

I am a researcher in The Netherlands working in a small field which is slowly gaining prominence in Dutch universities' Arts faculties. Firstly I would like to agree that maintaining a predominant use of the Dutch language in higher education is a valuable goal, I argue that the premises on which this bill are based do not completely correspond with the reality of higher education in The Netherlands. While Bachelor's degrees, the majority of degrees pursued in the university system, are overwhelmingly offered in Dutch, it is mainly MA and PhD positions, research positions which to a certain extent tend towards English. By keeping in mind this separation, I do not believe that it can be seriously argued that Dutch students overall are being "pushed out" of Dutch universities. Second, this premise also ignores the strong need The Netherlands has for international students to fill positions in the country.

Another issue which the assumptions of this bill is that the housing crisis was caused by the number of programs offered in English, or possibly the return of the student grant. In fact, it is not the number of English programs that caused it but the irresponsible recruitment abroad which universities engaged in, advertising the university system as friendly to international students, without making sure that students who came would be able to find or afford housing. This problem also had to do with the disastrous Bursary PhD scheme, which offered/offers researchers substandard working conditions and artificially increased the number of PhDs available, thus encouraging universities to recruit researchers with less security or promise of housing. The solution here is to, of course, invest in student housing, but also to compel universities to limit the number of international students they recruit if it is clear that no housing can be found for them. None of this has to do with the number of programs offered in English or Dutch, but with the mismanagement of recruitment by universities, and the lack of requisite regulation by the government.

The letter encourages mandatory Dutch courses, but this could only reduce the Netherlands' competitive ability for graduate students and research. The letter acknowledges that almost all MBO institutions are completely Dutch, meaning that the majority of industry positions remain and will continue to be operated in Dutch. However, research, by virtue of the global nature of the industry, must be able to communicate to an international audience to be competitive, since very few research topics apply solely to the Dutch context. When researchers, especially non-native English speakers such as Dutch individuals, must interact with other researchers, collaborate, publish, or attend conferences, when they have almost never operated in English, this artificially limits the impact of Dutch research in the world. A good example of this is French or Israeli research, which in many fields is not competitive outside France or Israel because far fewer French and Israeli academics speak English on an academic level.

At the moment, more Dutch students are fluently bilingual than almost any other student body in Europe. By limiting their access to higher education and research in English, this bill proposes to limit their ability to think and discuss critically in an additional language which places The Netherlands at the forefront of the global research and other industries. A good comparison at the moment is the reform proposed in Quebec, Canada for law 101 which limits the access of Francophone students to English colleges; many francophone students who, naturally, are fluent in French, choose to access English programs because it allows them to gain fluency in a

second language and thus increase their skillset and job opportunities, while by no means endangering the place of French in the industry (the majority of Quebec residents still speak French as a first language). If The Netherlands is concerned about the linguistic integration of foreign students, then it should make language courses more affordable and accessible, and perhaps even regulated according to a proper standard, for international individuals. If it truly is worried about Dutch students' access to courses, it has yet to show that the number of English courses currently offered has anything to do with this. If, as principle 5 states, the government is committed to equipping students to play their part in an internationally connected world, then it must offer fact-based solutions to problems such as housing and funding, rather than blaming international students for having come to The Netherlands for better opportunities and then being unable to find housing. It was primarily international students who found themselves living in tents in Groningen.

While this letter admits that "Internationalisation remains of strategic importance for the Netherlands", the practical application of the bill ignores this sound principle. There is no proof offered by the letter that an influx of international students truly restricts accessibility for Dutch students, and thus this notion descends into jingoism. The idea that "scope should always remain for recruiting exceptionally talented international students" is a sufficient baseline for the treatment of international students is absurd, since international students acquire their education here and thus develop the appropriate skills and senses to contribute to the Dutch economy and society here. Again, no proof has been given that Dutch or EEA students have been or will be "crowded out" of popular courses.

The letter furthermore suggests that Dutch will be "promoted [...] in all courses, including those taught in another language". There is no explanation for how this would work, maintain accessibility, or quality. The Netherlands could learn from non-European contexts which attempted a homogenization of education, such as Morocco's Arabization efforts since 1956 which took decades to complete, and had limited advantages. A Dutchification of higher education and possible backtracking on policies could lead to a generation of students educated in multiple years in multiple languages. Even if implemented carefully, the letter has yet to truly prove why this would be advantageous for Dutch students, amongst whom the decline of the Dutch language is simply not a fact, nor for non-native Dutch speakers, who already find it incredibly difficult to find employment in The Netherlands without speaking Dutch, and thus are encouraged strongly to learn it.

The most responsible part of this letter is the notion that the influx of international students should be limited responsibly. This does not mean, for me, that the value of international students should be underestimated or ignored, that we should treat international students with less care than Dutch students, but rather that if we invite international students to take part in Dutch society and education, we do so ensuring that they will meet humane and appropriate conditions.

In all I cannot agree with the way this letter suggests the reform of the Dutch higher education system. Such changes should be made with more fact-based arguments which take into

account ALL persons involved in the education system, students, instructors, administrators, etc. They should not be made by offering fear-based arguments about whether or not specifically Dutch students will be able to have an education. Thank you.