



Recommendations for Action Regarding the Use of Language and Multilingualism at Paderborn University

As of December 2025

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1 Introduction: Institutional Understanding of Language Policy

Paderborn University views itself as an institution where the use of language is shaped collaboratively, encompassing written and oral communication in internal and external contexts, in both formal (e.g. committee and board communication, e-mails, public relations) and informal settings (e.g. casual chats during coffee breaks). Especially in the context of internationalisation, language plays a key role in the fields of research and knowledge transfer, teaching, campus life and administration, as well as external representation. In accordance with the Diversity Charter signed by Paderborn University in 2011 and the guidelines for respectful behaviour (only available in German)¹ adopted in 2022, Paderborn University is committed to fostering a diversity-sensitive, gender-equitable², and respectful environment, in both physical and digital spaces, particularly through the use of language grounded in mutual respect. Language is neither neutral nor static; it evolves through use and within specific contexts, which means that language practices are continually negotiated. Members of Paderborn University acknowledge that language is a powerful tool that can be used to intentionally or unintentionally bring joy or cause offence, inspire or belittle, include or marginalise, and encourage or hurt others. Accordingly, they strive to reflect on their use of language and communicate with awareness of diversity.³

These recommendations focus on actions within the context of linguistic diversity. Paderborn University identifies as an internationally oriented and multilingual institution. Multilingualism is a valuable asset in

¹ https://www.uni-paderborn.de/fileadmin/gleichstellung/gleichstellungsbeauftragte/Beratung_und_Beschwerde/2022_Richtlinie-respektvolles-Miteinander-d_en.pdf [18 July 2025, only available in German]

² <https://www.uni-paderborn.de/en/equality/genderportal/gender-glossar> [18 July 2025].

³ Diversity-sensitive language entails an awareness of the potential harm that language can cause, regardless of the speaker's intention, and a willingness to extend mutual respect and recognition. For more information on diversity-sensitive language at Paderborn University, please visit the Diversity Portal. Detailed guidance on gender-sensitive language use can be found in the Gender Glossary on the website of the Central Gender Equality Office.



global education and is reflected in the use of language in research, teaching, external representation, and daily university life. The appreciation of linguistic diversity, as described above, does not only refer to the languages visibly associated with research and teaching activities, but also to all other languages used by members of the University. These languages form part of their individual linguistic repertoires and are regarded as parts of the linguistic landscape and as a valuable resource in research, teaching, learning, and communication. With this in mind, and in line with the German Rector's Conference's (HRK) recommendation on language policy at German higher education institutions, issued on 22 November 2011, Paderborn University is promoting individual multilingualism among its researchers, teaching staff, students, as well as technical and administrative staff, along with the University's institutional multilingualism.

Multilingualism is considered an essential prerequisite for research across different contexts – national and international alike –, for successful teaching, studies, entry into the labour market, and participation in both university and social life. Furthermore, it constitutes a core aspect of the University's internationalisation efforts, strengthening its international visibility as an appealing research hub, increasing the number of excellent international academics, visiting researchers, and qualified international degree-seeking students, while also fostering student exchange and staff mobility. By promoting multilingualism, the University contributes to shaping the European Higher Education Area, which, as stated in the Bologna Declaration, is only possible by "taking full respect of the diversity of [...] languages"⁴.

This document outlines Paderborn University's institutional understanding of language and provides a framework for the University's approach to the use of languages. In doing so, it does not prescribe specific ways of speaking or using language. Rather, the recommendations serve as a point of reference for everyday practice and future decisions in the key areas of a) research and knowledge transfer, b) teaching, c) campus life and administration, and d) external representation.

2 Framework Conditions

The University's approach to languages and multilingualism takes into account the diversity of its members. Furthermore, steps are being taken to pursue goals in research, teaching, and knowledge transfer. In addition to the University's overarching educational goals and internationalisation objectives, the following framework conditions, among others, serve as key reference points for decisions concerning the use of languages at Paderborn University:

- the circumstances and needs of international students, researchers⁵, and technical and administrative staff;
- exchange opportunities for outgoing students at partner universities abroad, including the utilisation and organisation of said exchanges;⁶
- international cooperation in research and teaching, such as EU framework programmes for research and innovation, bi- and international study programmes, and the European University Alliance COLOURS;
- regional specificities.⁷

⁴ The European Higher Education Area: Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education, 19 June 1999, Bologna https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf [16 May 2024].

⁵ Information on the number of international students and their countries of origin is available in the report "Zahlenspiegel Studierende und Abschlüsse" (statistical report on students and degrees awarded, only available in German).

⁶ Potential destination countries for outgoing students are documented in the [Mobility Online portal](#).

⁷ Details on the composition of the population in the District of Paderborn are provided on the website www.kreis-paderborn.de (only available in German) under "Zahlen und Fasten" (facts and figures).



