

A judicious use of English in higher education

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This report focuses on the question of how the government, education institutions and other actors in the education community can maintain a balanced language policy that helps to encourage development of high-quality English-taught programmes, but at the same time ensures that the position of Dutch as the language of culture and science is safeguarded. Our recommendations in this report were written in response to a request by the Dutch Senate.

The Education Council believes that higher education is the guardian of Dutch language and culture, but also fulfils an essential role in the international knowledge economy. Mindful of this view, the Education Council makes the following recommendations.

Institutions should formulate a clear, reasoned vision

The Education Council recommends that the government demands from every institution a clear, reasoned vision on internationalisation and the use of foreign languages as a teaching medium. A national debate could prove useful in developing a vision on this. The governing bodies of educational institutions should use its annual report to render an account of the reasons why a programme is taught in a given language or languages. It is recommended that the vision on the use of foreign languages be clearly communicated to prospective students, staff and society.

Foster, maintain and monitor the quality of English-taught programmes

Quality aspects relating to English as a teaching medium should be given a prominent place in the scrutiny of NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders. A suitable level of language proficiency of the teachers and lecturers is greatly important. It is recommended that this level of language proficiency be included in the basic teaching qualification at universities.

Ensure that the English language proficiency of students does justice to academic standards

Internationalisation in higher education places demands on the languages skills of students. This applies not only to international students, but to home students too. The Education Council believes that the learning outcomes of senior secondary vocational education, level 4, (MBO 4), senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO) must be comparable to the language proficiency requirements demanded of international students.

Ensure that international students and lecturers receive a thorough grounding in Dutch language and culture

Higher education institutions should give international students and lecturers who stay in the Netherlands for more than one year the opportunity to learn the Dutch language and culture at a level that would allow them, if they so wished, to participate in Dutch education and society in a responsible way. The quality of the facilities provided should be subject to scrutiny by NVAO.