to develop an attitude and enthusiasm for lifelong languages learning.

**3. LANGUAGE CENTRE TEACHERS:** Teachers need to know that their professionalism will be fully recognized and supported by management. In turn, they should fully participate in all measures which expand their own skills and career development. This approach should be embedded in the working culture of all language centres.

**4. BUSINESS:** Future employers of students should recognize and reward language skills in ways that help the teacher persuade the learners to advance their language learning to the greatest extent. Other outside agencies such as local governments and the central government should increase their cooperation with language organizations.

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# The Wulkow Group

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