

### **Multilingual learning in an internationally oriented university**

Under this heading, I have been asked to speak about the importance of English in higher education and on the opportunities and challenges of the multilingual and multicultural learning space. In this context there are two points worth bearing in mind: (i) While an increasing amount of programmes or courses are taught through English in Europe, it is still only a small percentage of the total number of courses offered outside the UK and Ireland (Wächter & Maiworm 2014). (ii) The internationalisation of higher education does not per se require that courses are taught through English (de Wit et al. 2015).

With these two points of departure, I will discuss the opportunities and challenges of the multilingual and multicultural learning space. I use multilingual to refer to 'a situation where teachers and students, despite their similarities, have different first languages, none of which need to be the language of instruction'. I use multicultural to refer to a situation where, in addition to other factors such as gender, religion, beliefs, etc. 'students and their teachers have different ethnic backgrounds (cultures), but meet in the local culture of a higher education institution (HEI) where they teach and learn' (Lauridsen & Lillemose 2015:9).

In my talk, I will outline some of the opportunities – and also some of the tensions – that present themselves in such a multilingual and multicultural learning space; opportunities or tensions for the university, the academic staff, and the students. In this context, the languages of instruction and the languages of general communication and interaction are important; however, a university language policy and its implementation is only one of several closely interlinked factors. Other factors include the content of the programmes, the educational culture, the inclusion of all students in the learning space, and the pedagogical / didactic choices that teachers make.