

# Mediating between academic and professional worlds

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# Objectives

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- to set the context for languages in UK higher education
- to locate language degrees within frameworks of reference (CEF, QAA benchmarks)
- to show an example of how a link between academic and professional worlds can be created in language degree provision

# Context: Employability

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- Communication skills
  - ranked **1<sup>st</sup>** in International Employer Barometer (IEB) survey (2007)
  - BUT: ranked **16<sup>th</sup>** in employer satisfaction with graduate skills
- Team-working skills
  - ranked **2<sup>nd</sup>** in IEB survey
  - **7<sup>th</sup>** in employer satisfaction with graduate skills
- Literacy
  - in 8<sup>th</sup> place (before numeracy)
- Language skills
  - important for 26% of international companies

# Context: The internationalisation agenda

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- Ambiguity of term – what is the meaning behind “internationalisation”?
  - international cooperation
  - enhancing the global outlook of own graduates
- empty words?
- relationship of language skills, communication skills and internationalisation underdefined

# Context: Statistics

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- 2002/3-2006/7: decrease of **6%** in specialist degree enrolment for languages.
- BUT: increase of **27%** of students studying languages for credit at UG level (institution-wide language programmes).
- Perception of language degrees
  - language skills vs. subject matter
  - lack of economic impact factor
  - research-active staff dispersed to cognate departments
    - ➔ widening of gap between language learning (in language centres) and linguistics & area studies (academic departments)
    - ➔ languages lack academic base

# The nature of the subject (QAA benchmark statement)

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- Multidisciplinary study
- And by the way, also language learning...
  - *"The study of languages and related studies at university level represents a **multidisciplinary learning process**, allowing access to a broad range of enquiries, whether these be **literary, cultural, social, historical, political** or of some other nature. As such, it is in the **best traditions of serious humanistic education**.*

*At the same time, the study of languages and related studies **affords the opportunity for acquiring and developing competence in one or more foreign languages, and thus provides for its students a vocational training opportunity.**"*

# The CEFR and the QAA

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- “The majority of these students cannot be regarded as languages specialists and do not aspire to the graduate-level standards of competence in the language studied, as set out in section 6.0 of this *statement*. For the majority of such students, the descriptors of levels of proficiency as set out in the *Common European Framework* and use of the *European Language Portfolio* may be both helpful and appropriate.”
  - institution-wide language programmes: language
  - Language graduates: language + ?

# Subject benchmarks: The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

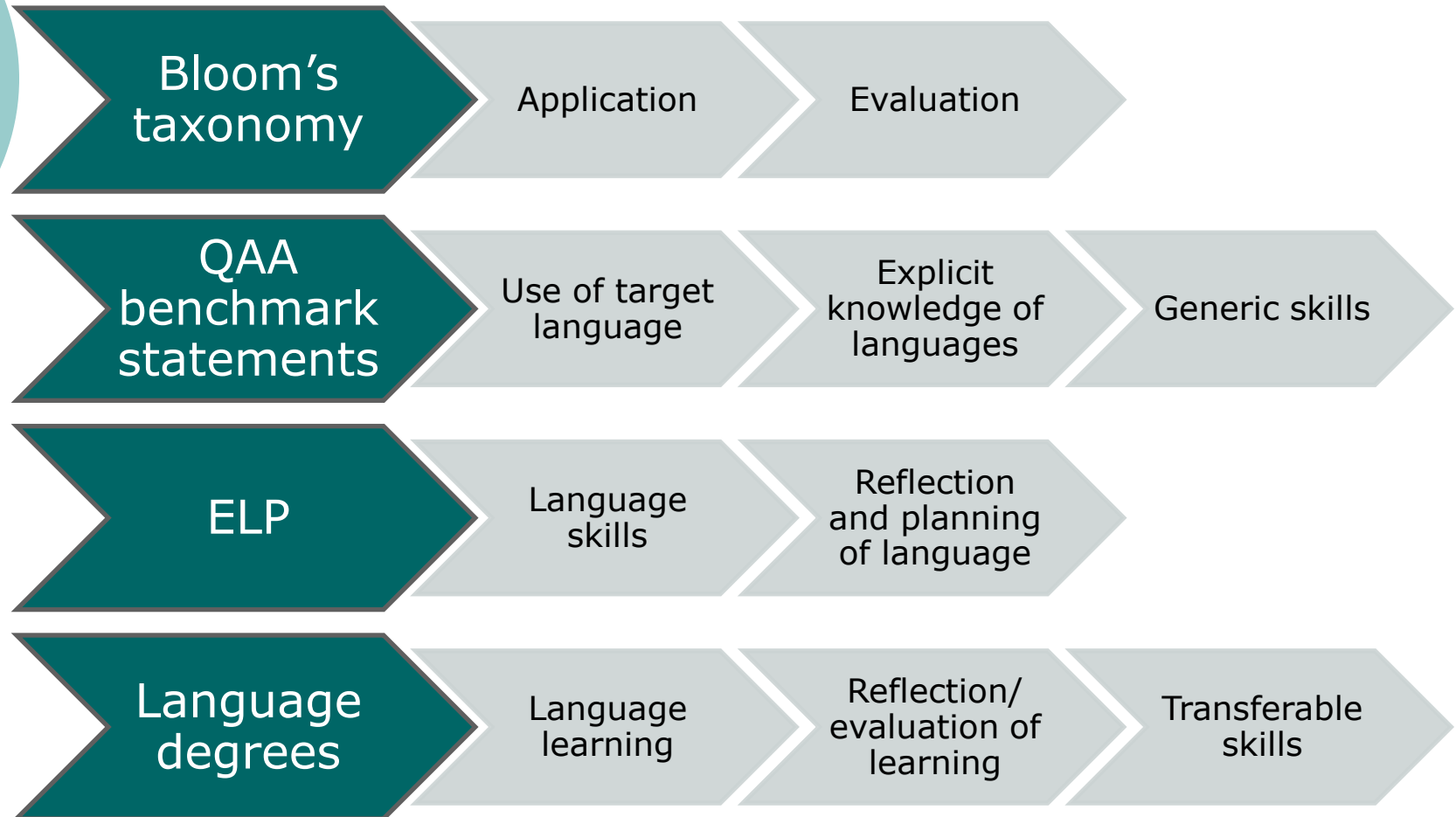
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- Descriptors:
  - outcome-based
  - can-do statements > skills
- Self-assessment: the European Language Portfolio (ELP)
  - evidence + reflection = product + process
    - LSP: + evidence -reflection
  - declarative knowledge (terminology, theory and techniques)
- ➔ knowing language and knowing about language



