

**FINELC 2020: THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

FINELC Action Plan 2017−2020

Approved at the Executive Group Meeting on 13 December 2016

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# Foreword

The Network of Finnish University Language Centres (FINELC) describes its goals and activities in this action plan for 2017−2020. The action plan is a tool for developing the joint activities of language centres in chosen focal areas.

The action plan first looks into the future through the vision for 2020 and then examines the network’s near-future development goals at a general level. Thereafter, the focus is on the three chosen focal areas: research-based development of teaching and learning, internationalisation and management of the network.

The action plan is primarily a tool for the staff of university language centres, but it also provides information to anyone interested in the current activities of FINELC.

# Vision 2020

In 2020, language centres (LCs) and other corresponding language and communication units at universities are connected by a network that provides their staff with effective cooperation channels for developing language and communication teaching and other activities, as well as for assuring their quality. This networking facilitates the use of pedagogically sound language-learning environments that are at the cutting edge of European development and take into account the needs of each individual university. The network has diverse and multidisciplinary teaching and learning practices and materials suited to students’ changing needs.

The language centres have a common understanding of quality goals and practices in language and communication teaching and other activities. This common understanding is based on current research, strategic goals in teaching, and national and international benchmarking. The network is a strategic planning partner for working groups and committees dealing with internationalisation, working life competences, and language and communication skills.

The language centres in the network conduct research that supports teaching. They have external funding for projects and research as well as good connections to representatives of the working community. The network is managed in an active, systematic and forward-looking manner. It is a nationally and internationally known and respected expert body whose activities promote the development of its member LCs.

# 1. FINELC’s general goals

To develop its activities, FINELC has set a number of goals defined in discussions between its strategic committee and Executive Group in 2012. The discussions focused on the development needs identified by the Executive Group based on the strengths and weaknesses recognised and acknowledged in the December 2011 Executive Group meeting. The goals have been specified and updated in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The need to redefine the goals has increased in the past few years particularly because of the changes in the Finnish university system and the resultant pressure to change the role, tasks and operating culture of language centres. A joint action plan is a tool for reacting to the pressures.

FINELC’s general goals pertaining to internal and external activities are presented in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. FINELC’s general goals*

The Executive Group of FINELC has selected three of the above-mentioned goals as spearhead objectives (Figure 2):

*Figure 2. FINELC’s spearhead objectives*

Research-based development of teaching and learning is an indispensable success factor for language centres. Teaching at language centres, just like any other university teaching, must be based on the latest research. A shared understanding and definition of research conducted at language centres is an essential part of this objective.

Internationalisation is an overarching objective of the Finnish higher education system. From the perspective of FINELC, internationalisation implies participation and influencing in the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS) and promotion of the visibility and networking of the member language centres.

To achieve the goals, FINELC must also be managed in a systematic and proactive way. It is essential to continue developing its management structures and activities.

# 2. Concrete actions (roadmap)

The spearhead objectives have been defined further, with aims and concrete actions as outlined below.

## 2.1 Research-based development of teaching and learning

Research-based development of teaching and learning is aimed at ensuring the quality of teaching, the core task of language centres. A research-based approach epitomises the academic principle of ‘teachers as researchers and researchers as teachers’. Language centres can achieve exceptional teaching quality and learning support only from a research-based perspective.

The research-based approach is visible at different levels, ranging from systematic and goal-oriented development of a unit’s overall operation to the development of an individual teacher’s activities. At the unit level, research and development implies developing the curriculum and instruction offered, while individual-level research and development can involve research into one’s own work, development of one’s own teaching, and publishing conducted research.

The present goals of the network are compiled in the project From Analog to Digital, a joint project of FINELC aiming to develop teaching based on research.

Table 1 presents the key aims and actions to be taken in the research-based development of teaching and learning.

