

# Language policy of the University of Fribourg

## 1. Context

The University of Fribourg is a Swiss university which is shaped by both its official bilingualism and its actual multilingualism. Situated as it is in a bilingual region on the language border between the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland, it is characterized by a historically developed German-French bilingualism which is enshrined in law and is a normal part of everyday life in the University community. Its institutional culture is inspired by both French- and German-speaking university traditions. And since the University of Fribourg welcomes a high percentage of students from the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, Italian is widely used on campus. At the same time, English, being an important academic language plays a significant role as a *lingua franca* in several areas. With German, French, and English as its main working languages, the University draws on the potential of three major languages of science and culture. In certain Faculties and sections of the University, other (mainly European) languages are also used, including the other two Swiss national languages, Italian and Romansh. The institution thus has a unique profile that allows intellectual, linguistic and cultural traditions to meet in a context characterised by diversity.

The University is positioned in an international research and teaching landscape and welcomes students, lecturers and researchers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It regards its linguistic position as a significant advantage in developing excellence and in its attractiveness on a national and international level. Its Language Centre's daily task is to strengthen the institution's bilingualism and to help all members of the University to succeed in a multilingual academic environment. At the same time, bilingualism and multilingualism present the University with considerable challenges. This is especially true in regard to the quality of its teaching, equal opportunities for students, administrative workload, employment of staff, and the cohesiveness of the University community. These challenges demand a strong institutional commitment.

## 2. Vision and purpose of the document

According to the guidelines of its Strategy 2030, the University of Fribourg is committed to German-French bilingualism, which it recognizes as a special feature of its profile. At the same time, it specifically promotes English as a scientific *lingua franca* in certain areas. Both aspects of this vision contribute to positioning the University as an academic institution of excellence in both national and international contexts. To this end, the University pursues an active language policy that involves its entire community.

This document sets out the general objectives of this policy, describes the linguistic characteristics of the University, lists specific developmental goals, and formulates a framework for implementing the policy. Further documents may supplement it, particularly with regard to the actual application of the language policy in specific areas.

## 3. General objectives

The language policy supports both the strategic and the academic development goals of the University. It takes into account the needs of the Faculties and Central Services. Through its active multilingual policy, the University endeavours, in particular:

- to equip itself, because of its status as an officially bilingual university, with the necessary instruments to perform the bridging function between the different parts of the country which this status entails;
- to support and promote the implementation of its official bilingualism;
- to promote the targeted development of multilingualism within the University;
- to make the University community aware of the challenges and advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism;
- to maintain and strengthen its attractiveness for students (especially for students from other cantons and international students);
- to increase the employment and retention of bilingual or multilingual staff;
- to secure and promote the attractiveness and reputation of its research units for national and international researchers;
- to consolidate its position as an international university;
- to strengthen bilingualism and multilingualism in general.

## 4. Linguistic features and specific development objectives

The language policy is based in particular on the following guidelines, the implementation of which will be developed:

## **a. Two official languages and several working languages**

- The University has two official languages: French and German. Both are used as languages of research, scientific exchange and academic education, and as working languages in its administration. This enables the University to work transparently and efficiently in its local, regional and international environment and to network and engage with social actors.
- Embedded in a globalised world, the University encourages and supports its members in acquiring and using languages other than the two official ones. This is especially true for English, which has the status of a language of science in many areas and often serves as a common language between people from different linguistic backgrounds. Thus, at the level of the institution as a whole, the University has three working languages: French, German, and English.
- However, the linguistic diversity of the University of Fribourg goes far beyond the two official languages and three main working languages at the level of the institution as a whole. In sections of the University and Faculties (e.g. Departments), other, mainly European, languages are used as working languages, including the other Swiss national languages: Italian and Romansh. European languages are particularly important with regard to mobility and cooperation within Europe.

## **b. Ongoing efforts to improve language quality**

- The University community in Fribourg cultivates multilingualism and internationality. It accepts that this requires additional effort since it is convinced that these elements contribute to its profile and recognition.
- If one studies or works multilingually, the quality of language production in the second or third language is generally less high. Therefore, multilingual learning and working requires continuous effort, a willingness to make progress, and a degree of tolerance for the language production of others.
- Members of the University community are encouraged to participate in activities in various languages, regardless of their language level. This is especially true for students who are generally encouraged to take courses taught in a language other than their first in order to practise and improve their language skills.
- As a leading research and educational institution, the University places great emphasis on both the professionalism and the linguistic quality of all textual material it produces. Regardless of the language in which it is produced, it must be formulated in an appropriate, clear and understandable form. Special attention is to be paid to editorial and formal quality. This applies in particular to seminar papers, degree theses and doctoral dissertations, but also to scientific texts and university documents that are publicly accessible (statutes and regulations, websites and other public documents).

