

Language Policy

The University of Twente has a long history of language policy documents. Upon request of the University council, last year, the board prepared an overview of the status of language at the UT. This turned out to be [an extensive document](#) and the University Council established a special committee. This committee has spent the last months analysing the Language Policy. With welcome support by staff from *Strategy and Policy* the committee has traced all segments of the language policy document to previous decisions. The work resulted in an overview of the areas that need further attention.

When formulating [the advice](#) we tried to focus our recommendations and kept some fundamental considerations in mind. This in order to limit the discussion and provide focus to the follow-up. By and large the considerations were that:

- the document "Language policy" did not aim to introduce new policy, but rather, provided a *status quo* document;
- language forms a cornerstone to personal identity and culture. As such, considerations and implications of changes in predominant language at the institute should not only look at the needs of a well-functioning organization, but also take to heart the concerns the Dutch society at large might have with such changes;
- although language policies can be part of internationalization strategies, they are not uniquely so. Therefore, in our analysis, we did not look at the internationalization strategy;
- changing the institutional language to English is a considerable change to the way day-to-day operations in an organization take place. This requires detailed, well-developed policies;
- a national debate is taking place in which international recruitment by universities in general, and language policies of universities in specific are critically observed. This forces the university to make clear choices, backed up by proper reasons;

After effectively analysing 10 years of policies on language, the university council has advised the board of areas that require extended / more detailed policies. The council was unanimous on these recommendations.

In broad strokes these recommendations fall into five main areas:

1. Clarify how and ensure that the language policies are in line with the requirements of the law on higher education (WHW), and provide internal guidelines to continue meeting these requirements.
2. Clarify how and ensure that the language policies are in line with the requirements of the General Administrative Law Act (Algemene wet Bestuursrecht).
3. Update the code of conduct.
4. Expand the language policies when it comes to Human Resources.
5. Ensure clear and unambiguous communication regarding language policies.

When we look in more detail, the core of the recommendations focus on the need for educational programmes to have a vision on language within the programme, taking into account that academic use of a language is a more specific skill. Furthermore, we have noticed that within English-taught programs there is a need to stimulate and support the further development of Dutch skills of students. We also recommend the UT to expand services enabling staff and students to master English or Dutch as a foreign language, including a certification process.

Within the organization, we would like to get better specification of situations that dictate the use of English, and where Dutch is the recommended language. This applies to regular work situation, but

has a special focus when it comes to formal meetings and policy discussions. We recommended looking at language in participatory boards. Here we consider on the one hand the need to be open, and allow all staff and students to join participatory boards, which would lean towards the use of English in these boards. However, we are aware that discussions in other than the mother tongue may lose depth and detail. As such, alternative solutions than fully switching to English should be considered.

Within the code of conduct, we requested the board to take special notice of the role of the University in the Netherlands as well as in Twente, and the implications of changing the organizations' principal language. Furthermore, we feel it is important to address the procedures to be followed when a programme decides to switch language of instruction, and to regularly evaluate the language of instruction used.

For personnel, our recommendation is to make it clear what the minimum language competences are for each functional group in the organization. Within this request, we added the advice to keep this as a non-limiting competence level: Staff that decides they would like to develop to a near-native level should be facilitated to do so. Furthermore, we noted that minimum competence levels should be made explicit for both English as well as Dutch skills. In order to facilitate language training, we recommend providing language courses that can be entered throughout the year, rather than at fixed moments.

Finally, we asked the board to be clear of the status and intent of language policies when these are communicated in the organization.

All in all we are happy with the constructive discussions between the board and the university council. The board has accepted our recommendations and promised to start working on a timeline for implementing these recommendations. In the next council cycle, we will discuss their timeline.