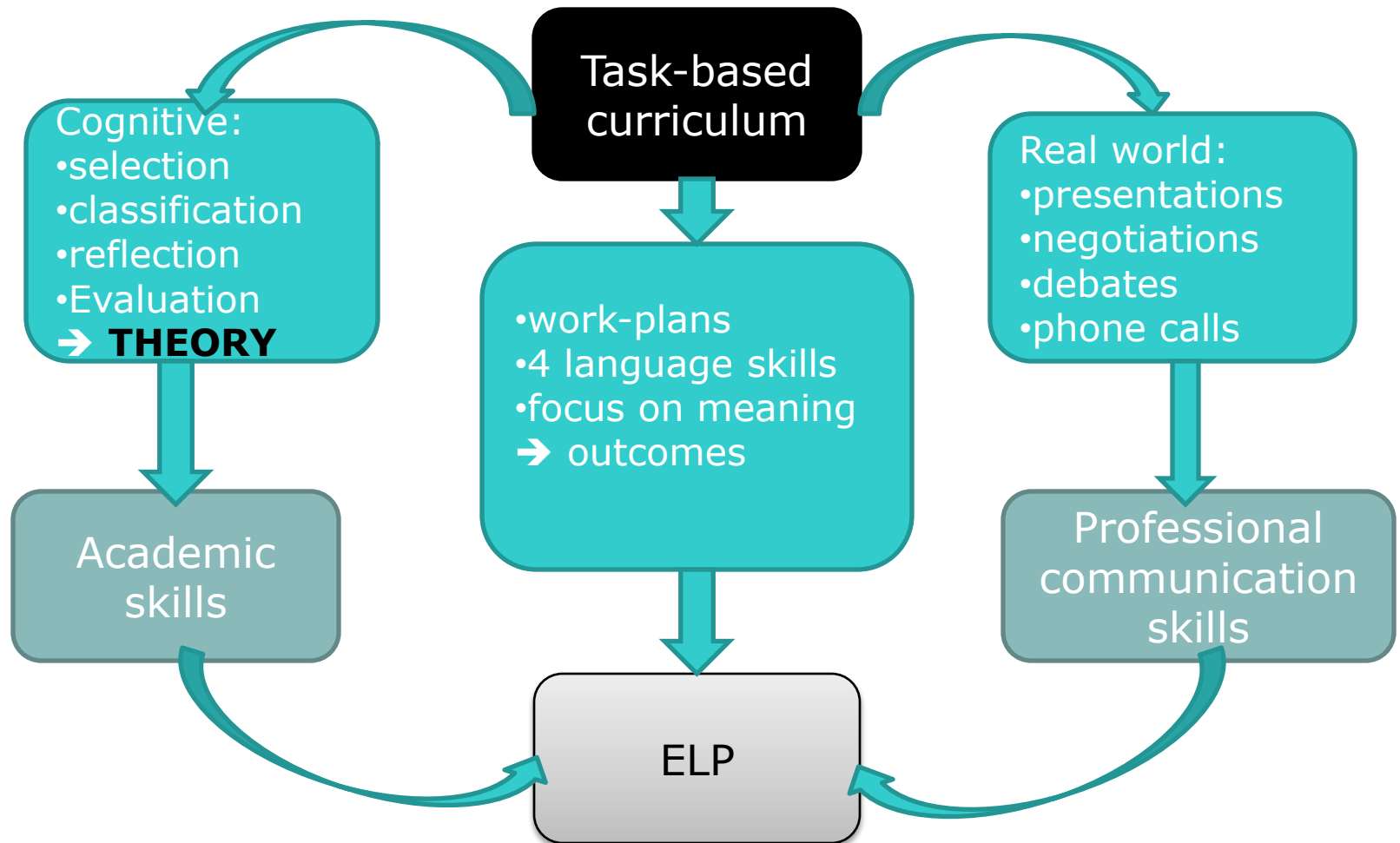
# Learning and teaching theories and languages at HE

