

Position Paper on the New Language Law

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Introduction

On July 14th, 2023, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in the Netherlands introduced the Balanced Internationalisation Act (*Wet internationalisering in balans, WIB*). This new policy aims to address the significant increase of incoming international students in higher education over the years by imposing stricter regulations to non-Dutch language educational programmes. This proposal not only affects prospective students, but also Assistant Professors who devoted their time and effort to cultivate the next generation of scholars and professions. In response, APNet has conducted an online survey and a roundtable discussion to understand how such a change in language policy would influence assistant professors and the Dutch academia in general.

Background

In the Balanced Internationalisation Act, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science proposed that from the 2025 / 2026 academic year onwards, universities in the Netherlands will be required to teach at least two-thirds of their bachelor's credits in Dutch.

In the meanwhile, recent statistics shows that almost half (46.4%) of Assistant Professors in the Netherlands is of non-Dutch origin.¹ Therefore, the new language law will adversely affect Dutch academia. To understand the potential impact better, APNet has conducted an online survey supplement with a roundtable discussion to collect our members' opinion.

Result

According to our survey, at least 60% of respondents disagree with the new language law. More than 80% believed that, at present, Dutch is not important (or extremely unimportant) in their day-to-day work and teaching activities in the Netherlands.

If the new policy needs to be implemented soon, only around 25% of respondents are comfortable to teach in Dutch within a reasonable time. However, within this pool of respondents, there are still concerns that the time required for them to prepare for lesson materials will be doubled. This can further increase the work pressure among Assistant Professors and negatively impact the teaching quality for students.

75% stated that they are not (fully) comfortable in teaching university courses in Dutch. Among these Assistant Professors, a strong uncertainty is present regarding the time it will

¹ The Dutch Network of Women Professors. [Women Professors Monitor 2022](#).

take to acquire sufficient Dutch language skills, and the availability of resources to do so, and at which cost-opportunity. Many are worried that the new language law will result in a decline of competitive advantage, and feel that an imposition to teach in Dutch would force them to leave the country in search of other international opportunities.

APNet's concerns

Based on the above, we could foresee that the new language law would have at least three disastrous effects on Dutch academia.

First, the new language law will result in a loss of global talent, thus a decline in the quality and competitiveness of higher education in the Netherlands. This does not only affect the current generation of scholars but would have a long-term impact in higher education in this country.

Second, the new language law will require scholars to reach a sophisticated competence in a language that they do not use much in their day-to-day activities. A lot of effort will be devoted to acquiring that language and converting teaching materials from English to Dutch, axing away their time in enhancing better learning experience for their students and conducting research that is valuable and urgently needed to address various issues in the contemporary world.

Thirdly, the new language law will also threaten the availability of fundings to research projects. For instance, grants in technological subjects or disciplines always require co-funding. Changing the teaching language to Dutch in these disciplines would result in a loss in co-funding from all international companies. This will certainly hinder research opportunities of scholars in the Netherlands and could potentially result in a decline of global ranking of Dutch universities. Therefore, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science shall carefully consider the impacts of the new language law on Dutch academia.

Conclusion

Internationalization of higher education has become an important strategic priority for many institutions and governments around the world. In this trajectory, the new language law sounds contradictory to the urge of sourcing global talent to enrich academia in the Netherlands and maintaining its top-notch position in research and development.

Thus far, the internationalization process of higher education in this country did not impact or never impacted negatively neither Dutch people nor the Dutch language. Instead, it enriches this country culturally, linguistically, and economically.

In facing contemporary challenges brought by climate change, migration, AI, pandemics etc., universities must act fast in researching, coming up solutions and equipping our future



generations with knowledge and skills to combat these challenges. To achieve this, a group of global talent is essential, and they shall not be hindered by language requirements.

APNet therefore urges the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to re-evaluate the impact of such a change in language policy in the quality and competitiveness of higher education in the Netherlands.