

# Input to the new language policy

Lastet ned: 9. oktober 2024 kl. 09:25

---

Svar-ID: 33234634

Lvert: 08.10.24 21:05

A committee led by Professor Helge Jordheim has proposed a new language policy for the University of Oslo. You can read more about [the work leading up to the proposal on this page](#).

The deadline for providing input is 11 October. All responses will be published on [www.uio.no](http://www.uio.no).

Name \*

Andrea Nightingale

Email address \*

a.j.nightingale@sosgeo.uio.no

My role

Academic staff at UiO

## Provide your input to the new language policy for UiO

It is excellent that UiO is responding to the need for a consistent and updated language policy. I fully support this effort and thank the committee for their excellent efforts. This is not an easy undertaking.

Language is vital, not only for communication but also for world making. It is ontological in that sense, people reflect and understand themselves in the world through their languages. As such, taking seriously how we educate and function linguistically at UiO is crucial.

However, I have several concerns. The most fundamental is that the language policy reflects an inward looking logic. It is about how Norwegian is used at UiO in education and administration with little recognition of what that means for how UiO is positioned within a global community.

In terms of education, there is no question that staff and students need equal opportunities to learn in Norwegian and English. However, at the moment, there is an overwhelming emphasis on Norwegian in course offerings and many students come in with English skills which are not adequate for university level learning. Reducing the number of courses taught in English, or placing more emphasis on Norwegian within courses that might have English as the dominant language, will not help them to increase their bilingual capacities. The vast majority of the literature they read is in English in many disciplines—because that is how scientific conversations are primarily being held today—so being fully fluent is vital. It also excludes international students. An international student body has been shown to be critical for learning, connections and expanding worldviews of everyone involved.

In terms of administration, while certainly official documents need to be in Norwegian, to stipulate that the language must be Norwegian excludes the possibility to bring in international experts to help inform the decisions being made at Department, Faculty and University level. As an example, several years ago at another Norwegian university, one of the Faculties had an international colleague on their board. When one member insisted that the meetings had to be held in Norwegian, a situation unfolded whereby the international colleague was expected to attend meetings but could understand nothing of what was being discussed. There must be not only accommodations for situations like that one, but also recognition that international colleagues can help enhance the governance of UiO. We need to be intelligible outside of Norway as well as being able to engage in governance and academic conversations within Norway. A policy that stipulates everything has to be done in Norwegian language works against such an outward looking logic.

Finally, given the expectations placed on international staff to learn Norwegian, UiO must recognise what this means. Staff need to be given time to learn Norwegian that is realistic. Many academic staff come as established scholars, later in life. We are busy, well past prime language learning age, and managing complex personal lives. Expecting someone to attend NORA courses while also teaching is a recipe for failure and burnout. As is imagining we will spend our summer holidays in intensive language classes right after moving. New international staff should be given at least one semester for adjustment and language learning only, without any other obligations if the long term goal is to have people fluent in Norwegian and enthusiastic about staying in Norway. This is not making special concessions, it is about a realistic approach to recruiting and integrating people who come from abroad.

I note also that the move towards making UiO more Norwegian language focused is out of sync with Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Holland and Belgium where universities have the vast majority of their Masters programs in English and PhD programs would be assumed to be in English. These universities also offer many Bachelors levels programs and courses in English. I wonder if some conversations about language with similar universities, like University of Copenhagen, would be productive?

UiO is a fantastic place to work and the dynamism that a diverse and international group of colleagues brings helps to generate top class research and teaching. It would be a shame to see these qualities of UiO diminished due to a language policy that looks inward rather than outward. UiO should be a model for the rest of Norway about how to be a global university that speaks to Norwegian society and its needs, as well as helping to share that learning and inspiration to the rest of the world. Such a vision requires a more bilingual approach to language at the university than the one proposed here.

You can upload a document here

Ikke besvart