

Language policy

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ROTTERDAM
UNIVERSITY OF
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Future Makers

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1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation

At Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences we think language matters. The central role of language in thinking, learning, communicating and practising a profession makes promoting students' language development a core aspect of our education. However, language is more than just a tool within education or the profession. Language is the basis for participation in society, for personal development and for forming identity. Through language, students give meaning to their experiences, learn to collaborate, think critically and express themselves in a variety of situations ranging from the classroom to the workplace and everyday life.

Language aware teaching contributes to student success and the accessibility and feasibility of the study programmes. Focusing on language skills also helps students develop professional and interdisciplinary language and communication skills.

In 2010 Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences first established a language policy. The key points of the report were as follows: a broad vision of language, continuous learning pathways and the integration of communication skills into the study programmes. These key points remain valid. However, a changed context requires an updated language policy.

Internal

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences' Strategic Agenda 2023–2028 is focused on key social challenges. In order to make a valuable contribution to society, it is important that the professionals we train are linguistically competent and able to communicate with different disciplines both internally and externally, often in an international or multilingual context.

Language skills can also be seen as a social challenge. In everyday life, language is essential for participating, collaborating and understanding complex societal issues. Reports show that the language skills of students are declining.¹ In addition, the use of language model-based artificial intelligence (hereinafter 'AI') for language tasks such as reading and writing presents education with the challenge of determining how to embrace this technology while retaining essential skills.

These developments necessitate that higher education institutions take differences in language competence into account and that they contribute to the enhancement of language skills among future professionals in higher education.

A focus on language is also necessary to achieve better quality education. Language is an essential tool for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. An integrated approach to education, with a curriculum that is well aligned with the professional field, also pays close attention to language. This contributes to the curriculum's practicality and to the development of the student as a thinking and acting citizen. The Educational Vision of Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (2024) describes a focus on an integrated approach, including language support, which can best be offered in relation to professional practice. In the context of inclusive education, it is also important that lecturers use both inclusive language and language-aware teaching methods.

¹ Education Inspectorate (2024). *De Staat van het onderwijs*.

<https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2024/04/17/rapport-de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2024>; Meelissen, M., Maassen, N., Gubbels, J., Van Langen, A., Valk, J., Dood, C., Derks, In 't Zandt, M., & Wolbers, M. (2023). *PISA resultaten in vogelvucht*. University of Twente. <https://doi.org/10.3990/1.9789036559461>.

External

A nationwide legislative proposal is currently under review, with the aim of regulating the choice of language of instruction in higher education. This proposal, entitled the Balanced Internationalisation Act (*WIB* in Dutch), is intended to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are met. The Act is primarily known for its role in reducing the number of foreign-language study programmes in higher education. The objective of the Act is also to promote students' Dutch language skills. Following the announcement of the presentation of the Balanced Internationalisation Act to the government, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (referred to as *VH*) has entered into an agreement with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science². Universities of applied sciences must establish a language policy that specifies why the choice has been made to offer programmes in other languages, how the accessibility of these study programmes for Dutch-speaking students will be guaranteed, and how the institution will contribute to the development of students' Dutch language skills. The current Code of Conduct for the Language of Instruction (2019) must be revised in line with the criteria of the Balanced Internationalisation Act. In the lead-up to the Act, measures to be implemented in relation to the language of administration and the support of students and staff must be agreed upon. This language policy has been designed to address these issues.

1.2 Reading guide

This language policy commences with a description of the role of language in higher education (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the working language at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. It is important to note the distinction between the administrative language and the language of instruction. Chapter 4 then goes on to describe how students' language competence is developed, both inside and outside of the curriculum. Please refer to Chapter 5 for a detailed description of the current implementing measures.

1.3 Status and scope

The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences Language Policy is a document that contains a shared and research-based vision and principles for the entire institution. It is vital that this vision and these principles are then translated into the study programmes and other relevant organisational units. Further details on these activities will be set out in the implementation plan, which will be published in due course.

Target groups affected by this policy:

- Students (language-aware education; language support provision)
- Lecturers (providing language-aware education; professional development opportunities)
- All staff (working language; professional development opportunities)
- Support Services (support for language-aware education; professional development opportunities)

The Language Policy of Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences is related to the following documents: a Strategic Action Plan on Diversity and Inclusion; the RUAS Vision on Education; the 2024-2028 Internationalisation Vision; and an AI Policy that is currently being drafted.

The owner of the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences Language Policy is the department of Education & Development (E&D) Language & Admissions Team.