*Table 1. Research-based development of teaching and learning: aims and actions*

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Aims** | **Actions** |
| (1) | Defining the role of research in LCs | * The role and forms of research are defined at the network level. |
| (2) | Developing recruitment practices and HR strategies to  incorporate a research  perspective | * Time is allocated for research in work plans if possible (see item 3 below). * An applicant’s ability to use current research as the basis of teaching and its development is regarded as an advantage during the recruitment process. FINELC provides comparative data on the recruitment policies of LCs. |
| (3) | Supporting research in LCs  through joint research  projects | * New networks are established for the generation and implementation of research topics and projects (a multidisciplinary perspective, e.g. teacher training, trade unions and the Confederation of Finnish Industries). * From Analog to Digital project 2017–2018. * Information on funding sources is provided and good practices are collected for acquiring funding. |
| (4) | Utilising the community  in research | * LCs develop their curricula and educational activities based on research. FINELC supports this in the form of courses, etc. * Research seminars, reading circles, methodology training and workshops are organised jointly among LCs and/or with language or pedagogical departments. * FINELC can organise research seminars, methodology training and other activities supporting the research perspective (e.g. a thematic area on the FINELC Wiki). |
| (5) | Developing research  supervision | * The aim is to arrange an experienced mentor for staff members who are starting research. |

## 2.2 Internationalisation

Internationalisation is currently one of the central aims of Finnish universities, and language centres play an important role in this process. Multilingualism and multiculturalism have always been such a natural part of the work of LCs that universities seeking a more pronounced international role can utilise it more effectively than they now do. This internationalisation trend also increases the demand for different language services. To this end, the translators and language revisers of LCs have formed a cooperation network supported by FINELC.

Another perspective on internationalisation is the internal internationality of LCs. Language centres have traditionally been regarded as international, but they should critically analyse their own internationality as well. It is thus important to define what internationality means for LCs now and in the future.

Table 2 presents the aims and actions for furthering internationalisation.

*Table 2. Internationalisation: aims and actions*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Aims** | **Actions** |
| (1) | Networking on an international level | * Active participation in CercleS continues. |
| (2) | Participation in international  projects | * FINELC and its members take part in projects that implement the network’s objectives. Project reporting on the FINELC portal. |
| (3) | International comparison of  areas of operation | * Staff exchange is utilised by teachers and other staff to develop teaching and other activities. * Exchange experiences are shared within LCs, in Executive Group meetings, in other joint events and via the FINELC portal. * FINELC has a data bank on the cooperation partners of different LCs and on partners interested in cooperation (a so-called partner bank). |
| (4) | FINELC’s internal  communication: language | * Multilingualism is favoured: various languages are used in interaction when possible. * All key points are communicated in Finnish, Swedish and English. |
| (5) | Language services | * The network of translators and revisers is supported by, for example, enabling them to participate in FINELC’s events. |
| (6) | Education export | * A general idea is created of the role of LCs in the education export of their universities. The inclusion of language training in education export projects is promoted. |
|  |  |  |

## 2.3 Systematic and proactive management

The aim is to manage FINELC systematically and proactively. The key players in managing the network include the Executive Group, the Executive Group chair and the vice-chairs. Table 3 outlines FINELC’s development aims and the practical steps planned to promote the activities of the Executive Group.

*Table 3. Developing the operations of the Executive Group: aims and actions*

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Aims** | **Actions** |
| (1) | Effective meetings | * Each meeting is assigned a theme in line with   FINELC’s objectives and action plan.   * All participants prepare carefully for the meetings, and the person calling the meeting ensures that the meeting is well organised. |
| (2) | More activity | * Meetings are organised as often as needed to handle all tasks, also using web conferencing. |
| (3) | Effective operations | * Thematic working groups are set up. * Everyone commits to collaboration. * All Executive Group members are available for all tasks, utilising their respective strengths. * Responsibilities are shared evenly whenever possible. * The FINELC portal is used effectively (e.g. to distribute materials). |
| (4) | Definition of responsibilities | * The responsibilities of the chair and vice-chairs are defined clearly. * The role of vice-chairs is strengthened. * Areas of responsibility are delegated to working groups. |

Figure 3 specifies the tasks to be handled by the Executive Group chair.

*Figure 3. Tasks of the Executive Group chair*

Figure 4 presents the tasks of the two FINELC Executive Group vice-chairs. The chair and vice-chairs agree together on the division of their tasks.

*Figure 4. Tasks of Executive Group vice-chairs*

The chair and vice-chairs meet regularly between the annual meetings of the Executive Group to review the activities of the group and FINELC as well as to create ideas for and plan projects and cooperation.

# 3. Follow-up

The Executive Group follows up on the implementation of the action plan as a whole.