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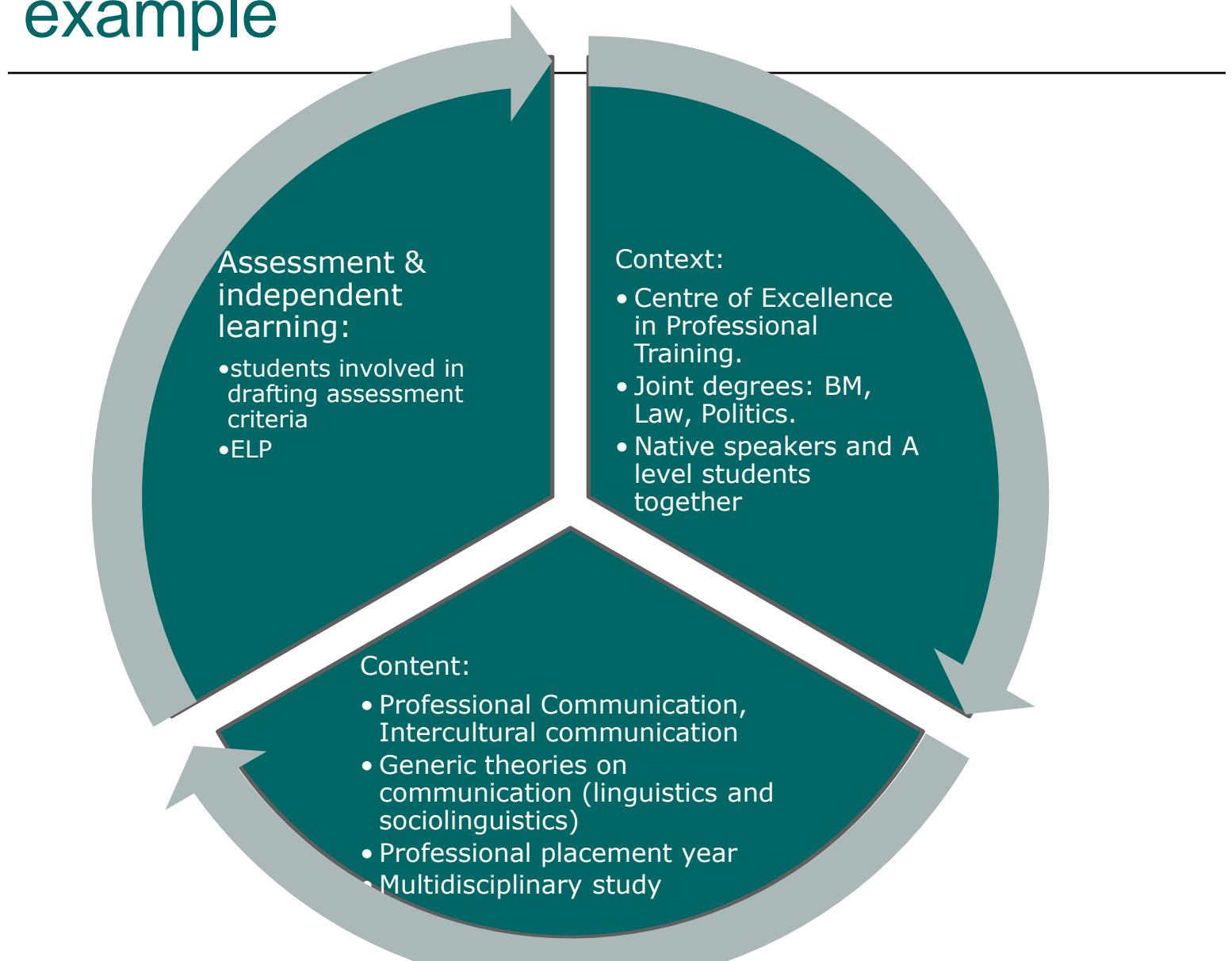