The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences Language Policy was adopted on 13 January 2026 by the Executive Board and is evaluated every three years.

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https://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/system/knowledge_base/attachments/files/000/001/475/original/Brief_24.5418.AS_betreffende_Zelfregie.pdf?1710482017

2. Language vision

The central role of language in thinking, learning and professional practice makes promoting students' language development a core aspect of our education. Language is a means of acquiring and sharing knowledge, but also of understanding the world, connecting with others and expressing oneself.

As soon as students enter higher education, their language skills show a significant development. Students acquire the specialised language(s) commonly used in their profession on the basis of a solid foundation of general language skills. These general language skills are not only a prerequisite for academic success, but also for active citizenship and an inclusive society.

Study programmes should be designed to support these developments in language skills. Providing support for developing language skills is a shared responsibility. This objective is realised through the incorporation of language skills into the professional competencies to be acquired. Professional competencies can be developed through adequate integration of language skills into the curricula. Incorporating specific language components being an option. Furthermore, the curriculum should emphasise developing the multilingual and intercultural competencies required in the professional field.

Paying close attention to language in curriculum design and didactics contributes to the accessibility and studyability of the study programme. In doing so, we must take into account the diversity of prior educational and language backgrounds. By adopting a language-aware teaching approach, lecturers can present subject-specific material in a comprehensible and challenging manner for all students, thereby enhancing their ability to use language effectively in various contexts, including school, work and external environments. Paying attention to language also means using generative AI responsibly (for example, the copilot chat assistant) while recognising the importance of developing knowledge, critical thinking and writing skills.

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences is an inclusive university of applied sciences in a diverse and international context. Dutch is the primary language of instruction. However we do see multilingualism among students and staff as an added value. We recognise and value the rich variety of languages spoken by our students and staff. Acknowledgement of language diversity contributes to a sense of belonging and to the acquisition of international and intercultural competences. These languages can also be used in education and for future career development. Research in the field of language acquisition has demonstrated the efficacy of facilitating learning through the use of students' home languages. This approach enables collaborative learning among students in different languages and promotes engagement with literature in their preferred language. We consider it to be of great importance to provide international students and staff with the opportunity to learn the Dutch language. In this way, we promote their connection with the Netherlands and with Rotterdam (see also Internationalisation Vision 2024-2028). In order to ensure a successful future career, it is essential that students learn to communicate flexibly with a large variety of conversation partners.

This language vision is informed by the knowledge base Language-Aware Higher Education, which was compiled by the research group of the same name and the Language and Admissions team. (E&D). The basis for this knowledge base is rooted in academic insight. The knowledge base and implementation principles can be consulted at hr.nl/leidraadtaalbewusthogeronderwijs.

3. Language of communication

3.1 Administrative language

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences uses Dutch as its administrative language. Consequently, the Dutch language is used for all university-wide meetings, conferences and documents. Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences also offers study programmes in other languages, and relevant documents are therefore published in English. Institutions with study programmes in other languages are responsible for providing the relevant documentation to staff in English. Please note that this also applies to the Centre of International Affairs.

Meetings and gatherings intended exclusively for students or staff of a study programme in another language may be held in the language of that study programme. In order to make meetings on a small or larger scale more accessible to students and staff who speak other languages, it is recommended that the listening language principle be applied. This means that participants have the option of expressing themselves in another language, provided that all other participants can understand it.

Foreign-language staff are offered the opportunity to learn Dutch, at least on a basic level.³ Conversely, we offer Dutch speaking staff the opportunity to improve their English language skills, to contribute to internationalisation of education and research activities.

3.2 Language of instruction

The language of instruction is Dutch in most cases, except for those study programmes that are officially registered as being taught in another language. At Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, this applies to a very limited number of bachelor's study programmes and a number of master's study programmes. A study programme is considered to be Dutch-language if at least two-thirds of its content is delivered in Dutch. The language used for instruction and assessment is a key factor in this regard. The Exam Board of each study programme may allow a deviation from the assessment language.

Institutes (Schools) that intend to start a new foreign-language study programme or track must align it with the criteria for foreign-language education, as laid down in the Code of Conduct for Language Use, and the VH assessment framework. These criteria are considered when a new study programme or track is started, so they are discussed with the E&D educational advisors. In the context of a foreign-language study programme or track, the following steps must be taken internally:

- Administrative coordination with other institutions in the context of portfolio management;
- Determination that there is a Dutch-language alternative to the new foreign-language study programme, within or outside the institution;
- Coordination with housing organisations and the municipality about the new programme and its possible impact on student housing.

