

TEACHING THE TEACHERS – A report on key events and activities run by the UAS Wildau Centre of Competence for Teaching in English

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Zusammenfassung

Ziel dieses Berichts ist es, die Ergebnisse der wichtigsten Aktivitäten des Kompetenzzentrums Lehrsprache Englisch der Technischen Hochschule Wildau [FH] zu präsentieren, um zu illustrieren, wie wichtig es ist, das Lehrpersonal im tertiären Bildungsbereich im Umgang mit der englischen Sprache zu unterstützen.

Der Artikel wird sich auf vier Hauptthemen konzentrieren:

- Gründe für den Aufbau des Kompetenzzentrums Lehrsprache Englisch
- Die Rolle und Position des Zentrums auf lokaler, nationaler und europaweiter Ebene
- Schlüsselthemen in Bezug auf Englisch als Lehrsprache im tertiären Bildungsbereich
- Zukünftige Aktivitäten

Im Bericht wird dargelegt, dass die Unterstützung für die Lehrenden notwendig ist, nicht nur um den Anforderungen der Internationalisierung der Hochschulen gerecht zu werden, sondern auch den Anforderungen der Studierenden, die in englischer Sprache studieren wollen. Ohne ein nachhaltiges Sprachprogramm und ohne Unterstützung für die Lehrenden besteht die Gefahr, dass einige Universitäten nicht in der Lage sind, vom Wunsch der ausländischen Studierenden in Deutschland zu studieren, zu profitieren.

Abstract

The aim of this report is to present the results of activities recently undertaken by the UAS Wildau Centre of Competence for Teaching in English in order to illustrate the importance of the provision of English language support to the teaching staff in tertiary education.

The article will focus on four main subjects:

- Reasons for setting up the Centre of Competence for Teaching In English
- The role and position of the Centre, locally, nationally and Europe-wide
- Key issues concerning teaching in English at tertiary level
- Future activities

The report will argue that support for teachers is needed in order to not only meet the demands of universities for internationalization but also the demands of students who want to study in English. English language support for the teaching staff is therefore an issue that should take a high priority at universities where the traditional focus has been on the students' language needs and not on the teachers' language needs. Without a sustainable language programme and support for teachers there is a danger that some universities will not be able to benefit properly from the desire of foreign students to come to Germany to study.

» I. SETTING UP THE CENTRE OF COMPETENCE FOR TEACHING IN ENGLISH

The University of Applied Sciences Wildau showed great foresight and initiative in establishing the Centre, which was set up through a target agreement (Zielvereinbarung) by Professor Haack and Dr Bond from the Faculty of Business, Administration and Law in 2010. A key driver of this initiative was to address the issues of internationalization; not only locally in Wildau, but also regionally in Brandenburg and over time, Germany.

Internationalization is a buzzword in tertiary education at the moment, and

indeed, this focus has been around really since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999. According to Dr Herbert Grieshop, the Managing Director of the Centre of International Cooperation at Freie Universität Berlin, in his keynote speech at a language conference in Wildau on 5th May 2012 (Grieshop 2012), there are many reasons why internationalisation is so important for higher education institutions. Amongst them he named, in no particular order: the global labour market, teaching quality, international standards, student development, support for developing countries, rankings, profile, financial incentives, "war for talents", visibility, branding, and lastly because everyone is doing it. As can be seen, there are

plenty of reasons why internationalization is a buzzword and why our university has taken and is taking positive action in promoting the international services it offers. The main thinking behind the initiative was to be able to offer more courses taught in English in Wildau. This has the dual effect of attracting students from abroad who want to study in Germany but not in German as well as providing the German-speaking students the opportunity to study courses in English so that they have much better options of studying and/or working abroad for a semester and finding a job with international prospects.