# The development of language learning as an academic subject

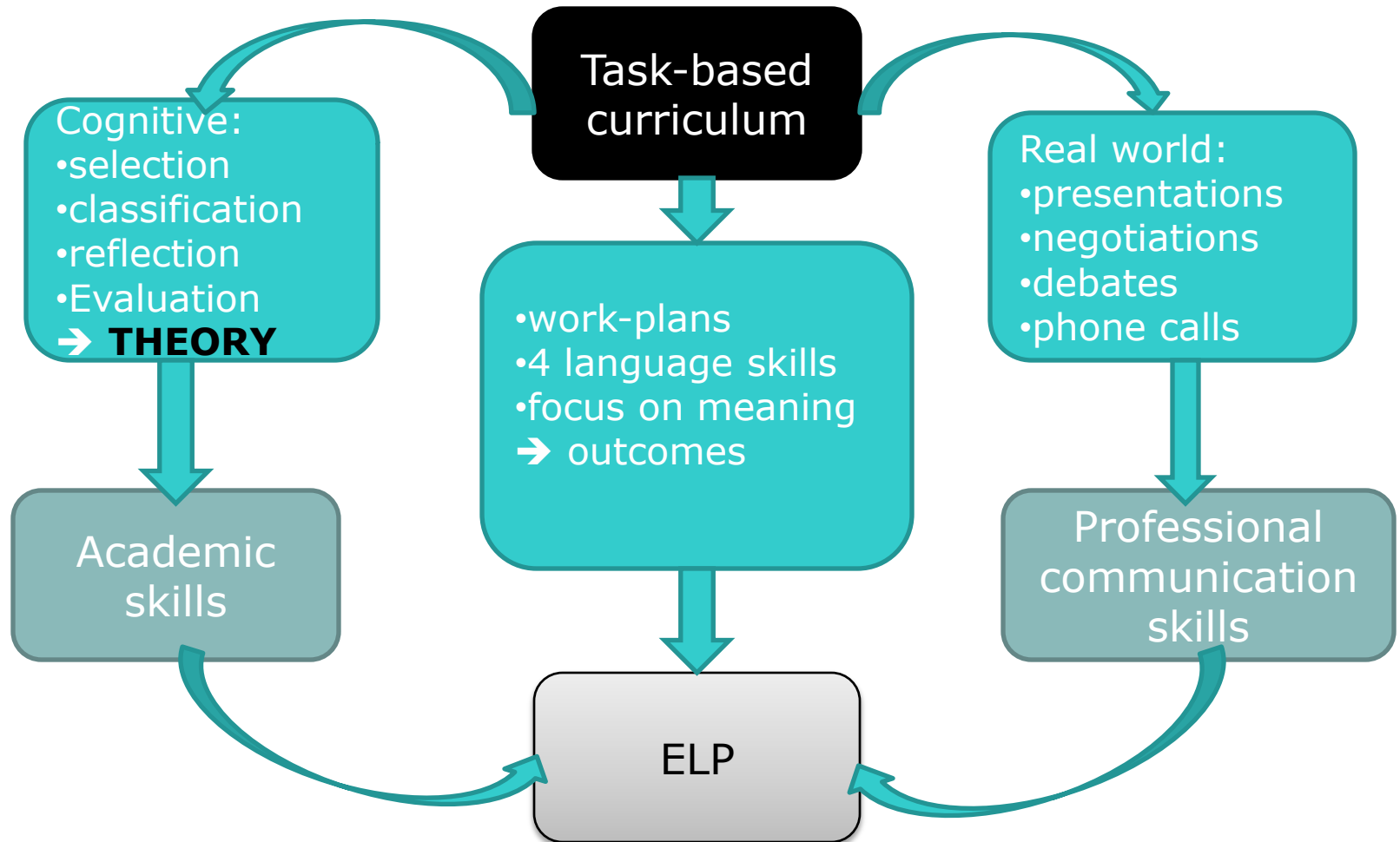
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# Language degree structure: an example



# Example: Oral Language module



# Benefits

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- Beyond institution-wide language programmes!
  - “Professional professional communicators” → **expert knowledge system**
  - Task + reflection = **academic** language learning
  - Generic communication skills
- Shift from an art-based or culture-based language degree to language degree based on authentic communication
- Relevance for society and economy
- Justifying the existence and counteracting the decrease of language degrees

# Challenges

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- Linguistic / Sociolinguistic basis:
  - authenticity
  - availability of teaching materials
  - pedagogic requirements
- Experience of tutors: learning curve?
- Learning a language is not all the same in institution-wide programmes and degrees: changes in advertising?
- need: out of the ML cellar, into the real world – knowledge transfer to and from industry!

# References

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# Questions

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