

Disclaimer: This translation is provided for information purposes only. In the event of a difference of interpretation, the original Dutch version of this document is binding.

Code of Conduct governing Foreign Languages at the University of Amsterdam
(Adopted by the Executive Board on 21 September 2000)

1. The sole purpose of this Code of Conduct is to regulate the language in which undergraduate teaching (lectures, seminars, practical training, etc.) is provided and interim or other examinations are conducted. It does not apply to teaching materials (books, syllabuses, etc.) or any assignments or theses that students may produce.
2. Teaching will be provided and interim or other examinations conducted in the Dutch language.
3. Notwithstanding the provision in sentence 2, a language other than Dutch may also be used if so required because of the specific nature of the programme.
4. The use of a foreign language in a study programme will be set out in the relevant Teaching and Examination Regulations (*Onderwijs- en examenregeling*, OER).
5. The decision to use a foreign language in all or part of a study programme must be based primarily on educational grounds. Educational grounds are present in any event if:
 - 5.1. the study programme includes specialisations for which knowledge of a language other than Dutch is indispensable;
 - 5.2. it is deemed essential to provide components in a language other than Dutch as a skill component in the specific discipline of the programme;
 - 5.3. components are involved that are specifically targeted at foreign students.
6. The use of a foreign language may not lead to an increase in the study load, affect the quality level of the study programme or adversely affect the students during interim or other examinations.

Explanatory Notes to the Code of Conduct governing Foreign Languages at the University of Amsterdam

General

Section 7.2 of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (*Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*, WHW) reads as follows:

‘Teaching shall be provided and examinations conducted in the Dutch language. Notwithstanding the first sentence, another language may be used:

- a. if the study programme relates to that language,
- b. if teaching is provided within the context of a guest lecture given by a non-Dutch-speaking lecturer, or
- c. if the specific nature, organisation or quality of the teaching or origin of the students so requires, in accordance with a code of conduct adopted by the board of the institution.’

The explanatory notes to the sixth ministerial memorandum of amendment to the proposed bill 21.073, in which this provision was introduced, states the following:

‘This memorandum of amendment stipulates that the promotion of skills of expression in the Dutch language is one of the objectives of institutions of higher education. In view of that, Dutch is named as the official language for use in the provision of teaching and the conducting of examinations. Exceptions to this rule are possible. In addition to the reasons given under a. and b., section c. also allows for other grounds on which to base the decision to provide teaching in another language. These may relate to the specific nature and organisation of the programme as well as to considerations regarding the quality of the teaching or the origin of the students. The nature and organisation of the programme may be linked to internationalisation and international exchange programmes. The quality of the teaching may constitute grounds for an exception if specific expertise is not available in the Netherlands and a lecturer from abroad must be deployed. Finally, the origin of the students may count as a reason for offering teaching in a language other than Dutch. The board of the institution will specify these reasons in greater detail in a code of conduct.’

The reason for the basic principle that Dutch be spoken is that the language of the country should be respected. In this sense, the legislator leaves several questions unanswered by permitting the use of other languages in the cases indicated. These questions relate not only to the legislator’s view that the language of the country should be respected, but also to the notion that someone who attends an educational institution in his/her own country should expect to be able to be served in his/her own language in so far as the course or subject does not require otherwise and, in any case, not in languages in which he/she cannot be expected to be proficient on the basis of his/her previous education. In particular, there may be a clash between the trend towards internationalisation and the latter expectation.

In recent years, there have been a growing number of cases of foreign students participating in programme components that are part of the regular study programme, and of Dutch students taking programme components that are part of the non-regular study programmes intended for foreign students, as part of their own regular study programme. The latter case entails a free choice on the part of the Dutch student and does not require any specific rules or conditions to be imposed relating to the use of a foreign language. In the former case, certain study programmes have a tendency to switch over (most frequently) to English teaching for all or part of the programme.

The Executive Board shares the legislator’s view that teaching at the University should in principle be provided in Dutch. This applies in particular to teaching in the regular study programmes. This

of course means that all students, foreign or otherwise, who participate in such programmes must have a sufficient knowledge of the Dutch language. The Executive Board considers it important to note that the Dutch language is an important element in the creation of the Dutch cultural heritage. Effective skills of expression in the Dutch language are a not unimportant objective in many study programmes.