Therefore, the Centre's main purpose is primarily to provide our teachers

with English language support so that they can teach their modules in English confidently and effectively. The main services provided by the project cover:

- Needs analysis and support for professors and teaching staff who teach in English
- One-to-one coaching
- Group coaching
- Support in the development of material in English
- Language and pedagogical training for teaching in English
- Class observations and team-teaching
- Support in assessing students' oral abilities

Another key purpose of the Centre is to network with other tertiary institutions in Brandenburg and Germany in general. This again is part of the internationalization process; working with our local partners and institutions Germany-wide to help promote Germany as a place to study for foreign students.

» II. THE ROLE AND POSITION OF THE CENTRE, LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND EUROPE-WIDE

In order to establish contact, co-operation and mutual support with other universities it was important to find out exactly where the Centre stood in regard to other initiatives in Germany. To do this, I (the Head of the Centre of Competence for Teaching in English), joined the *Arbeitskreis der Sprachenzentren, Sprachlehrinstitute und Fremdspracheninstitute* (www.aks-web.de), making Wildau one of the 132 institutes registered as members. In February 2011, I then sent a questionnaire via email to all member institutes concerning what language support they provided to their teaching staff. Unfortunately, only ten replied. I therefore followed the questionnaire up with phone calls, emails and talks at various language events around Europe and found out that many people had not replied as the questionnaire

did not apply to them as they do not provide much English language support to academic staff.

From the replies that did come and from subsequent interviews, the main points that came up regarding the provision of language support to teaching staff were:

- few institutions offer dedicated language support for professors due to either lack of money or time or both
- When this was offered, there was consistent positive feedback from the teaching staff who greatly valued this service.
- Few of the universities that offered help had any contact with other universities that did the same; they were working independently.
- There were reports of resistance from professors themselves regarding language support. This took the form of professors resenting having their English language abilities questioned.
- Many universities do offer a wide variety and large number of courses in English at Bachelor's and Master's level, though more so at Master's level.
- There are issues of balance between language and content knowledge. That is, how much of an expert should the teacher be in language and indeed, vice versa, what qualifications, skills and knowledge English language experts need to be able to teach academic courses?
- It was also noted that there is very little, if any, specific material on the market for teaching English to teachers in higher education.

It became quite clear that this was an area in which there was little activity, and when so, relatively isolated. There were and are some institutions that have active teacher programmes that are set up to provide the teaching staff with English language support. The Copenhagen University Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language

Use (<http://cip.ku.dk/english>), set up in 2008, runs five week courses to professors that consist of one meeting a week, at the end of which the professors receive an own certificate showing they have done the course. This is quite formalized and different to what the Centre at Wildau offers. Also the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts-School of Engineering and Architecture, ran a course on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) on the initiative of the university president for lecturers teaching on the Business Engineering degree programme. But, as said, such services seemed few and far between.

An important association for English language teachers world-wide is IATEFL, the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (<http://www.iatefl.org/>) which contains several special interest groups, one of the most prolific and active being BESIG, the Business English Special Interest Group (<http://www.besig.org/>). A considerable proportion of the participants in their annual conferences teach in higher education, and it is of significance that these teachers use the business English special interest group to network. Talking to people at these conferences I became aware that there was a genuine need for academic teachers to have their own platform to network and share information etc. and that there was little opportunity for interaction at this level Europe-wide.

In a workshop held at the BESIG conference in Dubrovnik in 2011 (Bradbeer 2011), I presented the work done by the Centre of Competence for Teaching in English and found there to be a great interest from all those present in setting such a centre up at their institutions. This confirmed my findings from the questionnaire and informal and formal interviews that the situation in Wildau was quite unique and ground-breaking and that there was a need to encourage others to establish language support at their universities for teaching staff.

» III. KEY ISSUES CONCERNING TEACHING IN ENGLISH AT TERTIARY LEVEL

The signing of the Bologna Process by the original 29 countries (now numbering

47) in 1999 firmly put the focus of universities on internationalization. The Bologna Process (<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>) aims to set up a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that is attractive not only to European students and teachers but also to students and staff from around the world. One of the key goals of the declaration is to standardize university courses and qualifications, making them transferable and comparable across Europe and so encouraging mobility within Europe in terms of studying and working, therefore closely following the aims of the European Union. The main language of communication, the lingua franca, is English. This has subsequently led to a need for more and more subject courses in English, which have also led to more demands being put on teachers to offer their courses in English. However, although these demands are an obvious consequence, very little has been done in the way of supporting the teachers in their language needs, until now.

