



Reality Check: Internationalization @ UT

Internationalization of the University of Twente (UT) is proceeding at a break-neck pace. CAMPUSSY supports these efforts, but questions the wisdom of four specific sub-policies of internationalization at the UT, namely:

- Marketing the UT aggressively in Asia.
- Defining the UT's competitiveness on purely academic grounds.
- Unwillingness to face up to the language problem.
- Insufficient help for foreign students to settle in.

In this policy paper we provide our basic ideas on these issues.

Asian or European markets?

The UT is targeting China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia and India as potential markets for recruiting international students. In these markets the UT sees its relatively low costs as a competitive advantage compared with the Main English Speaking Destination Countries (MESDC; UK, USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand).

CAMPUSSY is not convinced of this argument. We do not believe the UT is competing with the MESDC but on another, second-tier market in which it **does not** have a competitive cost advantage.

The reasons we believe Asian students choose for the MESDC are the 'brand name' of their education systems, the higher quality of education than that locally available and to a lesser extent the prospect of immigration to and employment in the MESDC upon graduation. The availability of scholarships also plays a role, particularly in promoting the university's brand name as it attracts the 'best and brightest'.

Fees of a M.Sc. (Electrical Engineering) or equivalent degree for Asian students.

University	Country	Total course fees	
		Local currency	Euro
National University of Singapore (NUS)	Singapore	S\$ 3,000	€ 1,488
University of Hong Kong (HKU)	China	2 × HK\$ 46,670	€ 9,438
University of Nottingham	UK	£ 12,150	€ 17,984
	Malaysia	RM 33,000	€ 7,078
University of Twente (UT)	Netherlands	2 × € 8,310	€ 16,620
University Tenaga Nasional (UTN)	Malaysia	RM 26,400	€ 5,663

To an Asian student the University of Twente does not have a reputation that is comparable to the likes of the University of Nottingham. The University of Nottingham educated D.H. Lawrence (novelist), Deng Yaping (China's greatest sportswoman) and two kings of Malaysia. It also operates a campus in Malaysia and one in China, giving it added visibility. An Asian student will gladly pay an extra € 1,364 to study in 'well known' Nottingham as opposed to 'unknown' Twente, which isn't even located in an English speaking country.

So clearly, the UT is second-best and cannot be compared with the MESDC. So it competes with some of the best in the local Asian market: NUS and HKU. According to the Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking these universities are better than the UT, their fees are lower and with the exception of Hong Kong living costs are lower than those in the Netherlands. Flying time is less and cultural differences are smaller. Can the UT really compete?

Other competitors include good local universities such as UTN (popular with students from the Middle East) and local franchises of 'brand name' universities like Nottingham. These offer significantly lower fees and much lower costs of living compared to the Netherlands.

The UT has a lot to offer international students, but convincing them that we do is an uphill battle, considering that the Dutch education system in general and the UT in particular are almost completely unknown in the region. If we underestimate this challenge (which is the case in our opinion) and attempt to recruit **good students** from Asia (and not those simply rejected by MESDC), this venture will fail.

The UT does have a strong cost advantage for EU students over native English speaking countries like the UK and Ireland. Our tuition fees are lower as is our cost of living. Moreover a UT education can be a good stepping stone to the Dutch labor market for EU students as they are free to work here and Dutch multinationals tend to heavily recruit good Dutch students from the UT, an added incentive for European students to study in the Netherlands. Compared to the UT's intensive marketing efforts in the Netherlands, there is still a very long way to go in Europe.

Summarizing: CAMPUSSY believes the recruitment efforts in Asia are ill-advised. We should focus on the EU instead.

Defining our competitiveness

The UT claims to be a world-class English language university, but it has trouble providing the evidence to back this up. In international rankings the UT is good, but not exceptional. We don't have any Nobel prize winners or internationally recognized alumni. Our market presence is mainly restricted to the Netherlands and Germany with the exception of specific niche fields in which the UT excels internationally.

Some UT departments are jewels of international academia but most departments are very average. This means the UT brand-name has nowhere near the value of the likes of

Cambridge, MIT or even Delft. Moreover we are attracting some of the best-and-brightest of both students and staff, but the salaries of professors are regulated by the central labor agreement (CAO) and the UT has to accept all Dutch students with a VWO diploma, so there are limits to how far we can go. We can never become an elite institution like the Indian IIT's or the French Grande Écoles. We are a Dutch public university, so what can we do?