## **c. National and international impact – thanks to multilingualism**

- With its official bilingualism, the University is participating in the dynamic development of the two major Swiss national languages as well as in the development of Switzerland's linguistic and educational culture. It also occupies a special position in the higher education landscape as a bridge between the different language-speaking parts of the country.
- As an academic institution in a bilingual canton of a multilingual country, the University of Fribourg pursues an active and efficient policy of bilingualism and multilingualism. The multilingual education and research it offers are attuned to the demands of a bilingual and multilingual environment at the cantonal, national and international level. This helps to promote multilingualism and understanding between language communities.
- The University welcomes international students, lecturers and researchers who can contribute to multilingualism in the University environment with their own language culture.
- Its personnel is also increasingly international in terms of personal development and qualifications, in line with the University's orientation towards internationalism.

## **d. Flexible use of languages in teaching**

- French and German are the main teaching languages of the University.
- The bilingualism of the institution is reflected in a wide offering of monolingual and bilingual programmes of study. Besides the programmes taught exclusively in German or French, many programmes offer a large range of courses in German and French which students are free to choose. This means that students can choose to take most programmes exclusively in French, exclusively in German, or bilingually.
- Many subjects are also taught in other languages, particularly in English as a language of science.
- The development of teaching in English forms part of the University of Fribourg's effort to enhance its international visibility and attractiveness, as well as to promote cultural diversity and enrichment. It is embedded in the context of its official bilingualism.
- The University offers a wide range of classes and programmes of study in various linguistic configurations:

- monolingual (e.g. seminars in Italian in the Italian programme; lectures solely in German in law, economics and theology);
- bilingual (e.g. lectures alternatively in German and French);
- multilingual (e.g. a programme of study combining courses in German, French, and English).
- The bilingual or multilingual nature of a course may also find expression in the way its assignments are structured. For example, a course taught in French may be combined with academic readings in English and German, or with group work during which students communicate with each other in German, Swiss German, and French.
- The Faculties have a certain freedom regarding the linguistic design of their programmes of study. The relevant details are to be found in their regulations.
- The promotion and up-grading of students' language and communication abilities during their studies forms part of their personal academic advising sessions. Students are given information about the languages of teaching and study which may differ from their first language, as well as about language learning opportunities offered by the University.
- For international students, the language proficiency required for admission is determined in accordance with University and Faculty criteria.
- The University's alumni activities are offered bilingually (in German and French) and, depending on the Department, also in English.

### **e. Multilingualism as a response to the demands of the economy and society**

- The University recognizes the importance of language skills as an advantage in the national and international employment market, in the public sector (especially in the Swiss Federal Administration) as well as in the private sector. Its multilingual profile is a factor in the promotion of the linguistic competence of its students at Bachelor, Master and doctoral levels.
- Graduates as well as students of the University of Fribourg have the opportunity to apply and to develop their language skills so as to be able to communicate in several languages in their field of expertise.
- Academic learning and research require the development of communicative competencies in a variety of languages depending on the field of specialisation. This is addressed appropriately in the design of programmes of study at all levels.
- The University promotes bilingual programmes. Depending on the Faculty, several modalities coexist. Students are appropriately supported, in particular by the services offered by the Language Centre.
- The University offers bilingual degrees (German - French) in numerous fields of study. A requirement of such a degree is that a substantial part of the study programme, usually at least a third (including examinations and other measures of proficiency), be completed in each language.
- For certain programmes, the University also offers a trilingual degree in German, French and English. This usually requires that at least one fifth of the content of the programme (including examinations and other measures of proficiency) be completed in each of the three languages.

