

Language policy recommendations for the university community



Introduction

The University of Vaasa is a strongly internationalising university, where both staff and students form a multicultural and international university community. Currently, the university offers Master's programmes in both Finnish and English. In the fields of engineering and business, the intake of Master's programmes in English has increased in recent years, and new programmes have been established. In addition, Bachelor's programmes in Finnish include a substantial amount of teaching in English, which varies according to the field of studies, the major, and the student's own choices.

According to a report by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2023), university teaching in the national language at Master's level is already endangered in many fields. According to the University of Vaasa's strategy, 35% of students and staff will be international in 2030. With new degree programmes such as Robotics (DI) and Strategic Project Management (DI), the number of courses in English is already increasing.

VYY does not propose a significant reduction in the number of courses taught in English and recognises its important role in the internationalisation of the university and in meeting the needs of the working life. However, VYY recommends that consideration is given to the amount of teaching in English and that alternatives should be offered for courses taught in English. This paper presents VYY's language policy recommendations to ensure that students have access to Finnish in their studies, while at the same time providing them with quality English language teaching and preparing them for international jobs.

Saarikivi, J., Koskinen, J. (July 4, 2023). Monikielistä sivistystä vai englanninkielisiä ratkaisuja?: Selvitys yliopistojen kielivalinnoista. Ministry of Education and Culture.

Recommendations

Completing the degree and courses

Native speakers of Finnish will continue to make up the majority of students at the University of Vaasa. The right of these students to receive teaching in Finnish must be guaranteed as the University offers more and more teaching in English.

- Education programmes must take into account both the nature of the discipline and the importance of the national language.
- Programmes in English should also include the possibility to take courses in Finnish.
- If a course is defined as being taught in both languages in parallel, it must be actually available and pedagogically high-quality in both languages.
- In courses where both students and teachers speak Finnish, teaching should be in Finnish, even if the course materials are in English, so that the use of English is appropriate and justified.
- Assignments in courses taught in English, such as reports or exercises, should be possible to complete in Finnish whenever feasible.

Language skills and participation

Learning national languages contributes to integration and employability of international students and staff. The university must support the development of both native language and English language skills..

- International students should have the opportunity to participate at every level of the university's administration in English.
- International students should be encouraged to study national languages in order to promote language development and integration, for example by including national language studies in degree programmes.
- International staff should be encouraged to study national languages and should be given full opportunities to do so.
- A high level of English language proficiency for both national and international staff must be ensured at the recruitment stage, and staff must be offered opportunities to improve their language skills for teaching purposes.
- The university must ensure that sufficient resources are available for language courses to provide high-quality opportunities to learn national languages and improve English language skills.