

Language policy at the Department of Public Health Sciences

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Aim

The aim of this language policy is to define what language is to be used in various situations at the Department of Public Health Sciences, and thereby improve the work environment for all employees. This language policy is based on the Stockholm University language policy, Dnr SU 209-1772-10, and also on two questionnaires that was carried out at the department in January 2018. In areas where this policy is unspecific, the Stockholm University language policy will serve as guidance.

Parallel languages

Swedish is the principal language of the department. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. The department is a Swedish workplace
2. Swedish is the principal language in the surrounding society
3. Using Swedish in everyday work helps integration into the Swedish society
4. Swedish is the native language for a majority of the staff
5. Part of the department's mission is to use and develop Swedish terminology in the Public Health Sciences

The use of Swedish instead of English in most contexts is problematic for the employees with other native languages than Swedish. This was obvious from the answers in the two questionnaires.

The language policy of Stockholm University also mentions an important reason for using English in the university's activities:

Internationalization within the field of higher education and research is crucial for improving quality and the university deliberately strives to reach a more eminent position internationally. The university must be able to attract Swedish and foreign researchers as well as students. [...]

The university shall strive to use Swedish and English as parallel scientific languages. The goal is that teachers and students master Swedish on a perfectly satisfactory level and English on a high level. Development and use of one of the languages must not lead to deteriorated knowledge and skills in the other. The goal set forward of parallel languages means that efforts shall be made to strengthen the international parts in education and at the same time to develop Swedish terminology and Swedish phrases within every field.

In order to make the department a workplace that attracts international researchers and teachers, some communication must take place in English. However, since we are part of a government institution, all decisions, guidelines and similar are required to be written in Swedish. The same goes for decisions, guidelines etc. from higher decision-making bodies. Altogether a large quantity of text, redounding to the department or composed here, must be in Swedish. Also, due to limited economic resources, it is not possible to have this large amount of documents translated into English. See "*Texts and documents*" below for information on how this will be handled by the department.

Comments from the staff

Below is a brief description of the answers from the two questionnaires.

Employees whose native language is not Swedish

A wish was expressed that staff meetings and staff conferences should be held in English - this was expressed in 9 out of 12 answers. The main reason for this was that there is a lot of important information given during such venues, and that the chance to express one's opinion is reduced for those who cannot understand or don't have time to penetrate the issue, and so the opportunity to participate is lost. Some persons answered that e-mails, forms, everyday speech and regulations in Swedish could also be difficult to understand.

A majority (8 out of 12 answers) suggest that work time is allocated for studies. Furthermore, it is suggested that - every now and then - there is a "language coffee" organised by the department. Non-

native staff should also be informed about available Swedish courses. Evidently many do not know what Swedish courses are offered at the university.

Employees with Swedish as native language

The employees with Swedish as native language answered questions regarding what language to be used at staff meetings. Out of the 48 respondents, 29 % answered Swedish, 27 % answered English, 32 % said everyone should make his or her own choice and 12 % answered that it didn't matter.

In the comments that followed, the importance of accessibility for all employed was emphasised. This was expressed both by those who favoured the use of English and those who favoured a free choice in the matter. Among those who had answered in favour of using Swedish, it was pointed out that when a message is translated into English it often gets distorted, and also that Swedish actually is the principal language in Sweden.

Mentors

In the two questionnaires, the employees could also express their opinion on Swedish mentors for those who do not speak Swedish. The answers diverged strongly in both groups. Some answered it was a good idea, whereas others doubted that it would function well in reality. Some also feared that this would "alienate" non-Swedish speakers in a negative way.

Instead of establishing a mentor programme, the Department will create guidelines on introduction for new employees. This should ensure a good work environment, and facilitate integration into the department activities irrespective of native language.

Language policy of the Department of Public Health Sciences

It is not possible to find a solution that meets each and every person's requirements. The reasons for this are that opinions diverge and that translation resources are scarce. However, a clear language policy combined with adjustments for special needs and wishes within the economic resources of the department, should create a good work environment for everyone.

Foreign colleagues' qualifications are precious

The Department should be an attractive workplace for foreign researchers and teachers (see the Stockholm University language policy for reasons noted). If foreign colleagues do learn Swedish, their qualifications will be of particular value. When employing personnel for two years or more, the applicant should always be informed that he or she is expected to learn Swedish within twelve months.

Studies during working hours

Employees may attend Swedish lessons during working hours. Researchers are not restricted by office hours and can more easily switch their day schedule. Other staff categories must be guaranteed a chance to participate in Swedish courses during working hours. They must be allowed some flexibility when their work schedule is planned. Those who participate in a research project shall inform the project leader about his or her absence due to Swedish lessons. Other employees should inform the Head of Department or the Head of administration.

For examinations, the employee may take a leave with salary for a maximum of five days per year.

Texts and documents

Strategic documents, rules and guidelines from higher decision-making bodies at the university are not translated at the department. When staff members are informed about new or changed rules and guidelines, a brief explanation in English shall be offered.

All strategic documents, rules and guidelines at the Department of Public Health Sciences are written in Swedish. When staff members are informed about new or changed rules and guidelines, a brief English explanation of the change will be provided.

Protocols from the Department Board and research centres are written in Swedish.

Minutes from staff meetings are written in Swedish with a summary in English.

All educational course plans are written in Swedish. Course plans for courses that are given in English are also provided in English.

Internal newsletters are written in Swedish with a summary in English.

The intranet is basically in Swedish. If resources permit the material will be translated into English.

Meetings and seminars

Staff meetings and staff conferences

Our staff meetings and staff conferences are venues for the whole staff for information exchange and dialogue. Important information is given on these occasions and it is of great importance that every staff member can understand what is being said and is able to participate in the discussions regarding the future of the department. Therefore English should be the primary language on these occasions. For written information the guidelines under “*Texts and documents*” apply.

Note that each staff member is free to speak Swedish even if English is the primary language at staff meetings. Only the staff member himself/herself can decide whether the message is best formulated in Swedish or English. The also applies to Power Point presentations, where the speaker decides what language is most suitable for the presentation.

Decision making bodies

The three decision making bodies at the Department of Public Health Sciences (the Department Board and the two research centres CHESS and SoRAD) hold their meetings in Swedish.

Drafting committees

The Department’s drafting committees (the department head council, the work group for quality in education in public health sciences (KUF), the supervisors’ consortium and the council for work environment and equal conditions hold their meetings in Swedish.

Other

The teaching staff for basic and advanced level education hold their advanced level meetings in English so that all teachers can participate. Basic level education meetings are generally held in Swedish.

Each researcher makes his/her own decision regarding what language to use in various situations.

Language courses at Stockholm University

Staff members who want to improve their academic English can turn to Centre for Academic English (CAE) at Stockholm University. CAE supports students and employees and gives guidance in oral and written academic English. CAE also gives specially designed courses in English for academic and professional aims.

Link to CAE: www.english.su.se/centre-for-academic-english

Staff members who wish to learn Swedish can turn to the Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism that offers several courses in Swedish for international students and employees working at Stockholm University.

Link to “Swedish for international employees”:

www.su.se/svefler/english/education/courses-and-programmes/swedish-language-courses-for-international-employees