

I am writing this comment in extreme disagreement with the proposal that mandates universities to teach part of their bachelor programs in Dutch. The proposal has clear and sizable costs, while its alleged benefits are nonexistent or dubious. I fully subscribe to the comments by Prof. A. R. Stevens and Dr. Romagnoli.

In my opinion:

**The reform will reduce the quality and quantity of the research output in the Netherlands:**

Following the internationalization policy, many departments have hired foreign staff to perform teaching and research duties. Most of these academics didn't become proficient in Dutch as they had little incentive to do so. Several of these researchers will leave if they are forced to learn Dutch (I know two esteemed colleagues who have this intention; one already started applying for jobs outside the Netherlands as a reaction to the proposal). The most likely researchers to leave are the most productive ones: for them, it will be easier to find attractive jobs abroad. Even the researchers who will not leave will have less time to dedicate to research as they will have to spend time and energy learning Dutch and updating their courses.

When hiring, the universities will have to focus on Dutch speakers or people willing to learn Dutch. This restriction will severely limit the pool of eligible candidates. It, hence, will preclude the universities from hiring many talented researchers.

Moreover, an essential part of university funds comes from international students. As per its objective, the proposal will significantly reduce their number. Without new government funds, the universities will have fewer resources. Hence, they will be able to support fewer researchers working on a smaller research budget.

**The effect of the policy on the quality of education is ambiguous:**

In reducing the number of foreign students, the policy might reduce class sizes, which can improve the quality of education. Yet, as argued above, the policy will likely reduce the number of researchers who do the most innovative work. Therefore, the students will have less knowledgeable teachers to learn from. In addition, in many disciplines, including Economics, research is conducted in English, meaning that the researchers think, write, and

communicate about their sciences in English rather than in Dutch (or their native language). Forcing them to teach in a language that is not useful for their academic inquiries will likely make their teaching less effective (on a personal note, I would rather teach in English than in Italian, my native language). Teaching in Dutch is particularly difficult if, as Prof. A. R. Soetevent argued in his comment, there isn't - and will not be - any Dutch textbook on the market for some disciplines.

### **The reform will likely harm the Dutch economy:**

Starting from Robert Solow, economists have long recognized the importance of technological progress as a driver of economic growth. Technological progress requires discoveries that allow producing more with fewer inputs. As argued above, the quality of research in the Netherlands will drop due to the reform. This drop will harm the growth prospects of the country.

In addition, international students are a valuable asset, which the proposal destroys. An important fraction of these students stay in the country after completing their higher education (32%, according to the latest CBS data). In staying, these students keep in the Netherlands all the knowledge they acquired in the 12 or 13 years they spent in the foreign school system. The Netherlands benefits from this knowledge for free. In my experience as a teacher at the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Amsterdam, international students are highly competent and motivated. I believe this is more generally true. These students had to pass several hurdles (including language tests and relocation) to start their studies in the Netherlands. Only if the students are talented enough, it makes sense for them to invest in passing these hurdles. In discouraging many international students from coming, the Netherlands will lose a crucial source of human capital.

### **The reform will likely make student accommodation more affordable, but there are better policies to reach the same aim.**

If successful in reducing the number of university students, the policy will make student accommodation more affordable, suppressing demand for that housing segment. However, there are probably better ways to reach this aim. Some ideas include:

- Increase the grant for students who graduate from Dutch high schools and attend university. The grant will allow Dutch students to afford more expensive houses. At the same time, house prices will increase, making it more expensive for foreign students to study in the Netherlands. This additional cost should discourage some (but not most) international students from coming to the Netherlands.
- Incentivize students to live outside the university cities or to keep living with their parents. Ways to do so include providing subsidies for students who face long commutes to reach their university and for parents who host their children during the university years. These subsidies should result in students being more uniformly spread across the country, reducing pressure on the housing markets in the university cities.
- Mandate a minimum proficiency in Dutch to obtain a bachelor's degree in the Netherlands to reduce the number of international students.

All these three proposals have drawbacks, but they have two key advantages compared to introducing mandatory teaching in Dutch. First, they can be easily fine-tuned. Suppose student houses are still not affordable after one year of implementation. In that case, the subsidies can be increased, and the language requirements can be made more severe. The opposite can happen if the number of students drops excessively, calling into question the financial stability of the universities.

Second, and more importantly, the proposals preserve the research strength of the Dutch universities. They don't force international researchers to become proficient in Dutch. They don't restrict the set of researchers the universities can hire. Therefore, the universities will still be able to conduct world-class research and hire and retain talented researchers.