The great advantage of the UT are its smallness in size, flexible education programs and a wonderful campus environment. An important part of this environment is student activism which the university generously and actively supports. A UT student may not have been taught by all the best professors, but at least by some very good ones. A UT student may not have graduated from an instantly recognizable brand-name university. But a UT student has had an opportunity to develop him or herself academically and in a holistic way.

This culture of free European academic thinking combined with the UT's support for student entrepreneurship in all its different forms is the key competitive advantage the UT has. The UT should strengthen this advantage by encouraging international students in getting involved in extra-curricular activities, being flexible in its academic programs and making it affordable for international students to be active, like it is for Dutch students. This would not only be a good marketing strategy, it would also create a better university.

Summarizing: student entrepreneurship is a key strength of a UT education. It should be further strengthened and form a centre piece of the UT's marketing efforts.

Language

English is the international language of science and business. Period. It would be madness for the UT not to teach in English. However teaching well in English is easier said than done.

Currently foreign students need not learn any Dutch and it is presumed that the level of English spoken by Dutch students and lecturers is sufficient. For practical purposes it probably is, but many Dutch students would have difficulty in writing and defending an English-language M.Sc.-thesis and most foreign students need at least some Dutch to survive at the UT.

It is important to note that understanding a language is much easier than expressing oneself in it. With a good knowledge of Dutch you can follow most German TV programs, but speaking in German is an entirely different matter. Similarly, teaching and writing a dissertation in English is much more complicated than listening to a lecture in English or reading a book. The university must recognize this fact.

The administration's efforts to improve the usage of English is encouraging, but not always realistic. There is a difference between being able to communicate in English with

another person, being able to know your subject-specific terminology in English and being able to have a thorough academic discussion in English. To know English that well requires work or study experience in a native English-speaking environment to fully understand all the nuances of the language.

Most academic discourse at the UT does have a ‘Dutch touch.’ ‘Forbidden’ is not the correct translation of ‘verboden’, it should be ‘prohibited.’ It is a small difference in nuance, but these differences matter when using English at such a high level. To understand that when a Dutchman says ‘forbidden’ he means ‘prohibited’ requires basic knowledge of the Dutch language and culture. Without this knowledge much of the meaning of a lecture can be lost in translation. The UT should seriously consider a bilingual policy of both Dutch and English in its teaching and examinations if it cannot bring the level of English to a high enough level.

International students are also largely excluded from the decision-making process at the UT. This is mainly due to the language barrier, although progress is being made. Without the involvement of international students in this process, the UT will not become an international university like Wageningen or ITC. Using international students as *advisors* means you listen to them when what they say suits your agenda. But it is when they exercise their *rights* and force you to listen and when you don’t like what they’re saying that their input is often most valuable.

Summarizing: foreign students should learn basic Dutch to compensate for the type of English spoken at UT. Bilingualism should be considered as a solution to insufficient standards of English. English should be the working language of the university administration in all policy pertaining to international students and staff.

Welcoming foreign students

Woningbouwcorporatie. Voorlopige teruggaaf. Chipknip. Arbo. Getting your money back when the train is delayed. Registering yourself with the municipality. Getting insurance and finding out where your bike is if you parked it illegally again because you can’t read the Dutch sign! These are all matters which are second-nature to Dutch students but they can seem quite daunting to foreign students. It is not easy: arriving in a new country, starting courses at a new university, finding an affordable place to live and meeting new friends all at the same time.

Yet what support do students get from the university? The international office is understaffed to answer all these questions. Most student associations do not specifically cater to non-Dutch members. And for a lot of these issues, it really helps if you do know some Dutch. The new Practical Information website¹ is a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done.

You occasionally find new arrivals wondering around campus. They drag their heavy suitcase through the mud, half-dazed from a jet-lag and a long journey from Nepal or

¹ http://www.utwente.nl/en/practical_information/

Ethiopia and then they try to find the building of their 'contact person' on the out-dated UT map that you can download from our pretty website. It really is a very cold welcome to the UT and the Netherlands.

Helping foreign students feel at home and making their adjustment to their new situation easier can be done with relatively little effort. Why shouldn't we put up some clear signs at Enschede station or have one central welcoming point for international students. They arrive, get a cup of coffee and can leave their suitcase there temporarily before they start finding their way around campus. They should be assigned to a Dutch student who can help them find their way around during their first few days. Since students are paid for showing Dutch students around during information days, why should we not pay a student to help new foreign students find a place to live, open a bank account, etc.? Is that not much more important?

Summarizing: Foreign students should be made to feel welcome as soon as they arrive here and they should get practical help with settling in.