DEVELOPING ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES IN ENGLISH: THE KEY TO INTERNATIONALISATION? SOME QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

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AGENDA: Developing academic programmes in English: the key to internationalisation?

1. Different dimensions of internationalisation
2. English-language curricula at Humboldt? Four hypothetical cases considered
3. Interim conclusions from our considerations
4. Beyond English-language curricula?
5. Discussion/Q&A
1. Different dimensions of internationalisation

- **Internationalisation of the curriculum**
  - Delivery of content in English (and other foreign languages), but also: **diversification of content** (Internationalisation at home I)

- **Internationalisation of the experience**
  - Support for **outward bound** student and staff mobility (including administrative staff)

- **Internationalisation of the university**
  - Support for **incoming** students and staff (English as lingua franca in admin and support – Intl. at home II)
English-language curricula at Humboldt? Four hypothetical cases considered

- The German Physics applicant: Would an undergraduate genius in physics have to have A-level English, too?
- The Chinese MA Student: Would it make sense for a Chinese graduate to come all the way to Berlin for an English-language MA in German Literature?
- The British/American Exchange Student: Would native speakers benefit from courses in English the same way as non-native speakers?
- The German teaching staff: Would a blanket requirement to deliver classes in English enhance the quality of the teaching?
CASE A: The Physics undergraduate

- **Objection No. 1**: the aim of universities is to recruit and train ‘the best in their field’
  - Making English an entry requirement would potentially be counterproductive and unfair to the best physics students

- **Objection No. 2**: as a publicly funded university, Humboldt university is obliged to serve the community that funds it.
  - State legislation requires that – at undergraduate level – the language of instruction must be German (with obvious exceptions). The same applies to consecutive MA degrees.

- **Question No. 1**: who are ‘the best in the field’, what is the ‘field’ we are recruiting from?

- **Question No. 2**: does the university want to enable its best students to become key players in the global scientific community?
CASE B: The Chinese Student on the MA German Literature

- **Objection No. 3:** a subject like German Literature cannot and should not be taught in any language other than German (especially at a German university)
  - Giving in to English means the death of German, first as a language of science, then as a language

- **Counter-Question No. 3:** would it make sense for a Chinese or even German student to do an MA in German Literature at Harvard, Columbia, Rutgers (USA) or Lund (Sweden)?
  - The quality of a degree programme depends on its contents, the staff involved in teaching it and the general conditions of study
  - German universities clearly have a competitive advantage when it comes to ‘total immersion’ in German
  - At Harvard, Columbia, Rutgers, MA applicants need to be fluent in a second foreign language (other than English or German)
  - Lund does not require its applicants to be fluent in Swedish
CASE C: Exchange Students on English-Language Programmes

- **Objection No. 4**: visiting students will get a cultural ‘bubble’ experience in English-based programmes
  - They will miss out on an in-depth experience of German culture

- **Objection No. 5**: native speakers will have an unfair advantage over non-native speakers in assessment

- **Counter-Question No. 4 & 5**: does this outweigh the potential benefits for both international and domestic students?
  - Berlin Perspectives: only 25% of participants are native speakers.

  - For domestic students who cannot afford to go abroad for a semester or a year, such courses can provide an opportunity to engage with different scientific, disciplinary and cultural perspectives at home (Internationalisation at Home).
CASE D: Will delivery in English enhance the quality of teaching at Humboldt?

• **Objection No. 6:** staff are employed because of their expertise, not their linguistic skills
  ➔ Requiring staff to deliver their knowledge in a language that is not their working language would be detrimental to the quality of their teaching
  ➔ Making fluency in English a requirement in new appointments would give native English speakers an unfair advantage over non-native speakers (both German and international)

• **Objection No. 7:** non-German speaking professors cannot adequately function in the university’s governance structures
Some Interim Conclusions

Discrimination/Legal Requirements

English cannot be an entry requirement, English language content cannot be compulsory

Preventing students to become key players in the scientific community

English language content should be optional, but highly attractive to incentivise students into subject-based language learning early on in their studies.

Domination of English/Death of National Languages

Internationalisation should not and need not be one way. English language content should – where appropriate – complement and add to existing programmes

Internationalisation of classroom & curriculum

Delivery in English is not enough. Course content needs to capture and reflect the skills and experiences of the international student body
Internationalisation can only be a gradual process and cannot happen in the university alone.

- Reduce barriers for students and staff to gain international experiences.
- Ensure that the university learns and benefits from those experiences.

Internationalisation of the university

Support for *outward bound* student and staff mobility (including administrative staff)

Internationalisation of the experience

Support for *incoming* students and staff (English as lingua franca in admin and support – Intl. at home II)

- Ensure all documentation is available in English (and other languages where appropriate).
- Provide subject-based training for support staff.
Discussion/Q&A
Suggested Further Reading

