

Language Policy for UiO

A university is a diverse linguistic community. Few institutions see as much variation in language use as an internationally oriented, research-focused, comprehensive, and urban university like UiO. The purpose of these guidelines is to enhance the institution's capacity to foster and reinforce linguistic diversity, making UiO a global leader while also maintaining its role as a cornerstone in Norwegian society.

The university's primary focus is always its students. UiO must use language in ways that benefit the students in their learning, personal development, and future careers.

To develop language use at UiO, we need to consider its essential functions, partly to remind us of their differences. In research, language is an extremely specialized and focused *tool*, as vital for research results as measuring instruments and formulas. In teaching, language is our most important *medium* for learning and knowledge communication. In administrative work, language *guides actions* – it determines what we can achieve and not achieve. Additionally, good communication is a *precondition* for a successful working environment and a strong university democracy, ensuring that employees and students at all levels feel seen, included, cared for, and able to perform at their best.

At UiO, there is not one singular language, but rather multiple languages. Norwegian is and should be the dominant language for teaching and administration. The Norwegian Language Council's Language Policy Status Report (2021) shows that 90% of scientific publications from Norwegian institutions in 2019 were in English. The term that best describes and addresses this duality is "parallel language use." In its most general sense, parallel language use means that multiple languages are used simultaneously within one or more areas. One language does not exclude the other, but the languages are used in parallel. Universities Norway's (UHR) language policy platform (2007) has a more precise and concrete definition: "Institutions should develop language strategies that ensure parallel language use, i.e., Norwegian as the national professional language and English as the international professional language." A research report on parallel language use at Nordic universities (2014) further defines the balance: "The introduction of more English language use at universities, in teaching, research, administration, etc., must not come at the expense of national languages (and other foreign languages), and conversely, strengthening national languages must not come at the expense of the use of English."

Several dilemmas concerning parallel language use have been vigorously discussed in recent years, such as: How do we develop a Norwegian professional terminology that can also be used in other areas of Norwegian society, including the public sphere, if most research is published in English? How can we attract international researchers and students if we insist that they must learn Norwegian, in addition to performing at a high professional level? Can we demand that our students follow teaching in a language they do not master well, whether it is Norwegian or English? What does parallel language use mean regarding administrative language? And so on.

The goal of this language policy is not to solve all these dilemmas but to make them easier to handle at all levels of the institution. The most important contribution is to emphasize that language policy is an institutional responsibility, which should not be shifted onto individual employees or students.

On June 20, 2023, the university board approved the process and working principles the new language policy should address. Following this, the University of Oslo's rectorate established a

committee to draft the new language policy, which would later be sent out for consultation. The committee began its work in January 2024.

The need for this process should be seen in the context of some historical developments. For more than twenty years, internationalization has been a goal for UiO, both in research and education, when recruiting and qualifying researchers and students. This has been and is a successful policy. Now, UiO is entering a new phase, where the institution must consider the consequences and responsibilities that come with being an international and internationalized university. This new language policy is intended to be a part of this process.

The committee has based its work on the existing language policy guidelines, approved by the rector in September 2010. In addition, we have taken into consideration other strategies at UiO, including Strategy 2030 and UiO's policy for diversity, equality, and inclusion. Unlike Strategy 2030, we have placed less emphasis on the Norwegian language as a "cultural phenomenon to be preserved". Instead, we want to highlight Norwegian as a language in use, in teaching and research etc. We have adhered to relevant laws and regulations but have also followed the work on the Action Plan for Norwegian Language Policy and the ongoing processes with new laws and regulations. We have been inspired and informed by the ongoing language policy work at other institutions in the Nordic countries, particularly UiB, NTNU, and the University of Copenhagen. We have also taken into account research on parallel language use and the ongoing work of The Norwegian Language Council on Norwegian professional language. Lastly, the committee suggests specific measures that UiO should take to ensure the practical implementation of the language policy.

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Regulations

The regulations for language and language use are found in the Language Act and the University and University Colleges Act (effective 1 August 2024).

General Principles

- UiO needs to have a clear and continuously evolving language policy that is implemented at both the central and unit levels. This means that language use and choice should be an integral part of UiO's strategies.
- The enforcement of the language policy is a systematic and targeted leadership responsibility and should not be left to individual employees or students.
- The primary language at UiO is Norwegian, which encompasses both Bokmål and Nynorsk. Danish and Swedish are considered equivalent to Norwegian. English is the primary non-Scandinavian language.
- UiO must promote varied, balanced, and well-justified parallel language use between Norwegian and English.
- The language policy must be managed for the benefit of UiO as well as individual employees and students. Local adaptations and discretion must be exercised to ensure the quality of research, studies, work, and study environments.
- As an employer, UiO must enable employees to acquire the competence in Norwegian and/or English necessary to perform their tasks.