3 Field of Action: Research and Knowledge Transfer

Research at Paderborn University takes place within national and international discourses. The choice of preferred languages used in research depends on the actors involved, the disciplines, and the research focus areas. The main languages are German and English. German plays a key role in research, particularly with regard to research activities and knowledge transfer in national and regionally embedded contexts. English is crucial for enhancing the visibility of research and facilitating international networking. Some disciplines also employ additional languages in research, with Spanish and French being the most notable examples. Furthermore, the University encourages those involved in research to use their individual language repertoire to engage in additional research discourses and to disseminate their research findings. The University acknowledges that linguistic diversity is essential to fostering diversity of content and complexity of academic work, as ways of thinking and patterns of argumentation are shaped by language, and a focus on a single language entails limitations.

Therefore, the University promotes both English and German as languages of academia and communication, while also supporting the use of additional languages in academic contexts. To this end, researchers and early-career researchers have access to a wide range of English and German courses, as well as individual language coaching. Additional language courses are also available. Language teaching and learning are understood to be closely linked to cultural reflexivity and the development of the capacity to act effectively in diverse contexts.

4 Field of Action: Teaching

At Paderborn University, the languages of instruction and the languages taught are selected consciously and in accordance with defined criteria. Language-related admission requirements and additional language requirements applicable to degree programmes are clearly defined.

a) Languages of Instruction

Teaching at Paderborn University is predominantly conducted in German and/or English, with the exception of language courses. In addition, courses and study programmes in French and Spanish are offered (in the field of Romance Studies). In some subjects, courses involve engaging with foreign-language texts in additional languages. In this context, more than one language may be used within a single course.

Teaching staff acknowledge that students require support in acquiring the academic language and subject-specific language required within their disciplines, irrespective of whether the language of instruction is their first or a foreign/second language. This process is understood as the acquisition of language-based academic practices within the respective disciplines. Alongside subject-specific support, Paderborn University also offers subject- and faculty-spanning services, including those provided by the Language Centre (ZfS), the Kompetenzzentrum Schreiben (writing centre), and the Sprach- und Rechtschreibbüro (language and spelling advisory service).

Paderborn University is also committed to supporting multilingualism in teaching. In order to ensure the quality of such offers, the use of a language other than German as the language of instruction for an entire study programme requires prior consideration of the following aspects:

- the decision is grounded in subject-specific considerations and is aligned with the learning objectives and disciplinary culture;



- that students are able to complete their studies by providing a sufficient number of courses offered in this language of instruction (e.g. also as part of extracurricular studies (Studium Generale)), particularly where no or very limited proficiency in German is required for admission;
- teaching staff have the appropriate competences to teach at an excellent level in the foreign language, and
- students' high level of language proficiency in the chosen language of instruction allows subject content to be taught without restriction.

Successful teaching requires teaching staff to possess a high level of language competence in the respective language of instruction. The University's objective is for teaching staff to regularly attain a C1 level of language proficiency. Upon request, UPB supports teaching staff who teach in a foreign language in further developing their language competences for teaching. In addition to language courses, teaching staff can make use of workshops and coaching for German for non-native speakers, as well as peer classroom observations (see STEMI – Support for Teachers Using English as a Medium of Instruction).

b) Languages Taught

Paderborn University supports multilingualism among its students to ensure successful study progression and completion, foster mobility (preparation for semesters abroad and internships), and strengthen employability in national and international labour markets⁸. Students who are multilingual in their everyday lives are supported in further developing their competences and in building a discipline-specific profile in their languages of origin, in order to utilise their linguistic repertoire as a valuable resource for themselves, the University, the labour market, and society.

Paderborn University promotes the acquisition of German among international students enrolled in both German- and English-language study programmes. In doing so, the University aims to support successful study progression and completion, strengthen academic, administrative, and personal agency both within the University and in social environments, and open up opportunities for entry into the German labour market.

Accordingly, Paderborn University offers its students a comprehensive programme of language courses and additional advisory services, such as language learning advising. These offers also foster the ability for life-long language learning.

Where possible, language courses (including German) are embedded in the curriculum as required modules of a study programme, with target levels defined in line with the CEFR. Generally, participation in language courses is recognised with credit points.

c) Language-Related Admission Requirements and Additional Language Requirements

The applicable examination regulations clearly lay down the language-related admission requirements (which also apply to international full-time students), specifying

⁸ For students enrolled in teacher education programmes, the latter includes the provision of family languages relevant to the school system. Where students pursue a special educational needs specialisation, this may also involve courses in acquiring German Sign Language.



- the language(s) required and the corresponding proficiency level(s), as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR),
- which certificates are accepted as proof of the required language level,
- the point in time by which evidence of these language competences must be submitted at the latest, and
- where relevant, which additional language competences are expected to be acquired upon completion of the degree programme.

