

# Guide for language choice in the university and university college sector

**Universities and university colleges are part of an international environment. At the same time, they are to reflect the priorities of Norwegian society at large, and the higher education sector has a legally mandated responsibility to uphold and further develop Norwegian as a technical and academic language. This poses certain dilemmas relating to language choice.**

This document is divided into ten main sections and provides concrete recommendations on what universities and university colleges can do to balance their use of English versus Norwegian in order to ensure optimum quality in instruction, research, dissemination and administrative services. The document also recommends measures that these institutions can implement as part of the effort to preserve and maintain Norwegian as a technical and academic language.

The recommendations presented here are based largely on the reports found in the reference list at right. Recommendations must be adapted to the individual institution. Please note that some of the documents in the reference list or linked to under “Read more” may not be available in English.

## ***Read more:***

- [Section 1-7 of the Act relating to universities and university colleges](#), “Responsibility for maintaining and further developing Norwegian academic language”
- [Proposition to the Odelsting No. 71 \(2008–2009\)](#) (on amendments to the Act relating to universities and university colleges)

## **1 Language policy guidelines**

*Purpose: To promote sound, systematic language choices in the higher education sector.*

Universities and university colleges should draw up language policy guidelines with principles for language choice at all levels. These guidelines should be reflected in the institution’s internal strategies.

In order to increase awareness of the importance of good language quality and appropriate language choice, the institutions should include academic as well as administrative staff and students when designing the language policy guidelines.

An action plan should be drawn up, at the faculty or department level, for instance, to ensure that the language policy guidelines are implemented.

The responsibility for following up the institution's guidelines and action plan should be assigned to a language policy board, a committee or a department within the organisation.

**Tips:**

Universities Norway (UHR) adopted a [language policy platform](#) in 2007. This platform has been used as the basis for language policy guidelines at several institutions.

**Read more:**

- [pp. 12–14 i \*More parallel, please!\*](#) (in Danish)
- [UHR's Language Policy Platform](#) (in Norwegian)

## 2 Language of instruction

*Purpose: To ensure that students are proficient in the use of Norwegian and English in their academic or professional areas of expertise after completing their education.*

Students should encounter both Norwegian and English (or other foreign languages) as part of their course instruction.

For Bachelor's level programmes, most of the syllabus and instruction should be in Norwegian unless the subject matter itself is a foreign language. If there is an academic reason to choose an English language textbook during the course, it should be supplemented with supporting material in Norwegian (see [Section 3](#))

For Master's and Ph.D. programmes, there should be room for both Norwegian and English in the syllabus and instruction to enable the student to communicate professionally in both languages in his or her future workplace.

The language of instruction within a programme of study may vary, but the institution should set **objectives** relating to the language skills that students should possess when they are finished with their programme. These objectives should be specified in the study programme and in the description of learning outcomes for the individual courses.

Individual subjects should be offered in English to accommodate Bachelor's and Master's degree students who are in Norway for one semester or more. International Ph.D. fellows

with longer stays in Norway should be offered Norwegian language training courses (see Section 4).

If the institution incorporates video recordings as part of the instruction, then they should consider providing subtitles of the content in Norwegian and English.

It is essential for the quality of instruction and the learning outcome that both the lecturers and the students have good command of the language of instruction (see [Section 4](#) and [Section 5](#)).

**Tips:**

If there is no Norwegian language textbook available, it is possible to apply to the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) for funding for publication. The agency administers a committee that distributes funding for publication of textbooks that are needed for academic reasons in Norwegian higher education, but will have a limited commercial reach (publication support to publishers).

**Read more:**

- [pp. 2–24 i \*More parallel, please!\*](#) (in Danish)
- [“The Disciplinary Literacy Discussion Matrix”](#) (Airey 2011)

### **3 Term lists and other supporting materials**

*Purpose: To ensure that students and academic staff are able to acquire Norwegian and English as technical and academic languages.*

English language textbooks should be supplemented with auxiliary materials in Norwegian. As an example, Norwegian language fact sheets can be produced for a lecture if the associated literature on the curriculum is in English (or any other foreign language).

Bilingual term lists should be devised for the various subjects/courses.

Lists of this type serve as bilingual glossaries for students. At the same time, they help to ensure that the Norwegian terminology used remains consistent and precise.

**Tips:**

In 2013, chemistry experts at the University of Oslo and University of Bergen carried out a terminology project that resulted in practical recommendations for academic personnel seeking to create bilingual term lists in other subject fields. The Language Council helped to coordinate these efforts. Since then, term lists have been produced in astronomy, linguistics, gender research, climate research, cellular and molecular biology, mathematics and library science, among others. Lists of this type can be created locally at the individual institution or

coordinated at the national level. Local lists should be made publicly available. NHH has produced a term list in organisational theory for students, for example.