The Centre for International Affairs and the Language & Admissions Team can advise on the language of instruction. They do this on the basis of three criteria:

- Contribution to national or regional development programmes;
- Demonstrable labour market demand;
- Contribution to educational quality.

³ An obligation to learn the Dutch language, as mentioned in documents relating to the WIB act, is not legally feasible. See also the self-regulation proposal of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, see note 2.

The advisory team on study programme range, or assortment, provides guidance to the Executive Board and the director of the institute on key issues, including the scope of the study programme range (as defined by the Higher Education Efficiency Committee) and its positioning in relation to the existing range. RUAS is obliged to submit any plans for a new study programme or track to the Administrative Working Group on Foreign Language Programmes of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences. This obligation remains in place as long as the group exists. Following the issuance of advice by the administrative working group, the Executive Board will determine whether to submit an application to the Higher Education Efficiency Committee for a new study programme or track.

Please note that study programmes can choose to include other languages. Within study programmes where Dutch is the main language of instruction, educators can still offer a wide range of educational components in a other languages. For example, educators can access international literature and teaching materials or make use of students' home languages to process the subject matter.

3.3 Language, communication and AI

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences is an inclusive institution. This is also reflected in the way we communicate. As outlined in the Strategic Action Plan for Diversity and Inclusion, we employ a uniform, inclusive tone of voice in all our internal and external communications. For more detailed guidance on this matter, please refer to the website pages 'onsmerk.hr.nl'. As a knowledge institution, we are committed to facilitating accessible academic communication to enhance the impact of research.

The integration of generative AI in language and communication presents a significant challenge to the design of our educational programmes. In order to address this challenge, employees should have the knowledge and skills to incorporate AI tools responsibly within the educational sector. Employees are urged to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages within the context of the AI policy prior to utilising AI tools for educational purposes or in their own professional activities.

4. Language-aware education

4.1 Integration of language and subject content

The development of students' language skills is addressed throughout the entire curriculum, in relation to the subject matter and their future profession, in line with the Educational Vision. This makes sense, because developing subject matter and professional skills is impossible without language. At the same time, language skills are best developed in the relevant study and professional context. The knowledge base, promoting language awareness in higher education, underpins this idea and includes six implementation principles to this end:

- Students' language development is a collective responsibility.
- Gain insight into the characteristic language use of the study programme and profession.
- Integrate attention to language throughout the curriculum.
- Use language aware teaching methods.
- Organise knowledge sharing and joint professionalisation around language-aware education.
- Develop a vision on the role of language in the study programme and language policy specific to study programmes.

To continue reading in Dutch, please visit: (hr.nl/leidraadtaalbewusthogeronderwijs)

It is imperative that all study programmes at the University of Applied Sciences give due consideration to these implementation principles when determining the curriculum. A well-considered curriculum structure and specific lecturing skills are essential for effective language and subject integration in higher education. Support, sharing of knowledge and teacher professionalisation in the fields of language and subject integration (see section 5.2) are based on academic insights and linked to applied research on these themes.

4.2 Accompanying language support

Dutch as a second language

In addition to integrating language development into subject-specific teaching components, study programmes can also offer components that focus exclusively on language, such as supporting language courses. In the case of study programmes taught in other languages, non-Dutch-speaking students are in any case offered the opportunity to learn Dutch. These study programmes are responsible for the way in which they offer this opportunity, with support from Language & Admission (E&D) where necessary.

Use of Dutch in Dutch-language study programmes

Further language or communication courses or workshops may also be offered in Dutch-language study programmes. Alternatively, language support may take the form of targeted guidance from a language lecturer, a peer coach or a decentralised language centre. Study programmes can make this choice themselves and determine the content and design. The advantage of this autonomy is that language support is closely linked to the study programmes and is therefore tailored to specific programmes and professions. The educational teams involved in this process can seek support from Language & Admission (E&D) and join the Language Expertise Network to exchange ideas with other study programmes.

Other languages

At present, the primary focus of efforts to strengthen students' language skills is on the Dutch language. We recommend that study programmes also make a conscious choice about the place of other languages in the curriculum. This involves offering language teaching in English and any other languages that are relevant to the profession, and consciously using reading and listening materials in other languages. Study programmes may also utilise languages that students have already mastered to support subject-specific

development. This contributes to the feasibility of the curriculum and offers opportunities to stimulate the development of international and intercultural competences (see also Internationalisation Vision 2024–2028).