For degree programmes taught in German, Paderborn University refers to the framework regulation on German language examinations for studies at German universities (Rahmenordnung über Deutsche Sprachprüfungen für das Studium an deutschen Hochschulen, RO-DT, only available in German)⁹. When defining the German-language admission requirements for applicants whose higher education entrance qualification was not acquired at a German-language institution. Where no minimum language level has been defined as an admission requirement, international students in undergraduate English-taught degree programmes at Paderborn University are given the opportunity to develop their German-language competences to at least level A2 during the course of their studies. The Language Centre (ZfS) advises faculties on the definition of language requirements in their respective degree programmes.

Both students arriving at Paderborn University from abroad and UPB students going abroad are advised to have language competences at level B1 in the language of instruction and a minimum of level A1 in the pre-dominant language of their host country.

5 Field of Action: Campus Life and Administration

All languages are welcome on the campus of Paderborn University. At present, campus signs are predominantly in German; however, the Campus Map is also available in English. Over the medium term, the visual wayfinding system will be adapted to ensure full accessibility. The system's design will incorporate findings from architectural psychology with regard to orientation and recognition.

The University's overall objective is to create an environment in which international students and staff with limited German proficiency can successfully navigate their daily studies and work. With this objective in mind, English is intended to play a more prominent role in the medium term. This will be achieved by providing a fully bilingual website and Diploma Supplements, as well as by making the University's portals and platforms available in both German and English. In addition, English translations will be provided for the examination regulations of English-taught master's programmes and for the doctoral degree and habilitation regulations (not legally binding courtesy translations), as well as for key administrative information. In doing so, the University complies with the minimum standards set out in the "National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students at German Universities", which it endorsed in 2009. These standards require that "any important information – including information on general everyday life at university – will be made available in the respective languages of instruction"¹⁰ (see point 4a).

For international students, teaching staff, and researchers with little or no knowledge of German, contact persons who can provide support in English are available (e.g. for students, in Section 3/Unit 3.1 – International Office, as well as within the individual faculties and other institutions of the University). In addition, English-language instructions for completing key forms (or not legally binding English courtesy translations for reference) are available. The aim is to strengthen English-language competences within the

⁹ https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-07-Internationales/Rahmenordnung_ueber_Deutsche_Sprachpruefungen_fuer_das_Studium_an_deutschen_Hochschulen_RO-DT_2020.pdf.

¹⁰ https://www.hrk.de/uploads/media/CC_Broschuere_1109-fin.pdf S. 12-13 [17 November 2023].



administration and to promote the visibility of the administration's diverse language competences, in order to improve accessibility. Employees receive support in further developing their language competences.

Additional languages spoken by members of the University constitute a valuable resource, for example in advising students, teaching staff, and researchers.

6 Field of Action: External Representation

Paderborn University maintains an international profile in its external communications, especially through its consistently bilingual website. The translation of key webpages and documents from German into English is carried out by the Translation Office of Paderborn University.

It also provides editorial guidelines for English web content¹¹ and a glossary that ensures a consistent translation of UPB-specific terms (e.g. names of faculties and institutes, names of degree programmes, etc.) into British English¹². Furthermore, the Translation Office offers workshops on the post-editing of machine-generated translations. Responsibility for the translation of any additional texts, as well as for the proofreading of foreign-language publications, lies with the respective areas of the University. The corporate design templates provided in Paderborn University's Brand Portal are available in both German and English. Additional templates are issued in both languages, where relevant to the respective target group.

In its press relations, the University focuses on German-language media; topics of international interest are also disseminated via international press mailing lists in English.

In the field of social media, automated translation tools are now in place on the respective platforms, each tailored to the specific requirements of the platform, thus enabling users to translate content into multiple languages.

7 Information on the Implementation

Paderborn University employs a range of measures to foster a linguistic environment in which all employees can participate. Meeting this objective entails openness to multilingualism and a conscious approach to language use. Where particular language skills are required in a specific area of the University, this requirement is taken into consideration in the recruitment of new employees, who are expected either to already possess the relevant competence or to acquire it within a specified period of time. In addition, employees and students regularly receive information on opportunities to further develop their multilingual competence and their German language proficiency, along with details on other language-related support services. All offers and measures are continuously evaluated and adjusted where necessary.

The Language Policy Working Group comprises representatives from the Executive Board, the faculties, the International Relations Office, University administration, the Press, Communications and Marketing Office, and University entities with a primary focus on languages. The Group regularly reviews the linguistic situation at Paderborn University and submits recommendations to the Executive Board to ensure the continuous improvement of the University's approach to languages.

¹¹ <https://www.uni-paderborn.de/en/university/press-communications-marketing/brandportal/guidelines-and-statutes>.

¹² <https://www.uni-paderborn.de/en/university/international-relations/translation-office/glossar>.



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