A general English-Swedish glossary of academic terminology has been produced in Sweden. It is designed to help students with unfamiliar academic terms that they do not find in their subject-specific term lists.

**Read more:**

- [The Language Council of Norway's handbook for terminology work](#) (Norwegian only)
- [pp. 4–5 i Parallelspråk i høyere utdanning \[“Parallel languages in higher education”\]](#) (NHH, Norwegian only)
- [“The Disciplinary Literacy Discussion Matrix”](#) (Airey 2011)

## 4 Increasing bilingual competence among students

*Purpose: To ensure that students develop bilingual proficiency in their subject fields in keeping with the described learning outcome for the programme/discipline. (See [Section 2](#))*

Institutions should, for example, offer courses in academic reading and writing, subject-specific writing, and training in presentation technique – in both Norwegian and English (or other foreign language).

Students' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills should be evaluated, and academic personnel should decide which skills should be mastered in which language.

Subject-specific language courses should be an integral part of instruction.

**Tips:**

Courses in general academic writing are available at a number of institutions, such as the [Norwegian University of Science and Technology](#) and the [University of Stavanger](#).

At the University of Bergen, psychology students have access to training in academic and subject field-specific writing in psychology, organised as a five-module online course.

A number of institutions, such as NHH Norwegian School of Economics, University of Oslo and University of Stavanger, offer Norwegian courses for international students, for example under the EU's ERASMUS Plus programme.

**Read more:**

- [pp. 19–21 in More parallel, please!](#) (in Danish)
- [pp. 104–105 in Hvor parallelt - Om parallelspråkighet på Nordens universitet \[“How parallel – Parallellingualism at Nordic Universities”\]](#) (English chapter summaries)

## 5 Increasing bilingual competence among academic personnel

*Purpose: To ensure that academic personnel are able to provide instruction in both Norwegian and English.*

All academic personnel should be able to read scientific literature, teach, provide supervision, conduct examinations and carry out administrative tasks in Norwegian and English.

It is important to map out the need to raise Norwegian and English language proficiency among academic personnel in order to offer appropriate language courses and pedagogical training that will enhance the quality of instruction.

Internationally recruited academic personnel that does not already know Norwegian should have access to language courses during work hours. Institutions can stipulate that these personnel must have obtained a certain level of proficiency in Norwegian (such as B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) within a specified period (such as three years after their appointment), so that they as a minimum can read written Norwegian and understand spoken Norwegian. This level of competence will enable them to participate in meetings held in Norwegian and answer questions in Norwegian from students, although they may themselves use spoken English in these contexts.

The need to increase bilingual competence should be incorporated into the template for performance assessment reviews.

### ***Tips:***

A number of institutions offer courses in Norwegian language and culture. The University of Oslo offers [a three-level course](#).

Personnel in permanent positions at NHH Norwegian School of Economics who do not have command of Norwegian or another Scandinavian language must acquire Norwegian proficiency corresponding to level B1 within three years of their appointment.

At the University of Helsinki, the language and communication skills of personnel are an integral part of [performance assessment reviews and competency mapping activities](#).

### ***Read more:***

- [pp17–18 i More parallel, please!](#) (in Danish)

## 6 Language in research activities

*Purpose: To ensure that Norwegian academic and technical language is further developed in the context of research activity.*

As a rule, English is the language of international research. Research articles and monographs in English or another foreign language should have a summary in Norwegian, and similarly, Norwegian texts should have a summary in English. Norwegian keywords and summaries should always be registered in Cristin (Current Research Information System in Norway).

Institutions must establish a framework that enables academic staff to publish research articles in Norwegian, for example using Open Access journals.

### **Read more:**

- [pp. 6–10 i \*Parallelspråk i høyere utdanning\* \[“Parallel languages in higher education”\] \(NHH, Norwegian only\)](#)

## 7 Language in dissemination activities

*Purpose: To ensure that research findings are disseminated in good Norwegian in order to fulfil the institution’s social mission in the relevant field.*

Dissemination to the general public generally takes place in Norwegian. Researchers and students at the Master’s degree level and upwards should be provided with courses in dissemination to the public and encouraged to write articles for the Norwegian encyclopaedia Store norske leksikon and the forskning.no website, as well as for Norwegian newspapers and textbooks, etc.

Academic dissemination is a means of further developing Norwegian terminology and scientific language. Participation in expert commissions that deliver official reports and similar documents is also important in this context.