5. Implementation

Do you want to start using this language policy? This chapter outlines the current measures in place and refers to the available tools. Based on this language policy, we will draw up an implementation agenda in consultation with the study programmes.

5.1 Language of communication

An internal translator is available for translations of relevant documents. Further information on this matter, as well as a Dutch-English Word List, can be found at onsmerk.hr.nl/. Any support for multilingual meetings or conferences according to the listening language principle is tailor-made and can be offered in consultation with the relevant departments (Communication, Events and Language & Admission).

Institutions offering study programmes or courses in languages other than English must adhere to the Code of Conduct for Language Use. Should you require assistance with this matter, please contact the Centre of International Affairs or Language & Admission.

5.2 Language-aware education

5.2.1 Language education advice and Language Expertise Network

The Language-Aware Higher Education Guide (hr.nl/leidraadtaalbewusthogeronderwijs) contains materials to help study programmes integrate language development into education. The guide consists of a , implementation principles, tools and good examples. The **knowledge base** provides a comprehensive academic foundation for language-aware education. These **six implementation principles** (see also 4.1) serve as a guideline for study programme teams to follow. These implementation principles can be introduced in a phased manner. For instance, a study programme team may commence with the professionalisation of lecturers, the development of a language skills learning track or the formulation of a vision. Utilising **tools** such as the 'Language Selfie', a curriculum scan, can facilitate the initiation of this process. **Good practices** can serve as a source of inspiration and a practical starting point.

The educational advisor will help to integrate this process into the working method and planning of the study programme. Study programme teams and educational advisors can also call on the support of language education advisors from Language & Admission (E&D). For issues at the intersection of language skills and generative AI, language education advisors collaborate with AI experts within our university of applied sciences. This support is demand-driven and evidence-based. The use of this support is determined by urgency.

The Language Expertise Network facilitates encounters, exchanges and exchange of information between lecturers with regard to language teaching and language-aware teaching through meetings and a Teams environment. Three or four thematic meetings are held each year, and colleagues can connect with each other in the Teams group. The Network is coordinated by Language & Admission (E&D).

5.2.2 Lecturer professionalisation

Lecturer professionalisation in language-aware teaching

Providing language-aware education requires specific teaching skills to stimulate language development in subject-specific lessons. Using multilingualism functionally in the classroom and teaching students how to use it in their future profession. And also to develop and supervise writing assignments that fit the

programme's AI vision. The design of a language and subject-integrated curriculum, and staff professionalisation is a team effort. To this end, HR Academy (and, in time, the Centre for Teaching and Learning) offers a range of evidence-based training courses and learning tracks, provided by the Language & Admission Team (E&D).

Please refer to: <https://hint.hr.nl/nl/HR/Werken-bij/faciliteiten/hr-academie/Onderwijs/taal/>.

Professionalisation in language skills

Lecturers must possess sufficient language skills to teach in the language of instruction. In order to strengthen the professional relationship between our institution and Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, foreign-language staff will have the opportunity to learn Dutch. Dutch-speaking staff have the opportunity to enhance their English language proficiency. The HR Academy provides professional development activities for these target groups. The HR Academy offers both in-house and external professional development activities. For example, in collaboration with the Erasmus Language and Training Centre. See <https://hint.hr.nl/nl/HR/Werken-bij/faciliteiten/hr-academie/persoonlijke-ontwikkeling/communicatie/>.

5.2.3 Central language support for students

Central language support for students consists of accessible online support in the form of the Language Assistant (hr.nl/taalassistent). The Language Assistant is meant for all students and offers information and exercises for general and field-specific Dutch skills. Students can also use the Language Assistant to make an appointment at the Language Centre at Museumpark. There, students can get help to improve their language skills.

The Centre of International Affairs has compiled online tips for international students to learn Dutch. (<https://www.rotterdamuas.com/go/living-in-rotterdam/starting-out/dutch-for-beginners/>).

In addition, several elective courses are available to support all students in developing their Dutch language skills. These courses primarily focus on providing specific support for non-native speakers of Dutch who are following a Dutch-language study programme, as well as for students with dyslexia. Due to the limited number of students who require these courses, we have organised the teaching and in-house expertise centrally. There are a number of general electives focused on reading, listening and writing skills. For more information, please refer to <https://hint.hr.nl/nl/HR/english/study-information/choices-in-your-study-programme/electives/>.

The Language Assistant, the Language Centre at Museumpark and the language electives are provided and coordinated by Language & Admission (E&D).