During my time at Wildau working with the teaching staff, I have seen different categories of needs and competence levels amongst the teaching staff and responded with differing forms of support:

- There are those who have excellent language skills and do not need any support at all.
- There are those whose English is quite advanced but who still make mistakes and perhaps lack confidence in their language abilities. The mistakes they make will generally not lead to communication breakdown but may cause confusion and disturb the learning process. Support provided in these cases usually takes the form of sitting in during seminars and providing on-the-spot feedback followed by feedback at the end of the seminar.

- Other teachers are on the verge of being able to teach their courses in English but need support in terms of confidence building, fluency and accuracy and pronunciation. General vocabulary can also be a problem, though the course-specific vocabulary is normally known by the teacher. These teaching staff can greatly benefit from teaching abroad at partner universities on intensive courses. They can 'practise' their language away from their peers while still providing a valuable service to partner universities.

- Some teachers are still quite a far way from being able to run courses in English and need intensive support, regular lessons and input, time spent in English speaking environments and a lot of practice. These teachers need to be highly motivated to improve their language skills.

- There are other teachers who feel that their language abilities are good enough to run courses in English although they are reluctant to have this checked. This also came out of the survey as mentioned above. It would be beneficial for all concerned if these teachers overcome this reluctance and take advantage of the support offered if needed. They would then have expert input into their language needs and competences. If their language skill is competent this input will be reassuring. If, however, they do see they need support, then work can start on their English to improve the learning situation in class and boost their confidence in being able to deliver courses in a foreign language effectively knowing they have this language support.

There are, of course, many cases where teachers do not need to teach their subject in English as it makes no sense from a subject point of view. For example German Law is taught in German as this will be the language used when dealing with this subject in professional life.

In order to assess the English language courses and the courses taught in English from the students' point of view, I ran a questionnaire with the invaluable help of Prof Wendler in the first half

of 2012. The idea for running such a questionnaire came about in May 2011, when I attended a conference entitled Professional Development Day for Business English Teachers at the Cooperative State University Baden-Württemberg in Villingen-Schwenningen organized by Stephanie Ashford (<http://www.dhbw-vs.de/events/professional-development-day-for-business-english-teachers.html>). During the conference students presented the results of a language questionnaire they had run, with very interesting consequences. I decided that a similar questionnaire at Wildau would be useful to see if similar results would come out. And to a large extent, this is what happened.

The questionnaire was sent out to European Management Master's and Bachelor's students and Business and Law Master's students as their courses contain several modules taught entirely in English. In total there were 72 respondents. There were 15 questions on English lessons and lessons taught in English and some questions regarding the respondents' personal details (degree course attending, gender, self evaluation of level of English etc.). Two separate but related areas were addressed. Firstly, English courses in which the focus is on learning English for specific subjects like law, marketing, general business etc., which will help them follow and perform in the other subject modules. This is the second area, courses taught in English where English is used as a medium of instruction (EMI), for example the Marketing module for the EM Bachelor course.

The main results of the questionnaire are:

- 87.5% think that English courses are either very important or important
- 91.7% think courses run in English important or very important
- 97.2% consider the language level of the lecturer to be important or very important
- 59% think the lecturers' vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation to be important

- 33% consider the above to be very important
- 14% are not satisfied with their lecturers' English
- 74% are satisfied with their lecturers' English
- 12% are very satisfied with their lecturers' English
- 56.9% are not concerned when a lecturer makes a language mistake
- 41.7% are not concerned when they perceive their English as better than the lecturers' English
- 86.1% would help a lecturer if they are stuck for a word

The main conclusions from these results are the following:

- Students welcome the chance of having English as a medium of instruction
- Students are fairly tolerant when it comes to lecturers' English
- Students would help out lecturers with their English
- Students place high importance on lecturers' language competence
- There is demand on the lecturers to provide courses in English and deliver them competently, but who can also depend on the tolerance and support of their students

These results closely reflect the results from Villingen-Schwenningen. Of great importance and indeed comfort to the teachers is that, for students, having the chance to take EMI courses is more important than having lecturers who speak perfect English.