International academic personnel should be offered translation assistance or other kinds of language help to enable them to communicate research findings in Norwegian.

### **Tips:**

The Department of Biosciences at the University of Oslo offers a 10-credit course in dissemination and science journalism for natural science students. The communication departments at several universities and university colleges offer courses in media contact and dissemination for researchers.

## 8 Administrative language

*Purpose: To ensure that Norwegian is generally used as the administrative language.*

It is important to have some common guidelines for choice of language in emails, announcements, meeting documents, webpages and other administrative information.

A wide range of administrative personnel need to be proficient in both Norwegian and English, and should be provided with relevant courses.

Certain standard texts and texts that apply to the institution as a whole should be available in both Norwegian and English. Webpages with important information for personnel should also be available in Norwegian and English versions.

Important emails to multiple recipients can include a short summary in English or Norwegian (depending on the original language used).

The UHR's Termbase for Norwegian higher education institutions should be made easily available via the institution's website.

### ***Tips:***

At the University of Oslo, particularly important emails to employees and students are sent out in both Norwegian (Bokmål and Nynorsk) and English.

### ***Read more:***

- [pp. 24–25 i \*More parallel, please!\*](#) (In Danish)
- [pp. 10–14 i \*Parallelspråk i høyere utdanning\*](#) ["Parallel languages in higher education"] (NHH, Norwegian only)

## 9 Language use in meetings and at social events

*Purpose: To ensure that international students and academic personnel become integrated and have the opportunity to practice using Norwegian.*

The institution should establish a set of common rules for language use in meetings and at social events.

In some contexts, it may be expedient to use two languages simultaneously during meetings. International personnel who are still in the process of learning Norwegian can speak in English, but hear Norwegian speakers use Norwegian during the meeting.

Remember that meetings and social events represent a good opportunity to practice language skills!

**Tips:**

Every Friday the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at NTNU arranges a language café where staff and ph.d.-students can socialize and speak Norwegian. They serve buns and hold kahoots in Norwegian.

**Read more:**

[pp. 14–15 i \*Parallelspråk i høyere utdanning\*](#) [“Parallel languages in higher education”]  
(NHH, Norwegian only)

## 10 Coordination of language services

*Purpose: To ensure effective coordination of language services at the institutions.*

Institutions should consider establishing a dedicated resource centre or office to develop and coordinate language courses, translation and language revision services.

Such resource centres may be utilised even more optimally if two or more institutions collaborate on them, for example at the regional level.

Many of the proposals put forth in this document could be administered from an entity of this type.

**Tips:**

[UiA PULS – Centre for Teaching and Learning](#) at the University of Agder offers translation and language revision for the university administration as well as for texts written by academic personnel and Ph.D. students. UiA PULS also offers language courses and language consultations.

The University of Copenhagen has a [research centre](#) that offers courses in English and Danish. The research centre also carries out needs analyses and diagnostic language tests.

**Read more:**

[s. 15–16 i \*More parallel, please!\*](#)



## References

- Airey, John. [“The Disciplinary Literacy Discussion Matrix: A Heuristic Tool for Initiating Collaboration in Higher Education”](#) in *Across the Disciplines* (8). 2011.
- [“Language Policy of the University of Helsinki. From Guidelines to Practice: Towards Functional Multilingualism”](#). 2014. (Finnish, Swedish and English)
- [Hvor parallelt. Om parallellspråkighet på Nordens universitet](#) [“How parallel – Parallellingualism at Nordic Universities”]. 2014. (English chapter summaries available)
- [Act relating to universities and university colleges](#). 2005.
- [More parallel, please! Nordisk Gruppe for Parallelsprogligheds afsluttende rapport med 11 anbefalinger til universiteterne om mønsterpraksis for brug af internationale og lokale sprog](#) [“More parallel, please! Final report of the Nordic Working Group for Parallellingualism, with 11 recommendations to the universities on best practice for use of international and local languages”]. 2017. (In Danish)
- [Ot.prp. nr. 71 \(2008–2009\). Om lov om endringer i lov 1. april 2005 nr. 15 om universiteter og høyskoler](#) [“Proposition to the Odelsting No. 71 (2008–2009) (on amendments to the Act relating to universities and university colleges”)]. (Norwegian only)
- [Parallellspråk i høyere utdanning – rapport fra arbeidsgruppe ved Norges handelshøyskole](#) [“Parallel languages in higher education – Report of the Working Group at NHH- Norwegian School of Economics”]. 2017. (Norwegian only)
- [UHR’s Language Policy Platform](#). 2007. (Norwegian only)