Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues dans l'Enseignement Supérieur

European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education

Europäischer Verband der Hochschulsprachenzentren

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CercleS Focus Group Associate Members White Paper

1. Introduction to Topic and Relevance

Associate Members have historically been less actively involved in CercleS activities compared to full members. This Focus Group, aims at bringing together CercleS Associate Members providing them with opportunities to become more active in CercleS by sharing their experience and competencies and by discussing their specific problems, their needs and their potential. The creation of this Focus Group constitutes a proactive initiative by CercleS to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for all members, empowering them and giving them a stronger voice and a more central role within the confederation.

Fostering Inclusivity and Collaboration in Language Education

Language learning in higher education has undergone a significant transformation in the 21st century, being influenced by various social, technological, and pedagogical developments (Dou et al., 2023; González-Lloret, 2024; Ou et al., 2024). In this evolving and dynamic landscape of language education, CercleS is dedicated to promoting and enhancing language learning and teaching within higher education across Europe and beyond, supporting Language Centres in European establishments of higher education, promoting research in foreign language learning at international level, and encouraging international and interdisciplinary cooperation between Language Centres (CercleS, 2024). CercleS consists of full members and associate members, fostering an inclusive collaborative environment for Language Centres for networking and professional and academic development. According to CercleS statutes (article 3.1), full members are non-profit institutions, associations and other bodies, which represent Language Centres in higher education in individual European countries, language communities, or transnational associations. Full members are composed of Language Centres, each of which is an institutional member of the Association. Associate Members are other non-profit institutions, associations and other bodies, which support CercleS in the realisation of its aims (CercleS statutes, article 3.2). Associate Members can potentially be key contributors to CercleS vision and mission, due to their most valuable characteristics which are diversity and variety of experiences coming from different parts of their world. Their unique perspectives and expertise enrich the CercleS community.

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This white paper outlines the current role of Associate Members within CercleS, identifying the challenges they face, and making recommendations for concrete solutions to enhance their integration and active participation.

Challenges Faced by CercleS Associate Members

One of the most common challenges faced by Associate Members are the varied institutional contexts. The activities of the Focus Group need to be tailored to fit the needs of these diverse contexts. Another challenge faced is the difficulty in maintaining regular communication between members, which may constitute a challenge for all CercleS members. Furthermore, Associate Members need to become more active and have a greater voice in shaping the direction of CercleS. This diversity of backgrounds, plurality of opinions and variety of experiences could bring fresh insights and innovative approaches that can spark new ideas and collaborations within the confederation.

2. Proposed Solutions

The Associate Members Focus Group aims to become a forum that fosters communication and networking amongst all CercleS Associate Members and beyond, so that the general mission and vision of CerlceS is fulfilled. To achieve this, CercleS has dedicated an online space on its website for the Associate Members Focus Group which can serve as a central hub where members discuss common issues in a specialised forum, access a resource repository tailored to their specific needs, and stay informed with a calendar of events designed just for them. Additionally, a comprehensive directory of Associate Members that would be regularly updated would further facilitate valuable networking opportunities within the community.

Additionally, this Focus Group aims to organise events which are tailored to the needs of Associate Members through holding regular meetings and organising a variety of events such as:

- Virtual webinars/ workshops on topics of specific interest to Associate Members
- Exchange of good teaching/ research practices events
- Hybrid events that allow for both online and in-person participation
- Networking events designed to foster connections between Associate and full members

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The Focus Group strongly encourages participation and support of CercleS general and other Focus Groups' events and initiatives, fostering a sense of belonging to a community committed to the highest possible standards in language education and research to promote language education in higher education across Europe and beyond. It also supports resource sharing and promotes collaboration in joint research initiatives on topics of common interest, development of shared teaching materials or assessment tools, and exchange programs for staff development. Amongst the objectives of the Focus Group is also the representation of Associate Members in CercleS working groups and activities and the obtainment of regular input by Focus Group members.

3. Intended Impact

In general, the Focus Group's future objectives involve increasing Associate Member engagement by creating a more inclusive and supportive environment to enhance their participation in CercleS activities. This, in turn, will lead to enhanced collaboration, as stronger connections between Associate and Full Members are expected to inspire new joint projects and initiatives. Ultimately, these efforts aim to fortify the CercleS community, integrating Associate Members' fresh ideas, diverse perspectives, and valuable resources to make the confederation stronger and more vibrant.

4. References and Further Reading

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