If there are reasons to depart from the basic principle and to provide teaching in a language other than Dutch, the Executive Board is of the opinion that this choice is best made at the faculty level. This therefore requires the establishment of the curriculum at the level of the study programme, and the stipulation of any choice of a language other than Dutch in the relevant teaching and examination regulations following recommendations from the programme committee.

The decision-making process at the faculty level must answer the question whether it is acceptable for a specific study programme (or parts of it) to be offered in a foreign language (almost always English). In the opinion of the Executive Board, there is usually no objection to this if the use of a foreign language in the programme as a whole or in part is based on educational reasons. One could also say that it must be in the interest of the students if the teaching in question is to be offered in a language other than Dutch. The professional perspective, the labour market, exchange programmes and subsequent study programmes (the effects of the Bologna Treaty might be considered here) may also play a role here.

In addition, the Executive Board believes that not all the teaching offered in a foreign language also needs to be offered in Dutch. The nature of the study programme may be an important factor here (for example, the degree programme in French), but organisational or financial aspects might also play a role. Valid arguments must be presented during the decision-making process, however, to demonstrate that a parallel programme in Dutch is either not possible or of no added benefit.

Even if regulations are agreed at the faculty level and included in the relevant OER, problems can still arise. For example, not all lecturers are capable of providing English-language teaching (at the required level). This can damage the quality of the teaching, especially in disciplines where nuances in the use of language are of key importance. Caution is thus called for in this area. Because the UvA aims to be a fully-fledged international institution, teaching staff will therefore be given the opportunity to improve their language proficiency (primarily in English). This could take the form of courses in teaching in a foreign language or facilities to support publishing in English. For the staff members involved, it is very important that clear agreements are made with the faculty or organisational unit in which they work regarding how and under what conditions they can improve their proficiency in a foreign language.

In addition, students may have difficulties following English-language teaching and processing English-language study materials. This means that including English-language teaching in a study programme is only appropriate if the students have the required level to deal with the teaching offered. It is not inconceivable that first-year students will have more difficulty with teaching in another language than more advanced students. In terms of language proficiency, the same applies to students as to teaching staff. Students must also be given the opportunity to improve their language proficiency, for example by taking writing courses in a foreign language or having access to English-language experts who can read and correct their English-language theses and papers. To this end, the Executive Board intends to establish an 'English Centre' within three to four years. It is also possible to include English, specifically academic English, as a fixed component in the curriculum.

Because specific requirements and external factors play a role in every study programme or faculty, it is not possible to formulate detailed conditions for the use of a foreign language in a code of conduct. In order to ensure that the different perspectives are taken into consideration, all

relevant individuals and bodies will be involved in the decision-making at the faculty level.

The Executive Board therefore believes that only conditions of a general nature will be of benefit at the institutional level. The consequences of teaching in a foreign language will be revealed through experience (for example, the teaching evaluations). Teaching in a foreign language will therefore become part of the internal quality assurance for teaching. In addition, an assessment will be made as to whether an additional instrument is required to measure the effects of the Code of Conduct.

Additional explanatory notes

Re 1

The basic principle is that the thesis will be written in Dutch unless there are good reasons for it to be written in another language. In all cases, the language of the thesis must prevail in the discipline and it must be possible for the result to be assessed by the relevant teaching staff. In the case of a thesis in a language other than Dutch, agreements must be made in advance between the student and the lecturer.

Re 4

As is already known, the dean sets the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) following recommendations/approval from the Student Council and the Works Council. The dean also seeks the advice of the programme committee, the Examinations Board, the programme director and the director of each educational institute to which the programme belongs or contributes. All relevant individuals and bodies are involved in the decision to teach in a foreign language. The existing Teaching and Examination Regulations often already contain a provision on conducting interim and other examinations in a foreign language, but rarely on teaching in a language other than Dutch.

Re 5

As a rule, educational grounds must serve as the basis for using a foreign language in the regular study programmes. The Code indicates a number of situations that in any case may call for the use of a foreign language.

Re 6

Evaluations will reveal whether these conditions are met.