

Guidelines

Languages at the University of Bern



Background and objectives

Background	<p>The University of Bern is the largest educational institution in the Canton of Bern. Supported by the canton, it offers a wide range of degree courses and study programs with national and international appeal. It is a top university situated in a bilingual canton and operates in an international context.</p>
Purpose	<p>The guidelines for languages apply to all members of the University. They outline the basic principles for a reasonable and appropriate use of languages at the University of Bern. They serve to ensure transparency and specify the expectations for the use of languages and communication at the University. These guidelines are based on principles drawn from legal frameworks and strategic objectives.</p>
Values	<p>All communication in every language should comply with the University's values and basic principles. This supports its mission and vision of, "Knowledge creates value", underpins its importance to society, and strengthens its role in the bilingual Canton of Bern.</p>
Language diversity	<p>The University sees diversity in general as a major advantage and in particular, it sees multilingualism as presenting a significant opportunity. It welcomes people of all linguistic backgrounds and promotes language acquisition and communication.</p>
Objectives	<p>The competent use of languages in teaching, research and administration helps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– students understand one another and network at the University and beyond,– increase the University's appeal among researchers and trainees,– strengthen the University's position as an institution with local roots and international ambition and scope,– drive internationalization forward,– simplify access to the University and to university services as well as,– gain advantages on the job market.

Basic principles

Main languages

The main language at the University of Bern is German. The fact that the Canton is bilingual means that German and French are seen as equal. English is a very important language when it comes to science.

Communication at the University of Bern thus takes place primarily in German and English and, wherever necessary and useful, in French. Other languages are desirable and necessary depending on the context.

Use

It is essential for lecturers and students to be able to communicate at a high level in German as well as in English, the international language of science. Wherever possible and meaningful, English and French are used in addition to German for consultations and services provided by the central administration as well as for information for students.

Requirements

The University expects its members to have the necessary language and communication skills which are relevant for the field in which they work. Non-German-speaking members should, after a period of two years, be able to understand German well enough to be able to fulfill everyday requirements of their position.

Lecturers are proficient in the language of instruction at the necessary level. They must acquire the requisite skills. Lecturers who are not proficient in German must become capable of teaching in German in accordance with the teaching requirements after a reasonable period of time.

Promotion of language skills

The University provides its members with target-group-appropriate opportunities to improve their linguistic capabilities. It promotes the acquisition of language skills through language courses and other offers for the independent learning of languages.

Use according to context

The use of languages must be appropriate and considerate of the situation. Dealing with languages can be challenging but should also be done pragmatically. This results in the following principles for the various areas of the University.

Administration, consultation, and legal content

Documents

The main language of the UniBE institution is German. Documents are written in German and, wherever possible and useful also in English and French. This includes basic information on employment and course registration general administrative procedures and requirements, as well as documents about the University itself.

Information

The University also provides employees and outside parties with basic information and consultation up to the faculty level in English and, wherever possible and useful in French.

Legal

Legal documents are usually first created in German. Wherever possible and useful they are translated into English and French. Rulings and appeal proceedings are written in an official language (German or French).

Internal and external communication

Multilingual presence

The University has a multilingual presence, in general. Communication with members of the University usually takes place in the relevant language of correspondence (German, English, or French). Communication within the University with employees and students through newsletters, emails, etc. takes place in a way that suits the particular target group and, whenever possible, is in multiple languages.

Correspondence

If correspondence is to address all employees and/or students, communication takes place in German, English, and French.

External communication

The University's external communication is tailored to suit the respective target group. This usually means in German and/or English if need be, as well as in French wherever necessary and useful.

Teaching and research

Languages in teaching

At bachelor's level, teaching is always in German. If appropriate, courses can be offered in English. Where language competence is part of the required coursework, academic work is completed in the language of instruction.

At master's level, the language of instruction should be adapted to the requirements of the relevant field and take the corresponding academic culture into consideration. Master's degree programs can be offered entirely in English. Other languages can be used in teaching depending on the requirements of the individual subjects.

Proof of language proficiency

People who wish to register at the University of Bern for a bachelor's degree program but who do not have a Swiss high school leavers' certificate (Matura) usually have to provide proof of sufficient German proficiency (level C1). Then, specific language requirements can be set for certain study programs or prerequisites for a master's degree program.

Evaluations

Evaluations and written work are always done in the language of instruction. Other languages are usually possible; this must be requested by the lecturer.

Titles

Titles are to be used in the language in which they were awarded. Diplomas and diploma supplements are issued in an original language (German or English) along with a translation in the other language in each case (not signed).

International context

In international contexts, such as applications for international funding submitted by research or teaching teams, or in networks and alliances, the working language is usually English.

Research

In research, the language(s) used is decided by the language(s) of each academic discipline and any other relevant languages used within the respective research communities.

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University of Bern
General Secretariat
Hochschulstrasse 6
3012 Bern

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