DUTCH AND/OR ENGLISH?
LANGUAGE POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

Janneke Gerards
Professor of fundamental rights law, Utrecht University, the Netherlands
Chair of the commission reporting on language policy for the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences
Higher education

Research universities

Universities of applied sciences
## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION – RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

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Source: report KNAW, annex 4 (data 2015/16)
* ENG=English as language of instruction
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REQUEST FOR ADVICE

• ‘Foresight study’

• Choice of language of instruction + supportive language policy

• Research universities + universities of applied sciences

• Focus on English and/or Dutch
NEDERLANDS EN/OF ENGELS?
Taalkeuze met beleid in het Nederlands hoger onderwijs
CHOICE OF LANGUAGE: ARGUMENTS
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1. Nature and subject matter of the programme
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2. Labour market and profession
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CHOICE OF LANGUAGE: REQUIREMENTS

• Need for a conscious choice

• Need for differentiation
  o Based on nature and objectives of each study programme
  o Taking into account intermediate and mixed scenarios, e.g.:
    o First year Dutch-language, second year mixed, third year English-language
    o Intensive and dedicated courses in English
    o Minors and electives in English, otherwise Dutch-language programme
SUPPORTIVE LANGUAGE POLICY

• Improving language skills of staff

• Improving language skills of students
SUPPORTIVE LANGUAGE POLICY

• Improving language skills of staff
  o Proficiency is not enough
  o Intensive coaching and training in English as a medium of instruction

• Improving language skills of students
SUPPORTIVE LANGUAGE POLICY

• Improving language skills of staff

• Improving language skills of students
  o Students learn differently in a foreign language!
  o Dedicated language training, according to need and objectives
  o Differentiation in developing language skills
INTERNATIONAL CLASSROOM

• Value of internationalisation: sharing knowledge and experiences from different backgrounds

• Presence of international students is not enough!

• Intercultural skills must be trained – learning to deal with diversity
MAIN FINDINGS

• **Choice of language of instruction**
  • Should be made consciously
  • Based on nature and objectives of each study programme

• **Language policy**
  • High level, individualised
  • Differentiated according to need and nature/objectives of the programme
  • Should also pay attention to intercultural skills

• *... and more*
IMPORTANT OF PROFICIENCY IN DUTCH

• Most students enter the Dutch labour market

• Speaking Dutch contributes to stayrate of international students

• No one-size-fits-all policy
LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION

• Dilemma:
  • Exclusion of Dutch-speaking (support and administrative) staff OR
  • Exclusion of international students and staff?

• Aim: effective participation for all

• Solution: parallel use of language
IMPACT ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

• Disadvantage for students from a disadvantaged background or non-Dutch origin

• Wedge between academia and society

• Further study needed