



Statement on the proposed Language Act (Taalwet)

A crucial discussion on internationalization

by Utrecht Young Academy

The recently proposed *Language Act* about the language of instruction in Dutch Universities is a crucial component of larger discussions on internationalization. The proposal put forth by the Minister of Education, R. H. Dijkgraaf, has raised concerns and unease within Dutch academia, particularly among international students and staff. As Utrecht Young Academy (UYA) members, we are also cautiously attentive to the (un)intended consequences of this proposed act. Based on our values of institutional autonomy, research excellence, and an inclusive academic environment, we would like to share some of our concerns and invite involved parties to think carefully about the wider implications of the provisional changes.

In the short term, the Language Act has the potential to exacerbate the already high work pressure at Dutch universities. Implementing courses in Dutch instead of English would require significant changes, including the adaptation of lectures and materials and the adjustment of teaching staff depending on their language skills, as well as administrative and organizational burdens.

In the medium term, the sudden policy shift would put additional burden on educational programs due to the prioritization of Dutch language learning among international staff and students. Namely, the need for international staff to learn Dutch within two years to communicate professionally would require investing significant amount of time and energy to language learning. This would potentially impact their availability for teaching obligations. Ultimately, these changes would place additional strain on teaching teams as a whole, particularly Dutch speaking colleagues.

In the long term, imposing language restrictions in Dutch academia could also impact our embeddedness and excellent positioning within higher education internationally. Limiting English teaching opportunities for international researchers, teachers and colleagues within Dutch academia may significantly reduce the attractiveness of Dutch universities.

The Utrecht Young Academy believes that the proposed Language Act requires careful consideration of its potential consequences. We urge the Ministry of Education to provide universities with the autonomy and flexibility to address the challenges of internationalization in other ways, focusing on sustainable and inclusive solutions (inclusive of other issues such as housing) rather than enforcing rigid language regulations. For example, the UYA suggests exploring alternative selection criteria that may benefit Dutch academia as a whole (e.g. [Numerus Fixus](#)).

In conclusion, we strongly advocate that higher education institutions should have the autonomy and flexibility to select the language of instruction of their educational programs while considering their learning objectives, international character, and unique job markets they serve. Moreover, if new language requirements are imposed, we call for the provision of additional financial and material resources in order to meet the rigorous demands required for such changes that go against decades of internationalization efforts.