Education

Language is an essential factor when learning something new. The language used in teaching has an impact on learning outcomes, conceptual understanding, participation, engagement, learning environment, and completion. Therefore, when choosing the language for teaching, the primary consideration should be the students' learning. Additionally, language in teaching also affects inclusion and further opportunities in education. At UiO, educating highly qualified students involves teaching a professional language that can be used in the Norwegian working life, while also providing support to develop sufficient English skills.

- Norwegian is the primary language of teaching. Exceptions require justification and support from the academic community.
- UiO must use, develop, and strengthen the Norwegian professional language through its education.
- Course descriptions must specify the language of teaching and examination. Students must be familiar with the central terminology for their field in both Norwegian and English. The course description should also outline how students will work with the Norwegian professional language.
- In international study programmes, teaching is conducted in English. International students staying for one semester or longer must be offered introductory courses in the Norwegian language. UiO must offer courses taught in English to exchange students, also at the bachelor's level.

- For master's theses written in English, a summary in Norwegian is required, and for theses written in Norwegian, a summary in English is necessary.

Research and Dissemination

UiO is an internationally oriented research-intensive comprehensive university. A reflective and well-founded use of language is essential to realise the University's ambitions for independent, groundbreaking, and long-term research. UiO disseminates its research findings both internationally and with Norwegian society.

- Researchers and research environments must have the freedom to choose the language that best serves their research purposes.
- UiO must contribute to a knowledge-based public debate in Norway and must provide support and incentives for researchers to communicate their research in Norwegian.
- The faculties are responsible for determining the languages that can be used in dissertations. All doctoral dissertations must include a summary in both Norwegian and English. Norwegian and English summaries must be published for a general audience in connection with the public defence.

Administration

Administration ensures that the organization functions effectively, and language use is crucial in achieving that goal. Employees and students should receive accurate, clear, relevant, and user-friendly information related to their work and student life.

- Norwegian is the administrative language at UiO.
- Administrative employees at UiO must have sufficient written and oral proficiency in Norwegian and English. UiO must support employees in improving their language skills by taking courses.
- Important information for employees and students must be available in both Norwegian and English. The responsibility for translating rests with the sender of the information.

Working Environment, Democracy, and Inclusion

People are the university's most valuable resource. Language plays a crucial role in creating a sense of community and contributing to the overall work environment. This can be achieved by giving due consideration to both language use and language choices and assuring predictability. Parallel language use must be managed in a way that considers both competence and participation in university democracy.

- UiO's language policy must be implemented in a way that contributes to strengthening the working environment for everyone. This involves welcoming new employees and promoting inclusion, diversity, and participation. This is a leadership responsibility.
- In formal meetings at the department, faculty, museum, and university boards, Norwegian is used. A sufficient knowledge of Norwegian is required for standing for election to these boards.

- At lower levels in the organisation, everyone should be able to participate, and the language should be adjusted accordingly. Local strategies must be developed to make language use predictable and transparent for all parties.
- Local language strategies should provide guidance for the choice of language in daily communication with colleagues and students, in informal settings and at social gatherings. Local units should also facilitate employees' use, practice, and improvement of Norwegian language skills.

Employment conditions

UiO is part of an international knowledge society and recruitment market. This forms the basis for the linguistic diversity at the institution. Language competence requirements should be aligned with UiO's core tasks of research, teaching, dissemination, and innovation.

- UiO must have employment and onboarding policies that consider linguistic diversity and include all employees.
- Language proficiency should be addressed during employee interviews as relevant.
- Employees in permanent scientific positions without a Scandinavian language background should generally achieve a B2 level of Norwegian within 3 years. Norwegian language training should commence upon employment, and UiO must provide support for this goal. Progression can be adjusted based on individual needs and prerequisites.
- Introduction to teaching duties in Norwegian should preferably begin within 3 years after permanent employment.
- UiO must offer Norwegian training to PhD students and postdocs without a Scandinavian language background as necessary. Participation in the training is voluntary and should be tailored to the individual's career plan.

Recommendations and measures

1. It is necessary to improve the knowledge base for both the parallel language reality and access to courses for employees and students at the University of Oslo. A survey should be initiated immediately and conducted over time.
2. Based on the knowledge base, UiO should expand the course capacity and portfolio for students and employees. This expansion will allow UiO to offer a wide range of language courses both locally and centrally, and during working hours and after hours. There should be a central budget for language courses, local language initiatives, and other employee support measures.
3. UiO should establish a centre for research on parallel language use and Norwegian as a professional language, at the institution itself, as well as nationally and internationally.
4. UiO should appoint a permanent committee to manage UiO's language policy and competence enhancement measures.
5. UiO should provide support to leaders and environments who wish to develop local language policies.
6. Guidelines on the use of Norwegian as a professional language in teaching should be included in Uniped courses (university pedagogical basic competence).