



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 Management and Leadership White Paper

1. Introduction to the topic and relevance

The CercleS Leadership and Management Focus Group is essential to maintaining the leading role of Language Centres (LC) in language education at HEIs and reinforcing a strategic role of LCs in HEIs' internationalization and adaptation to contemporary pedagogical trends, e.g. AI-enhanced pedagogy. LCs contribute to HEIs far beyond traditional language education areas and LC directors must secure political and financial support for all types of their activities, such as high-quality teaching, continuous curriculum innovation, professional development, cutting-edge research, student and staff mobility support, lifelong learning or collaboration between academia and industry.

The Leadership and Management Focus Group provides a structured platform for LC leaders, managers and directors to exchange best practices, coordinate strategic planning, navigate institutional challenges, advocate for greater recognition of LCs as active drivers in influencing HE language policies and strengthen the impact of LCs in areas, such as multilingualism, intercultural skills, employability, internationalization, inclusivity and democratic values.

Challenges in European Language Centers and Universities

European language centres and university departments have been facing a complex set of interrelated challenges. Persistent financial constraints, limited human resources and a lack of professionalization of the language teaching staff at HEIs impede long-term planning and innovation, while national education policies often marginalize language education. For example, the rise of nationalist sentiments in certain regions may have contributed to a declining interest in foreign language learning. Also, structural reforms within universities, such as re-organizations or the integration of language centres, can reduce or increase institutional capacity, creating operational instability and casting uncertainty over the future role of language education in higher education.

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2. Proposed Solutions and Actions

In the long term, the CercleS Leadership and Management Focus Group aims to establish an information exchange and mutual-support-based network which will empower LC leaders, managers and directors with information and collaborative support. Thanks to the FG, LC leaders, managers and directors will become even stronger players in negotiations with HEI leadership, administration and external stakeholders in their task to secure or even elevate the status of LCs as valuable, integral and ideally even respected parts of their HEIs and guarantee their long-term sustainability.

This long-term goal can be supported by the following five objectives which focus on progressive enhancement of professional recognition of LCs in the short term. The objectives include a data-driven, evidence-based and contextualization-based development of:

1. A definition of the role of LC leadership with the objective to establish a shared framework for the job description of LC leaders, managers and directors, covering areas such as HR- hiring, evaluations, promotions; communication - with faculties, authorities and services; administration; budget responsibilities; long-term strategic planning; teaching – organisation of courses and programmes, teaching, assessment, further development.
2. A strong argument for LCs with the objective to compile a comprehensive collection of evidence-based arguments that highlight the impact of LCs on academic excellence, employability, multilingual education and overall student and staff success. This collection will also include counter-arguments to anticipate and address perspectives from university leaderships, administration and other stakeholders.
3. Expertise through best-practices (or Success stories collection) with the objective to gather testimonials from graduates who have benefitted from LC training and case studies to demonstrate the real-world impact of LCs on academic and professional success as well as to reinforce visibility of LCs within their HEIs.
4. Branding and communication with the objective to develop effective marketing and communication tools and strategies for flexible branding and re-branding of LCs in order to reinforce the presence of LCs and significance of language education within their HEIs, ensuring LC relevance in different local/global contexts and for diverse target audiences.

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3. Intended Impact

The Leadership and Management Focus Group seeks to re-affirm language learning as a fundamental pillar of democratic participation in Europe. Its objectives include active promotion of plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and multilingual education, stronger collaboration and alignment across language certification systems, and a strategic shift from a reactive stance (responding to, for example, market demands) towards a proactive approach that defines which languages and language- and communication-related skills, and competencies are essential for future societal and institutional needs.

In support of these goals, the FG will actively identify and develop projects focusing on the EU priorities, ensuring that language education remains a vital and forward-looking element of the European educational landscape.

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