### **f. High quality and dedicated research**

- Comprehensive language and communication skills are part of the expected professional competence of researchers. They are a fundamental prerequisite for participation in national and international research which facilitates the direct exchange of ideas and is supported by the University.
- Although the University recognizes the important position of English in many disciplines, it is committed to the promotion of the Swiss national languages, especially German and French, and supports their role as languages of science.
- Research into multilingualism is carried out at the University of Fribourg, especially at the Institute of Multilingualism. Research projects and activities encompass various perspectives on the subject (namely cognitive, social and/or pedagogical-didactic) and also favour and support research-based teaching in the area of multilingualism.
- Researchers are encouraged to include in the University's research database a brief summary in German or French of their research publications that have not been published in one of these languages, and also, ideally, in English. At the very least, keywords in German, French, and English should be entered in the database.
- As a public institution, and in accordance with the legislation governing it, the University is mandated to contribute to the cultural, social and economic development of society. In the context of increased compliance requirements, it is also incumbent on the University to demonstrate that public funds are used efficiently and appropriately, and to ensure that the results of research conducted at the University are freely available to society. For this reason, the University encourages researchers who work in a foreign language to publish information in their field in the Swiss national languages too, and to disseminate it through various channels, such as audio-visual and social media. In communicating research results to the public, researchers are supported by the Unicom Service.

- Dissemination of the University's research results also occurs through the organisation of events open to local, national and international audiences. The University endeavours to offer events in German as well as French and, whenever possible, to organise bilingual events.

### **g. Efficient and flexible management**

- The University's bi- and multilingualism is also reflected in its central administration, with German and French predominating.
- Central Services are able to communicate in both official languages with members of the University community and the general public. They strive to provide services of equal quality in German and French and, when possible, in English. Administrative services, information of an essential nature, as well as information relating to student and staff rights, are generally made available in German and French and, whenever possible, in English.
- The University requires that all personnel have language and communication skills adequate to the positions they hold, since the functions to be performed determine the degree of bilingualism required. In most cases, employees must be allowed to choose whether to work in German or French and must have sufficient language skills to make multilingual communication possible. In some areas, English may also be required.
- Depending on the target audience, the University's communication takes place in German and French, as well as in English and other languages as necessary. At the same time, depending on the means of communication, the University may adjust the language of communication used in its public relations activities to suit target audiences and situations.
- The use in parallel of German, French and/or English is handled flexibly within the individual administrative services of the Faculties, Departments, and Institutes as well as at the level of the Central Services. Differing modes are possible, such as:
  - Monolingualism (e.g. French in the Department of French, or German in the Department of German Studies);
  - Bilingualism (e.g., Faculty or Departmental committees in German and French without simultaneous translation, but with translation of documents when possible);
  - Multilingualism (e.g., German, French, and English as working languages in some Departments).

## **5. Support measures**

- The University supports the efforts of all its members to strengthen and further develop their language skills, especially in German, French and English.
- The Language Centre is the University's language service provider. Its activities and course offerings are consistent with the goals of the language policy. It seeks to expand its range of course offerings which are open to all members of the University community, and it develops targeted learning opportunities, particularly in English, German, and French.
- The Faculties are strengthening their collaboration with the Language Centre and using its expertise to integrate language and communication skills into subject-specific teaching.
- With regard to the courses offered by the Language Centre, the University collaborates with various institutions in the greater Fribourg area.
- Language courses for Swiss and international students are developed and offered according to need, especially in order to prepare students for both the academic world and the employment market. The University makes provision for the particular needs of students who do not speak any of the Swiss national languages.
- The University provides information about platforms with translation programmes and, within available resources, will fund subscription to a professional version of a translation programme for organisational units which apply as part of the annual IT Services budget process.
- Wherever possible, the University supports staff who teach in languages other than their primary or first language, as well as those who work in bilingual or multilingual teaching situations. The Centre for Higher Education Didactics offers free, dedicated training modules or online resources for this purpose, while the Institute of Multilingualism is tasked with conducting research projects and supporting teaching in the area of multilingualism.
- There are guaranteed support services for students and employees who speak other languages. These are mainly provided by the Language Centre.
- The University supports the development of the language skills of all personnel, especially within the framework of its HR policies. It ensures that adequate linguistic-communicative training and continuing education opportunities are available so that the goals of the University's language policy can be achieved.
- The University's Continuing Education programme implements the University's language policy. In doing so, it is tasked with paying appropriate attention to the target groups involved and the particular features of this educational remit.
- The University develops best practices in relation to multilingual communication in its daily operations.

## **6. Implementation and development**

The Faculties and Central Services take account of the language policy in their areas of activity and implement it within the framework of their respective responsibilities. The Rectorate and the Faculties each designate at least one appointee responsible for language issues and specify their tasks. Central Services are also regularly consulted. The University Administration regularly evaluates the implementation of the language policy and its results and decides on possible revisions and alterations.