» IV. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Encouraged by the results of the questionnaire, I will run a further questionnaire in partnership with Stephanie Ashford from Villingen-Schwenningen that will be Germany-wide as well as including universities in Italy. Italy is being included as there is a move at Italian universities to offer degree courses only in English. The questionnaire will aim to take a snapshot of the situation of English-language courses and courses run in English from the students' perspective and propose what action can be taken to address any issues that arise.

On May 5th 2012, the Centre of Competence for Teaching in English ran an English for Academic Purposes and Business Studies Conference with a focus on internationalisation. There were 90 participants and speakers from Germany plus Italy, Switzerland, the UK, Finland and Russia. The conference was held in partnership with Oxford University Press, with the British Council and Business Spotlight magazine being the other sponsors. The keynote speech on internationalization was held by Dr Herbert Grieshop, the Managing Director for International cooperation at the Freie Universität Berlin and was very informative and provoked much discussion. The conference included workshops on:

- English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
- New issues in English as a Lingua Franca
- English for Business Studies
- Getting the most out of the new material from Business Result (OUP)
- Introducing lexis in the classroom to students
- Corpora work with language learners
- IELTS exams and studying in the UK
- Motivating students through games
- The importance of generic business communication skills
- Integrating content, language and skills through business simulations

There was also a panel discussion on the issues of internationalization and the implications of this including:

- The role of English as a medium of learning
- The need to attract more foreign students and how to deal with this to make it sustainable
- How best to market your university in order to attract the foreign students
- The issue of the growing need to support lecturers in teaching in English
- How teachers deal with teaching international students
- Integrating international students into the university

There was great interest and motivation for EAP events with the opportunity of having an exchange of information, views, material, and a forum to discuss and network. Such was the interest that a group of people, made up of myself and others involved in the conference, have formed an organizing committee, after having decided to make this an annual event and are now planning the next conference on May 4th which will be held at the Humboldt University with the idea of having different hosts for the conference each year.

More or less at the same time as the conference, teaching staff at Wildau, led by Anne Hodgson, also set up a ning to provide support for tertiary education teachers called the European Lecturers of English for Academic Purposes EULEAP (<http://euleap.ning.com/>). The idea of the ning is to provide a forum for academic staff to network, exchange ideas, information and material and plan and promote events. The idea in the future is to expand the ning and make it the place for academic teachers to go to for information, support etc.

The German/Italian questionnaire, the annual conference and the ning will greatly help the tertiary sector teaching community in providing English language support to those teachers who already teach or who want to or need to teach in English, not only in Germany but also Europe-wide.

» V. CONCLUSION

According to a recent study by the British Council, Global Gauge, Germany tops the list of most favourite places to study in the world (Times Higher Education 2011). The report states “The British Council said German universities had attracted more foreign students by teaching a larger number of courses in English”. In order to attract high quality students on a sustainable basis it is therefore vital for universities to offer high quality courses in English. Many universities are in a position to do this however it is still of great importance for universities, local regions and governments to invest in providing language support to their teaching staff.

Wildau is in the fortunate position of already having a position set up to provide English language support to its teaching staff and through the questionnaires, the annual conference, networking activities and the teaching community, Wildau will continue its work in supporting teaching staff not just locally but also on a wider European basis.

About the Author

Martin Bradbeer has been the Head of the Centre of Competence for Teaching in English since August 2010. He has been in Berlin since 1992 and worked for several years at the British Council before moving onto work for the Cornelsen Verlag and Oxford University Press. He is the author of a Langenscheidt self-study business English book and the co-author of the recently published Langenscheidt book IQ.

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